



A McCarter Theatre production | Venue: Berlind Rehearsal Room | **AUDIENCE GUIDE STAFF:** Editor for Literary Content: Elizabeth Edwards | Editor for Education Content: Paula Alekson | Editorial Administrator: Francine Schiffman | Web Design: Dimple Parmar | Contributors: Elizabeth Edwards, Carrie Hughes, Paula Alekson, Adam Immerwahr.

INTRODUCTION TO THE MAD 7



The Seven Beggars - Illustration by Moreen Greenberg from Safed (Isr.)

Yehuda Hyman's *The Mad 7* is the modern story of one man's quest to find his lost soul. Based on the story of *The Seven Beggars* by Rabbi Nachman of Breslov, a nineteenth-century Ukrainian mystic, this one-man play integrates music, dance, and storytelling as it spins a whimsical and compelling fable of self-discovery. Elliott Green, a contemporary, alienated, Jewish office drone, embarks on an epic journey in search of his elusive destiny, glimpses of which have come to him in a mysterious, recurring dream. He is whisked

away on an odyssey led by a series of storytellers, each reflecting a different facet of the Jewish Diaspora.

Yehuda Hyman's work explores the intersection of theater, dance, myth and mysticism. He writes from a very personal place, and out of that authenticity extraordinary characters emerge. He creates imaginative stories that in their specificity have broader social and political impact. Unlike conventional plays, *The Mad 7* is conceived as a blend of storytelling, movement and music. While the play is epic in its scope and imagination, it is a deeply personal story and representative of an artistic voice that is as infectious as it is original.

The Mad 7 is rich in meaning, symbols and allusion. Like many great plays, it exists on several levels—at once an extraordinarily accessible fable and a set of deeply resonant metaphors. Like the story on which it is based, it can be taken and enjoyed at face value, or it can be decoded and explored for its secrets and mysteries. The content in this guide (and throughout our website) is intended as only a first step in that voyage of discovery and exegesis. So investigate, uncover, prospect and scrutinize. We can't wait to hear what you find!

WHO'S WHO IN THE PRODUCTION

ACTOR



Yehuda Hyman

ARTISTIC STAFF

Written and Performed by	Yehuda Hyman
Adapted from a tale by	Rabbi Nachman of Breslov
Directed by	Mara Isaacs
Costume Design	Kristin Fiebig
Lighting Design	Mary Louise Geiger
Sound Design	Karin Graybash
Choreography	Yehuda Hyman
Video Design	Seth Mellman
Set Design	Narelle Sissons
Line Producer	Adam Immerwahr
Production Stage Manager	Lauren Kurinkas

BIOGRAPHY OF YEHUDA HYMAN



Yehuda Hyman's work explores the intersection of theater, dance, poetry, myth and mysticism. His career began when he traveled to Brussels, Belgium at age 16 to attend Maurice Bejart's movement-based theater school, MUDRA. In 1990, Mr. Hyman met playwright/poet James Carroll Pickett who became his writing mentor. Mr. Hyman's plays include: *The Mad Dancers*, *Center of the Star*, *Swan Lake Calhoun*, *I Ask You*, *Ladies and Gentlemen* (adapted from the novel by Leon Surlmelian), and *Max and Rapunzel and the Night*. His work has been produced at San Diego Repertory Theatre, Theater J, Actors Theatre of Louisville, Beast Theater Festival, Taper Too, The Marsh, Greenway Court Theatre, Mixed Blood Theatre, Cornerstone Theater, and Piven Theatre Workshop, among others. His plays have also had workshops at McCarter Theatre, Arena Stage and the Mark Taper Forum. Honors include the Kennedy Center Fund for New American Plays Award, Heideman Award (Actors Theatre of Louisville); residencies at The Millay Colony, Djerassi Foundation and Mishkanot Sha'ananim (in Jerusalem) and grants from the Center for Jewish Culture and Creativity and the National Foundation for Jewish Culture. He was a Jerome Fellow at the Playwrights' Center of Minneapolis and a National Endowment for the Arts/Theatre Communications Group Playwright-in-Residence with the Cornerstone Theater Ensemble of Los Angeles. He is currently collaborating with composer Daniel Hoffman on a new musical called *David in Shadow and Light* (about the life of the biblical hero, David), which

premieres at Theater J in Washington, D. C., this coming May. His poetry and prose have been published in the *San Francisco Bay Guardian*, *Northern California Jewish Bulletin*, *Minnesota Monthly* and an upcoming anthology on Jewish and Israeli dance edited by Judith Brin Ingber, to be published by Wayne State University Press. He lives in Los Angeles.

INTERVIEW WITH YEHUDA HYMAN

- Conducted By Elizabeth Edwards



Yehuda Hyman is the writer and performer of The Mad 7, Spotlight Production of McCarter Theatre's 2008 IN-Festival. The play is based on "The Seven Beggars," a story by Hasidic Rabbi Nachman of Breslov, and follows a character named Elliott as he encounters seven storytellers from various regions of the world. Each one shares a mystical story through music and dance, propelling Elliott on a spiritual journey of self-discovery.

PART I

I'm going to start with a very broad question, which is, what is the story about for you?

[laughs]

You can answer whatever aspect of that...

Ahhhhhh... What is the story of the play about?

Mm-hm.

Mm-hmm. I'm trying to figure that out...

Well, let me start with me. For me, it's a quest to understand why I'm drawn to these stories. And they seem to hold some answers to questions I have about my life—how to live my life in this realm. So, on a very ground level, I'm looking for guidance through these stories.

And so is the character of Elliott, although he doesn't know it. He's lost, but he doesn't really know—he's so lost that he doesn't know how lost he is. And so, this is a story about guides or mentors who come and lead this person to an understanding of himself, and his place in the universe, and who he is in this world and the other world. So that's the base, I think, for what it is. It's somebody who's lost, who gets found.

What are those questions for which the stories seem to hold answers?

Are we alone in the universe? Do we matter? Does our life have any impact in time? Does it impact other people? Can we make a difference? What can we do to make the world a better place? I'm just going through, filtering through the story...

How do we deal with and accept the duality of our natures? We're made up of two sides, and how do we integrate that and accept that into our lives—not just be one thing or the other thing, but our full selves?

And then on an even, just, surface level, it's the power of storytelling. How a story that you hear can transform you. So Elliott is hearing stories, and the audience is hearing stories, and they're transforming at the same time. They're going through a series of circles, like hoops, one to get to the next, and the audience is experiencing it at the same time. So, we're growing together and going through an experience together. It's not the kind of theater where you want to just sit back; it's the kind of theater that's experiential. Because I think that's what storytelling is, too.

And this comes out of the specific storytelling tradition of Rabbi Nachman, right? And a broader tradition of storytelling in general...?

Well, there's a specific tradition of Hasidic storytelling. And that is that they're very, very simple stories—almost childlike, fairy-tale stories—but they contain secrets. They contain transformative secrets. And that is the reason for them. Something needs to move between the beginning of the story and the end of the story.

And that, I think, is what I can bring to these. That's why I think I've been summoned [chuckle] to do this piece. Because of my being a dancer. And because Rabbi Nachman was a dancer.

Oh?

Yeah, he really, really believed in the power of music and dance. And Breslov Hasidim, which is a sect of Hasidim, always end every prayer session with a dance. It's a very simple dance, it's just a little dance in a circle, but that is one way, and I think Rabbi Nachman felt it was even the strongest way, to achieve union with the unknowable.

So, in addition to the tradition of storytelling, this piece falls within various traditions of dance, right? Because many different kinds of dance are incorporated into your version of this story.

Right, right, right. I mean, I myself have a very, very eclectic dance background. Beginning with being trained as a classical ballet dancer, and then jazz, and then ethnic dance: Israeli folk dance, flamenco dance, Bharata Natyam—you know, Indian sacred dance. Tap dance... So, I come from a lot of different traditions.

And what I'm attempting to do in this piece is bring different dance traditions for each of the storytellers in the story. I'm attempting to find a way to release these stories through the dance, so they really come to life on the stage. I think they just come to life more easily, that they're more accessible through movement. It's not a dance piece, at all, I mean I don't want to make it seem like *that*. But I am moving and I'm speaking, and dance is a very important element of it.

PART II

The play consists of seven individual stories told by seven different storytellers. Is there an overarching theme, or something that ties each of the individual stories together, in this piece?

That's a tough question because I don't want people to come in with a lot of preconceived explaining of what this is or isn't about. Because it's going to be completely different for every person.

It's open to many, many interpretations. Through the process of this, I've come at each story from a different angle several times. It's fluid; it's like water. It's always changing for me. One day it means something, another day it means something else a little bit. And I think it needs to be that—whenever it gets stuck, it's dead. You know?

For instance, there are seven beggars. There are seven days of the week. There are seven days of creation in the Torah, the Hebrew scripture. So that's one way of looking at it—what happened on each of those seven days, what was created, what came into being. That's one way of encountering the story.

But then the second story, for me, is also connected to the Sephardic experience. The story talks about this magnificent city. Well, in Sephardic culture, there's the idea of a Golden Age, which was when they lived in Spain before the expulsion of the Jews in 1492. That was a peak, beautiful time, where Jews and Christians and Muslims all lived together and got along. The Jewish population was in a very good situation. And it was lost—they were expelled, they were all forced to leave or convert. Just like the magnificent city in the story is lost. So, that's another way of encountering the stories—on a historical level.

You can also come from the angle of what happens in the story, and what does each thing mean. Which is interesting, because everything *is* a symbol for everything else. But then if people get stuck in “okay, what does *this* symbol mean,” they miss the whole thing. They miss the ride, they get distracted. “What is that, he's going through a tunnel, what is the tunnel, is that the birth canal, what is going on?” No, it's just a tunnel. Just go through the tunnel, and we'll see where we're going.

I mean, there are certain givens. Like, when we talk about the princess in the story, that's a given. The princess, which is in the sixth story, is *Shechina*, which is the feminine aspect of God. And that comes from the Kabbalah. It's an ancient, ancient part of Judaism, which is interesting, because it's been left out. We think, “Oh, it's a male God.” Well, it's not male, exclusively, there are different aspects of God in Judaism, and that's one of them, the *Shechina*. And so when we talk about the princess, that's the *Shechina*, the dwelling place of the soul, the beauty of the soul. Okay?

But, on the other hand, when you're performing the story, you don't want people to go, “Oh, I don't know, I don't feel the *Shechina*.” Or, “I'm not religious, I'm an atheist, and I can't bear this.” It's just a princess; it's a princess story. Whatever that means to you, is what the meaning is.

Rabbi Nachman himself always said, “Just tell the story.” You know, you tell it as a simple—it's just a little story. You don't go, “I'm going to tell you the secret of the universe, you're going to have a great mystical awakening!” No, I'm just telling you a little story. So I think that's really, really, really important.

How do you combine your multi-layered sense of this tale, and all its connections to Jewish history and symbolism, with your commitment to simply telling the story in a way that is accessible to people from all different backgrounds?

Well, let's start at the beginning. The very first story begins, “Once there was a shipwreck.” And in the footnotes it says the shipwreck is the destruction of the second temple in Jerusalem, which starts the Diaspora. And I feel that in my bones. When I say, “Once there was a shipwreck,” I feel three thousand years of dispersion. I just do. It also comes from my family: I never met any of my relatives because they all died in the Holocaust. So, I know about a shipwreck.

And my job as a storyteller is to embody that. When I say “shipwreck,” I have to feel it, what that means, you know? And to an African person it will mean something different; to a person from

South America it will mean something different. But if I'm successful, if I'm doing my job, they will feel something.

So, he says "Once there was a shipwreck, and they came to a tower." So, what is that tower? What do you think that tower is, Elizabeth?

Um... I don't know, I guess it's maybe a place of safety?

Uh-huh. Right. So it's a place of safety. And we all have different places of safety...

You know, it's interesting... Rabbi Nachman didn't write any of these stories down—he just told them, and his disciple wrote them down. But he did write down a book of his teachings, called *Likutey Moharan*. And in the preface it says to be very clear that when Rabbi Nachman is talking, he's talking about all humanity. He's not just talking about the Jews; he is talking about all human beings.

And I really believe that. I think he was—I guess in modern day, you would say he was a guru. He was very, very smart. And very compassionate for all people. Because none of his stories say, "This was a Jew." It's like, "This happened, this old blind man," or "this man with no hands." They're just people.

PART III

Why did you choose the specific traditions of dance and culture that are incorporated into *The Mad 7*?

Well, as I was working on this tale, "The Seven Beggars" tale, I was also at the same time on a journey into my culture, which is Jewish culture. And as part of that investigation I was finding out about different subcultures within the Jewish culture. For instance, the Sephardic Jews, who are descended from the Jews of Spain, have their own language—Ladino—and a rich, rich culture of music and language and customs. And the Jews of Yemen, of Persia, of Ethiopia, of India—very different cultures, very different music.

And so, part of this process has been going into these different cultures. And they are different, even though the commonality is that we're all Jewish. But within that circle, it's very, very diverse—different languages, different ways of worshipping, certainly different music. And it just fascinated me.

And I'm attempting to be very true and very specific, but in the end I hope for the audience that it is just a treat; it's sort of a magic carpet ride of different cultures. Specifically, the music and the dance—that they just can enjoy that. And that I can bring these characters to life, and bring the story that each character is telling to life.

What is your personal connection to Jewish culture, and Jewish mysticism? Is that something you have always been really connected to?

No. I've been connected to theater all my life, and through theater I've been led on different experiences...

I mean, I grew up in a Jewish household, in Los Angeles. I'm a first-generation American; my parents were from Eastern Europe. My father's family was killed in the Holocaust. So I had a very strong cultural feeling as a Jew, and I did have some religious training. But it's a pretty common experience for American Jews that you assimilate into the larger culture, which I did.

And at a certain point shortly after my Bar Mitzvah I felt very distanced from my identity, and any religious beliefs, and I didn't even really think about it.

And my main focus was being at first a dancer, and then other things: choreographer, writer. So that was sort of my religion, and my culture, was theater. Then in the mid-80's, I was hired to do a piece about the Jewish theater troupe in Vilna, Lithuania. It's called *Ghetto* [by Joshua Sobol]. It's an Israeli play, and it was having its American premiere, and I was hired to be its choreographer. I was having a lot of trouble because I had never really dwelt in [that world, and] I didn't know what the language was going to be.

Through [that production I met] Giora Feidman. He's a world-renowned klezmer clarinetist, and he's someone who goes into a lot of different cultures—he doesn't just stay within the Jewish community, he travels. He was a mentor to me. He really woke me up through his music, and started something with me. He forced me to face a side of myself that I hadn't dealt with, dwelt with, looked at—which is my Jewish soul. That was really the beginning. And it was in the theater. It was in L.A., at the Mark Taper Forum.

So, that began my trip. Several years later I went to Israel for the first time, and that was very, very eye-opening for me. That's where I encountered the diversity of culture within Judaism for the first time. Because American Jews, I don't know if you know this, but mostly we think of ourselves as Ashkenazi Jews, which is, you know, the culture at large. That's where “oy vey” and all that, what we think of as Jewish humor, comes from. And that's really just one part of it.

So, in Israel I was exposed to a plethora of other things: Persians, and Moroccans, and Africans, and... It was very mind-expanding for me; it was really intense and great. After I came back from Israel, in the early 90's, I just knew in my heart that it was time to start exploring this in theater. And that's when I started.

I'd always been intrigued by Hasidic stories. I'd read a few as a child; I always loved them. They're humorous, they're unexpected. I thought I would just adapt a few little stories, simple stories...and instead I stumbled on these Nachman stories, which are not simple stories at all. They're actually very complex. And they were just kind of gifted to me, out of nowhere. That led me—has led me, is still leading me—on this experience of working with them, and trying to uncover the layers. Uncover the layers to the point where I can simply convey them to somebody else.

What drew you to this particular story, “The Seven Beggars” story?

I had an experience a long time ago, in Israel, in a town called Tsfat, which is way up in the north of Israel. A lot of kabbalists lived there in the sixteenth century. It has this aura of mysticism. And I spent one night there, in a motel, in room number seven, and I just had this idea of seven little stories. And I was speaking of this to a young rabbi, and he said, “Well, what about ‘The Seven Beggars’?”

So I heard about it, and I read it, and I was fascinated. I was drawn, I was confused, I was challenged. I loved it, and I just thought—this is material that I want to work with. And I couldn't quite grasp it. But in some way, some deep way, it really spoke to me.

I remember particularly the story of the two birds, which is the fourth story in the play, and I'm going to do that in the Persian world. And that, I think, was the one, the clincher. So I'm excited about working on that, because that's one I've worked on the least so far, in this whole process. And I know that's the one that really has some special meaning for me.

PART IV

What has the developmental process of this piece been like since you first became inspired to explore Jewish cultures and spiritual awakening through “The Seven Beggars” story?

Well, I feel like this is a fresh start, this piece. [I have explored the story in several different forms and from several different angles, but] I don't feel like, “Oh God, I'm hauling this thing out again.” Because it actually is really new for me.

[When I first started working with this material,] I was living in San Francisco. I had given up my career as a choreographer and become a temp, and was writing, and creating performance pieces in little clubs around San Francisco.

At first I was just working ten-minute increments on nights where you could go up and try stuff out. I did that for about a year, and eventually it became a forty-five minute piece—just the first story [out of the seven]. And it seemed clear that there was something of interest to an audience. So that was the beginning.

Then at a certain point I didn't want to be in it, because it was too big, and I felt that I needed to be outside of it, so that I could look. And that impulse eventually culminated in a play for seven actors [called *The Mad Dancers*]. And that is *that* play, and that's a different entity. And I feel good about it.

And then what made you decide to create a new piece, a one-person performance piece, that also explored “The Seven Beggars” story?

Well, Mara [Isaacs, director of *The Mad 7*,] had this opportunity in Bulgaria. She had been involved fairly early in the process, when she was working at the Taper, and I was still doing a section of it as a solo performance. And you can talk to her about it, but I think she felt that in some ways it was the best marriage of the material, that it's told through a solo performer. She wanted to explore that again, but explore me doing the entire piece, because I'd never done that. I'd only ever done the first story, that's all—the set-up of Elliott and then the first story and that was it.

And I was a little scared, but Mara said, “We're going to be in Bulgaria, no one will see us. We can just play and experiment. And I'm really excited about it.” I mean, I'll just quote her, she said, “When I think of all the plays I've worked on, the one I'm most excited about is this.” So I couldn't say no.

The process of making it a one-man show, what does that do to the story, or to your experience, or to the audience's experience of it? How does that change things?

Well, it's very different. Because the play *The Mad Dancers* was actually the story of two people—it was Elliott and the Rabbi character in the play. And there was a whole drama about Rabbi Nachman, nineteenth century, and Elliott, who is this contemporary man. That doesn't exist in this piece at all, now—this is really Elliott's story. Elliott is telling the story, and it's all through his eyes, and through his body. So, that's one thing.

I think, also, it's just better, because it is storytelling, that it's one person telling the story. And the audience watching that person go through transformations, rather than having different actors play different parts. It's certainly more in the spirit of Hasidic storytelling—or any kind of storytelling, really.

And also, I come in a certain body, in a certain package, and I'm just using everything I've got. I'm using everything I have as a dancer, and an actor, and a singer, and everything. I bring all my history, and all my anxiety and fears and emotions and feelings and love. I'm bringing all my questions about Judaism, about religion, about belief in God, about culture, about everything. I bring the whole package to the stage.

I bring myself as a performer, as someone who wants to entertain people, someone who wants to take them through an experience. I'm a great believer in theater as an interactive process, so I'm bringing all of that. I bring my life to it. I'm really putting, in a way, my life on the stage—that's what's also very scary about it.

PART V

Are there any specific artistic influences that you've had, from other dancers or writers...?

In this particular piece?

Mm-hm.

God, there's so many. From a very early age the person that most excited me about theater was Peter Brook. I remember I saw a piece of his in Germany, in an armory. It was an African folktale called *The Bone*, with a multi-national troupe. They did the piece in French mostly, which I'm not fluent in, and some German, a little bit of English—so basically I couldn't understand what was being said. They did it on a bare stage; I think it was six actors and a percussionist. And it was—I'll never forget it—it was one of the most enjoyable, funny, powerful pieces I've ever seen.

And it was very much integrated with the audience. So that idea of that, and the simplicity of a folktale—because that piece was about hunger, it was about a village that was hungry. So it tapped something, in all of us. All of us can relate to that. So his work was really, really an influence to me.

I also remember, on my first trip to Israel, there was an international theater festival. I don't know who this woman was, I wish I did, but she was from India, and she was on this tiny postage stamp stage, and it was just her, and she told stories and danced them. And I thought—this is *it*, this is the whole experience. She was so highly skilled. She really brought everything to life, and she did it with her body and her voice, and so... Whoever that woman is, I don't know, but... It's the kind of thing I'm attempting.

Some of my favorite writers, even as a child: Edward Albee, because it's... bigger. It's not realism, so it's bigger. And it's a combination of humor and something dark going on, underneath. Thornton Wilder was a big influence on me, even as a child. His, I guess, spirituality, as a writer, finding the different levels in the universe, and doing it with humor and compassion. And speaking in plain language.

I think music is a huge influence. I listen to music all the time when I'm writing and moving around. For this piece I'm listening to all kinds of music. Diverse rhythms, and... Dancers, of course. The dancers influence. In the next month and a half I'm going to be studying more dance, and learning more dances.

And then, you know, with this piece, things just happen. Little weird things happen, and I meet people, and they help me to tell the story. They become part of the story, and they help me to understand the story. Last week I was doing storytelling at a camp for inner-city kids at risk. And I told them, not something from "The Seven Beggars," but I told them a very simple parable from

Rabbi Nachman. It was really interesting because most of these kids are African-American, or Latino, but they got it, they really responded to it, because it's about their lives.

I mean, if you understand the time that Rabbi Nachman was telling the stories, it was in 1810, in Eastern Europe, in the Jewish ghetto. They were in a very violent situation, that community. So he was teaching them ways to preserve their identity, give them courage, find their joy in life. He was saying, "Look, we know it's very bleak out there, but on the inside, there's more than what's out there. There are other worlds, and inside you have *this*, inside you, and it's your life force." And I think there's value in that, if you can tell that story. I mean, I've found value in it. I wouldn't be able to work on these [stories] as long as I have... But they're constantly inspiring me.

JEWISH MYSTICISM, KABBALAH AND HASIDISM

- By Elizabeth Edwards



Claimed portrait of Israel ben Eliezer, founder of Hasidism

Religious mysticism, in general, involves the pursuit of a sense of unity with the Divine, an altered sense of perception through which the hidden spiritual nature of the universe can be accessed and experienced. Jewish mysticism undertakes a similar pursuit, but over its several thousand years of development it has taken on the significant additional goal of affecting the very nature of the Godhead. The Jewish mystic seeks not merely to become one with God, but to join together with the Creator to contribute to the repair of a world that is seen to be broken and in need of redemption.

The first recorded instances of Jewish mysticism come from the second century CE. Most mystics of this time period strove to re-create and expand upon visions of the Divine in biblical books such as Ezekiel and Song of Songs, in order to gain access to the heavenly realms. A few others chose to delve into the process of Creation. It was from among this second group that a book eventually emerged (sometime between the third and sixth centuries CE) that would serve as a foundation for all subsequent mystical thought. It was called *Sefer Yetzirah*, or *The Book of Formation*, and its anonymous author claimed that the Creation was achieved through the manipulation of the ten numbers and twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet. The ten numbers are referred to as the *Sefirot* (Hebrew for ciphers), a term that would eventually take on deep significance within the Jewish mystical tradition.

The next major development in Jewish mysticism occurred in the second half of the twelfth century, in northern Spain and southern France, with the advent of the Kabbalah movement. The mystics within this movement transformed the ten *Sefirot* of *Sefer Yetzirah* into a complex and interlinked set of divine characteristics. The Kabbalistic view of God remained monotheistic, and thus did not stray beyond mainstream Judaism's firm boundaries on that theological point. However, the Deity was understood to possess complex dualities of energy and even gender among its various "emanations." With the advent of this line of thought, the goal of Jewish mysticism expanded beyond the mere quest to gain a glimpse of God, and began to focus on achieving a deeper understanding of the multifaceted nature of the Divine.

The most fully developed Kabbalistic description of the internal complexity of the Godhead (a term referring to the abstract, essential nature of the Divine) comes from *Sefer ha-Zohar* (*The Book of Splendor*), written by Moses de Leon in the late thirteenth century (although he claimed it had been authored by the second-century sage Simeon bar Yochai). This book organizes the ten *Sefirot*, understood to be manifestations of different aspects of the nature of God, into a figure of

interwoven connections known as the “Tree of Life.” Each *Sefirah* represents a different characteristic of God, and is associated with a part of the body, a color, and one of the names of the Holy One. (For a delineation of the ten *Sefirot* as described in the *Zohar*, see “[The Tree of Life](#)” section of this guide.) These aspects are arranged in a hierarchy of accessibility, ranging from the infinite, unknowable *Eyn Sof* to the *Malkhut* (or *Shechina*), which represents God’s presence as it is experienced by man.

The next major figure to contribute to the gradually developing mystical understanding of the Divine was sixteenth-century Rabbi Isaac Luria. Although he shared his ideas with only a dozen or so followers before his early death and left behind no writings, by the seventeenth century his teachings were widespread and central to traditional Jewish thought. He pointed out that an infinite Almighty would need to remove or exile itself from a portion of the universe in order to produce an empty space in which Creation could occur. Luria then envisioned an outpouring of Divine light from the Godhead into this empty space: into vessels taking the shape of the ten *Sefirot*.

However, Luria believed that these vessels had been too fragile to contain the perfection of such holy illumination, resulting in the “shattering” of the lower seven vessels. Those forces that had resisted Creation and caused the shattering (*shevirah*) became the forces of evil in the world; they lacked the power to survive on their own and relied on access to the sparks of Divine light that had fallen into the lower realms during the *shevirah*. Through this idea, Lurianic Kabbalah connected Jewish mysticism with Jewish ethics, presenting the possibility that humans should strive not only to experience and understand God, but could indeed partner with God in the ongoing process of the universe’s redemption. Humanity’s task was to raise the holy sparks out of the control of the forces of evil and back into the upper world through the performance of *mitzvot*, or good deeds—thus participating in the *tikkun olam*, the process of repairing the world.

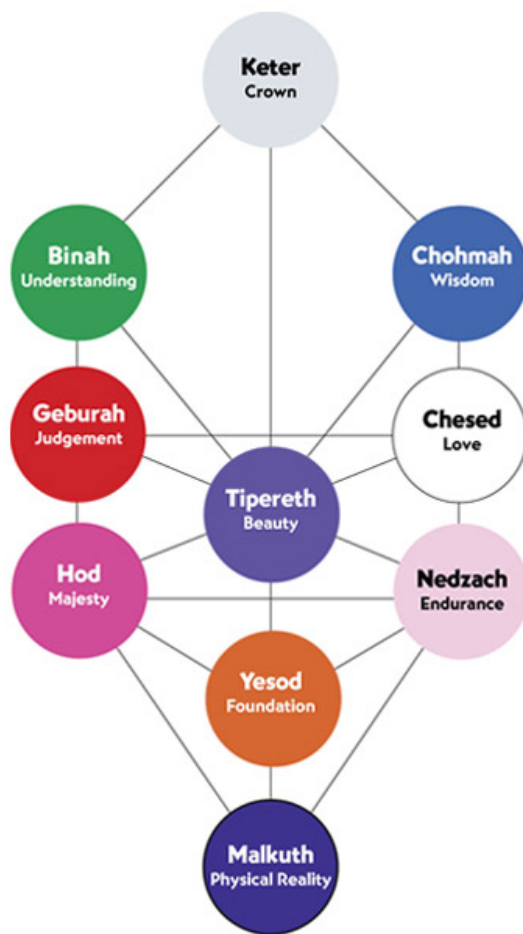
This process would be given further attention during the mid-eighteenth century emergence of yet another Jewish mystic with an influential perspective on the relationship between God and man. His name was Israel ben Eliezer (widely known as the *Baal Shem Tov*, or Master of the Good Name), and he founded the Hasidic movement. Hasidic mysticism emphasized a joyful approach to life and sincere, devoted focus in worship and prayer. Many Hasidim engage in ecstatic dance in an effort to forget themselves and become attuned to the presence of God. Israel ben Eliezer considered God to be present in all things, and a spark of the Divine to exist even in the midst of great evil. He thus believed that evil was to be not only overcome, but uplifted, corrected, and cleansed. Even the smallest and most mundane act was thought to have spiritual consequences, and so the Hasidic leader, or *tzaddik*, was given authority over the worldly as well as the spiritual matters in the lives of his congregants.

The impact of Jewish mysticism continues even to the present day. Hasidic groups are still in existence throughout the world, and study of the Kabbalah has come into renewed vogue in recent years. Perhaps the most significant effect of the historical development of Jewish mysticism, however, has been the way that mystical understandings of the nature of God and the role of humanity have come to permeate Jewish thought and practice on a more general level. Guided by the developments in mystical thought over the past several thousand years, the quest for a deeper connection to the Divine continues, and will likely do so for centuries if not millennia to come.

THE TREE OF LIFE

“Happy is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked, who does not stand in the path of sinners, who does not sit in the place of scorners, but who desires God’s Torah, and immerses himself in it day and night. He shall be like a tree planted by the streams of water.”

—Psalms 1:1-3



*The Ten Sefirot organized into the figure of the Tree of Life
Image by Danny Garber*

The theory of the *Sefirot* is an attempt to explain how the infinite God can have a relationship with any finite thing, and how an unknowable God can be known by man. The *Sefirot* refer to ten aspects, or emanations, of the incorporeal, unchangeable, incomprehensible Creator known as *Eyn Sof*. They are the bridge across the abyss, the connective tissue between the infinite God and the finite world. By climbing the ladder of the *Sefirot*, beginning at the root of the Tree with the Divine Presence in its earthly manifestation (known as *Shechina* or *Malkuth*), the soul can come into closer contact with and deeper understanding of an otherwise unfathomable God.

The relationship between the *Sefirot* and *Eyn Sof* can be compared to that between the body and soul. The soul dwells within the body, acting through a variety of physical organs, and yet is not to be identified with any of those organs. In the same way the *Sefirot* are the instruments through which *Eyn Sof* acts, and any seeming changes or inconsistencies in God’s behavior are in fact only a reflection of the various modes by which the *Sefirot* channel, reflect, and employ the essence of *Eyn Sof*.

A brief description of the specific nature of each *Sefirah* and its relationship to the others can be found below.

impulse that precedes thought but is necessary for action. It is also called *Ayin/Nothingness*, because it was out of the infinite void that the Almighty first created. This is the highest, most inaccessible state of the Godhead.

Chohmah/Wisdom—This represents the first impulse to create, the flash of intuition or inspiration that precedes conscious thought. It is considered to be a male aspect of the Divinity.

Binah/Understanding—This represents the point at which Divine inspiration begins to take on definite form. It signifies analytic, distinguishing thought, rather than contemplative intuition. The *Binah* is the uppermost female element of the *Sefirot*, and the womb from which the lower seven *Sefirot* were born.

Keter/Crown—This represents the first stirrings of the Will within the Godhead, the primal

Chesed/Love—This represents the generous, benevolent side of God, the quality of unconditional Divine Love. It is connected to the masculine intuition of *Chohmah*, and serves as a counterpart of the potential destructiveness of *Geburah*/Judgement.

Geburah/Judgement—This is the aspect of God manifested as a wrathful Divinity of awful punishment. It is considered to be feminine, like the analytic thought of *Binah*, and serves as a counterbalance for *Chesed*, so that the world is not so overwhelmed by God's love that it is reabsorbed into the Divine.

Tiphereth/Beauty—Also translated as “glory,” this is the balancing force between *Chesed* and *Geburah*, and is in fact considered to be their offspring. This force unites the upper nine *Sefirot*.

Nedzach/Endurance—This represents God's active grace and benevolence in the world—it is a more earthly manifestation of *Chesed*.

Hod/Majesty—This represents the manner in which the judgment of the Deity is dispensed on earth—it is a more earthly manifestation of *Geburah*.

Yesod/Foundation—This is the channel by which *Tiphereth* connects to (or impregnates) *Shechina* or *Malkuth*, the path through which Divine Creativity and Fertility are visited upon all creation.

Malkuth/Physical Reality—Also referred to as *Shechina*, this is the culmination and synthesis of all the attributes of God, the quality that links the Eternal Sovereign to the “real” world. It is the Divine Presence, God's immanent and female aspect, the way in which humans experience the Divine.

For a description of the historical development of the concept of the ten *Sefirot*, see the “[Jewish Mysticism, Kabbalah and Hasidism](#)” section of this guide.

Individual descriptions collected from *Essential Judaism* by George Robinson. General background on the *Sefirot* from *The Mystic Quest: An Introduction to Jewish Mysticism* by David S. Ariel.

RABBI NACHMAN AND THE BRESLOV HASIDIM

- By Elizabeth Edwards



*Rabbi Nachman's "kibbutz" and the original Breslov Synagogue (on right horizon), circa 1922
Image from Breslov on the Internet [<http://www.breslov.com/content.html>]*

Rabbi Nachman of Breslov was born in the Ukrainian town of Medzeboz on April 4, 1772 (1 Nisan 5532 by the Jewish calendar). He was the great-grandson of Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov, who founded the Hasidic movement of Jewish mysticism in the early eighteenth century. Born at a moment when

the Hasidic movement was first beginning to ebb, Rabbi Nachman founded a group known as the Breslov Hasidim, which is still in existence today in many scattered communities throughout the world.

There are no specific practices, prayers, or dress code unique to the Breslov Hasidim. Rather, Rabbi Nachman's teachings focus on living intensely and with joy, taking a positive view of oneself, one's life, and other people. He did place special emphasis on the universal Jewish practice of *hisbodedus*—private prayer and meditation with God discussing personal needs and concerns. His major teachings were published in 1808, in a book called the *Likutey Moharan*. Rabbi Nachman was also known for his prolific storytelling, through which he conveyed many spiritual lessons and insights. Though he did not write down his stories, many (like "The Seven Beggars" tale on which *The Mad 7* is based) were eventually compiled into books by his disciples, and have since been the subject of academic and popular study by Jews and non-Jews alike.

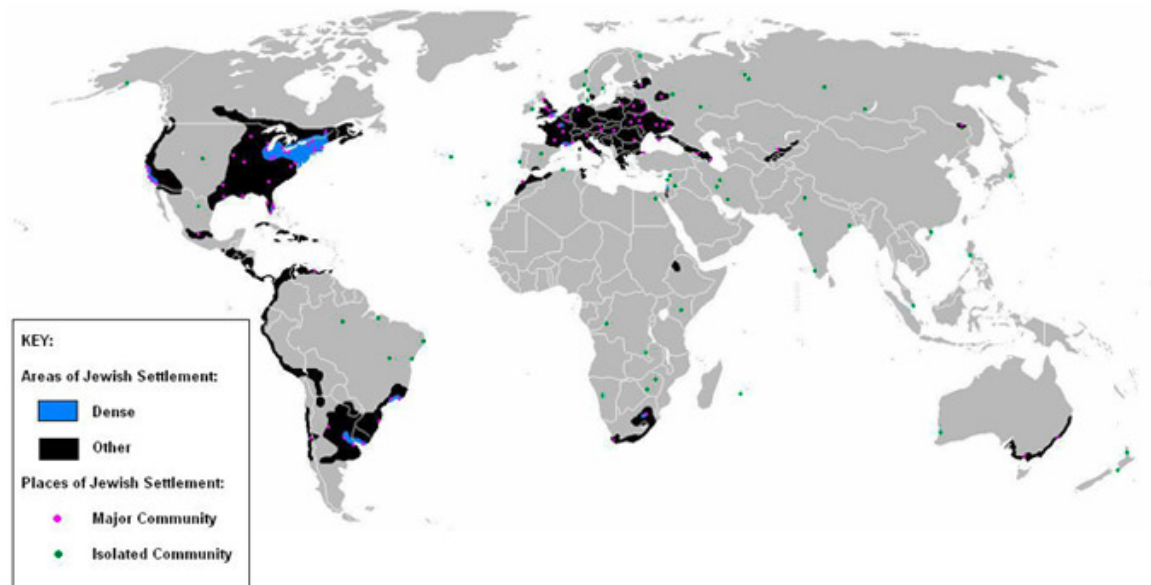
Rabbi Nachman died of tuberculosis on October 16, 1810. He chose to be buried in Uman, site of a 1768 massacre of some 20,000 Jews, so that he might "lie amongst the holy martyrs." His grave is visited by Breslov Hasidim from all over the world even today. After his death, the teachings of Rabbi Nachman continued to spread through the devoted energy of his followers.

Unlike many Hasidic leaders (or *tzaddikim*), Rabbi Nachman did not appoint a spiritual successor prior to his death, and his followers did not identify any among his closest disciples as being worthy to take his place. Instead, Breslov Hasidim have continued to look to the teachings of Rabbi Nachman for their day-to-day spiritual inspiration and guidance. Even today, Rabbi Nachman is considered to be the leader of the Breslov movement, earning Breslov Hasidim the nickname "the dead Hasidim" amongst the Jewish communities of Eastern Europe. Still, his followers consider the spirit of Rabbi Nachman to be very much alive through his teachings, which are interpreted and applied with the help of the most prominent rabbis in each generation of Breslov Hasidim.

*(An adaptation of Rabbi Nachman's original tale "The Seven Beggars" can be accessed [here](http://www.xs4all.nl/~rcassuto/beggars.html).
[<http://www.xs4all.nl/~rcassuto/beggars.html>])*

A VOYAGE AROUND THE DIASPORA

- By Carrie Hughes



The story of the Jewish people is a story of a search for a homeland. The Old Testament narrates the struggles of a small tribe first forced into slavery in Egypt, who then wandered homeless in the desert, before finally arriving in their promised land, which would itself ultimately prove to be a fleeting refuge. King Solomon's First Temple was destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BCE. After the destruction of the Second Temple in 70 CE, the unifying feature of Jewish life was destroyed, and a gradual dispersal of the Jewish people began. The conversion of the Roman Emperor to Christianity in 313 CE, and the establishment of Christianity as a state religion, made the Roman Empire even less hospitable to Jews, and their migration accelerated. Much of that early migration was directed towards the Mediterranean, particularly what is now Spain. Ancient trade routes along the Red Sea, to Yemen and possibly as far as Ethiopia or India, were dotted with Jewish settlements that also provided sanctuary for the dislocated.

The Diaspora has continued steadily over the intervening centuries, with exile and oppression often further scattering already displaced populations of Jews. As a result, Jewish communities can now be found all over the world. Although many commonalities of belief and tradition still link these diverse groups, unique customs have also developed within each group in response to its surrounding cultural environment. *The Mad 7* celebrates the diversity of the Diaspora through its storytellers, each of whom embodies a different cultural realm in which a Jewish community has developed.

To learn more about the background and unique practices of some of the international Jewish communities from which the *Mad 7* storytellers originate, read the descriptions below. These descriptions explore a few of the many Jewish communities throughout the world. It is important to note that there is often as diverse a range of practices within various communities as there is between them. These descriptions are meant to give a sense of some of the traditions historically associated with the groups discussed, but do not necessarily reflect the full diversity of Jewish culture in these regions or around the world.

ASHKENAZI—

Comprising the largest and most well-known community of the Jewish Diaspora, Ashkenazi Jews are descended from medieval Jewish people who arrived in the Rhineland and northern France around 800 CE. Members later migrated eastward, and in the tenth to nineteenth centuries their presence expanded to Germany, Poland, Hungary, Russia and throughout Eastern Europe. A large number also immigrated to the US in the nineteenth century. Though geographically scattered, they were united in their common language, Yiddish (now much less prevalent). Much of what Americans think of as “Jewish culture” is Ashkenazi, including Klezmer music and dance, along with foods like bagels, gefilte fish, and chopped liver. The Hasidic movement has its roots in Ashkenazi Judaism.

SEPHARDIC—

The second largest Jewish cultural group, the Sephardic community originated in Spain and Portugal. While initially tolerated there, the conversion of the Visigoth rulers to Catholicism in the sixth century led to aggressive persecution of Jews. This was alleviated between the eighth and eleventh centuries, when Spain fell under the rule of Muslim Moors. During this “golden age,” Jews were allowed to practice their religion, participated in secular education and business, and made many artistic and scientific contributions. In the late fifteenth century, however, King Ferdinand V and Queen Isabella I (in Spain) and King Manuel I (in Portugal) ordered all Jews expelled from their respective countries. Some were absorbed by communities in North Africa and the Middle East; others founded communities in Europe—in Venice, Amsterdam, London and Hamburg, for example. Still later, many of the first colonial Jewish immigrants to the United States were Sephardic.

Sephardic Jews share a common language, Ladino (derived from Old Castilian with Turkish influences), which many consider the Sephardic equivalent of Yiddish. The Sephardic tradition is characterized by a unique style of liturgy, with variations in the form and order of the prayers as well as in the Hebrew pronunciation. Some of the best known Sephardic traditions concern holidays: the Sephardic Hanukkah menorah is often an oil lamp instead of a candelabra, for example. Sephardic Jews are also permitted to eat rice or beans at Passover (forbidden for Ashkenazi Jews), but eating fish and milk, which is permitted in the Ashkenazi tradition, is prohibited.

YEMENITE—

Tradition states that there have been Jews in Yemen from the time of King Solomon, even before the destruction of the First Temple. A significant population arrived in the second century CE, and the powerful third-century king Abu-Kariba Asad-Toban converted to Judaism, spreading the religion throughout the region. The situation for Jews deteriorated in the seventh century with the advent of Islam, and continued to decline in the centuries to follow. In the twentieth century, Yemenite Jews faced harsh persecution, and by 1949, the situation was dangerous enough (following a 1947 Pogrom) that “operation magic carpet” evacuated most Yemeni Jews to Israel. By 1976, when an American diplomat encountered a remote Jewish community in the north of the country, they were believed to have become extinct.

Yemeni Jews read the Torah in both Hebrew and Aramaic Targum, and worshippers sit on the floor in the synagogue, in contrast to most other Jewish communities. They also continued to practice prostration well beyond its post-Renaissance decline in popularity among other Jewish traditions. Because of their tenuous status in a generally Islamic country, they sometimes worshipped in homes rather than synagogues, and their ritual objects, rather than the buildings in

which they worship, are more likely to be decorated and embellished even today. Yemeni Jewish tradition also includes the use of Henna for decoration of brides.

ETHIOPIAN—

Also known as Beta Israel, tradition suggests that Ethiopian Jews are descended either from a group of Moses's followers who separated after the Exodus, or from members of the tribe of Dan who arrived around the tenth century BCE, at the breakup of the Kingdom of Israel. Other scholars have proposed that they are descended from Yemeni immigrants who intermarried with a local population, or from Ethiopian Christians who assumed a Jewish identity. For centuries there was some dispute as to whether or not this group was really Jewish; in the sixteenth century the Chief Rabbi of Egypt proclaimed definitively that they were, and by the nineteenth century most European authorities agreed. After another period of dispute, Ethiopian Jews were granted "right of return" to Israel in 1973. Most of the population (85%) resettled in Israel between 1984 and 1991.

Certain unique practices adapted by the Ethiopian Jews have allowed them to preserve their culture and religion despite their isolation from the rest of Jewish society. In the fifteenth century they developed a monastic tradition, which served them in preserving the tenets and practices of their faith until the twentieth century. Also around the fifteenth century a strict rule of purity called "attenkuan" arose, which required members who had been in contact with outsiders to purify themselves before returning. Restrictive laws prohibited Jews from owning land, so many concentrated on crafts such as masonry, pottery, smithing, carpentry and weaving.

The Beta Israel liturgy focuses heavily on the Psalms, and is not in Hebrew, but in an earlier Semitic language, Ge'ez. Traditionally their services occur in small, three-chambered, round prayer-houses. Prayers are sung, and accompanied by a five-beat rhythm on a drum and metal gong. Ethiopian Jews have a unique holiday, Sigd, celebrated on hilltops outside the villages and involving bowing and prostration. It celebrates the giving of the Torah, the return from Babylonia to Jerusalem under Ezra and Nehemiah, and Ezra's injunction against taking Babylonian wives. Traditionally, Ethiopian Jews are required to confess to a monk or priest once a year, and before death.

IRANIAN/PERSIAN—

The book of Ezra credits Persian kings with permitting the Jewish return to Jerusalem and the reconstruction of the Temple. It also indicates that there was, by the late sixth century BCE, a significant and influential Jewish community in Persia (with settlements in what is now Afghanistan, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan). Perhaps the most famous of the Persian Jews is Esther, heroine of the story of Purim, who hid her Jewish identity and married the King of Persia. When the King's evil advisor Haman plotted to kill the Jews she revealed her identity, and her people were saved.

As the story of Purim demonstrates, some Persian Jews achieved high rank in the third through seventh centuries CE. During this time the Jews of Iran wrote the Babylonian Talmud, one of the most important documents of Jewish law and commentary. While the introduction of Islam in the mid-seventh century did not significantly affect Persian Jews, the early sixteenth-century establishment of Shiitism and the foundation of the Safavid Dynasty was the beginning of a harsh period for Jews, which lasted until the Constitutional revolution at the beginning of the twentieth century. The Islamic revolution in 1979 led once again to hardships for the Jews, though Iran still holds the second largest population of Jews (outside of Israel) in the Middle East.

Iranian Jews have a tradition of carefully blending in to the larger society. For example, they typically hang their mezuzahs on the inside of the doorframe, rather than the outside, and give their children Arabic, Persian, or even Islamic names. They have also proved instrumental in the preservation of certain elements of Persian culture. Because of strict prohibition of secular music by Shiite authorities, the preservation of Persian music fell to religious minorities, including Jews, as did the process of wine-making.

INDIAN—

There are several distinct Jewish communities in India. The community depicted in *The Mad 7* is the Cochin Jews, who live in the Southern part of India. Jews came to live in Cochin in several waves. The first arrived during the time of King Solomon and after the destruction of the Second Temple. Later immigrants arrived over the ensuing centuries from Holland, Portugal, the Middle East, North Africa, and Spain.

Under the protection of a Hindu Raja who granted them land for a town, the Jews found Cochin to be a relatively safe place. In fact, Cochin Jews have experienced an uncharacteristic degree of tolerance and freedom from anti-Semitism over the course of their history. However, the community also has a tradition of Zionism, and the promise of economic opportunity, the ability to lead a more religious life, and the chance to build a Jewish state inspired many to immigrate to Israel. Now most members of the community have moved west, where they continue to have a vibrant community.

Worship among Cochin Jews contains a combination of Sephardic, Yemenite and Baghdadi elements, with unique ancient melodies and prayers. Unlike other Orthodox Jewish communities, they have no prohibitions against women singing in public, and so prayers and narrative songs are often performed by women. Many women are also taught to read Hebrew and follow the ritual in synagogue. Even in the nineteenth century, girls were registered in the Jewish schools, and the Jewish population had a much higher literacy rate than their non-Jewish neighbors.

DANCE TRADITIONS, SPIRITUAL AND INTERNATIONAL

Traditions of dance can be found in societies from all time periods and in every corner of the world. Although the forms these dance traditions take can vary tremendously across cultures, the goals and purposes behind these traditions fall into several recurring themes. Spiritual expression and the quest for a connection with the Divine is a common goal of dance traditions in a wide variety of societies. *The Mad 7* explores several specific traditions of ritual dance in connection with the process of spiritual expression and exploration. Each one comes from a different area of the world to which the Jewish people have been scattered in the process of Diaspora.

The videos below contain examples of spiritual dance in some of the styles explored in *The Mad 7*.

Klezmer:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hJ-r5mwBH0E>

Sephardic:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=srGHxUd54aM>

Yemenite:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hbpc3AC86I>

Classical Persian:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UCAIbY9J66A>

Ethiopian:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y7PmXKaubs4>

Bharata Natyam:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=04B8Pjv9zLU>

CONCEPT VOCABULARY



*Hunchback Beggar and the Tree of Life
Illustration by Moreen Greenberg from Safed (Isr.)*

The title has since acquired a special reference to a prophetic figure who, it is said, will usher in an age of universal peace and plenty and bring about the spiritual regeneration of humanity.

Jewish History and Tradition

Diaspora— A Greek term meaning dispersion, Diaspora refers to the spread of Jewish people to all corners of the world, often as a result of persecution and exile at various points throughout Jewish history. Significant moments of Diaspora include the destruction of the Temple in the second century CE and the exile of the Sephardim from Spain in 1492.

Peyos— These are the earlocks (i.e. curled hair) grown by certain strictly observant Jews in response to Leviticus 19:27, which states: “You shall not clip your hair at the temples or mar the edges of your beard.”

Tzaddik— This Hebrew term meaning “righteous one” is used to describe the leader of a Hasidic group, who is viewed by the members of that group as the living incarnation of the Torah.

Messiah— Originally this term, which means “anointed one,” was used to refer to any person anointed with holy oil and consecrated to carry out the purposes of God as high priest or king.

Mitzvah (pl. mitzvot)— This term originally refers to divine precepts taking the form of specific behavioral commands, either positive or negative. There are computed to be 613 such commands contained in the Torah. Colloquially, the term *mitzvah* has come to refer to any act of charity or human kindness that fulfills a person's comprehensive duty towards all humanity. In mystical thought, the performance of a mitzvah constitutes the triumph of the spiritual nature over the physical nature (or, alternately, the proper recombination of these two fractured aspects of the individual), and contributes to the redemption of the broken universe.

Aspects of the Soul and the Divine

Nefesh— A Hebrew term meaning “life” or “soul,” the *nefesh* is that which constitutes a living being. It is related to the verb “to blow,” and is thus associated with the breath. The term is used in the Torah in connection with animals as well as men.

Ruah— An aspect of the soul somewhat deeper than the *nefesh*, the *ruah* is the faculty that motivates man to understand the deeper, spiritual meaning of things. Perfection of this understanding leads to development of the *neshamah*.

Neshamah— This represents the deepest level of the soul, which enables man to achieve mystical insight into the nature of the Divine. It is through the *neshamah* that man can attain union with the *Sefirot*.

Sefirot—The Hebrew term for ciphers, or numbers, this word has since come to refer to ten divine emanations or aspects of God. See “[The Tree of Life](#)” section of this guide for a more detailed description of the ten *Sefirot* and their interrelationship.

Shechina— Also called the Princess, the Bride, or Beautiful Girl with No Eyes (she has lost her eyes from weeping while in exile), the *Shechina* represents the presence of God, the limited aspect of the infinite and unknowable Divine that humans are capable of tangibly experiencing. The *Shechina* is considered to be omnipresent and immanent in all things—especially in the performing of a *mitzvah*, or when man approaches God through worship, prayer, or sacred study. *Shechina* is also represented by the Garden, in which the Tree of Life (a symbol for the ten interconnected *Sefirot* for which the *Shechina* serves as foundation) is planted.

Educators Introduction

Welcome to the McCarter Resource Guide Educator Edition for Yehuda Hyman's *The Mad 7*, the Spotlight Production of our 2008 IN-Festival. This guide has been assembled to complement both your students' theater-going experience as well as your class curriculum by offering a variety of interesting and engaging activities for both pre-show and post-performance instruction and enjoyment.

This production of *The Mad 7* affords opportunities for enrichment in literature, history, theater, music, dance and media/visual arts. Students can embark upon an investigation into Jewish history, culture, and religious beliefs and practices; explore the geographical and ethnic diversity of the Jewish Diaspora; consider the prevalence of “The Quest” and “Riddle” plots in Western drama and literature; read and reflect upon the mystical symbolism and profundity of a two-hundred-year-old Hasidic tale; contemplate the challenges of solo performance; and ponder the personal relevance of themes involving one's search for self, truth, meaning, the source of happiness, and the relevance of faith or spirituality in contemporary life.

Our student audiences are often our most engaging audiences at McCarter, and we encourage you and your students to join us for a discussion with playwright and performer Yehuda Hyman

and director Mara Isaacs after the performance. Our visiting artists are always impressed with the preparation and thoughtfulness of McCarter's young audiences, and the post-performance discussion offers a unique opportunity for students to engage intellectually with professional theater practitioners. We look forward to seeing all of you for a wonderful discussion about the magically entertaining and deeply profound *The Mad 7*.

Core Curriculum Standards

According to the NJ Department of Education, "experience with and knowledge of the arts is a vital part of a complete education." Our production of *The Mad 7* and the activities outlined in this guide are designed to enrich your students' education by addressing the following specific Core Curriculum Standards for Visual and Performing Arts:

- 1.1** All students will use aesthetic knowledge in the creation of and in response to dance, music, theater and visual arts.
- 1.3** All students will demonstrate an understanding of the elements and principles of dance, music, theater and visual arts.
- 1.4** All students will develop, apply, and reflect upon knowledge of the process of critique.
- 1.5** All students will understand and analyze the role, development, and continuing influence of the arts in relation to world cultures, history, and society.

Viewing *The Mad 7* and then participating in the pre- and post-show discussions and activities suggested in this resource guide will also address the following Core Curriculum Standards in Language Arts Literacy:

- 3.2** All students will write in clear, concise, organized language that varies in content and form for different audiences and purposes.
- 3.3** All students will speak in clear, concise, organized language that varies in content and form for different audiences and purposes.
- 3.4** All students will listen actively to information from a variety of sources in a variety of situations.
- 3.5** All students will access, view, evaluate and respond to print, non-print and electronic texts and resources.

In addition, the production of *The Mad 7*, as well as the resource guide activities, will help to fulfill the following Social Studies Core Curriculum Standards:

- 6.1** All students will utilize historical thinking, problem solving and research skills to maximize their understanding of civics, history, geography and economics.

6.6 All students will apply knowledge of spatial relationships and other geographic skills to understand human behavior in relation to the physical and cultural environment.

PRE-SHOW PREPARATION, QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION, AND ACTIVITIES

Note to Educators: Use the following assignments, questions, and activities to prepare your students, as well as to engage their imaginations and creativity, before they experience The Mad 7 in performance.

1. **ONE PART QUEST AND ANOTHER PART RIDDLE.** Yehuda Hyman, playwright and solo performer of *The Mad 7*, describes his play's central character, Elliott Green, as "so lost that he doesn't know how lost he is." Regarding Elliott's dramatic journey, Hyman offers, "...this is a story about guides or mentors who come and lead this person to an understanding of himself, and his place in the universe, and the relationship of who he is, in this world and the other world."

With these brief descriptions, Hyman not only captures the essence of the story at the center of *The Mad 7*, but also invokes two of the great pervasive plots in Western drama and literature: The Quest and The Riddle. One part quest (that is, involving the main character's search for a person, place or thing which is either tangible or intangible) and another part riddle (that is, involving the main character's search for clues to find the hidden meaning of something that is deliberately enigmatic or ambiguous), *The Mad 7* dramatically depicts Elliott's mysterious, mystical, and existential search to find himself and to figure out what is missing in his life.

PLOTS IN COMMON

- Ask your students if they can think of any books or plays from previous study, personal reading, or theater-going that feature either a quest or a riddle plot. If students cannot think of any titles off the top of their heads, ask them to conduct a little research for homework to identify at least two books or plays they have read or seen which feature quest or riddle plots. Have them write brief synopses of each story/play, considering the following details:
 - character traits of the protagonist
 - nature of the object or person for which the protagonist searches
 - obstacles that stand in the protagonist's way
 - what the protagonist learns along the journey
 - how the plot is resolved (i.e., does the protagonist find that which s/he has been seeking), and
 - what, if anything, the protagonist discovers about herself or himself

- The next time class meets, ask your students to present one of the stories they researched to their classmates and to share its details. After every student has presented his or her own book or play, ask the class as a group to brainstorm a list of common characteristics (based upon the categories above) for each type of plot.

PERSONAL PLOTS

- Ask your students to reflect upon:
 - A moment in their lives when either they or a friend or family member was “so lost that [they didn’t] know how lost [they were].”
 - or
 - A situation in their or someone else’s life in which a guide or mentor led them or someone they knew to a better understanding of themselves and “their place in the universe.”
- Give students an opportunity to freely write about one of these experiences for ten minutes. If appropriate, students may volunteer their compositions to be read aloud to the class and discussed.

2. **INSPIRATION EXPLORATION.** Ask your students if they can think of any books or plays from previous study, personal reading, or theater-going that feature either a quest or a riddle plot. If students cannot think of any titles off the top of their heads, ask them to conduct a little research for homework to identify at least two books or plays they have read or seen which feature quest or riddle plots. Have them write brief synopses of each story/play, considering the following details:

- | | |
|--------------------|---|
| • Judaism | • Jewish mysticism |
| • Jewish history | • Kabbalah (history, philosophy, symbolism) |
| • Jewish Diaspora | • Jewish storytelling tradition |
| • Hasidic Judaism | • Jewish dance traditions |
| • Breslov Hasidism | • Jewish symbolism |
| • Rabbi Nachman | |

Have your students teach one another about their individual or group topics via oral and illustrated (i.e., posters or PowerPoint) reports. Following the presentations, ask your students to reflect upon their research process and discoveries.

3. **ON MYSTICAL STORIES OF BEGGARS, GARDENS AND BIRDS.** Yehuda Hyman’s *The Mad 7* is imaginatively based upon “The Seven Beggars,” a mystical and allegorical story told by the renowned Hasidic Rabbi Nachman of Breslov in the year 1810. At an early age, Nachman devoted himself to a spiritual existence of religious study, prayer, reflection, meditation and fasting, and he quickly became an influential rabbi (“teacher”) and *tzaddik* (a righteous person of outstanding holiness and piety) who attracted many followers. As a teacher and spiritual guide he taught religious and moral lessons via many modes of discourse, including seemingly simple fairytale-like stories filled with vivid imagery and multi-layered meanings. The purpose of these stories, according to the wise Rabbi as reported by his closest disciple, scribe and publisher, was “to arouse people from their spiritual slumber.”

Printed in both Hebrew and Yiddish, the *tzaddik's* wisdom was made available to all, including women (who at the time received no formal religious education) and the unlearned. Nearly two hundred years later, Rabbi Nachman's stories continue to inspire and are studied by both Jews and non-Jews.

Have your students read a simple translation or adaptation of "The Seven Beggars" (adapted versions are available online at <http://www.xs4all.nl/~rcassuto/beggars.html> or at <http://www.shuvubonim.org/storysb.html>). You might divide your students up into groups and assign portions of the tale; it is divided into six sections (i.e., "days" or "beggars"). Then:

- Ask your students to discuss the characters, stories, and themes of Rabbi Nachman's tale. Ask them to consider what lesson, ideal, or value the story of each beggar attempts to teach or instill.
- Give your students the opportunity to explore the visual imagery of "The Seven Beggars" through the medium of collage. In collage, an artistic composition is created by affixing cutout images and text, material/fabric, and other small objects to paper. Ask your students to create a collage based upon one of the beggars' tales.
 - They will need an 8½" x 11" sheet of paper (either colored paper or paper that can be painted), magazines with visual images/photographs, scissors, additional colored paper for cutouts, colored pencils or paint for a background, and glue.
 - They should think about how they might use color, images and text to symbolize the characters, setting or mood of the story.
 - Educators might also opt for their students to create electronic collages by utilizing PowerPoint technology (or any art or photo software accessible) and images gleaned from the Internet.
 - Students should be given time to show their finished collages to the class and to explain how the objects and images in their collages express and symbolize their chosen tale from "The Seven Beggars."

Post-Show Questions for Discussion and Activities

Note to Educators: Use the following assignments, questions, and activities to have students evaluate their experience of the performance of The Mad 7, as well as to encourage their own imaginative and artistic projects through further exploration of the play in production. Consider also that some of the pre-show activities might enhance your students' experience following the performance.

1. **THE POWER OF ONE.** In addition to his work on *The Mad 7*, Yehuda Hyman has previously explored "The Seven Beggars" tale through a separate theatrical piece entitled

The Mad Dancers. *The Mad Dancers* similarly tells the story of Elliott Green and his journey in search of himself, yet features a cast of seven actors. Ask your students to reflect upon *The Mad 7* as a solo performance piece, and then comparatively as a play for multiple actors. Then ask them the following questions:

- What, do you imagine, are the challenges of solo performance?
- What are the pleasures of watching one actor embody multiple characters?
- What, if anything, cannot be done or achieved in a solo performance?
- What in the nature of *The Mad 7* (e.g., narrative, theme, characters) recommends it for solo performance? Explain your answer. [Following student contemplation of this question, you might have the class read or reread aloud Part 4 of the “Interview with Yehuda Hyman,” which focuses upon the past development of the piece and the playwright-performer’s decision to make it a solo performance piece.]

2. **MEDITATING ON *THE MAD 7*.** Following their attendance at the performance of *The Mad 7*, ask your students to reflect on the questions below. You might choose to have them answer each individually, or you may divide students into groups for round-table discussions. Have them consider each question, record their answers and then share their responses with the rest of the class.

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR STUDENTS ABOUT THE PLAY IN PRODUCTION

- a. What was your overall reaction to *The Mad 7*? Did you find the production compelling? Stimulating? Intriguing? Challenging? Memorable? Confusing? Evocative? Unique? Delightful? Meaningful? Explain your reactions.
- b. Did experiencing the play heighten your awareness or understanding of the play’s themes [e.g., the challenge of an existential crisis in an ordinary person’s life, the search for one’s self, the search for what is truly meaningful in life, the source of true happiness, the path to self-fulfillment, the relevance of faith or spirituality in contemporary life]? What themes were made even more apparent in performance? Explain your responses.
- c. Do you think that the pace and tempo of the production were effective and appropriate? Explain your opinion.
- d. Did you find the elements of music and dance to be integral to the production as a whole? Explain your thoughts.

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR STUDENTS ABOUT THE CHARACTERS

- a. Did you personally identify with Elliott Green or any of the other characters in *The Mad 7*? Who? Why?
- b. What memorable qualities or character traits were revealed by the action and speech of the characters? Explain your ideas.
- c. Did Elliott Green undergo a transformation during the course of the play? If so, how would you describe his transformation? What caused this transformation?
- d. In what ways did the characters reveal the themes of the play? Explain your responses.

QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR STUDENTS ABOUT THE STYLE AND DESIGN OF THE PRODUCTION

- a. Was there a moment in *The Mad 7* that was so compelling or intriguing that it remains with you in your mind's eye? Can you write a vivid description of that moment? As you write your description, pretend that you are writing about the moment for someone who was unable to experience the performance.
 - b. Did the style and design elements of the production enhance the performance? Did anything specifically stand out to you? Explain your reaction.
 - c. How did the production style and design reflect the themes of the play?
 - d. What mood or atmosphere did the lighting design establish or achieve? Explain your experience.
 - e. Did the design of the costumes and makeup serve to illuminate the characters, themes, and style of the play? How?
3. **WEARING THE HAT OF THE CRITIC.** Have your students take on the role of theater critic by having them write reviews of *The Mad 7*. A theater critic or reviewer is essentially a "professional audience member," whose job is to report the news, in detail, of a play's production and performance through active and descriptive language for a target audience of readers (e.g., their peers, their community, or those interested in the Arts). Critics/reviewers also analyze the theatrical event to provide clearer understanding of the artistic ambitions and intentions of a play and its production; reviewers often ask themselves, "What is the playwright and this production attempting to do?" And, finally, the critic offers a personal opinion as to whether the artistic intentions of a production were achieved and effective. Things to consider before writing:
- Theater critics/reviewers always back up their opinions with reasons, evidence and details.
 - Particulars of a production that can be discussed in a theatrical review are the play text or script (and its themes, plot, characters, etc.), scenic elements, costumes, lighting, sound, music, acting, dance and direction (i.e., how all of these elements are put together).
 - We encourage you to provide your students with sample theater reviews from various newspapers. Many of these reviews can be found online.

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Rabbi Nachman and Breslov Hasidism:

Breslov on the Internet. 1 Jan. 1997. Friends of Breslov. 17 Jan. 2008
<<http://www.breslov.com/content.html>>.

Kaplan, Rabbi Aryeh, ed. *Rabbi Nachman's Stories*. Jerusalem: Breslov Research Institute, 1983.

The Tale of the Seven Beggars. Caslog. 22 Jan. 2008
<<http://www.xs4all.nl/~rcassuto/beggars.html>>.

Jewish Mysticism:

Ariel, David S. *The Mystic Quest: An Introduction to Jewish Mysticism*. Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 1988.

Besserman, Perle, ed. *Teachings of the Jewish Mystics*. Boston: Shambhala, 1998.

Birnbaum, Philip. *A Book of Jewish Concepts*. New York: Hebrew Publishing Company, 1975.

Judaism and Jewish History:

Ausubel, Nathan. *Pictorial History of the Jewish People*. New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1979.

Barnes, Trevor. *World Faiths: Judaism*. Boston: Kingfisher, 2005.

Charing, Douglas. *Eyewitness Books: Judaism*. New York: DK Publishing, 2003.

Hundert, Gershon David, ed. *Essential Papers on Hasidism: Origins to Present*. New York: New York University Press, 1991.

Robinson, George. *Essential Judaism: A Complete Guide to Beliefs, Customs, and Rituals*. New York: Pocket Books, 2000

Jews of the Diaspora:

De Lange, Nicholas. *Atlas of the Jewish World*. New York: Facts on File, Inc., 1984.

Juhasz, Esther, ed. *Sephardi Jews in the Ottoman Empire: Aspects of Material Culture*. Jerusalem: The Israel Museum, 1990.

Muchawsky-Schnapper, Ester. *The Yemenites: Two Thousand Years of Jewish Culture*. Jerusalem: The Israel Museum, 2000.

Sarshar, Houman, ed. *Esther's Children: A Portrait of Iranian Jews*. Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society, 2002.

Shelemay, Kay Kaufman. *The Jews of Ethiopia: A People in Transition*. Tel Aviv: Beth Hatefutsoth, The Nahum Goldmann Museum of the Jewish Diaspora, 1986.

Slapak, Orpa, ed. *The Jews of India: A Story of Three Communities*. Jerusalem: The Israel Museum, 1995.