This implies that we need to rethink the common assumptions about *malkhut*: *Malkhut* does not simply refer to a powerful position of dominance. The image of *malkhut* is not necessarily an imperial presence, a regal man or woman crowned and resplendent. Rather, it can perhaps be better represented by a beehive or an ant colony. These are familiar examples of complex systems that express far more than the sum of their parts. Individual bees or ants are incapable of functioning alone; they cannot reproduce; they cannot find food. They exist only as units within a larger whole. Put these units together, and suddenly, as if by magic, they begin differentiating, each individual performing a specific task according to the needs of the integrated system, the super-organism. When a hive attacks a person, it comes after him like a single organism; when ants go on a march, their relentless miles-long movement is that of a unified power, an army. *Malkhut* is the name we use to describe a system in which components work synergistically to produce a whole that is greater than its components.[[1]](#footnote-1)

The Talmud expresses this idea by juxtaposing its interpretation of “the judges judged” (*sh’fot hashof’tim*) with its interpretation of the term "*Malkhat Sheva*”– usually translated as Queen of Sheba.

Whoever says that *Malkhat Sheva* refers to a woman is mistaken. Rather it means the Kingdom of Sheba.

Baba Batra 15b

In other words, the individual king or queen is not the essence of a *malkhut*;rather, the *malkhut* per se allows the society to function as a single unit, as a kingdom. There is no Queen of Sheba as such. There is only the Kingdom of Sheba. Another Talmudic statement sheds further light on this concept.

One who wishes to anoint his entire body should begin by anointing the head, because the head is the king of all the organs.

Shabbat 61a

The Talmud refers to the head as the king not because it is the most powerful of the organs, but rather because it is the seat of the brain, the switchboard that *unites* the various parts of the body. The brain consists of neurons. Lots of them – approximately one hundred billion. These neurons are not intelligent: they are simple on-off switches, similar to computer bits. Switches do not know anything. They do not think. You can put together an infinite number of neurons, but you will still not get a thought. How then does a thought emerge from nothing other than cells that cannot think at all? How does a mind that is aware emerge from a brain that is nothing other than a mass of cells that are not? The mind emerges from a context that provides for complex interrelationships. To quote a famous contemporary neuroscientist’s fascinating observation:

The human brain, it has been said, is the most complexly organized structure in the universe and to appreciate this you just have to look at some numbers. The brain is made up of one hundred billion nerve cells or “neurons,” which is the basic structural and functional unit of the nervous system. Each neuron makes something like a thousand or ten thousand contacts with other neurons and these points of contact are called synapses where exchange of information occurs. And based on this information, someone has calculated that the number of possible permutations and combinations of brain activity, in other words, the number of brain states, exceeds the number of particles in the known universe.

The mind is a *malkhut*. It is more than the sum of billions of neurons – it is an entity that provides the opportunity for these neurons to interrelate in what we call brain states, out of which emerge patterns that are so complex that we actually find them to be things that do not belong in a physical universe. A thought is not a property of anything physical. Nonetheless, it emerges from the physical.

1. This vision of *malkhut* is embedded in every aspect of the world. We are accustomed to thinking of the universe as constituted of individual objects. But such a universe does not, in fact, exist. There are no discrete things; there are not even any discrete particles. The universe is nothing but the interrelationship of various forces that together birth complexity. We are subject to these forces and even use them to describe our experiences. We speak of another person as being “attractive.” We talk about the electricity of someone’s touch; the magnetism of their personality; the gravitas of their presence. These are not mere metaphors. They express our subliminal recognition that we are part of a universe that comes into being through the magical interrelationship of things. As those interrelationships become more complex and subtle, the results become ever more surprising. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)