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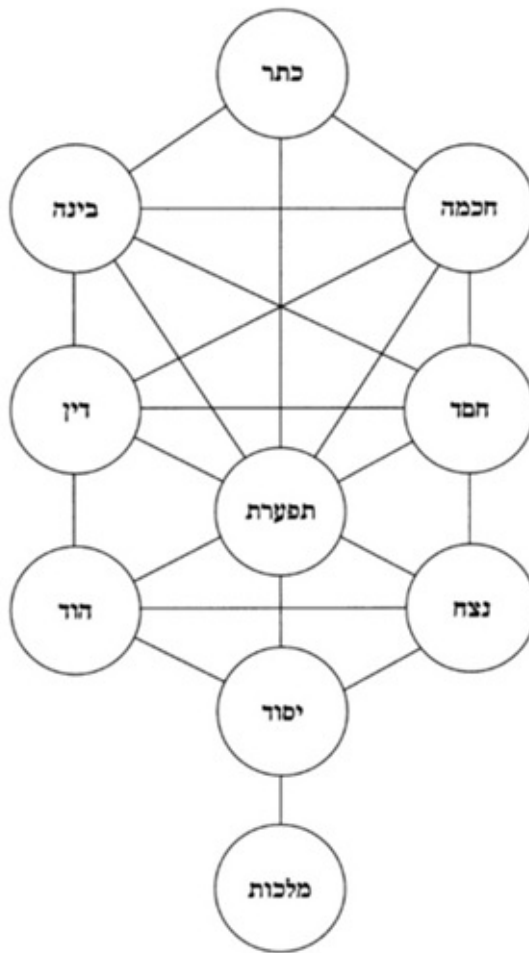
Basic Readings from the Kabbalah

GERSHOM SCHOLEM





50 Years of Publishing
1945-1995



THE TREE OF THE SEFIROT

ZOHAR

The Book of Splendor



BASIC READINGS FROM THE KABBALAH

SELECTED AND EDITED BY
GERSHOM SCHOLEM

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INTRODUCTION

HISTORICAL SETTING OF THE ZOHAR



The book of Zohar, the most important literary work of the Kabbalah, lies before us in some measure inaccessible and silent, as befits a work of secret wisdom. Whether because of this or in spite of it, among the great literary products of our medieval writings, however much clearer and more familiar than the Zohar many of them seem to us, not one has had an even approximately similar influence or a similar success. To have determined the formation and development over a long period of time of the religious convictions of the widest circles of Judaism, and particularly of those most sensitive to religion, and, what is more, to have succeeded in establishing itself for three centuries, from about 1500 to 1800, as a source of doctrine and revelation equal in authority to the Bible and Talmud, and of the same canonical rank—this is a prerogative that can be claimed by no other work of Jewish literature. The radiant power did not, to be sure, emanate at the very beginning from “The Book of Radiance” or, as we usually render the title in English, “The Book of Splendor,” but from Maimonides’ “Guide to the Perplexed,” in almost every respect the antithesis of the Zohar. It influenced its own time directly and openly; from the moment of its appearance it affected people’s minds, moving them to enthusiasm or to consternation. Yet, after two centuries of profound influence, it began to lose its effectiveness more and more, until finally, for centuries long, it vanished almost entirely from the consciousness of the broad masses. It was only at the end of the 18th century that the Jewish Enlightenment again brought it into prominence, seeking to make it an active force in its own struggle.

It was different with the Zohar, which had to make its way out of an almost completely hardly penetrable anonymity and concealment. For a hundred years and more it elicited scarcely any interest to speak of. When it came on the scene, it expressed (and therefore appealed to) the feeling of a very small class of men who in loosely organized conventicles strove for a new, mystical understanding of the world of Judaism, and who had not the faintest notion that this particular book alone, among the many which sought to express the new world-view in allegory and symbol, was destined to succeed. Soon, however, the light shadow of scandal that had fallen upon its publication and initial appearance in the world of literature, the enigma of the illegitimate birth of a literary forgery, disappeared and was forgotten. Very slowly but surely the influence of the Zohar grew; and when the group among which it had gained dominion proved themselves in the storms of Jewish history to be the bearers of a new religious attitude that not only laid claim to, but in fact achieved authority, then the Zohar in a late but exceedingly intensive afterglow of national life came to fulfil the great historical task of a sacred text supplementing the Bible and Talmud on a new level of religious consciousness. This inspirational character has been attached to it by numerous Jewish groups in Eastern Europe and the Orient down to our own days, nor have they hesitated to assert that final conclusion which has since earliest times been drawn in the recognition of a sacred text, namely, that the effect upon the soul of such a work is in the en-

not at all dependent upon its being understood.

It was only with the collapse of that stratum of life and belief in which the Kabbalah was able to represent a historical force that the splendor of the Zohar also faded; and later, in the reevaluation of the Enlightenment, it became the "book of lies," considered to have obscured the pure light of Judaism. The reform-tending polemic in this case too made haste to become an instrument of historical criticism, which, it must be said, after a few promising starts showed itself weak and uncertain in the carrying out of its program, sound as its methods and true as many of its theses may have been.

Historical criticism, however, will survive the brief immortality of that "genuine" Judaism whose view of history and whose hierarchy of values gave rise to it. Freed from polemic, and concerned for a more precise and objective insight into its subject matter, it will now assert itself in the new (and in part very old) context in which we begin to see the world of Judaism, and Judaism's history.

LITERARY CHARACTER

The Zohar in its external literary physiognomy seems far from being conceived and constructed as a unified composition. Still less can it be regarded as any kind of systematic exposition of the world-view of the Kabbalah, like many such which have come down to us from the period of the Kabbalah's origin and even more from later times. It is rather, in the printed form that lies before us, a collection of treatises and writings that are considerably different from one another in external form. Most of the sections seem to be interpretations of Bible passages, or short sayings or longer homilies, or else often artfully composed reports of whole series of homilies in which Rabbi Simeon ben Yohai, a famous teacher of the 2nd century, and his friends and students interpret the words of Scripture in accordance with their hidden meaning, and, moreover, almost always in the Aramaic language. Other sections, though these are few, have been presented in the form of anonymous and purely factual accounts in which there can be recognized no such settings of landscape and persons as those described with so much care elsewhere in the work, often in highly dramatic fashion. Fairly often the exposition is enigmatically brief, but frequently the ideas are very fully presented with homiletical amplitude and an architectonically effective elaboration. Many sections actually appear as fragments of oracles and as reports of secret revelations, and are written in a peculiarly enthusiastic, a solemn, "elevated" style; so much so that the detached reader is apt to feel they have overstepped the bounds of good taste in the direction of affectation and bombast. While often the exposition has an only slightly elevated tone and is pregnant and realistic, we do find in a certain number of passages a passion for the association of ideas which is pushed to an extreme, degenerating into a flight from conceptual reality. Externally, also, many parts are set off from the rest by special titles as more or less independent compositions, and this not without very good reason.

The main part of the Zohar, which is arranged by Pentateuch portions, purports to be an ancient Midrash, and in many details it imitates the form of the ancient midrashic works of the first centuries C.E. On the whole, indeed, it breaks through this form and assumes the quite different one of the medieval sermon. Such extended compositions, constructed on a definite plan, as we find in the Zohar to the length of fifteen or twenty or even forty pages, are quite

foreign to the ancient Midrash. Here a different principle of composition obtains. The same true of the parts called *Midrash ha-Neelam* (The Secret Midrash) and *Sitre Torah* (Secrets of the Torah), which in a large number of Pentateuch portions, especially in the first book, provide parallel pieces to the “main parts.”

The Secret Midrash, to be sure, has much to say about Simeon ben Yohai and his circle, but almost completely avoids genuinely mystical and theosophical trains of thought; instead, in its most important sections, it presents radical allegorizations of the patriarchal stories indicative of the fate of the soul before and after death. These allegories very clearly reveal their kinship to the philosophical homiletic of the 13th century. The Secrets of the Torah, on the other hand, which in the main was composed without the use of the Midrash form or the addition of names, represents the transition from philosophical-eschatological allegory to genuinely mystical exegesis.

The *Idra Rabba* (The Great Assembly) describes, on an excellently constructed plan, the mystical “figure” of the Deity in the symbol of Primal Man, and Simeon ben Yohai treats the same theme a second time in a monologue before his death, an event which is most vividly described in *Idra Zutta* (The Small Assembly). Anonymous “Mishnayot” and “Toseftot” intended as introductions to other, longer sections, expound oracles concerning the world and the soul. In *Raya Mehemna* (The Faithful Shepherd), Moses and Rabbi Simeon converse about the hidden reasons for the commandments. The *Tikkunim* again give a detailed interpretation of the first section of the Pentateuch, and thus we have more than a total of ten great and small parts that are evidently separate units. It is no wonder, therefore, that the question of the unity of the Zohar has found very uncertain answers.

ORIGIN AND AUTHORSHIP

While the different points of view in Zohar criticism cannot be fully gone into here, the present status of research can, at any rate, be briefly summarized. The most radical opinion was put forth by Heinrich Graetz. He declared all parts of the Zohar without exception to be the work of the Spanish kabbalist Moses de Leon, who died in 1305, and the great historians emptied the vials of an exceedingly vehement wrath over him. Very few reputations have come down to posterity from the school of Graetz in so battered and pitiable a state as has de Leon's. Far from recognizing the genius that must have been at work in the Zohar, if it was the production of a single man, Graetz saw in it only deception and charlatanism.

In contrast to this view, the Zohar has been regarded, especially in the preceding generation, as a work altogether without unity, or else as one that grew anonymously in the course of time, and in which the most varied and often contradictory forces of the kabbalistic movement found expression. In either case, Moses de Leon was in this view regarded as the redactor of ancient writings and fragments, to which he may perhaps have added something of his own. The theory that “primitive” sources and documents have been preserved in the Zohar, although admittedly in revised form, is today widespread. Thus the Zohar (and this is undoubtedly what has gone to make this view so attractive though it lacks all proof) would really be, even in its external beginnings, a deposit of the creative folk-spirit and, like the Bible and Talmud, the anonymous work of centuries. And it may be taken as an indication of the enduring influence of the school of Ahad Haam that the lack of proof for this theory—and

in its behalf not even the shadow of philological-critical evidence has been brought forward—has in no way seriously hindered its spread. What is plausible can do without proof.

Every attempt to establish, through the working out of exact criteria, that certain layers and parts of the Zohar go back to a time before the middle of the 13th century turns out to be new evidence to the contrary. This fact has been vividly experienced by the present writer. After devoting many years to just such an analysis, he found the unequivocal result correspond so little to the expectations with which he started out, refuting them in fact so thoroughly, that he ventures to state with assurance the following conclusions.

The Zohar is, in the main, a unified book, although not so unified as Graetz imagined. Among the separate parts there are no strata or ancient material from mystical Midrashim unknown to us; on the contrary, these parts came out of the heads of their authors just as they are, except that many parts are undoubtedly missing, having disappeared from the manuscripts as early as the 14th century. Much of the printed text is wrongly arranged where the manuscript, however, retains the correct order. Finally, a few shorter pieces were added still later in the 14th century. The separate parts do not relate to a corresponding number of strata or authors, but the whole corpus of Zohar literature was in origin made up of three strata. These, in themselves predominantly unified, are:

1) *Midrash ha-Neelam*.

2) The main part of the Zohar with the *Idra Rabba*, *Idra Zutta*, *Sitre Torah*, and most of the other short treatises.

3) *Raya Mehemna* and the so-called *Tikkune Zohar*, both of which had a single author.

Certain it is that the author of the third stratum, who had the second before him in completed form and cites it and rather unsuccessfully imitates it, is not the author of the first two. Everything speaks against this being so: the linguistic character of the third, its strong apocalyptic tendencies, its laborious construction, its divergent views, and its way of using sources. One might perhaps propose the rather hazardous thesis that we are here dealing with the work of the old age and decline of the chief author, whose early talents had left him an imitator who was imitating himself, were it not for the fact that too much of an independent nature inheres in the book *Tikkunim* to make this thesis tenable. This last group of writings was composed around 1300.

The first two strata, on the other hand, are in all probability by a single author, whose development from the composition of the first to the second is still clearly traceable, and thus it becomes gratuitous to assume any break in the identity of the person who stands behind the whole production. The Secret Midrash, which has hitherto been customarily regarded as the latest part of the whole work because of its free use of philosophical terminology as well as its partial use of the Hebrew language, is in all probability the earliest part.

Behind the whole stands the living personality of a mystic who, starting with the philosophical and talmudic education of his time, lets himself be ever more deeply drawn into the mystical and gnostic ideas of the Kabbalah, and finally gives up his philosophical interests altogether, developing instead a truly astonishing genius for mystical homiletics; indeed, had a millennium had to elapse before Jewish literature was again able to show anything comparable. For such is the author of these most important parts of the Zohar—no redactor or collector but a homiletic genius. It was Kabbalah, as it had developed before his time, and having become his spiritual home, which he, with unexpected and impressive power

constructed from out of the text of Scripture and the ancient haggadic motifs of the Midrash.

Thus although his world of thought and concept was not novel, his mystical sources were by no means forgotten tomes and apocrypha from obscure centuries. They were the literature of the Kabbalah to the time of Moses ben Nahman (1195–1270) and his circle, a literature which has been in large part preserved and is today quite well known. The manner in which this Zohar author's mystical world was constructed reveals to us very precisely the one period of time in which he is to be correctly placed in the development of the Kabbalah; in addition to which a whole series of linguistic and factual criteria, quite independent of one another, point to exactly the same time. It was certainly around 1280 that these main parts of the Zohar were composed in Spain by a kabbalist who had not seen Palestine. In ever new disguises and externally different literary and stylistic forms this work erupts from an author who seems to have deeply experienced his conversion to kabbalism. But in spite of all the masks which he is fond of putting on, the inner form and the personal style are always identical.

But what about these masks? What about this whole Galilean landscape, which dissolves into unreality, and Rabbi Simeon ben Yohai, his family and friends, and all the other trappings of a Midrash-like finery, in which the author seems to find so much pleasure, as if enjoying himself in the play of fantasy? This flight into pseudonymity and romantic background evoked in the critical writings of the 19th century a literary excitement—angry attacks and moralistic condemnation, as well as a circumspect and sometimes vociferous apologetic—which seems to us today to have been considerably exaggerated. For a long time we have known that literary forgeries represent a flight into anonymity and pseudonymity just as often as they indicate trickery; and not for nothing have we retained the foreign word “pseud-epigrapha” to designate in particular a legitimate category of religious literature by a term devoid of the moralistic undertone of reprobation which echoes in the English word “forgery.” Important documents of our religious literature are in this sense forgeries; also, the mystical literature which the author of the Zohar may have read consisted, to a considerable extent, of earlier pseudepigrapha.

We are not even sure whether the author, who handles the technique of pseudepigrapha with so much virtuosity and permits the persons of his dialogue a profusion of invented books, titles and citations, took the literary form of the kabbalistic pseudepigrapha very seriously. Certainly, in a whole series of imitations of the Zohar which appeared during the first hundred years after its publication, it is clear that their authors did not by any means take the masquerade for the real thing. The masquerade served as a welcome means of letting the chance name of an author who found himself in possession of secret wisdom disappear behind his material, and if the framework is sometimes overdecorated by wilful or, it may be, reckless hands—and the Zohar is the most important but by far not the only example of such love of masquerade in Jewish literature—still this was only an added touch. Only later were these things more crudely conceived, when the disguise became a historical reality.

How playfully the author of the Zohar himself used this form is shown by the noteworthy fact that together with this book he composed still other, shorter pseudepigraphic works, of which one, the so-called Testament of Rabbi Eliezer the Great, has enjoyed the good fortune of being among the most widely circulated Jewish folk-books, although its true origin has gone generally unrecognized. Graetz, indeed, has pictured Moses de Leon to us as forging the

Zohar out of greed for profit, in order to make money out of the gullible rich after the book published under his own name had ceased to yield him sufficient gain. This storybook figure of a cunning rogue would be unacceptable to historical criticism even if we did not have conclusive proof that the main part of the Zohar was in existence before 1286, the year that Moses de Leon wrote his "own" first book, which was entirely based upon the Zohar. This does not, of course, exclude the possibility of his having written the Zohar himself previous to that year.

But was Moses de Leon in fact the author of this very Zohar, as even his own contemporaries long ago suspected? We may now say with a fair amount of philological certainty that Moses de Leon must indeed be considered the actual author of the book. True, while much former evidence bolstering that hypothesis has been disproved, there has not yet come to light certain entirely new evidence to speak decisively for Moses de Leon's authorship. This much is certain: Moses de Leon was in possession of the original work and circulated it from 1280 on, so that a countryman of his, Isaac ibn Sahula of Guadalajara, read The Secret Midrash as early as 1281. From 1286 on, Moses de Leon composed his "own" writings in very considerable number. These books reveal an author who lives and moves wholly in the specific world of the Zohar and not merely in the general world of the contemporary Kabbalah, so that we have only the choice of saying either that he entirely surrendered himself to the stronger personality of the nameless author of the Zohar, to the extent of giving up his own personal traits, or that he himself was the author. For the latter view there is a noteworthy chronological indication. Up until recently, no one knew how old Moses de Leon was when he began to write, or whether it was at all possible to fit into his "pre-history," before he began to write under his own name, those ten to twenty years which must have been at the very least required for the conception of a work of the kind to which the first two strata of the Zohar belong. But before the First World War, there was found in Moscow a manuscript which by a strange coincidence was none other than one of the scribbles of Maimonides' "Guide to the Perplexed," and had been written for Moses de Leon in 1264. These twenty "empty" years (1264 to 1286) preceding his public appearance fit in very strikingly indeed with the period of the origin of the Zohar, which has been determined through quite different connections and criteria. Would not the path that led from the reading of the "Guide to the Perplexed" to the eschatological mysticism of Moses de Leon's "Book of the Rational Soul" be the very one which was described above as that of the inner development of the Zohar's author, from half-philosophical allegory to the mystical-theosophical interpretation of Scripture? We may say with certitude that no one of the other Spanish kabbalists of that period who are within our ken and appear before us with their individual spiritual traits can be brought into the question as a possible author of the Zohar. Neither Abraham Abulafia nor Moses of Burgos, neither Jacob of Segovia nor Joseph Gikatili shows that unmistakable physiognomy. And whoever is unwilling to believe in the Great Unknown who has so successfully eluded all attempts to trace him must give his adherence to Moses de Leon if he wishes to succeed in the reconstruction of one of the most significant and clearly marked figures of Jewish religious history.

Something must here be said about the language of the Zohar, which has proved to be one of the most important factors in its influence. The sustained chiaroscuro of this peculiar Zohar-Aramaic has overlaid with a venerable patina and a luster of restrained enthusiasms

ideas which, if they had been expressed in the sober Hebrew of the 13th century, would have had to speak by themselves; in the form which they assumed, they have, one might say, found their native idiom. This linguistic achievement is the more admirable in that the medieval Hebrew, as is evident to a keen eye, shows through the Aramaic on page after page in word order, syntax, and terminology; and the more admirable also, considering that the Aramaic vocabulary of the author evidences a curious poverty and simplicity. As soon as one has read thirty pages of the original, one knows the language of the whole book well enough and in this same respect it is astonishing with what modest resources so much has been expressed and so great an effect has been achieved. Often enough the exact understanding of a passage in the Zohar is dependent upon a retranslation into the Hebrew of the contemporary Kabbalah, and Moses de Leon's writings above all quickly give the key to many passages. A good many mystical concepts are expressed rather arbitrarily in new word formations, which in many cases have arisen from corrupted forms of talmudic words in medieval manuscripts, or from similar misunderstandings.

ON THE SELECTION FOR THIS VOLUME

It would seem to be nothing less than presumptuous to offer any selection from such a work as the Zohar, and, certainly, it is difficult to focus into a brief book anything like the richness of content, the plenitude of ideas inhering in the original. Indeed, no selection can assume the task of portraying the mystical doctrine of the Zohar. Such a presentation—if at all feasible within the compass of a small volume—would require an apparatus of explanatory notes and comments of no less size than the body of text.

What I have therefore attempted to present in the pages following is a sequence of passages which might be expected to arouse an immediate interest in the reader: by the colorfulness with which the life of the soul is pictured, by the curious poignancy of scriptural exegesis, by the outright paradoxicality of the thoughts asserted.

All the passages selected—some given in a slightly condensed form—have in common the direct appeal to the imagination and fantasy of the reader, an appeal not dependent on the interpretation of the numerous technical and symbolical associations in which the text abounds. Some absolutely necessary explanations are provided in the footnotes. On the whole, however, I ventured to assume that the interested reader would himself desire to reflect on the profuse symbols and images as they appear herein. It was in such manner that the Zohar did appeal to wider circles of readers through the ages. It matters little whether this or that symbolic connotation is properly recognized, or not.

With the foregoing in mind, I selected such passages as would throw light on the mystical ideas concerning God, together with the various stages of his manifestation, and on the idea of the soul, its grades and its destiny, as taught by the Zohar. In a number of instances, one passage may find elucidation by another.

Nor did I deem it wise to arrange the volume according to themes and topics. Such an organization does not recommend itself, inasmuch as all the passages selected are broadly interrelated, one being connected and bound up with another. Thus it was found advisable to follow, on the whole, the same sequence in which the pieces appear in the original text of the

Zohar.

This small volume will have fulfilled its task if it succeeds in conveying to the reader some notion of the power of contemplative fantasy and creative imagery hidden within the seemingly abstruse thinking of the kabbalists.

G.G.

GENESIS



THE BEGINNING



“In the beginning” {Gen. 1:1}—when the will of the King began to take effect, he engraved signs into the heavenly sphere {that surrounded him}. Within the most hidden recess a dark flame issued from the mystery of *eyn sof*, the Infinite, like a fog forming in the unformed—enclosed in the ring of that sphere, neither white nor black, neither red nor green, of no color whatever. Only after this flame began to assume size and dimension, did it produce radiant colors. From the innermost center of the flame sprang forth a well out of which colors issued and spread upon everything beneath, hidden in the mysterious hiddenness of *eyn sof*.

The well broke through and yet did not break through the ether {of the sphere}. It could not be recognized at all until a hidden, supernal point shone forth under the impact of the final breaking through.*

Beyond this point nothing can be known. Therefore it is called *reshit*, beginning—the first word {out of the ten} by means of which the universe has been created.

THE UNIVERSE: SHELL AND KERNEL

When King Solomon “penetrated into the depths of the nut garden,” as it is written, “descended into the garden of nuts” {Cant. 6:11}, he took up a nut shell and, studying it, he saw an analogy in its layers with the spirits which motivate the sensual desires of humans, and it is written, “and the delights of the sons of men {are from} male and female demons” {Eccles. 2:8}.

The Holy One, be blessed, saw that it was necessary to put into the world all of these things so as to make sure of permanence, and of having, so to speak, a brain surrounded by numerous membranes. The whole world, upper and lower, is organized on this principle from the primary mystic center to the very outermost of all the layers. All are coverings, the one to the other, brain within brain, spirit inside of spirit, shell within shell.

The primal center is the innermost light, of a translucence, subtilty, and purity beyond comprehension. That inner point extended becomes a “palace” which acts as an enclosure for the center, and is also of a radiance translucent beyond the power to know it.

The “palace” vestment for the incognizable inner point, while it is an unknowable radiance in itself, is nevertheless of a lesser subtilty and translucency than the primal point. The “palace” extends into a vestment for itself, the primal light. From then outward, there is extension upon extension, each constituting a vesture to the one before, as a membrane to the brain. Though membrane first, each extension becomes brain to the next extension.

Likewise does the process go on below; and after this design, man in the world combines brain and membrane, spirit and body, all to the more perfect ordering of the world. When the moon was conjoined with the sun, she was luminous, but when she went apart from the sun and was given governance of her own hosts, her status and her light were reduced, and she was after shell was fashioned for investing the brain, and all was for its good.

THE FIRST LIGHT

“And God said, Let there be light, and there was light” {Gen. 1:3}.

This is the primal light which God made. It is the light of the eye. This light God showed to Adam, and by means of it he was enabled to see from end to end of the world. This light God showed to David, and he, beholding it, sang forth his praise, saying, “Oh how abundant is Thy goodness, which Thou hast laid up for them that fear Thee” {Ps. 31: 20}. This is the light through which God revealed to Moses the land of Israel from Gilead to Dan.

Foreseeing the rise of three sinful generations, the generation of Enoch, the generation of the Flood, and the generation of the Tower of Babel, God put away the light from the enjoyment. Then he gave it to Moses in the time that his mother was hiding him, for the first three months after his birth. When Moses was taken before Pharaoh, God took it from him and did not give it again until he stood upon the mount of Sinai to receive the Torah. Thenceforth Moses had it for his until the end of his life, and therefore he could not be approached by the Israelites until he had put a veil upon his face {Exod. 34:33}.

“Let there be light, and there was light” {Gen. 1:3}. To whatsoever the word *vayehi* {and there was} is applied, that thing is in this world and in the world to come.

Rabbi Isaac said: At the Creation, God irradiated the world from end to end with the light, but then it was withdrawn, so as to deprive the sinners of the world of its enjoyment, and is stored away for the righteous, as it stands written, “Light is sown for the righteous” {Ps. 97:11}; then will the worlds be in harmony and all will be united into one, but until the future world is set up, this light is put away and hidden. This light emerged from the darkness which was hewed out by the strokes of the Most Secret; and likewise, from the light which was hidden away, through some secret path, there was hewed out the darkness of the lower world in which inheres light. This lower darkness is called “night” in the verse, “and the darkness He called night” {Gen. 1:5}.

CREATION OF MAN

Rabbi Simeon then rose and spoke: In meditating, I have perceived that when God was about to create man, then above and below all creatures commenced to tremble. The course of the sixth day was unfolding when at last the divine decision was made. Then there blazed forth the source of all lights and opened up the gate of the East, from where light flows. The light which had been bestowed on it at the beginning, the South gave forth in full glory, and the South took hold upon the East. The East took hold on the North, and the North awakened and, opening forth, called loud to the West that he should come to him. Then the West traveled up into the North and came together with it, and after that the South took hold on the West, and the North and the South surrounded the Garden, being its fences. Then the East drew near to the West, and the West was gladdened and it said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness” {Gen. 1:26}, to embrace like us the four quarters and the higher and the lower. Thereupon were East and West united, and produced man. Therefore have our sages said that man arose out from the site of the Temple.

Moreover, we may regard the words “Let us make man” as conveying this: to the lower beings who derived from the side of the upper world God disclosed the secret of how to form

the divine name Adam, in which is encompassed the upper and the lower, in the force of its three letters *alef*, *dalet*, and *mem* final. When the three letters had come down below, they were perceived in their form, complete, the name Adam, to comprehend male and female. The female was fastened to the side of the male, and God cast the male into a deep slumber, and he lay on the side of the Temple. God then cut the female from him and decked her as a bride and led her to him, as it is written, "And he took one of his sides, and closed up the place with flesh" {Gen. 2:21}. In the ancient books, I have seen it said that here the word "one" means "one woman," that is, the original Lilith, who lay with him and from him conceived. But up to that time, she was no help to him, as it is said, "but for Adam there was not found an help meet for him" {Gen. 2:20}. Adam, then, was the very last, for it was right that he should find the world complete when he made his appearance.

"No shrub of the field was yet in the earth" {Gen. 2:5}.

Rabbi Simeon went on to say: The allusion is to the magnificent trees which grew later, but as yet were minute. Adam and Eve, as we have said, were created side by side. Why not face to face? For the reason that heaven and earth were not yet in complete harmony, "the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth" {Gen. 2:5}. When the lower union was rendered perfect, and Adam and Eve turned face to face, then was the upper union perfected.

This we may know from the matter of the Tabernacle: for we have learned that together with it there was put up another tabernacle, nor was the upper one raised until the lower one was erected; and so it was in this case. Moreover, inasmuch as all above was not yet perfected, ordered, Adam and Eve were not created face to face. This is borne out by the order of the verses in the Scripture; first it is written, "For the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth," and following, "there was not a man to till the ground" {*ibid.*}, and it signifies that man was yet imperfect, for only when Eve was made perfect, was he then made perfect to her. Further proof is that in the word *vayisgor* {and he closed}, there occurs for the first time in this passage the letter *samekh*, which signifies "support," as much as to say that male and female they now supported the one the other. In like wise, do the lower world and the upper sustain each other. Not until the lower world was made perfect, was the other world also made perfect. When the lower world was made to support the upper, by being turned face to face with it, the world was then finished, for previously "the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth."

Then, "There went up a mist from the earth" {Gen. 2:6}, to make up for the lack, by "watering the whole face of the ground" {*ibid.*}; and the mist rising is the yearning of the female for the male. Yet another interpretation says that we take the word "not" from the first verse to use in the second with "mist," and this means that God failed to send rain because a mist had not gone up, for from below must come the impulse to move the power above. Thus, to form the cloud, vapor ascends first from the earth. And likewise, the smoke of the sacrifice ascends, creating harmony above, and the uniting of all, and so the celestial sphere has completion in it. It is from below that the movement starts, and thereafter is perfected. If the Community of Israel failed to initiate the impulse, the One above would also not move to go to her, and it is thus the yearning from below which brings about the completion above.

MALE AND FEMALE

Rabbi Simeon set out one time for Tiberias, and with him were Rabbi Yose, Rabbi Judah, and Rabbi Hiyya. On the road coming toward them they met Rabbi Phineas. All dismounted and sat down on the mountainside, under a tree. Rabbi Phineas spoke: While we sit, I should like to hear some of those wondrous ideas which figure in your discourse daily.

Then Rabbi Simeon spoke, commencing with the text, "And he went on his journeys from the South even to Bethel, unto the place where his tent had been at the beginning, between Beth-el and Ai" {Gen. 13:3}. He said: We might here have expected the word journey; but instead we read "journeys," which is intended to mean that on the journey with him was the Divine Presence. It behooves a man to be "male and female," always, so that his faith may remain stable, and in order that the Presence may never leave him. You will ask: How will the man who makes a journey, and, away from his wife, cease to be "male and female?" Such a one, before starting, and while he still is "male and female," must pray to God, and draw unto himself the Presence of his Master. After he has prayed and offered thanksgiving, and when the Presence is resting on him, then he may go, for by virtue of his union with the Presence he is now male and female in the country, just as he was male and female in the town, for it is written: "Righteousness {*zedek*, feminine of *zaddik*} shall go before him and shall make his footsteps a way" {Ps. 85:14}.

Remark this. The whole time of his traveling a man should heed well his actions, lest the holy union break off, and he be left imperfect, deprived of the union with the female. If it was needful when he and his wife were together, how much greater the need when the heavenly mate is with him? And the more so, indeed, since this heavenly union acts as his constant guard on his journey, until his return home. Moreover, it is his duty, once back home, to give his wife pleasure, inasmuch as she it was who obtained for him the heavenly union.

There is twofold reason for this duty of cohabitation. First, this pleasure is a religious one, giving joy also to the Divine Presence, and it is an instrument for peace in the world, as stands written, "and thou shalt know that thy tent is in peace; and thou shalt visit thy habitation and not sin" {Job 5:24}. (It may be questioned, is it a sin if he fails to go in to his wife? It is a sin, for in his failure, he detracts from the honor of the heavenly mate who was given him by reason of his wife.) Secondly, if his wife should conceive, the heavenly partner bestows upon the child a holy soul; for this covenant is called the covenant of the Holy One, and he who is blessed.

Hence, a man should be as zealous to enjoy this joy as to enjoy the joy of the Sabbath, which time is consummated the union of the sages with their wives. Thus, "thou shalt know that thy tent is in peace," for the Presence accompanies you and sojourns in your house, and for this reason "thou shalt visit thy habitation and not sin," in gladly carrying out thy religious duty to have conjugal intercourse before the Presence.

So it is that the students of Torah, away from their wives the six days of the week they engage in study, are in this period attached to a heavenly mate, so that they do not cease to be "male and female." And with the incoming of the Sabbath, it behooves them to rejoice with their wives, to the honor of the heavenly union, and in seeking to do the will of their Master, as has been stated.

In like wise, when a man's wife is in her days of separation, in those days while he waits for her the man has with him the heavenly mate, so that he continues to be "male and female."

female.” When the wife is purified, the man is in duty bound to rejoice her, in the joy of fulfillment of a religious obligation. The same reasons we have given apply also in this case.

According to secret doctrine, the mystics are bound to give their whole mind and purpose to the one {the Shekhinah}. It may be objected that in the light of the previous argument, man is in a state of more honor on a journey than at home, by virtue of the heavenly man who is then with him. This is not so. At home, the wife is the foundation of a man’s house inasmuch as it is by virtue of her that the Presence does not leave the house.

So the verse, “and Isaac brought her into his mother Sarah’s tent” {Gen. 24:67}, our masters have interpreted to mean that the Divine Presence came to Isaac’s house along with Rebecca. According to secret doctrine, the supernal Mother is together with the male only when the house is in readiness and at that time the male and female are conjoined. At such time blessings are showered forth by the supernal Mother upon them.

Likewise, the lower Mother is found together with the male only when the house is in readiness, and the male goes in to the female and they conjoin together; then the blessings of the lower Mother are showered forth for them. Therefore, two females, his Mother and his wife, are to compass a man about in his house, like the Male above. There is reference to this in the verse “Unto {ad} the desire of the everlasting hills” {Gen. 49:26}. This *ad* is the desired object of the “everlasting hills,” by which is meant the supreme female, who is to make ready for him, and make him blissful and bless him, and also the lower female, who is to be joined in union with him and take support from him.

Likewise below, the desire of the “everlasting hills” is for the man when he is married, and two females, one of the upper, one of the lower world, are to give him bliss—the upper one in showering upon him all blessings and the lower one in receiving support from him and being joined together with him. So it is with the man in his house. But when he is on a journey, while the supernal Mother is still with him, the lower wife remains behind; and therefore on his returning, it behooves him to do that which will compass him about with two females, as we have explained.

CONSUMING FIRE

Rabbi Simeon said: In one place it is written, “For the Lord thy God is a consuming fire” {Deut. 4:24}, and elsewhere, “But ye that cleave unto the Lord your God are alive every one of you this day” {Deut. 4:4}. The Companions have already discussed the seeming inconsistency between these texts, but I offer yet another interpretation.

It has been affirmed by the Companions that there exists a sort of fire which is stronger than other fire, and the one consumes and annihilates the other. If we continue this thought it can be said that he who cares to pierce into the mystery of the holy unity of God should consider the flame as it rises from a burning coal or candle.

There must always be some material substance from which the flame thus rises. In the flame itself may be seen two lights: the one white and glowing, the other black, or blue. Of the two, the white light is the higher and rises unwavering. Underneath it is the blue or black light upon which the other rests as on a support. The two are conjoined, the white reposing upon the throne of the black. The blue or black base is, likewise, connected to something beneath it, which feeds it and makes it to cling to the white light above. At times this blue

black light turns red, but the light above remains constantly white. This lower light, at times black, at times blue, at times red, serves to link the white light above it with the material substance below to which it is bound and through which it keeps kindled. This lower light in its nature an instrument for destruction and death, devouring whatever comes near it. But the white light above neither consumes nor demolishes, nor does it ever change.

Therefore Moses said, "For the Lord thy God is a consuming fire" {Deut. 4:24}, consuming actually, all that is beneath him; for this reason he said "thy God" and not "our God" inasmuch as Moses stood in the supernal light which does not consume and does not demolish.

Remark further. It is Israel alone which impels the blue light to kindle and to link itself with the white light, Israel, who cleave to the blue light from below. And though it be in the nature of the blue or black light to destroy whatever it touches beneath, yet Israel, cleaving to it from beneath, are not destroyed; so it is said, "But ye that cleave unto the Lord your God are alive every one of you this day." *Your* God and not *our* God; that is to say, it is the blue or black flame, consuming and annihilating whatever cleaves to it from below, and still you cleave and are alive.

Only just perceptible above the white light and encompassing it, is yet another light, the one symbolizing the supreme essence. So does the aspiring flame symbolize the supernal mysteries of wisdom.

Rabbi Phineas went to him and kissed him, and said, Blessed be God who guided me here. And they went out with Rabbi Phineas, accompanying him for three miles. When they had returned, Rabbi Simeon spoke: The description I have given may be taken as a symbol of the holy unity of God. In the holy name YHVH ,* the second letter *hé* is the blue or black light attached to the remaining letters *yod*, *hé*, *vav*, which constitute the luminous white light. But there come times when this blue light is not *hé* but *dalet*, which is to say, poverty; this means when Israel fail to cleave to it from beneath and it in turn fails therefore to burn and cleave to the white light, the blue light is *dalet*, but when Israel make it to cleave to the white light then it is *hé*. If male and female are not together, than *hé* is erased and there remains only *dalet* {poverty}. But when the chain is perfect, the *hé* cleaves to the white light, and Israel cleave to the *hé* and give substance for its light, and are yet not destroyed.

In this we see the mystery of the sacrifice. The rising smoke kindles the blue light, which then joins itself to the white light, whereupon the entire candle is wholly kindled, alight with a single unified flame. As it is the nature of the blue light to demolish whatever comes into touch with it from beneath, therefore if the sacrifice be acceptable and the candle wholly kindled, then, as with Elijah, "the fire of the Lord descends and consumes the burnt-offering" {I Kings 18:38}, and this reveals that the chain is perfected, for then the blue light cleaves to the white light above, while at the same time consuming the fat and flesh of the burnt offering beneath, nor can it consume what is below, except it rise and join itself to the white light. At such time, peace reigns in all worlds, and all together form a unity.

The blue light having devoured every thing beneath, the priests, the Levites, and the laity gather at its base with singing and meditation and with prayer, while above them the lamp glows, the lights are merged into a unity, worlds are illumined, and above and below, all are blessed. Therefore it is written, "ye, even while cleaving to the Lord your God, are alive every one of you this day." The word *atem* {you} is here preceded by the letter *vav* {and

which indicates that while the fat and flesh cleaving to the flame are devoured by it, you who cleave to it are yet alive.

DEPARTURE FROM LIFE

As a man is in his hour to go from life, Adam, the first man, comes before him and asks him why he is departing from the world, and in what condition. The man says: Woe to thee that must die on account of thee.

Adam answers: My son, one commandment did I break, and was punished for it; see how many are the commandments of your Master, both to do and not to do, that you have transgressed.

Said Rabbi Hiyya: To this day Adam exists, and two times each day he stands before the patriarchs and confesses his transgressions, and shows them the place where once he dwelled in heavenly glory.

Rabbi Yesa said: Adam comes before every man at the moment he is about to leave this life, in order to declare that the man is dying not because of Adam's sin, but on account of his own sins, as the sages said: "There is no death without sin."

THE THREE STRANDS OF SPIRIT

"And Noah begot three sons" {Gen. 6:10}.

Rabbi Hiyya said to Rabbi Judah: About this text, I will tell you what I have heard. This may be compared to a man who went into the recesses of a cave, and two or three children emerged together, widely diverse in character and comportment; one being virtuous, second evildoing, a third ordinary. Likewise, there are three strands of spirit, moving hither and thither, and they are drawn into three different worlds. *Neshamah* {super-soul}* issues forth and goes in among the mountain passages and there is joined by *ruah* {spirit}. Then it descends below, and here *nefesh* {vital soul}† joins *ruah*, and the three are linked into unity.‡

Rabbi Judah said: *Nefesh* and *ruah* are conjoined, while *neshamah* has its abode in the character of a man, which place remains unknown and undiscovered. If a man strive to a pure life, he is therein assisted by holy *neshamah*, through the which he is made pure and saintly and attains to the name of holy. But if he does not strive to be righteous and pure of life, there does not animate him holy *neshamah*, but only the two grades, *nefesh* and *ruah*. More than that, he who enters into impurity is led further into it, and he is deprived of heavenly aid. Thus, each is moved forward upon the way which he takes.

HIGHEST GRADE OF FAITH

The "soul" {*nefesh*} stands in intimate relation to the body, nourishing and upholding it; it is below, the first stirring. Having acquired due worth, it becomes the throne for the "spirit" {*ruah*} to rest upon, as it is written, "until the spirit be poured upon us from on high" {Isa. 32:15}. And when these two, soul and spirit, have duly readied themselves, they are worth

to receive the “super-soul” {*neshamah*}, resting in turn upon the throne of the spirit {*ruah*}. The super-soul stands preeminent, and not to be perceived. There is throne upon throne, and for the highest a throne.

The study of these grades of the soul yields an understanding of the higher wisdom; and is in such fashion that wisdom alone affords the linking together of a number of mysteries. It is *nefesh*, the lowest stirring, to which the body adheres; just as in a candle flame, the obscure light at the bottom adheres close to the wick, without which it cannot be. When fully kindled it becomes a throne for the white light above it, and when these two come into their full glow, the white light becomes a throne for a light not wholly discernible, an unknowable essence reposing on the white light, and so in all there comes to be a perfect light.

It is the same with the man that arrives at perfection and is named “holy,” as the verse says, “for the holy that are in the earth” {Ps. 16:3}. It is likewise in the upper world. Thus when Abram entered the land, God appeared before him, and Abram received *nefesh* and there erected an altar to the like grade {of divinity}. Then he “journeyed toward the South” {Gen. 12:9}, and received *ruah*. He attained at last to the summit of cleaving to God through *neshamah*, and thereupon he “built an altar to the Lord,” whereby is meant the ineffable grade which is that of *neshamah*. Then seeing that he must put himself to the test, and pass through the grades, he journeyed into Egypt. There he resisted being seduced by the demonic essences, and when he had proved himself, he returned to his abode; and, actually, he “went up out of Egypt” {Gen. 13:1}, his faith was strong and reassured, and he attained to the highest grade of faith. From that time, Abram knew the higher wisdom, and cleaved to God, and of the world he became the right hand.

MIDNIGHT

Rabbi Abba set out from Tiberias to go to the house of his father-in-law. With him was his son, Rabbi Jacob. When they arrived at Kfar Tarsha, they stopped to spend the night. Rabbi Abba inquired of his host: Have you a cock here? The host said: Why? Said Rabbi Abba: I wish to rise at exactly midnight. The host replied: A cock is not needed. By my bed is a water-clock. The water drips out drop by drop, until just at midnight it is all out, and then the wheel whirls back with a clatter which rouses the entire household. This clock I made for a certain old man who was in the habit of getting up each night at midnight to study Torah. Thus this Rabbi Abba said: Blessed be God for guiding me here.

The wheel of the clock whirled back at midnight, and Rabbi Abba and Rabbi Jacob awoke. They listened to the voice of their host coming up from the lower part of the house where he was sitting with his two sons, and saying: It is written, “Midnight I will rise to give thanks unto Thee for Thy righteous judgments” {Ps. 119:62}. The word “at” is not used, and so we assume that “Midnight” is an appellation of the Holy One, be blessed, whom David speaks of, thus because midnight is the hour when He appears with his retinue, and goes into the Garden of Eden to converse with the righteous. Rabbi Abba then said to Rabbi Jacob: Now we indeed have the luck to be with the Presence.

And they went and seated themselves by their host, and said: Tell us again that which you just said, which is very good. Where did you hear it? He replied: My grandfather told it me. He said that the accuser angels below are busy all about the world during the first three hours

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