Translator’s Introduction

Daniel C. Matt

Sefer Ha-Zohar (The Book of Radiance) has amazed and overwhelmed readers ever since it emerged mysteriously in medieval Spain (Castile) toward the end of the thirteenth century. Written mostly in a unique Aramaic, this masterpiece of Kabbalah exceeds the dimensions of a normal book; it is virtually a body of literature, comprising over twenty discrete sections. The bulk of the Zohar consists of a running commentary on the Torah, from Genesis through Deuteronomy. This translation begins and focuses there—in what are projected to be ten volumes; two subsequent volumes will cover other, shorter sections.

Arthur Green’s introduction to this volume traces the development of Kabbalah and discusses the historical and literary context of the Zohar, its style, the complex question of authorship, and the symbolism of the ten sefirot (various aspects of the divine Self). Here I wish to treat several topics directly related to this translation and commentary.

Establishing the Text of the Zohar

This edition reflects a newly constructed, precise text of the Zohar, based on original manuscripts. Why was the creation of such a text necessary? All previous translations of the Zohar are based on the standard printed editions, which nearly all derive from the Mantua edition (1558–60), supplemented by variant readings from the Cremona edition (1559–60). At first I intended to

1. The title derives from the word נצר (zohar) in Daniel 12:3: The enlightened will shine like the zohar, radiance [or: splendor], of the sky.

2. On the various sections of the Zohar, see Gershom Scholem, Kabbalah, 214–19; Isaiah Tishby, Wisdom of the Zohar, 1:1–7. All of these sections are written in Aramaic, except for Midrash ha-Né’lam, which is written in Hebrew and Aramaic.

The following sections are scheduled to be translated as part of the running commentary on the Torah, as in the standard editions of the Zohar: Raza de-Razin, Sava de-Mishpatim, Sifra di-Tan’uta, Idra Rabba, Idra Zuta, Rav Metivta, and Yamaqa. The two subsequent volumes will include Midrash ha-Né’lam, Matmitin, Tosefta, Sietre Torah, Heikhalot, Sietre Otiyyot, "Vision of Ezekiel," Qav ha-Middah, and Zohar to Song of Songs. Two sections identified as imitations written by a later kabbalist, Tsagganei ha-Zohar and Ra’aya Meheimna, are not planned to be included.
follow the same procedure, but upon examining many of the original manuscripts of the Zohar dating from the fourteenth through sixteenth centuries, I discovered a significant number of superior readings that had been rejected or revised by editors of the first printed editions.

Upon further examination, I noticed something more intriguing—a phenomenon familiar to scholars of medieval texts. Within the manuscripts themselves were signs of an editorial process: revision, reformulation, and emendation.3 After careful analysis, I concluded that certain manuscripts of older lineage reflect an earlier recension of the Zohar, which was then reworked in manuscripts of later lineage.4

I realized that I could no longer rely on the printed versions of the Zohar, since these obscured earlier versions. So I took it upon myself to reconstruct a new-ancient version of the Aramaic text based on the manuscripts, one which could serve as the foundation for this translation.

If I could have located a complete, reliable manuscript of the Zohar, this would have provided a starting point. Unfortunately no such manuscript exists anywhere in the world; in all likelihood it never did, since from the start the Zohar was circulated in sections or booklets. Probably no single complete Book of the Zohar existed until it was printed nearly three hundred years later in the sixteenth century, collated from various manuscripts.5


4. Among the manuscripts reflecting an earlier recension are the following: Cambridge, University Library, MS Add. 1023; Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Cod. Hebr. 277; New York, Jewish Theological Seminary, MS 1761; Oxford, Bodleian Library, MS 1564; Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, heb. 779; Rome, Biblioteca Casanatense, MS 2971; Toronto, University of Toronto, MS Friedberg 5-015; Vatican, Biblioteca Apostolica, ebr. 206, 208. Manuscripts resembling (and perhaps underlying) the Mantua edition include: London, British Museum, MS 762; Paris, Bibliothèque nationale, heb. 781; Parma, Perreaux 15/A.

A list of eighty-four Zohar manuscripts (assembled by a team working under Rivka Schatz-Uffenheimer) was published by Zvia Rubin in "Mif'al ha-Zohar: Mattarot ve-Hesegim," 572–73. Ronit Meroz of Tel Aviv University is conducting a systematic analysis of over six hundred extant manuscripts and fragments of the Zohar. In her extensive research she has identified numerous examples of editing and revision. While the discovery noted here of earlier and later recensions of the Zohar is my own, I have benefited from discussions with her and wish to thank her for sharing her insights with me. See her article "Zoharic Narratives and Their Adaptations" and her other studies listed in the Bibliography.

For further information on the manuscripts of the Zohar, see Tishby, Wisdom of the Zohar, 199–101; Scholem, Kabbalah, 236–37; and the comments of Malachi Beit-Arié, cited by Ta-Shma, Ha-Nigleh she-ba-Nistar, 103–4.

Translator's Introduction

This situation left me with two choices. I could select the best manuscript for each individual Torah portion of the Zohar and produce a "diplomatic" text, an exact reproduction of the original. Or, I could fashion a critical text, selecting from a wide range of variants in different manuscripts.

After consulting with members of our Academic Committee for the Translation of the Zohar, I chose to compose a critical text, based on a selection and evaluation of the manuscript readings. The primary reason was simply that even for individual sections of the Zohar there is no one "best" manuscript: each has its own deficiencies and scribal errors. Back in the sixteenth century, the editors in Mantua and Cremona also fashioned critical texts, the former drawing on ten manuscripts, the latter on six.6

For the first two volumes of the translation, I identified approximately twenty reliable manuscripts, based on the criteria of provenance, age, lack of scribal errors, and legibility. The originals are preserved in the libraries of Oxford, Cambridge, London, Paris, Munich, Rome, the Vatican, Parma, Toronto, and the Jewish Theological Seminary, while microfilm copies are available in the Institute for Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts, in the Jewish National and University Library on the campus of the Hebrew University, Jerusalem.7

It is appropriate to describe more fully the methodology used in this scholarly undertaking. My research assistant meticulously combs through about half of these manuscripts and prepares a list of variant readings. For particularly difficult words or phrases, we check additional manuscripts. In addition to the manuscripts, my assistant lists variants from the Mantua and Cremona editions of the Zohar, as well as the edition used by Moses Cordovero in his sixteenth-century commentary, Or Yaqar.8

My procedure for establishing the Aramaic text is as follows. I begin with Reuven Margaliot's edition of Sefer ha-Zohar,9 based on the Vilna edition, which in turn is based on the Mantua edition. This represents a relatively reliable starting point. In front of me I have the list of variants prepared by my research assistant, photocopies of the original manuscripts, and other witnesses referred to previously.10 I peruse the variants line by line. Some of these are

6. See Tishby, Wisdom of the Zohar, 198. For an enlightening comparison of diplomatic and critical editing, see Chaim Milikowsky, "Further on Editing Rabbinic Texts."
7. See the list of Zohar manuscripts in the Bibliography, and above, note 4. Bound copies of nearly all of these manuscripts are housed in the Gershom Scholem Collection, Jewish National and University Library.
8. I also check readings in other sources including: Menahem Recanati, Perush al ha-Torah; Joseph Angelino, Livnat ha-Sappir; Abraham Galante, in Or ha-Hammah; Shim'on Lavi, Ketem Paz; Abraham Azulai, Or ha-Levanah; Joseph Hamiz, ed., Derekh Emet (a list of emendations to the Mantua edition); Shalom Buzaglo, Migdash Melek; Yehudah Ashlag, Perush ha-Sukkah; and Gershom Scholem’s Annotated Zohar. See the Bibliography.
10. See above, note 8.
simply scribal errors or glosses, but some represent what appear to be better readings. When I identify an apparently better reading, I check if it is shared and confirmed by several reliable manuscripts and witnesses. If it is, I consider substituting it for the printed text.

Over the centuries, Sefer ha-Zohar has been revised by countless scribes and editors who tried to smooth away the rough edges of the text by adding an explanatory phrase, correcting an apparent syntactical mistake, or taming a wild neologism by substituting a more familiar, bland term. Often, relying on the variants, I decide to remove these accumulated layers of revision, thereby restoring a more original text. I seek to recover the Zohar's primal texture and cryptic flavor.

If the early manuscripts preserve unusual, striking wording that is revised or "corrected" by several later manuscripts and the printed editions, I tend to go with the older reading. Often, according to the more reliable manuscripts, a Zoharic rabbi creatively paraphrases a Talmudic saying. Some of the later manuscripts and the printed editions may then restore this saying to its exact Talmudic form. In such cases I emend the printed text in favor of the Zohar's original formulation—original in both senses: older and creative. In the commentary I cite the Talmudic saying on which the paraphrase is based, so that readers can see the transition and trace the imaginative process.

I do not claim to be fully restoring "the original text of the Zohar." There may never have been any such thing, since the text probably emerged over many years, written and distributed piecemeal. However, through painstaking analysis of the variants, I am able to scrape away some seven hundred years of accretion and corruption, and at least approach that elusive, hypothetical original. This Aramaic text of the Zohar, the basis of my translation, is available for study and scholarly examination.11

Translation and Commentary

All translation is inherently inadequate, a well-intentioned betrayal. In the words of the second-century sage Rabbi Yehudah, "One who translates a verse literally is a liar; one who adds to it is a blasphemer."12 Furthermore, the Zohar is notoriously obscure—perhaps the most difficult Jewish classic to translate. It was composed in Castile mostly in Aramaic, a language no longer spoken in medieval Spain.13 The author(s) concocted a unique blend of Aramaic out of traditional sources, especially the Babylonian Talmud and Targum Onqelos (an

---

11. At the website of Stanford University Press: www.sup.org/zohar.
12. BT Qiddushin 49a.
Aramaic translation of the Torah). This unparalleled neo-Aramaic is peppered with enigmatic expressions, puns, outlandish constructions, puzzling neologisms, solecisms, and traces of medieval Hebrew and Castilian.

The Zohar’s prose is poetic, overflowing with multiple connotations, composed in such a way that you often cannot pin down the precise meaning of a phrase. The language befits the subject matter, which is mysterious, elusive, and ineffable; words can merely suggest and hint. An unfathomable process may be stated, then immediately denied: “It split and did not split its aura.” Occasional we encounter oxymorons, such as “new-ancient words,” alluding to the dual nature of the Zohar’s secrets, recently composed yet ascribed to ancient sources. The first impulse of divine emanation is described as הבט gratuito תreira (bostina de-qardinuta), “a spark of impenetrable darkness,” so intensely bright that it cannot be seen.

Through the centuries, the potency of the Zohar’s language has mesmerized even those who could not plumb its secrets. While kabbalists delved deeply, the uninitiated chanted the lyrical Aramaic, often unaware of its literal meaning. In the words of an eighteenth-century mystic, “Even if one does not understand, the language is suited to the soul.”

No doubt it is risky to translate the Zohar, but it would be worse to leave these gems of wisdom buried in their ancient Aramaic vault. So I have plunged in, seeking to transmit some of the Zohar’s magic. The previous English translation (composed in the 1930s by Harry Sperling, Maurice Simon, and Paul Levertoff) reads smoothly but often misunderstands the text. Its gentile prose is more a paraphrase than an accurate translation—avoiding unfamiliar terms, censoring erotic material, skipping difficult passages and even entire sections. The English flows too fluently compared to the original, subduing the unruly Aramaic, failing to render its untamed vibrancy. Moreover, since the translation is unaccompanied by a commentary, the symbolism remains impenetrable.

Despite its shortcomings, I have learned much from consulting this translation, along with others. But my approach is significantly different. Though I wish to make the Zohar accessible, I also want to convey its strangeness,

---


17. Moses Ḥayyim Luzzatto, in his preface to Qeḏaḥ Piṭḥaḥ Ḥokhmah, cited by Tishby, Wisdom of the Zohar, 1:29.

18. This five-volume edition is entitled The Zohar (see Bibliography). Scholem remarks (Kabbalah, 243) that it “suffers from incomplete or erroneous understanding of many parts of the kabbalistic exposition.”

19. I have also consulted four different Hebrew translations, by Yehudah Ashlag, Daniel Frisch, Yehudah Edri, and Yechiel Bar-Lev; Charles Mopsik’s French translation, Le Zohar;
Translator's Introduction

potency, and rich ambiguity. Here the commentary is essential. When the translation cannot adequately express a multifaceted phrase, I unfold the range of meaning in the commentary. When the translation is as cryptic as the original Aramaic, the commentary rescues the stranded reader.

My style of translation is literal yet poetic. I am convinced that a literal rendering of the Zohar is not only the most accurate but also the most colorful and zestful—the best way to transmit the lyrical energy of the Aramaic. Still, at times, the multivalent language invites a certain freedom of expression. Let me cite two related examples. In Zohar 1:83a, Rabbi Shimon describes the nighttime journey of the soul, soaring skyward from her sleeping body: “Flying, she encounters those דמעי תחיין (qamrīn tehīn) of defilement.”

What does this bizarre term mean? The Sperling-Simon translation renders it as “certain bright but unclean essences.”20 The English translation of Tishby’s Wisdom of the Zohar reads: “the deceiving lights of uncleanness,”21 while Tishby’s original Hebrew translation reads a bit differently: קוספיע כדמות (qimmurei neghot)—roughly: “vaulted splendors”—though in his note he acknowledges that the meaning is “doubtful.”22 I render the sentence as follows: “Flying, she encounters those hooded, hunchbacked, dazzling demons of defilement.” The accompanying commentary explains that these are malevolent forces who block the ascent of an unworthy soul. Qamrin derives via rabbinic usage from the Greek qamara, “arched cover,” while tehinn is a cognate of the Aramaic thara, meaning “brightness, noon.” One class of demons is named tiharei, “noonday demons.”

The virtuous soul who evades these demons reaches heaven and receives a divine message. According to another Zoharic passage (1:130a), while descending back to her sleeping earthbound body, the soul is assailed by הביאל תרין (havilei teriqin). The Sperling-Simon translation renders this phrase as “malignant bands.”23 The English translation of Tishby’s Wisdom of the Zohar reads: “ill-intentioned destructive powers.”24 I render it as “ravaging bands of truculent stingers.” The commentary explains that havilei derives from either hevel, “band, group,” or the verb hvil, “to injure, destroy.” Teriqin derives from the root tøtq, “to sting, bite.”

the Hebrew anthology by Fischel Lachower and Isaiah Tishby, Mishnat ha-Zohar, and its English version, The Wisdom of the Zohar, trans. David Goldstein; and the recent English translation edited by Michael Berg, The Zohar by Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai, which, however, is based not on the original Aramaic but on Ashlag’s Hebrew translation. For details on all of these, see the Bibliography.

22. Idem, Mishnat ha-Zohar, 2:134. He concludes by saying that the phrase may mean: “delusive lights.”
Translator’s Introduction

Although the Zohar’s basic vocabulary is limited, its roots generate a rich variety of meanings. For example, the root נֶשׁ (tnq) spans the following range: “establish, institute, mend, restore, correct, perfect, prepare, arrange, array, adorn.” The root נְסִי (tns) can mean: “rise, raise, culminate, attain, surpass, depart, disappear, die, remove, postpone, reserve, emit (fragrance).” In normal Aramaic and Hebrew, the specific verbal conjugation determines which meaning of the root applies, but the Zohar ignores or flouts rules of grammar—confusing the conjugations, playing with multiple meanings, often leaving the reader stumped and wondering.

Mysticism strives to penetrate a realm beyond distinctions, but this mystical masterpiece demands constant decision making, challenging the reader or translator to navigate between conflicting meanings and determine the appropriate one—or sometimes to discover how differing meanings pertain simultaneously. The frequent dilemmas of interpretation suggest that in exploring the Zohar, linguistic search and spiritual search go hand in hand.

Especially puzzling, though charming, are the neologisms strewn throughout the Zohar, intended to bewilder and astound the reader. Some derive from rare Talmudic terms, which the author refashions by intentionally misspelling or by inverting letters; some derive from Greek, Latin, or Castilian; some appear to be pure inventions. These nonce words often contain the letters ט (tet), ש (samekh), פ (pe), ר (resh), and כ (kaph) in various combinations: קִסְפִּית (qispita), קַטְפִּירה (qatpira), קִטְרִית (qitra), קַסְרִית (kesira), קַסְרְסֵרָה (qustera). Qustera derives from the Latin word castrum (plural, castra), “fortress, castle.” Qatpira and its variations mean several things, including “knot” (based on Aramaic קִטְרֵא [qitra]) and “waterskin.”

One newly coined noun, קְלֵפֶט (kqeta), is particularly versatile. In various contexts it can mean “scale, hollow of the hand, fist, potter’s wheel, and water clock.” This last sense refers to a device described in ancient and medieval scientific literature, which in the Zohar functions as an alarm clock, calibrated to wake kabbalists precisely at midnight for the ritual study of Torah. A similar device was employed in Christian monasteries to rouse monks for their vigils. How appropriate to invent a word for an invention!

Often, by pondering the context, comparing Zoharic and rabbinic parallels, and scouring sundry dictionaries and lexicons, one can decipher or at least conjecture the meaning of these weird terms, but some remain as perplexing as originally intended.

---

27. See Zohar 292b and my commentary.
28. After wrestling with Zoharic neologisms for years, I no longer share Tishby’s view (Wisdom of the Zohar, 1:66) that “only rarely is it possible to determine their meaning from the context, while for the most part it is difficult even to guess what the author had in
In translating biblical citations, I have consulted various translations but generally composed my own. Sometimes, in quoting a verse, the Zohar intends a meaning different from that conveyed by any known translation. In such cases I usually translate the verse as the Zohar understands it and then explain the difference in the commentary.

The main purpose of the commentary is to clarify the dense symbolism and unique terminology. Here I seek to elicit the meaning of the text, drawing it forth from the Zohar's own language without being heavy-handed—without ruining the subtlety and ambiguity of the original. Remember that the Zohar was not intended to be easily understood but rather to be deciphered. I want to allow and compel the reader to wrestle with the text. Over the centuries, the tendency has grown to overinterpret, with commentators often insisting on assigning sefirotic significance to nearly every image and metaphor. I have resisted this tendency, while still identifying sefirotic correspondences when they are called for. Often a phrase or passage implies more than one meaning; the reader is encouraged to ponder various possibilities.

To clarify the context, I cite sources and parallels from the Bible, rabbinic literature, and the Zohar itself, with occasional references to secondary literature. The aim is not to overwhelm the reader by citing everything conceivable, but rather to provide what is needed to make sense of this enigmatic work of art.

In composing the commentary, I have drawn on numerous traditional and modern Zohar commentaries, especially those of Moses Cordovero, Shim'on Lavi, Ḥayyim Vital, Abraham Galante, Shalom Buzaglo, Yehudah Ashlag, Charles Mopsik, and Daniel Frisch. Other valuable resources include the annotations of Reuven Margaliot (Nissotsei Zohar) in his edition of the Zohar, Isaiah Tishby's monumental Mishnat ha-Zohar (The Wisdom of the Zohar), Gershom Scholem's Annotated Zohar, and Yehuda Liebes's eye-opening Peragim be-Millon Sefer ha-Zohar (Sections of the Zohar Lexicon).

A glossary, bibliography, and an index of biblical and rabbinic citations are appended to each volume. A diagram of the ten sefirot appears on page xi of mind." Still, I can appreciate the confession of David Goldstein (translator of Wisdom of the Zohar), who, after rendering several obscure lines directly from the Aramaic, writes (ibid., 106, n. 16): "The English translations given are purely hypothetical."

29. Translations I have consulted include the King James Version, New International Version, New Revised Standard Version, the JPS Hebrew-English Tanakh, Everett Fox's The Five Books of Moses, and Richard Elliott Friedman's Commentary on the Torah with a New English Translation.


31. See the Bibliography.
this volume. The standard Aramaic pagination of the Zohar is indicated in the running head on each page (e.g., 1:34b).

How to Read the Zohar

There is no single right way to read and proceed through the Zohar, but I can point out certain features and suggest several guidelines.

First of all, the Zohar is dynamic—full of surprises. Typically we find that "Rabbi Hiyya and Rabbi Yose were walking on the way," wandering through the hills of Galilee, sharing secrets of Torah—but also moving from one dimension to another, accompanied by Shekinah, the Divine Presence Herself. Who knows whom they will encounter on the road? A child amazes them with wisdom, a beggar enriches them with precious teachings, a cantankerous old donkey-driver turns out to be a sage in disguise.

You are about to enter an enchanted realm. Still, although the Zohar sometimes reads like a mystical novel, remember that this is fundamentally a biblical commentary. It's helpful to have a Bible at hand to check the original context, to see how a particular verse becomes a springboard for the imagination. Every few pages we read: "Rabbi Hiyya opened," "Rabbi Yose opened," signifying that he is opening not only his exposition but also the verse: disclosing new layers of meaning, expanding the range of interpretation. The reader of the Zohar should be open, too—open to new ways of thinking and imagining. As the Ha'arayya (Companions) continually exclaim, "Come and see!"

The Zohar is firmly rooted in tradition but thrives on discovery. "This verse has been discussed, but come and see!" "This verse has been established, but come and see!" 32 "Innovations of Torah are required here!" 33 Innovation emerges through scrutinizing the biblical text, so questioning becomes a supreme value. After Rabbi Hizkiyah asks Rabbi Abba a challenging question, we are told that "Rabbi Abba came and kissed him." 34 Why? Because, as one commentator notes here, "The question is half the answer; without a question, there is no reason for an answer." 35

Even when the meaning of a verse is perfectly clear, the Zohar may question its structure, sometimes probing so deeply that the reader is stunned. To take an extreme example, come and see how Rabbi Elazar deals with the concluding verse in the story of the Garden of Eden, which could hardly be more explicit: He drove out Adam. 36 "We do not know who divorced whom: if the blessed

---

32. Zohar 1:56b, 112a, 136a, and frequently.
33. Ibid., 155b.
34. Ibid., 155a.
Holy One divorced Adam, or not.37 As the rabbi demonstrates by exegetical artifice, the mystical meaning is the shocking alternative lurking within that bland phrase, "or not": Adam drove out, divorced Shekhinah, splitting Her from Her divine partner, Tif’eret, and from himself. Once, as Adam, humanity was wedded to God. The original sin lies in losing intimacy with the divine, thereby constricting unbounded awareness. This loss follows inevitably from tasting the fruit of discursive knowledge; it is the price we pay for maturity and culture. The spiritual challenge is to search for that lost treasure—without renouncing the self or the world.

As you read, see how the Hавраага coax new meaning out of a biblical verse, phrase, word—or even letter. Often, they rely on standard rabbinic techniques of interpretation, such as verbal analogy: "Here is written: [such-and-such a biblical expression], and there is written: [an identical (or nearly identical) expression]," implying a close link between the two expressions.

The hermeneutical leap may be long, far from the literal meaning, but sometimes a verse is read "hyperliterally," ignoring idiomatic usage in favor of a radically spiritual sense. For example, when God commands Abraham, הבקיע לך (Lekh lekha), Go forth, . . . to the land that I will show you (Genesis 12:1), Rabbi El’azar insists on reading the words more literally than they were intended: Lekh lekha, Go to yourself?38 Search deep within to discover your true self.

Another startling illustration is the Zohar’s reading of the opening words of the Torah, traditionally rendered: In the beginning God created. Everyone assumes the verse describes the creation of the world, but for the Zohar it alludes to a more primal beginning: the emanation of the sefirot from אין סוף ("Infinity"). How is this allusion discovered, or invented? By insisting on reading the Hebrew words in their precise order: בראשית巴拉אלהומ (Bereshit bara Elohim), construed now as With beginning, It created Elohim—that is, by means of Hokhmah (the seirah of "Wisdom," known as beginning), It (ineffable אין סוף) emanated Binah (the seirah of "Understanding," known by the divine name Elohim).39 God, it turns out, is the object of the verse, not the subject! The ultimate divine reality, אין סוף, transcends and explodes our comfortable conception of "God." The Zohar dares us to confront this reality, as it transforms the familiar story of Creation into divine biography.

So, as you undertake this adventure, expect to be surprised—stay alert. The Zohar’s teachings are profound and intense; one who hopes to enter and emerge in peace should be careful, persevering, simultaneously receptive and active. The message is not served to you on a platter; you must engage the text.

37. Zohar 1:33b.
38. Ibid., 78a.
39. Ibid., 15a.
and join the search for meaning. Follow the words to what lies beyond and within; open the gates of imagination.

Above all, don’t reduce everything you encounter in these pages to something you already know. Beware of trying to find “the essence” of a particular teaching. Although usually essence is the goal of mystical search, here essence is inadequate unless it stimulates you to explore ever deeper layers, to question your assumptions about tradition, God, and self. In the words of a Zoharic parable:

There was a man who lived in the mountains. He knew nothing about those who lived in the city. He sowed wheat and ate the kernels raw. One day he entered the city. They offered him good bread. The man asked, “What’s this for?”

They replied, “It’s bread, to eat!”

He ate, and it tasted very good. He asked, “What’s it made of?”

They answered, “Wheat.”

Later they offered him thick loaves kneaded with oil. He tasted them, and asked, “And what are these made of?”

They answered, “Wheat.”

Later they offered him royal pastry kneaded with honey and oil. He asked, “And what are these made of?”

They answered, “Wheat.”

He said, “Surely I am the master of all of these, since I eat the essence of all of these: wheat!”

Because of that view, he knew nothing of the delights of the world, which were lost on him. So it is with one who grasps the principle but is unaware of all those delectable delights deriving, diverging from that principle.  

---

40. Zohar 2:376a–b. The wheat and its products (kernels, bread, cake, and pastry) may symbolize four levels of meaning in Torah: simple, homiletical, allegorical, and mystical. See Matt, The Essential Kabbalah, 207.