



*The Ten Sefirot*

These are little children, youngsters, as is written: *Make two cherubim of gold* (Exodus 25:18).<sup>25</sup>

בראשית (Be-reshit), *In the beginning*. Rabbi El'azar opened, "Lift your eyes on high and see: Who created these? (Isaiah 40:26). Lift your eyes on high.

To which site? The site toward which all eyes gaze. Which is that? *Opening of the eyes*.<sup>26</sup> There you will discover that the concealed ancient one, susceptible to questioning, *created these*. Who is that? *Who*.<sup>27</sup> The one called End of Heaven above,<sup>28</sup> whose domain extends over everything. Since it can be questioned, yet remains concealed and unrevealed, it is called *Who*. Beyond, there is no question.<sup>29</sup>

25. *Make two cherubim*... In BT *Sukkah* 5b, Rabbi Abbahu interprets the word כרוב (keruv), "cherub," as כרביא (ke-ravya), "like a child." The plump childlike angels of Christian art derive either from this tradition or from the Greco-Roman *Erotes*, "loves." Here Rabbi Shim'on relates the golden cherubim to the golden wreaths of the Song of Songs, concluding that both images allude to children.

26. *Opening of the eyes* פתח עינים (Petaḥ einayim). The phrase originates in Genesis 38:14, where it means "the entrance to Einayim," a village where Tamar seduced her father-in-law, Judah. The midrash on Genesis (*Bereshit Rabbah* 85:7) discovers a deeper meaning: "Rabbi [Yehudah the Prince] said, 'We have searched through the entire Bible and have not found a place called Petaḥ Einayim. What is Petaḥ Einayim? This indicates that she [Tamar] gazed at the opening toward which all eyes gaze and said, 'May it be the divine will that I not leave this house empty.'" In the *Zohar*, this opening is identified with *Shekhinah*, gateway to the divine. See 3:71b–72a.

27. *Who* מי (Mi). *Binah*, the Divine Mother, is called *Who*. A spiritual seeker may inquire about Her, but such questions do not yield ordinary answers. The identity of the divine is discovered only in a realm beyond words. The mystical name *Who* becomes a focus of meditation, as question

turns into quest. See Shim'on Lavi, *KP*, 1:91a: "Concerning everything that cannot be grasped, its question constitutes its answer."

See *Zohar* 1:29b–30a, 45b, 85b–86a, 237b; 2:126b–127a, 138a, 139b, 226a, 231b.

28. *End of Heaven above* See Deuteronomy 4:32: *For ask now of primal days, which were before you: from the day that God created humankind on earth, and from one end of heaven to the other*. In BT *Ḥagigah* 11b, this verse is interpreted as imposing a limit on cosmological speculation: "You may inquire concerning *from one end of heaven to the other*, but you may not inquire concerning what is above, what is below, what came before, what will come after." See M *Ḥagigah* 2:1; *Bereshit Rabbah* 1:10.

These restrictions on cosmological speculation recall the Gnostic striving after "the knowledge of who we were, what we have become, where we were, where we have been thrown, where we hasten, from what we are redeemed, what birth is and what rebirth" (Clement of Alexandria, *Excerpts from Theodotus* 78:2). See *Zohar* 1:30a; Moses de León, *Sheqel ha-Qodesh*, 31; idem, *Sefer ha-Rimmon*, 20, 375; idem, *Sod Eser Sefirot Be-limah*, 371.

29. *Beyond*... The realms beyond *Binah*, namely, *Ḥokhmah*, *Keter*, and *Ein Sof*, are so unknowable that no question concerning them can even be formulated.

“This end of heaven is called *Who*. There is another below, called *What*.<sup>30</sup> What distinguishes the two? The first, concealed one—called *Who*—can be questioned. Once a human being questions and searches,<sup>31</sup> contemplating and knowing rung after rung to the very last rung—once one reaches there: *What?* What do you know? What have you contemplated? For what have you searched? All is concealed, as before.

“Concerning this mystery it is written: *What can I take as a witness to you? What can I compare to you?* (Lamentations 2:13). When the holy Temple was destroyed, a voice cried out: ‘*What can I take as a witness to you? What can I compare to you?*’ I take *What* as a witness to you. Every single day I have called witnesses against you, since days of old, as is written: *I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day* (Deuteronomy 30:19).<sup>32</sup> I compare you to *What*, precisely!<sup>33</sup> I crowned you with holy crowns, gave you dominion over the world, as is written: *Is this the city that was called perfect crown of beauty, joy of all the earth?* (Lamentations 2:15). I called you *Jerusalem built up, a city bound together* (Psalms 122:3). Now, *What can I liken to you, [to console you]?* (Lamentations, *ibid.*, 13).<sup>34</sup> Just as you sit desolate, so it is above, as it were. Just as now, the holy people do not enter you in holy array, so I swear to you that I Myself will not enter above until your inhabitants enter you below.<sup>35</sup> This is your consolation: I compare this rung to you completely.<sup>36</sup> But now that you are here, *your ruin is vast as the ocean* (*ibid.*).<sup>37</sup> Yet if you say you cannot endure or be healed, then *Who will heal you* (*ibid.*), really! That concealed, high rung in which all exists will heal you and raise you up.

30. *What* מה (*Mah*), a name for *Shekhinah*, last of the ten *sefirot*, daughter of *Binah*. See *Zohar* 2:127a. *Binah* and *Shekhinah* comprise the two ends of heaven, above and below *Tif'eret*, who is called Heaven.

31. and searches ומפּשֵׁשׁ, *Umpashpesh*. Cr reads here: ומתפּשֵׁשׁ, *u-mitpashshet*, “and expands.” See *Bahir* 134 (194); and Azriel of Gerona, *Peirush ha-Aggadot*, 39: “Thought expands מתפּשֵׁשׁת, *mitpashshetet*) and ascends to its source. When it reaches there, it is stopped and can ascend no further.”

32. *I call heaven and earth*... Earth symbolizes *Shekhinah*.

33. *I compare you to What, precisely!* Israel resembles *Shekhinah* perfectly.

34. *What can I liken*... Again, Israel and *Shekhinah* (*What*) are compared.

35. *I Myself will not enter*... The blessed Holy One promises not to enter the heavenly Jerusalem, *Shekhinah*, until the earthly Jerusalem is restored. See *Tanhuma, Pequdei* 1: “There is a Jerusalem above aligned with Jerusalem below. Out of His love for the one below, He fashioned another above... He has sworn that His presence will not enter the heavenly Jerusalem until the earthly Jerusalem is rebuilt.”

See Revelation 21:2; *Targum Yonatan*, Psalms 122:3; BT *Ta’anit* 5a; *Zohar* 1:80b (*ST*), 128b, 183b, 231a; 3:15b, 68b, 147b.

36. *this rung*... *Shekhinah*.

37. *But now that you are here, your ruin is vast*... Now that Israel has fallen to the low state of exile, her *ruin is vast as the ocean*, another name for *Shekhinah*, who shares Israel’s exile.

“Who is End of Heaven above; What is End of Heaven below. Jacob inherited this, *running from end to end* (Exodus 26:28),<sup>38</sup> from first end, *Who*, to last end, *What*, for he stands in the middle. So, *Who created these*.”

Rabbi Shim'on said, “El'azar, my son, cease your words,<sup>39</sup> so that the concealed mystery on high, unknown to any human, may be revealed.”

Rabbi El'azar was silent.

Rabbi Shim'on wept and paused for a moment. Then he said, “El'azar, what is *these*?<sup>40</sup> If you answer, ‘Stars and constellations,’ they are always visible there<sup>41</sup> and were created by *What*, as is said: *By the word of YHVH the heavens were made* (Psalms 33:6).<sup>42</sup> As for things concealed, such would not be referred to as *these*, for that word indicates something revealed. This mystery was only revealed one day when I was at the seashore. Elijah<sup>43</sup> came and asked me, ‘Rabbi, do you know the meaning of *Who created these*?’ I answered, ‘These are the heavens and their array, the work of the blessed Holy One. Human beings should contemplate them and bless Him, as is written: *When I behold Your heavens, the work of [2a] Your fingers, the moon and stars that You set in place, . . . YHVH our Lord, how majestic is Your name throughout the earth!* (Psalms 8:4, 10).

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38. *running from end to end* A description of the central wooden beam of the Tabernacle in the desert. The *Zohar* applies this description to *Tiferet*, the central *sefirah*, symbolized by Jacob, who spans the *sefirot* from *Binah* (*Who*) to *Shekhinah* (*What*). See *Zohar* 1:148b (ST).

39. **cease your words** פסוק מליך, *Pesiq millaikh*. The phrase could also be translated: “utter your words.” See BT *Hagigah* 15a–b: פסוק לי פסוקך, *pesiq li pesuqekha*, “Recite for me your verse”; cf. *Zohar* 1:238b. “Cease” fits the context of our passage, but the ambiguity may be intentional, in which case a better rendering would be: “Complete your words,” or “Cut your words.”

40. **these** In the verse from Isaiah 40:26: *Lift up your eyes and see: Who created these?* Now that the mystical meaning of *Who* has been established, Rabbi Shim'on explores the meaning of *these*.

41. **they are always visible there** So why would the verse say, *Lift up your eyes and see*, implying that there is something new to see?

42. **By the word of YHVH . . .** The word of *YHVH* symbolizes *Shekhinah*, who conveys the divine essence. Thus the heavens were made by Her (also known as *What*), not by *Binah* (*Who*).

See *Zohar* 1:119b; 3:191a, 193b.

43. **Elijah** According to the Bible (2 Kings 11:12), the prophet Elijah did not die a normal death but was carried off to heaven in a chariot of fire. He became associated with the Messianic age (Malachi 3:23–24) and in rabbinic tradition is described as “still existing” (BT *Bava Batra* 121b) and revealing divine secrets to righteous humans (BT *Bava Metsi'a* 59b).

In Kabbalah mystical experiences are known as revelations of Elijah. See Scholem, *On the Kabbalah*, 19–21; *Zohar* 1:151a; 3:221a, 231a; *ZH* 59d. In *Zohar* 3:241b Elijah turns to Rabbi Shim'on for instruction! Elsewhere (*ZH* 63d, 70d, 73c [*ShS*]) Elijah encourages him to reveal the secrets and says (62c), “My words will be written by you.”

“Elijah said to me, ‘Rabbi, the word was concealed with the blessed Holy One, and He revealed it in the Academy on High.’<sup>44</sup> Here it is:

‘When Concealed of all Concealed<sup>45</sup> verged on being revealed, it produced at first a single point,<sup>46</sup> which ascended to become thought. Within, it drew all drawings, graved all engravings,<sup>47</sup> carving within the concealed holy lamp<sup>48</sup> a graving of one hidden design, holy of holies, a deep structure emerging from thought, called מי (*Mi*), *Who*, origin of structure.<sup>49</sup> Existent and non-existent, deep and hidden, called by no name but *Who*.

‘Seeking to be revealed, to be named, it garbed itself in a splendid, radiant garment and created אלה (*elleh*), *these*.<sup>50</sup> אלה (*Elleh*) attained the name: these letters joined with those, culminating in the name אלהים (*Elohim*).<sup>51</sup> Until it created אלה (*elleh*), it did not attain the name אלהים (*Elohim*).<sup>52</sup> Based on this mystery, those who sinned with the Golden Calf said “אלה (*Elleh*), *These, are your gods, O Israel!*” (Exodus 32:8).<sup>53</sup> Just as מי (*mi*) is combined with אלה (*elleh*), so the name אלהים (*Elohim*) is constantly polysemous.<sup>54</sup> Through this mystery, the universe exists.’

“Then Elijah flew off; I did not see him. From him I discovered the word, whose mysterious secret I have demonstrated.”

Rabbi El’azar and all the Companions came and bowed down in front of him. Weeping, they said, “If we have come into the world only to hear this, it is enough.”<sup>55</sup>

44. **Academy on High** The Heavenly Academy, where souls of the righteous study Torah with God.

45. **Concealed of all Concealed** *Ein Sof* or *Keter*, the most hidden recesses of divinity.

46. **single point** The primordial point of *Hokhmah* (“Wisdom”), the first emanation.

47. **it drew all drawings...** The *sefirot* were prefigured within divine thought before they emerged in the process of emanation.

48. **concealed holy lamp** *Hokhmah*.

49. **graving of one hidden design...** *Binah*, the origin of the structure of the seven lower *sefirot*.

50. **created אלה (*elleh*), *these*** *Binah* emanated the seven lower *sefirot*, which are less hidden than *Binah* and therefore referred to as *these*.

51. **these letters joined...** אלהים (*Elohim*) The letters אלה (*elleh*) (*these*) joined with the letters מי (*mi*) (*who*) to form the divine name אלהים (*Elohim*). See *Zohar* 2:105a.

52. **Until it created...** *Binah* was not called אלהים (*Elohim*) until She emanated the seven lower *sefirot*.

53. **“אלה (*Elleh*), *These, are your gods...*”** Their sin was that they separated the lower, more concrete *sefirot* (אלה [*elleh*], *these*) from their mysterious source, *Binah* (מי [*Mi*], *Who*), and worshiped *these* alone.

54. **constantly polysemous** The name *Elohim* refers not only to *Binah*, but also to *Gevurah* and *Shekhinah*, as well as to angels and human judges. See Moses de León, *Sefer ha-Mishqal*, 42–43.

55. **“If we have come...”** Similar exclamations appear in rabbinic literature and often in the *Zohar*. See *Pesiqta de-Rav Kahana* 1:3; *Shir ha-Shirim Rabbah* on 3:11; *Qohelet Rabbah* on 6:2; *Qohelet Zuta* 5:17; BT *Berakhot* 16a, 24b; *Shabbat* 41a; *Zohar* 1:148b, 164b, 240a; 2:99a, 121b, 122a, 193b; 3:26a; KP 1:20d.

Time was granted to him. He emerged trembling, his eyes streaming with tears. Quivering, he cried, “Happy is the share of the righteous in that world! Happy is the share of the son of Yoḥai who has attained this! Of him is written: *So that I may endow those who love Me with substance and fill their treasuries* (Proverbs 8:21).”<sup>172</sup>

Rabbi Shim’on opened, “*I have put בראשית (Be-reshit), In the beginning. My words in your mouth* (Isaiah 51:16). How vital it is for a human being to engage in Torah day and night! For the blessed Holy One listens to the voice of those who occupy themselves with Torah, and every word innovated in Torah by one engaged in Torah fashions one heaven.

“We have learned: The moment a new word of Torah originates from the mouth of a human being, that word ascends and presents herself before the blessed Holy One,<sup>173</sup> who lifts that word, kisses her, and adorns her with seventy crowns—engraved and inscribed.<sup>174</sup> But an innovated word of wisdom<sup>175</sup> ascends and settles on the head of צדיק (Tsaddiq), Righteous One—Vitality of the Worlds.<sup>176</sup> From there, it flies and soars through 70,000 worlds,<sup>177</sup> ascending to the Ancient of Days.<sup>178</sup> All the words of the Ancient

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Yitṣḥak when it was decreed that he was to die.

The theme of a holy person remaining on earth appears in a contemporary thirteenth-century Spanish hagiography, *Vida de Santa Oria*, composed by Gonzola de Berceo. There St. Orea ascends to heaven and sees her reward as a throne but is told that for now she must return to earth and continue her spiritual practice. See Wineman, *Mystic Tales from the Zohar*, 28–29.

172. *So that I may endow those who love Me with substance...* According to rabbinic tradition, this verse describes the reward of the righteous in the afterlife. See *M Avot* 5:19; *Uqtsin* 3:12; *Pesiqta de-Rav Kahana, nispaḥim, Vezot Haberakhah*, 451; *BT Sanhedrin* 100a; *Zohar* 1:158a, 206a, 242b; 2:166b.

173. **the blessed Holy One** *Tif’eret*.

174. **seventy crowns...** The number seventy appears in the context of revelation in *BT Shabbat* 88b: “Rabbi Yoḥanan said, ‘... Every utterance emerging from the mouth of Power branched into seventy languages.’” See *Bemidbar Rabbah* 13:16, where

Torah is compared to wine: “Just as יין (yayin), wine, is numerically equivalent to seventy, so Torah assumes seventy faces.”

See *Sefer Ḥanokh (Beit ha-Midrash, 2:116)*; Ibn Ezra, introduction to Commentary on the Torah; *Zohar* 1:26a (TZ), 47b, 54a.

175. **innovated word of wisdom** A new mystical insight, which rises higher than other new interpretations. Cf. *OY*: “One is able to innovate in Torah matters that Moses himself was not permitted to reveal.”

176. **צדיק (Tsaddiq), Righteous One—Vitality of the Worlds** *Yesod*, who channels the flow of emanation to *Shekhinah* and the worlds below.

On various senses of the title “Vitality of the Worlds,” see *Daniel* 12:7; *Mekhilta, Pisha* 16; *Bereshit Rabbah* 1:5; Schäfer, *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur*, § 275; *Zohar* 1:132a, 135b, 167b.

177. **70,000 worlds** Corresponding to the seven lower *sefirot*.

178. **Ancient of Days** עתיק יומין (*Attiq yomin*). See *Daniel* 7:9: *The Ancient of Days sits, the hair on His head like clean fleece, His*

of Days are words of wisdom, conveying supernal, concealed mysteries.<sup>179</sup> When that secret word of wisdom, innovated here, ascends, it joins those words of the Ancient of Days. Along with them, it ascends and descends, entering eighteen hidden worlds, which *no eye has seen, O God, but You* (Isaiah 64:3).<sup>180</sup> Emerging from there, they roam until they arrive, full and complete, presenting themselves before the Ancient of Days. At that moment, the Ancient of Days inhales the aroma of that word and it pleases Him more than anything. Lifting that word, He adorns her with 370,000 crowns.<sup>181</sup> The word flies, ascending and descending, and is transformed into a heaven. So each and every word of wisdom is transformed into a heaven, existing enduringly in the presence of the Ancient of Days. He calls them *new heavens*, newly created heavens, hidden mysteries of supernal wisdom. As for all other innovated words of Torah,<sup>182</sup> they stand before [5a] the blessed Holy One, then ascend and are transformed into *earths of the living* (Psalms 116:9). Then they descend, crowning themselves upon one earth,<sup>183</sup> which is renewed and transformed into a *new earth* through that renewed word of Torah. Concerning this is written: *As the new heavens and the new earth that I am making endure before Me...* (Isaiah 66:22). The verse does not read *I have made*,<sup>184</sup> but rather *I am making*, for He makes them continually out of those innovations and mysteries

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*throne—flames of fire.* In the *Zohar* this name designates the primordial *sefirah* of *Keter*.

179. **words of the Ancient of Days...** In BT *Pesaḥim* 119a, secrets of Torah are referred to as “things hidden by the Ancient of Days.” See the rabbinic blessing in BT *Berakhot* 17a: “May your steps run to hear words of the Ancient of Days.”

See BT *Bava Batra* 91b; *Zohar* 1:9a; 2:168a; 3:105b, 138b (*IR*), 232b; and 3:20a: “Rabbi Yose said to Rabbi Ḥiyya, ‘Let us engage in words of Torah, in words of the Ancient of Days.’”

180. **eighteen hidden worlds...** Recalling the phrase above, *חי עלמין* (*hei almin*), “vitality of the worlds,” describing *Yesod*; the word *חי* (*hei*) has a numerical value of eighteen. See BT *Avodah Zarah* 3b: “Rabbi Abba said to Rabbi Naḥman son of Yitṣṣhak, ‘...What does [God] do at night?... He rides his light cherub and sails through 18,000 worlds.’”

See BT *Berakhot* 34b: “Rabbi Ḥiyya son of Abba said in the name of Rabbi Yoḥanan,

‘All the prophets prophesied only concerning the days of the Messiah, but as for the world that is coming, *No eye has seen, O God, but You, [what You will do for one who awaits You]...* All the prophets prophesied only concerning masters of return [those who succeed in turning back to God], but as for the completely righteous, *No eye has seen, O God, but You.*”

181. **370,000...** An allusion to the three higher *sefirot* (3 × 100,000) and seven lower *sefirot* (7 × 10,000). See *Zohar* 1:4b; 2:14a–b (*MhN*); 3:128b (*IR*).

182. **all other innovated words of Torah** Nonmystical insights.

183. **earths of the living...one earth** *Shekhinah* is the singular “earth of the living,” who is adorned and renewed by human insights of Torah, which have been transformed into planetoids, miniature *earths of the living* orbiting Her.

184. **The verse does not read *I have made*** In the past tense, referring to the original creation of heaven and earth.

of Torah. Of this is written: *I have put My words in your mouth and covered you with the shadow of My hand, to plant heavens and establish earth* (Isaiah 51:16). The verse does not read *the heavens*, but rather *heavens*.<sup>185</sup>

Rabbi El'azar asked, "What is the meaning of: *I have covered you with the shadow of My hand*?"

He replied, "When Torah was transmitted to Moses, myriads of celestial angels came to scorch him with flames from their mouths, but the blessed Holy One sheltered him.<sup>186</sup> Now when this word ascends, is aroused, and stands before the blessed Holy One, He shelters that word and covers that person so that he will not be discovered by them—arousing their jealousy—before that word is transformed into new heavens and a new earth, as is written: *I have covered you with the shadow of My hand, to plant heavens and establish earth*. From this we learn that every word concealed from the eyes attains supernal value,<sup>187</sup> as is written: *I have covered you with the shadow of My hand*. Why was it covered and hidden from view? For the sake of supernal value, as is written: *to plant heavens and establish earth*, as already explained.

"To say to Zion: 'You are עמי (ammi), My people!' (ibid.). To say to those gates, those distinguished words,<sup>188</sup> these above those: 'You are עמי (ammi).'

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185. The verse does not read *the heavens*... The reference is not to the existing heavens, but to new heavens. See BT *Sanhedrin* 99b: "Rav said, '[Concerning one who studies Torah for her own sake,] it is as though he built heavenly and earthly palaces, as is written: *I have put My words in your mouth and covered you with the shadow of My hand, to plant heavens and establish earth*.'" Rabbi Shim'on amplifies this teaching and radicalizes it; note how the phrase "it is as though" has disappeared.

186. angels came to scorch him... Jealous that a mere mortal dared to enter the celestial realm. See *Pesiqta Rabbati* 20: "When Moses ascended on high... a band of angels of destruction... sought to scorch him with the breath of their mouths. What did the blessed Holy One do? He spread over him some of His splendor."

See *Ma'yan Hokhmah (Beit ha-Midrash, 1:58–60)*; and BT *Shabbat* 88b: "Rabbi Yehoshu'a son of Levi said, 'When Moses ascended on high, the ministering angels said before the blessed Holy One, "Master of the Universe! What is one born of woman doing

here among us?" He answered, "He has come to receive Torah." They said, "That precious treasure hidden by You for 974 generations before the world was created, You desire to give to flesh and blood! *What is a human that You are mindful of him, a human being that You take note of him?*" (Psalms 8:5). "Answer them," said the blessed Holy One to Moses. "Master of the Universe," he replied, "I fear they could scorch me with the breath of their mouths." He said, "Grasp My throne of Glory, and answer them. . . ." Rabbi Naḥman observed, "This teaches that the Almighty spread some of the luster of His *Shekhinah* and His cloud over him." See *Zohar* 2:58a, 156b.

187. every word concealed... See BT *Ta'anit* 8b: "Blessing is not found in anything weighed, measured, or counted, but only in that which is hidden from the eye." Cf. *Zohar* 1:64b, 202a.

188. Zion... gates... distinguished words In BT *Berakhot* 8a, the phrase *gates of ציון (Tsiyyon), Zion* (Psalms 87:2) is interpreted in the name of Rav Ḥisda as "gates מצויינים (metsuyyanim), distinguished, by *halakhah*." Based on this passage, Rabbi Shim'on iden-



Do not read ‘*You are עמי (ammi), My people,*’ but rather ‘*You are עמי (immi), with Me, becoming My partner!* Just as I made heaven and earth by speaking, as is said: *By the word of YHWH, the heavens were made* (Psalms 33:6), so do you.’ Happy are those engaged in Torah!

“Now if you say that the word of any ignorant person has the same effect, come and see: One who is unaccustomed to the mysteries of Torah and innovates words he does not fully understand—when that word ascends, *a man of perversity, tongue of falsehood* (Proverbs 16:28; 6:17)<sup>189</sup> bursts forth from the chasm of the immense abyss,<sup>190</sup> leaping 500 parasangs<sup>191</sup> to obtain that word. Grabbing her, he takes that word back to his chasm and transmogrifies her into a distorted heaven called ‘chaos.’ The *man of perversity* flies through that heaven—6,000 parasangs in one glide.<sup>192</sup> As soon as the distorted heaven is established, *a woman of whoredom* (Hosea 1:2)<sup>193</sup> emerges, clinging to it, joining with it. From there she sets out, killing thousands, myriads. For as long as she endures in that heaven, she is empowered to swoop through the entire world in a single moment.<sup>194</sup> Concerning this is written: *Woe unto them who haul iniquity with cords of falsehood, and sin as with a cart rope* (Isaiah 5:18).<sup>195</sup> *Iniquity* is the male. Who is *sin*? The female. He<sup>196</sup> hauls the one called *iniquity* with those *cords of falsehood*, and then *sin as with a cart rope*, that female called *sin*, who is empowered there to fly and kill human beings. So, *Many are those she has struck dead* (Proverbs 7:26). Who has struck them dead? This *sin* who slays human beings. Who causes this? A disciple unqualified to teach who teaches.<sup>197</sup> May the Compassionate One save us!”

tifies original interpretations of Torah as Zion.

189. *man of perversity*... Samael, the male demon who schemes and accuses falsely.

190. *chasm of the immense abyss* The abode of demons.

191. *parasangs* The Greek parasang equals about 3.5 miles.

192. *in one glide* The distorted heaven empowers Samael, providing him a fast celestial highway.

193. *woman of whoredom* Lilith, the female demon, wife of Samael. Together they comprise *Sitra Aħra*, “the Other Side.” See *Zohar* 1:148a (*ST*); 2:245a; Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 356–61.

194. *in a single moment* See *BT Berakhot* 4b: “A *tanna* taught: ‘Michael [reaches his destination] in one [glide], Gabriel in two,

Elijah in four, and the Angel of Death in eight—in time of plague, however, in one.”

195. *Woe unto them*... See *BT Sukkah* 52a: “Rabbi Assi said, ‘The evil impulse at first resembles the thread of a spider but ultimately it resembles cart ropes, as is said: *Woe unto them who haul iniquity with cords of vanity, and sin as with a cart rope.*” Cf. *Zohar* 1:57a.

196. *He* The sinner or the distorted heaven.

197. *A disciple unqualified*... See *BT Sotah* 22a: “Rav said, ‘What is the meaning of the verse *Many are those she has struck dead, numerous are her slain? Many are those she has struck dead*—this refers to a disciple unqualified to teach [to decide questions of law] who teaches. *Numerous are her slain*—this refers to a disciple qualified to teach who does not.”

Rabbi Shim'on said to the Companions, "I beg of you not to utter a word of Torah that you do not know and have not heard properly from a lofty tree,<sup>198</sup> lest you enable *sin* to slay multitudes without cause."<sup>199</sup>

They all opened, saying, "May the Compassionate One save us! May the Compassionate One save us!"

"Come and see: With Torah the blessed Holy One created the world. This has been established, as is written: *I was with Him as a nursling, I was a daily delight* (Proverbs 8:30).<sup>200</sup> He gazed upon her once, twice, three and four times, then spoke, creating through her.<sup>201</sup> To teach human beings not to err in her,<sup>202</sup> as is written: *Then He saw and declared her, arranged her and probed her. He told humanity* (Job 28:27).<sup>203</sup> The blessed Holy One created what He created corresponding to those four times: *He saw and declared her, arranged her and probed her.*<sup>204</sup> Before generating His work, He introduced four words: *את בראשית ברא אלהים את* (*Be-reshit bara Elohim et*), *In the beginning God created*. First, these four; then, *השמיים* (*ha-shamayim*), *the heavens*. These correspond to the four times that the blessed Holy One contemplated Torah before actualizing His work of art."

29

198. **from a lofty tree** From a recognized authority. See the similar expression: "from high tamarisks" (BT *Beitsah* 27a). One of the five things that the imprisoned Rabbi Akiva taught Rabbi Shim'on (BT *Pe-sahim* 112a) was: "If you want to be strangled, then be hanged on a large tree," which according to Rashi (ad loc.) means: If you must depend on an authority, see that it is a great one.

See *Kallah Rabbati*, 2; *Zohar* 2:87a; 3:76a-b; and BT *Berakhot* 27b: "Rabbi Eli'ezer says, '... One who says something that he has not heard from his teacher causes *Shekhinah* to depart from Israel.'"

The conservative attitude here contrasts with the preceding encouragement to innovate. See *OY* and *KP*.

199. **slay multitudes without cause** Righteous and sinful die together in the plagues and disease brought by Lilith.

200. **With Torah... This has been established...** According to M *Avot* 3:14, Torah is the "precious instrument by which the world was created." See *Bereshit Rabbah* 1:1: "Rabbi Osha'ya opened, 'I was with Him as אמן (*amon*), a *nursling*... אמן (*amon*)—אמן

(*umman*), an *artisan*. Torah says, "I was the artistic tool of the blessed Holy One."... The blessed Holy One gazed into Torah and created the world."

See *Zohar* 1:47a, 134a-b; 2:161a-b; 3:35b; Wolfson, *Philo*, 1:243-45.

201. **then spoke...** Only after perusing Torah did God proclaim her words, thereby creating the world.

202. **not to err...** But rather to imitate God and study Torah thoroughly. Cf. BT *Eruvin* 54b: "Rabbi Eli'ezer said, 'One must teach his student four times.'"

203. **Then He saw... declared... arranged... probed...** See *Bereshit Rabbah* 24:5. The four verbs correspond to the four times that God gazed into Torah, perhaps also to the four methods of interpretation: literal, allegorical, midrashic, and mystical. After creating the world, God *told humanity* to imitate Him by studying Torah intensively.

204. **corresponding to those four times...** Apparently a reference to the four worlds, containing respectively the *sefirot*, the Chariot, the angels, and the physical world.

## Parashat Be-Reshit

“IN THE BEGINNING” (GENESIS 1:1–6:8)

בראשית (*Be-reshit*), *In the beginning* (Genesis 1:1).

**A**t the head of potency of the King,<sup>1</sup> He engraved engravings<sup>2</sup> in luster on high.<sup>3</sup> A spark of impenetrable darkness<sup>4</sup> flashed within the concealed of the con-

1. **potency of the King** הרומנותא דמלכא (*Hurmanuta de-malka*), “Authority [or: decree] of the king.” The phrase הרמנא דמלכא (*harmana de-malka*), “authority [or: decree] of the king,” appears in BT *Berakhot* 58a, *Gittin* 57b, *Bava Metsi’a* 83b–84a, *Hullin* 57b.

See *Zohar* 1:76b, 97a, 108a, 109b (all *ST*), 147a (*Tos*); 2:123a; *ZH* 67c (*ShS*), 121d. Here the King is *Ein Sof*, arousing Itself to manifest through the process of emanation.

2. **engraved engravings** These engravings eventually manifest as the *sefirot*. See *Zohar* 1:3b, 38a; 2:126b; 3:128a (*IR*).

3. **luster on high** The brilliance of the first *sefirah*, *Keter*, represented in the *Zohar* as coeternal with *Ein Sof*.

4. **spark of impenetrable darkness** ברצינא דקרדינותא (*Botsina de-qardinuta*), “A lamp of impenetrability.” Though ברצינא (*botsina*) usually means “lamp,” here “spark” is likely. See the wealth of material collected and analyzed by Liebes, *Peraqim*, 145–51, 161–64. *OY* and *OL* record the variant ברציצא (*botsitsa*), “spark.” Cf. *Zohar* 3:139a (*IR*), 295a (*IZ*); and the phrase ברציצא דקרדינותא (*botsitsa de-qardinuta*), which appears several times in *ZH* 56d–58d (*QhM*). קרדינותא (*Qardinuta*) recalls a phrase in BT *Pesahim* 7a: חייט קורדניתא (*hittei qurdanaita*), “wheat from Kurdistan,” which, according to Rashi,

is very hard. *OY*, *OL*, and *DE* record the variants קרדינותא (*qadrinuta*) or קרדיניתא (*qadrinita*), “darkness.” See *ZH* 2a, where קרדנותא דסיהרא (*qardenuta de-sihara*) means “eclipse of the moon,” corresponding to the Hebrew קדרות הירח (*qadrut ha-yareah*), “darkening of the moon.” Shim’on Lavi (*KP*) retains the reading ברצינא דקרדינותא (*botsina de-qardinuta*) but renders it שביב הקדרות (*sheviv ha-qadrut*), “the spark of darkness.” Cf. Tishby, *Mishnat ha-Zohar*, 1:163: שביב של קדרות (*shaviv shel qadrut*), “a spark of darkness”; Tishby, *Wisdom of the Zohar*, tr. Goldstein, 1:309: “a spark of blackness.” See *Tanhuma*, *Shemot* 15.

The spark is so potently brilliant that it overwhelms comprehension. Many mystics convey similar paradoxical images: “a ray of divine darkness” (Dionysius, *Mystical Theology* 1:1); “the luminous darkness” (Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Moses* 2:163); “the black light” (Iranian Sufism; see Corbin, *The Man of Light in Iranian Sufism*, 99–120). Prior to the *Zohar*, Azriel of Gerona and the author of *Ma’yan ha-Ḥokhmah* mention “the light darkened from shining.” See Verman, *The Books of Contemplation*, 59–60, 158–59; Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, 336. Cf. Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed* 1:59: “We are dazzled by His beauty, and He is hidden

cealed,<sup>5</sup> from the head of Infinity<sup>6</sup>—a cluster of vapor forming in formlessness, thrust in a ring,<sup>7</sup> not white, not black, not red, not green, no color at all.<sup>8</sup> As a cord surveyed,<sup>9</sup> it yielded radiant colors. Deep within the spark gushed a flow, splaying colors below, concealed within the concealed of the mystery of *Ein Sof*.<sup>10</sup> It split and did not split its aura,<sup>11</sup> was not known at all, until under the

from us because of the intensity with which He becomes manifest, just as the sun is hidden to eyes too weak to apprehend it.”

Here the blinding spark is the first impulse of emanation flashing from *Ein Sof* through *Keter* and proceeding to delineate the various *sefirot*. (On the connection between *qardinuta* and measurement, see Liebes, *Peraqim*, 146–49, 162–63.) The goal of meditation is to attain this spark and participate in the primal flow of being. See *ZH* 57d–58a (*QhM*); cf. *Zohar* 1:18b, 86b, 172a; 2:133b, 177a, 233a, 254b, 260a; 3:48b–49a, 135b, 139a (*IR*), 292b, 295a–b (*IZ*).

Other renderings of the phrase include: מנורה חשוכה (*menorah hashukhah*), “a dark lamp” (Galante); ניצוץ חזק (*nitsots hazaq*), “powerful spark” (*DE*); נר של חשך (*ner shel hoshekh*), “a lamp of darkness” (Elijah of Vilna, *Yahel Or*); “a dark flame” (Scholem, *Zohar*, 27); “a very powerful light” (Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 228); “a lamp of scintillation [or: darkness, measurement]” (Sperling and Simon, *The Zohar*); “a blinding spark” (Matt, *Zohar*, 49); *une flamme obscure* (Mopsik, *Le Zohar*); “the hardened spark” (Wolfson, “Woman—The Feminine as Other in Theosophic Kabbalah,” 178–82). On the phallic connotations of the phrase, see Wolfson’s discussion there and in his *Circle in the Square*, 60–62, and index, s.v. “hardened spark”; Liebes, “*Zohar ve-Eros*,” 73–80.

5. **concealed of the concealed** The luster on high, the first and most hidden *sefirah*, *Keter*.

6. **Infinity** Hebrew, אין סוף (*Ein Sof*), “there is no end,” the ultimate divine reality. On the evolution of this term, see Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 88–89.

7. **cluster of vapor forming in formlessness...** קוטר בגולמא (*Qutra be-gulma*). *Qutra* means both “knot” and “smoke” in

the *Zohar*. See 1:172a, and 30a, 33b, 94b, 106a, 161b; 2:80a, 124a; 3:45b, 51a–b, 107a, 289b, 295b (*IZ*).

Some commentators (Galante, *OY*, *Sullam*) suggest translating *qutra* as “form.” Cf. קטורין (*qeturin*) in *Vayiqra Rabbah* 23:12; *Arukh*, s.v. *qtr*. The phrase would then mean: “a form in formlessness,” which resonates with “a spark of darkness.” The ring is *Keter*, the “Crown.”

8. **not white, not black...** These four colors are associated with four *sefirot*: *Hesed*, *Shekhinah*, *Gevurah*, and *Tif'eret*, none of which appears until a later stage of emanation. See *ZH* 57a (*QhM*); Liebes, *Studies in Jewish Myth*, 84.

9. **As a cord surveyed** The spark that is a vapor is also a cord (משיחא [*meshiḥa*]), referred to elsewhere in the *Zohar* as קו המדה (*qav ha-middah*), “the line of measure,” based on Jeremiah 31:38.

See Azriel of Gerona, *Peirush ha-Aggadot*, 89–90; Jacob ben Sheshet, *Meshiv Devarim Nekhoḥim*, 113; *Zohar* 1:18b; 2:233a–b, 258a; *ZH* 56d–58d (*QhM*); *TZ* 18, 37b.

The cord, or measuring line, maps out the paths and stages of emanation, the spectrum of divine colors, each with its own wavelength.

10. **concealed within the concealed...** The flow of emanation has just begun; everything is still hidden within the mystery of *Ein Sof*.

11. **It split and did not split...** בקע ולא בקע (*Beqa ve-la beqa*). The flow somehow broke through, but the nature of the breakthrough is impossible to describe, so the act is stated and immediately denied. See Scholem’s remarks on expressions of this kind in *Major Trends*, 166–67.

The aura (אוריא [*avira*]), “air, space, ether, aura”) is *Keter*. See *Zohar* 1:16b; 3:135b (*IR*); Altmann, *Studies*, 174; Scholem, “*Iqvotav shel*

impact of splitting, a single, concealed, supernal point shone. Beyond that point, nothing is known, so it is called ראשית (*Reshit*), *Beginning*,<sup>12</sup> first command of all.<sup>13</sup>

*The enlightened*<sup>14</sup> will shine like the *זוהר* (*zohar*), *radiance*,<sup>15</sup> of the sky, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars forever and ever (Daniel 12:3).

this point.<sup>16</sup> Then this *beginning* expanded, building itself a palace worthy of

זוהר (*Zohar*), *Radiance!* Concealed of concealed struck its aura, which touched and did not touch

*Geviroi be-Qabbalah*,” 167–68; idem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, 331–47 (especially 342); Pines, in *Tarbiz* 50 (1981): 339–47; Liebes, in *Mehqerei Yerushalym be-Mahashevet Yisra’el* 6:3–4 (1987): 80–86; Verman, *The Books of Contemplation*, 153–56.

See *Sefer Yetsirah* 2:6: “Out of chaos He formed substance, making what is not into what is. He hewed enormous pillars out of ether that cannot be grasped.”

See Solomon ibn Gabirol, *Keter Malkhut* 9:101: “He called to אין (*ayin*), nothingness, ונבקה (*ve-nivqa*), and it was split, to יש (*yesh*), something, and it was thrust.” On the parallel between the *Zohar*’s description and the Orphic myth of the hatching of the cosmic egg, see Liebes, *Studies in Jewish Myth*, 79–84.

12. a single, concealed, supernal point . . . *Beginning* The flow of emanation manifests as a point of light. This is the second *sefirah*: *Hokhmah* (“Wisdom”), which is called *Beginning* because it is the first ray of divine light to appear outside of *Keter*, the first aspect of God that can be known.

The identification of ראשית (*reshit*), *beginning*, with Wisdom appears widely. See *Targum Yerushalmi* (frag.), Genesis 1:1; Wolfson, *Philo*, 1:242–45, 266–69; *Bereshit Rabbah* 1:1; Azriel of Gerona, *Peirush ha-Aggadot*, 81; Nahmanides on Genesis 1:1; *Zohar* 1:2a, 3b, 16b, 20a, 145a; Moses de León, *Sheqel ha-Qodesh*, 21–22 (25–26); Scholem, *Major Trends*, 391, n. 80.

13. first command of all According to *M Avot* 5:1, “The world was created through ten commands.” Only nine explicit com-

mands appear in Genesis 1, but the decade is completed by counting the phrase *In the beginning*.

See BT *Rosh ha-Shanah* 32a, *Megillah* 21b; Ezra of Gerona, *Peirush Shir ha-Shirim*, 506; *Zohar* 1:16b, 30a; TZ 32, 76a. In Kabbalah the ten commands symbolize the ten *sefirot*, the first of which establishes the basis for the other nine.

14. *The enlightened* המושבילים (*H-maskilim*). Both philosophers and kabbalists described themselves by this term, which originally may have designated the community of those who shared Daniel’s vision. See Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, 224. On the following pages of the *Zohar* (15b–16a), the term is applied to the letters and vowels, as well as to the *sefirot*. The *Zohar* on Exodus opens with the same verse and applies it to the kabbalists: “*The enlightened* are those who contemplate the secret of wisdom” (2:2a).

See *Bahir* 95 (139); *Zohar* 2:23a; ZH 58c (*QhM*), 93d–94b (*Tiq*); Wolfson, *Through a Speculum That Shines*, 383–84; Liebes, “*Zohar ve-Eros*,” 73–75.

15. זוהר (*zohar*), *radiance* The word designates the hidden power of emanation and provides the title of the book. See below, and *Zohar* 1:100a (*ST*); 3:124b, 153b (*RM*); Liebes, “*Zohar ve-Eros*,” 73–86.

16. זוהר (*Zohar*), *Radiance!* . . . this point The spark of emanation flashes again, and *Keter*, the aura, subtly transmits the impulse to *Hokhmah*, the point of Wisdom. See *Zohar* 1:16b, 65a; 2:268b.

glorious praise. There it sowed seed to give birth, availing worlds.<sup>17</sup> The secret is: *Her stock is seed of holiness* (Isaiah 6:13).<sup>18</sup>

זוהר (Zohar), *Radiance!* Sowing seed for its glory, like the seed of fine purple silk wrapping itself within, weaving itself a palace,<sup>19</sup> constituting its praise, availing all.

With this *beginning*, the unknown concealed one<sup>20</sup> created the palace. This palace is called אלהים (Elohim), *God*.<sup>21</sup> The secret is: בראשית ברא אלהים (Bereshit bara Elohim), *With beginning, \_\_\_\_\_ created God* (Genesis 1:1).<sup>22</sup>

17. palace worthy of glorious praise... sowed seed... The purpose of emanation is to display the glory of the hidden God, which is achieved through a rhythm of revelation and concealment: only by concealing itself can the overwhelming light be revealed. The point expands into a circle, a palace—the third *sefirah*: *Binah* (“Understanding”). She is the divine womb, where the seed of *Hokhmah*, the divine father, is sown. *Binah* gives birth to the seven lower *sefirot*, which engender the rest of creation. See *Zohar* 2:68b (*Tos*). The idea that the sperm originates in the brain is based on the theory of the second-century Greek physician Galen, common in medieval literature.

18. *Her stock is seed of holiness* The prophet Isaiah refers to one-tenth of the people of Israel, who will be saved. The *Zohar* cites the verse as an allusion either to *Binah* or *Shekhinah*, the mystical Assembly of Israel, the tenth *sefirah*, whose origin is the seed of *Hokhmah* (known as “Holiness”) sown in *Binah*. See Azriel of Gerona, *Peirush ha-Aggadot*, 20; *Zohar* 2:121a.

19. fine purple silk wrapping itself within... As the silkworm spins a cocoon out of its own substance, so *Hokhmah*, the point of *beginning*, expands into the palace of *Binah*. (The silk industry was extensive in Andalusia, south of Castile, where the *Zohar* emerged.)

See *Bereshit Rabbah* 21:5: “like the locust whose garment is of itself.” Cf. Shneur Zalman of Lyady, *Sha’ar ha-Yihud ve-ha-Emunah*, chap. 7; and the spider simile in the Upanishads (Hume, ed., *The Thirteen Principal Upanishads*, 95, 367).

20. the unknown concealed one The hidden source of emanation, *Ein Sof* or *Keter*.

21. אלהים (Elohim), *God* Here the name signifies *Binah*, the Divine Mother who gives birth to the seven lower *sefirot*. See *Zohar* 1:3b, 15b.

22. The secret is... The *Zohar* offers its mystical reading of the opening words of Genesis. It translates the first word, בראשית (*Be-reshit*), as *With beginning* rather than *In the beginning*, relying on an alternative meaning of the preposition ב (*be*). See *Targum Yerushalmi* (frag.) and Naḥmanides, ad loc.; *Bereshit Rabbah* 1:1; Azriel of Gerona, *Peirush ha-Aggadot*, 81.

The subject of the verse, אלהים (*Elohim*), *God*, follows the verb ברא (*bara*), *created*. In its typical hyperliteral fashion, the author(s) of the *Zohar* insists on reading the words in the exact order in which they appear, thereby transforming *God* into the object! This means that the subject is now unnamed, but that is perfectly appropriate because the true subject of emanation is unnamable. The opening words of the Bible no longer mean: *In the beginning God created*, but rather: *With beginning* [by means of the point of *Hokhmah*], the ineffable source *created Elohim* [the palace of *Binah*].

The rabbis of the Talmud were aware of the danger of misinterpreting *Elohim* as the object of the sentence, which could promote Gnostic dualism (see BT *Megillah* 9a; Rashi and Tosafot, ad loc.). Various early kabbalists also adopt such a reading. See *Kiryat Sefer* 6 (1929–30): 415; Verman, *The Books of Contemplation*, 139–41; Isaac ibn Latif, *Sha’ar ha-Shamayim* 2:10; *Ma’arekhet ha-Elohut*, 82b–

זוהר (*Zohar*), *Radiance!* From here all commands were created through the mysterious expansion of this point of concealed radiance. If *created* is written here, no wonder it is written: *God created the human being in His image* (Genesis 1:27).<sup>23</sup>

זוהר (*Zohar*), *Radiance!* Mystery! בראשית (*Be-reshit*), *In the beginning*, first of all. אהיה (*Ehyeh*), *I will be* (Exodus 3:14), a sacred name engraved in its sides;<sup>24</sup> אלהים (*Elohim*), *God*, engraved in the crown.<sup>25</sup> אשר (*Asher*), *Who* (*ibid.*)—a hidden, treasured palace, beginning of the mystery of ראשית (*reshit*).<sup>26</sup> אשר (*Asher*)—ראש (*rosh*), head, emerging from ראשית (*reshit*).<sup>27</sup> When [15b] afterward point and palace were arrayed as one, then בראשית (*Be-reshit*) comprised supernal ראשית (*reshit*) in wisdom.<sup>28</sup> Afterward the color of the palace transformed and it was called בית (*bayit*), house, while the supernal point was called ראש (*rosh*), merging in one another in the mystery of בראשית (*Be-reshit*), when all was as one in one entirety, before the house was inhabited.<sup>29</sup>

83a; Scholem, *Major Trends*, 402, n. 55; Liebes, *Studies in the Zohar*, 152–54. For Gnostic parallels, see Robinson, ed., *The Nag Hammadi Library*, index, s.v. Autogenes, Self-begotten One.

23. If *created*... no wonder... The verb ברא (*bara*), *created*, thought to be reserved for creation *ex nihilo*, refers in the opening verse of Genesis to an act of emanation, the emanation of *Binah* (*Elohim*) from the primordial point of *Hokhmah* (*Reshit*). See below, page 113: “*Bara*—concealed mystery, from which all expands.” If so, no wonder the same verb is employed to describe the creation of Adam and Eve, a further stage of divine unfolding.

For alternative interpretations, see Scholem; *KP*; *OY*; Galante; *MM*; Tishby, *Wisdom of the Zohar*, 1:310. Liebes (“*Zohar ve-Eros*,” 75) suggests: If, by means of זוהר (*zohar*), *radiance*, God created heaven and earth, no wonder that it is written: *God created the human being in His image*, a verse that perplexed those medieval interpreters who denied anthropomorphism. The verse is not comparing the human and divine forms, but rather the creative power called *zohar*, common to both God and humans. In creating the human being, God emanated and imparted this creative potential.

24. אהיה (*Ehyeh*), *I will be*... A name of *Keter*. At the burning bush, God reveals His name to Moses: אשר אהיה (*Ehyeh asher ehyeh*), *I will be who I will be* [or: *I am who I am*]. Here the first two of the three Hebrew words are applied to *Keter* and *Binah* respectively. See *Zohar* 3:11a, 65a–b.

25. אלהים (*Elohim*), *God*... As noted above, this name applies to *Binah*, but it also alludes to *Shekhinah*, known as עטרה (*atarah*), “crown.”

26. אשר (*Asher*), *Who*... Referring to *Binah*, the palace, the first *sefirah* to emanate from *Hokhmah*, known as ראשית (*reshit*), *beginning*. On *Asher* as a name of *Binah*, see *Zohar* 1:158a, 246a.

27. אשר (*Asher*)—ראש (*rosh*), head... אשר (*Asher*), signifying *Binah*, is an anagram of ראש (*rosh*), the initial letters of ראשית (*reshit*), signifying *Hokhmah*. *Binah* emerges from *Hokhmah*.

28. then בראשית (*Be-reshit*)... in wisdom The opening word of the Torah indicates both the primordial point of *Hokhmah* (*reshit*) and the palace of *Binah* (*be*).

29. the color... transformed... *Binah* develops further and is no longer called by the single letter ב (*bet*) (i.e., the preposition *be*, “in” or “with”), but by the word בית (*bayit*), “house,” though it is still joined with

ate (ibid., 6)—receiving it willingly<sup>1282</sup>—and also gave to her husband beside her, for now she aroused desirously toward him, offering passionate love. This shows human beings how the act corresponds above.”<sup>1283</sup>

Rabbi El’azar said, “If so, how can we demonstrate the evil impulse above, seizing the female?”<sup>1284</sup>

He replied, “We have already aroused our awareness of the mystery of left and right, corresponding to the good impulse and the evil impulse—good impulse on the right, evil impulse on the left—these above and those below.<sup>1285</sup> The left above grasps the body to join with Her as one, as is said: *His left hand beneath my head* . . . (Song of Songs 2:6).<sup>1286</sup> So until here words are interpretable above and below. From here on, words with a residue of tar, interpretable by tiny children.<sup>1287</sup> By this the Companions have already been aroused.”

Rabbi Shim’on was traveling to Tiberias, accompanied by Rabbi Yose, Rabbi Yehudah, and Rabbi Ḥiyya. On the way they saw Rabbi Pinḥas approaching. Upon joining as one, they dismounted and sat beneath the trees of the hillside.

Rabbi Pinḥas said, “Now that we are sitting, I am eager to hear some of those sublime words you convey every day!”<sup>1288</sup>

Rabbi Shim’on opened, saying, “*He went on his journeys from the Negev as far as Bet-El* (Genesis 13:3).<sup>1289</sup> *He went on his journeys*. The verse should read: *his journey*. Why *his journeys*? Because there are two journeys: one, his; one, of

1282. receiving it willingly Seduced by the evil impulse, Eve indulged in physical desire.

1283. how the act corresponds above In the realm of the *sefirot*, male and female interact similarly.

1284. how can we demonstrate the evil impulse above . . . How can an evil component appear in the realm of the *sefirot*?

1285. the mystery of left and right . . . The good and evil impulses derive, respectively, from the *sefirot* of *Ḥesed* on the right and *Gevurah* on the left.

See BT *Berakhot* 61a; *Zohar* 1:144b, 155b, 165b, 174b; 3:263b.

1286. *His left hand beneath my head* The verse continues: *his right embracing me*. In the divine romance, the left hand (*Gevurah*) arouses the body of *Shekhinah*, then the right hand (*Ḥesed*) completes the embrace, uniting Her with *Tiferet*. See above, page 270.

1287. So until here . . . Perhaps meaning: until this point in Genesis (3:6), the verses apply both on the earthly plane and the sefirotic plane. From here on, they apply primarily on the corporeal level (as indicated by “a residue of tar”) and their interpretation requires no profound insight.

See KP; *Bei’ur ha-Millim ha-Zarot*, 176–77; Scholem; Tishby, *Wisdom of the Zohar*, 3:1390.

1288. I am eager to hear some of those sublime words . . . The expression derives from the Talmud and appears often in the *Zohar*. See BT *Berakhot* 8a; *Ta’anit* 20b; *Ḥa-gigah* 14a; *Zohar* 1:87a, 96b, 197b; 2:31a; 3:148a, 209b, 231a.

1289. *He went on his journeys* . . . Describing the journeyings of Abraham on his way back to Canaan from Egypt. See *Bere-shit Rabbah* 40:3 (on Genesis 13:3); *Zohar* 1:83b.



*Shekhinah*. For every human being should manifest as male and female to fortify faith; then *Shekhinah* never separates from him.<sup>1290</sup>

“You might say: ‘If one sets out on the road and is no longer male and female, *Shekhinah* separates from him.’<sup>1291</sup> Come and see: Whoever sets out on the road should offer his prayer to the blessed Holy One to draw upon himself *Shekhinah* of his Lord before he leaves, while still male and female.<sup>1292</sup> Once he has offered his prayer and *Shekhinah* rests upon him, he can leave, for *Shekhinah* has coupled with him so that he will be male and female: male and female in town, male and female in the countryside,<sup>1293</sup> as is written: *Righteousness goes before him, and he sets out on his way* (Psalms 85:14).<sup>1294</sup>

“Come and see: As [50a] long as one lingers on the way, he must guard his conduct, so that supernal coupling will not separate from him, leaving him defective, lacking male and female.<sup>1295</sup> In town he must, when his female is

1290. every human being should manifest as male and female... When a human couple unites, they stimulate the union of *Shekhinah* and Her partner, *Tiferet*, thereby strengthening the entirety of the *sefirot*, the realm of faith. A married man is constantly accompanied by *Shekhinah* (*Zohar* 1:228b).

See BT *Sotah* 17a: “Rabbi Akiva expounded: ‘איש ואשה (*Ish ve-ishshah*), Man and woman: If they are worthy, *Shekhinah* abides between them; if not, fire consumes them.’” As indicated by Rashi (ad loc.), the two Hebrew words איש ואשה (*ish ve-ishshah*), “man and woman,” share the letters א (*alef*) and ש (*shin*), which spell אש (*esh*), “fire”; in addition each contains one of the two letters of the divine name יה (*Yah*). Without divinity between them, only fire remains.

1291. no longer male and female... If he travels without his wife, *Shekhinah* would apparently desert him.

1292. should offer his prayer... before he leaves... Before setting out on a journey, one should pray, including (or specifically) *tefillat ha-derekh* (“the prayer for the way”). See BT *Berakhot* 29b: “Elijah said to Rav Yehudah the brother of Rabbi Sala the Ḥasid, ‘Do not let your anger boil and you will not sin; do not get drunk and you will not sin; and when you set out on the way, consult your Creator and then set out.’ What is meant by ‘consult your Creator and then set

out’? Rabbi Ya’akov said in the name of Rav Ḥisda, “This is *tefillat ha-derekh*.”

By praying before leaving home and while still with his wife, the husband ensures that *Shekhinah* will abide with him throughout his journey.

See BT *Berakhot* 14a (cited in the note after next), 30a; *Zohar* 1:58b, 121a (*MhN*), 178a, 230a–b, 240b; 2:130b; *Shulḥan Arukh, Oraḥ Ḥayyim* 110:7; David ben Samuel ha-Levi, *Turei Zahav*, ad loc.; Issachar Ber Eilenburg, *Be’er Sheva*, 45; Mordechai Shpielman, *Tiferet Tsevi*, 1:351–53.

1293. in town...in the countryside In town with his wife, in the countryside with *Shekhinah*.

1294. *Righteousness*... See BT *Berakhot* 14a: “Rav Idi son of Avin said in the name of Rabbi Yitṣṣhak son of Ishyan, ‘Whoever prays and then sets out on the way, the blessed Holy One fulfills his desires, as is said: *Righteousness goes before him, and he sets out on his way*.’”

In this Talmudic passage, *righteousness* (or: *justice*) implies justification by prayer, which guarantees a successful journey. Here in the *Zohar*, *Righteousness* is a name of *Shekhinah*, who symbolizes divine justice. By praying, one secures Her accompanying presence. See *Zohar* 1:49a, 58b.

1295. supernal coupling... *Shekhinah*, his partner on the road.

with him; how much more so here, for supernal coupling is linked with him! Further, this coupling protects him on the way, not parting from him until he returns home.

“Upon entering his house he should delight the lady of his house, for she engendered that supernal coupling.<sup>1296</sup> As soon as he reaches her he should delight her anew, for two nuances. First, because the joy of this coupling is joy of *mitsvah*, and joy of *mitsvah* is joy of *Shekhinah*.<sup>1297</sup> Further, he increases peace below,<sup>1298</sup> as is written: *You will know that your tent is at peace, attend to your abode and not sin* (Job 5:24). Is it a sin if one does not attend to his wife? Certainly so, for he diminishes the splendor of supernal coupling coupled with him, engendered by the lady of his house.<sup>1299</sup> Second, if his wife conceives, supernal coupling pours into it a holy soul,<sup>1300</sup> for this covenant is called Covenant of the blessed Holy One.<sup>1301</sup> So one should focus on this joy as on the joy of Sabbath, coupling of the wise.<sup>1302</sup> So, *You will know that your tent is*

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1296. **he should delight the lady of his house...** Upon returning home, he should unite with his wife, thanks to whom *Shekhinah* accompanied him. See the question posed by King David to Uriah in 2 Samuel 11:10: *You just returned from a journey; why didn't you go down to your house?*

See BT *Yevamot* 62b: “Rabbi Yehoshu’a son of Levi said, ‘A man must attend to his wife when he is about to set out on the road, as is said: *You will know that your tent is at peace...* [you will attend to your abode and not sin].”

1297. **the joy of this coupling is joy of mitsvah...** Uniting with one’s wife upon returning from a journey is a religious obligation and stimulates the union of *Shekhinah* with Her partner, *Tif’eret*. See BT *Shabbat* 30b: “*Shekhinah* abides neither through gloom nor laziness nor frivolity nor levity nor talk nor idle chatter [or: vain pursuits], but only through the joy of *mitsvah*.”

1298. **he increases peace below** He guarantees peace and harmony in his house. See BT *Shabbat* 152a, where Rabbi Shim’on son of Ḥalafta refers to the phallus as “peacemaker of the home.”

1299. **he diminishes the splendor...** If on returning home, the husband fails to unite with his wife, he dishonors *Shekhinah*,

who united with him because of his wife, and he hinders Her union with *Tif’eret*.

1300. **supernal coupling pours into it...** *Shekhinah* emanates to the fetus a holy soul generated from Her union with *Tif’eret* (through *Yesod*).

1301. **this covenant is called Covenant of the blessed Holy One** The human phallus, inscribed with the covenant of circumcision, symbolizes the *sefirah* of *Yesod*, the divine phallus. Human sexual union stimulates the divine union of *Yesod* and *Shekhinah*, which generates the soul.

1302. **the joy of Sabbath, coupling of the wise** The Mishnah (*Ketubbot* 5:6) discusses how often husbands of various professions are required to fulfill the commandment of *onah* (עונה), “conjugal rights,” i.e., to satisfy their wives sexually. According to Rabbi Eli’ezer, “The *onah* mentioned in the Torah [applies as follows]: Those who are unoccupied, every day; laborers, twice a week; donkey-drivers, once a week; camel-drivers, once every thirty days; sailors, once every six months.”

The Talmud (BT *Ketubbot* 62b) adds: “When is the *onah* of the disciples of the wise? [i.e., What is the proper interval between two successive times of fulfilling this *mitsvah*?] Rav Yehudah said in the name of

at peace, for *Shekhinah* accompanies you and dwells in your house; therefore, you will attend to your abode and not sin. What is the meaning of *not sin*? Not fail to perform the joy of *mitsvah* in the presence of *Shekhinah*.<sup>1303</sup>

“Similarly, when disciples of the wise part from their wives all days of the week to engage in Torah, supernal coupling couples with them, not parting from them, so that they be male and female.<sup>1304</sup> Once Sabbath enters, disciples of the wise should delight their wives anew for the sake of the splendor of supernal coupling, focusing their hearts on the will of their Lord, as has been explained.

“Similarly, when a man’s wife undergoes days of impurity and he waits for her fittingly,<sup>1305</sup> supernal coupling couples with him all those days, so he is male and female. Once his wife is purified, he should delight her anew—joy of *mitsvah*, supernal joy!

“All the reasons we have offered rise to a single rung.<sup>1306</sup> The gist of the word: All scions of faith should focus their heart and will on this.<sup>1307</sup>

“Now you might say, ‘If so, it is more admirable for a person to set out on the road than to stay at home because of supernal coupling who couples with him.’ Come and see: When a man is at home, the essence of the home is his wife, for on account of her, *Shekhinah* does not leave the house. So we have learned: *Isaac brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah* (Genesis 24:67), for the lamp was kindled. Why? Because *Shekhinah* entered the home.<sup>1308</sup>

Shemu’el, ‘From one Sabbath eve to the next.’”

See *Zohar* 1:112a (*MhN*); 2:63b, 89a–b; 3:49b, 78a.

1303. What is the meaning of *not sin*? Not fail... The Hebrew verb חטא (*ht’*) means both “to sin” and “to fail, miss.”

1304. when disciples of the wise part from their wives... See above, note 1302. All week long *Shekhinah* joins the solitary male devotees of Torah.

1305. undergoes days of impurity... During and immediately following menstruation, when the husband must avoid contact with her.

1306. All the reasons we have offered rise to a single rung The reasons for delighting one’s wife upon returning from a journey apply as well to sexual union on Sabbath eve and following the wife’s purification. All pertain to *Shekhinah*.

1307. All scions of faith... Those who

believe in the reality of the *sefirotic* realm are called בני מדינותא (*benei meheimanuta*), “children of faith.”

1308. the lamp was kindled... See *Bereshit Rabbah* 60:16: “*Isaac brought her [Rebekah] into the tent of his mother Sarah*... As long as Sarah existed... the lamp would burn in her tent from one Sabbath eve until the next. As soon as she died, it went out. As soon as Rebekah arrived, it returned.”

Rabbi Shim’on alludes to this midrash to demonstrate that the presence of the light of *Shekhinah* in the home depends upon the presence of the essence of the home (the wife): first Sarah, and upon her death, Rebekah. See *Zohar* 1:133a.

On the phrase “essence of the home,” see Psalms 113:9; *Bereshit Rabbah* 71:2; *Pesiqta de-Rav Kahana* 20:2; *Tanhuma* (Buber), *Vayetse* 15; *Bemidbar Rabbah* 14:8; *Zohar* 1:29a–b, 149b, 154a, 157b.

“Mystery of the matter: Supernal Mother appears with the male only when the house is arrayed, when male and female join. She then pours blessings upon them.<sup>1309</sup> Similarly, Lower Mother appears with the male only when the house is arrayed, when the male approaches his female and they join as one. She then pours blessings upon them.<sup>1310</sup> So a man at home is adorned with two females, as above.<sup>1311</sup> This corresponds to the mystery written: *until the desire of hills of eternity* (ibid. 49:26). *The desire of hills of eternity* extends to this *until*: supernal female, to array, adorn, and bless Him; lower female, to unite with Him, be nourished by Him.<sup>1312</sup>

“Similarly below, when a male is married, *the desire of hills of eternity* verges toward him, and he is adorned with two females, one above and one below: the upper to pour blessings upon him, the lower to be nourished by him, unite with him.<sup>1313</sup> A man at home is the focus of *the desire of hills of eternity*, with whom he is adorned. Not so when he sets out on the road: Supernal Mother unites with him, while the lower is left behind.<sup>1314</sup> Upon returning home he should adorn himself with two females, as we have said.”

Rabbi Pinḥas said, “Even in a skein of scales and fins,<sup>1315</sup> no one [50b] dares challenge you.”

Rabbi Shim'on said, “Similarly Torah stands between two houses, as is written: *for the two houses of Israel* (Isaiah 8:14), one concealed on high, the

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1309. **Supernal Mother appears...** *Binah*, the Divine Mother, manifests only when *Tif'eret* and *Shekhinah* join.

1310. **Lower Mother appears...** *Shekhinah* manifests only when husband and wife establish a home and join together.

1311. **adorned with two females, as above** Adorned with both his wife and *Shekhinah*, as in the sefirotic realm *Tif'eret* is adorned both with His partner, *Shekhinah*, and the Divine Mother, *Binah*. See *Zohar* 1:66b, 153b.

1312. ***The desire of hills of eternity extends to this until...*** *Binah* and *Shekhinah* are the *hills of eternity*, towering, respectively, over the lower *sefirot* and the lower worlds. See BT *Rosh ha-Shanah* 11a; *Targum Yerushalmi*, Genesis 49:26; *Pirquei de-Rabbi Eli'ezer* 48, and David Luria, ad loc., n. 20; *Zohar* 2:112b.

Both of these female divine entities desire the male divine potency (*Tif'eret* or *Yesod*), who is known as ער (*ad*), *until*. See *Zohar* 1:150b, 247b; 2:22a.

1313. **he is adorned with two females...** The human husband is adorned by both *Shekhinah* and his wife.

1314. **Supernal Mother unites...** On the road, *Shekhinah* joins him, while his wife remains at home.

1315. **in a skein of scales and fins...** בקילפי סנפירי קטרא (*Be-qilpei senappirei qitra*). According to Leviticus 11:9 (see *Targum Onqelos*, ad loc.), fins and scales are the distinguishing features of kosher seafood. Perhaps Rabbi Pinḥas's point is that in all realms, ranging from mystical truth to the fine points of dietary law, Rabbi Shim'on's wisdom is unchallenged. More likely, the phrase is metaphorical: Rabbi Shim'on has mastered not only the holy but also the demonic realm. See *Pirquei de-Rabbi Eli'ezer* 9, where it is said of the monstrous Leviathan: “Between his fins stands the axis of Earth.”

Cf. *Seder Rabbah di-Vreshit*, 17 (*Battei Midrashot*, 1:28): “The entire world stands

other more revealed.<sup>1316</sup> The concealed one on high is the *mighty voice*, as is written: *a mighty voice unceasing* (Deuteronomy 5:19). This voice is inward, inaudible, and unrevealed, as the larynx wells, whispering ה (*he*), flowing incessantly, tenuous, internal, eternally unheard.<sup>1317</sup>

“From here emerges Torah, *voice of Jacob*, audible issuing from inaudible.<sup>1318</sup> Afterward speech merges in it, resounding from its potency.<sup>1319</sup> The voice of Jacob, Torah, is embraced by two females: this inner, inaudible one, and this outer one, audible.<sup>1320</sup>

“Two are inaudible, two audible. Of the two inaudible, this is supernal, concealed Wisdom abiding in Thought, unrevealed, unheard. Afterward it emerges, revealing itself slightly in a whisper unheard, called *mighty voice*, tenuous whispering.<sup>1321</sup>

“Two who are audible issue from here: voice of Jacob and speech merging in it. The *mighty voice* in a whisper unheard is בית (*bayit*), a house, for supernal Wisdom—every female is called ‘house’—while final speech is a house for the voice of Jacob, mystery of Torah.<sup>1322</sup> Therefore Torah begins with בית (*bet*): בִּי ראשית (*Bet reshit*), *Two-house beginning* (Genesis 1:1).”<sup>1323</sup>

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He opened, saying, “בראשית (*Be-reshit*), *In the beginning, created* אלהים (*Elohim*), *God* (Genesis 1:1), corresponding to what is written: *YHWH Elohim fash-*

on one fin of Leviathan.” See *Midrash Konen* (*Beit ha-Midrash*, 2:26); *Zohar* 2:34b, 108b; 3:279a (*RM*).

1316. **Torah stands between two houses...** Torah symbolizes *Tif'eret Yisra'el*, the core of the *sefirot*, God's self-revelation. *Tif'eret* is situated between *Binah* and *Shekhinah*, the two feminine houses.

1317. **the mighty voice...** *Binah* is *mighty*, powerful in Her silence. Through Her, the divine voice begins to emerge as the whispered letter ה (*he*), the second letter of the name יהוה (*YHWH*). This ה (*he*) expands from the primordial point of Wisdom, the initial letter י (*yod*).

See *Zohar* 2:226b; 3:261a; Moses de León, *Sheqel ha-Qodesh*, 89 (113).

1318. **Torah, voice of Jacob...** See Genesis 27:22. *Tif'eret*, identified with the third patriarch, Jacob, harmonizes the qualities of *Hesed* and *Cevurah*, symbolized by Abraham and Isaac. With the emergence of *Tif'eret*, silent revelation becomes audible.

See *Zohar* 1:16b, 74a, 97b–98a, 141b; 2:226b. Cf. BT *Berakhot* 15b: “The womb, which takes in silently, gives forth loudly.”

1319. **speech merges in it...** *Shekhinah*, symbolized by speech, resounds from the power of the voice.

1320. **two females...** *Binah* and *Shekhinah*.

1321. **Two are inaudible...** *Hokhmah* and *Binah*.

1322. **every female is called ‘house’...** As indicated in BT *Shabbat* 118b; *Yoma* 2a; *Sotah* 44a; cf. 2 Samuel 11:10. In the sefirotic realm, *Binah* houses *Hokhmah*, while *Shekhinah* houses *Tif'eret*.

1323. **Therefore Torah begins with בית (bet)...** The initial letter of the Torah, the ב (*bet*) of בראשית (*Be-reshit*), *In the beginning*, is numerically equivalent to two and suggests the word בית (*bayit*), “house.” Thus the Torah opens with an allusion to two houses: *Binah* and *Shekhinah*. The word ראשית (*reshit*), *beginning*, signifies the pri-

*footstool*, not permanently. But then You will never depart from there, as is written: *For you shall burst forth right and left* (Isaiah 54:3), all becoming one.<sup>1339</sup>

“Come and see: **את השמים** (*Et ha-shamayim*), *Heaven* (Genesis 1:1) is upper *Shekhinah*; **ואת הארץ** (*ve-et ha-arets*), *and earth* (ibid.) is lower *Shekhinah*, in a merging of male and female as one.<sup>1340</sup> This has been explained, as discussed arousingly by the Companions.”

They rose and were about to leave, when Rabbi Shim'on said, “A word lingers here with us.”

He opened, saying, “Two verses are written: *YHVH your God is a devouring fire* (Deuteronomy 4:24), and *You, cleaving to YHVH your God, are alive every one of you today* (ibid., 4). We have established these verses in various places, and the Companions have been aroused by them.<sup>1341</sup>

“Come and see: *For YHVH your God is a devouring fire*. The word has been discussed among the Companions: There is a fire devouring fire, devouring and consuming it, for there is fire fiercer than fire, as they have established.<sup>1342</sup> But come and see: Whoever desires to penetrate the wisdom of

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1339. **But then...** When the world is perfected and renewed.

1340. **את השמים** (*Et ha-shamayim*), *Heaven... ואת הארץ* (*ve-et ha-arets*), *and earth...* On the word **את** (*et*), see above, note 1325. Here, apparently, **את** (*et*) refers not to a specific *sefirah*, but to the flow of emanation from **א** (*alef*) to **ת** (*tav*). **את השמים** (*Et ha-shamayim*), *Heaven*, refers to *Binah* (upper *Shekhinah*), from whom emanation flows to *Tif'eret* (*heaven*). The following words, **ואת הארץ** (*ve-et ha-arets*), *and earth*, refer to *Shekhinah* (lower *Shekhinah*), known as *earth*, who, by uniting with *Tif'eret*, receives the flow. The letter **ו** (*vav*) in the word **ואת** (*ve-et*), whose numerical value is six, may symbolize *Tif'eret* together with the five *sefirot* surrounding Him (*Hesed* through *Yesod*).

1341. **We have established these verses...** The apparent contradiction between the two verses is discussed in BT *Ketubbot* 111b: “Rabbi El'azar said, ... ‘*You, cleaving to YHVH your God, are alive every one of you today*. Now is it possible to cleave to *Shekhinah*, of whom is written: *YHVH your God is a*

*devouring fire*? Rather the meaning is: Whoever marries his daughter to a disciple of the wise, conducts business on their behalf, or benefits them from his assets is regarded by Scripture as if he cleaves to *Shekhinah*.”

In BT *Sotah* 14a, Rabbi Hama son of Hanina explains that one can approach and withstand the consuming fire of *Shekhinah* by imitating the divine, e.g., by clothing the naked, visiting the sick, comforting mourners, and burying the dead. See the discussion by Heschel, *Torah min ha-Shamayim*, 1:153–55.

A mystical response to this dilemma is offered by Gikatilla, *Sha'arei Or*, 166: “As to what the rabbis have said: ‘Now is it possible for one to cleave to *Shekhinah*?’—it certainly is!”

1342. **There is a fire devouring fire...** See BT *Yoma* 21b, where the fire of *Shekhinah* is identified as “a fire devouring fire,” i.e., consuming the fiery angels.

Cf. *Zohar* 3:27b; Moses de León, *Sefer ha-Mishqal*, 63–65.

holy unification should contemplate the flame ascending from a glowing ember or a burning candle.<sup>1343</sup> For flame ascends only [51a] when grasped by coarse substance.

“Come and see! In a flame ascending are two lights: one, a white light, radiant; the other, a light tinged with black or blue.<sup>1344</sup> The white light is above, ascending unswervingly, while beneath it is the blue or black light, a throne for the white, which rests upon it, each embracing the other, becoming one. This black light colored blue, below, is a throne of glory for the white—here lies the mystery of the thread of blue.<sup>1345</sup> This blue-black throne is grasped by another substance below, so it can flame, arousing it to embrace the white light.<sup>1346</sup> Sometimes this blue-black turns red,<sup>1347</sup> while the white light above never wavers, constantly white. This blue one, though, changes color: sometimes blue or black, sometimes red. This is grasped in two directions: above, by that white light; below, by what lies beneath, by which it is fueled, primed to glow. This constantly consumes and devours what is placed beneath it, for the blue light consumes anything cleaving below, anything it rests upon, since by nature it consumes and devours. On it depends destruction and death of all.<sup>1348</sup>

“So it consumes anything cleaving below, while that white light hovering over it never devours or consumes, nor does its light waver. Therefore Moses said, ‘For YHVH your God is a devouring fire’—really *devouring*, devouring and

1343. **candle** בורזינא (*Botsina*), “Lamp,” employed by *Targum Onqelos* (e.g., Exodus 27:20; 30:7–8) to render the Hebrew word נר (*ner*), “lamp” and later “candle.”

Wax candles are discussed in a thirteenth-century treatise commissioned by Alfonso X of Castile (1252–1284); see *Libro del saber de astrologia* (University of Madrid MS 156), fol. 194r. See *Bereshit Rabbah* 85:4; *Tosafot, Shabbat* 20b, s.v. *ad kan*; *Zohar* 1:83b.

1344. **a white light... a light tinged with black or blue** Symbolizing, respectively, *Tif'eret* and *Shekhinah*. The last *sefirah* has no light of Her own but reflects the light of the other *sefirot*.

See *Zohar* 1:12a, 77b, 83b. On *Shekhinah* and the color blue, see the next note; *Zohar* 2:139a, 152a–b.

1345. **the mystery of the thread of blue** The blue thread woven into the tassels of one's garment, according to Numbers 15:38. See *Sifrei*, Numbers 115: “Rabbi Me'ir says,

‘...Whoever fulfills the *mitsvah* of *tsitsit* (the “tassel”) is considered to have greeted the face of *Shekhinah*, as it were; for blue resembles the sea, and the sea resembles the sky, and the sky resembles the Throne of Glory.’”

1346. **another substance below...** The flame of the candle (or lamp) feeds on the wick and wax (or oil). Similarly, *Shekhinah* feeds on the realms beneath Her and is thereby enabled to flame and unite with *Tif'eret*.

1347. **Sometimes this blue-black turns red** When *Shekhinah* is influenced by *Gevurah*, the attribute of strict judgment, She is tinged with its color: red.

1348. **destruction and death of all** *Shekhinah* is identified with the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, which—according to *Seder Eliyyahu Rabbah* 5—is called the Tree of Death, because when Adam and Eve ate its fruit, death ensued. See Genesis 2:17; *Zohar* 1:35b.

consuming anything found below. That is why he said *your God*, not *our God*, for Moses inhabited that white light above, which does not consume or devour.<sup>1349</sup>

“Come and see: The only arousal kindling this blue light, to be grasped by the white light, is Israel cleaving below.<sup>1350</sup>

“Come and see: Although by nature this blue-black light consumes anything cleaving below, Israel cleaves below and abides enduringly, as is written: *You, cleaving to YHVH your God, are alive. To YHVH your God, not our God; to YHVH your God, to that blue-black light devouring, consuming whatever cleaves below—yet you cleave and endure, as is written: alive every one of you today.*

“Above the white light hovers a concealed light, encompassing it.<sup>1351</sup> Here abides supernal mystery. You will discover all in the ascending flame, wisdoms of the highest.”<sup>1352</sup>

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Rabbi Pinḥas approached and kissed him, saying, “Blessed be the Compassionate One, that we happened to meet here.”

They escorted Rabbi Pinḥas for three miles.<sup>1353</sup> When Rabbi Shim’on and the Companions returned, he said, “What we have discussed is a mystery of wisdom concerning holy unification, for the final ה (*he*) of the holy name is blue-black light, grasped by יוד־ה־ו־ו־ (yod, he, vav), radiant white light.<sup>1354</sup>

1349. *your God, not our God*... Moses specified *your God*, indicating the *sefirah* pertaining to Israel, namely, *Shekhinah*, who devours and consumes. Moses, himself, attained the rung of *Tiferet*, the white light, who does not consume.

See *Zohar* 2:79b; Moses de León, *Sefer ha-Mishqal*, 67.

1350. **Israel cleaving below** Their devotion fuels the passion of the divine couple.

1351. **Above the white light hovers a concealed light**... The encompassing light of *Binah*, the Divine Mother.

1352. **You will discover all in the ascending flame**... See the remark of the nineteenth-century physicist Michael Faraday at the beginning of his *Chemical History of a Candle*: “There is not a law under which any part of this universe is governed which does not come into play and is touched upon in these phenomena. There is no better, there is no more open door by which you can

enter into the study of natural philosophy, than by considering the physical phenomena of a candle.”

1353. **for three miles** According to Rav Sheshet (BT *Sotah* 46b), one should escort his teacher a distance of a parasang. A distinguished teacher, however, is to be escorted for three parasangs. (The Greek parasang equals about 3.5 miles.)

See *Pesiqta de-Rav Kahana* 18:5; *Bereshit Rabbah* 32:10; *Zohar* 1:87a, 96b, 150b; 2:14a, 164a, 187a; 3:8b.

1354. **the final ה (*he*) of the holy name**... The name יהוה (*YHVH*) represents the entirety of the *sefirot*: י (*yod*) symbolizing the primordial point of *Hokhmah*; the feminine marker ה (*he*) symbolizing *Binah*, the Divine Mother; ו (*vav*), whose numerical value is six, symbolizing *Tiferet* and the five *sefirot* surrounding Him (from *Hesed* to *Yesod*); and the final ה (*he*) symbolizing *Shekhinah*. Here Rabbi Shim’on focuses on the final ה (*he*),



been said.<sup>1433</sup> At that moment the erect stature of Adam diminished by one hundred cubits.<sup>1434</sup> Separation ensued, Adam was arraigned, earth was cursed, as we have established.”

*He drove out* אֵת הָאָדָם  
(*et ha-adam*), *Adam* (ibid., 24).<sup>1435</sup>

*out* אֵת (*Et*)—precisely!<sup>1437</sup> Who drove out *Et*? *Adam*. *Adam* actually drove

Rabbi El’azar said, “We do not know who divorced whom: if the blessed Holy One divorced Adam, or not.<sup>1436</sup>

But the word is transposed: *He drove out* אֵת (*Et*)—precisely!<sup>1437</sup> Who drove out *Et*? *Adam*. *Adam* actually drove

1433. *fig leaves...they discovered every kind of sorcery...* According to Rabbi Nehemiah (BT *Berakhot* 40a), Adam and Eve sinned by eating from the fruit of a fig tree. The leaves of this Tree of Knowledge convey the knowledge of magic. See *Zohar* 1:56a, 63b, and 36b: “Once they knew of this world and clung to it, they saw that this world is conducted by those leaves of the tree. So they built themselves a stronghold, fortifying themselves with them in this world, discovering every kind of magic. They sought to gird themselves with the weapons of those leaves of the tree for protection.” Cf. BT *Bava Metsi’a* 114b.

“The one below” apparently refers to the demonic realm, though perhaps to *Shekhinah*, identified with the Tree of Knowledge and split off from the other *sefirot* by Adam’s sinful act. See *Zohar* 1:35b–36a, 52a, and below.

1434. *the erect stature of Adam diminished...* See BT *Hagigah* 12a: “Rabbi El’azar said, ‘Adam extended from earth to heaven... As soon as he sinned, the blessed Holy One placed His hands upon him and diminished him...’ Rabbi Yehudah said in the name of Rav, ‘Adam extended from one end of the world to the other... As soon as he sinned, the blessed Holy One placed His hand upon him and diminished him.’”

See *Bereshit Rabbah* 12:6: “Rabbi Aivu said, ‘His stature was reduced to one hundred cubits... Rabbi Shim’on said, [‘His stature was originally] two hundred cubits.’” Cf. *Sifra*, *Behuqqotai* 3:3, 11b; BT *Bava Batra*

75a; *Sanhedrin* 100a; *Araqim* 6 (*Otsar Midrashim* 1:70–71); *Zohar* 1:142b; and Rashbam, *Bava Batra* 75a, who suggests, matching the view here, that his original stature was two hundred cubits and was reduced by half.

For Iranian and Gnostic parallels, see Altmann, “The Gnostic Background of the Rabbinic Adam Legends”; Urbach, *The Sages*, 227–32.

1435. *He drove out* אֵת הָאָדָם (*et ha-adam*), *Adam*. Literally, *He drove out the human*. The preceding verse reads similarly: *YHVH Elohim expelled him from the Garden of Eden*. The apparent redundancy stimulates the following mystical midrash.

1436. *We do not know who divorced whom...* Several midrashim interpret the biblical word *vaygaresh* (יִגְרַשׁ), *He drove out*, in the sense of *geirushin* (גֵּירוּשִׁין), “divorce.” See *Bereshit Rabbah* 21:8; *Midrash Avkir*, in *Yalqut Shim’oni*, Genesis, 34; and *Seder Eliyyahu Rabbah* 1: “*He drove out Adam*. This teaches that the blessed Holy One divorced him like a wife.” Cf. *Ziqquqin de-Nura*, ad loc.; and *Midrash ha-Gadol* on this verse: “This teaches that he was divorced like a wife divorced from her husband because of some indecency.”

Adam’s harmonious and intimate relationship with God is ruined by sin. Rabbi El’azar adopts this midrashic view but reassigns the roles.

1437. אֵת (*Et*)—precisely! Grammatically, the accusative particle אֵת (*et*) has no ascertainable independent sense, but Naḥum of Gimzo and his disciple Rabbi Akiva taught that when *et* appears in a biblical

out *Et!*<sup>1438</sup> Consequently it is written: *YHVH Elohim expelled him from the Garden of Eden* (ibid., 23). Why did He expel him? Because Adam drove out *Et*, as we have explained.<sup>1439</sup>

“*He placed* [. . . *the cherubim*] (ibid., 24).<sup>1440</sup> He installed them in this site; he was the cause, closing pathways, inflicting punishment on the world, extending curses from that day on.<sup>1441</sup>

verse, it amplifies the original meaning. See BT *Pesahim* 22b; *Hagigah* 12a.

Here, as often in the *Zohar*, אֵת (*et*) becomes a name of *Shekhinah*, who comprises the totality of divine speech, the entire alphabet from א (*alef*) to ת (*tav*). See *Zohar* 1:29b, 247a; 2:90a, 135b; and the Christian parallel in Revelation 1:8: “I am *alpha* and *omega*.”

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1438. *Adam actually drove out Et!* By dividing the biblical sentence, *He drove out אֵת (et) Adam*, into two units, Rabbi El’azar transforms its meaning. The first unit consists of: *He drove out אֵת (et)*. The second unit identifies the subject of the sentence, which is shockingly not God, but *Adam*. His sin consists in divorcing *Shekhinah*.

In the *Zohar*, the exact nature of Adam’s sin is a tightly guarded secret; the biblical account of the Garden story is seen as hiding the true meaning. See ZH 19a (*MhN*), where Rabbi Shim’on recounts a conversation he had with Adam while selecting his future site in Paradise: “Adam . . . was sitting next to me, speaking with me, and he asked that his sin not be revealed to the whole world beyond what the Torah had recounted. It is concealed in that tree in the Garden of Eden.” The Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil symbolizes *Shekhinah*. Adam’s sin was that he worshiped and partook of *Shekhinah* alone, splitting Her off from the other *sefirot* and divorcing Her from Her husband, *Tiferet*, the Tree of Life. See *Zohar* 1:12b, 35b–36a, 221a–b; Scholem, *Major Trends*, 231–32, 236, 404–5, n. 105; Tishby, *Wisdom of the Zohar*, 1:373–76.

On the psychological plane, the sin corresponds to the splitting off of consciousness from the unconscious. See Jung, *Collected Works*, 8:157; Neumann, *Origins and History*

*of Consciousness*, 102–27; Jaynes, *Origin of Consciousness*, 299; cf. Scholem, *Major Trends*, 216, 236–37.

By his midrashic transposition, Rabbi El’azar teaches that Adam divorced *Shekhinah*, divorcing Her from *Tiferet* and consequently also from himself. See above, page 294: “When Adam sinned by eating from the tree, . . . he caused a defect, separating the Woman from Her Husband.” Cf. Isaiah 50:1: *Because of your transgressions your mother was divorced*. See *Bereshit Rabbah* 19:7: “Rabbi Abba son of Kahana said, ‘The essence of *Shekhinah* was in the lower realms. As soon as Adam sinned, it withdrew to the first heaven.’” Cf. Nahmanides on Genesis 3:8; Gikatilla, *Sha’arei Or*, 15–17.

Adam’s sin has driven *Shekhinah* from the Garden and dissolved Her union with *Tiferet*, so She finds Herself abandoned in a no-man’s-land. Meanwhile, as a result of his sin, Adam is banished from the Garden. Wandering outside, he finds *Shekhinah*, and together they go into exile. See *Zohar* 3:114a–115b, and 1:237a: “Come and see the secret of the word: Adam was caught in his own sin, inflicting death upon himself and the whole world, causing that tree with which he sinned to be divorced, driven away with him, driven away with his children forever, as is written: *He drove out אֵת (et) Adam*.”

1439. *Consequently it is written . . .* The apparent redundancy is eliminated. Adam was expelled because he divorced *Shekhinah*.

1440. *He placed . . .* The verse continues: *east of the Garden of Eden the cherubim and a blazing, ever-turning sword to guard the way to the Tree of Life*.

1441. *He installed them . . .* As in the beginning of the verse, the subject is not God

## *Foreword*

SOME YEARS AGO, I began to study the Torah. As my facility with the text grew, I pursued the midrashic literature of the rabbis, and the interpretations of the classic medieval commentators. Eventually, I began to inquire about mystical commentaries on the Torah. I turned to the *Zohar*, seeking an English translation of its original Aramaic. I soon learned that previous translations not only were incomplete but also had been undertaken in the early twentieth century. Therefore, they did not reflect the enormous advances in scholarship since made by Gershom Scholem and his students. It was at this point that I realized how much I wanted to be able to study the *Zohar* from an English translation that would draw upon the research and scholarship of the past half-century. I determined to sponsor such a translation; the book you hold in your hands is the result.

By its nature and purpose, the *Zohar* is difficult to penetrate. For hundreds of years it was inaccessible to all but a few. Furthermore, after the Sabbatean episode of the seventeenth century, the Jewish community became concerned about the potency of mystical ideas; leaders were anything but eager to promulgate the *Zohar*. Even with the rise of Hasidism as a mystically based movement starting in the eighteenth century, the *Zohar* remained a closed book. Consequently, bringing the *Zohar* to the English-reading public was—and continues to be—a complex, challenging task.

The words that can express my appreciation to Daniel C. Matt are found on every page of his translation of the *Zohar*. His scholarship, his artistry, and his poetry speak for themselves. You, the reader, are in his debt.

The odyssey of the past nine years, which will continue for some years to come, has been shepherded through a tangle of legal and administrative steps with the able and devoted skill of Glen Miller.

Professor Arthur Green, who co-chairs the Academic Committee for the Translation of the *Zohar*, has been a thoughtful and faithful counselor from the inception of the project.

My husband Tom, while not a student of the *Zohar*, recognized the magnitude and the importance of this project. He has kept us ever vigilant and focused with his insightful questions and thoughts and his constant support.