

Zohar Appendix I

ON THE ZOHARIC EXPOSITION OF THE FIRST CHAPTER OF GENESIS

From page 15a onwards the Zohar consists mainly of a verse-by-verse exposition of the Pentateuch of the type known in Hebrew literature as Midrash. The discursive style of the work, and the amount of extraneous matter which has been intercalated in the original text, render this fact liable to be overlooked; and it has therefore been one of the objects of the translation to keep it clearly before the reader's eye.

The Zoharic expositions of the Scripture are frequently, if not usually, difficult to follow, on account partly of their far-fetched character, partly of their technical language, partly of the abrupt and even uncouth manner in which they are expressed. The point which the Zohar desires to make is often highly elusive, and not to be grasped without close and attentive scrutiny. Particularly can we apply this remark to the expositions of the first chapter of Genesis contained in pages 15a-22a and 29a-31a of the original text. On these passages there rests a special and exceptional obscurity which, it is to be feared, the translation has done little to dispel. It seems, therefore, advisable to add some observations setting forth the views by which the translators have sought to guide themselves through the intricacies of these pages, and which have determined their version of many obscure passages. An endeavour to understand these pages is all the more necessary as we may surmise a priori that they contain some of the most important teaching of the Zohar; and we do indeed find on examination that they are capable of yielding light on two of the most fundamental tenets of the Zohar—the distinction of the divine grades and the potency of the sacred Name— and so of providing the key to the whole of its esoteric doctrine.

I. One of the most characteristic ideas of the Zohar is that God, while essentially one, is yet found in various grades or degrees. These 'grades' turn out on examination to be degrees of creative power, arranged in descending or ascending order according to the sphere in which each one functions and the stage of development which it postulates in the created universe, and which thus constitutes, so to speak, its 'opposite number'. Thus the highest grade corresponds to sheer nothingness, and the lowest grade to the conscious soul of man (the neshamah). The creative power in itself is conceived as 'thought', which in the process of creation becomes 'light' or 'illumination'. The primal light is utterly beyond human (or even angelic) comprehension. But as the grades descend, the 'lights' (which form, as it were, a vestment to one another) swim into human ken, until between the lowest grade and the conscious soul of man a close communion is established.

The main purpose of the Zoharic exposition of the first chapter of Genesis, in so far as it is contained in the pages mentioned, seems to be to derive this doctrine from (or read it into) the text of the Scripture. The way in which the Scripture is made to yield the desired meaning is more or less as follows.

The first grade—the 'Most Mysterious and Recondite'— indistinguishable from the En-Sof (limitless, uncharacterisable), and corresponding to absolute nothingness in the work of creation—is not directly mentioned in the Scripture, unless it is alluded to by the letter beth (=in) of the word bereshith, implying that it went, so to speak, into itself, and so made a start. This start consists in a 'flash' (zohar), which thus releases the creative powers of the 'limitless'.

From this 'inwardness' resulted a point or focus capable of infinite development and expansion; this is called in the Scripture Reshith (beginning), and it is identified by the Zohar with Hokmah (Wisdom), the architect of the creation. This is the second grade.

The next word, 'created', according to the Zohar, denotes in this place the expansion of Reshith, which produced a 'palace' or 'house' containing in itself the germ of creation. This place is called in the Scripture Elohim, and it constitutes the third grade, the artificer of the creation. By the

Zohar it is called more specifically Elohim Hayyim (living God), the word Elohim being a generic name for all the grades. Its creative powers or faculties are pictured as 'letters' or 'seed', and are divided into an active and a passive principle. The active principle is called in the Scripture 'heaven', and is identified by the Zohar with the 'Voice'. The passive principle is called in the Scripture 'earth', and in v. 2 it is identified with the primordial elements of the terrestrial, the celestial, and the spiritual worlds (v. page 39b).

Up to this point there has been no clear differentiation between creator and created: the creation has not yet emerged from the realm of potentiality. From this point, however, the two are distinguished, the creator using and the created obeying the Voice. This is indicated in the Scriptural words, 'And God said'. The Voice henceforth issues in a series of maamaroth (creative utterances) which shape the material universe, or, in the language of the Zohar, 'imprint and inscribe letters'. With the new developments of the creation there issue new grades of the Godhead, which are called by the Scripture 'days' (v. page 39b).

The first maamar, according to the Zohar, produced light in three grades, one called light, the second firmament, and the third darkness. The first seems to be regarded as the light of mind, the second as that of light

proper, and the third as that of fire. The first is called by the Zohar right, the second centre, and the third left. The first vanished as soon as it appeared, so that the second became the right. This is apparently derived from the verse: 'And God saw the light (i.e. the centre) that it was good, and God divided between the light (i.e. the right) and the darkness.' The centre was thereupon given continued existence in a category of time called day, and the darkness in a category of time called night. To produce these is the function of the next grade, called in the Scripture 'one day', and by the Zohar Right, or sometimes Hesed (Kindness).

In some way not specified in the Zohar, the 'light' and the 'darkness' of the first day became 'upper waters' containing, in solution as it were, 'lower waters'. The second maamar created an instrument for separating or liberating the lower waters from the upper. This instrument is called 'firmament' or 'expansion' (a different firmament from that mentioned in connection with the first day). The upper waters are characterised after separation as 'male', and the lower as 'female'. To effect this separation is the function of the next grade, called in Scripture 'third day', and by the Zohar Left or Geburah (Force).

The next maamar gave a certain flow or direction to the upper and lower waters, so that they should meet in 'one place' in a kind of sexual union, the result of which is to enable the 'earth' or 'dry land' to appear. This means that, as a result of the meeting of the upper and lower waters, the existence of the earth is rendered possible. To confirm this possibility a new maamar produced the 'Throne of Glory' with its attendant angels, figuratively referred to in the Scripture as 'the earth putting forth verdure and fruit tree-' (pages 18a, 19b). To effect the union between the waters and to guide the 'Throne of Glory' is the function of the grade called in the Scripture 'third day', and by the Zohar He 'Olimin (Life of Worlds).

The next maamar produced a 'membrane for the brain' in the shape of a lower firmament containing heavenly luminaries which reflected the upper light, and served as a kind of screen to the 'Throne of Glory'. These luminaries are, properly speaking, not those which are visible to the human eye, but sentient beings which stand to these in the same relation as the human soul to the body. The chief of them are the sun and the moon, which were originally equal in status. They are charged 'to give light upon the earth', i.e. to determine the forms and characters of all beings on the earth. To procure for these luminaries their light and energy is the function of the grade called in Scripture 'fourth day'.

Having pursued the development of the grades up to this point, the Zohar, on page 22a, goes off on to quite a different tack, nor does it anywhere complete the exposition of the first chapter of Genesis on these lines. In later passages, however, we find frequent references to a grade called Zaddik Yesod 'Olam (the Righteous One, the Foundation of the World), which upholds God's covenant with the earth and procures sustenance for the living beings upon it. As it is also called 'ninth', we may without hesitation identify it with the 'sixth day' of the Scripture.

On page 29a the Zohar reverts to the beginning of the first chapter in order to define the position of what it calls the 'Female'. If this part of the Zohar is to be brought into harmony with the preceding part, then this 'Female' can only be the tenth grade, corresponding to the 'seventh day' in the Biblical account. The function of the 'Female', according to the Zohar, is to reproduce in a new medium the work of the original creative force. This medium is called 'the lower heaven and earth', and the work itself 'the lower world'. What exactly is meant by these terms is not specified, but we may surmise that in reality the medium of the 'Female' is the human consciousness, and the 'lower world' stands to the 'upper world' in this connection in the relation of phenomenon to noumenon; or, in Kantian language, that the 'upper world' is the Ding an sich and the 'lower world' the human idea of it.

II. The development of the grades, according to the Zohar, corresponds not only to the development of the created universe, but also to the emergence of a certain name, which is their unifying element. It is a postulate of the Zohar that the Biblical name TETRAGRAMMATON-the so-called tetragrammaton- has an intimate, if unspecified, connection with the primordial Thought. It is the chosen instrument for rendering the Thought intelligible or realisable to the human mind. It is regarded as having been 'in' the Thought from the first, and its emergence into external or objective existence is stated to have been one of the purposes of the creation (page 29a). According to the Zohar, it emerged in various stages, each of which is symbolised by one or more of its constituent letters and is associated with the emergence of one or other of the grades. Thus with the grade Reshith emerged the letter Yod; with the next grade, Elohim Hayyim, the letter He, called the first or upper He; with the heavens, the letter Vau; with the earth, the second, or lower He; with the first day the combination of the letters Yod, He; with the second day, the combination of the letters Vau, He; while with the third day all the four letters were combined. The resultant Name is the absolute One or unit of being, representing on the one side the first integration of the Thought, and on the other the ultimate discoverable cause of existence (v. page 18b).

The above explanation, while leaving much obscure, will perhaps suffice to give a general idea of what the Zohar has in mind in this exposition of the first chapter of Genesis, to bring the whole, as it were, into focus, and exhibit the purpose which runs through it. It remains to complete the picture of the grades by bringing them into connection with the Sefiroth of the Cabbalah and with the names of the Deity used in the Scripture.

It is worthy of note that the Zohar rarely uses either the term Sefirah or the names of the Sefiroth current

in the Cabbalistic literature. Where these names do occur, it is usually in passages which on other grounds may be suspected of belonging properly not to the Zohar but to one or other of the allied works (e.g. page 21b). Nevertheless, there is an exact correspondence between the Zoharic grades and the Cabbalistic Sefiroth, and they could be interchanged with one another (as indeed they are by most of the Zoharic commentators) without causing any confusion. Similarly there is, according to the Zohar, a correspondence between the designations of the grades found in the first chapter of Genesis and the names of the Deity scattered throughout the Scripture. This fourfold correspondence may be conveniently exhibited in the form of a table giving (a) the designation of each grade in the first chapter of Genesis; (b) the special Zoharic names of each grade; (c) the corresponding name of the Deity in the Scripture; (d) the corresponding Sefirah.

TABLE SHOWING THE CORRESPONDENCE OF THE GRADES WITH THE SEFIROTH, ETC.

Designation in Genesis 1	Zoharic Appellatives	Names of Deity	Sefiroth
B' (In)	Most Mysterious and Recondite; King	Ehyeh	Kether (Crown)
Reshith (Beginning)	First Point; Wisdom; Father	Asher (or Asher Ehyeh)	Hokmah (Wisdom)
Elohim (God) (Heaven and Earth)	Palace; Elohim Hayyim; Mother	TETRAGRAMMATON	Binah (Understanding)
One Day	Right; Kindness	El Gadol	'Hesed (Kindness)
Second Day	Left; Force	Elohim	Geburah (Force)
Third Day	Life of Worlds; Central Column	TETRAGRAMMATON	Tifereth (Beauty)
Fourth Day		Zebaoth (?)	Nezah (Victory)
Fifth Day		Shaddai (?)	Hod (Majesty)
Sixth Day	Righteous One; Foundation of the World	El (?)	Yesod (Foundation)
Seventh Day	Female	Adonay	Malkuth (Kingship)