

# The Soul

Listen to what the Zohar has to say about the soul.

When the Holy One, blessed be He, came to create the world, it pleased Him to form all the souls which were destined to be allotted to the children of men, and each was shaped before him in the very outline of the body she was afterwards to inhabit. He examined each one, and saw that some of them would corrupt their ways in the world. When the time of each was arrived, the Holy One summoned it, saying: Go, descend into such and such a place, into such and such a body. But ofttimes it chanced that the soul would reply, Lord of the world, I am satisfied to be here in this world, and desire not to leave it for some other place where I shall be enslaved and become soiled. Then would the Holy One respond: From the very day of thy creation thou hast had no other destiny than to go into that world. At this the soul, seeing that it must obey, would descend against its will and enter into this world. The Torah, which counsels the whole world in the ways of truth, observed this, and proclaimed to mankind: Behold, how the Holy One has pity upon you! He has sold to you for nothing His costly pearl, for you to use in this world, namely the holy soul.<sup>1</sup>[He has given away His precious pearl, the holy soul, for you to use in this world.]

We read in Ecclesiasties,

*And the spirit returns to God who has provided it.*<sup>2</sup>

On this the sages explain,

Render it back to him as He gave it to you, [viz.] in purity, so must you return it in purity.<sup>3</sup>

So the soul comes from God, inhabits a body, and is returned to God. The question is what is suppose to happen to the soul while it is with its body? The Zohar tells us that when the soul comes into this world and inhabits a body, the body makes a contract to marry the soul. So if everything

---

<sup>1</sup> *The Zohar*, Vol. 3, (II, 96b), Harry Sperling, Maurice Simon and Paul Levertoff, translators, (London: The Soncino Press, 1978), p. 291-292.

<sup>2</sup> *Ecclesiasties*, 12.7.

<sup>3</sup> *Shabbat*, 152b.

is properly carried out, when the soul returns to her Creator, she has the status of a married daughter.

The Zohar explains this by interpreting the Torah verse,

*If a man sells his daughter to be a maidservant she shall not go out as the menservants do.*<sup>4</sup>

Here the Zohar makes a parallel with its statement:

He has sold to you for nothing His costly pearl, for you to use in this world, namely the holy soul.

The Zohar is equating the man who sells his minor daughter to be a maidservant with God who sells the soul, his precious pearl, to a buyer in this world. In making this parallel, the Zohar relies in part upon the Talmud which states,<sup>5</sup>

The word *man* signifies none other than the Holy One, blessed be He, as it is said,

*The Lord is a man of war.*<sup>6</sup>

So the full analogy is God:man, soul:maidservant, buyer:body.

The plain meaning of the verse

*she shall not go out as the menservants do*

refers to the case in which the buyer injures the maidservant. In the case of the Canaanite servant, if the buyer injures the servant he/she is to be let free.<sup>7</sup> However, in the case of the buyer injuring the Hebrew maidservant, not only is she not let free, but she stays under the care of the buyer for up to the time of six years (or until the Jubilee or until she reaches puberty, whichever comes first) and he must pay her proper monetary compensation for the injury.

The Zohar continues now making the analogy between injury as mentioned above with the tainting of the soul caused by the sinful deeds of the body,

---

<sup>4</sup>Exodus 21:7.

<sup>5</sup>Sotah 42b.

<sup>6</sup>Exodus 25:3.

<sup>7</sup>Exodus 21:26-27.

When the Holy One delivers His daughter, the holy soul, to be a maidservant, enslaved in bondage unto you, I adjure you, when her time comes, let her not go out as the menservants do, polluted by sins, but free, illumined, and pure, in order that her Master may be able to find joy in her, and to give her goodly reward in the splendours of Paradise, as it is written:<sup>8</sup>

*And he shall satisfy thy soul with brightness (בְּצִהְזוֹת)  
literally, places lit by the sun)<sup>9</sup>*

Namely, when she shall ascend again thence, bright and pure [*He shall satisfy thy soul with brightness*]. But should she not please her Master, being polluted with sin, then woe to the body which has lost its soul for ever! For when the souls ascend from this world in a bright and pure condition, they are entered into the King's archives, each one by name; and He says: This is the soul of such a one: she belongs to the body which she left; as it is written:<sup>10</sup>

*Who hath betrothed her to himself.*

According to Nachmanides, the plain meaning of the verse

*If a man sells his daughter to be a maidservant she shall not go out as the menservants do.*<sup>11</sup>

is that the Hebrew menservants go out to freedom in the seventh year and in the Jubilee year. But for the Hebrew maidservant,

The master [the buyer] can never send her away from his house if the maiden pleases him and she obtains kindness of him, but he is to take her for a wife as is his will.<sup>12</sup>

The Torah continues,

---

<sup>8</sup>*The Zohar*, Vol. 3, (II, 96b-97a), Harry Sperling, Maurice Simon and Paul Levertoff, translators, (London: The Soncino Press, 1978), p. 292.

<sup>9</sup>Isaiah 58:11.

<sup>10</sup>*The Zohar*, Vol. 3, (II, 97a), Harry Sperling, Maurice Simon and Paul Levertoff, translators, (London: The Soncino Press, 1978), p. 292.

<sup>11</sup>Exodus 21:7.

<sup>12</sup>Nachmanides, *Ramban Commentary on the Torah*, Vol. 2, Charles Chavel, translator, (New York: Shilo Publishing House, 1973), p. 354.

*If she does not please her master, who has designated her for himself, then shall he let her be redeemed.*<sup>13</sup>

Nachmanides says,

But if she pleaseth not her master, who has not espoused her to be his wife, – for he who buys an Israelite’s daughter does so with the intention of taking her as his wife, thus she is under ordinary conditions designated for him; but now if her master does not desire her, then shall the father mentioned redeem her, for as soon as the master says:

I do not want to marry her

it is forbidden for the father to leave her any longer under his authority, nor may he sell her to a foreign people in case he comes to deal deceitfully with her, for it is deceit for a man to sell his daughter except to someone who can marry her.<sup>14</sup>

When the buyer decides that neither he nor his son will marry her within the six year period from the date of purchase, she must be redeemed by her father for the price originally paid times the fraction of the years not yet served. Likewise since it would be deceit for God to place a soul in a body who will not marry the soul after at most six incarnations of the soul, then the soul is set free from the body and is returned to God, its source,

The Zohar continues now referring to the reincarnation of the soul.

But if she pleased not her Master, that is, if she be polluted by sin and guilt, He does not again appoint that same body for her, and so she loses it for ever, unless the person should be roused to repentance, for then shall she be redeemed - as it is written:

*He will deliver his soul from going into the pit.*<sup>15</sup>

which signifies that man is advised to redeem his own soul by repentance and amendment. In fact, the words he shall redeem her have a

---

<sup>13</sup>Exodus 21:8.

<sup>14</sup>Nachmanides, *Ramban Commentary on the Torah*, Vol. 2, Charles Chavel, translator, (New York: Shilo Publishing House, 1973), p. 354.

<sup>15</sup>Job 33:28.

double significance: they point to man's own redemption of his soul by repentance, followed by the redemption from Gehenna effected by the Holy One.<sup>16</sup>

If the master is not pleased with the maidservant, the Torah continues,

*To sell her to a strange nation he shall have no power,  
seeing he has dealt deceitfully with her.*<sup>17</sup>

Continuing with the metaphor, if the body is not pleased with the maidservant, the body has no power to sell her to a strange nation, for the body has made a contract to marry the soul. And if the body were to sell the soul, it would be dealing deceitfully with the soul. The contrast here is between the holy and the unholy. A strange nation is a metaphor for the unholy.

Who is this strange nation? Hapless is the soul when she leaves this world after being attached to a man who has turned away from the right path. She desires to ascend to the heights, in the midst of the holy hosts; for holy hosts stand along the way to Paradise, and strange hosts line the other way, to Gehenna. If, then, the soul is worthy and wears the precious protecting garment, multitudes of holy hosts stand ready to join her and accompany her to Paradise. But if she hath not that garment, the strange hosts compel her to take the path which leads to Gehenna. Angels of destruction and confusion are they, who will gladly take their revenge on her. But He shall have no power to sell her unto a strange nation, if His garment is upon her, by which the Holy One guards her from the strange nations of the angels of destruction and despoilment.<sup>18</sup>

Here the Zohar is telling us that when the soul leaves the physical body, she wears the clothing the spiritual body. These consist of the mitzvot and sins that the body brought into the world. IF the soul is weighted with the clothing of sin, she must take the path to Gehenna where this impure clothing will be cleansed off her.

---

<sup>16</sup>*The Zohar*, Vol. 3, (II, 97a), Harry Sperling, Maurice Simon and Paul Levertoff, translators, (London: The Soncino Press, 1978), p. 292.

<sup>17</sup>Exodus 21:8.

<sup>18</sup>*The Zohar*, Vol. 3, (II, 97a), Harry Sperling, Maurice Simon and Paul Levertoff, translators, (London: The Soncino Press, 1978), p. 292-294.

The Or Hachayim tells us that when the body consistently engages in Torah incorrect actions, the soul, which is the spirit of life within us, becomes poor. In this explanation, he switches the metaphor of soul as a maidservant to soul as a brother. He explains this by the verse,

*If your brother becomes poor and his means fail while he is with you, a stranger or a resident, he shall live with you.*<sup>19</sup>

Our brother, he tells us means soul; the spirit of life within and it is called brother here, because this spirit is the spirit of God, "our brother."

When the Torah describes *our brother becoming poor*, it refers to the *spirit of life within us*; the reason it seems to weaken is that it observed that we failed to study Torah and practice the commandments. There is no greater kind of poverty than the dearth of merits due to Torah study and the performance of kind deeds towards one's fellow man. As a result, the individual Israelite's light fails.<sup>20</sup>

The Zohar continues.<sup>21</sup>

*And if he [the buyer of the maidservant] betrothed (designated) her for his son, he shall deal with her after the manner of daughters.*<sup>22</sup>

How careful should a man be not to walk in a crooked way in this world! For if he shall have proved himself worthy in this world, having guarded his soul with all care, then the Holy One, blessed be He, will be well pleased with him, and will praise him daily to His celestial Family, saying: Behold the holy son whom I have in that lower world! See what acts he performed, how upright are his ways. And when such a soul leaves this world, pure, bright, and unsullied, the Holy One illumines her daily with innumerable radiances and proclaims concerning her: This is the soul of my son<sup>23</sup> so-and-so: let her be

---

<sup>19</sup> *Leviticus* 25:35.

<sup>20</sup> Chayim ben Attar, *Or Hachayim*, Eliahu Munk (translator), Jerusalem, 1995, p1286.

<sup>21</sup> *The Zohar*, Vol. 3, (II, 97a), Harry Sperling, Maurice Simon and Paul Levertoff, translators, (London: The Soncino Press, 1978), p. 292-294.

<sup>22</sup> *Exodus* 21:9.

<sup>23</sup> Here son is a metaphor for the body.

kept<sup>24</sup> for the body which she has [temporarily] left.<sup>25</sup> This is the significance of the words:

*And if he have betrothed her his son, he shall deal with her after the manner of daughters.*<sup>26</sup>

The plain meaning of the phrase

*after the manner of daughters*

concerns the marital rights obligated to the wife by her husband: these include support, clothing, and conjugal rights. The Zohar continues,

What is the meaning of these words,

*after the manner of daughters?*

This is a secret entrusted to the keeping of the wise alone, and here is the substance thereof. In the midst of a mighty rock, a most recondite firmament, there is set a Palace which is called the Palace of Love. This is the region wherein the treasures of the King are stored, and all His love-kisses are there. All souls beloved of the Holy One enter into that Palace. And when the King Himself appears, Jacob kisses Rachel (Genesis 29:11), that is, the Lord discovers each holy soul, and takes each in turn up unto Himself, fondling and caressing her, acting towards her after the manner of daughters, even as a father treats his beloved daughter, fondling and caressing her, and giving her presents.

*For since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither has the eye seen, that God beside thee should do such a thing for him that waits for him.*<sup>27</sup>

As that daughter, the soul, has done her work in this world, so will the Holy One do His work on her in the world to come.<sup>28</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup>She will marry the body.

<sup>25</sup>The soul energizes the body for a fixed number of years after which the physical body dies.

<sup>26</sup>Exodus 21:9.

<sup>27</sup>Isaiah 64:3.

<sup>28</sup>*The Zohar*, Vol. 3, (II, 97a), Harry Sperling, Maurice Simon and Paul Levertoff, translators, (London: The Soncino Press, 1978), p. 292-294.

The Zohar relates body and soul in terms of the resurrection of the dead.<sup>29</sup>

Observe that the day on which a man is about to depart from this world is a day of reckoning when the body and the soul in combination have to give an account of their works. The soul afterwards leaves him and the body returns to the earth, both thus returning to their original source, where they will remain until the time when the Holy One will bring the dead to life again. Then God will cause the identical body and the identical soul to return to the world in their former state, as it is written,

*The dead shall live, my dead bodies shall arise.*<sup>30</sup>

The same soul is meanwhile stored up by the Holy One, thus returning to its original place, as it is written,

*And the spirit returns to God who gave it.*<sup>31</sup>

The Zohar explains the structure of the soul in terms of grades that are called maidservant, manservant, bondswoman of the King's Daughter, the King's daughter, and the son of the Holy One, and soul from the sphere of Father and Mother, each grade being associated with a different sphere. The grades of the soul a body receives depends on the merit of the body. In Hebrew the grades are grouped by two sets of three, the group of three being called: **נפש**, **רוח** and **נשמה**. The soul may increase or decrease in grade depending on the actions of the body.

When a human being is born into the world he is given a soul (*Nefesh*) from the primordial animal sphere, the sphere of purity, the sphere of those who are designated Holy Wheels-namely, the supernal order of angels. If he is more fortunate he will be endowed with a spirit (*Ruah*) which appertains to the sphere of the Holy *Hayoth*. Should he possess still greater potential merit he is given a soul (*Neshamah*) from the region of the Throne. These three grades of personality are the maidservant, the manservant, and the bondswoman of the King's daughter. And if the newly created being deserves still more, the

---

<sup>29</sup> *The Zohar*, Vol. 2, (I, 130b), Harry Sperling and Maurice Simon, translators, (London: The Soncino Press, 1978), p. 21.

<sup>30</sup> Isaiah 26:19.

<sup>31</sup> Ecclesiastes 12:7.



soul which is put into his bodily form derives through a process of emanation (*Aziluth*) from the sphere of the Only Daughter, and is itself called the King's daughter. If his merit is still greater he will be endowed with a spirit (*Ruah*), deriving through emanation from the sphere of the Central Pillar, and its owner is then called the son of the Holy One, as it is written:<sup>32</sup>

*Sons are ye to the Lord your God.*<sup>33</sup>

Should he be of even greater worth he is given a soul (*Neshamah*) from the sphere of Father and Mother, concerning which it is written:

*And he breathed into his nostrils the breath (Nishmath) of life.*<sup>34</sup>

What does life signify? It signifies the Divine Name  $\aleph \beth$ ; and therefore it is written of such souls:

*Let the whole soul (all souls) praise  $\aleph \beth$ .*<sup>35</sup>

But if he should acquire still greater merit, the Holy Name  $\aleph \beth \daleth \aleph \beth$  is granted to him in its fulness—the letters  $\beth, \beth, \daleth, \beth$ , representing Man in the sphere of the supernal *Aziluth*, and he is said to be in the likeness of his Lord, and in him the words,

*Have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing.*<sup>36</sup>

are properly fulfilled: for his dominion is indeed over all the firmaments and over all the Wheels and Seraphim and Living Beings (*Hayoth*) and over all the hosts above and below. It is therefore concerning one who has attained to the sphere of the Only Daughter and has derived his soul from thence that it says,<sup>37</sup>

---

<sup>32</sup> *The Zohar*, Vol. 3, (II, 94b), Harry Sperling, Maurice Simon and Paul Levertoff, translators, (London: The Soncino Press, 1978), p. 283-284.

<sup>33</sup> Deuteronomy 14:1.

<sup>34</sup> Genesis 2:7.

<sup>35</sup> Psalms 150:6.

<sup>36</sup> Genesis 1:28.

<sup>37</sup> *The Zohar*, Vol. 3, (II, 94b), Harry Sperling, Maurice Simon and Paul Levertoff, translators, (London: The Soncino Press, 1978), p. 284.

*She shall not go out as the menservants do.*

The Zohar says that these three grades form a unity in those people who serve God. Furthermore, as a person becomes more successful in his striving to serve God, the soul successively ascends in grade.

Observe that when the Holy One, blessed be He, created Adam, He gathered his earthly matter from the four corners of the world and fashioned him therefrom on the site of the Temple here below and drew to him a soul of life out of the Temple on high. Now the soul is a compound of three grades, and hence it has three names, to wit, *Nefesh* (vital principle), *Ruah* (spirit), and *Neshamah* (soul proper). *Nefesh* is the lowest of the three, *Ruah* is a grade higher, whilst *Neshamah* is the highest of all and dominates the others. These three grades are harmoniously combined in those men who have the good fortune to render service to their Master. For at first man possesses *Nefesh*, which is a holy preparative for a higher stage. After he has achieved purity in the grade of *Nefesh* he becomes fit to be crowned by the holy grade that rests upon it, namely *Ruah*. When he has thus attained to the indwelling of *Nefesh* and *Ruah*, and qualified himself for the worship of his Master in the requisite manner, the *Neshamah*, the holy superior grade that dominates all the others, takes up its abode with him and crowns him, so that he becomes complete and perfected on all sides; he becomes worthy of the world to come and is beloved of the Holy One, blessed be He; of him Scripture says:

*To cause my beloved ones to inherit substance.*<sup>38</sup>

the beloved ones being those who have attained to the holy *Neshamah*.

R. Judah remarked: If that be so, how can we understand the verse in the account of the Flood:

*All in whose nostrils was the soul of the spirit (Nishmath-Ruah) of life... died.*<sup>39</sup>

R. Isaac replied: This bears out what I said. Among the generation of the Flood no one was left that possessed the holy *Neshamah*, as, for instance, Enoch or Jered or any of the other righteous who by their

---

<sup>38</sup>Proverbs 8:21.

<sup>39</sup>Genesis 7:22.

merits could have saved the earth from destruction, and its inhabitants from being exterminated. Scripture thus tells us that all in whose nostrils was the soul of the spirit of life, of all those on dry land, died, that is to say, they had died already and departed this world, so that none was left to shield the world at that time. Observe that *Nefesh*, *Ruah*, and *Neshamah* are an ascending series of grades. The lowest of them, *Nefesh*, has its source in the perennial celestial stream, but it cannot exist permanently save with the help of *Ruah*, which abides between fire and water. *Ruah*, in its turn, is sustained by *Neshamah*, that higher grade above it, which is thus the source of both *Nefesh* and *Ruah*. When *Ruah* receives its sustenance from *Neshamah*, then *Nefesh* receives it in turn through *Ruah*, so that the three form a unity.

The soul and its aspects has the structure of the Tree and is associated with the light that emanates from the sefirot. The sefirot, in the worlds in which they have their being, are considered vessels relative to the soul which is considered light.

The light which emerges from the sefira of *Chochmah* is called *Chaya*. The light emerging from the sefira of *Binah* is called *Neshamah*. The light emerging from the sefira of *Tiferet* is called *ruach* and the light emerging from the sefira of *Malchut* is called *Nefesh*. Since the light spreading from the sefira of *Chochmah* is in the world of emanation, and the light diffusing from the sefira of *Binah* is in the world of creation, the light spreading out from the sefira of *Tiferet* is in the world of formation and the light diffusing from the sefira of *Malchut* is in the world of making, the worlds of creation, formation, and making are the three vessels which contain within them the universal *Nefesh*, *ruach*, and *Neshamah*. Indeed, the world of making is the vessel of the light of the universal *Nefesh*, the world of formation is a vessel for the light of the universal *ruach*, and the world of creation a vessel for the light of the universal *Neshamah*. The lights of *Chaya* and *Yechida* are so high and lofty that no vessel can contain them. Thus, they are all-embracing.<sup>40</sup>

Bar-Lev explains the nature of the grades in terms of the sefirot:

---

<sup>40</sup>Yechiel Bar-Lev, *Song of the Soul*, (Petach Tikva, Israel: 77 Rothchild St., 1994), p. 64.

The soul is an actual, indivisible force which vitalizes and activates all the organs of the body. Although the soul is one force, when it activates the eyes, the result is vision, seeing, etc. When it activates the ears, the result is hearing, listening, etc. We can cite a further example: Electric current originating in one source operates an air conditioner producing cold air, while that same current operating a radiator results in warm air; although the electricity is the same, the tools operated by it are different.

This is also the case with our body. The soul is a single spiritual force. Yet, when this force operates the eye, the result is vision, and so too which the other organs. Similarly, the force of the *En Sof* is a definite unity, absolute perfection, so that one cannot attribute anger or compassion to the Creator, Blessed be He, for that would violate unity.

The sefirot, however, are the vessels through which the Creator acts. When the Creator, Blessed by He, wishes to act with lovingkindness, He sends His “light-*ratzon*” through the sefira of *chesed*, and the result of this action is what we term lovingkindness.<sup>41</sup>

So it is with our soul, when we wish to act with lovingkindness, we send our soul’s “light-*ratzon*” through the sefira of *chesed*. As a result we feel lovingkindness and we act accordingly.

The Zohar explains further how the three grades form a unity and how Divine help in is given each person according to the direction they wish to strive.

Said R. Hiya to R. Judah:

The *Neshamah* (spiritual soul) emerges and enters between the gorges of the mountains, where it is joint by the *Ruah* (intellectual spirit). It descends then below where the *Nefesh* (vital spirit) joins the *Ruah*, and all three form a unity.

R Judah said:

The *Nefesh* and the *Ruah* are intertwined together, whereas the *Neshamah* resides in a man’s character – an abode

---

<sup>41</sup>Yechiel Bar-Lev, *Song of the Soul*, (Petach Tikva, Israel: 77 Rothchild St., 1994), p. 76.

which cannot be discovered or located. Should a man strive towards purity of life, he is aided thereto by a holy *Neshamah*, whereby he is purified and sanctified and attains the title of "saint." But should he not strive for righteousness and purity of life, he is animated only by the two grades, *Nefesh* and *Ruah*, and is devoid of a holy *Neshamah*. What is more, he who commences to defile himself is led further into defilement, and heavenly help is withdrawn from him. Thus each is led along the path which he chooses.<sup>42</sup>

The Zohar again and again says that we are spiritually aided in the direction we decide to strive in, day by day and night by night.

Every night when a man retires to his bed his soul leaves him and ascends to be judged before the King's tribunal. If she is found deserving to continue in her present state, she is allowed to return to this world. In the judgement, good and evil actions are not weighed in the same way. No account is taken of evil deeds which a man is likely to perpetrate in the future, for so it is written,

*for God hath heard the voice of the lad where he is.*<sup>43</sup>

But in regard to good actions, not only those already performed in the past are taken into consideration, but also those which a man is going to perform in the future; so that even if the present account would prove a man guilty, the Holy One in His bounty towards His creatures puts to his credit all his future good deeds, and the man is thus saved.<sup>44</sup>

The Zohar tells us that according to a person's strivings, so are his dreams.

As the works of the righteous differ in this world, so do their places and lights differ in the next world. Further, it has been laid down that even in this world, when men sleep at night and their souls leave them

---

<sup>42</sup> *The Zohar*, Vol. 1, (I, 62b), Harry Sperling and Maurice Simon, translators, (London: The Soncino Press, 1978), p. 203.

<sup>43</sup> Genesis 21:17.

<sup>44</sup> *The Zohar*, Vol. 2, (I, 121b), Harry Sperling and Maurice Simon, translators, (London: The Soncino Press, 1978), p. 3-4.

and flit about through the world, not every one alike arises to behold the glory of the Ancient of Days, but each one in proportion to a man's constancy of attachment to God and to his good deeds. The soul of the man who is besmirched, when it leaves the body asleep, meets with throngs of unclean spirits of the infernal orders traversing the universe, who take her up and to whom she clings. They disclose to her events about to come to pass in the world; occasionally they delude her with false information. This has been already stated elsewhere. But the soul of the worthy man, when it leaves him in sleep, ascends and cleaves its way through the unclean spirits which cry aloud, "Make way, make way! Here is one not belonging to our side!" The soul then ascends among the holy angels, who communicate to it some true information. When the soul is on its descent again, all those malignant bands are eager to meet it in order to obtain from it that information, in exchange for which they impart to it many other things. But the one thing it learned from the holy angels is to those other things as grain to chaff. This is a rare privilege for one whose soul is still in this world.<sup>45</sup>

The Zohar also tells us that according to the level of a person's striving in this world to serve God, so will be the level of the person's soul in the next world.

Whoever pollutes himself in this world draws to himself the spirit of uncleanness, and when his soul leaves him the unclean spirits pollute it, and its habitation is among them. For according to a man's strivings in this world is his habitation in the next world; hence such a man is polluted by the spirits of uncleanness and cast into Gehinnom. Thus whoever sanctifies himself and is on his guard against defilement in this world finds his habitation in the next world among the holy angels, where they carry out God's messages.<sup>46</sup>

In another passage the Zohar tells us,

Similar adventures await the souls when they altogether leave the body to depart from this world. In their attempt to soar upwards they have

---

<sup>45</sup> *The Zohar*, Vol. 2, (I, 130a-130b), Harry Sperling and Maurice Simon, translators, (London: The Soncino Press, 1978), p. 18-19.

<sup>46</sup> *The Zohar*, Vol. 2, (I, 129b), Harry Sperling and Maurice Simon, translators, (London: The Soncino Press, 1978), p. 18.

to pass through many gates at which bands of demons are stationed. These seize the souls that are of their side and deliver them into the hands of Duma in order that he may take them into Gehinnom. They then seize them again and ascend and make proclamations concerning them, saying, "These are they who transgressed the commands of their Lord." They then sweep through the universe and bring the souls back to Gehinnom. This procedure goes on for the whole of the first twelve months. After that they are assigned each to its appropriate place. On the other hand the worthy souls soar upwards, as already explained, and are assigned the places corresponding to their merits. Happy, therefore, are the righteous, for whom many boons are reserved in the next world. But for none is a more interior abode reserved than for those who penetrate into the divine mystical doctrines and enter each day into close union with their Divine Master.<sup>47</sup>

The Zohar calls the angels who help us to go in the direction we strive for the good prompter and the evil prompter. When we are successful in serving God, then the evil prompter becomes our servant and there is peace within us.

*When a man's ways please the Lord, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him.*<sup>48</sup>

About this verse Rabbi Simeon of the Zohar says:

How greatly is it incumbent on man to direct his path toward the Holy One, blessed be He, so as to observe the precepts of the Torah. For, according to our doctrine, two heavenly messengers are sent to accompany man in his path through life, one on the right and one on the left; and they are also witnesses to all his acts. They are called, the one *good prompter*, and the other *evil prompter*. Should a man be minded to purify himself and to observe diligently the precepts of the Torah, the good prompter who is associated with him will overpower the evil prompter, who will then make his peace with him and become his servant. Contrariwise, should a man set out to defile himself, the evil prompter will overpower the good prompter; and so we are

---

<sup>47</sup> *The Zohar*, Vol. 2, (I, 130a-130b), Harry Sperling and Maurice Simon, translators, (London: The Soncino Press, 1978), p. 18-19.

<sup>48</sup> Proverbs, 16:7.

agreed. Thus when a man sets out to purify himself, and his good prompter prevails, then God makes even his enemies to be at peace with him, that is to say, the evil prompter submits himself to the good prompter.<sup>49</sup>

About the verse Rabbi Judah of the Zohar says:<sup>50</sup>

*For he will give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways.*<sup>51</sup>

The moment a child is born into the world, the evil prompter straightway attaches himself to him and thence forth brings accusations against him as it says,

*Sin crouches at the door.*<sup>52</sup>

the term “sin” being a designation of the evil prompter, who was also called sin by King David in the verse;

*And my sin is ever before me.*<sup>53</sup>

He is so called because he makes man every day to sin before his Master, never leaving him from the day of his birth till the end of his life. But the good prompter first comes to man only on the day that he begins to purify himself, to wit, when he reaches the age of thirteen years. From that time the youth finds himself attended by two companions, one on his right and other other on his left, the former being the good prompter, the latter the evil prompter. These are two veritable angels appointed to keep man company continually. Now when a man tries to be virtuous, the evil prompter bows to him, the right gains dominion over the left, and the two together join hands to guard the man in all his way; hence it is written

*For he will give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways*

---

<sup>49</sup> *The Zohar*, Vol. 2, (I, 144b) Harry Sperling, Maurice Simon, and Paul Levertoff, translators, (London: The Soncino Press, 1978), p. 65.

<sup>50</sup> Harry Sperling, Maurice Simon, and Paul Levertoff, translators, *The Zohar*, Vol. 2, (I, 165b) The Soncino Press, London, 1978, p. 134.

<sup>51</sup> Psalms 91:11.

<sup>52</sup> Genesis 4:7.

<sup>53</sup> Psalm 51:5.



How greatly, he said, it behoves a man to guard against sin and to pursue the straight path, so that the evil prompter, his daily assailant, should not lead him astray. And since he assails man perpetually, it behoves man to muster all his force against him and to entrench himself in the place of strength; for as the evil prompter is mighty, it behoves man to be mightier still; and those sons of men who do excel him in might are called “mighty in strength,” dealing with him in his own coin, and they are “the angels of the Lord” who come from the side of Gevurah (Might) to deal mightily with him.<sup>54</sup>

It is clear from this portrayal that the evil prompter is our enemy who we must subdue. From this perspective, Or Hachayim has a beautiful commentary on the verse.

*When you go out to do battle against your enemies and you see a horse and a chariot, and a people more numerous than yourself, be not afraid of them: for the Lord your God is with you, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt.*<sup>55</sup>

He says,

The verse alludes to the battle man fights against his evil urge. It intends to remove fear and timidity from you heart. The Torah writes לְמִלְחָמָה instead of לְמִלְחָמָה, vocalising it thus to indicate that it refers to the well-known battle, the most crucial one, the fiercest one. In this battle man suffers from two elements both of which are apt to undermine him and to weaken his power to resist the attacker.

1) Man has never been trained to fight this particular adversary as he has been trained to fight external enemies. 2) The very composition of man is such that the enemy is constantly part of him urging him to steal, to lie, to murder, to eat whatever he desires, etc. These factors make it difficult for a human being to listen to the voice of the Torah which is “only” an external voice. These difficulties are multiplied once man has sinned repeatedly and his deeds have created forces which aid the evil urge in his fight against him, as I have explained on numerous occasions.

This is why God speaks of

---

<sup>54</sup>*The Zohar* Vol. 2, (I, 189b), Harry Sperling, and Maurice Simon, translators, The Soncino Press, London, 1978, p. 222.

<sup>55</sup>Deuteronomy 20:1.

*when you go out to do battle against your enemies and you see a horse and a chariot and a people more numerous than yourself*

The word סוס, horse, is a simile for the readiness of the evil urge to do battle and the word רכב, chariot, is a simile for the fact that man is composed of a variety of materials drawn to the profane as well as to the sacred, instead of a single element as is his attacker the evil urge. The words עם רב, numerous people, are a hyperbole for the multitude of evil forces created by man's sins all of which are arraigned against him in this battle. The Torah reassures us לא תירא מהם,

*you must not be afraid of them for the Lord your God is with you*

The Torah agrees that if you were on your own, unassisted by God, you would be justified in being afraid of this battle; however, seeing that the Lord your God is on your side you need not fear; you may rest assured that God will save you provided you want to rehabilitate yourself morally and ethically.

The Torah continues with המעלך מארץ מצרים,

*the God who has brought you out of Egypt [elevated you out of Egypt].*

The miracle of what happened at the Exodus demonstrated to you that God has the power to free you from the spiritually negative forces, קליפות, which had held you captive prior to the Exodus and had prevented the sanctity within you from being freed. The memory of the Exodus must always serve as a sign for you that you can overcome the forces of evil in the war in which you are engaged. We find confirmation of this thought in<sup>56</sup>

*The wicked watches for the righteous seeking to put him to death.*<sup>57</sup>

---

<sup>56</sup>Chayim ben Attar, *Or Hachayim* Vol. 5, Eliyahu Munk, translator, Jerusalem, 1995 p. 1900-1901.

<sup>57</sup>Psalms 37:32.

On this verse, the Talmud continues,

*And were not the Holy One, blessed be He, to help him [man] he would not be able to prevail against him, for it is said,*<sup>58</sup>

*God will not abandon him to his power; He will not let him be condemned in judgment.*<sup>59</sup>

Chayim ben Attar concludes stating

that these verses refer to the assault on man by the evil urge and to the assistance God extends to man in that fight.<sup>60</sup>

The Torah continues,

*When you come near to a city to fight against it, then call out to it peace. And it shall be, if it gives you an answer of peace, and it opens to you, then it shall be that all the people found in it shall be tributaries to you, and they shall serve you. And if it will not make peace with you, but will make war against you, then you shall besiege it. And when the Lord your God has delivered it into your hands, you shall smite every male in it with the edge of the sword, but the women and the little ones, and the beasts and all that is in the city you may plunder for yourself. And you shall eat the spoil of your enemies which the Lord your God has given you. Thus shall you do to all the cities which are very far off from you, which are not of the cities of these nations. But of the cities of these peoples, which the Lord your God gives you for an inheritance, you shall save alive nothing that breathes.*<sup>61</sup>

Or Hachayim explains

We know from Zohar Chadash Ruth pages 97 on the verse

*There is a small city with few inhabitants.*<sup>62</sup>

---

<sup>58</sup> *The Babylonian Talmud*, Seder Nashim, Vol. 4, Kiddushim 30b, I. Epstein, translator, (London: The Soncino Press, 1936), p. 147.

<sup>59</sup> Psalms 37:33.

<sup>60</sup> Chayim ben Attar, *Or Hachayim* Vol. 5, Elyahu Munk, translator, Jerusalem, 1995 p. 1901.

<sup>61</sup> Deuteronomy 20:10-16.

<sup>62</sup> Ecclesiastes 9:14.

that the city King Solomon speaks of is the human body. ...

*then call out to it peace.*

The meaning is that you do not immediately wade into the den of iniquity (your evil urge) and try to conquer it in one single frontal assault; rather you first suggest that it also give heaven its due, as a result of which it will experience great benefits. As a result the evil urge will allow that man has a duty also vis-a-vis heaven. After all, secular activities such as eating and drinking in this life also enable man to perform his spiritual tasks better. As a result of this accommodation with the evil urge one assures oneself of not losing one's hereafter altogether.

*if it gives you an answer of peace*

.... If your approach to the evil urge is in the manner we have just described so that you have opened the door a crack to spiritually positive values, God in His turn will open this door wide, so that it embraces all the people, i.e. the 248 bones and 365 sinews which man's body is constructed of and they will all become subservient to the soul (instead of the evil urge). The body will then perform both the positive commandments and refrain from violating the negative commandments.

*and they shall serve you*

i.e. like a slave who is afraid of his master and will neither deviate to the left nor to the right.

*And if it will not make peace with you*

If the city does not accept the soul's proposal to allow heaven its due, or that even after man began to become a penitent he slid back into sin, then you have to make all out war against the city, i.e. the evil urge. The words **ועשתה עמך מלחמה**, refer to the body, i.e. the evil urge making war against you. ...

*by the sword*

In our context these words may be understood as analogous to<sup>63</sup>

*When they have songs of praise to God in their throats and [this is equal to having] two-edged swords in their hands. To wreak vengeance upon the nations, contentions upon the kingdoms. To bind their kings with chains and their nobles with fetters of iron.*<sup>64</sup>

In other words, when we are in a state of God consciousness, there is an internal sense of delight and there is praise to God from our throats, exactly as we say in the morning prayer,

Offer praise to the Lord, proclaim His Name! Make His deeds known among the nations. Sing to Him! Chant praises to Him! Speak of all His wonders. Glory in His holy Name.<sup>65</sup>

And when we are truly in this spiritual mode of being, when it comes time to fight the nations, to cut off, separate, and sacrifice that part of us that has a will to not stand with or turn toward God, our very act of praising God provides for us a two-edged sword that we can swing from the left or swing from the right to obliterate the enemy.

Chayim ben Attar continues,

*Only the women and the children*

The word נשים refers to the נפש ורוח, both of which are called “women” in comparison to the higher soul known as נשמה. The word הטרף [little ones] refers to the commandments and good deeds a person has performed (and which are considered his children) prior to his becoming despised by God as a sinner.

*and the beasts and all that is in the city you may plunder for yourself.*

---

<sup>63</sup>Chayim ben Attar, *Or Hachayim* Vol. 5, Eliyahu Munk, translator, Jerusalem, 1995 p.1902-1903.

<sup>64</sup>Psalms 149:6-8.

<sup>65</sup>*Siddur Tehillat Hashem*, Nissen Mangel, translator, (Brooklyn NY, Merkos L'Inyonei Chinuch, 1995), p. 27.

The word “beasts” refers to the animalistic desires a person suffers from, his love for everything sensual and material. A true **בעל תשובה** will be able to put all these urges and desires to use in his efforts to serve the Lord.

*So you shall do to all the cities which are distant.*

All the commandments mentioned in this paragraph have been given only to the “cities,” i.e. the bodies which have become distant from God. We know [from]

*Peace, peace both from far and near, says the Lord. And I will heal him.*<sup>66</sup>

that God offers peace to the near and the far. The “far” are the sinners. He has become distant from his holy source, the **שכינה** from where all holy souls originate.

However,

*from any city of these nations*

(Canaanites) cities of the Gentiles, which never had contact with sanctity and which had left its source due to its many sins, such a city has no hope of returning to a sanctity it had never possessed in the first place. This is why the Torah mentions

*which are not of the cities of these nations.*

that all the Torah’s exhortation to return to the fold is addressed only to the Jew. Others, such as the cities of the seven Canaanite nations, have to be annihilated completely.<sup>67</sup>

In the next passage, the Zohar explains that each person has within a potential for good and a potential for evil. When the good is actualized the Holy presence attaches itself to us. When the evil is actualized, the Holy presence absences itself from us and its place becomes filled with defilement. The Zohar begins this discussion with the verse,

---

<sup>66</sup>Isaiah 57:19.

<sup>67</sup>Chayim ben Attar, *Or Hachayim* Vol. 5, Eliyahu Munk, translator, Jerusalem, 1995 p. 1904.

*And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground.*<sup>68</sup>

Man was formed with two inclinations, the good and the evil, one corresponding to Water and the other to Fire. The word man (אדם) indicates a combination of male and female. The dust from which he was formed was that of the Holy Land, of the Sanctuary. He breathed in his nostrils the breath of life: this is the holy soul which derives from the life above.

*And the man became a living soul*

he was provided with a holy soul from the supernal living being which the earth brought forth. Now, as long as that holy soul is attached to a man, he is beloved of his Master, he is guarded on all sides, he is marked out for good above and below, and the holy Divine presence rests upon him. But if he perverts his ways the Divine presence leaves him, the super-soul does not cling to him, and from the side of the evil serpent a spirit arises which can abide only in a place whence the heavenly holiness has departed, and so a man becomes defiled and his flesh, his facial appearance and his whole being, is distorted.<sup>69</sup>

The Zohar tells us that when God began to create the world, He put in man a combination of good and evil. However, this combination is not a homogeneous mixture. Each is in its own place and time and thus separated from the other.

When the Holy One, blessed be He, created the world, He created it by means of the letters of the Torah, all the letters of the Alphabet having presented themselves before Him until finally the letter Beth was chosen for the starting point. Moreover, the various Alphabets [Tr. Note: i.e. the various combinations of the Alphabet, based on a series of permutations, each one constituting, as it were, an Alphabet by itself.] in their variety of permutation presented themselves to participate in the Creation. But when it came to the turn of the Teth and the Resh to present themselves together, [Tr. Note: i.e. within

---

<sup>68</sup>Genesis 2:7.

<sup>69</sup>*The Zohar* Vol. 5, (III, 46b), Harry Sperling, and Maurice Simon, translators, The Soncino Press, London, 1978, p. 12.

the Alphabet called, from its initial letters, Albam. In this scheme the order is: Aleph, Lamed, Beth, Mim... Teth, Resh, etc.] the Teth refused to take its place; so God chid it, saying:

0 Teth, Teth, why, having come up, art thou loth to take thy place?

It replied: Seeing that Thou hast placed me at the head of טוב (good), how can I associate with the Resh, the initial of רע (evil)? God thereupon said to it: Go to thy place, as thou hast need of the Resh. For man, whom I am about to create, will be composed of you both, but thou wilt be on his right whilst the other will be on his left. The two then took their places side by side. God, however, separated them by creating for each one special days and years, one set for the right and one for the left. Those of the right are called days of good, and those of the left days of evil.<sup>70</sup>

Here the days of good refer to the times and situations that God gives us in which God's bountifulness is openly seen. The days of evil refer to the times and situations that God gives us in which God's bountifulness, although ever present, is not seen. In these cases we suffer for we are living through an apparent existential limitation or deficiency whose real purpose is to shake us up thereby providing an opening for us to make an internal change so that our soul can ascend in grade. This is the reason the Zohar tells us about the question which is asked of each soul as it enters the next world.

Who among you labored to turn darkness into light and bitter into sweet before you entered here?<sup>71</sup>

The Zohar is telling us that the on-going process in our life in this world, our spiritual mission, must be a striving for serving God, a striving for living our lives in accordance with Torah. And this is a process in which we are inevitably turning the ever present inclination for evil within us into an actualized manifestation of goodness. When we do this, we discover that this

---

<sup>70</sup> *The Zohar* Vol. 2, (I, 204a), Harry Sperling, and Maurice Simon, translators, The Soncino Press, London, 1978, p. 274-275.

<sup>71</sup> *The Zohar*, Vol. 1, (I, 4a), Harry Sperling and Maurice Simon, translators, (London: The Soncino Press, 1978), p. 16.



inclination for evil, becomes our servant in our actualization of goodness. Our souls develop and ascend higher and higher grades finally reaching the inner sanctum, the Palace of Love, where God is eternally caressing the soul.