

# Secret Revelations about the Truths in the Zohar

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*“Understanding is a three-edged sword, your side, their side, and the truth.”*

J. Michael Straczynski

Things are not as they seem. What you see, and what really is, are two different things. There are many myths that have been woven over the years. Today, while many know the myths, they do not know what myths actually are. This is very true when it comes to a discussion of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yohai, his relationship to the day of Lag B'Omer, and his believed authorship of the Zohar.

## Lag B'Omer

Lag B'Omer is the 33<sup>rd</sup> day of the traditional counting of the Omer offerings that were performed during Temple times. Today, in remembrance of the Temple practice, Torah observant Jews daily mark the Omer period by counting off the days between Passover and Shavuot.

Legends has it that during the first 33 days of this period, in one unrecorded year around the turn of the first century, a great plague struck ancient Israel resulting in the deaths of thousands of Rabbi Akiva's students. On the 33<sup>rd</sup> day of counting the Omer, the plague ceased. Therefore, to this day, Lag (the Hebrew rendition of the number 33) of Omer is celebrated as the day the plague ended, and something else very special.

It is said that this day is the Day of Ascent for Rabbi Shimon Bar Yohai. Traditionally this ascent is interpreted to be the day of his death, thus his ascent to Heaven. Others, however, interpret Rabbi Shimon's ascent to be the day that he merited to receive the secret traditions of the Torah from his master, Rabbi Akiva. Thus Rabbi Shimon's ascent was an ascent in Torah, and had nothing to do with his mortal demise.

The important thing to remember with regards to all these things is this, there are no intact historical records that can verify if any of these things actually happened. Any of them, or all of them, might be verbatim fact, or they might just as easily be complete mythology and legend. All these stories might have been created for their moralistic (midrashic) value, to inspire spiritual refinements, or they might be history, or they might be a rich blend and combination of both. What we have here are myths, and their historicity neither adds to, nor detracts from, their mythical value and content.

## Myths

Remember this, a myth, in psychology, is not something make-believe, but rather it is a specific psychic model of the mind, embraced and believed as true. Therefore, it does

not matter whether or not the belief has any historical foundations. In the mind, what is believed to be true is true, and that's all that matters from a psychological, consciousness point of view. What is real internally, does not need to be real externally. The mind decides its own reality, the world around the mind may or may not be involved in this decision. Thus, every day, in every way, we are all surrounded by our very own self-embraced myths.

From the moral, spiritual and religious points of views, these and similar stories are, of course, all true. Yet, religious truths and historical truths are not necessarily one and the same thing. Something can be true on the moral level, without it being true on the factual level. A good example of this is any children's story. We are all familiar with the story of Goldilocks and the Three Bears. The moral of this story is a valid one, and we need not concern ourselves whether or not there is any fact or reality that underlies a story. Sometimes a story is just a story, yet it is its moral that is eternal and true.

The Sages of Israel learned well this technique, maybe from Grecian culture, and used it liberally, especially throughout midrashic literature, the likes of which we see throughout the Agadata of the Talmud. Yet, the Grecian ways used by the Sages of the Talmud are not limited to the pages of that special book. We find the method of midrash and metaphor used elsewhere in Jewish literature far and wide. This is especially true in Kabbalistic literature of the philosophical school, specifically the works of the Zohar.

### The Zohar

The wisdom, beauty and profundity of the Zohar speaks for itself. Whether the texts were written in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century by Shimon Bar Yohai, or in the 13<sup>th</sup> century by Moshe DeLeon, or by an even unknown third party at some unknown point, adds or subtracts nothing from the objective value of the texts themselves. The value of the Zohar stands on its own merits regardless of its authorship.

Another point of value in the Zohar is that readers should not be concerned whether the individuals or the events mentioned in the text are historical. It doesn't matter if the events related are history or legend. Either way, all Zoharic teachings make great points and provide for us valuable lessons about life and the human psyche. It is the lesson that counts, not the details of its telling.

Any honest scholar can clearly see that some Zoharic teaching either reflect or repeat concepts that can be found in Neo-Platonic metaphysics of 2<sup>nd</sup> century Greek philosophers. Yet, we must ask, is this either important or significant?

Many Rabbinic teachings, especially the school of Maimonides are based upon Aristotle, so why should it be a bad thing if Zoharic literature has a relationship with other schools in Greek thought?

Indeed, another question that must be asked is who learned from whom? Were the Greek writers influenced by Jewish teachers, or were Jewish teachers influenced by the Greeks? Who influenced whom is a matter that cannot be proven either way.

Therefore, to dismiss Zoharic metaphysics because of a connection to Neo-Platonic concepts is disingenuous at best, and outright prejudice and ignorance at worst.

Again, the value of the Zohar stands on its own merits, and all the scholarly dissections of it, by religious and secular philosophers alike, may add flavor to the academic debates, but they add nothing to, nor detract anything from the Zohar's value, profundity, beauty and moral authority.

### **Partzufim**

In some of the most arcane sections of the Zohar, the Idarot, we are exposed to a series of cryptic metaphors that defy the intellect to interpret. This is because these metaphors are speaking about different grades of human consciousness, and the only way any of them can ever be understood properly is through experience, and not through academic study.

When the Zohar introduces to us the concepts of Partzufim, most readers are completely lost, and have no idea what is being described. So, let's begin with the obvious. A Partzuf is a mask. Rather than ask, who wears the mask, ask instead who is seeing the mask?

It is we who are gazing upon the masks. The Partzufim are the masks that cover the metaphorical Face of God, as perceived by the meditative mind. What this means is that as the human mind goes deeper and deeper into meditative states of consciousness, the mind draws ever closer to experiencing the numinous reality of God within. Each grade of deeper consciousness exposes to us God within, as psychically perceived as "God" wearing different masks.

These masks are given names like Zeir Anpin, Arikh Anpin, Atika Kadisha and others. Let the Kabbalistic philosophers argue and banter about all they wish as they try to understand what all this means. They are like the blind leading the blind in trying to describe something that the blind cannot see and thus can never clearly imagine. Yet, those who make the descent into the deeper stratas of consciousness come to experience these masks and thus see them for what they are, as vessels, masks, and concealments.

These psychic, psychological structures that we call Partzufim exist within the human mind and enable the mortal mind of man to expand beyond the mortal coil of his flesh to experience the Divine beyond the limitation imposed upon him by the sensory organic brain.

As the mind descends deeper into meditative states it draws ever closer to God. This path is called, ascending the Sefirotic Tree of Life, and the revelations of the Partzufim. Partzufim are the inner perceptions of how we perceive God.

Remember this, God does not really wear any masks. This is all metaphorical talk. Yet, when we reach out to touch God, our limited human faculties only enable us to perceive

God through psychic, psychological masks that enable our minds to perceive that which would otherwise be imperceivable.

### **Learning Zohar vs. Understanding Zohar**

*“There are many differences at every moment. In accordances to these differences do the teachings of the Zohar [themselves] change, and are to be interpreted differently each day with new understanding. This is how it is done, in the Supernal Heavenly Academy of the Holy One, blessed be He. Every day the Zohar is learned with new understandings from the Holy One, blessed be He.”* (SBST Va'ethanan 72)

The Zoharic texts were not written to teach us about outer space, but rather about inner space. If and when this lesson is ignored, then I believe the entire message of the Zohar becomes lost.

Weaved within every story and teaching, the Zohar mixes together a remarkable blend of midrash, metaphor and other teachings, which are quite true and direct to the point. Those experienced in Zoharic learning and meditative practices intuitively recognize how to read Zoharic texts, and to recognize when the text is speaking metaphorically, and when it is speaking literally.

This same principle and practice is found in the Talmud, and is used and understood in the exactly the same way. Whenever the expression TaShma (in the Talmud) and TaHazez (in the Zohar) are used to introduce a subject (or an explanation of a subject), one should pay special attention.

In Talmud, one should listen, meaning one should take care to understand and contemplate matters deep in thought. On the other hand, in the Zohar, one should sit back, close one's eyes and let one's imagination run wild seeing within, what needs to be seen. These are two different ways of leaning, and the one experienced in them, knows, understands and sees exactly what I am saying. As for the many others without this experience, what can be said about them?

The Zohar is like a mirror. One will see reflected out of it what one projects into it. This is why there will never be an end to original and unique Zoharic commentaries. No two people see alike, no two people share the exact same myth. The Zohar is a work of art, not science. The Zohar should be appreciated as if it belongs in a museum. It cannot be studied as if it belongs in a laboratory.

The mind is the realm of inner experience. This is the realm of the Zohar, and all true Torah Secrets. Only personal inner numinous experience can rightly be called Sod. The chatter of the philosophical Kabbalists does not even come close to this.

We can believe whatever we want to about the Zohar and Rabbi Shimon Bar Yohai. But our beliefs and our myths are far less significant than are our actions and behaviors. Rather than be concerned with the source of the material, one should instead pay attention to the material itself! It is not the learning, but the doing that counts!