

*"Aina D'Satana Ila'ah":*  
The Incarnate Wickedness of the Zoharic Evil Eye

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## Introduction

The belief in the malevolent potential of a human being's eyes is a universal phenomenon that existed in Ancient Egypt, Babylon, Sumeria and is still present today.<sup>1</sup> This belief is not confined to polytheistic religions, esoteric traditions, or superstitious circles; but has been expressed explicitly in the writings of at least two major religions. As a youth living in the *Hasidic* culture, incantations meant to thwart the evil eye were on my lips daily. After articulating any sort of positive remark about an individual or mentioning any level of good fortune, it was considered mandatory that one say, "without an evil eye" or, "against an evil eye" so as not to attract its negative gaze. Though this belief was very strong in my mind and the minds of my fellow *Hasidim*, its exact definition was always ambiguous.

In much of early Jewish literature, the belief in the evil eye precluded any sort of speculation in regards to its origins or mechanics.<sup>2</sup> To my knowledge, there has been only a single systematic, modern study of this belief in a Jewish context.<sup>3</sup> One of the more common motifs is that the evil eye is a force projected through the eyes of a greedy or envious individual.<sup>4</sup> The topic of this thesis is a study in the belief of the evil eye as depicted by the Zohar.<sup>5</sup> The purpose of this study is to explore the possibility of there being an observable, distinct definition of this phenomenon peculiar to this mystical work.

Before viewing the various references to the evil eye in the Zohar, it will be

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<sup>1</sup>*The Encyclopedia of Religion*, p 238, *New Catholic Encyclopedia* Vol. 5, p.671.

<sup>2</sup>*Encyclopedia Judaica* Vol. 6, p. 998.

<sup>3</sup>Rivka Ulmer, in *The Evil Eye In Biblical and Rabbinic Judaism*, p. V, states that, before her work, there had never been a single study.

<sup>4</sup>*The Encyclopedia of Religion* Ibid, *Encyclopedia Judaica* Volume 6, p. 998, *Encyclopedia Biblica* Vol. 2, p. 1453.

<sup>5</sup>For more information regarding the origins of the Zohar, see Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, pp. 156-204, Yehuda Leibes, *Studies in the Zohar*, pp. 85-138 and Isaiah Tishby, *Wisdom of the Zohar*, Vol. I, pp. 55-94.

important to survey prior traditions where this belief is discernible. Since the Zohar contains an accumulation of the Jewish tradition that preceded it, and contains elements similar to both Christianity as well as Gnosticism, this endeavor is vital for a clear understanding of the overall question.<sup>6</sup> Thus, this thesis is structured according to a chronological progression, starting with biblical literature, followed by non-canonical Holy Scriptures and then classical rabbinic writings. In the following sections, applying the insights gained from a consideration of references to the evil eye that predate the Zohar, I will explore the ways in which the zoharic belief in this phenomenon is articulated. The final stage of this thesis is an attempt to define the zoharic evil eye according to its mystical theology and to see what, if any, innovations its authors contributed to this belief.

#### *Mentioned in the Bible*

Variants of the term "evil eye" are explicitly stated four times in the Hebrew Bible. Two of these references are found in the book of Deuteronomy and the other two are located in the book of Proverbs. The first reference is as follows:

Beware that there be not a thought in your wicked heart, saying, 'The seventh year, the year of release, is at hand'; and your eye be evil against your poor brother, and you give him nothing; and he cry to the Lord against you, and it be sin to you.<sup>7</sup>

The context of this reference is a discussion of the Jubilee year.<sup>8</sup> As is stated earlier in this context, all that one loans another during this time must be forgiven. The

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<sup>6</sup>For information regarding the Gnostic elements of the Zohar, see Gershom Scholem, *The Mystical Shape of the Godhead*, pp. 56-87, Isaiah Tishby, *The Wisdom of the Zohar*, Vol. II, p.447 and note 77 of this thesis. For information on Christian influence on the Zohar, see Yehuda Liebes, *Studies in the Zohar*, pp. 139-161.

<sup>7</sup>Deuteronomy 15:9. All passages from the Hebrew Bible, unless noted otherwise, were translated by D. Mandel.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid 15:1-2 begins by saying, "At the end of every seven years you shall grant a release. And this is the manner of the release; Every creditor who lends anything to his neighbor shall release it; he shall not exact it of his neighbor, or of his brother."

authors of the book of Deuteronomy anticipated that such a law would make it very difficult for the less fortunate to come by monetary assistance during this time. This verse directly addresses the creditor; warning him that such behavior is immoral and an actual sin. The phrase "and your eye be evil against your poor brother, and you give him nothing", articulates the biblical view of the evil eye. An individual whose eye "becomes evil" is defined as someone who refuses to share what they have with others unless there is some monetary compensation they shall receive in the future.

The second Deuteronomic passage reads:

So that the man who is most tender among you, and very delicate, his eye shall be evil towards his brother, and towards the wife of his bosom, and towards the remnant of his children which he shall leave; so that he will not give to any of them of the flesh of his children whom he shall eat when he has nothing left; because of the siege, and the distress, with which your enemies shall distress you in all your gates. The tender and delicate woman among you, which would not venture to set the sole of her foot upon the ground for delicateness and tenderness, her eye shall be evil towards the husband of her bosom, and towards her son, and towards her daughter. And towards her afterbirth that comes out from between her feet, and towards her children whom she shall bear; for she shall eat them secretly, for want of all things, in the siege and distress, with which your enemy shall distress you in your gates.<sup>9</sup>

The context of this passage is a list of curses, where God warns the Israelites of what will befall them if they fail to fulfill his commandments. One of the more vivid images of God's wrath is the consumption of dead children by their parents. The reason a parent would turn to such behavior is that the city they are dwelling in under is siege and stricken by an intense famine. This passage portrays parents eating the flesh of their own dead children in order to survive.

This act, as horrific as it is, is not the evil eye. A man's eye that has become evil is defined as one who, "... will not give to any of them of the flesh of his

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<sup>9</sup>Deuteronomy 28:54-57.

children whom he shall eat.” The first depiction of the evil eye pertains specifically to a man who does not share the sustenance derived from this form of cannibalism with the rest of his family. The second verse depicts a woman with an evil eye. The only difference between the two depictions is that the woman eats the flesh in secret. The notion of secrecy is not mentioned in regards to the man. This difference probably has very little theological significance and is most likely due to the fact that a man in ancient times would be able to overpower the rest of his family and thus keep the flesh for himself. If a woman tried to keep the food for herself in such a desperate situation, the men in her household, in order to secure a meal, would most likely use violence if it were necessary.

The point of consistency between both of these Deuteronomic chapters is the idea that the evil eye has to do with the refusal to share sustenance with others. From these two passages it is evident that the authors of Deuteronomy viewed the evil eye as a form of selfishness and a refusal to help others who are in need. The eyes of a “tender” individual are those the biblical author imagined most likely to be predisposed to this sort of behavior.

The idea that greed is the definition of the evil eye is confirmed by the relevant proverbial verses. The first reference states, “Do not eat the bread of him who has an evil eye, nor should you desire his delicacies. For he is one who calculates in his heart; 'Eat and drink', he says to you; but his heart is not with you.”<sup>10</sup> This passage gives both a definition of the evil eye and a prohibition against deriving benefit therefrom. The prohibition is clearly articulated by the words “Do not eat . . . nor should you desire . . .”, while the definition of such a person is, “one who calculates in his heart . . . 'eat and drink' he says . . . but his heart is not with you.” According to this

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<sup>10</sup>Proverbs 23:6.

definition, a person with the evil eye is one who makes the appearance of being generous, though internally he does not want to share his bread with another.

The other proverbial reference is thus, "He who hastens to be rich has an evil eye, and considers not that want shall come upon him."<sup>11</sup> This verse adds another dimension to the biblical view of the evil eye. As shown before, there is most definitely a sense of greed in the Pentateuch's definition. Both passages from Deuteronomy define the evil eye as someone who refuses to share their goods with another. The first proverbial verse added a level of nuance to this notion by defining it as not only the refusal to share, but even an unspoken, internal reluctance to do so. This final biblical passage augments both of these notions by saying that a person with the evil eye is "He who hastens to be rich". From the context of the verse, the pursuit of monetary wealth above all else is another level of greed and stinginess that is added to the definition of the evil eye.

Opposing the evil eye of greed is the good eye of Proverbs 22:9, "He that has a good eye shall be blessed, for he gives of his bread to the poor." This verse contains the only reference to the good eye in the entire Hebrew Bible. Its perceived definition by the author of Proverbs is quite clearly the act of generosity.

There is one more possible reference to the evil eye in the Hebrew Bible located in I Samuel 18:9, "From that time onward, Saul kept a jealous eye on David". There are those that view it as an explicit biblical reference to the evil eye.<sup>12</sup> This verse, does not use the roots *Reish.Ayin.Hei* or *Zadi.Reish.Hei* that are used to speak about the Hebrew evil eye when describing Saul's actions. Instead, the root *Ayin.Yod.Nun*, which means, "eye" is conjugated in a verb form.<sup>13</sup> The fact that Saul

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<sup>11</sup>Proverbs 28:22.

<sup>12</sup>Encyclopedia of Religion, p. 238.

<sup>13</sup>I Samuel 18:9.

“kept a jealous eye on David”, is an interpretive translation.<sup>14</sup> The literal translation would be, “eyed David”. For this reason I chose not to include it in the list of explicit references.

### *Apocrypha*

The evil eye is also mentioned in the apocryphic book “The Alphabet of Ben Sirah” with the same implications. The verses are as follow: “The envious man hath a wicked eye; he turns away his face, and despises men. A covetous man’s eye is not satisfied with his portion; and the iniquity of the wicked dries up his soul. A wicked eye envies bread, and he is selfish at his table.”<sup>15</sup> The definition of the evil eye portrayed in this verse is consistent with those from the bible, all of which depict the evil eye as a form of greed.

The point of departure from the biblical view, however, are the words “he turns away his face and despises men”. According to Deuteronomy and Proverbs, a person with the evil eye is greedy, stingy or miserly but not necessarily one who has disdain for other human beings in general. The moral implications turn from a refusal or reluctance to share with others to the loathing of mankind.

The destructive force of the evil eye is one of the more consistent superstitions associated with this phenomenon. Though these destructive qualities are absent from the Hebrew Bible, there is another passage in Ben Sirah that cautions against an action believed to attract the evil eye. “When seated at a grand table do not smack your lips and exclaim, ‘What a feast!’ Remember, it is a bad thing to have a greedy eye. There is no greater evil in creation than the eye; for that reason it must shed tears

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<sup>14</sup>Translated by *Oxford Study Bible*, p. 298.

<sup>15</sup>Alphabet of Ben Sirah 14:8-10, all translations of the Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha unless otherwise noted, are taken from, *The Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha*, edited by R. H. Charles.

at every turn.”<sup>16</sup> Gloating over a bountiful portion is shown to be an act that can attract the gaze of the evil eye. Due to this belief, the verse warns not to “smack your lips and exclaim 'What a feast!'" The idea of greed is clearly stated and the notion of gloating over monetary wealth is most definitely implicated.

The book of Tobit also contains two references to the evil eye. “Distribute alms from what you possess and never with a grudging eye. Do not turn your face away from any poor man, and God will not turn his face away from you.”<sup>17</sup> And, “Share your food with the hungry, your clothes with those who have none. Whatever you have beyond your own needs, distribute in alms, and do not give with a grudging eye.”<sup>18</sup> Though neither of these verses explicitly label this “grudging eye” as an evil eye, the moral implications as well as the context of the verses are consistent with the biblical portrayals.

#### *New Testament*

The Book of Matthew also speaks of the evil eye, “Is it not lawful for me to do what I will with mine own? Is thine eye evil, because I am good?”<sup>19</sup> The moral implications of the evil eye in this verse are definitely consistent with those of the Hebrew Bible. There is another verse in Matthew that mentions the evil eye, but the moral aspect is left unarticulated. What is significant about the following reference, however, is that it speaks of the destructive qualities of the evil eye “But if thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!”<sup>20</sup> There is a parallel to this verse in the book

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<sup>16</sup>Alphabet of Ben Sirah 31:12-13.

<sup>17</sup>Tobit 4:7.

<sup>18</sup>Tobit 4:16.

<sup>19</sup>Matthew 20:15 all translations from the New Testament, unless otherwise specified, are taken from the King James Version.

<sup>20</sup>Matthew 6:23.



of Luke, "The light of the body is the eye: therefore when thine eye is single, they whole body also is full of light, but when thine eye is evil, they body also is full of darkness."<sup>21</sup> Thus, while there is no mention of the destructive forces pertaining to the evil eye in the Hebrew Bible or Apocrypha, the New Testament does contain this nuance.

### *Pseudepigrapha*

The evil eye is mentioned only once in the Pseudepigrapha in the "Testament of Solomon". The context of the verse is when King Solomon is interrogating thirty six heavenly spirits to learn their qualities and how to overpower them.<sup>22</sup> The reference is as follows, "The thirty fifth said, 'I am called Rhyx Phtheneoth. I cast the evil eye on every man. But the much-suffering eye, when inscribed, thwarts me.'<sup>23</sup> This verse is devoid of any and all moral implications and is the first reference viewed thus far to offer an antidote to the evil eye. This, "much-suffering eye", though of completely ambiguous nature, was evidently believed to subvert the evil eye.

Though it may be impossible to determine exactly what this "much-suffering eye" of the Testament of Solomon or the good eye of Proverbs were, there is an eye that is contrasted with the evil eye in mishnaic literature.

### *Mishnah*

When discussing the minimum amount one must give from their produce to fulfill the obligation of the Levitical offering, the mishnah begins with "The fixed amount for *terumah*: A beautiful eye is one fortieth . . . and the evil (eye) is one

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<sup>21</sup>Luke 11:34.

<sup>22</sup>Testament of Solomon, chapter 18.

<sup>23</sup>Testament of Solomon 18:39.

sixtieth.”<sup>24</sup> Though this passage is devoid of any theurgical notions, neither of the evil eye's destructive capabilities or the good eye's ability to counteract them, the idea of an evil eye denoting miserliness is at the root of the terminology being used by the mishnaic authors.

Tractate Avot is another mishnaic work that speaks about both the good eye and the evil eye:

He said to them, “Go and see, which is the straight path that a person should cling to?” Rabbi Eliezar said “A good eye.” . . . He said to them, “Go and see, which is the evil path that a person should distance himself from?” Rabbi Eliezar said, “an evil eye.”<sup>25</sup>

This dichotomous paradigm is further utilized to contrast an individual of holiness and one of wickedness. The side of morality is represented by the “disciples of Abraham” and the evildoers are represented by the “disciples of Balaam”.<sup>26</sup> The former are said to have a good eye while the latter are contaminated by the evil eye.<sup>27</sup> Abraham, being the archetype of hospitality in Judaism is a logical choice for an example of a good eye.<sup>28</sup> Balaam's own character traits are expounded quite frequently in the Gemara.<sup>29</sup>

There is also an entire mishnah in tractate *Avot* that deals with the ethics of giving charity. A person who gives freely to the poor but wishes that others would not be so generous is said to have an evil eye that pertains to others.<sup>30</sup> A person who does not want to give charity but wishes that others would is said to have an evil eye that pertains to his own possessions.<sup>31</sup> This seems to show that the belief in the evil

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<sup>24</sup>Mishnah Terumah 4:3, all translations of rabbinic texts were done by the author unless otherwise specified.

<sup>25</sup>Mishnah Avot 2:9.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid 5:19.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid.

<sup>28</sup>Bereshit Rabbah 50:4.

<sup>29</sup>See note 38 of this thesis.

<sup>30</sup>Mishnah Avot 5:13.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

eye was not only strong during mishnaic times but that it had reached a new level of sophistication. In biblical literature, a person who freely shares his possessions could in no way be considered to have the evil eye. According to *Avot*, however, even if the person is very generous, unless he wishes that others shared his magnanimity, he still would possess an evil eye. The only difference between these two evil eyes is that one is directed externally and the other internally.

#### *Gemara*

Building upon both the ancient superstitions and the biblical definitions of the evil eye, this negative force is mentioned a number of times in the Talmud. The biblical view is clearly expressed by the statement, "there are some who desire to benefit others but have not the means; whilst others have the means but have not the desire, and it is written: "Eat thou not the bread of him that hath an evil eye . . ." <sup>32</sup> The deuteronomic definition of refusing to share with others is clearly expressed by both this passage and another where Mar Ukva shares his information regarding a medical issue, so that his rabbinical colleagues will not say that he has an evil eye. <sup>33</sup> By the fact that his sharing of knowledge would prove to his contemporary rabbinic figures that he was not of the evil eye demonstrates that it was believed to be a form of greed. So not only does greed with monetary wealth fall into the definition, but also stinginess with knowledge.

The idea of unethical means in the pursuit of wealth is present in a talmudic passage that says a blood letter is an individual with the evil eye. <sup>34</sup> The reason given by Rashi for this profession being linked to the evil eye is that the blood letter wishes to increase his income and therefore places an evil eye on potential patients to secure

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<sup>32</sup>Talmud Bavli Chullin, 7b.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid Shabbat, 108b.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid Kiddushin, 82a.

his livelihood.<sup>35</sup> This notion itself adds another nuance to what exactly the evil eye was viewed to be. Not only is it miserly behavior but the intention of a miserly individual that is projected onto another.

There are also passages that depart from the biblical view and tend to portray the evil eye as an ambiguous malignant force. There is one passage that states "ninety nine out of a hundred people die from an evil eye."<sup>36</sup> The exact origin of this evil eye is not given but this notion does seem to link the evil eye to the angel of death.<sup>37</sup> This idea is consistent with the New Testament and the pseudapigraphic portrayals where the evil eye is said to drain the light out of a person's soul. This perception is also concurrent with the portrayals of Balaam as a caster of the evil eye.<sup>38</sup> The only difference is that Balaam is said to have utilized the evil eye intentionally. No known reference in biblical or non-canonical Holy Scripture contains this nuance.

Besides the verses above quoted from Deuteronomy, Proverbs and even I Samuel, there are other biblical verses which are viewed by the Talmud as referencing the evil eye. Rab links Deuteronomy 7:15, "And the Lord will take away from you all sickness . . ." to the evil eye.<sup>39</sup>

Attracting the evil eye through boasting or gloating over a bountiful portion as is found in Ben Sirah, is also present in the Talmud. There is a story of how Rabbi Joh<sup>h</sup>annan, who was a handsome man, would sit at the bathhouse and bless the women

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<sup>35</sup>Rashi on *ibid.*

<sup>36</sup>Talmud Bavli Baba Metzia, 107b.

<sup>37</sup>Assertion based on the rabbinic belief in the angel of death as is depicted in such places as Talmud Bavli Berachot, 4b, 51a, Sukkah, 53a and many other texts outside the scope of this thesis. The point of consistency between such passages is that the angel of death escorts the vast majority of people from this world to the grave. Such a death is contrasted by the "kiss of death", which is a rare occurrence as is stated in *Ibid* Berachot, 8b, Mo'ed Katan, 28a and Baba Batra, 17a.

<sup>38</sup>Talmud Bavli Niddah, 31a and Sanhedrin, 105a both state that Balaam's intended curse was the evil eye. Other passages that speak of his wickedness but do not clearly associate him with the evil eye are: Talmud Bavli Berachot, 7a and 55b, Ta'anith, 20a, Chagihah, 15b, Sotah, 11a, Gittin, 57a, Baba Batra, 14b-15b, Sanhedrin, 39a, 90a, 105a-106b, Makkoth, 10b, Azodah Zarah, 4a-b, and Zevachim, 116a.

<sup>39</sup>*Ibid.*

that they may have a child as attractive as he. His contemporaries warned him against the evil eye, though he replied that due to his lineage, he was immune.<sup>40</sup> The source of this immunity is said to be Joseph, whose descendants are insusceptible to the evil eye.<sup>41</sup> Rabbi Joh<sup>h</sup>annan claimed to be from this lineage and therefore believed himself to be invulnerable to the evil eye. Fish are also said to be immune to the evil eye, since they dwell underwater and are hidden from its gaze.<sup>42</sup>

### *Midrash*

Though there are numerous references to the evil eye in the Talmud, this number is quite small compared to the slew of references in midrashic literature. Building upon the deuteronomic and the proverbial verses, the evil eye becomes the character trait of one who wishes for anything beyond his grasp. Sarah, the wife of Abraham the patriarch, is said to have placed an evil eye on Hagar since she was jealous over her ability to give birth.<sup>43</sup> Efron is another individual who is said to have had an evil eye due to the fact that he was jealous over Abraham's wealth.<sup>44</sup> Joseph's brothers are also said to have placed an evil eye into their younger brother out of jealousy.<sup>45</sup> The curse of Balaam is quite frequently labeled the evil eye.<sup>46</sup> The fact that Saul placed an evil eye on David is also confirmed.<sup>47</sup>

The idea that one can attract the evil eye by basking in his fortune as was depicted the Alphabet of Ben Sirah, is present in a number of midrashic passages. Joseph is said to have cautioned his sons to hide themselves from the view of the

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<sup>40</sup>Talmud Bavli Berachot, 55b.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid.

<sup>43</sup>Bereshit Rabbah, 45:5 and 55:13.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid, 58:7, Tanchuma Parshat Bahar I, Re'eh 10 and Mishpatim 5.

<sup>45</sup>Bereshit Rabbah 87:4.

<sup>46</sup>Bamidbar Rabbah 2:4, 20:6, 7, 10, and 15.

<sup>47</sup>Vayikra Rabbah 26:9 and Tanchuma Parshat Emor 4. There are those who do list this as an explicit reference however, *Encyclopedia Judaica*, ibid.

Egyptians in order not to attract the evil eye.<sup>48</sup> This contradicts the many passage that say Joseph and his descendants are immune to the evil eye.<sup>49</sup>

It has been noted that the biblical and rabbinic belief in the evil eye solely constituted some form of greed or jealousy.<sup>50</sup> From surveying the biblical references, this seems to be true in regards to the bible. The rabbinic references on the other hand, while keeping these moral associations in tact, add another level to its definition, which is not dissimilar to witchcraft. The association of the evil eye with the forces of death and the developments in the associations with superstitious practices and sorcery, demonstrate the evolution of the belief in the evil eye from biblical times through late antiquity.

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<sup>48</sup>Bamidbar Rabbah 91:6, Tanchuma Miketz 8.

<sup>49</sup>Bamidbar Rabbah 14:6.

<sup>50</sup>Rivka Ulmer, *The Power of the Evil Eye and the Good Eye in Midrashic Literature*, p. 345. There, Ulmer notes this earlier assessment and thoroughly disproves it.

## Zohar

### *Introduction*

The goal of this endeavor is to see if there is a definition of the evil eye peculiar to the Zohar. As will be shown, the Zohar built heavily upon the Hebrew Bible and rabbinic literature when formulating its notions about the evil eye. This fact in itself is not surprising. What is interesting in this regard, are the innovations the Zohar made to fit this belief into its sefirotic cosmological theology.<sup>51</sup>

Due to the vast amount of relevant rabbinic sources, those cited in the last section were chosen to express the overall evolution of the belief in the evil eye. The cited passages were not necessarily those in which the Zohar chose to root its mystical innovations. Though there will be some overlap, due to the way the Zohar transformed prior tradition, it is impossible to structure the following sections based upon the concepts already extrapolated. However, one of the core similarities between the zoharic perception of the evil eye and those that preceded the Zohar is its association with of greed.

### *Greed in the Zohar*

The association of greed with the evil eye found in the Hebrew Bible and early rabbinic literature carried over to the Zohar. This fact expressed by the following reference:

Nebuchadnezzar, even though he had that dream, the entire time that he was merciful to the poor, his dream did not come to pass, since the evil eye came upon him, which stopped him from being charitable to the poor, what is written [in his regard] "While the word

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<sup>51</sup>For an overview of Zoharic sefirotic cosmology, see Arthur Green, *A Guide to the Zohar*, pp. 28-62 and Isaiah Tishby, *Wisdom of the Zohar*, Vol. I, pp. 269-290.

was in the king's mouth, a voice fell from heaven,  
saying, O king Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken;  
"The kingdom is departed from you."<sup>52</sup>

This reference is significant since it gives an example of a person who possessed the evil eye and associates it with a particular form of behavior. Though neither the proverbial nor deuteronomic verses are quoted, the moral qualities of the evil eye are consistent with much of what preceeded the Zohar.

The notion of greed being one of the main qualities of the evil eye is the basis for another passage. The difference here is that the greed is not between man and his fellow but man and the spirit realm:

The one who sits in this shade [the sukkah] of faith and summons these supernal guests, the guests of faith, and does not give them their part, they all depart from him and they say "do not eat of the bread of the evil eye" for it is found that the table the man set was his, and not God's.<sup>53</sup>

Here the term for the evil eye differs from most references in this thesis, but the meaning is the same, a fact that is clearly expressed by the moral implications of this passage. Rather than *aina bishah*, the term used is *zar ayin*, like a "harmful" or "narrow eye".<sup>54</sup> This passage is another example of the evil eye's association with greed. This notion is further validated by the phrase "any man of the evil eye regarding the poor it is fitting that he should not live . . . nor does he have life in the world to come".<sup>55</sup> Here, the Zohar takes the association between greed and the evil eye but applies it to a situation that is completely alien in earlier contexts. Not only does the evil eye come from stinginess between man and his fellow but also between man and the supernatural.

Esau's evil eye is also found in the Zohar, with the destructive quality, his

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<sup>52</sup>Zohar I 13b, all zoharic translations were done by the author unless otherwise specified. The verse quoted is from Daniel 4:48.

<sup>53</sup>Zohar III 104a.

<sup>54</sup>For more information regarding the evolution of this term, see Rivka Ulmer, *The Evil Eye in the Bible and Rabbinic Judaism*, p. 5.

<sup>55</sup>Zohar I 109a.



level of jealousy and his adulterous intentions articulated. Two of the more prominent passages that show this relationship are as follows:

"And Esau came from *zido*, (his side).<sup>56</sup> From *hazad*, (the side) is not written but *mizido*, for this is from his side which has no blessing, the holy spirit exclaims and says "Do not eat the bread of the evil eye."<sup>57</sup>

Rabbi Shimon opened, "And he lifted his eyes and saw the women and the children and said, 'Who are these with you' and he said 'The children with whom God has graced your servant'."<sup>58</sup> Come and see that wicked Esau gave his eyes to look at the women, and because of this Jacob made preparations and put his maidservants at the front and his children behind them for they are more [important]. And Leah behind them and her sons after her. After them was Joseph and behind him was Rachel. . . . Joseph was a good son, merciful, a righteous man of the world. Since Joseph saw that the eyes of that evil man were looking at the women, he became worried about his mother, he came from behind her and spread his arms and body, covering her, so that the wicked man could not put his eyes on her. How much did he cover her? For six cubits on each side and he covered her and the eye of that wicked man was not able to have power over her.<sup>59</sup>

Here we are shown that the evil eye was something that Esau possessed, and whether he purposely wished to put an evil eye on the women, or because he was one who was destined to have the evil eye, he could not help but inadvertently bring damage upon the women by looking at them.<sup>60</sup> We also see this force was perceived to have been in the mind of Joseph, for he wished to protect his mother from the evil glance of Esau. The authors of the Zohar were most definitely familiar with prior tradition regarding this interaction between Esau and Jacob.<sup>61</sup> Evoking this passage and weaving their mystical paradigm into the already existing tradition, Jacob and

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<sup>56</sup>Genesis 27:30.

<sup>57</sup>Zohar I 144a. For the second verse quoted in this passage, see note 10 of this thesis.

<sup>58</sup>Genesis 33:5.

<sup>59</sup>Zohar III 202b. There is a parallels passage in Zohar I 175a, both of which are based on Bereshit Rabbah 78:10, where the evil eye is neither mentioned nor implied.

<sup>60</sup>See note 83 for the notion of a person destined to have the evil eye.

<sup>61</sup>See note 59 of this thesis.

Joseph's actions are re-read as a response to the evil eye.

As was shown by the prior passages, the evil eye was perceived as a force that begins to permeate a person once he becomes greedy and envious.<sup>62</sup> There is no doubt a sexual nuance in the passage that speaks of Esau. Being that he was a man endowed with the evil eye, lusting after the women in his brother's camp, he would most definitely have been perceived as a threat. Like much of the rabbinic lore, the evil eye depicted here consisted of one looking upon what rightfully belonged to someone else. Being that Esau is associated with the *Sitra ahra*, there is little wonder why the Zohar also interprets his gaze as the evil eye.<sup>63</sup> This sort of greed happens to be sexual. Lusting after someone who is committed to someone else is further demonstrated to be equated with the evil eye by the statement, "the man who runs after debauchery of his fellow's wife, the husband of the adulteress causes mischief with the left eye without a word and all is completed."<sup>64</sup>

Contact with a wicked individual is not the only way the zoharic authors believed one could come under the gaze of the evil eye. There are also acts that can evoke its destructive qualities:

Rabbi Isaac asked Rabbi Shimon, "It has been established that blessing does not reside in anything that has been counted . . . so why do we find all of these accounts of what was used to make the tabernacle?" He answered, "This has been said, but any place where the side of holiness rests, if the account came from the side of holiness, blessing does reside upon it . . . but all other forms of counting in the world that are not from the side of holiness, blessing does not reside upon them, because of the other side, which is the evil eye."<sup>65</sup>

All forms of counting items, taking a census or counting wealth were deemed to be

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<sup>62</sup>This notion is actually clearly articulated in a passage dealing with Balaam in Talmud Bavli Sotah, 9b. Though it does not mention the evil eye, the moral qualities are synonymous.

<sup>63</sup>For more information on the concept of evil and the *Sitra achra* see the section of this these titled, "Structure of the Left and Right Sides".

<sup>64</sup>Zohar II 78a.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid II 225a.

dangerous for they might arouse the evil eye. This concept is noted and questioned in another passage:

Rabbi Abba said, "We have learned, 'that everywhere that the side of holiness resides, even when someone numbers, blessing will not cease' . . . behold, Israel is holy and comes from the side of holiness . . . therefore, why when David took a census of the Israelites did it cause death?"<sup>66</sup>

The reference inferred in these two proceeding passages, "It has been established" and "We have learned", may be a direct reference to a talmudic tradition that states, "blessing is not to be found in anything that has been already weighed or measured or numbered, but only in a thing hidden from sight".<sup>67</sup> Here we see the Zohar building upon this earlier rabbinic "superstition" and adding its own mystical twist to the belief.

Though the evil eye is not explicitly labeled as the cause of danger in any of the three preceding passages, it is most definitely implied. The fact that the authors were alluding to the evil eye is demonstrated by another zoharic passage concerning counting:

"Who can count the dust of Jacob and the number of the progeny of Israel?"<sup>68</sup> There are two indeed who did count these without the evil eye having any effect on them.<sup>69</sup>

Here we see that the cause of death from David's census was most definitely considered to be the evil eye. The first passage gives an interesting explanation, saying that David did not redeem the children of Israel with money, and since holiness most definitely is infinite and therefore should not be counted, that is why death came.<sup>70</sup> The second passage openly labels the evil eye as the reason for the prohibition of counting people.

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<sup>66</sup>Ibid.

<sup>67</sup>Talmud Bavli Ta'anit, 8b.

<sup>68</sup>Numbers 33:10.

<sup>69</sup>Zohar II 105a-b, translation taken from the Soncino Zohar.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid 225a.

## Retention and Innovation

### *Retention*

So far, all the accounts of the evil eye in the Zohar are consistent and apparently taken from prior literature. This reliance upon earlier tradition continues throughout the Zohar.

According to an anonymous rabbinic tradition quoted by the Zohar, there are eleven transgressions which can bring about the plague.<sup>71</sup> This teaching actually does exist with a few variations in earlier rabbinic tradition.<sup>72</sup> In the talmudic source, one of the terms for the evil eye is *zarot ayin*, which could mean the “damaging”, “narrow” or “leprous eye”.<sup>73</sup> According to the medieval commentator Rashi, this evil eye comes from “someone who places his evil eye on others and does not let them borrow his utensils”.<sup>74</sup>

One of the more common themes of the evil eye in the Zohar is its relationship to the side of evil. This fact may seem so simple that it does not require articulation, but the way in which this works out in the Zohar’s sefirotic paradigm is quite important. In order to properly understand this relationship, we must proceed with a few words of explanation about the nature of evil in zoharic theology.

### *Structure of the Left and Right Sides*

According to the Zohar, there are ten ways in which God manifests himself in phenomenal reality. These divine manifestations are referred to by a number of terms

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<sup>71</sup>Zohar III 206a.

<sup>72</sup>Bamidbar Rabbah 7:5; Vayikra Rabba 17, Tanhuma Metzora 4:11, and 10:11. A parallel passage is located in Talmud Bavli Erchin, 16a, where the number is actually seven.

<sup>73</sup>For more information regarding the association in rabbinic literature between the evil and leprosy, see Rivka Ulmer, *The Evil Eye in the Bible and Rabbinic Literature* p. 27.

<sup>74</sup>Rashi on Bavli Erchin, 16a.

such as "levels", "crowns", or "knots".<sup>75</sup> Throughout this thesis I will refer to these emanations as *sefirot*. This term, though almost entirely absent from the Zohar, is the most common term in Kabbalah for these concepts. The zoharic view of the *sefirot* defines them as representations of the internal essence of the divine. Thus, the *sefirot* were named according to the different manifestations of God's perceived personality. God's love is often labeled *Hesed*, while his wrath was labeled as *Din* or *Geburah*. The dichotomy between these two *sefirot* comes to represent the struggles between good and evil, pain and pleasure, depression and elation that are experienced here on earth. These human experiences were projected onto the divine reality in an effort to make sense of the universe according to the context in which the mystics lived.

The two *sefirot* mentioned above were viewed as the ultimate archetypes for the powers of good and evil. *Hesed*, on the right side of the layout of the Tree of Life, represents all forms of God's positive qualities. *Din*, is located on the left side and is a symbol for all negative and destructive forces in the universe. Reverberating this structure are the zoharic terms, *Sitrah d'smola*, which literally means "the side of the left" and *Sitra d'yamina*, or "the side of the right". The former is used throughout the Zohar to represent the realm of evil while the latter refers to the side of holiness.

Since all of creation is viewed as an extension of the divine, this divine dualism is read into all of reality.<sup>76</sup> South and north, day and night, silver and gold, the Tree of Knowledge and the Tree of life as well as Israel and the other nations of the world, are just a few pairs believed to be mundane manifestations of the supernal duality. These terms, as well as others, are used throughout the Zohar as code words for the powers of good and evil.

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<sup>75</sup>Isaiah Tishby, *Wisdom of the Zohar*, Vol. II, p. 450.

<sup>76</sup>For more information about the Kabbalah's pantheistic and panentheistic views as well as the debate over which of these two is a proper representation of Kabbalistic theology, see Gershom Scholem, *Kabbalah*, pp. 144-152.

The problem all monotheistic traditions have faced concerning the existence of evil is rooted in a belief in the singular and righteous nature of God. If God is both all good and all-powerful, then how is it possible for evil to exist? The mystical cosmology constructed by the Zohar is a definite attempt to reconcile this contradiction.

Zoharic cosmology employs a dualism that has many similarities to various sects of ancient Gnosticism.<sup>77</sup> This Gnostic-like dualism is expressed through the zoharic struggle between the right and left sides of the *sefirot*.

### *Innovation*

The fact that the evil eye is by definition associated with negativity is reflected by the following passage:

*Habdalah* on *mozei shabbat* distinguishes those forces that have power during the week and those that have power on the Sabbath.<sup>78</sup> When the Sabbath is over, there is one side from the evil eye that goes forth from purgatory with the desire to have power . . . And it goes from that level which is called the left, *Sheol* and wishes to mix among the seed of Israel and to have power over Israel.<sup>79</sup>

The underworld, known as *gehinnom*, which I have translated as "purgatory", is course considered by the Zohar to be part of the *Sitra ahra*, which literally means "the other side", and is synonymous with the term *Sitra d'smola*. While offering a glimpse into the cosmological nature of the evil eye, this passage keeps its exact identity rather vague. Here, the evil eye is depicted as some sort of malevolent force that arises from the underworld. Its identification with the side of evil is clearly expressed by the

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<sup>77</sup>Joseph Dan, *Samael, Lillith, and the Concept of Evil in Early Kabbalah*, p. 18. Also see note 6 of this thesis.

<sup>78</sup>*Habdalah*, is the Jewish ceremony performed on Saturday nights to commemorate the transition between the Sabbath and the rest of the week. For an example of this ceremony, see, *The Complete Artscroll Siddur Nusach Sefard*, pp 654-656.

<sup>79</sup>Zohar I 17b.

phrase, "and it goes from that level which is called the left, *Sheol*".

There is a further and more definitive relationship between the other side and the evil eye. This is articulated by Rabbi Shimon when he says "the other side, which is the evil eye".<sup>80</sup> The words used for both the evil eye and the other side in this passage are the common terms used throughout the Zohar for these concepts. The Aramaic phrase, "*d'ihu qina bisha*", translated as, "which is the evil eye", is a definition of sorts that equates the evil eye and the realm of evil as one and the same. According to this, the evil eye is not necessarily a specific force that comes from the evil side but is, in fact, the evil side incarnate.

The perceived intention of this evil eye is "to mix among the seed of Israel and have power over Israel". This shows the evil eye to be an extension of the realm of evil, intent on contaminating and ruling the nation of Israel. Relating this to the fact that Israel is seen to be a representation of the side of holiness, the fact that the evil eye attempts to have power over Israel articulates the cosmic struggle between the two kabbalistic sides. Having power over Israel, in other words, represents the triumph of evil and subversion of holiness. The "mixing among the seed of Israel", also represents the zoharic concept of sin.

There are two definitions of sin, within which all transgressions are included. These are: the separation of that which was meant to be unified and the unification of that which was meant to be separate.<sup>81</sup> The ritual of *Habdal*ah, was viewed as an articulation of the founding principle of the latter form of sin. "He who separates between holiness and the mundane . . . between Israel and the nations . . .", implies that if one were to mix evil with holiness or Jewish seed with gentile or anything

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<sup>80</sup>See note 65 of this thesis.

<sup>81</sup>Gershom Scholem, *Kabbalah* page 124. There, he articulates that all forms of sin, save for sorcery and magic, involve the former, while prohibited theurgy is the only sin that involves the latter. For a more in-depth explanation of the Zoharic perception of sin and its origins, see Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, pp. 230-235.

considered unfit for unification, his actions would be considered an attack on the very fabric of nature.<sup>82</sup> Therefore, this intent of the evil eye to mix with the seed of Israel is an attempt at unifying that which is meant to be separate. This shows the evil eye as a direct projection of the overall mission of the other side. This intention corroborates the equation of the evil eye with the side of evil. Since the evil side is defined as the evil eye, their aims would have to be one and the same.

A reference to the evil eye that depicts its more mundane destructive qualities is found in a discussion concerning the high priests duties on the Day of Atonement:

A person who is dedicated to this . . . is one of a spirit of destruction, that wherever this person would touch would die . . . In Syria there was a man that wherever he looked, even if [he meant it] beneficially, everything would be turned over to evil. One day there was a man who was walking in the market place with a radiant face. That one man came and looked at him and he was killed by his eyes. Because of this there are people predestined for this and those predestined for that.<sup>83</sup>

Here not only do we have a description of the evil eye but also an account of the destruction that emanated from an average person who was contaminated by this force. The passage concerning *Habdalah* showed this force to be some sort of hellish energy that rises from the depths of the other side. Here however, we are shown that it is a force that can come not only from the depths of purgatory, but can emanate from a human being. This passage is distinct in its portrayal of the evil eye as an innate, predestined force that an individual may have no control over.<sup>84</sup> "Even if [he meant it] beneficially. . ." shows that although a person may mean well it matters not, for "everything would be turned over to evil". Such a person is shown to have no choice over how he effects the world. The phrase, "There are those predestined to

<sup>82</sup>Rendering of Hebrew from the *Habdalah* service. The complete sentence is, "Blessed art thou Lord our God who separates between the holy and the mundane, between light and darkness, between Israel and the nations, between the seventh day and the six days of work."

<sup>83</sup>Zohar III 63b.

<sup>84</sup>This notion is mentioned by Joshua Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition*, p. 198.



this and those predestined to that", means that a person's gaze is inherently either beneficial or destructive. Thus, having the evil eye does not necessarily have to do with the character of an individual.<sup>85</sup>

The destructive properties of the evil eye are personified as a sort of angel in another passage:

For it behooves an individual to not make oneself visible to the destroying angel . . . for whoever makes himself known before him, he has the right to destroy them. And this is as Rabbi Shimon said, "Every man that has the evil eye is one who the destructive angels dwell in him, and he is called the destroyer of the world".<sup>86</sup>

This passage and those that preceded, show a close relationship between the evil eye and the underworld. This is achieved by both its association with purgatory and the destructive forces it is shown to have. Here, in this second passage, it is also identified with a specific supernatural being in charge of destruction. This section is found in the Zohar's commentary to Parshat Noach.<sup>87</sup> This angel is said to have been the destructive force which carried out the killing that took place when the world was submerged under water.<sup>88</sup> This demonstrates that the Zohar correlated the evil eye with the forces that cause death.

### *Extrapolation*

The imagery of the main body of the Zohar is a code of sorts, where each symbol consistently refers to a mystical concept.<sup>89</sup> So cataloging and investigating

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<sup>85</sup>The term *jettatori* is an Italian term for men born with an evil eye as is noted by Joshua Trachtenberg in, *Jewish Magic and Superstition* page 54. This demonstrates that the belief in a predestined evil eye exists outside of the Zohar and Judaism as a whole.

<sup>86</sup>Zohar I 68b.

<sup>87</sup>Ibid 118b-152b.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid 68b.

<sup>89</sup>Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* p. 176, second paragraph. Moshe Idel's work, *Absorbing Perfections; Kabbalah and Interpretation*, is a new excellent resource for understanding

each time a certain term is used renders a clearer conception of what the authors were alluding to.

The destroying angel spoken of in the preceding passage is equated with *mhevla d'alma*, the destroyer of the world. In another passage, this *mhevla d'alma* is also equated with the *havya bisha*, or the "evil serpent".<sup>90</sup> This evil serpent itself is said to be the angel of death.<sup>91</sup> The rabbinic idea that the vast majority of people die from the evil eye already associated it with the forces of death or maybe even the angel of death itself. By tracing the points where these symbols overlap, shows that the Zohar shared the rabbinical view that "ninety nine out of a hundred people die from an evil eye."<sup>92</sup>

The proverbial verses that speak of the evil eye are utilized by the Zohar in its exegesis and discussion thereof. The association with greed is not absent from the Zohar's belief, though parts of its interpretation of the verse were innovative and contain an overlapping symbolism concerning the evil Tree. Thus:

Rabbi Hiyya opened, "Do not eat the bread [of a man] of the evil eye nor should you desire his delicacies".<sup>93</sup>  
"Do not eat the bread of the evil eye" since the bread or benefit [derived] from a man of the evil eye is not fit to eat or benefit from.<sup>94</sup>

Here we see not only the Zohar's utilization of the verse, but an interpretation based on a very literal reading of the text. The words "do not eat the bread of the man who has an evil eye" as I have translated them, are rendered by the Zohar as "do not eat the bread of the evil eye", meaning that the bread itself is some distinct entity. This bread is shown to have been a receptacle of sorts for the force of the evil eye. This parsing

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Kabbalistic symbolism. On p. 311, Idel speaks of the post-Zoharic literature that arose in an attempt to decode her symbolism.

<sup>90</sup>Zohar I 70b.

<sup>91</sup>Ibid II 248b.

<sup>92</sup>The relationship between the destructive capabilities of the evil eye and a harmful angels, is noted by Joshua Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition*, p. 56.

<sup>93</sup>Proverbs 23:6

<sup>94</sup>Zohar II 3a.

is interesting for it does not contradict the plain meaning of the text grammatically but does add a level of nuance that is not necessary. As a matter of fact, the Zohar's reading of the verse is much closer to the original. Both Targum Onkelos and Yonatan on this verse insert the word *geber*, which I have included in the above translation as "of a man", but the verse's literal rendering is actually how the Zohar reads it.

This "bread of the evil eye" is transformed by the Zohar into a tangible phenomenon. This bread itself is clearly defined as the passage continues:

For when the Jews were living in Egypt, if they had not tasted the bread of the Egyptians, they would not have been exiled and enslaved by the Egyptians . . . Rabbi Isaac said, "One who has a hearty appetite, who eats more than the rest of people, or one who goes after his belly if he arouses the evil eye, separate from him and do not eat of his bread for there is no bad bread in the world save for the bread of the evil eye. What is written [concerning this], 'the Egyptians would not eat of the bread of the Hebrews because it was disgusting to the Egyptians.'<sup>95</sup> behold, here you have the bread of the evil eye."<sup>96</sup>

Thus, according to the Zohar, this bread that the Jews ate in Egypt was considered to be bread of the evil eye. This equates the bread spoken of in Proverbs with the bread of the Egyptians. The negative potential of this bread was thought to be so powerful that it caused the Israelites to be enslaved. Their partaking in the profits of the evil eye was the crime they were punished for. This is consistent with the idea of the evil eye attempting to "have power over Israel." The Egyptians, who are identified as the experts of evil, were the rulers and oppressors of the Jewish nation. The suffering the Israelites endured by the hand of the Egyptians thus becomes another symbol for the cosmic struggle between the left and right sides of the Tree.<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>95</sup>Genesis 43:32.

<sup>96</sup>Zohar II 3a.

<sup>97</sup>Ibid I 83a states that Egypt probed the very depths of the *Sitra ahras*.

The association with the pursuit of overabundant wealth as depicted in the Book of Proverbs is kept intact by the Zohar here through the words, "one who has a hearty appetite and eats more than other people". This phrase is definitely an evocation of earlier depictions of the evil eye.

This bread in Egypt is further equated with the idea of leavening.

It is written "Do not make a molten god for yourselves" and after this is written "the holiday of *matzot* shall you keep".<sup>98</sup> What is this verse doing next to the other? But it has been established that one who eats leavening during passover is like one who became an apostate. Come and see, when Israel left Egypt, they left their domain, from the other domain, from the domain which is called leavening, bad bread.<sup>99</sup>

This bad bread was considered a physical manifestation of the evil eye since "there is no bad bread in the world save for the bread of the evil eye". Thus, it is equated with the bread the Israelites were prohibited from eating as they left bondage.

So far, it has been shown that the Zohar used earlier tradition when formulating its notion of the evil eye. The concepts discussed in the following sections are an attempt to understand what further innovations were made by her authors.

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<sup>98</sup>Exodus 34:17 and 18.

<sup>99</sup>Zohar II 182a.

## Sorcery

The fact that the evil eye can also be an intentional, negative theurgical undertaking is confirmed by the many rabbinic passages concerning the curse of Balaam.<sup>100</sup> The Zohar, which by its nature of being a mystical work, deals with sorcery and witchcraft, utilizes earlier notions of magic and directly builds upon them. However, not only were wicked individuals believed to perform this ritual. King David, who is one of the most celebrated biblical figures is said to have used the evil eye to smote his enemies.<sup>101</sup>

The passage which speaks about David's evil eye also contrasts the physical characteristics of his eyes with those of Balaam, most likely in an attempt to make a distinction between some sort of righteous evil eye and a wicked one.

And David looked at him with an evil eye and everywhere that he would look with an evil eye all forms of suffering would emanate from the eyes of David . . . and here with this Philistine since he cursed the name [of God], he [David] looked at him with an evil eye. The guilty and evil Balaam, his eyes were the opposite of the eyes of David. David's eyes were colored with all sorts of hues . . . but the eye that wicked man [Balaam] was completely an evil eye.<sup>102</sup>

This passage differs from all others in the fact that it portrays an individual whom the zoharic authors most definitely considered to be righteous casting the evil eye. In every other passage where a biblical figure is said to have the evil eye, the individual is one regarded as undoubtedly evil. In a way, this discrepancy changes the whole zoharic perception of the evil eye.

There are other nuances to the ritualistic casting of the evil eye found both

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<sup>100</sup>See notes 38 and 46 of this thesis.

<sup>101</sup>My research has lead me to a refusal of equating the harmful gaze of certain rabbinic figures with the evil eye, (see Rivka Ulmer, *The Evil Eye in the Bible and Rabbinic literature*, pp. 83-104), unless explicitly labeled as such.

<sup>102</sup>Zohar III 206a.

within the Zohar and earlier rabbinic literature. In a few places it states that the sorcerer must close one of his eyes and gaze upon the intended victim(s).<sup>103</sup> There are also certain times in the day when the evil eye is most vulnerable to arousal.

There is a passage in the Talmud that speaks of such a time. The evil eye is not articulated by name, but the curse of Balaam as well as a rabbinic attempt at a curse are mentioned. The passage begins:

It is written: "My face will go and I will give thee rest".<sup>104</sup> The Holy One, blessed be He, said to Moses: Wait till My countenance of wrath shall have passed away and then I shall give thee rest. But is anger then a mood of the Holy One, blessed be He? Yes. For it has been taught: A God that hath indignation every day. And how long does this indignation last? One moment. And how long is one moment? One fifty-eight thousand eight hundred and eighty-eighth part of an hour. And no creature has ever been able to fix precisely this moment except the wicked Balaam, of whom it is written: "He knew lofty knowledge".<sup>105</sup> Now, he did not even know the mind of his animal; how then could he know the mind of the Most High? The meaning is, therefore, only that he knew how to fix precisely this moment in which the Holy One, blessed be He, is angry . . . And this too is the meaning of what Balaam said to Balak: "How shall I curse, whom God hath not cursed? And how shall I execrate, whom the Lord hath not execrated?"<sup>106</sup> This teaches us that He was not angry all these days. And how long does His anger last? One moment. And how long is one moment? R. Abin and some say R. Abina says: "As long as it takes to say *rīgā*". And how do you know that He is angry one moment? For it is said: "For His anger is but for a moment, His favor is for a lifetime".<sup>107</sup> Or if you prefer you may infer it from the following verse: "Hide thyself for a little moment until the indignation passes over".<sup>108</sup> And when is He angry? Abaye says: "In those first three hours of the day, when the comb of the cock is white and it stands on one foot. Why, in each hour it stands thus . . . In each other hour it has red streaks,

<sup>103</sup>Ibid I 68b states that in order to cast the evil eye, Balaam lifted one eye and cast the other downward. *Nigzei Ha Zohar* commenting on this quotes the work, *Hasdei Azot*, where it evidently states that a sorcerer must close one of his eyes to cast the evil eye.

<sup>104</sup>Exodus 33:14.

<sup>105</sup>Numbers 24:17.

<sup>106</sup>Ibid 23:8.

<sup>107</sup>Psalms 30:6.

<sup>108</sup>Isaiah 24:20.

but in this moment it has no red streaks at all."<sup>109</sup>  
This passage continues, entering into the realm of sorcery and cosmology:

In the neighborhood of Rabbi Joshua ben Levi there was a Sadducee who used to annoy him very much with [his interpretations of] texts. One day the Rabbi took a cock, placed it between the legs of his bed and watched it. He thought: When this moment arrives I shall curse him. When the moment arrived he was dozing [On waking up]he said: "We learn from this that it is not proper to act in such a way. It is written: 'And His tender mercies are over all His works.'<sup>110</sup> And it is further written: 'Neither is it good for the righteous to punish.'<sup>111</sup> It was taught in the name of R. Meir: "At the time when the sun rises and all the kings of the East and West put their crowns upon their heads and bow down to the sun, the Holy One, blessed be He, becomes at once angry."<sup>112</sup>

Though the evil eye is not explicitly mentioned here, it is undoubtedly inferred by the reference to Balaam and his attempt to curse the Israelites. This is demonstrated by the vast number of rabbinic traditions that interpret the curse of Balaam as an intentional casting of the evil eye.<sup>113</sup> The fact that he is said to have utilized this specific time of wrath for his curse, shows that the theurgical application of casting the evil eye was associated with a specific time of day.

The kings of the east and west are spoken of in a further passage:

"A prayer of David . . . Keep my soul, for I am pious."<sup>114</sup>  
Levi and R. Isaac: The one says, "Thus spoke David before the Holy One, blessed be He: 'Master of the world, am I not pious? All the kings of the East and the West sleep to the third hour, but I, at midnight I rise to give thanks unto Thee.'" The other one says: "Thus spoke David before the Holy One, blessed be He: 'Master of the world, am I not pious? All the kings of the East and the West sit with all their pomp among their company, whereas my hands are soiled with the blood [of menstruation], with the fetus and the placenta, in order to declare a woman clean for her

<sup>109</sup>Talmud Bavli Berachot, 7a, translation is from the Soncino Talmud. There is a parallel passage on Azoda Zara, 4a and Sanhedrin, 105a.

<sup>110</sup>Psalms 145:9.

<sup>111</sup>Proverbs 17:26.

<sup>112</sup>Talmud Bavli Berachot, ibid, translation taken from the Soncino Talmud.

<sup>113</sup>Refer to note 100 of this thesis.

<sup>114</sup>Psalms 86:1-2.

husband."<sup>115</sup>

It is impossible to discern with any level of certainty how the zoharic authors would have read these passages. Determining this however, would lend a great deal of insight into how they reinterpreted prior rabbinic tradition in their zoharic exegesis. The only way to comprehend their understanding of these traditions, is to view how they were re-worked into the Zohar's system of sefirotic cosmology.

As already demonstrated, the zoharic authors utilized earlier rabbinic literature to gain insight and inspiration for their own biblical interpretations. The sections quoted above from the Talmud are a clear example of this reliance upon prior tradition. What is peculiar about these specific passages in terms of the Zohar, is the extent to which they were drawn upon. The authors of the Zohar utilized these passages so completely that they were almost paraphrased once mystically reinterpreted. This is demonstrated by the following text:

'Now,' continued R. Shimon, 'we must look more closely into this verse. We remark at once that another passage says: "All the nations are as nothing before him".<sup>116</sup> What special glorification is then here expressed? Is He only the King of the Gentiles and not the King of Israel? the explanation is this. We find in every place in the Scriptures that the Holy One, blessed be He, has desired to be glorified only by Israel and has attached His name to Israel only; so it is written: "The God of Israel", "the God of the Hebrews".<sup>117</sup> And further: "Thus saith the Lord, the King of Israel".<sup>118</sup> The nations of the world therefore said: We have another patron in heaven, since your King has dominion only over you alone and not over us. Hence the verse comes and says: "Who would not fear thee, O King of the Gentiles? For as much as among all the wise men of the nations".<sup>119</sup> This alludes to the great chiefs in heaven appointed over the Gentiles. The expression "and in all their royalty there is none like unto thee" alludes to the celestial government, inasmuch as there are four rulers on high who, by the will of God, rule over all the other

<sup>115</sup>Talmud Bavli Berachot, 4a, translation from Soncino Talmud.

<sup>116</sup>Isaiah 15:17.

<sup>117</sup>Exodus 5:1, 3.

<sup>118</sup>Isaiah 44:6.

<sup>119</sup>Jeremiah 10:7.



nations.<sup>120</sup> . . . The wise ones of the Gentiles" are, then, the heavenly superintendents from whom they draw their wisdom; and the phrase "and in all their royalty" implies the heavenly over-lords of the nations, as has just been explained. This is the plain meaning of the passage. When the cock crows it is precisely midnight, and at that moment the Holy One, blessed be He, is to be found in company with the righteous in the Garden of Eden. It is therefore proper then to pronounce the benediction and study the Torah; but one may not pronounce the benediction with unclean hands. So, too, at any time that one rises up from his sleep. For whilst a man is asleep his soul departs from him and an impure spirit comes forth and settles on his hands and defiles them: hence one may not pronounce a blessing without first washing them . . . for whoever does not arouses the evil eye of Satan.<sup>121</sup>

The idea of the evil eye is further implicated in this passage by indicating its

moral characteristics:

Now we have been taught that whenever a banquet is given, the Accuser comes to spy out whether the owner has first dispensed charity and invited poor people to his house. If he finds that it is so, he departs without entering the house. But if not, he goes in and surveys the merry-making, and having taken note that no charity had been sent to the poor nor had any been invited to the feast, he ascends above and brings accusations against the owner.<sup>122</sup>

The fact that the authors of the Zohar were working from the above text is expressed by a number of points. The curse of Balaam, the rooster's relationship to this specific moment and the kings of the East and West, which the Zohar renders as the kings of the gentiles, are all contained within the span of two pages in both the Zohar and the Talmud. This talmudic passage, interestingly enough, is found in the middle of a nine page section in which Rabbi Shimon Bar Yohai, the mythical author of the Zohar, is quoted sixteen times.<sup>123</sup> All of this clearly indicates that this section of the

<sup>120</sup>Ibid.

<sup>121</sup>Zohar I 9b-10b, translation taken from the Soncino Zohar.

<sup>122</sup>Ibid I 10b, translation take from the Soncino Zohar.

<sup>123</sup>Talmud Bavli Berachot, 5a-14b. The parallel passage in Avodah Zara, (see note 134 of this thesis), is not in a similar context, but does have a single quote from Shimon Bar Yohai on the following folio. The passage from Sanhedrin is proceeded by such quotations, scattered sparsely throughout from 39b. On 103a, he is quoted twice. This I believe greatly increases the likelihood of the Zohar's authors' utilization of these texts.

Talmud was directly and intentionally used as a source of inspiration by the zoharic authors. The Zohar took the structure from the Gemara and weaved its own mystical discourse into it, tying it all into its cosmological paradigm.

The ritualistic casting of the evil eye, the talmudic passages quoted regarding the specific time of day and the curse of Balaam, were all linked by Nachmanadies in his commentary on Numbers 24:1-2 before the Zohar was ever written. It seems that the Zohar either built upon this comentary or was transcribing an oral tradition that existed amongst kabbalistic circles in the Middle Ages that believed in the relationship between this specific moment and the casting of the evil eye by Balaam. The Zohar's belief in this that specific moment and its relationship to the evil eye is confirmed in a zoharic reading of Numbers 22:6: "And now, please curse the people for me'. The (words) 'and now', imply that the hour when God is mad had come upon them, therefore Balak besought Balaam to do his duty".<sup>124</sup>

These traditions were transformed in various ways by the zoharic authors. The relationship between the rooster and the strike of midnight is changed from the color of its feathers to its crow.<sup>125</sup> This crow itself is elaborated upon throughout the Zohar. The exact cosmological process behind the crow of the rooster is explained in the following text:

"As the cloud is consumed and vanishes away, so he that goes down to *Sheol* shall come up no more".<sup>126</sup> At that moment a certain flash springs forth from the side of the North and strikes the four quarters of the world and comes down and alights between the wings of the cock, which is thereby awakened and begins to crow. But none are stirred save those truly pious ones who rise and remain awake and study the Torah, and then the Holy One, blessed be He, and all the righteous in the Garden of Eden listen to their voices, as it is written, "Thou that dwells in the gardens,

<sup>124</sup>Zohar III 198a, translation taken from the Soncino Zohar.

<sup>125</sup>For an interesting discussion concerning the development of the rooster and its relationship to the evil eye, see Joshua Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition*, pp 211-214.

<sup>126</sup>Job 7:9.

the companions hearken for thy voice, cause me to hear it".<sup>127</sup>

The specific time when God is angry is further linked to the crow of a rooster at midnight in another passage:

We have learned that on the dread day when a man's time comes to depart from the world, four quarters of the world indict him, and punishments rise up from all four quarters, and four elements fall to quarreling and seek to depart each to its own side. Then a herald goes forth and makes proclamation, which is heard in two hundred and seventy worlds. If the man is worthy, all the worlds welcome him with joy, but if not, alas for that man and his portion! We have learned that when the herald makes proclamation, a flame goes forth from the North and passes through the stream of fire, and divides itself to the four quarters of the world to burn the souls of sinners. It then goes forth and flies up and down till it alights between the wings of a black cock. The cock then flaps its wings and cries out at the threshold of the gate. The first time it cries: "Behold, the day cometh burning like a furnace . . .".<sup>128</sup> The second time it cries: "For lo, he that forms the mountains and creates the wind and declares unto man what is his thought".<sup>129</sup> That is the time when a man's deeds testify against him and he acknowledges them. The third time is when they come to remove his soul from him and the cock cries: "Who would not fear thee, King of the nations? For to thee doth it appertain . . .".<sup>130</sup> Said R. Jose: 'Why must it be a black cock?' R. Judah replied: 'Whatever the Almighty does has a mystic significance. We have learned that chastisement does not fall save upon a place which is akin to it. Now black is the symbol of the side of *Din*, and therefore when the flame goes forth, it strikes the wings of a black cock, as being the most appropriate.'<sup>131</sup>

The reason for the blackness of the chicken may have its roots in earlier tradition that the authors were taking into account. The Talmud gives specific parameters regarding the sale of a white fowl to a gentile, for that was the particular color that was preferred for idolatrous sacrifices.<sup>132</sup> Being that King David and a rabbinical figure are both shown to have utilized some form of the evil eye, it would be logical

<sup>127</sup>Zohar I 77b. The latter verse quoted is from II Samuel 8:13.

<sup>128</sup>Malachi 3:19.

<sup>129</sup>Amos 4:13.

<sup>130</sup>Jeremiah 10:7.

<sup>131</sup>Zohar I 218b, translation is from the Soncino Zohar.

<sup>132</sup>Talmud Bavli Avodah Zarah, 14a.

that an explicit zoharic magical recipe would contain elements intended to separate it from known pagan practices. The authors seem to have been very skilled at keeping themselves within the tradition they were intent on innovating.

The cries of the rooster are further elaborated upon in another section:

After midnight a flame of the pillar of Isaac goes out and pierces in this rooster that is called *Geber*.<sup>133</sup> Similarly to the other *Geber* on high. Since it has pierced this *Geber* it calls out and gives six voices and all of it is on our account. At the hour when it calls, all the roosters of the world call out and another flame goes out from them and it rests under their wings and it calls. What does it call? In the first hour . . . In the eighth hour it calls "The voice of God".<sup>134</sup>

The cosmological map continues, stating that after these eight crows, the rooster then exclaims what has been written in the book of judgment concerning man.<sup>135</sup>

In Midrash *Tanhuma*, the rooster is further implicated in the mischief of Balaam.

"And he [caused] the nation to sacrifice to idolatry".<sup>136</sup> Meaning that they followed the advice of Balaam, as it is written, "They, behold, were to the children of Israel."<sup>137</sup> . . . He [Balaam] said, "We are all the children of one man, the children of *Terah*, the father of Abraham."<sup>138</sup> And you do not wish to eat from our sacrifices and from our cooked food? Behold, you have calves and chickens and we slaughtered them according to your laws [of *kashrut*] and you will eat. Then they began to drink the wine and the *Satan* was aroused in it . . . And some say that Balaam commanded them to abstain from wine so that their drinking of [idolatrous] wine would be an intentional sin, [and therefore more heinous]. . . And he sacrificed a rooster to *Peor* and ate with them . . . Rabbi Levi said, "This was worse than the [golden] calf . . . when three

<sup>133</sup>The authors are making a play on the similarity between the Hebrew for rooster, *Gever* and the Aramaic for man *Gavra*, which is also found in *Vayikrah Rabbah* 5:5 in a context outside the scope of this thesis. For more information, see Joshua Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition*, p. 164.

<sup>134</sup>Zohar III 171b. Last verse quoted is from Psalms 29:30.

<sup>135</sup>Ibid III 172a. Mirrors the above passage referred to in note 131 of this thesis.

<sup>136</sup>Numbers 25:2.

<sup>137</sup>Ibid 31:17.

<sup>138</sup>On Zohar I 133ab it says that Balaam was a descendant of Abraham's concubines, which are called "the children of the East", and are expert sorcerers. An interesting zoharic teaching based upon similar passages.

thousand transgressed, and here [with *Baal Peor*] twenty-four thousand [transgressed].<sup>139</sup>

This rooster crow is shown many times to be associated both with the moment God enters the garden of Eden and the moment of God's wrath. The Zohar articulates these notions when it says "a flame goes forth from the North and passes through the stream of fire . . . and flies up and down till it alights between the wings of a black cock".<sup>140</sup> As has been demonstrated by the midrashic and talmudic passages quoted, there was precedence for associating the rooster with the moment of God's anger and the mischief of Balaam.

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<sup>139</sup>Midrash Tanhuma Buber Balak:27.

<sup>140</sup>For reference refer to note 131 of this thesis.

## Special Moment

There are persons who are predestined for curses to be fulfilled through their hands and everywhere they send their hands there are curses and . . . a person who is an example of those is Balaam the wicked who is called "evil eye" for he was predestined for every kind of bad and not predestined for good. And even though he blessed, his blessing did not last. And when he cursed all his curses would be fulfilled even *b'riga hada*, (in a split second).<sup>141</sup>

In this passage Balaam is once again named as a person who had the evil eye. One of the more interesting points in this passage is the Zohar's use of the term *riga hada*. Literally the translation would be "one moment" or more evocatively "a split second". The phrase seems to have been viewed by the Zohar as a designated term for a specific magical concept, that of the arousal of the evil eye.

According to the Talmud, as has been shown, there are specific times when the different attributes of God are aroused. The night itself is separated into three watches, each of which has its own attribute, which influences the cosmos at that time.<sup>142</sup> Just as a watch has a guard on duty fulfilling the hourly requirements of his shift, so too does this attribute of God have a certain time when it is "on duty".<sup>143</sup> To perform a theurgical application, it is vital that one do so during the time when the aspect of the divine that most closely represents the desired result of the application is the one on duty at that moment.

The term *riga hada*, as has been demonstrated by the passages cited in this section, is one of these such designations. It refers to a single second, "that no creation is able to calculate."<sup>144</sup> Another passage that mentions neither the evil eye nor *riga hada* by name gives further insight into their natures:

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<sup>141</sup>Zohar III 63b.

<sup>142</sup>Talmud Bavli Berachot, 3a.

<sup>143</sup>According to Zohar III 206b, the "lower crowns", have power during the first watch of the night.

<sup>144</sup>Talmud Bavli Berachot, 7a.

The sixth window which is called *Nagha*, (illumination), and one star goes into it, which is called *Gizron*, (decree).<sup>145</sup> For when it has power, the world stands in judgment with various decrees and various punishments and every day decrees are renewed on the world. . . . Similarly the seventh window is opened in the whole world and its star is the star of Jacob, and it is as Balaam said, "The way of the star from Jacob."<sup>146</sup> This star will shine a light for forty days.<sup>147</sup>

The context of this passage is a discourse on astrology. Different stars are shown to have inherent qualities that influence the world in distinct ways. The "windows" spoken of are specific coordinates in the sky. As the Earth rotates, if one were to gaze upon the night sky, it would appear as if the celestial bodies were "entering" these different points in the heavens.

Though the term *riga hada* is absent from this passage, it is definitely the topic of discourse. This is expressed by the phrase, "For when it has power, the world stands in judgment with various decrees and various punishments and every day decrees are renewed on the world." for "decrees" and "judgments" are terms used for the activity of the *Sitra ahra*. The fact that Balaam is mentioned in close proximity validates this idea. The moment of God's wrath is also located in this passage and is explained in astrological terms. All of this clearly indicates that the zoharic belief in the evil eye is the premise of this text.

The fact that *riga hada* was considered to be the ideal time to cast the evil eye is demonstrated by the zoharic equation of the evil eye with the Tree of Knowledge and its association with the time that evil issues into the world. Prior traditions which spoke of the relationship between the moment of God's wrath and the curse of Balaam did not elaborate on the cosmological mechanics of this negative theurgical ritual.

From the passages quoted, it is clear that the Zohar not only believed in the evil eye

<sup>145</sup>A mutation of the root *Gimel.Zayin.Reish*, of "to decree", which is often used by the Zohar to denote workings of the side of uncleanness.

<sup>146</sup>Numbers 24:17.

<sup>147</sup>Zohar II 172b.

and its specific time for casting but attempted to explain it in a tangible fashion.



## Exact Identity of the Sefirotic Evil Eye

There is a dualistic nature in the zoharic world view between the forces of holiness and the forces of uncleanness. Everything good that exists in this world is viewed to be a manifestation of the side of holiness while all forms of evil and suffering are said to be from the side of uncleanness. Since everything is viewed as a manifestation of God's presence, and according to the Zohar the *sefirot* are actual inner dimensions of God's essence, one is able to discern which portion of the godhead a phenomenon in this world originates by cataloging its negative or positive qualities. Thus, the *sefirot* become a system of cosmic organization in the Zohar. It is similar to a filing system for all of reality as is perceived by the human being.

With this fact, it is understandable that the superstition of the evil eye came to be viewed by the zoharic kabbalists as a manifestation of the forces of evil. As is demonstrated in the Zohar, the side of uncleanness is actually defined as the evil eye.

Since the zoharic authors viewed themselves as a reservoir for ancient and lost knowledge, they believed their paradigm was the kernel of truth throughout all of the shells of the Jewish tradition.<sup>148</sup> Being such, every negative preternatural force, according to their logic had to be part of the *Sitrah ahrah*.

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<sup>148</sup>This assertion is based upon Zohar III 152a, which is a well-known passage utilized by Gershom Scholem, (*Zohar the Book of Splendor* p.121), to illustrate the Zohar's perception of the Hebrew Bible.

## Cosmology

As will be demonstrated, the Zohar elevated the belief of the evil eye from the level of superstition to a sefirotic cosmological concept. As has already been shown, the biblical and rabbinic notions of greed and negative theurgy were also part of the zoharic belief in the evil eye. What is to be demonstrated in the next section however, is how the evil eye was incorporated into the sophisticated system of emanatory sefirotic Kabbalah.

In the Zohar, the evil eye was viewed not only as a malevolent force, but as one of the *parzufim* of the side of uncleanness.<sup>149</sup> This fact is apparent in a number of passages that describe the evil eye and its actions in a fashion very similar to how the coined names of the holy *parzufim* and their interactions are depicted.<sup>150</sup>

As has been shown through earlier scholarship, the Dog, the Snake, Samael, Lillith, the Donkey and the Ox are all images used to describe the essence and interaction of the levels of the Tree of Knowledge.<sup>151</sup> Samael and Lillith are an evil duo which mirror the *sefirot* of *Tiferet* and *Malcut*. Samael is shown to be the male aspect of the Tree of Knowledge with Lillith as his consort. Just as the Zohar depicts the emanatory process through the *parzufim* of the Tree of Life, so too does it depict the mechanics of left hand emanation through *parzufim* of the Tree of Knowledge.

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<sup>149</sup> *Partzufim* literally translates as "faces", are symbolic characters with differing personalities used by the Zohar to depict the workings of the divine. For more information, see Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, pp 268-271.

<sup>150</sup> I have concluded that the term, *dargin tatin*, literally translated as, "lower levels, throughout the main body of the Zohar, without exception, refers to the branches of the Tree of Knowledge. In the *Tikkunei HaZohar*, (for example *Tikkunei* 69, Zohar III 110b) this is not the case. The *Tikkunim*, as has been noted by Gershom Scholem, (*Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* pp. 156-204, especially p. 159), is believed to have been written by a different, later author than the main body of the Zohar. Due to this fact, its theology as well as symbolic use of metaphors, such as the eye, is peculiar unto itself. The span of which is too great to include in the body of this thesis.

<sup>151</sup> For more information, see Isiah Tishby, *Wisdom of the Zohar*, Vol. II, pp 461-470. For an account of the development of left hand symbolism and the characters of Samael and Lillith in particular, see, Joseph Dan, *Samael and the Problem of Jewish Gnosticism*, in "Perspectives on Jewish Thought and Mysticism" pp. 257-276.

Two interesting passages that give a layout of the Tree of Knowledge by portraying the negative *sefirot* and their *parzufim* are as follow:

As was said by Rabbi Isaac in the name of Rabbi Judah, "In these lower crowns, there is right and there is left. From the side of the right is the ass as has been established and from the side of the left is the donkey".<sup>152</sup>

The guardian of *Kenesset Yisrael*, (the community of Israel), warns against *Niddah*, (menstruation). The guardian of *Zadik*, "the righteous", warns against *Shifhah* "the maidservant".<sup>153</sup> The guardian of *Nezah* warns against *Bat Akum* (the foreign daughter). The guardian of *Hod* warns against *Zonah* (the whore). And concerning this is written "And to a woman in the uncleanness of *Niddah*, "do not come close to reveal her nakedness".<sup>154</sup> What is meant by "do not reveal her nakedness? This is *Kenesset Yisrael* and in this they are united and tied, other (negative) things that *Kenesset Yisrael* is tied to.<sup>155</sup> And we have established this matter. "And straight in the eyes you will do", this is *Zadik*, (the righteous), as is written, "The eyes of God are to the righteous".<sup>156</sup> To warn them of *Shifhah*, and thus is established the words. As is written, "And *Shifhah* when she inherits her man".<sup>157</sup> For she caused *Zadik* to be united with *Shifhah* . . . this is *Nezach* to warn that the imprint of *Bat El Naçar*, (the daughter of a strange god), will not enter it and not commit falsehood in *Nezah* . . . and . . . this is *Hod* to warn from *Zonah* . . . And the sword, this is *Yesod*.<sup>158</sup>

This paragraph not only gives the perceived *parzufim* of six of the lower *sefirot* but also depicts them as being in constant struggle with those on the side of holiness. The Snake as well as the Dog are *parzufim* for the level of the Tree of Knowledge that corresponds to *sefirat Yesod*. *Yezer Hara*, *Satan*, *Shifhah*, and Esau are also images used to describe the evil counterpart of *Yesod*. *Bat Akum*, is used to designate *Nezach HaRa*. *Zonah* is a term used for the negative *Hod*. As stated above, Lillith is one of

<sup>152</sup>Zohar III 207a.

<sup>153</sup>*Zadik* is a term used to denote *sefirat Yesod*, Arthur Green, *A Guide to the Zohar*, p. x.

<sup>154</sup>Leviticus 18:19.

<sup>155</sup>*Kenesset Israel* is a term used for *sefirat Malchut*. The Zohar here, is reading the prohibition of uncovering a menstrual woman's nakedness as a symbolic representation of contaminating the lowest rung of the divine. The metaphors being used here are highly sexual and express the zoharic notions of sin, (see note 81 of this thesis).

<sup>156</sup>Psalms 34:16.

<sup>157</sup>Proverbs 30:23.

<sup>158</sup>Zohar II 60b.

the *parzufim* for *Malcut* as is *Niddah*. *Hamor*, as in a "donkey", is a term used for the right column of the Tree of Knowledge. While another word for an ass, *Atun* is a term for the left column. These columns themselves are primordially represented as the *sefirot* *Hesed* and *Din*, so most likely these asses are *parzufim* for the corresponding negative levels of these two *sefirot*.

The duality of zoharic cosmology was not confined to its beliefs concerning the divine realm. Thus, the belief in sacred prophecy sanctioned by the realm of holiness was believed to have a counterpart that originated in the side of uncleanness.

### *Visions*

Eyes are inherently linked to the prophetic experience by the fact that many prophecies involve some sort of visual glimpse of the divine realm. Being thus, the eyes are also linked to visions in the Zohar. Due to its dualistic nature, there are valid visions which holy prophets behold and ones the wicked are able to attain. The reason for this was that any man who was uncircumcised was thought by the Zohar to be unfit for prophecy.<sup>159</sup> According to the Zohar, wicked visions are called, *m'haze shadai*, due to the fact that they stem from one of the connecting paths of *Yesod*.<sup>160</sup> The angels in charge of such wicked visions are called *Aza* and *Azael* and the angel in charge of good visions is labeled *Gadriah*.<sup>161</sup>

The sefirotic mechanics of prophecy are articulated in an interesting passage

<sup>159</sup>Elliott Wolfson, *Circle in the Square*, pp. 34-35, *Through a Speculum that Shines*, pp. 104-105 and 342.

<sup>160</sup>This term, *m'hazei shadai*, is actually used in midrashic literature, (Bamidbar Rabbah 14:19-20.) and by Nachmanadies on his commentary to Numbers 24:1-2, to denote the visionary experience of gentiles. *Yesod* is considered by the Zohar to be synonymous or related to the name *Shadai*. The Zoharic authors seemed to have been familiar with the teaching of Nachmanadies based upon the ways they utilize the term, and further innovate it into a more concrete sefirotic location.

<sup>161</sup>Zohar II 202a. For more information on the origin of *Aza* and *Azael*, see Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, p. 365.

discussing the occult knowledge of Balaam:

“And he knew lofty knowledge”.<sup>162</sup> [This refers to] the disgusting levels, these are the evil ones who steer the ships over the evil sea, they are forty minus one . . . “And he saw the *m̄hazei shadai*” this is one of the branches that go forth from *Shadai*.<sup>163</sup> And in this *Hocmah* where three branches are seen corresponding to *Shadai*, corresponding to the three branches that are there, and two prophets, the *b'dei aravot*, (side branches), that are founded there.<sup>164</sup> Corresponding to the seventy-two branches of the evil eye, to close them.<sup>165</sup>

The seventy-two letter name of God, which is holy, is shown here to have its counterpart on the side of uncleanness. The three branches that go forth from *Hocmah* of uncleanness are the *sefirot Hesed, Gebura* and *Tiferet*. Evidently, one of these branches contains the visions of *Aza* and *Azael*. The two prophets and *b'dei aravot* correspond to the *sefirot Netzah* and *Hod*. Thus, the workings of Balaam, comprised the entire side of evil, all seventy two branches of the Tree of Knowledge.

The latter half of the section quoted which spoke of Esau is also utilized in the Zohar to articulate its overall cosmological paradigm as well as to include the innovations it made to the Jewish perception of Balaam:

Similarly to this, “And Balaam lifted his eye . . .”.<sup>166</sup> It is written, his eye, [singular], which is that evil eye that wished to look upon them.<sup>167</sup> “And he saw Israel dwelling to their tribes.” What is meant by “sitting to their tribes”? Rather the tribe of Joseph was there and the tribe of Benjamin. The tribe of Benjamin that the evil eye has no power over . . . on me is the eye that the evil eye has no power over.<sup>168</sup>

<sup>162</sup>Numbers 24:16.

<sup>163</sup>Ibid ibid:4.

<sup>164</sup>The Zohar here is drawing a picture of part of the Tree of Knowledge. The holy name of God, *Shadai*, which means “almighty”, is a term used to connote *sefirot Yesod*, Joseph Gikatilla, *Sha'arei Or*, p. 101. The “three branches”, are three paths connecting *Yesod* to other *sefirot*.

<sup>165</sup>Zohar III 194a.

<sup>166</sup>Numbers 24:2.

<sup>167</sup>Ibid.

<sup>168</sup>Zohar III 203a, The commentary, *Derec Emet* on a parallel passage in Zohar I 68b, notes that the scrolls of the Torah today, actually refer to Balaam's eyes in the plural and speculates that the scrolls the Zoharic authors were working from must have been different then those today. The fact that Balaam was a “one eyed seer”, is stated by *Targum Yonatan* on this verse as is noted by the *Encyclopedia of Religion*, p.238.

The idea that the evil eye can be a negative form of theurgy is clearly demonstrated by this passage. As the discourse continues, the Zohar gives what was considered to be a contemporary example of one who is immune to the evil eye.<sup>169</sup> Rabbi Pinhas, one of the members of the mystical fellowship depicted in the Zohar, is said to be immune to the evil eye due to the protective force of the good eye. So the good eye found in prior tradition was also a belief held by the zoharic authors.<sup>170</sup>

The ways in which these passages and the concepts extrapolated from them shed light onto the Zohar's belief in the evil eye will be dealt with in the upcoming passages. To understand this however, it would be beneficial to examine the most likely counterpart to the evil eye on the side of holiness in order to then apply what can be said of its nature to the way the evil eye fits into the side of uncleanness.

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<sup>169</sup>Zohar III 203a.

<sup>170</sup>An observation thoroughly the section of this thesis titled *Good Eye*.

## Good Eye

Due to the Zohar's dualistic nature, for a complete and full understanding of the evil eye, it is necessary to look at its opposite, the good eye. The parallelism between the right and left sides in the Zohar is so complete, that by contemplating the *sefirot* of the *Sitra ahra* it is possible to gain knowledge and understanding of the divine sefirotic system.<sup>171</sup> Taking this into account, I theorize that the opposite must also be true, that by examining the divine *sefirot*, it is possible to gain insight into the nature of the evil ones.

Though there is no identification of what *sefirah* the evil eye represents on the side of uncleanness, the Zohar does say that the good eye corresponds to *Atik Yomin*.<sup>172</sup> The good eye being the corresponding concept to the evil eye is confirmed by the phrase, "Why did Joseph merit protection against the evil eye? For he merited the protection of the good eye."<sup>173</sup> Due to the identical structures shared by the Tree of Life and The tree of Knowledge, since the highest of all positive *sefirot* is openly referred to as the good eye, it may be extrapolated that the evil eye was thought to reside at the very top of the unholy hierarchy.

The mirroring structures of the Tree of Life and The tree of Knowledge are not the only echoes of dualism in the Zohar. The moral implications of both the good eye and the evil eye are also expressed. As has already been shown, the Zohar, building upon prior tradition, associated the evil eye with greed. In a similar fashion, the good

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<sup>171</sup>Isaiah Tishby, *Wisdom of the Zohar*, Vol. II, page 451.

<sup>172</sup>Zohar III 129b-130a.

<sup>173</sup>Ibid II 130a. A teaching loosely based on a rabbinical interpretation of Genesis 49:22 found in Genesis Rabbah, 78:10, 98:18, 99:12 and a large number of other texts beyond the scope of this thesis. This very interpretation is found in Zohar I: 175a, 246b, 257a, II: 135b, III: 187b, 202b, (where it is used as a proof text for Joseph's immunity to the evil eye) and Idra Rabba 130a (in a discourse concerning the single eye of *Atik Yomin* and the eyes *Zeir Anpin*).

eye was openly associated with unselfish generosity.<sup>174</sup> The theurgical capabilities of these opposing eyes were also set directly opposite one another. As has already been shown, the mundane consequences of the evil eye are all some form of death or destruction. The good eye, as is expressed in a passage concerning Ruth, shows that its powers were those of life:

Rabbi Judah opened a verse in Ruth, "Your eyes in the field that they reap . . .".<sup>175</sup> . . . Boaz the judge of Israel saw the humility of this righteous woman for she did not look in any place save for straight ahead and everything she looked at was with a good eye. . . . He praised her eyes for there are eyes with no power of blessing, but she was with the good eye for he saw in her that whatever she beheld was with a good eye. And he saw that whatever was in her hand succeeded for the more she gleaned the more the field increased.<sup>176</sup>

According to this passage the benefit of the good eye is associated with life. Since Ruth was constantly looking, "straight ahead", her eyes were always on whatever area she was gleaning. Whenever she picked some vegetation, not only did what she take not diminish the amount of vegetation but actually increased it. Where the evil eye was associated with the forces of death the good eye seems to be endowed with the power to create and increase life.

Though the passage of Ruth does express how the authors of the Zohar believed the good eye could effect change upon reality, it does not openly link it to any specific theurgical application. This is accomplished however, through a passage that states: "It is a commandment is the priests to bless the nation everyday . . .when

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<sup>174</sup>Ibid II 198a. A teaching loosely based on a rabbinical interpretation of Proverbs 22:9, (refer to page 5 of this thesis), located in Talmud Bavli Sotah, 38b. There, the exegesis is delivered by Rabbi Yehoshua Ben Levi, who changes the meaning of the verse from, "A good eye shall be blessed . . ." to "A good eye shall bless . . ." to teach that only an individual with the good eye is allowed to make the traditional blessing over wine. The zoharic authors were evidently familiar with this tradition, for it is also found in Zohar III 187b. Elsewhere in the Zohar, (II 218a, III 147b and Idra Rabba 130a), the same exegesis is utilized to depict the emanation of *sefirat Keter*.

<sup>175</sup>Ruth 2:9.

<sup>176</sup>Zohar II 217b.



the priest blesses the people, they must put the right hand over the left and to delve into the good eye."<sup>177</sup> Much like Balaam, who wished to intentionally cast an evil eye on the Israelites, the priests who perform this blessing have the intent to cast a good eye on the people. This shows that the zoharic authors believed the priestly blessing to be a ritualistic channeling of the highest of all *sefirot*. Since every positive nuance of phenomenal reality was believed to have a negative mirror image, it would be most logical to conclude that the ritual casting of the evil eye was considered to channel the lowest of all the *sefirot* on the side of darkness.

Balaam, who is said to have had an evil eye, is paralleled to Moses, Moses is said to have been the most powerful of all theurgists who utilized the Tree of Life. Mirroring this, Balaam is said to have been the most powerful of all masters of the evil *sefirot*.<sup>178</sup> With the midrashic identification of Moses having been an individual with the good eye, this theory seems even more substantial.<sup>179</sup> The generous act of sharing the Torah with the Israelites is what spawned the midrashic equation of Moses with the good eye.

There is a very pertinent passage that discusses the inner nature of *Kefer* and how it interacts with this world as well as the other side:

At the time when God is aroused to interact with the righteous, the face of *Atik Yomin* is illuminated with the face of *Zeir Anpin*.<sup>180</sup> And his desire is revealed to its desire and hence it is called an "auspicious time". And every hour that judgment is hanging and this desire goes out in one hundred thousand reddest of reds that are united with it and collected in it . . . and every time that this eye is not open all the ministers of judgment attack Israel and the rest of the nations overpower them. And at the time that

<sup>177</sup>Ibid III 145a, (Raya Mehemna). This teaching may reflect the practice of inscribing the biblical verses, Numbers 6:24-27, which articulate the priestly blessing, upon amulets for protection against the evil eye. For more information see Joshua Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition*, p. 158.

<sup>178</sup>Zohar II 21b-22a.

<sup>179</sup>Rivka Ulmer, *The Evil Eye in the Bible and Rabbinic Literature*, p. 33.

<sup>180</sup>*Zeir Anpin* represents the middle six *sefirot*. For more information, see note 48 of this thesis.

the eye is open it is connected with the good eye and there is blessings on Israel and the eye is lit and takes vengeance upon the rest of the nations . . . and when one looks into the good eye . . . the seven eyes of supervision are revealed.<sup>181</sup>

The qualities spoken of concerning *Atik Yomin*, though it is not explicitly stated, seem to be the subversion of the powers of the evil eye. Similar to the moment when the evil eye is aroused and wishes to wreak destruction, this passage shows there was a time when the good eye was aroused to defend holiness from its onslaught. The Jewish people and the rest of the nations of the world as already been stated were considered to be mundane manifestations of good and evil. The other nations overpower the Jews, in the zoharic mind, when there is an overabundance of evil in the supernatural realms.<sup>182</sup>

As noted, there was a rabbinic tradition that stated one must close one eye in order to cast the evil eye. The Zohar too picks up this idea. So when the eye of *Atik Yomin* is closed, or when a sorcerer closes one of their eyes, suffering falls upon the nation of Israel. This further demonstrates the parallelism as well as the connection between *Keter*, the good eye and evil eye.

### *Terminology*

The term most commonly used to describe the evil eye's power is a further expression of the relationship between *sefirat Keter* and the evil eye. The term, *sholet* in Hebrew or *shalta* in Aramaic, is a conjugated form of the root *shin.lamed.tet*, which means "to rule" or "have power".

The earliest use of this term in regards to an eye is in the Talmud.<sup>183</sup> The context of this passage is a discussion concerning the permissible distance between

<sup>181</sup>Zohar III 136b-137a, Idra Rabbah.

<sup>182</sup>Though this statement is most definitely true, it must be stated that the opposite is also true in Zoharic theology. When there is an overabundance of sin on the part of Israel in this world, the supernatural is flooded with evil.

<sup>183</sup>Talmud Bavli Eruvin, 3a and, Sukkah, 2a.

the roof of a *sukkah* and the ground. The reason given for the prescribed height is that it must be able to be seen by the eye, and anything above 20 cubits, "*lo shalit gina*", meaning "the eye cannot grasp". This reference has nothing to do with the evil eye whatsoever. Neither Rashi nor Tosafot, both of whom in various places do comment upon the evil eye, make any suggestion that this passage is speaking about that force. In the Gemara, this term is used very frequently to articulate the force of the evil eye. The belief in the evil eye in the Babylonian Talmud as well as midrashic literature was so widespread, much of the time the evil eye is merely called the eye.<sup>184</sup>

However, many times the phrase *gina shalta* is used in the Zohar, either in an affirmative or negative sense, defining things such as; times, places, degrees of reality as well as individuals and their association with or susceptibility to the forces of the evil eye. The term in the Zohar seems to always have the notion of some sort of power, usually pertaining to a positive or negative non-physical force. This term is used quite frequently in the depictions of the struggle between good and evil. There are certain places, times and spiritual notions where either the good or the bad side is *shalta*. This term is also frequently used to discuss power of the evil eye as well as other particular perceived supernatural phenomena. One of the more interesting passages that utilize this root is found in a passage concerning Noah. Noah went back into the ark once it had landed was to protect himself from the gaze of the evil eye.<sup>185</sup> According to the Zohar, the evil eye's powers could not penetrate the ark.

This term is also used repeatedly when describing *Atik Yomin*. Time and again the Zohar will state, "*lo shalta gina*," in reference to this divine attribute.<sup>186</sup> More often than not there is a nuance to the text, which is intended to articulate that the

<sup>184</sup>Rivka Ulmer, *The Evil Eye in the Bible and Rabbinic Literature*, pp. 4-5.

<sup>185</sup>Zohar I 68b

<sup>186</sup>Ibid II 176b.

highest level of the divine is absolutely imperceptible. This fact is indisputable. I do believe however, based upon the research conducted throughout this study, that there is another allusion being made by the text that often goes unnoticed. The concept being alluded to, is that though the evil eye is an extremely powerful force, it is no competition for the highest side of good. Another interesting passage relates that fish, which are immune to the evil eye, are able to behold *Atik Yomin*, for they have no eyelids.<sup>187</sup>

This is based upon the fact that the noun *Aina*, which means eye, and the verb *Shalta* are used in regards to one another in the same grammatical fashion numerous times. This fact is highlighted by the numerous similarities discussed until this point. The most definitive proof I believe for this hypothesis is that *Atik Yomin's* imperceptibility must be based upon the earlier rabbinic tradition utilized by the Zohar that states blessing can reside only on that which is hidden from the eye.

This is readily perceptible by the way the Zohar either follows these descriptions of *Aik Yomin* or precedes them with a discussion regarding the evil eye. The proximity of such passages, the Zohar's utilization of the term *aina bisha* to depict left hand emanation and the corresponding structures of the Tree of Knowledge and the Tree of Life, seem to further validate the cosmological parallel between the good eye and the evil eye. Thus, the sefirotic attribution of the evil eye appears to have a strong connection to the uttermost depths of uncleanness, the nemesis of *Atik Yomin*. This relationship might also be expressed by the way in which the evil eye seems to have been perceived as the totality of the evil side.

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<sup>187</sup>Ibid III (Idra Rabba) 129b. For an earlier rabbinic parallel see note 42 of this thesis.

## Findings

The equation of *Keter* with the good eye extrapolated earlier, may have its roots in the Testament of Solomon. This hypothesis is based on the Zohar's sefirotic vocabulary. One of the coined terms for the *sefirah* of *Keter* in the Zohar, is *Aric Anpin*, which itself is an Aramaic translation of *Erec Apayim*, which literally means "long" or "much suffering".<sup>188</sup>

The weakness of this theory is threefold. First, The original language of the pseudapegraphic work is thought to have been Greek.<sup>189</sup> This would make it highly unlikely for the zoharic authors to have utilized or to have even read.

The second factor that accentuates the unlikelihood of this scenario is also related to language. The manuscripts that would have been available to the authors would most likely have been written in Latin.<sup>190</sup> If this was the case, the probability of their having incorporated its contents into their mystical discourses is almost non-existent.

The final flaw in this theory is the lack of proof for the authors' use of the Testament of Solomon in any other instance. Though the parallelism between the Zohar's attribution of the evil eye's nemesis to a similarly named antidote to the evil eye in the Testament of Solomon is definitely noteworthy, the evidence to the contrary is much more substantial. There is a considerable amount of data however, which mandates further investigation into this possibility.

It has been concluded that the zoharic authors drew insight from non-canonical sacred scripture to facilitate their mystical innovations. The apocryphic work, The

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<sup>188</sup> Gershom Scholem, *Kabbalah*, p. 141.

<sup>189</sup> *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, edited by James H. Charlesworth, Volume I, pp. 939-940.

<sup>190</sup> A fact related by Dr. Tamara Eskenazi during a private conversation on this issue.

Alphabet of Ben Sirah, is known to have been a source of their inspiration.<sup>191</sup> This fact leaves room for further consideration of this question.

The references found throughout the Zohar to fictitious texts from antiquity is another phenomenon that makes this theory possible if not plausible. It has been suggested that when formulating their beliefs on magic, particularly of the dark persuasion, the authors looked outside of the Jewish tradition<sup>192</sup>. An example of this is a text on practical demonology titled the *Picatrix*.<sup>193</sup> Throughout the Zohar, there are references to a text on sorcery said to have been delivered by Asmodai to King Solomon. There was a Hebrew translation of the *Picatrix* that was widely circulated amongst Jewish circles during the time the Zohar was being written. Though this work was of non-Jewish origins, it remains to be a possible source for many zoharic teachings on sorcery.

The main theme of the Testament of Solomon is practical magic. The verse scrutinized throughout this thesis portrays Solomon in the middle of a magical evocation. There are other parallels between these two texts that have yet to be accounted for.<sup>194</sup>

Taking all of this into consideration, I am inclined to propose a theory that if substantiated, might account for all of the factors discussed in this section.

As already stated, the Testament of Solomon was originally written in Greek. Though this increases the unlikelihood of any impact it may have had on the Zohar and calls into question the relevance of the similar language employed by these texts, the matter is in no way conclusive.

The similarities between the two texts, in terms of content as well as

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<sup>191</sup> Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, p. 365.

<sup>192</sup> For more information, see Gershom Scholem, *Kabbalah*, p. 320.

<sup>193</sup> Gershom Scholem, *Mystical Shape of the Godhead*, p. 268.

<sup>194</sup> See Gershom Scholem, *Kabbalah*, pp. 356-357 and 386.

vocabulary, may have their origins in a mutual source that has eluded modern kabbalistic scholarship.

The Testament of Solomon is believed to be a Christian adaptation of a Jewish text on demonology.<sup>195</sup> If this work was still in existence when the zoharic authors were compiling their mystical theology, it would seem that they were not only familiar with this text, but that they incorporated some of its content into the body of their own literary creation. Certain aspects of this work, perhaps coincidentally, perhaps intentionally on the part of the zoharic authors, are very similar to a number of elements that found their way into the Apocrypha centuries earlier.

At the present time, there is little concrete known evidence in support of this theory. However, it would account for the similarities between the two texts, in terms of content and language. The Zohar's equation of the good eye with the "much suffering" nemesis of the evil eye, to the very best of my knowledge, has no precedence in a single known Jewish text. If there was a copy of the work upon which the Testament of Solomon was based that was available to the zoharic authors, its existence would account for the many similarities that exist between the two texts.

If this demonological text was not a work the mystics would have had access to and if they were not working from the Testament of Solomon, either in Hebrew or in any other language, it is possible that they were transcribing a parallel tradition that was preserved orally or in midrashic fragments now lost.<sup>196</sup>

### *Ambiguity*

Unfortunately, none of these scenarios contain an adequate amount of

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<sup>195</sup>Gershom Scholem, *Kabbalah*, p. 386.

<sup>196</sup>A possibility proposed by Dr. Eitan Fishbane in response to the implausibility of the authors' utilization of a Latin text.

evidence to make a conclusive argument. Therefore, the parallels between the Testament of Solomon and the Zohar still remain a mystery. Though this matter remains entirely inconclusive, future inquiry into this question may reveal a relationship between the Zohar and certain texts that remains theoretical. An in depth exploration of this possibility, has the potential to uncover valuable information about the interpretive process of the zoharic authors.



I cannot conclude with total certainty that the evil eye was considered *sefirat Keter* of the Tree of Knowledge. I do believe this is very likely and at the moment the evidence in support of this sefirotic attribution outweighs all others. There are two reasons I hesitate in making a final conclusion concerning the sefirotic attribution of the evil eye. First, there has been very little academic scholarship concerning the mechanics of the Tree of Knowledge. There are numerous works that depict the emanatory process of divine holiness, but those that examine the technical aspects of the interaction between the different *sefirot* of the Tree of Knowledge are relatively sparse.

The second reason is based upon various passages throughout the Zohar that depict left hand emanation. These tend to show a relationship not only to *sefirat Keter*, but also the *Yesod* of evil. Though I do believe that these passages contain vital information concerning evil emanation and though this question has been one I have sought to answer throughout this thesis, I am not yet able to extrapolate their exact meaning with absolute certainty. What my research has led me to hypothesize thus far, is that the majority of these passages contain information concerning the technical sefirotic mechanics of both left hand emanation and the ritual casting of the evil eye.

There is a definite relationship between the phallus and the eye in the Zohar.<sup>198</sup> Since *sefirat Yesod* was considered to be the divine phallus and the eye is one of the main symbols used by the Zohar to designate *Keter*, the symbolic relationship

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<sup>197</sup>Most of what follows, is based mainly upon the concepts articulated by previous academic scholars applied to my own Zoharic text research. The reason I feel this needs to be said, is that many of the conclusions reached through this study have yet to be clearly articulated by academia.

<sup>198</sup>Elliott Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines*, p. 5, *The Circle in the Square*, pp. 35 and 113.

between the male organ and the eye can be understood in a sefirotic context that links these two *sefirot* in some fashion. The passages that lead me towards the attribution of negative *Keter*, are those that speak of the positive *Keter* as the good eye and then very often juxtapose it with the evil eye.

Satan, which is a term for *Yesod* of the Tree of Knowledge, is associated with the evil eye in a particular passage. The juxtaposition between the evil eye and Joseph, which represents the *Yesod* of the Tree of Life, also shows a relationship between the two in zoharic cosmology. Another reason given by the Zohar for Joseph's immunity is that he had sexual restraint.<sup>199</sup> This further juxtaposes the qualities of *Yesod* to those of the evil eye. There is also a reference to Balaam and the specific time in the morning, which states that to cast the evil eye he "looked into the snake".<sup>200</sup> Even further is the relationship of the evil eye to the evil inclination and the angel of death, both of which are considered by the Zohar to be representations of negative *Yesod*.

Taking all of this into account, the most well-informed and cautious hypothesis I can put forth at this point in time is that the evil eye was considered to be the arousal of *Keter* of evil, made manifest through the evil *Yesod*. This idea may be reflected in the equation of the evil eye with the other side as a whole. All of this leads me to believe that the Zohar viewed the evil eye not only as the ultimate, most powerful destructive force of the side of uncleanness, but that it is in fact comprised of the entire Tree of Knowledge and is concentrated at the level of negative *Yesod*, from where it contaminates *Malcut*, turning her into Lillith. This exact process is expressed by the following:

Life in the present dispensation is cut short through the

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<sup>199</sup>Zohar II 22a.

<sup>200</sup>Ibid III 113a.

influence of the evil serpent, whose dominion is symbolized by the darkened moon.<sup>201</sup> Under the same influence the celestial waters, as it were, fail, and life is not dispensed in the world in proper measure. At that time, however, the evil tempter, who is none other than the evil serpent, will be removed from the world by the Almighty and disappear, as it is written, "and I will cause the unclean spirit to pass out of the earth".<sup>202</sup> After he disappears the moon will no more be obscured, and the waters of the celestial river will flow on perennially.<sup>203</sup>

Linking the concepts put forth by this passage with the others already discussed, it would make sense that the angel of death, which resides upon an individual who has the evil eye, must darken the moon. This would, in effect block her from the gaze of the good eye, leaving her vulnerable to the powers of the evil eye.

Another important passage that sheds light on the sefirotic attribution of the evil eye, portrays the channeling of *Keter* through the enactment of the middle pillar. The seventy-two letter name of God is said to be the "inscription" or "form" of the supernal *Keter*.<sup>204</sup> One of the passages already examined in this thesis speaks of the "seventy-two channels of the evil eye". This draws another direct parallel between the evil eye and *Keter*.

The *Kav D'Emzaita* (middle pillar) of the *Sitra ahra*, which is never referred to by the above term, is contrasted to its positive counterpart in a passage that states, "Judgment of truth (is) the middle pillar, lying lips (are) *Gehinnom* and Samael . . . the angel of death is on his thigh . . . and he cannot judge what his eyes do not see."<sup>205</sup> The gaze of the angel of death as has already been shown, is implied to be the evil eye. Here, the angel of death is portrayed as the agent of Samael.<sup>206</sup> This passage along with those already scrutinized, make it appear as if the process of evil eye

<sup>201</sup> According to Elliott Wolfson in his *The Circle in the Square*, p. 84, the moon is used as a symbol for the *Shechinah*, which is synonymous with *Malcut*.

<sup>202</sup> Zechariah 8:2.

<sup>203</sup> Zohar I 131a, translation from the Soncino Zohar.

<sup>204</sup> Zohar I 17a.

<sup>205</sup> Zohar III 117a.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

emanation and its intentional casting are an enactment of the middle pillar of the Tree of Knowledge. This would explain the relationship between the evil eye, *Keter* and *Yesod*. The unification between *Malcut* and *Tiferet*, which is the sefirotic enactment of the middle pillar, is accomplished through *sefirat Yesod*. *Tiferet*, the male principle, places his phallus, *Yesod*, into the feminine *Malcut*.<sup>207</sup> In this passage, Samael, the evil counterpart to *Tiferet*, is shown to unite with the evil *Malcut*, which the passage designates as *Gehinnom*.<sup>208</sup> This is accomplished through his phallus, the angel of death, which is on Samael's" thigh". The eyes of Samael are depicted here as the instruments with which he passes evil judgments and decrees.

Moses, who is said to have been the only man to truly reach the middle pillar, is often juxtaposed with Balaam. This is even further substantial proof for the ritualistic casting of the evil eye being an enactment of the middle pillar of evil. Thus the evil eye, summoned the force of negative *Keter* in a straight line that united the entire Tree of Knowledge. Something that entails the exact definition of sorcery according to the Zohar.<sup>209</sup>

<sup>207</sup>For more information on the unification between *Malcut* and *Tiferet* through *Yesod*, see, Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, pp. 229-235, Isaiah Tishby, *Wisdom of the Zohar*, Vol. I, p. 298-302. For information regarding the erotic imagery of their unification, see Elliott Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines*, 339, and *The Circle in the Square*, 80-85. The "middle pillar", is represented by the *sefirah Tiferet*, which is considered to be the composition of the middle six *sefirot*. When *Tiferet* and *Malcut* are united, the holy unification of the Godhead as well as the entire cosmos are implemented.

<sup>208</sup>A term synonymous with Lillith. For more information, refer to page 42 of this thesis.

<sup>209</sup>To bring about a unification of the Tree of Knowledge would in effect, be uniting that which is meant to remain separate. For more information see note 81 of this thesis.

## Conclusion

The two forms of sin, greed as well as lust over what is not one's right to own, comprise the entire notion of sin in the Zohar. The act of being stingy keeps separate that which should be united, which are manifest as the person in need and the goods they lack. Desiring what is not one's own borders on the concept of sorcery, for the individual wishes to unite that which should be separate, themselves and the wealth that has not been allotted to them. Thus, the moral implications of the evil eye fall under both of these categories.

The same can be said concerning the theurgical application of the evil eye. Enacting the middle pillar on the side of uncleanness, as stated above, unites that which was meant to be separate. The passage which spoke of the "darkening of the moon", is a symbolic articulation of the other definition of sin, for *Malcut* is meant to be united with her mate, *Tiferet*. Once covered and contaminated by evil however, he does not find her attractive and rejects her.<sup>210</sup>

## Explanation

The concepts extrapolated throughout this study can be readily understood in the overall zoharic perception of the sides of good and evil. The side of good, is shown to be the originator of all life and is characterized by abundant generosity. The side of evil, is said to be infertile, unable to produce life and absolutely parasitic in nature.<sup>211</sup> This, I believe, lies at the root of the innovations the zoharic authors made to the beliefs in the good and evil eye. The moral qualities of each of these symbols expresses the most basic and archetypal qualities of the Trees of Life and Knowledge.

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<sup>210</sup>Zohar III 197a.

<sup>211</sup>Isiah Tishby, *Wisdom of the Zohar*, Vol. II, pp. 509-512.

This may be another reason the good eye was seen to be the very uppermost level of divine holiness, for it was a symbol of generosity and productivity. The evil eye, in the minds of the zoharic authors, was considered the worst of all the negative *sefirot*; for the concepts of greed and stinginess were truly the definition of evil.

The evil eye is shown to be the only concept that encompasses the very notion of negativity in all of its aspects. As has been demonstrated, both the moral implications and the intentional casting of the evil eye independently comprise every single form of sin. The declaration of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai referred to throughout this thesis, “the other side, which is the evil eye”, is a deceptively uncomplicated statement that articulates the fact that every form of evil as perceived by the zoharic worldview, definitely fell under the category of the evil eye.

## Epilogue

With certain questions answered and others only given preliminary consideration, something must be said about the philosophical tendencies of the zoharic authors and the methodologies that facilitated their interpretations.<sup>212</sup>

### Conclusion<sup>213</sup>

From all of this, it seems that the authors were trying to bring about a new reconciliation of differing Jewish traditions on multiple levels and to explain away seeming contradictions. Medieval Jewish mysticism in contrast to contemporaneous Jewish philosophy, directly confronted the question of evil and always confirmed its

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<sup>212</sup>There are several passages within the Zohar, which utilize the eye as a metaphor, sometimes in relationship to the evil eye, others seemingly not. Due to my own limitations, I have not yet arrived at a thorough understanding of every single passage. The references discussed here were limited to those I felt to have an adequate understanding of to present and extrapolate. They were also chosen based upon their level of expression in terms of the notions related to sefirotic cosmology. This thesis is not meant to represent the final stage of research on this topic but to open the door for further scholarship.

<sup>213</sup>There are passages in the Zohar that mention the evil eye that were viewed by the author but not quoted in this paper. There are also references I have not seen quoted by earlier scholars that depict left hand emanation. These were too vast to include in the body of this thesis but their depictions did help to shape the conclusions reached. Though there is a great number of passages that are neither here nor in the main body, those below were selected to facilitate further scholarship on this topic and future critique of this thesis. Evil eye: Vol. I: 93a. Vol. II: 37b, 56b, 134a (states that reciting *keriat shema* can protect one from the evil eye), 240b (states that the underground stones of ancient Jerusalem are protected from the evil eye) and 273b. Vol. III: 41b, 76b, 84a, 117b, 162-163b (a depiction of the evil eye and left hand emanation, 175b, 226b-229b and 245b, Idra Rabba: 129b-130b (speaks of the evil eye and how if the good eye did not sit on its throne, then nothing could survive a "split second"). Left hand emanation: Vol. I: 6a, 28a (speaks of the *parzuf shifrah*), 60a-61b, 139b (speaks of the color red, Esau, Laban and *sefirat Din*), and 223a. Sitrei Torah: 74b (states that the deeds of harmful spirits are all done in *riga hada*), 162a-165b. Vol. II: 165b, 194b (equates Esau with the evil snake), 208a, 212a, 213b and 236b (speaks of the evil red snake). Vol. III: 8b, 15b (depicts a specific form of left hand emanation that is spawned by the uncovering of *Binah*), 27b (speaks of the bad snake with a red head), 35b-36a (in which Samael is depicted as riding on the evil snake, which is equated with Satan, the evil inclination and the angel of death), 48b, 55a-b, 69a-70a (is a passage dealing with *parufim* of the other side), 77b (speaks of red, the red of menstrual blood and the side of evil), 101b, 107b-112b, 122b (is a complex and intricate passage that speaks about eyes, *Atika Kadisha*, death and various *parufim*), 146a-147a (speaks of the properties of metals, angels, colors and singles out red), 154a-157b, 186a (speaks of the upper higher Satan), 190b, 193b-195a, 206a-209b, 241a-b and 296b. *Tosfot L'Zohar*: 305a. *Raya Mehemna*: 248b. *Tikkunim*: *Tikkuna* 43.

existence as a somewhat independent force.<sup>214</sup> Kabbalistic attempts to answer this question have inevitably led it many a time into the realm of superstition.<sup>215</sup> What has been shown in regards to how the zoharic authors dealt with the idea of the evil eye is one demonstration of this phenomenon.

As stated earlier, there has been very little academic work done on the evil eye in Judaism. The lack of contemporary material may be due to the perception that this belief was merely an illogical superstition. This itself might stem from the fact that even in early and late antiquity there was never a definite explanation for this belief in Judaism. From what I have investigated, it is my conclusion that the zoharic authors meant to explain what had been until their time, an unexplained supernatural phenomenon.

It is impossible to say whether the authors were transcribing oral tradition in order to fill in the gaps between preexisting literary references, or whether their interpretations were accomplished in a similar fashion to the way I have conducted this study, viewing each passage that is relevant in order to gain insight into the larger issue at depth. If the latter method was primarily employed to validate their innovations, there still are substantial differences between the Zohar's methodology and the manner in which I have sought to answer this question. The factors that distinguish this thesis from the zoharic process of textual extrapolation are rooted in different perceptions of sacred scripture, the authority asserted by the researchers and dissimilar agendas.

The zoharic authors, if they were not transcribing oral tradition, were trying to find a consistent doctrine that wove through the Hebrew Bible, Talmud, midrashic and perhaps pseudapigraphic as well as apocryphic literature. The consistency that

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<sup>214</sup>Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, p. 36.

<sup>215</sup>*Ibid.*



they were looking for, though, seems to be an impossibility unless all the above mentioned texts were done by, at most, a tight circle of authors. As is most definitely known, this was not the case. Employing such a method does seem logical however, if one is working with a single literary work, or a piece of works contemporaneous to one another on various levels.

Due to this, innovations were needed to fit the preexisting literary references into a single structure. This single structure itself had a somewhat established format, the ten *sefirot*. With the authority the Zohar claimed, these innovations would go largely unchallenged. The way the authors weaved these innovations into long-standing tradition, must have given even more validity to its claims of authenticity. Random passages from across the tradition that until then seemed to make little sense or contradict one another, when read through the lens of Zohar, would have been viewed in a new light. A new light that brought harmony to much of the tradition overall and read the system of the *sefirot* into the complete body of the Jewish faith.

The Hebrew Bible establishes the belief in the evil eye as a term for miserliness. The Mishnah utilizes this and elaborates upon the idea, giving it a technical, legal definition. The Midrash takes both of these notions, greed and law, and elaborates upon its association with jealousy while adding a sense of the supernatural and superstition to the belief. The Talmud also built upon these ideas when trying to understand the nature of the evil eye.

The authors of the Zohar, took the above mentioned texts and wove them into its overall mystical cosmology. The evil eye, was transformed into the eye of the side of darkness, which as stated before, I am led to conclude is the most horrid of all rungs of uncleanness.

The connection between evil and superstition has already been discussed. The

link between speculative Kabbalah and practical Kabbalah is not something that has been thoroughly dealt with. This latter connection I believe, is most clearly demonstrated by the Zohar's treatment of the evil eye. This is expressed by the ways in which the passages that deal with the evil eye sometimes operate on the level of sorcery, sometimes on the level of complex cosmological speculation and sometimes both levels simultaneously. This shows that in the Medieval Jewish mind, at least as is represented by the zoharic authors, there really was no distinction between *Kabbalah Ma'asit* and *Iyunit*.<sup>216</sup>

Thus, the Zohar, in dealing with the evil eye, did its very best to bring a consolidation between the Bible, classical rabbinic writings, non-canonical writings, sefirotic Kabbalah, dualism and emanatory mysticism. This was achieved in a spirit that remained true to the original meaning of the evil eye, greed.

Thus, the path that lies between retention and innovation was tread to define the evil eye and make sense of a seemingly senseless concept.

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<sup>216</sup>“Practical” and “speculative” mysticism. For more information on the development as well as the similarities and differences between the two, see Gershom Scholem, *Kabbalah*, pp. 5, 182-189, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, pp. 143-146 and especially Joshua Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition*, pp 11-24.

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