

HEBREW UNION COLLEGE - JEWISH INSTITUTE OF RELIGION  
New York School

INSTRUCTIONS TO LIBRARY

Statement  
by Referee

The Senior Thesis of

Martin Guss

Entitled: \_\_\_\_\_

- 1) May (with revisions) be considered for publication ( ☒ ) ( ☐ )  
yes no
- 2) May be circulated ( ☐ ) ( ☐ ) ( ☐ ) ( ☒ )  
to faculty to students to alumni no restriction
- 3) May be consulted in Library only ( ☐ ) ( ☐ )  
by faculty by students
- ( ☐ ) ( ☐ )  
by alumni no restriction

5/9/76

(date)

Ernest B. Bouslog  
(signature of referee)

Statement  
by Author

I hereby give permission to the Library to circulate my thesis

( ☐ ) ( ☒ )  
yes no

The Library may sell positive microfilm copies of my thesis

( ☐ ) ( ☒ )  
yes no

3-26-76

(date)

Martin M. Guss

(signature of author)

Library  
Record

The above-named thesis was microfilmed on

8/1/76

(date)

For the Library

\_\_\_\_\_  
(signature of staff member)

THE ZOHARIC CONCEPTION OF THE SHEKHINAH

As Presented In

TISHBY'S MISHNAT HA-ZOHAR

by

Marvin M. Gross

Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements  
for Ordination

Hebrew Union College - Jewish Institute of Religion  
New York, New York

1976

Advisor: Professor Eugene B. Borowitz

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I wish to express my deep gratitude to Dr. Eugene B. Borowitz. His encouragement, direction, and thoroughgoing critical review of my efforts were a significant contribution to this undertaking. Warm and special thanks are due also to Joel Oseran, chaver and fellow-student, for the patience and thoughtfulness he unceasingly displayed during our many discussions of this project.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS . . . . .	ii
INTRODUCTION . . . . .	1
CHAPTER I. THE ZOHARIC SHEKHINAH: SELECTED TEXTS IN TRANSLATION WITH NOTES AND COMMENTARY . .	5
House of the World. . . . .	5
Lily . . . . .	13
Rose and Lily . . . . .	16
Well . . . . .	22
Doe . . . . .	27
Valorous Woman . . . . .	37
Righteousness . . . . .	41
Messenger of the Holy One Blessed Be He .	45
Moon . . . . .	51
Diminution of the Moon . . . . .	55
Expulsion of the Queen . . . . .	60
CHAPTER II. CONCLUSIONS . . . . .	65
GLOSSARY OF ZOHARIC TERMS . . . . .	88
BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	90



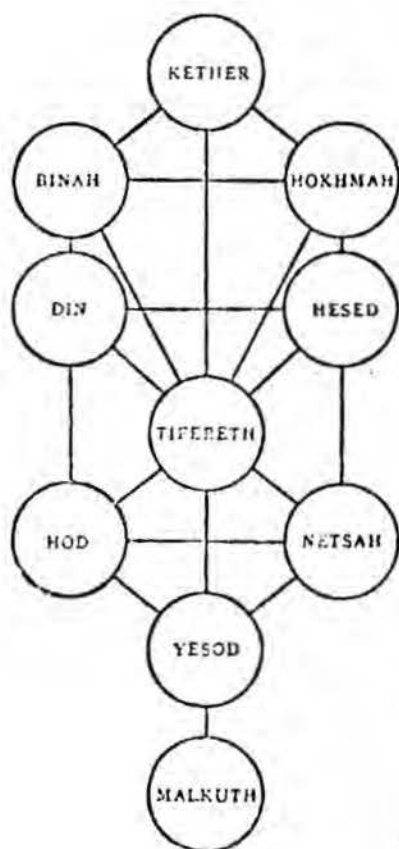


Diagram of the Sefirot

## INTRODUCTION

In the nearly seven hundred years since it appearance in Spain, the Zohar has come to be regarded as one of the fundamental works of Jewish mysticism. Its widespread popularity and success led it to be ranked, for a period of several centuries, with the Bible and the Talmud.<sup>1</sup> Written in Aramaic and employing a midrashic style, the Zohar purports to transmit the mystical teachings of Rabbi Simon ben Yoḥai, a Palestinian Tanna of the first half of the second century C.E.<sup>2</sup>

Yet, despite its centrality and nearly-canonical status within Jewish mysticism, the Zohar has only recently been the subject of critical analysis and scholarly interpretation. This may be due to at least two reasons. First, the entire field of Jewish mysticism was given almost no serious scholarly attention prior to the pioneering efforts of Gershom G. Scholem. Secondly, an obstacle to the study of the Zohar is its sheer bulk. It is an immense and complex work of eighteen sections comprising two thousand four hundred pages in its published form.<sup>3</sup>

In addition to Scholem, a notable contribution to the field of Zohar scholarship has been made by Isaiah Tishby. In his two-volume Mishnat ha-Zohar, Tishby has selected and thematically arranged passages from the Zohar,

translated the original Aramaic into Hebrew, and supplied explanatory notes. Thus, Tishby's work greatly reduces the conceptual, linguistic, and organizational difficulties which confront the modern student desiring to understand something of the Zohar.

Still, there exist few, if any, detailed studies which seek to elucidate and interpret specific aspects of the Zohar. No such studies are currently available in English. This thesis is one effort in this direction. The focus of this study is the Zoharic conception of the Shekhinah, the tenth Sefirah in the mystical world of emanations. It is the writer's purpose to formulate an understanding of the Zoharic Shekhinah through an examination of selected passages from Tishby's chapter on the Shekhinah in Mishnat ha-Zohar.

In order to accomplish this task, the writer has translated these selections and Tishby's notes thereto from Hebrew into English. Each translated selection is followed by comments which reflect the writer's attempts to understand the nature of the Shekhinah in that particular passage. An overall view of the Zoharic Shekhinah including a brief comparison and contrast with the rabbinic notion of the Shekhinah concludes this study.

It is the writer's hope that the following offers an in-depth understanding of the Zoharic conception of the

Shekhinah. As a preliminary study, it may provide stimulus for further and more exhaustive research in this area.

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Gershom G. Scholem, Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism (New York: Schocken Books, 1946), p. 156.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 163.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 162.

## CHAPTER I

### THE ZOHARIC SHEKHINAH: SELECTED TEXTS IN TRANSLATION WITH NOTES AND COMMENTARY

#### House of the World

(Zohar, Part I 172a,b; Tishby, Vol. I pp. 233-35)

#### Translation

R. Ḥiya began discourse on the verse: "A song of Ascents of Solomon. If the Lord did not build the house, etc., if the Lord did not guard the city, etc." (Ps. 127:1). Come and see: at the moment when God willed to create the world, He drew a mist out of the spark of darkness [a spark which is enkindled in the domain of Keter, which has the aspect of darkness due to its extreme hiddenness; this spark begins the process of emanation which is described here as the rising of a mist in the midst of darkness]\* which (i.e., the mist) glowed in the darkness and remained on high [the mist itself remained in the upper, hidden area] and descended below [while its force reached beyond the upper area in the establishment of the sefirotic system]. That same darkness glowed and was caused to glow in one hundred paths and ways, some narrow and some wide [in the ten Sefirot, each one inclusive of ten; the

\*[...] denotes Tishby note.

the upper Sefirot are like narrow paths, the lower ones are like wide paths], and the house [Malkhut] of the world was made. That same house is in the center of all [the Sefirot surround Malkhut from above and the worlds surround her from below], with many doors and chambers all about it, hidden and holy places, where birds of heaven [angels] nest, each one according to its kind. In its midst there sprouts a large and mighty tree [Tiferet, the Tree of Life], with abundant branches and fruit; in it there is sustenance for all. This same tree rises to the clouds of heaven and is hidden between three mountains [Keter, Hokmah, and Binah]. From underneath the three mountains it goes forth, rising above and descending below. The house is refreshed from this tree, and it stores in this house many high and unknown treasures. In this manner the house was built and decorated. The tree is revealed by day and hidden at night. [Tiferet has the attribute of night.]

At the hour when darkness sets in [Gevurah, who is connected to Malkhut and conveys the influence of stern judgment to her at the beginning of night] and touches the house, it (darkness) governs, all the doors [the gates of compassion and the funnels of shefa] are closed from all sides [because of the dominion of the Shells]; immediately, many spirits [the forces of the Other Side] fly

through the air, desiring to know what is in it and to enter it; they enter among the birds and receive testimony from them [the spirits receive information (Divine truths?) from the angels], go about and see what is to be seen, until that same darkness is stirred [at midnight a flame issues forth from Gevurah which drives out the Shells] and sends forth a flame and strikes with all the strong hammers and opens doors and splits rocks. The flame rises and descends and strikes the world, and voices are stirred above and below. Immediately a herald ascends, joins himself to the air and calls out. That air goes forth from the pillar of cloud of the inner altar [apparently Binah; many of the symbols here are connected to Temple worship and their exact meaning is not clear] and spreads itself out to the four directions of the world; a thousand thousands [angels] stand at the left side, ten thousand ten thousands at the right side and the herald stands in his place and proclaims vigorously. How many they are who prepare songs and engage in worship! Two doors open [doors for the descent of shefa from Hesed and Gevurah], one on the south side and one on the north. The house ascends, takes its stand, and is attached between two areas [Hesed and Gevurah who arouse the love between Malkhut and Tiferet] while songs, chants, and praises ascend. Immediately, he who enters, enters [Tiferet, by



means of Yesod] in secret [in sexual pairing] and the house glows with six lights [the six Sefirot from Hesed to Yesod] which shine brilliantly from all sides. Rivers of spice go forth [from Malkhut] and water all the creatures of the field [the angels], as it is said in Scripture: "They give drink to every beast of the field, the wild asses quench their thirst" (Ps. 104:11,12), and they sing praises until daybreak. When the dawn breaks the stars and the constellations, heaven and its hosts together sing praises and hymns, as it is written in Scripture: "The morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy" (Job 38:7).

Come and see: "If the Lord did not build the house, they that build it labor in vain; if the Lord did not guard the city, the watchman keeps vigil in vain." This refers to the High King [Tiferet] who constantly builds that house and adorns it. When? When intentions [of prayer and of the mitzvot] and worship ascend from below in the appropriate manner. "If the Lord does not guard the city," when? At the hour when night grows dark and armed spirits [forces of the Other Side] go forth in the world and the doors are closed and the city is guarded from all sides [the Holy One Blessed Be He protects Malkhut from the Shells so they won't defile her], so that the uncircumcised and unclean will not come near it, as it is said

in Scripture: "For henceforth there shall no more come to you the uncircumcised and the unclean" (Isa. 52:1), since the Holy One Blessed Be He will remove them from the world at a future time. Who is the uncircumcised and who is the unclean? Rather, all is one: the uncircumcised and the unclean is he who enticed Adam and his wife to follow him and brought death to the world; he is the one who defiles this house, until the time when the Holy One Blessed Be He will remove him from the world. Therefore: "If the Lord does not guard the city, etc." -- of a certainty! [The angels who guard the Shekhinah are not able to protect her if the Holy One Blessed Be He, Himself, does not guard her.]

#### Comment

This elaborate and complex passage, filled with beautiful imagery, indicates that the creation of the world began with the initiation of the process of emanation. Further, parallels are seen between the creation of the Shekhinah and her continuing maintenance.

The Shekhinah is presented here as passive in nature. Once created, she must rely on nourishment from Tiferet, with whom she alternates temporal dominion. Though nourished by Tiferet, she, in turn, nourishes her hosts. The

Shekhinah's ability to nourish is dependent upon having sexual relations with Tiferet.

The sexual imagery employed by the author may act as the symbolic representation of Tiferet's direct transmission of shefa to the Shekhinah. That is, the Zohar utilizes sexual imagery to depict a level or type of interaction not easily comprehended via human experience.

Though the Shekhinah reigns at night, it is at that time when she is susceptible to contamination by evil forces. She must be protected by Gevurah. However, the relationship between these two Sefirot is something of a paradox. Gevurah's nocturnal presence effectively closes the channels by which Hesed sustains the Shekhinah with mercy. When the Shekhinah is prevented from receiving both mercy and shefa, she is influenced by stern judgment, which has its source in Gevurah. Moreover, there exists a complex relationship between the prevalence of stern judgment and the simultaneous appearance of evil. What seems to be the case is that Gevurah stems the flow of compassion to the Shekhinah and this promotes stern judgment. This action has the additional effect of allowing the evil Shells to dominate. Stern judgment and evil seem to be twin phenomena. Yet, it is Gevurah which ultimately thwarts the evil which seeks to defile the Shekhinah. This is accomplished by the means of a flame which appears

after midnight. The power and intensity of this Gevurotic flame which, in effect, purifies the Shekhinah, may correspond to the increasing brightness of the material world in the hours between midnight and dawn. In the mythology of this passage, evil is associated with night; as the hour and light of dawn approach, its influence is weakened. Stern judgment is once again tempered with mercy.

Gevurah's guardianship over the Shekhinah is matched by Tiferet's role as "builder." While the creation of Tiferet apparently was subsequent to the "historic" creation of the Shekhinah, it is Tiferet who is charged with her continuing maintenance. His "tools," so to speak, are the intentions the faithful apply to their prayers and to the commandments they follow. These intentions with which the Shekhinah is re-inforced parallel the mist with which she was created.

While Gevurah protects the Shekhinah from the forces of the Other Side, additional protection is needed as well. This is provided by no less than "the Holy One Blessed Be He," without whose protection all other efforts are in vain.

A particular threat to the Shekhinah is posed by evil in the form of the biblical serpent, described as "the uncircumcised and unclean." One may conclude that the variety of symbols and images which represent the

forces of the Other Side signifies the belief that the Shekhinah is highly vulnerable to the evil which exists in multiple forms and many quarters. It is noteworthy that this passage concludes with the messianic expectation that evil will eventually be driven from the world.

In summary, this text states how the Shekhinah was created and how, furthermore, she undergoes a process of continual construction. As the house which is "in the center of all," her centrality and importance within the sefirotic system is clearly established. Yet, the Shekhinah requires nourishment both from Tiferet and from the worship and halachic observance of righteous Jews. Moreover, she is, at times, exposed to defilement and contamination by evil and, therefore, needs the ever-vigilant protection of God.

## Lily

(Zohar, Part I 1a; Tishby, p. 235)

### Translation

R. Hezkiah opened discourse on the text: "As a lily among thorns" (S. of S. 2:2). Who is the lily? The Assembly of Israel [Malkhut who dwells close to the Shells which are thorns]. Just as the lily, which is among the thorns, has red and white in her, so does the Assembly of Israel possess judgment and mercy. Just as the lily has thirteen leaves, so does the Assembly of Israel contain thirteen attributes of mercy, which surround her from all sides. Thus, the word Elohim (in the first verse of Genesis) brought forth thirteen words to surround the Assembly of Israel and to protect her. [The term Elohim in the Genesis Creation Story is the Sefirah Binah; the thirteen words in the Torah from the first appearance of the term to the second appearance symbolize the thirteen attributes of mercy which went forth from Binah to surround Malkhut]. Afterwards, it is mentioned for a second time. Why is it mentioned a second time? [From the second appearance of Elohim to the third there are five words which symbolize the five Sefirot from Hesed to Hod (Yesod being counted with Tiferet) which emanated from Binah and bring shefa down to Malkhut.] To bring forth five strong

leaves which surround the lily, these five being called "salvation" [because of shefa which brings salvation to Malkhut], and they are five gates [for through them one enters to the secret of divinity]. About this secret it is written in Scripture: "I will lift up the cup of salvation" (Ps. 116:13), this is the cup of blessing [for Birkat haMazon]. The cup of blessing must be raised with five fingers and no more, like the lily which sits upon five strong leaves, in the pattern of five fingers. And this lily [Malkhut] it is a cup of blessing.

#### Comment

In this passage, the lily of the Song of Songs verse is understood to represent the Shekhinah, designated as the Assembly of Israel. The final segment of the text identifies the "lily" as a "cup of blessing." The passage traces the relationship between the Shekhinah and the other Sefirot. It is primarily concerned with the relationship between the Shekhinah and Binah. The Shekhinah, threatened by the proximity of the Shells, is protected and surrounded by the thirteen attributes of mercy which have emanated from Binah.

The identification of Binah as the source from which the thirteen qualities of mercy emanate rests upon



the mystical understanding and interpretation of the opening verses of the Creation Story. Central to this interpretation is the notion that the precise number of words which intervene between the appearances of Elohim in the text conveys a specific message to the enlightened reader.

In addition to the thirteen attributes of mercy which have come from Binah, the five Sefirot from Hesed to Hod have emanated from her as well. Like the thirteen attributes of mercy, these Sefirot protect the Shekhinah. The existence of these dual "layers" of protection (the thirteen and the five) emphasizes the Shekhinah's extreme vulnerability to contamination from the nearby Shells.

Moreover, these five Sefirot are gates to the secret of divinity. The Shekhinah, in turn, is the preliminary path or gate to the five subsequent (and more hidden?) gates. In order to enter these gates and obtain the blessing of divine knowledge, one must lift the "cup of blessing" -- "lift" the Shekhinah. What is meant by this activity is not made clear. However, one can speculate that "lifting" the Shekhinah is to protect, honor, and serve her through prayer and good deeds.



## Rose and Lily

(Zohar, Part I 221a; Tishby, p. 235-6)

Translation

R. Simon began discourse on the verse: "I am the rose of Sharon, the lily of the valleys" (S.S.2:1) and said: how beloved is the Assembly of Israel [Malkhut] by the Holy One Blessed Be He [Tiferet], for He praises her and she constantly praises Him. O, how many hymns of praise and songs does she continually sing for Him! Happy is Israel's portion, for they grab fast to Him by the rope (hevel) of the Holy Portion (haylek), as it is written in Scripture: "For the Lord's portion (haylek) is His people, Jacob is the lot (hevel) of His inheritance" (Deut. 32:9).

"I am the rose of Sharon." This refers to the Assembly of Israel who stands amidst the splendorous beauty of the Garden of Eden [in the world of emanations].

"Sharon," for whe sings and praises the Most High King.

Another interpretation: "I am the rose of Sharon," who wants to be refreshed from the pools of the deep river, the fountain of rivers, [the source of the Sefirot, for they are the rivers for the transfer of shefa] as it is said in Scripture: "And the parched ground shall become

a pool" (Isa. 35:7). [That is, Malkhut desires refreshment and soaking from Binah. On her own, Malkhut is dry and it is the Sefirot which convey shefa from Binah to her.] (Malkhut is called) "lily of the valleys" for she stands in the deepest place [in Hokmah; Malkhut, lower wisdom, is connected to Hokmah, upper wisdom, which is designated as "the valleys"]. What are the valleys? As it is said in Scripture: "From out of the valleys I called you, Adonai" (Ps. 130:1). (Malkhut is called) "rose of Sharon," for she is a rose from the self-same place of the pools, from which the rivers go out and never cease. (She is called) "lily of the valleys." for she is a lily from the self-same place that is called the deepest place, closed from all sides.

Come and see: At first, [before mating] she is pale green like a rose whose leaves are pale green. Afterwards, she is "lily," with red and white colors [for the judgment that is in her is tempered by the shefa of mercy]. She is a "lily" with six leaves [which represent the six Sefirot from Hesed to Yesod]. She is a lily for she changes from color to color.

At first, when she desires to have intercourse with the king, she is called "rose." After she has united with him, the king, in kisses, she is known as "lily," for it is written in Scripture: "His lips are like

lilies" (S.S. 5:12). She is a "lily of the valleys," for she changes her colors, at times for good, at times for evil, at times for mercy, at times for judgment.

#### Comment

This passage begins by stating that the relationship between the Shekhinah, termed "the Assembly of Israel," and Tiferet is one of love and amorous praise. It continues by interpreting the Song of Songs verse to show the specific nature of the Shekhinah and the nature and development of her relationship with Tiferet.

The Shekhinah is likened to both the rose of Sharon and the lily of the valleys. Paradoxically, she is (a) both at once, while through relationship with Tiferet, she (b) also evolves from the former to the latter.

The Shekhinah is the rose of Sharon. This indicates that she sings (sharah) songs of praise to her lover. In addition, she desires soaking (shariah) from Binah, a metaphor reflecting the Shekhinah's need to receive shefa. As the rose of Sharon, the Shekhinah dwells at the place where shefa is distributed by the Sefirot, for Sharon apparently refers to an oasis-like area (the Plain of Sharon). Further, before intercourse with Tiferet, the Shekhinah is like a pale green rose; her appearance is

virginal. She is green and not yet ripened through sexual experience.

As the lily of the valleys, the Shekhinah dwells in the valley-like "deepest place," where she is joined to Hokmah. Following intercourse with Tiferet, the Shekhinah becomes like a lily of the valleys, for she is sexually mature and blossoms with colors. The lily's red and white colors symbolize the judgment and mercy which, through relations with Tiferet, are now equally present in the Shekhinah. The mixing of judgment and mercy within the Shekhinah is highly significant. When this occurs the harshness of pure judgment is mitigated and judgment is no longer stern. The presence of lenient judgment allows the world to exist in relative peace and prosperity. Hence, the softening of judgment is of critical importance for human existence. (See comment to "Righteousness.")

Like a lily (shoshanah) with six (shesh) leaves, the Shekhinah is connected to the six Sefirot from Hesed to Yesod. Moreover, the Shekhinah is similar to the lily, for she has changed (root: shanah) from innocence to sexual awareness and still changes from goodness and mercy to evil and judgment and back again, in accordance with various aspects of her nature. (According to this text, the Shekhinah manifests the influence of the Sefirot Hesed and Gevurah. Although there seems to be no evidence

anywhere that the Shekhinah directly reflects the influence of evil, rather, she is pursued by it, there does appear to be a correlation between the presence of Gevurah and the appearance of evil. See the comment to "House of the World.")

A further result of intercourse between the Shekhinah and Tiferet is that the influence of Hesed upon the Shekhinah is brought forth. It is as though the relationship of the Shekhinah with Tiferet allows her to become affected by mercy as well. Through union with Tiferet the Shekhinah is "completed," for the opposite aspects of judgment and mercy now both add dimension and depth to her nature.

Overall, the Shekhinah is seen as being dry--passive and needful. To obtain shefa, she must rely on the other Sefirot which serve as conduits. That is, the Shekhinah is utterly dependent upon the fully integrated sefirotic system for her nurture and maintenance. Like the rose and the lily, she must rely on her environment in order to flower.

An additional insight offered by the passage is that the Shekhinah and Hokmah stand in parallel relation. Hokmah is upper wisdom, while the Shekhinah is characterized as lower wisdom. This may indicate that it is through the Shekhinah that the influence of Hokmah is conveyed to the worlds below.

Finally, the nature of the Shekhinah as it is revealed in this passage is dynamic and changing. Her evolution from "rose" to "lily" is not, apparently, a singular, unrepeated process. Rather, it recurs, just as the Shekhinah is influenced time and again by the opposites good and evil, judgment and mercy. In these respects, the Shekhinah is characterized by a high degree of instability.

The dynamism of the Shekhinah reflects the nature of ultimate reality as a whole. The world of emanations, in which the aspects of God (Eyn Sof) are manifest, is not at all static. It is, rather, a world of activity, change, and continual process. Its movement reaches and affects all realms of the universe. That is to say, in the Zoharic view, God is an active deity.

## Well

(Zohar, Part I 151a-152a, Sitre Torah:Tishby, pp.236-7)

Translation

"And he looked, and behold, a well in the field, and behold, there were three flocks of sheep lying about it" (Gen. 29:2). "Well" (Malkhut)-- this is a degree of "the Lord of all the earth" (Josh.3:11 "In the field," the field of holy apples. "Three flocks of sheep," -- three holy, upper degrees arrayed about this self-same well, which are Netzah, Hod, and Yesod. These draw forth water from above and fill the well. This same source, Yesod, as he dwells [in intercourse] in the midst of the well, produces fruit and flows constantly and the well is filled from him. When the well is filled, it follows that: "for out of that well they watered the flocks" (Gen 29:2) -- these are all the holy populations and camps, all of whom drink and are satisfied from that well, each one according to what is proper for him.

"And there was a great stone upon the mouth of the well" (Ibid.). This is the stone upon which the inhabitants of the world stumble, a stumbling block and a rock of falling, which always stands at the mouth of this well (by her decree) in order to demand judgment of the world so that sustenance and goodness will not descent down to it.



[The "stumbling block" is an alternate designation for the Shells which cause humans to falter in sin and which act as those who fulfill the Shekhinah's commands with regard to the direction of the world through judgment. Thus, shefa is prevented from descending more than a moderate amount].

"And all the flocks were gathered there" (Gen.29:3). The text does not say: "the flocks were gathered there," but rather "all the flocks." Or, the holy camps from above and holy camps from below, the former with songs and praises from above and the latter with prayers and petitions from below; together and immediately "they rolled the stone from the mouth of the well" (Ibid.) They rolled her and transferred her from the holy. (The subject of the pronoun her would logically seem to be "the stone." However, the Hebrew even--stone-- is of the masculine gender. The subsequent portion in the text and the Tishby note thereto indicate that "her" may refer to the Shekhinah.) And she separates from the judgment. [Malkhut separates from the attributes of judgment, and for a time, the channels of mercy are opened.] "And (they) watered the sheep" (Ibid.). The upper messengers take shefa above and Israel takes shefa below.

Afterwards, "they replace the stone" (Ibid.) at the decree of the well, to stand firm before her to demand



judgment of the world [Malkhut commands the Shells so that they will again stand to serve her], so that the world will behave with judgment. This is necessary, for the world cannot exist but for judgment which insures that all will be conducted with truth and righteousness.

### Comment

The dominant image here is that of the Shekhinah as a well. She is also directly described as an aspect or dimension of God; the Shekhinah is a "degree" of the "Lord of all the earth." In addition, the Shekhinah is understood to have dual aspects. She is either a well or a field. According to Tishby (note, p.236) she is a well when she is filled with shefa and directs the worlds, a field when she receives shefa from the Sefirot Hesed, Gevurah, and Tiferet, known as "holy apples."

The Sefirot which feed the well are: Netzah, Hod, and Yesod. The "water" with which they fill the well is shefa. Yesod apparently plays a significant role in this process, for the Shekhinah is filled by means of sexual union with Yesod. Once again, the Shekhinah is initially passive, requiring nourishment, completion, and fertilization from the other Sefirot. Her ability, in turn, to sustain the upper and lower hosts which surround her depends on her prior contact with elements

which function to provide her with shefa.

The process may be understood to be a progression. At first, the Shekhinah is an empty receptacle, awaiting her providers. Once receiving nourishment, she can then sustain the "flocks" dependent upon her. In this manner, shefa is transmitted from the Sefirotic world to the worlds below.

However, the Shekhinah is not merely an agency for the transmission of shefa; she balances and controls its distribution as well. By commanding the forces of evil, the Shells, the Shekhinah necessitates the appearance of judgment. When evil abounds and judgment follows, the emanation of shefa and mercy is prevented.

The Shekhinah's role as the distributor of shefa has two noteworthy dimensions. Her goal is not simply to control the distribution of shefa and mercy. Rather, this is the means by which she fulfills her duty to keep judgment functioning. The presence of judgment is vital, for it insures the existence of the universe. To accomplish her task she commands the Shells to interrupt the transmission of shefa. The Shekhinah subjugates the forces of evil and harnesses their normally chaos-producing behavior for a positive end. This is quite an extraordinary and unexpected turn of events.

Secondly, the Shekhinah is neither passive nor

reactive. She is authoritatively active. Not only is this a markedly different aspect of her nature from those previously revealed, but her role as activist has decisive significance for the world.

Yet, just as the Shekhinah manifests both active and passive dimensions, so, too, does she promote both judgment and mercy. While the "stumbling block" of evil obstructs the flow of mercy and brings about judgment, this "stone" can be removed, thus permitting mercy to issue forth, evidently from the Shekhinah. This is accomplished through the combined efforts of heavenly and earthly forces. The Shekhinah's responsiveness to prayer, petition, and praise results in the distribution of shefa and mercy above and below.

The movement of cosmic forces, according to this passage, can be characterized as cyclic. The Shekhinah is filled and, therefore, enabled herself to spread divine energy. In addition, the opposite forces of judgment and mercy emanate from her depths. Evil causes human sin and judgment follows to re-order the world. Men pray, the Shekhinah listens, and mercy soothes the universe. Before long, judgment returns and the world continues.

Doe

(Zohar, Part III 249a,b; Tishby, pp. 237-9)

### Translation

R. Abba opened discourse on the verse: "As the stag pants after brooks of water, so my soul thirsts after You, O God" (Ps. 42:2). The meaning of this verse has been established. In this verse ayal (stag) is written and there (Ps. 22:1) ayelet (doe) is written, since there is male and there is female. And although there is male and female, all is one. [That is, male refers to Tiferet and female to Malkhut; however, they are one in the secret of sexual coupling. Therefore, although this sentence speaks of Malkhut, she is termed: ayal, in the masculine gender].

This stag is called male and he is also called female, for it is written in Scripture: "As the stag ta'arog" (fem. third per.) and ya'arog (masc. third per.) is not written. What is "ayelet ha-shachar" ("morning star," Ibid.) ? This is a beast, a feminine, merciful creature and there is no merciful creature like her among all the beasts of the world. When the hour is urgent and she requires sustenance for herself and for all the creatures, [when Malkhut needs shefa for herself and for the worlds sustained by her], she goes afar, upon a distant path, [upward to the higher Sefirot]; she comes and transports sustenance and does not want to eat until she has come and

returned to her place. Why? In order that the rest of the creatures may gather about her and she can distribute (their share) to them from the provisions. When she comes and all the remaining creatures gather about her, she stands in the center and distributes to each and every one. And the sign for this is: "She rises while it is still night and gives meat to her household" (Pro. 31:15). From that which she distributes to them, she is satisfied, as though she ate more food than all the others. And when the morning comes, which is called dawn, it brings her the birth agonies of exile. Therefore, she is called "ayelet hashachar," (doe of the dawn), in reference to the darkness of morning, for her woes are like those of a woman giving birth. [She is about to give birth to redemption and the Messianic souls.] This is the meaning of the Scriptural verse: "Like a pregnant woman, who draws near to the time of her delivery, is in pain and cries out in her agonies" (Isa. 26:17).

When does she distribute (food) to them? When the morning is about to come and it is still night and the darkness rises, when the (dawn) light breaks, as it is written in Scripture: "She rises while it is still night and gives meat to her household" (Pro. 31:15). [The dominion of Malkhut is at night, for she is contrary to night. She then prepares the shefa, which she received

from the Sefirot during her upward journey to them during the day, and distributes it before the breaking of dawn.) By the time morning dawns in full, all of them are satiated from her nourishment. Immediately, one voice arises in the center of the firmament; it calls with strength and says: those who are near [the holy forces] enter their places! the distant ones [the Shells] go out! each and every one be gathered to the proper place for him! When the sun shone each and every one was gathered to his place. This is the meaning of the Scriptural verse: "The sun arises, they gather themselves together" (Ps. 104:22). She walks by day, is revealed at night, and distributes in the morning. Therefore, she is called "doe of the dawn." Afterwards, she strengthens herself like a mighty one and goes, and is called "stag."

To which place does she go? She walks sixty parasangs from the place she went out from, [she goes up to the six Sefirot, each one equalling ten] and enters into the midst of a mountain of darkness [Gevurah, stern judgment]. At the time she walks in the midst of that self-same mountain of darkness, a tortuous serpent meets her foot and walks at her foot, [the power of the Other Side, which sucks from the attribute of judgment, requests to be seized by Malkhut, at the time she is found in the area of stern judgment], and she goes up from there to



the mountain of light [Hesed]. When she arrives there, the Holy One Blessed Be He prepares another serpent for her and He goes out and incites one against the other and she is saved [the Holy One Blessed Be He incites the forces of the Other Side (to struggle) one with the other in order to save Malkhut from the first serpent which pursues her]. And from there she takes food and returns to her place at midnight. From midnight she begins to distribute (the food) until the darkness of morning rises. When daylight breaks, she goes and is not seen, as was explained.

At the time when the world needs rain [shefa], all the rest of the creatures gather about her, and she goes up to the peak of a tall mountain and covers her head between her knees and groans one groan after another. The Holy One Blessed Be He hears her voice and becomes filled with compassion and consideration for the world. She descends from the peak of the mountain, runs and hides herself. All the other creatures run after her and are unable to find her. This is the meaning of the Scriptural verse: "Like a stag pants after brooks of water," (Ps. 42:2). What is "after brooks of water?" After brooks of water from those which have dried up and the world thirsts for water. Hence "pants."

From the time that she becomes pregnant she is blocked up. [She is not able to give birth to shefa because iniquities abound in the world and the Other

Side seals up the channels]. When the time comes to give birth, she groans and gives forth voices, voice after voice, until seventy voices, in accord with the number of words (in the Psalm) "The Lord hear you in the day of trouble" (Ps. 20), for this is the song of this pregnant one. The Holy One Blessed Be He hears and attends to her. Immediately, He brings forth a great serpent from the midst of the mountain of darkness [the dwelling-place of the Shells] who goes and comes between the mountains and his mouth licks the dust. [That is, the Other Side bites the Shekhinah. In doing so, he receives part of the holiness and separates himself from the opening of the Shekhinah.] He reaches this doe and comes and bites her twice in "that place" (i.e., the genitals). The first time blood issues forth and he licks; the second time water [shefa for the lower reaches] issues forth and all the beasts of the mountain drink, and she opens and gives birth. And your sign for this is: "And with his rod he smote the rock twice" (Num. 20:11), and it is written in Scripture: "and the congregation drank and their beasts also" (Ibid.). At the same time, when the Holy One Blessed Be He has consideration for the pregnancy of this creature [the Shekhinah], what is written in Scripture? "The voice of the Lord makes does calve and discovers the forests" (Ps. 29:9). "The voice



of the Lord makes does calve,"--the same agonies and birth pangs to arouse seventy voices. Immediately, "and discovers the forests"--to remove the same serpent and to reveal the same creature to go between them [between those who thirst for shefa]. "And in His palace" (Ibid.). What is "And in His palace?" In the palace of the Holy One Blessed Be He, the same population opens and speaks (His) glory. [That is, in the Shekhinah, which is called: the Glory of God.] What is glory? "Blessed be the glory of the Lord from His place" (Eze. 3:12).

#### Comment

In this most complex and fascinating passage, much is revealed concerning the Shekhinah's multiple roles. The text begins with a justification of why Ps. 42:2 can be interpreted as containing hidden references to the cosmic functions of the Shekhinah. The Shekhinah is characterized as a doe, and while the verse refers to a stag, the reference is actually to the Shekhinah. Because of her union with Tiferet, a male element, the Shekhinah can be rightly seen as male or female, since "all is one." The author of the passage adduces grammatical proof to indicate the true and hidden intention on the Psalm verse. Thus, the "stag" of Ps. 42:2 implies the Shekhinah--a merciful doe.

As a feminine, merciful creature--"doe of the dawn," the Shekhinah obtains and distributes shefa--the abundant influence whose original source is God--to the other creatures of the universe. She gathers shefa from the upper Sefirot. Gathering shefa at night, the Shekhinah accomplishes distribution in the early hours of morning, prior to daybreak. Therefore, the Shekhinah is "ayelet ha-shachar," understood to mean: a merciful creature who provides sustaining shefa at dawn, from what she has gathered at night. As a result of the distribution of shefa, the forces of the world--holy and evil--return to their proper places. The Shekhinah, in providing these contrasting elements with shefa, also insures maintenance of the appropriate balance of the universe. (This implies that the Zohar sees the evil forces in the universe as receiving sustenance from God.)

Morning is also the time when the Shekhinah suffers the travail of pregnancy. The child she struggles to bear is redemption. Therefore, a second interpretation of "ayelet ha-shachar" is that the Shekhinah is "a merciful doe (who is in the throes of birth agony) at dawn." Moreover, "ayelet ha-shachar" is also interpreted to mean: "the doe of the dawn of redemption."

The Shekhinah's peril and agony is caused by the combined menace of Gevurah and the Other Side. Evil --the serpent-- pursues her while she is on her journey,

evidently to prevent the Shekhinah from receiving and distributing shefa and, thereby, continuing the imbalance of the universe. The chaos of a universe unbalanced can be seen as the ultimate evil and the goal of the Other Side. Furthermore, when the Shekhinah is pregnant with shefa (and redemption?), her womb is sealed by the overwhelming presence of iniquity. In her role as provider and "mother" of shefa, the Shekhinah is hindered and opposed by evil.

The Shekhinah is first described as being pregnant with redemption. Later in the passage, the reference is to the bearing of shefa. Since redemption can be viewed as the ultimate of shefa, it is reasonable to conclude that the nature of the Shekhinah's "offspring" resulting from these two pregnancies are similar. That is to say, the symbolic content of the images of the Shekhinah as pregnant are closely related, if not identical.

In both instances of pregnancy, the Shekhinah's salvation comes through the intervention of the Holy One Blessed Be He (apparently Eyn Sof and not Tiferet). Moreover, in each case the instrument of salvation is a serpent. In the earlier episode, God overcomes evil's threat to the Shekhinah by causing the elements of the Other Side to become enmeshed in internal quarrels. The Shekhinah is later enabled to give birth to shefa when she is bitten

by a serpent. In this instance, it is clear that God not only frees the Shekhinah to give birth, but does so only when the time for delivery has come. Evil's domination over the Shekhinah, to the extent that the Other Side succeeds in preventing shefa from coming forth, appears to last only as long as God permits. The implication is that stern judgment, which follows the spread of sin, does function in the universe, but only on a controlled and limited basis.

The recurring image of the serpent as the means for divine salvation and the similarity of circumstance in which this image appears--i.e., when evil threatens the Shekhinah's ability to dispense shefa -- can lead one to conclude that this passage contains repeating allegories with a single underlying theme. Though the passage appears to recount two distinct episodes involving the Shekhinah and a "saving" serpent, in actuality it presents two expressions of one idea.

The sense of time which characterizes this passage seems to be two-fold. The first perspective is the present. Each twenty-four hours the Shekhinah seeks, acquires, and distributes shefa. She is active on a daily basis. Here, however, her intense activity does not include control over evil. This is the domain of God who uses evil forces to effect her salvation. Once again, evil is used to achieve a positive end.

Prior to the advent of the Messiah, the world requires this daily activity of the Shekhinah. The shefa she brings to it may be viewed as a nourishing but limited "foretaste" of the Messianic condition. The Shekhinah's daily ritual prefigures the coming of the Messiah. (This interpretation bears parallels to Heschel's view of the Sabbath.)

The second time-orientation is toward the future. One can speculate that once the Shekhinah has given birth to redemption and the Messiah, her daily ritual will cease. Having given birth to ultimate, eternal goodness, the Shekhinah will no longer need to acquire and dispense shefa -- "everyday," pre-Messianic goodness. The Shekhinah's greatest act of compassion (brought about by God) will enable the world to be sustained for all time.

In sum, the Shekhinah is seen as the agent for the distribution of shefa in the universe. The success or turmoil she encounters in this endeavor accounts for the balance or imbalance, the stability or chaos apparent in the world at any given moment. The periodic victories of the Other Side in frustrating the Shekhinah's execution of her task are ultimately suppressed by God. Moreover, the Shekhinah's role in relation to the maintenance of the universe both now and in the Messianic future is of profound importance.

### Valorous Woman

(Zohar, Part III 97a, Raya Mehemna; Tishby, p. 240)

#### Translation

"And he shall wave the sheaf" (Lev. 23:11). This is the commandment to offer the sacrifice of the omer. This sacrifice pertains entirely to adhesion, above and below--the matron and her children walk together. [With the omer sacrifice, the Shekhinah is purified from the grasp of the Shells; when it is offered Israel adheres to the Shekhinah and she adheres to Tiferet her husband.] Israel offers this omer in their purity, and this same sacrifice is of barley [like the jealousy offering, for the purity of the Shekhinah is tested by the omer] and is offered to arouse the wife's love for her husband. The indecent woman [Lilith, the female of the Other Side] removes herself from their midst, for she is unable to stand beside her (the wife). The woman of valor [the Shekhinah] comes near to approach the High Priest [Hesed, the High Priest of the Sefirot]; she is certainly pure, "then she shall be free and shall conceive seed" (Num.5:28), and she adds strength and love to her husband. The lewd woman escapes from the sanctuary, in order to approach it, for if she were to come near it at the same moment when the valorous woman examines herself (to make certain she



is not menstruating), she would perish from the world. Therefore, she does not want to approach the sanctuary and flees from it, and Israel remains pure, without a foreign mixture, in regard to the secret of faith [the world of emanations; the Other Side departs from Israel as well, and they stand in purity before the Divinity]. This hidden secret is the secret of the two sisters, [which refers to an incident involving two sisters, in which one became defiled and sent her pure sister to be examined in her stead; when the defiled sister kissed her (pure) sister upon her return from the examination, she (the former) died from the smell of the water which causes the curse, Tanhuma, Naso 6], and when this sister smells the other at her examination "her belly shall swell and her thigh shall rot" (Ibid. vs. 27), for the examination of the woman of valor is a lethal drug for the lewd woman. And this is the counsel-- the Holy One Blessed Be He gave (the practice of) offering this sacrifice to His children for the sake of the valorous woman, so that the lewd woman would flee from her and Israel would remain without a foreign mixture. Happy are they in this world and in the world-to-come.

#### Comment

This passage indicates the true and deepest meaning

of the omer sacrifice. It teaches that this sacrifice has been instituted by God as a means for purifying the Shekhinah and removing the influence of the Other Side, represented by the feminine evil persona: Lilith. When Lilith is forced to flee and the Sitra Achra can no longer intervene and contaminate, the Shekhinah and her husband, Tiferet, are united in love. A further and related result of the omer sacrifice is that it serves to purify Israel and cleanse it from the influence of the Other Side. Israel is pure and without blemish when the foreign element of evil is driven from its midst.

The omer sacrifice is related in kind and in function to the jealousy offering of the Sotah ritual (Num. 5.). The Shekhinah and Lilith are seen as two sisters, one pure, the other impure. They are the feminine essences of opposing cosmic forces--creative divine power and evil. Here these forces do not mix; they are totally antagonistic. While the Shekhinah, the valorous woman, can withstand the Sotah ritual because of her innocence, Lilith, evil, lewd, and impure, cannot. In the incident of the two sisters referred to by Tishby, the unclean sister dies as a consequence of coming into contact with the vapors of the curse-producing water on the breath of her pure sister. Though Lilith may not be ultimately defeated, her power is drained and her influence is dispelled.



While the omer sacrifice is the means of purification, Israel is charged with the task of enacting the sacrifice. Therefore, Israel's role in effecting change in the world of emanations is crucial. Through its acts of sacrifice and devotion, Israel restores purity and union to the universe. By offering up the omer, Israel causes the Shekhinah to adhere to Tiferet and insures that the matron will walk with her children--that the Shekhinah will be united with Israel, as well.

## Righteousness

(Zohar, Part II 139b-140a; Tishby, pp. 240-1)

### Translation

R. Simon began discourse on the verse: "who raised up righteousness from the east, etc." (Isa. 41:2). We have already established the meaning and explained this verse, but this is the secret of wisdom. "Who" is the secret of the upper world [Binah] for from there the beginning of the revelation of the secret of faith [the Sefirot which emanate from Binah, particularly Tiferet and Malkhut] goes forth, and we have already explained this. Additionally: "Who," the hidden of all the hidden [apparently Keter] which is not known and is not revealed at all, reveals its glory, so that they will recognize it, from the same place which is called "east" [generally Tiferet, but here, perhaps, Hokmah], for from there (is) the beginning of all the secret of faith and the revelation of the light. The text then says: "righteousness called him to his feet" (Ibid.) for righteousness [Malkhut, the attribute of lenient judgment, in which the power of stern judgment of Gevurah is revealed] reveals the supernal Gevurah and the dominion of the Holy One Blessed Be He, and this righteousness is the ruler (appointed by the Holy One Blessed Be He) over all the worlds to direct them

and to establish them properly. And therefore: "gave the nations before him and made him rule over kings" (Ibid.), for all the kings of the world exist by virtue of the authority of this righteousness, as it is said in Scripture: "And He shall judge the world with righteousness" (Ps. 9:9). Moreover: "Righteousness called him to his feet" (Isa. 41:2). Who calls to whom? Righteousness is he who constantly calls to the shining mirror [Tiferet] and is never silent, and righteousness constantly stands upon her feet [Malkhut stands near Netzah and Hod, which function as two legs of Tiferet] and does not move from there, calls and is not silent. This is the meaning of the Scriptural verse: "Do not keep Your silence, O God, do not hold Your peace, and do not be still, O God," (Ps. 83:2).

#### Comment

In this passage Binah is identified as the agent which conveyed the Shekhinah to the world. Rather than interpreting the Isa. 41:2 verse as either a question or a rhetorical statement, the Zohar sees this text as a "straight-forward" statement. "Who" (Mi), or Binah, raised up righteousness (the Shekhinah). That is, the Shekhinah is one of the Sefirot which emanate from Binah.

Furthermore, this text is also seen, apparently, as a reference to the Sefirah Keter. Keter, the Sefirah closest to Eyn Sof and, therefore, the hiddenmost of all the Sefirot, reveals itself through the Sefirah Hokmah. The energy or light of Keter is transmitted through Hokmah.

"Afterwards," or perhaps, once the sefirotic system is established, the Shekhinah "reveals" or motivates the working of stern judgment within the universe. The Shekhinah is involved in an essential relationship with Gevurah (stern judgment), though the intricacies of that relation are not fully explained in this text. Both represent judgment, though of different degrees. The Shekhinah is judgment mixed with mercy. Gevurah is judgment in its undiluted and most severe form. According to the Zoharic mind, the universe is ordered through judgment. Thus, God commissions the Shekhinah as the ruler of the world. The implication seems to be that some degree of judgment (lenient, but not severe) is necessary to maintain the balance of the universe. Elsewhere, the Zohar seems to indicate that the imbalance of the universe is connected to the forces of evil and the dominion of Gevurah.)

As righteousness, the Shekhinah is ever-watchful and ceaseless in her promotion of judgment and order.

This, presumably, is the import of her constant calling, directed primarily to Tiferet. Her role as the representative of God is firmly established by the re-interpretation of the verse from Psalms (Ps. 83:2) which concludes the passage. It is through the Shekhinah that the voice of God is proclaimed, and through her that righteousness-- judgment and order-- is brought to the world.

The most striking feature of this passage is the active centrality of the Shekhinah's role. Her character as Malkhut (Dominion) is clearly manifested. Once the sefirotic system is in operation, the Shekhinah functions as the stabilizer of the universe. As God's Presence, or the conveyer of His Presence, the Shekhinah serves as the foundation and guarantor of universal order. That is, the orderly operation of the world is a reflection of the Shekhinah's activity and control, and, therefore, God's Presence. Here rulership is equated with righteousness. The Shekhinah's righteous sovereignty establishes essential judgment and consequent fundamental order, a state which can only be brought about through divine rule.

Messenger of the Holy One Blessed Be He  
(Zohar, Part II 50-51a; Tishby, pp. 241-2)

Translation

R. Abba said: O, how many thousands, how many tens of thousands of holy hosts has the Holy One Blessed Be He; those with lofty faces, those who see, those who are armed, those who weep, those who wail, those of compassion, those of judgment; and above them He appointed the noble lady [the Shekhinah] to serve Him in the palace. In contrast to these, she, the noble lady, has armed hosts. The armed hosts have sixty countenances and they all stand around her with swords girt. Some go out, some enter; with six wings they fly over all the world. Before each one (there are) burning coals, his dress is flaming fire, on his back the flaming sword glows in all the world to guard her. This is the meaning of the Scriptural verse: "and the flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way of the tree of life" (Gen. 3:24). [The tree of life is Tiferet, who is the Upper Israel]. Who is "the way of the tree of life?" This is the great noble lady who is the path to the same great and magnificent tree, the tree of life. As it is written in Scripture: "Behold his bed, which Solomon's, sixty valiant men are around it, of the valiant of Israel" (S.S. 3:7) ["Solomon's bed" is the Upper Israel, which is sought by the

noble lady] -- the Upper Israel, "they all hold swords" (Ibid. vs. 8).

When the noble lady moves, they all move with her, as it is written in Scripture; "The angel of God...moved" (Ex. 14:19). And is she called the angel of God? Said R. Abba: Yes! Come and see: thus said R. Simon: the Holy One Blessed Be He prepared a holy palace [the Shekhinah] before Him, an upper palace, a holy city, an upper city which is called Jerusalem the Holy City. Whoever goes in to the king [Tiferet] does not enter except by way of this holy city, (from here) the path leads to the king, for from here the path is prepared. This is the meaning of the Scriptural verse: "This is the gate of the Lord, into which the righteous shall enter" (Ps. 118:20). All messages which the king wants to send go forth from the house of the noble lady, and all messages to the king from below first enter the house of the noble lady and from there to the king; thus, the noble lady is the messenger of all--from above to below, and from below to above, and therefore, she is the messenger of all. This is the meaning of the verse: "The angel of God, who had been going ahead of the Israelite army, now moved" (Ex. 14:19)--Israel of Above. "The angel of God," this is He about whom it is written: "The Lord went before them, etc." (Ex. 13:21); and this is: "to travel day and night" (Ibid.),



as they have explained. [The words: "The Lord" relate to the Shekhinah who goes on a mission on behalf of Tiferet. According to the Sages: "Every place in Scripture where va'adonai is said it refers to Him and His Court" (Gen. R. 51:3). With the "day and night," it is hinted that she functions with the assistance of Hesed and Gevurah.] And is it to the king's glory (is it proper) that the noble lady will go and wage war and act as a messenger? Rather, this resembles a king who married a noble matron. The king saw her glory over all the other matrons of the world. He said: they are all like servant girls (Soncino translation: "a vulgar herd") in contrast to this matron of mine; she is above all of them. What shall I do for her? All of my house shall be in her hands. The king made a proclamation: henceforth, all the affairs of the king will be handed over to the noble lady. What did he do? The king placed all his instruments of war, his military leaders, all his precious stones, and all his treasures in her hands. He said: henceforth, anyone who requires to speak with me will not be able to speak with me until he informs the noble lady. Likewise, the Holy One Blessed Be He, because of His great affection and love for the Assembly of Israel [the Shekhinah], entrusted everything to her authority. He said: Behold, all the rest (of the nations) are considered nothing when compared

to her.

Comment

The primary concern of this passage is the explication of the Shekhinah's role in relation to Tiferet. The Shekhinah is alternately described as a noble lady, a palace, an angel of God, and/or a messenger for Tiferet, and as the path to the Tree of Life (Tiferet). An element of paradox is inherent in the first two of these images, for the Shekhinah, as the noble lady, is commissioned to serve in the palace. Furthermore, the Shekhinah's presence is one of power and fearsome might, for she is surrounded and protected by a host of guards, described with the terrifying imagery of flaming swords, etc.

Tiferet is variously identified as the Tree of Life, Upper Israel, and a king. In addition, it may be reasonable to equate the Holy One Blessed Be He with Tiferet, as well.

According to the passage, the Shekhinah's role in regard to the activity of Tiferet is crucial. The Shekhinah maintains total control over access to Tiferet from "outside," as well as Tiferet's own contact with other "areas." She is the intermediary through which all interaction must pass, whether in-coming or out-going. Her position of control and administration has been awarded her

as a result of Tiferet's immense affection for her.

As the lower-most Sefirah in the sefirotic system, the Shekhinah is most logically suited to act as an agency of mediation. She, of all the Sefirot, is closest to the lower realms and, therefore, is best able to receive and deliver "messages," or act as the conduit for contact between Tiferet and other elements of the universe. Whether the Shekhinah acts as intermediary between Tiferet and both the other Sefirot and the other worlds, or solely between Tiferet and the other worlds is not clearly discernible from the text. (One may speculate, based on the thrust of this passage, that all of Tiferet's contact or exchange of divine energy, be it with the sefirotic or other realms, is mediated by the Shekhinah. However, the diagrams of the sefirotic system clearly indicate lines of connection between Tiferet and the other Sefirot that are direct and not via the Shekhinah.)

A problematic aspect of the passage is its lack of clarity in regard to references to the Holy One Blessed Be He and Tiferet. (In certain Zoharic passages, the phrase the Holy One Blessed Be He is understood to indicate Tiferet.) Was it the Holy One Blessed Be He (meaning, possibly, Eyn Sof) or Tiferet who established the palace in which the noble lady serves? This is not clear. Yet, the palace--as this image is developed in the text--

is inhabited by Tiferet, the king. Further, the phrases "angel of God" (Ex. 14:19) and "gate of the Lord" (Ps. 118:20) are interpreted and applied to the Shekhinah, as descriptive of her role vis-a-vis Tiferet. One must conclude, then that "God" and "Lord" here refer neither to Adonai nor Eyn Sof, but to Tiferet. While some confusion remains as to the precise implication of the appellation "the Holy One Blessed Be He" as it is used throughout the passage, an underlying consistency in the interpretation of biblical verses and phrases aimed at revealing the relationship between the Shekhinah and Tiferet is, nonetheless, apparent.

## Moon

(Zohar, Part I 199a; Tishby, p. 245)

Translation

R. Judah said: after God created the moon [Malkhut], he would gaze upon it constantly, as it is written in Scripture: "the eyes of the Lord your God are always upon it" (Deut.11:12). His providence was with her constantly, as it is written: "Then did He see it, and declare it; He prepared it, and searched it out" (Job 28:27). "Then did He see it," for through His care for her, the sun [Tiferet] is illuminated. [The light of Tiferet increases as a result of his care of Malkhut.] "Declare it" (vayesaprah) means, as it is said in Scripture: "Its stones are the place of sapphires" (Ibid.). [That is, he adorns her, in the sense of (with) "a sapphire stone."] "Prepared it" means that she sits in her dwelling in twelve regions [the camps of the Shekhinah], divided among seventy princes [the princes of the seventy nations of the world, who rule with the power of the shefa which they receive from Malkhut]; He established her upon seven supreme pillars [the seven Sefirot above Malkhut] to be illuminated and to sit on a fixture. "And searched it out" means: to guard her constantly, time after time, in an unceasing manner. Afterwards, He warned man: "And unto man He said,

Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to depart from evil is understanding" (Ibid. 28:28), for she is crowned by the lower ones, (so as) to fear and to know the Holy One Blessed Be He because of her. [The good deeds of humanity crown her, and about her it is said: "The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom," for if they fear her and honor her properly, she opens the door to the attainment of divinity.] "And to depart from evil is understanding" means to keep away the refuse [with the removal of the Shells from Malkhut, man acquires the understanding to observe the celestial realms], so as not to draw it near to her. Thereby, (man attains) the essence of understanding, to know and to consider the glory of the Supreme King.

#### Comment

In this passage the Shekhinah is depicted as the moon, first created and then cared for, adorned, and protected by God. Further, God has established the moon to dwell "in twelve regions"--or, the Shekhinah has been set among her many camps and hosts. This is, perhaps, an allusion to the position of the natural moon within the twelve astrological areas or "signs." Alternatively, the preparation of the moon in twelve regions may refer to the moon's relation to the twelve lunar months of the

Hebrew calendar. Whatever the precise meaning of these symbols, it does appear that the identification of the Shekhinah with the moon conveys the notion that, like the moon, the Shekhinah has a fixed, established domain within the celestial and sefirotic order.

In addition, the nations of the world are ruled by princes whose power is conferred upon them by the Shekhinah. She is the means by which they receive the divine shefa which enables them to rule. Thus, the Shekhinah not only is established in the heavenly realm, but she is a fundamental agent in the establishment of the earthly order as well.

Just as the Shekhinah is adorned by God, so, too, is she crowned and adorned by lower creatures. The behavior of the observant Jewish community towards the Shekhinah emulates and parallels that of God. The actions of Jews have a significant effect upon her. Their proper awe and fear of God, manifested specifically as awe or fear of the Shekhinah, motivates them to perform righteous acts. Further, the good deeds of Jews cause the influence of evil to depart from the Shekhinah. The welfare of the Shekhinah is dependent upon the proper attitude of faithful Jews who, out of their reverence, piety, and fear, effect behaviors which aid her. Thus, the Shekhinah is "crowned" by the actions of the pious.



As the result of performing ma'asim tovim, the Jew gains "wisdom" and "understanding," the capability to know and perceive the Divinity. The Shekhinah and the righteous Jew have a reciprocal relationship. In return for his removing evil from the Shekhinah, she opens the doors to divine knowledge. She is equipped to do this by virtue of the favored relationship she enjoys with God.

In sum, the Shekhinah is dependent upon God for protection and the enhancement of her beauty. Moreover, the Jew shares responsibility with God for defending and beautifying the Shekhinah. In reaction to the concern and attention paid her, the Shekhinah, displaying her responsiveness and generosity, enables the Jew to attain the utmost reward. Early in the passage the reader learns how the brilliance of Tiferet increases as a result of God's adornment of the Shekhinah. The parallelism of the passage is complete when the Jew, having in his own way adorned the Shekhinah, is, in consequence, "illuminated" by the knowledge of God.

### Diminution of the Moon

(Zohar, Part I 181a,b; Tishby, p. 246)

#### Translation

R. Simon began discourse on the text: "Behold, my servant shall prosper, he shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high." (Isa. 52:13). Happy is the portion of the righteous, for the Holy One Blessed Be He reveals the paths of the Torah to them so that they may walk upon them. Come and see: this verse contains an exalted secret meaning. "Behold, my servant shall prosper" they have already explained. But come and see: when the Holy One Blessed Be He created the world, He made the moon [Malkhut, who receives her light from Tiferet who is the sun] and limited its light, for it has nothing of its own; and since it lessened itself, it is illuminated by the sun and the power of the upper luminaries. At the time when the Temple existed, Israel was busy with sacrifices and offerings, which the priests, Levites, and Israelites performed in order to establish bonds and cause lights to shine. But after the Temple was destroyed, the light became darkened and the moon was not illuminated by the sun, for the sun departed from it and it was not illuminated; there was not a single day on which curses, afflictions, and pains did not abound, as has been explained. What

is written in Scripture about that hour [the era of the Messiah] when the time arrives for the moon to be illuminated? "Behold, my servant shall prosper" is said about the moon. "Behold, my servant shall prosper," this is the secret of faith. "Behold, my servant shall prosper" for there arises a stirring above, as of one who sniffs a fragrance and awakens alert and attentive. [Mal-khut regains strength from the shefa which descends from above.] "He shall be exalted," from the side of the supreme light [the upper Sefirot, for they are compassion] above all the luminaries. "He shall be exalted," as it is said in Scripture: "and therefore will He be exalted, that He may have mercy upon you" (Isa. 30:18). "And lifted up" from the side of Abraham [Hesed]; "and shall be high," from the side of Isaac [Gevurah]; "very," from the side of Jacob [Tiferet]. And although they explained this (in another manner), all is one in the secret of wisdom. At that time, the Holy One Blessed Be He will cause a stirring above that will illumine the moon, properly, as it is said in Scripture: "Moreover, the light of the moon shall be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun shall be sevenfold, as the light of seven days" (Isa. 30:26).

#### Comment

The subject of this passage is the state of the

Shekhinah prior to and following the Destruction of the Temple. Its primary thrust is provided by the mystic interpretation of Isa. 52:13 which is seen to contain an esoteric statement of extreme significance.

Here, the Shekhinah is depicted as the moon, passive with no light of her own. Rather, the Shekhinah is illuminated by the reflected light from Tiferet and the other Sefirot. The "light" that the Shekhinah receives is, presumably, the shefa which comes to her from the other elements in the sefirotic system. (It is perhaps worth noting that the astronomical knowledge in evidence in this passage--i.e., the moon is not, itself, a source of light but reflects the light of the sun--may already have been current at the time of the appearance of the Zohar--late thirteenth century--but may not yet have been known in the Jewish community at the time of R. Simon ben Yohai--second century C.E.--the alleged author of the Zohar.) Further, the sacrifices and worship which were practiced in the Temple caused the moon to be illuminated. That is, the rites enacted in the Temple in Jerusalem paralleled the activity of God at the Creation: the effect of both was to provide the Shekhinah with shefa.

With the Destruction of the Temple there was a cessation of sacrifice and worship. Moreover, this inactivity was analagous and inter-related to Tiferet's de-

parture from the Shekhinah. Light ceased to brighten the moon and it grew dark; the flow of shefa to the Shekhinah was interrupted. The corresponding factors necessary to supply shefa to the Shekhinah were absent in both the sefirotic and earthly realms.

The present state of the Shekhinah, from the perspective of this passage, is tragic. She is bereft of divine energy. Yet, the overall impact of this passage is dynamic and full of hope and certainty for the future. The "secret meaning" discerned in the Isaiah verse by the mystic interpreter is that, with the advent of the Messiah, the moon will regain its light to a degree even surpassing its previous magnitude. The Shekhinah will be re-strengthened by shefa which will once again descend to her from above. She will be nourished and fortified by the Sefirot Hesed, Gevurah, and Tiferet whose shefa-conveying activity will be ordained by God. A further implication of the text is that the re-building of the Temple, a result of the Messianic presence, will herald the renewal of sacrificial practice by Israel. The restoration of Temple rites will, as well, cause the moon to re-gain its light.

Thus, it is clear from the development and implications of this passage that the dawn of the Messiah will have truly cosmic ramifications from the Zoharic viewpoint. Not only will the Messianic era mark the redemption of

the Jewish People and the restoration of Jewish life in Palestine, but it will also bring about a definitely corresponding restoration and renewal in the sefirotic world, with special significance for the Shekhinah.

### Expulsion of the Queen

(Zohar, Part III 69a; Tishby, p.250-1)

#### Translation

It is taught: one day the comrades were walking with R. Simon. He said: we see that all these peoples are elevated and Israel is below them. What is the reason? Because the king [Tiferet] has sent the noble lady [the Shekhinah, who leads Israel] away, and put the servant girl in her place; as it is said in Scripture: "For three things the earth is disquieted..., for a servant when he reigns...and a handmaid that is heir to her mistress" (Prov. 30:21-23). Who is the handmaid? She is the foreign crown [Lilith, the governing female of the Other Side, by whose force the nations dominate] whose first-born the Holy One Blessed Be He slew in Egypt; as it is written in Scripture: "even unto the first-born of the maidservant who is behind the mill" (Ex. 11:5). Formerly, she sat behind the mill; now this maidservant is heir to her mistress. R. Simon wept and said: a king without a noble lady cannot be called a king; (if) a king cleaves to a maidservant, to the servant girl of the noble lady, where is his honor? The secret of the matter: in the future a voice will cry out to the noble lady, saying: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter



of Jerusalem, for your King comes to you; He is just (Tzaddik) and has salvation" (Zech. 9:9). As if to say: the righteous one (Tzaddik) [Yesod] is he who will be saved, because until now he had been riding [engaged in intercourse] in a place not his, in a foreign place which nursed him. About this is written in Scripture: "Poor, riding upon an ass" (Ibid.). "Poor" he was previously; "riding upon an ass," as we have explained, the lower crowns of the idolatrous peoples whose first-born the Holy One Blessed Be He slew in Egypt; this is (the meaning) of the Scriptural phrase: "and all the first-born of the beasts" (Ex. 11:5), and we have already explained the matters. It is as though "he is just and has salvation"--(the Tzaddik will be saved), he, indeed, more than all others, for until now he existed without righteousness [Tzedek--the Shekhinah], and now, since they copulate together "he is just and has salvation"--for he does not dwell on the Other Side.

#### Comment

This passage is made problematic by its apparent alternation in emphasis. It is first concerned with the relationship between the Shekhinah and Tiferet; it then discusses that of the Shekhinah and Yesod. Yet, there are similarities of theme and structure throughout the

passage. Tiferet and the Shekhinah are represented as a king and his noble lady; Yesod and the Shekhinah are, apparently, lovers who, in the end, achieve a conjugal union. In both cases, a separation between the parties is followed by (re)conciliation and (re)union.

Initially, the Shekhinah has been banished by Tiferet. She has been supplanted by Lilith, an alien figure, powerful in her own right as the evil counterpart to the Shekhinah, but of inferior status. Lilith is a "pretender" to nobility who is likened to a handmaiden. With her elevation, evil reigns and the nations of the world are ascendant; Israel is degraded.

There is, then, a direct correlation between the expulsion of the Shekhinah and the Dispersion of the Jews. In addition, there is also a clear correspondence between the exalted position of Lilith and the success of the idolatrous nations. Moreover, not only is there a parallelism between the fates of the Shekhinah and Lilith and that of their respective "earthly camps," but the two groups are in direct opposition in their particular realms. The position of Israel vis-a-vis the nations mirrors that of the Shekhinah vis-a-vis Lilith. In other words, when the Shekhinah enjoys favored status, Israel does as well. When she loses favor, Israel suffers also. The Shekhinah's loss of status and Israel's corollary decline are concurrent with and inter-related to Lilith's prosperity and the dominance of the nations.

The mystical interpretation of Zech. 9:9 predicts the triumphant restoration of the Shekhinah to her proper position and, necessarily, the victory of Israel. Lilith will be defeated and with her the nations. The king who was without a noble lady will come to his appropriate mate to be reunited with her. Yesod, the Tzaddik, who had been consorting with evil (a situation brought about by Tiferet's elevation of Lilith), will be saved by uniting with the Shekhinah, characterized as Tzedek(righteousness). In the one instance, movement and change will be effected by Tiferet. In the other, change will occur in Yesod. In both, the Shekhinah will neither move nor fundamentally change, but her status will be clearly altered. In this sense, she is dependent, passively awaiting the return of both Tiferet and Yesod. However, by returning to the Shekhinah, Tiferet will regain his royal honor and Yesod will acquire salvation. In this sense, the Shekhinah is an agent of change. Though the Shekhinah's predicted unification with Tiferet and then with Yesod appear to be separate occurrences, one may suspect that these will both be simultaneous and paradoxical elements of a singular restorative event. It is as though the Shekhinah will be joined with two distinct Sefirot at different times, but, in fact, she may be joined with both in the same moment of future redemption.

Serious questions which grow out of this passage concern Tiferet's actions. Why did he banish the Shekhinah in the first place? What were the circumstances which led Tiferet to initiate a course of events that resulted in a cosmic imbalance? Were his actions in direct response to the sins of the Jewish People? Perhaps so, but the answers to these questions must remain speculative for they do not appear in the text.

Finally, this passage is remarkable for it does not depict the Shekhinah as operative whatsoever in the present. This is in sharp contrast to her situation in the other texts analyzed above. However, the Shekhinah's absence here reflects the Zoharic notion that she is in galut with the Jewish People. This powerful concept takes two alternate forms in the Zohar. Briefly stated, they are:

1. The Shekhinah has chosen to go into exile out of her compassion for Israel in order to protect them in their dispersion.

2. God has sent the Shekhinah into exile with Israel as a pledge to them that He will yet fulfill the Covenant and as a sign of His love and mercy. (See Tishby selections: "The Darkened Light" and "Pledge.")

## CHAPTER II

### C O N C L U S I O N S

The primary view of the Shekhinah which emerges from the eleven passages analyzed above is that she is dualistic in nature. Repeatedly, she alternates between two distinct modes of being. On the one hand, she is passive, dependent, and vulnerable. On the other hand, she is an active, controlling figure whose behaviors are critical to the existence of the universe.

The passivity and dependence of the Shekhinah resides in the fact that, in general, she must rely on other Sefirot for nourishment. Like all the Sefirot, she generates no shefa of her own, but must await its transmission to her from its ultimate source, Eyn Sof. The Sefirot Binah, Hesed, Gevurah, Tiferet, Netzah, Hod, and Yesod all perform the conduit function for her at one time or another.<sup>1</sup>

In addition, the Shekhinah appears to be the Sefirah most susceptible to contamination by evil. While other Sefirot, notably Tiferet and Yesod, may be tempted by evil, it is the Shekhinah alone who suffers malicious pursuit. Tiferet and Yesod, masculine elements who alternate as the Shekhinah's lovers, can fall prey to the designs of evil when embodied by Lilith, its feminine aspect.<sup>2</sup>

It is then that the Shekhinah is rigorously opposed by the negative female interloper in a cosmic counterpart to the eternal triangle. On many other occasions the Shekhinah is subjected to the threat of defilement by the Shells, further manifestations of the Other Side.<sup>3</sup> Thus, the Shekhinah, defenseless in the face of evil, is recurrently in need of the protection of the other Sefirot and God Himself.<sup>4</sup> Israel, too, serves in the capacity of protector as will be discussed below.

Moreover, the Shekhinah's passivity is reflected in the fact that she is exiled by Tiferet, presumably through no fault of her own.<sup>5</sup> (In the first of the two Zoharic explanations for the Shekhinah's exile cited above, she demonstrates the capacity for active choice. However, in the second, the Shekhinah is entirely devoid of control over her situation.) In the instances in which she has been separated from either Tiferet or Yesod, the Shekhinah lacks the ability to stimulate their return.<sup>6</sup> Again, she is passive, initiating no activity of her own. Indeed, the Shekhinah's nearly identical aspects of passivity and vulnerability are those qualities of her diverse nature which, most probably, formed the basis of her femininity in the mind of the Zohar's author.

Though the Shekhinah receives shefa from several of the Sefirot, her relationships with Tiferet and Yesod exhibit a particular intensity. Both of these masculine



Sefirot are cast as the Shekhinah's ardent lovers from whom she receives shefa as a result of sexual union.<sup>7</sup> Of the two, Tiferet more frequently functions in this role.

The intimacy of the Shekhinah and Tiferet produces important consequences in addition to the Shekhinah's receipt of shefa. Through their interaction, Hesed comes to influence the Shekhinah.<sup>8</sup> The presence of Hesed within the Shekhinah matches the effect exerted upon her by Gevurah. Under the combined influence of both judgment and mercy, the Shekhinah is enabled to sustain the world through lenient judgment.<sup>9</sup> With the addition of shefa and mercy, the Shekhinah achieves a balanced state, encompassing the extremes of divine love and power. This internal balance within the Shekhinah equips her to promote a similar external balance within the lower realms, especially in the material world. It is as though Tiferet's function as mediator between Hesed and Gevurah in the sefirotic world is delegated to the Shekhinah with respect to the other realms through the act of intercourse.<sup>10</sup> This identity of role, albeit in different areas, may account, in part, for the Zoharic notion that when the Shekhinah and Tiferet unite, "all is one." That the gender differences between the two Sefirot are, upon occasion, indistinguishable may be one way of saying that



they perform the same function.

The Shekhinah's relationship with Yesod appears to be less complex than that with Tiferet. The sole purpose of sexual relations between Yesod and the Shekhinah seems to be the transmission of shefa from the former to the latter.<sup>12</sup> Perhaps because of its fewer sweeping ramifications, this relationship appears to be secondary to and less significant than the Shekhinah's relationship with Tiferet. This may be reflected by the fact that in the passages discussed above references to the Shekhinah's contacts with Tiferet are more numerous than those concerning her contacts with Yesod.

Viewed on an overall basis, the Shekhinah's relations with her lovers are not static. Intimate contact with one or the other is not a permanent, uninterrupted aspect of the existence of the Shekhinah. Rather, periods of intimacy can be followed by periods of separation, at which time the Shekhinah is without the positive effects of shefa and mercy.<sup>13</sup> Yet, it is of utmost significance that the Zohar sees these periods of separation as temporary, however, painful they may be for the Shekhinah. The ultimate outlook of the Zohar is optimistic, based on a profound faith in the eventual appearance of the Messiah. The separation from Tiferet and Yesod which the Shekhinah must endure will be followed by reunion with them. This

will be effected in the future, Messianic era.<sup>14</sup>

Once the Shekhinah has received shefa from Tiferet, Yesod, and the other Sefirot, she is enabled to distribute divine energy to the other realms.<sup>15</sup> This distribution of shefa is one of the fundamental components of her active dimension. Thus, both the Shekhinah's passive and active aspects are centrally linked to shefa, the former to its acquisition, the latter to its dissemination.

As an active agent for the distribution of shefa, the Shekhinah exerts a powerful, controlling influence upon the universe. In this respect, the term Malkhut (dominion) is most expressive of her status and endeavors. By providing shefa to the world, the Shekhinah establishes the appropriate balance between the holy and evil forces.<sup>16</sup> Further, the legendary seventy nations which rule the world find the source of their dominion in the shefa the Shekhinah transmits to them.<sup>17</sup>

A second fundamental component of the Shekhinah's active dimension is her control over the presence of mercy and judgment in the world. The Shekhinah exhibits her dominion as she rules or orders the world through lenient judgment.<sup>18</sup> Because she is responsive to the dual influence of Hesed and Gevurah, the Shekhinah is uniquely suited to stabilize the world in this manner.

Moreover, her femininity is, once again, manifested in her ability to soften judgment. Hence, the Shekhinah's aspects of activity and dominion are closely, if paradoxically, tied to her passive, responsive, and feminine aspects. Her capacity to bring stability to the world derives from her own mutable, unstable nature.

The Shekhinah's power and active control are further demonstrated by the method she employs to balance judgment and mercy. She does so by dominating the forces of evil and directing them to obstruct the flow of shefa.<sup>19</sup> The Klipot are like valves which open and close in accord with the will of the Shekhinah who determines the precise amounts of shefa, mercy, and judgment needed to insure the existence of the world.

It is obvious, then, that the functions the Shekhinah performs with respect to shefa, mercy, and judgment are of critical importance for the world. What remains unclear in the texts is the degree to which the Shekhinah is active. Does she monitor and control the amount and presence of judgment and mercy only on an intermittent basis? Or, does the stability of the universe require the Shekhinah's constant attention? Definite answers to these questions do not appear to be given in the textual material discussed above.

A further question arises at this point. What is

the relation between the state of balance in the universe and the Shekhinah's passivity? As pointed out above, the passivity of the Shekhinah has varying aspects. The passive state of the Shekhinah as she receives the adoration and shefa of Tiferet is in marked contrast to her condition when she is exiled by Tiferet. In the second case, her passive state corresponds to a disastrous imbalance in the universe. What of the first case? The Shekhinah is clearly passive, but does her passivity imply chaos or imbalance for the world? It does not. One may speculate that the Shekhinah's passive acceptance of shefa corresponds to the advent of a temporary restoration of order and stability in the world.

An additional aspect of the Shekhinah's activity and dominion is seen in her role as Tiferet's intermediary. Not only does she have complete control over Tiferet's contact with other elements, but her image here is that of a powerful, aggressive, war-like figure. Surrounded by a retinue armed with fiery swords, she is neither soft, modest, nor feminine.<sup>20</sup> (Femininity, as it is ascribed to the Shekhinah throughout this study, reflects the presumed associations of the author of the Zohar which are not necessarily shared by the author of this paper.)

In paradoxical contrast to its description of the Shekhinah's passivity in awaiting the Messiah and reunion

with Tiferet and Yesod, the text also foretells the role of high importance she will play in regard to the Messianic future. The Shekhinah will give birth to redemption and the Messianic souls.<sup>21</sup> This role parallels her active, day-to-day distribution of shefa. Though this occurrence may be somewhat more reactive than strictly active (a woman is impregnated by a male and eventually reacts by bearing offspring), it can be categorized as an aspect of the Shekhinah's active dimension.

The relationship between the Shekhinah and Israel is complex and intimate. The correspondence and parallels which exist between the changing status of the Shekhinah and that of Israel are signified by the very fact that the Shekhinah is often referred to in the texts as "the Assembly of Israel."<sup>22</sup> Israel often acts as the protector of the Shekhinah. Their sacrifices, righteous behavior, and good deeds cause the influence of evil to depart from the Shekhinah.<sup>23</sup> The result of Israel's piety is that evil is eliminated above and below, for Israel, too, is purified.<sup>24</sup> Further, the Shekhinah is united both with Tiferet and Israel.<sup>25</sup> Purification and union above parallel purification and union below, with the Shekhinah present on both levels simultaneously.

Israel's protective care of the Shekhinah brings them other benefits, as well. In response to their

righteous deeds, the Shekhinah acts as an avenue to divine knowledge for the faithful.<sup>26</sup> In response to their properly-intentioned prayers, the Shekhinah transmits shefa and mercy to the world.<sup>27</sup>

With the Destruction of the Temple and the consequent cessation of sacrifice and worship, Israel is forced into exile. These events correspond to Tiferet's departure from the Shekhinah and the cessation of the flow of shefa. The Shekhinah, too, is exiled along with Israel. The oppression of Israel by alien forces corresponds to the powerful opposition to the Shekhinah which is mounted by Lilith.<sup>28</sup>

The interdependence between the Shekhinah and Israel and the direct correspondence between their respective changing fortunes is representative of the doctrine of correspondences which underlies all of the Shekhinah material and the Zohar as a whole. Scholem explains this doctrine in the following manner:

On every plane...creation mirrors the inner movements of the divine life. The 'vestiges' of the innermost reality are present even in the most external of things. Everywhere there is the same rhythm, the same motion of the waves... Creation is nothing but an external development of those forces which are active and alive in God Himself. Nowhere is there a break, a discontinuity...

The most frequent illustration of this doctrine to be found in Moses de Leon's Hebrew writings is that of the chain and the links of which it consists...



'Everything is linked with everything else down to the lowest ring on the chain, and the true essence of God is above as well as below, in the heavens and on the earth, and nothing exists outside Him...God's essence is linked and connected with all worlds,...all forms of existence are linked and connected with each other, but derived from His existence and essence.'<sup>29</sup>

In regard to the correspondence between the Shekhinah and Israel, Scholem states:

In the Community of Israel, whose mundane life reflects the hidden rhythm of the universal law revealed in the Torah, the Shekhinah is immediately present, for the earthly Community of Israel is formed after the archetype of the mystical Community of Israel which is the Shekhinah. Everything that is done by the individual or the community in the mundane sphere is magically reflected in the upper region, i.e., the higher reality which shines through the acts of man.<sup>30</sup>

All events in the lower realms have their counterparts in the upper. Just as the Shekhinah and Israel are linked by the doctrine of correspondences, so, too, are the sins of mankind and the activities of the Other Side. Thus, the Zohar views the universe as an inter-related whole, with all its elements reflecting the existence and essence of God.

The relationship of Israel and the Shekhinah raises difficult questions in viewing the Shekhinah texts as a whole. How does the Zohar conceive of the relation of time to place? Secondly, what is the Zoharic conception of time in relation to history?

As noted above, divine reality as presented in the



Zohar can manifest events which defy rationality from the perspective of time and place. For example, the Shekhinah can be united with Tiferet and Yesod or with Tiferet and Israel at the same moment.<sup>31</sup> It is, apparently, no contradiction for the mystic that the Shekhinah can be found in two locations at once. This notion of time and place may reflect the mystical belief in the unity of the universe and God's omnipresence. Moreover, the contradictions which this view creates for the rational mind may indicate an overly limited, literal approach to the Sefirot on the part of the rationalist.

The Zohar seeks to explain what cannot be normally understood by logical means: God is both transcendent and immanent. Therefore, one could argue that paradox and contradiction must be accepted as inherent in the Zoharic enterprise. In confronting the Zohar, the rationalist must temporarily suspend disbelief and put aside his adherence to the scientific laws of time and motion. However, the fact that the Sefirot are described as something akin to distinct "personalities" undoubtedly contributes to the rationalist's confusion. Individual personalities cannot occupy two points in space at the same instant in a rational view of reality.

The second question with regard to the Zoharic view of time is perhaps the more problematic. In many of the

passages discussed above, the Shekhinah is described in the present. She awaits nourishment, distributes shefa, couples with Tiferet, and flees from the Klipot all in the present tense. One can conclude that these events in the life of the Shekhinah occur now and, in some cases, recur on a daily basis in the contemporary period. At least this is so from the point of view of the author. He was describing divine and cosmic reality as it was in his time. Further, one can assume that what the author of the Zohar was describing was an unchanging present. The weight and truth of hidden, mystic doctrine was thought to be eternal. What was occurring in the author's time would continue to occur in our time as well. Thus, both from the author's point of view and that of a later reader, the texts state what is occurring in the present.

However, in the latter passages there occurs a sudden and contradictory shift in perspective. The Shekhinah is now in galut with the Jewish People.<sup>32</sup> Her status as an exile is antithetical to both her passive and active dimensions when, for example, she is the recipient and distributor of shefa. As long as the Jewish People are in exile, so is the Shekhinah. One possible way to understand this contradiction is that the Zohar describes two, paradoxical present realities. The Shekhinah exists in the sefirotic realm in the various situations described above and is also in exile at the same time.

A somewhat less radical view would be that the Shekhinah alternates between exile and her sefirotic existence. She assumes her role as guarantor of judgment and provider of shefa in sufficient degrees to permit the world to exist. She then "returns" to the condition of galut to be with Israel.

A third explanation ascribes a more differentiated sense of historical time to the author's point of view. That is, the Shekhinah material may reflect two differing perspectives with regard to historical time. The initial passages may have been written from a pre-Destruction perspective; they detail an "earlier" period in the life of the Shekhinah. There, the present tense may have been utilized to describe the Shekhinah's "past." The passages which relate the exile of the Shekhinah may have been written from a post-Destruction point of view. Here, the present tense reflects the Shekhinah's current state. One may wonder how, if the Shekhinah is presently in exile, does the world exist. Perhaps, in her absence, the Shekhinah's duties are taken over by God Himself.

All the above attempts to come to grips with various questions and contradictions involving the Zoharic conception of time are purely speculative. The texts seem to lack even the most meager hint of a resolution of these problems. Nor can they lead one to prefer any one expla-

nation over the others. (It may well be that for the Zoharic Kabbalists no explanations were necessary, for they may have perceived no problem.) None of these explanations are offered as being wholly satisfying or definitive. Rather, they are responses which attest to the conceptual difficulties which beset the non-mystic student of the Zohar.

An additional curiosity of the Shekhinah material is that at no time do the terms Shekhinah or Malkhut actually appear in the texts. This fact would appear to be in consonance with the general indirection of the Zoharic style. The appearance of these terms in the selections translated above is limited to the Tishby notes and accurately reproduces his usage. A review of Tishby's use of the terms Shekhinah and Malkhut revealed the following:

The term Malkhut is associated with the transmission of shefa and the promotion of judgment and mercy.<sup>33</sup> It is Malkhut who has intercourse with Tiferet.<sup>34</sup> In general, Malkhut engages in the activities of control and dominion.<sup>35</sup>

The term Shekhinah appears more often than Malkhut when the tenth Sefirah is pursued by evil.<sup>36</sup> When Lilith appears as the antagonist, it is always the Shekhinah whom she opposes.<sup>37</sup> The Shekhinah has intercourse with

Yesod, though she also is the messenger of Tiferet.<sup>38</sup>  
 The Shekhinah is termed a "pregnant woman," "valorous woman," "noble lady," and "Assembly of Israel."<sup>39</sup>

In the passage "Doe," the terms Shekhinah and Malkhut both appear.

Though it would seem that the term Shekhinah represents the vulnerable and, to some extent, feminine aspects of the tenth Sefirah, this opinion cannot be considered conclusive. Further, the alternate use of Shekhinah and Malkhut does not appear to be reflective of the passive-active dichotomy of this Sefirah. The term Malkhut is used in both passive and active contexts and in situations in which the tenth Sefirah exhibits its feminine aspects.<sup>40</sup> Therefore, on the basis of this study, it would be inappropriate to conclude that the terms Shekhinah and Malkhut represent particular and contrasting elements in the nature of the tenth Sefirah. Tishby's use of these terms in his notes may reflect a need for variety in terminology and/or the fact that seemingly interchangeable appellations have come to be associated with this Sefirah in mystical literature.

Finally, the Shekhinah's nature can be best characterized as volatile, variegated, and unstable. (Her fundamental changeability may have been intimately bound up with her femininity in the mind of the author of

the Zohar.) While she is only a single element in the sefirotic system, the Shekhinah is unique. Her instability distinguishes her from the other Sefirot.

Each of the other Sefirot, save Keter, displays a distinct essence or characteristic attribute.<sup>41</sup> Each is a manifestation of a particular aspect of Eyn Sof: wisdom, intelligence, judgment, mercy, majesty, etc. The Shekhinah exhibits no such singular aspect or quality. Rather, she is consistently passible and susceptible to change.

Two modes of change can be discerned in the sefirotic world. The first is a change in position or in degree of influence. The Sefirot move, reorganize, and adopt new configurations or alignments. The second is a change of quality or tone. The other Sefirot change position, exhibit changing levels of influence, but their essences or overall attributes remain the same. The Shekhinah, on the other hand, undergoes changes of position and quality. The movements and re-alignments of the other Sefirot alter the specific influences upon the Shekhinah. Thereupon, the influence of the Shekhinah over the lower realms fundamentally alters, as well. Because the Shekhinah has multiple faces, because she can manifest varying qualities, she is uniquely capable of exerting control upon the disparate elements of the lower worlds. If it



can be said that the Shekhinah has an essence, her essence is instability. It is this instability which accounts for her importance.<sup>42</sup>

The concept of the Shekhinah did not originate in the Zohar. It first appeared in rabbinic literature. However, the rabbinic notion of the Shekhinah underwent a profound transformation in the Zohar. In both settings, the concept of the Shekhinah reflects an attempt to reconcile the transcendence and immanence of God, to articulate His nearness to mankind while maintaining the fact of His distance.<sup>43</sup> However, in addition to some important similarities and connections, significant differences exist in the nature of the Shekhinah in these two contexts.

In rabbinic literature, the Shekhinah is entirely passive. God confers His Presence upon mankind and later withdraws it in accord with His will and in response to human behavior.<sup>44</sup> The Shekhinah has no active functions or specific roles. This contrasts with the Zoharic Shekhinah who possesses both passive and well-developed active dimensions. As noted above, her active functions are critically significant.

Yet, the rabbinic view that God manifests or withdraws His Presence undoubtedly served as the basis for the Zoharic Shekhinah's sensitivity to the good and evil deeds of mankind. Moreover, the rabbinic Shekhinah does



not appear to be directly confronted or challenged by other elements. But given the rabbinic notion that the Shekhinah is removed in response to sin, the opposition and pursuit of the Zoharic Shekhinah by Lilith and the Klipot may be seen as an extension of the earlier rabbinic conception.<sup>45</sup>

The origins of other aspects of the Zoharic Shekhinah may be traced to the rabbinic view, as well. The Rabbis maintained that the Shekhinah was present in all places.<sup>46</sup> Yet, God's Presence was said to be found in specific locations, e.g., the Tabernacle and, subsequently, the Temple.<sup>47</sup> This view may have offered partial foundation for the Zoharic conception of time and place which permits the Shekhinah to occupy two positions simultaneously. Further, the Zohar's statements about the exile of the Shekhinah following the Destruction of the Temple have their basis in an identical rabbinic notion.

One area of significant divergence between the two Shekhinahs concerns gender and sexuality. Urbach flatly states that the rabbinic Shekhinah did not represent a feminine element of God.<sup>48</sup> In contrast, the Zoharic Shekhinah, referred to as "noble lady," "valorous woman," "pregnant creature," "doe," etc., is the feminine principle of divine reality who engages in frequent intercourse with the masculine elements. That is to say,

in the Zohar the Shekhinah has been transformed from the non-hypostasized Presence of God to a hypostasis of God's femininity, distinct from Tiferet and Yesod, His masculine aspects. According to Scholem, this innovation was one of the most significant in all of Kabbalistic thought and accounted for much of the widespread popularity of the Zohar.<sup>49</sup>

To some degree, then, the Zoharic Shekhinah exhibits the influence of the earlier version. Yet, the Shekhinah of the Zohar is of far greater complexity and depth than her rabbinic predecessor. In short, by coming to understand the mystical Shekhinah, one becomes aware of both the profound beauty and creative genius of the Zohar.

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Isaiah Tishby, Mishnat ha-Zohar, 2 vols. (Jerusalem: Mofad Bialik, 1948), 1:234,236, 236-237; supra, pp. 7-8, 16-22.

<sup>2</sup>Tishby, pp. 250-251; supra, pp. 60-61.

<sup>3</sup>Tishby, pp. 233,235,240; supra, pp.6,13,37.

<sup>4</sup>Tishby, pp. 234,245; supra, pp. 9,51.

<sup>5</sup>Tishby, p. 250; supra, p.60.

<sup>6</sup>Tishby, pp. 250-251; supra, pp. 60-61.

<sup>7</sup>Tishby, pp. 234, 235-236,237, 250-251; supra,pp. 7-8, 16-17, 22, 60-61.

<sup>8</sup>Tishby, p. 236; supra, p. 17.

<sup>9</sup>Tishby, pp. 240-241, 236-237; supra, pp. 41,22-24.

<sup>10</sup>See Glossary and diagram of the Sefirot for Tiferet as mediator.

<sup>11</sup>Tishby, p. 237; supra, p. 27.

<sup>12</sup>Tishby, p. 237, 250-251; supra, pp.22, 60-61.

<sup>13</sup>Tishby, pp. 240, 250-251; supra, pp. 37-38, 60-61.

<sup>14</sup>Tishby, pp. 250-251; supra, pp. 60-61.

<sup>15</sup>Tishby, pp. 234,237, 237-238; supra, pp. 8,22, 27-29.

<sup>16</sup>Tishby, p. 238; supra, p. 29.

<sup>17</sup>Tishby, p. 245; supra, p. 51.

- <sup>18</sup>Tishby, pp. 240-241, 236-237; supra, pp. 41, 22-24.
- <sup>19</sup>Tishby, pp. 236-237; supra, pp. 22-24.
- <sup>20</sup>Tishby, p. 241; supra, p. 45.
- <sup>21</sup>Tishby, p. 238; supra, p. 28.
- <sup>22</sup>Tishby, pp. 235 ("Lily"), 235 ("Rose and Lily"), 242; supra, pp. 13, 16, 47. See also: Tishby, pp. 252, 254, 256, 258.
- <sup>23</sup>Tishby, pp. 234, 240, 245; supra, pp. 8, 37, 52.
- <sup>24</sup>Tishby, p. 240; supra, p. 38.
- <sup>25</sup>Tishby, p. 240; supra, p. 37.
- <sup>26</sup>Tishby, p. 245; supra, p. 52.
- <sup>27</sup>Tishby, p. 237; supra, p. 23.
- <sup>28</sup>Tishby, p. 250; supra, p. 60.
- <sup>29</sup>Gershom G. Scholem, Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism, (New York: Schocken Books, 1946), p. 223.
- <sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 233.
- <sup>31</sup>In re: Tiferet and Yesod, see Tishby, pp. 250-251; supra, pp. 60-61. In re: Tiferet and Israel, see Tishby, p. 240; supra, p. 37.
- <sup>32</sup>Tishby, pp. 246, 250; supra, pp. 55-56, 60-61.
- <sup>33</sup>See Tishby notes to: "House of the World," "Lily," "Rose and Lily," "Well," "Doe," "Righteousness," "Moon," above.
- <sup>34</sup>See Tishby notes to: "House of the World," "Rose and Lily," above.

<sup>35</sup>See Tishby notes to: "Well," "Righteousness," above.

<sup>36</sup>See Tishby notes to: "Doe," "Valorous Woman," "Expulsion of the Queen," above.

<sup>37</sup>See Tishby notes to: "Valorous Woman," "Expulsion of the Queen," above.

<sup>38</sup>In re: Yesod, see Tishby notes to: "Well," "Expulsion of the Queen," above.

<sup>39</sup>See Tishby notes to: "Lily," "Rose and Lily," "Doe," "Valorous Woman," "Messenger of the Holy One Blessed Be He," "Expulsion of the Queen," above.

<sup>40</sup>Tishby, pp. 234, 236, 245; supra, pp. 7-8, 16-17, 51 for Malkhut as passive. Tishby, pp. 236-237, 240-241; supra, pp. 22-24, 41 for Malkhut as active.

<sup>41</sup>There are certain noteworthy similarities between Keter and the Shekhinah. Both occupy positions at the extreme edges of the sefirotic world. Keter is the uppermost, hidden-most Sefirah. The Shekhinah is the lowest. Neither Keter nor the Shekhinah represent qualities of Eyn Sof. Rather, both mediate between higher and lower realms and, therefore, are functionally related. Keter channels shefa from Eyn Sof to the Sefirot. The Shekhinah channels shefa from the Sefirot to the lower worlds.

<sup>42</sup>The writer acknowledges his debt to Tishby who, in the introduction to his chapter on the Shekhinah, points to her unstable nature.

<sup>43</sup>Ephraim E. Urbach, The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs, translated by Israel Abrahams, 2 vols. (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1975), 1:39 in re: the Shekhinah's function in rabbinic literature.

<sup>44</sup>B.B. 25a; Shab. 67a; Ber. 6a; Sotah 3b; Mid. Tehil. 7:7; Sotah 17a.

<sup>45</sup>Mekh. 72a; Mid Tehil. 12:2; Sifra 91a; Sotah 3b; Mid. Tehil. 7:7.

<sup>46</sup>San. 39a.

<sup>47</sup>Pesik d.R. Kahana sec.1, ed. Mandelbaum, p.3; Ma'aser Sheni 5:12; San. 4:5; Menahot 7:8. See Urbach, pp.52-53.

<sup>48</sup>Urbach, p. 65.

<sup>49</sup>Scholem, p. 229.

GLOSSARY<sup>1</sup>

EYN SOF--lit. "that which is with no end;" the infinite, eternally unknowable, hidden God.

KLIPOT--"shells;" the evil forces of the OTHER SIDE.

SEFIROT--the ten special attributes or aspects of the hidden God; the ten stages in the revelation of God's creative power which comprise the WORLD OF EMANATIONS. (Sing.: SEFIRAH). The SEFIROT are:

KETER-- the "crown" of God; the primal will.

HOKMAH-- the "wisdom" or primordial idea of God.

BINAH-- the "intelligence" of God; the organizing principle of the universe.

HESED-- the "mercy" or love of God.

GEVURAH--the "power" of God manifested as stern judgment and punishment; also known as DIN, "Judgment."

TIFERET--the "beauty" of God which mediates between HESED and GEVURAH.

NETZAH-- the "eternal endurance" of God.

HOD-- the "majesty" of God.

YESOD-- the "basis" or "foundation" of all active forces in God; the reproductive element of the universe.

SHEKHINAH--the "Presence" of God; also known as KNESSET YISRAEL, the "Assembly of Israel," and as MALKHUT, the "dominion" of God.

SHEFA-- the abundant "influence" of God; divine energy.

SITRA ACHRA--the "Other Side;" the realm of evil.



WORLD OF EMANATIONS--the realm of the SEFIROT; the highest of four realms which, in addition to EYN SOF, constitute the universe. The remaining three realms, in descending order, are: the WORLD OF CREATIVE IDEAS, the WORLD OF CREATIVE FORMATIONS, the WORLD OF CREATIVE MATTER.

<sup>1</sup>Adapted from Scholem, Major Trends, Chapter Six, pp.205-243.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Source

- Tishby, Isaiah. Mishnat ha-Zohar. 2 vols. Jerusalem: Mosad Bialik, 1948.

Secondary Sources

- Encyclopedia Judaica. S.V. "Shekhinah," by Alan Unterman, Rivka G. Horowitz, and Joseph Dan.
- Ginzberg, Louis. On Jewish Law and Lore. "The Cabala," pp. 187-238. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1955; reprint ed., New York: Atheneum, 1970.
- Jacobs, Louis. Seeker of Unity: The Life and Works of Aaron of Starosselje. "The Ten Sephiroth," pp. 27-48. London: Vallentine, Mitchell, 1966.
- Schechter, Solomon. Some Aspects of Rabbinic Theology. New York: MacMillan Co., 1909.
- Scholem, Gershom G. On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism. Translated by Ralph Manheim. New York: Schocken Books, 1969.
- \_\_\_\_\_, Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism. New York: Schocken Books, 1946.
- \_\_\_\_\_, ed. Zohar: The Book of Splendor. New York: Schocken Books, 1949.
- Urbach, Ephraim E. The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs. Translated by Israel Abrahams. 2 vols. Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1975.