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LIGHT THROUGH DARKNESS: THE IDEAL OF HUMAN PERFECTION IN THE ZOHAR

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INTRODUCTION

One of the perennial, and more vexing, problems in religious thought and philosophy has been the question *unde malum*. In ancient, medieval, and modern thought, the issue has been viewed mostly in its theological context. From the perspective of traditional monotheistic theology, the problem thus presents itself: If God is truly all good and all powerful, then why would God cause or even allow evil, whether natural (e.g., earthquakes, floods, human disease) or moral (murder, rape, and the like), to exist? Inasmuch as the existence of evil, at least from the phenomenological point of view, is an indisputable fact, it would seem that either divine omnipotence or benevolence must be limited.¹

This question, when examined from the divine axis, has prompted various responses in the religious consciousness of the West ranging from the neo-Platonic denial of the reality of evil² on the one hand, to the dualist affirmation

¹ The scholarly literature on this issue is vast. As a representative philosophical treatment of the problem, see H. J. McCloskey, "God and Evil," in Nelson Pike, ed., *God and Evil* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1964) 61–84.

² The classical formulation of evil as the privation of the good are to be found in Plotinus *Enn.* 1.8 (the following citations are taken from the Loeb edition of Plotinus translated by A. H. Armstrong). Cf. *Enn.* 1.8.1: "evil . . . appears in the absence of every sort of good"; "the better [i.e., the good] is Form, and the worse [i.e., evil] is nothing but privation (στέρησις) of form." See *Enn.* 1.8.3: "evil cannot be included in what really exists [i.e., Intellect or Soul] or in what is beyond existence [the One], for these are good. So it remains that if evil exists, it must be among non-existent things, as a sort of form of non-existence (εἶδος τι τοῦ μὴ ὄντος)." Plotinus further identifies matter as the principle of absolute evil insofar as the quality of formlessness or privation essentially characterizes matter; all bodies, on the other hand, which participate in matter are said to be "secondary" evil. See *Enn.* 1.8.6: "But when something is absolutely deficient—and this is matter—this is essential evil without any share in good." See, however, *Enn.* 5.8.7: "Then matter too is a sort of ultimate form (εἶδος τι ἑσχατον)." A key Platonic text for the Plotinian conception

of opposing forces eternally struggling in a cosmic process³ on the other. In the former case, the whole problem of evil is rendered logically fallacious insofar as evil is not a real entity but merely the absence of good, just as darkness is not considered a positive state but merely the absence of light. Technically speaking, one does not cause darkness, for darkness comes about simply when light is removed. Similarly, one cannot legitimately ask, does God create evil, for evil as such is a privation and consequently has no direct cause. While the metaphysician, with cunning ratiocination, may be satisfied with this approach, the psychological dimension of evil as an immediate and direct experience for the individual is hardly addressed by such philosophic gymnastics.⁴ In the case of

is *Theaetetus* 176a: "Evils . . . can never be done away, for the good must always have its contrary, nor have they any place in the divine world; but they must needs haunt this region of our moral nature. . . . In the divine there is no shadow of unrighteousness, only the perfection of righteousness." On the view that only good can be attributed to God, see further below, n. 6. The Plotinian position became the most widely accepted view in subsequent Christian writers. See Ps-Dionysius the Areopagite, *The Divine Names and Mystical Theology* (trans. John Jones; Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1980) 73–88, 148–62 = *Divine Names* 4.18–35; J. B. Russell, *Satan: The Early Christian Tradition* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981) 109–12, 128–29, 202–3; Régis Jolivet, *Le problème du mal d'après Saint Augustin* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1936) 28–43, 131–62; Jacques Maritain, *Saint Thomas and the Problem of Evil* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1942). For a parallel to this line of reasoning in the medieval Jewish tradition, cf. Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed* (trans. S. Pines; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963) III. 10. 438–40.

³ Perhaps the best known form of this dualism is that of Iranian Zoroastrianism, which sets a good and evil at the beginning of world history. Yet, as scholars have argued, even the dualism of Sassanian and Gathic Zoroastrianism was qualified inasmuch as the "Wise Lord" is both ontologically superior and chronologically prior to the evil spirit. See S. Shaked, "Some Notes on Ahreman, the Evil Spirit, and His Creation," in E. E. Urbach, R. J. Zwi Werblowsky, and Ch. Wirszubski, eds., *Studies in Mysticism and Religion presented to Gershom Scholem* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1967) 227–34. And see the comprehensive study by R. C. Zaehner, *Zurvan, A Zoroastrian Dilemma* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1955). A species of this type of dualism, in one form or another, characterizes the syncretistic phenomenon of Gnosticism which flourished in the first centuries of the Common Era. Various explanations for the origin of Gnostic dualism have been given by scholars, most notably Hans Jonas, who distinguished between two kinds of Gnostic dualism: (1) the "Iranian," represented by the Mandaean and Manichaean writings, which affirmed an eternal opposition between the forces of good and evil; and (2) the "Syro-Egyptian" strand, represented by the Nag Hammadi texts and the systems described by the Church Fathers, in which evil—the material world—derives from a "tragic split" in the godhead, a fall within the divine realm. Cf. Hans Jonas, *Gnosis und spätantiker Geist* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1939) 1. 256–67, 328–31. For a succinct summary of the different Gnostic views, see Kurt Rudolph, *Gnosis: The Nature and History of Gnosticism* (trans. R. McL. Wilson; San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983) 59–67. And see also G. G. Stroumsa, *Another Seed: Studies in Gnostic Mythology* (NHS 24; Leiden: Brill, 1984) 17–34, who traces the basis of the "Gnostic mythological consciousness of evil" to a "radical transformation" of the Jewish apocalyptic myth of the Fallen Angels.

⁴ See the description of evil in J. B. Russell, *The Devil: Perceptions of Evil from Antiquity to Primitive Christianity* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977) 17–35.

the dualist position, on the contrary, the real life struggle with evil as a positive and immediate force is not only not undermined, but maintained on a cosmic level. The consequence of this posture, however, is that God can be said to have control over only part of existence,⁵ even if in a modified dualist position, such as the Qumran community in the Dead Sea,⁶ the one God is the ultimate cause

⁵ The view that God is the author only of the good can likewise be traced to Plato; cf. *Republic* 379c: "for the good we must assume no other cause than God, but the cause of evil we must look for in other things and not God." See also the citation from *Theaetetus* given above, n. 2. According to Philo *Quod omnis probus liber* 12.84, the Essenes maintained "the belief that the deity is the cause of all good, but of no evil." On several occasions Philo himself maintains that God is the cause only of the good, and evil is caused by the powers or subordinates to God; see Harry Austryn Wolfson, *Philo: Foundations of Religious Philosophy in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1947) 1. 272–73.

⁶ Cf. J. Licht, "An Analysis of the Treatise of the Two Spirits in DSD," *Scripta Hierosolymitana* 4 (1958) 88–99; A. R. C. Leaney, *The Rule of Qumran and Its Meaning* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1966) 37–56; P. Wernberg-Möller, "A Reconsideration of the Two Spirits in the Rule of the Community (1QS III, 13–IV, 26)," *RevQ* 3 (1961–62) 413–41. See also J. Gammie, "Spatial and Ethical Dualism in Jewish Wisdom and Apocalyptic Literature," *JBL* 93 (1974) 356–85. Some scholars have argued that even Zoroastrian dualism is not absolute "metaphysical dualism" inasmuch as the evil spirit, as the good spirit, derives from the one "Wise Lord"; see above, n. 3. In a certain respect there is a fundamental inconsistency in the Qumran doctrine for, on the one hand, God is said to be the creator of both spirits, evil and good, yet, on the other hand, the eschatological culmination of history is envisioned as a time when the sons of light would rise up and conquer—indeed destroy—the sons of darkness. (For a similar tension in Zoroastrianism, see R. C. Zaehner, *The Dawn and Twilight of Zoroastrianism* [New York: Putnam's, 1961] 308–16.) If one begins from the monotheistic premise that God creates both good and evil, then the rabbinic ideal that one must worship God with both the good and evil inclinations (cf. *m. Ber.* 9.5; *Sifre Deut.* piska 32, p. 55) must be seen as a more logically consistent doctrine. For the rabbinic affirmation of God as creating the good and evil inclinations, a form of ethical dualism not unrelated to the Qumran doctrine, cf. *Bereshit Rab.* I, 14.4, p. 128; *Tg. Ps-Jonathan* on Gen 2:7; *Sifre Deut.* piska 45, p. 103; S. Schechter, *Aspects of Rabbinic Theology* (New York: Schocken, 1961) 290 n. 3; E. E. Urbach, *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs* (in Hebrew; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1978) 416–17 n. 2. And cf. the interpretation of Eccl 7:14, "God has made one even as the other," attributed to R. Akiba in *b. Hag.* 15a: "He created the righteous and he created the wicked, he created the Garden of Eden and he created Gehinnom." For an analysis of this text, see A. Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven* (Leiden: Brill, 1977) 22. See also the interesting parallel to this passage in *Pesiqta de-Rav Kahana*, piska 28, p. 426: "'God has made the one even as the other,' God has made the righteous and the wicked, as it is written 'Then his brother emerged, holding on to the heel of Esau' (Gen 25:26). R. Pinhas [in the name of] R. Hilkiyah in the name of R. Simon said: not even a rib was between them, and the one emerged righteous and the other wicked." In this case the wicked created by God has been subsumed typologically under the figure of Esau and the righteous under the figure of Jacob; see below, n. 34. On the appellation "wicked" for Esau in rabbinic sources, see I. Aminoff, "The Figures of Esau and the Kingdom of Edom in Palestinian Midrashic-Talmudic Literature in the Tannaitic and Amoraic Periods" (Ph.D. diss., Melbourne University, 1981) 15–17, 27–28, and passim. It must be pointed out, however, that certain rabbinic statements reflect the apocalyptic view that posited an abrogation of the evil inclination at the end of time; see below, n. 11. Cf. also the following interpretation of Ps 5:5, "evil cannot abide in You," in *Midrash Tehilim* 5.7: "For You do not dwell by evil nor evil by You." Though the fuller context of this passage is not clear, it would seem that the

of both good and evil, light and darkness. Hence, in the dualistic model, unlike the neo-Platonic, the soul's existential grappling with evil is affirmed, but at the expense of severely limiting divine omnipotence and restricting God's control over history.

Alternatively, the problem of evil can be viewed from the vantage point of religious anthropology. That is, in what sense and to what degree does the person of faith appropriate the evil dimension of experience—whether it be understood as an internalized principle of will or as an objective cosmic force—in his or her spiritual quest? It is with the latter that the focus of this paper is concerned. I will analyze this problem specifically in terms of the theosophic symbolism of the crowning work of medieval Jewish mysticism, the Zohar, pseud-epigraphically attributed to the second-century Palestinian rabbi, Simeon bar Yoḥai, though actually written in the last decades of the thirteenth century in northern Spain.⁷

This article will examine an ideal of human perfection that is found in the Zohar⁸ according to which one must incorporate evil, even the demonic side, into one's spiritual path. I will suggest that there are two distinct typologies in the Zohar, one positive and the other negative, that both assume this to be the case. In the one case appropriation of the demonic is viewed only as a means for purgation and refinement, whereas in the other it is a means for containment and unification. Common to both is the assumption that one can achieve holiness only through the unholy, that one can see the light only through darkness. The role of the former in the context of the Zohar's struggle with dualism has already been discussed by Isaiah Tishby.⁹ As Tishby concludes after surveying the relevant sources, this notion of incorporating the demonic into the religious

midrashist wants to remove evil from God in a way that would be analogous to the Platonic tradition.

⁷ On the author of the Zohar, assumed by scholars to be Moses ben Shem Tov de León (ca. 1240–1305), see Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Schocken, 1961) 156–204; idem, *Kabbalah* (Jerusalem: Keter, 1972) 213–42; I. Tishby, *Mishnat ha-Zohar* (Jerusalem: Bialik, 1971) 1. 103–8; D. Matt, *Zohar: The Book of Enlightenment* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1983) 3–10; and my dissertation, “*Sefer ha-Rimmon*: Critical Edition and Introductory Study” (Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 1986) 1–43.

⁸ For the purposes of this study I am limiting my analysis to the main body of the Zohar. On the various literary strata which make up the Zohar, see Scholem, *Major Trends*, 159–62. The editions used in preparation of this article were *Sefer ha-Zohar*, (ed. R. Margaliot; Jerusalem: ha-Rav Kook, 1984); *Zohar Hadash* (ed. R. Margaliot; Jerusalem: ha-Rav Kook, 1978); *Tiqqunei Zohar* (ed. R. Margaliot; Jerusalem: ha-Rav Kook, 1978). Citations refer to volume and page number.

⁹ Tishby, *Mishnat ha-Zohar*, 1. 294–95. The problem of evil in the Zohar was also discussed briefly by Scholem in *Major Trends*, 235–39, and more fully in idem, “Sitra achra: Gut und Böse in der Kabbala,” in idem, *Von der mystischen Gestalt der Gottheit* (Zürich: Rhein, 1962) 49–82. Like Tishby, Scholem also tended to emphasize the “gnostic” or dualistic dimension of the Zohar's treatment, though he too noted that at times the author of the Zohar affirmed a more monistic, even pantheistic, approach, stressing that there is only one continuous reality in existence.

life is a tacit affirmation of the Gnostic position by the author of the Zohar for, in the final analysis, spiritual perfection is achieved only after one wins the battle against the forces of evil and darkness. While this may be the case, Tishby does not take into account the second typology that I will discuss. Regarding this latter notion, however, the Zohar makes its most innovative contribution, and, in my opinion, provides us with an *Aufheben* of the gnostic position. At the outset I should like to note that these are not the only ideals that one can discover in the Zohar. Indeed, at times the Zohar stresses that one should avoid all contact with evil,¹⁰ while at other times the author envisions a messianic future in which the demonic shell, to use a Zoharic metaphor that became central in later Jewish mysticism,¹¹ will be broken.¹² Notwithstanding this qualification, the theme that I have selected warrants special treatment for it is, in my view, the ethical doctrine most consistent with the mythological and theosophical assumptions of the Zohar.

¹⁰ This theme is especially emphasized in connection with certain commandments whose purpose is to separate the divine and demonic realms. Furthermore, the position of Israel vis-à-vis the other nations is viewed in terms of this separation of demonic and divine realms. Cf. Yitzhak Baer, *A History of the Jews in Christian Spain* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1961) 1. 246–47; Tishby, *Mishnat ha-Zohar*, 1. 290–92; Morris Faierstein, "'God's Need for the Commandments' in Medieval Kabbalah," *Conservative Judaism* 36 (1982) 50–51; Jacob Katz, "Halakhic Discussions in the Zohar," in idem, *Halakha and Kabbalah: Studies in the History of Jewish Religion, its Various Faces and Social Relevance* (in Hebrew; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1984) 44. In my dissertation on "*Sefer ha-Rimmon*," 1. 118–23, I have discussed this motif specifically as it appears in that work; see my article, "Mystical Rationalization of the Commandments in *Sefer ha-Rimmon*," *HUCA* 59 (1988).

¹¹ See Tishby, *Mishnat ha-Zohar*, 1. 298–301; idem, *The Doctrine of Evil and the 'Kelippah' in Lurianic Kabbalism* (in Hebrew; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1984). For a discussion of the possible literary sources for this imagery, see Alexander Altmann, "The Motif of the 'Shells' in Azriel of Gerona," in idem, *Studies in Religious Philosophy and Mysticism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1969) 172–79.

¹² Cf. e.g., Zohar 2.41a, 108b [see below, n. 63], 199b, 258a; 3.54a. The Zoharic view is based on the rabbinic legend, itself based on earlier apocalyptic sources, mentioned in *b. Sukk.* 52a concerning the complete obliteration of the evil inclination in the messianic era. Cf. Schechter, *Aspects of Rabbinic Theology*, 290 n. 3; Urbach, *The Sages*, 416–17 n. 2. It should be noted, however, that it is possible to interpret the Zoharic idea concerning the annihilation of the demonic in the messianic future as an affirmation of the reintegration of the demonic into the divine rather than an affirmation of the dualistic stance. See in particular the interpretation of Deut 32:39 in Zohar 2.108b: "In that [messianic] time it is written, 'See, then, that I, I am He, there is no God beside Me' . . . The Holy One, blessed be He, said: Then you will see that which you could not see beforehand. 'That I, I,' why is [the pronoun repeated] two times? To emphasize that at that time there will be no God but Him . . . the Other Side [the demonic realm] will be removed . . . for nothing of the pollution [with which, according to rabbinic tradition, the serpent inseminated Eve; cf. *b. Šabbat* 16a and parallels] will be left in the world and the world will be one." In this regard it is interesting to further note that in his Hebrew theosophic writings de Léon sometimes stresses the pantheistic view, particularly in contexts where the demonic realm is discussed; see Wolfson, "*Sefer ha-Rimmon*," 2. 268:7–14, 301:6–10, 313:11–13.

THE "GNOSTIC" INFLUENCE

Among the most important sources that informed the theosophic outlook of the author of the *Zohar* are kabbalistic texts derived from what Scholem has called the "gnostic" school that emerged in the second half of the thirteenth century in Castile.¹³ The essential doctrine of this school that distinguished it from earlier kabbalistic currents such as the Gerona school¹⁴ was the affirmation of a demonic force that structurally parallels the divine: as the one is constituted by ten "holy" emanations (*sefirot*) on the right so the other is constituted by ten "unholy" emanations on the left. Already in the *Sefer ha-Bahir*, the first literary source based on a theosophic doctrine of emanations to emerge in medieval Europe,¹⁵ Satan is identified as one of the divine "attributes," the

¹³ See Gershom Scholem, "The Kabbalah of R. Jacob and R. Isaac Kohen," *Madda'ei ha-Yahadut* 2 (1927) 193–97 (in Hebrew); idem, *Les origines de la Kabbale* (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1966) 310–16; idem, *Kabbalah*, 55–57.

¹⁴ Cf. the following remark of the late thirteenth-century kabbalist, Isaac of Acre: "For aliens entered the sacred areas of the Lord's House' (Jer 51:51)—'Aliens' alludes to the outer gradations [sc. the demonic realm] . . . This is the way of the kabbalists of Sefarad [i.e., Castile] who merited to receive the kabbalah of the outer gradations. However, the kabbalists of Catalonia [i.e., Gerona] received a proper kabbalah concerning the ten *sefirot belimah* [the holy emanations] but did not receive anything with respect to the outer gradations." The passage is cited by Ephraim Gottlieb, *Studies in the Kabbala Literature* (in Hebrew; Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University, 1976) 341–42. See also Yehuda Liebes, "The Messiah of the Zohar" in *The Messianic Idea in Jewish Thought: A Study Conference in Honour of the Eightieth Birthday of Gershom Scholem* (in Hebrew; Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, 1982) 124–25. Yet, as Scholem noted (*Les origines*, 306–16), already in the writings of Isaac the Blind of Provence, one can discern a doctrine of dual forces, the holy and the unholy, albeit in a very rudimentary form. This accords with the testimony of Isaac ha-Kohen that he found in Arles ancient documents espousing the Gnostic doctrine.

¹⁵ Cf. Scholem, *Les origines*, 59–211; idem, *Kabbalah*, 42–44. According to Scholem, the work, pseudepigraphically attributed to R. Neḥuniah ben ha-Qanah of second-century Palestine, actually appeared in Provence sometime in the second half of the twelfth century. Scholem did not, however, rule out the possibility of earlier sources for the *Bahir* originating in the East, such as the *Raza Rabba* ("Great Mystery") dating from the ninth or tenth century and preserved in the writings of the thirteenth-century German pietists. See Scholem, *Reshit ha-Qabbalah* (Tel Aviv: Schocken, 1948) 41–49, 195–238; idem, *Les origines*, 194–201. Other scholars have substantiated Scholem's claim that the *Bahir* appeared in Provence by drawing attention to similarities between it and certain Catharic doctrines that surfaced in that area during that time. See O. H. Lehmann, "The Theology of the Mystical Book Bahir and its Sources," *StPatr* 1 (1957) 477–83; Shulamit Shahar, "Catharism and the Beginnings of the Kabbalah in Languedoc: Elements Common to Catharic Scriptures and the Book Bahir," *Tarbiz* 40 (1971) 483–509 (in Hebrew). Cf. also Joseph Dan, "Midrash and the Dawn of Kabbalah," in G. Hartmann and S. Budick, eds., *Midrash and Literature* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986) 127–40. When evaluating Scholem's hypothesis one should keep in mind that the other major school of mystical speculation in Provence during this time, the school of Abraham ben David and his son, Isaac the Blind, developed a kabbalistic terminology that is almost entirely independent of the theosophy of the *Bahir*. If the latter work did emerge at this time and place, one would expect to find some influence of it upon these other mystics. Scholem argued (*Les origines*, 224 n. 17, 225), however, that in several cases the influence of the *Bahir* on

“left hand” “whose name is evil” and “who is set on the north side of God.”¹⁶ In the kabbalistic circles of Castile, however, the demonic is presented not simply as one of the powers of God but rather as a realm fully complementing that of the divine. In the words of Moses of Burgos, a member of the circle, “There is a left [side] corresponding to the right, intended to perfect the right side, to punish and chastise with ‘chastisements of love’ those who walk in a bad way in order to purify them.”¹⁷ Or, as expressed by another member of the circle, Todros Abulafia: “Where dogs bark there the Angel of Death is to be seen, for [he] is emanated from the left side which is an emanation in itself.”¹⁸ It must be emphasized, however, that the dualistic posture in this circle is not of an ontological or metaphysical sort. That is, the kabbalistic conception as it developed in Castile did not posit two absolute cosmic powers. R. Moses and R. Todros quite explicitly state that the one God makes both good and evil, light and dark, the good and evil impulses of the human individual.¹⁹ Against this conceptual background we must understand these kabbalists’ concern with the question of the genesis of the demonic left side. The underlying assumption here is that even the demonic derives from a stage in the emanative process. The demonic

Provençal kabbalists, such as Jacob the Nazir, was evident. In addition, Scholem noted that some of the fragments attributed to the *Hasid*, i.e., Isaac the Blind, in the supercommentary on Nahmanides’ commentary on the Pentateuch attributed to Meir ibn Sahula contain citations from the *Bahir*; see *Les origines*, 53. The first to make extensive use of the *Bahir*, as far as I am aware, are Isaac’s disciples, the Spanish kabbalists who wrote in Gerona in the first part of the thirteenth century. See the comments of Moshe Idel, “The Sefirot above the Sefirot,” *Tarbiz* 51 (1981) 239 (in Hebrew); and Joseph Dan, “Mysticism in Jewish History, Religion and Literature,” in idem and Frank Talmage, eds., *Studies in Jewish Mysticism* (Cambridge: Association for Jewish Studies, 1982) 11–12. Cf. also the following remark of Isaac of Acre in his *Ozrot Hayyim* (MS Jewish Theological Seminary Mic. 1674 [ENA 1589] fol. 133b: “The sages of Catalonia [sc. Gerona] rely on a strong foundation which is the *Sefer Bahir*, and the sages of Sefarad [sc. Castile] rely on a firm foundation which is the *Sefer ha-Zohar*.” The specific distinction which Isaac of Acre draws between the two schools centers around the tradition concerning demonic forces: whereas the kabbalists of Castile received such a tradition, the kabbalists of Gerona did not; see preceding note. What is of interest to emphasize for our purposes is the particular connection made between the Geronese kabbalists and the *Bahir*.

¹⁶ See *Sefer ha-Bahir* (ed. Reuven Margalio; Jerusalem: ha-Rav Kook, 1978) §§ 162–63. According to one fragment attributed to Isaac the Blind by ibn Sahula (see n. 15), the former likewise identified the forces of impurity as emanating from the left side of God, the *sefirah* of *paḥad* or *gevurah*; see Scholem, *Les origines*, 310.

¹⁷ Moses of Burgos, “The Left Pillar,” ed. Scholem, *Tarbiz* 4 (1933) 209.

¹⁸ *Ozār ha-Kavod ha-Shalem* (Jerusalem: Maqor, 1970) 3a.

¹⁹ “The Left Pillar,” 209; *Ozār ha-Kavod ha-Shalem*, 24a.

is thus depicted as an extension of a divine attribute, usually identified as judgment,²⁰ rather than an autonomous power.²¹

Yet, these very same kabbalists insisted on an ongoing cosmic struggle between the domains of light and darkness, sometimes pictured as a mythical war between the seven forces on the right and seven demonic archons on the left. Indeed, for R. Moses, it would appear that this struggle is a fundamental, enduring ontological principle: "All reality," he wrote, "is dependent on peace and war which are opposites."²² "And this is an established tradition handed over to all masters of the hidden wisdom . . . that reality in general could not exist except through the existents that do good and [those] that do evil, [those] that establish and sustain, [and those] that exterminate and destroy, [those that] give reward and [those] that punish."²³ In contrast, R. Moses' teacher, R. Isaac ha-Kohen, imagines a time when the demonic will be uprooted. Thus he ends his "Treatise on the Left Emanations" with an apocalyptic description of the time-to-come (based on legends recorded in *b. B. Batra* 74b) when Gabriel, the angel of judgment, together with Michael, the angel of love, will descend to destroy the powers of Samael and Lilith: "And when it is willed the emanation which comes from the side of Samael and Lilith through the blind angel will be diminished and weakened in utter destruction by means of Gabriel, the angel of strength, who stirs up a war with them with the help of the angel of love."²⁴ When the emanations of the left are destroyed, then once again "the bride [i.e., *Shekhinah*] will rejoice with her groom [*Tif'eret*] and the righteous will take pleasure" in the salty flesh of the slain Leviathan.²⁵

The gnostic theme of competing cosmic forces is likewise one of the essential doctrines of the Zohar. Like his Castilian predecessors, the author of the Zohar posits a demonic realm, *Sitra Ahra*, the "Other Side," which parallels the divine.²⁶ Moreover, the author of the Zohar similarly was concerned with the problem of the origin of evil. Elsewhere I have discussed the two basic approaches to this problem in the Zohar, which I have termed respectively the

²⁰ According to some kabbalists, e.g., R. Isaac ha-Kohen, the left emanations derived from the third divine gradation, *Binah*, whereas according to other kabbalists, e.g., R. Moses of Burgos, the demonic powers derived from the fifth emanation, *Din* or *Gevurah*. Cf. Scholem, "Sitra achra," 54–57.

²¹ Cf. Tishby, *Mishnat ha-Zohar*, 1. 292, 295–98.

²² "The Left Pillar," 211.

²³ *Ibid.*, 208–9.

²⁴ Cf. Scholem, "The Kabbalah of R. Jacob and R. Isaac Kohen," 263.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 264.

²⁶ Cf. Tishby, *Mishnat ha-Zohar*, 1. 288–89. I have discussed the various nuances of the structural parallelism between the holy and satanic realms in the Zohar in my essay, "Left Contained in the Right: A Study in Zoharic Hermeneutics," *AJS Review* 11 (1986) 29–30.

cathartic and the emanative views.²⁷ According to the former, evil is the waste eliminated from divine Thought, a process that occurs during the first stages of activity before the emanative process.²⁸ The primary act is conceived of as an excretion of the unbalanced forces of judgment, referred to as the “glowing sparks in divine Thought”²⁹ or mythically as the “primordial kings of Edom who died” (based on Gen 36:31)³⁰ or the “worlds created and destroyed.”³¹ As a result of the divine catharsis two sides emerged: the side of happiness (the holy realm) and the side of sadness (the demonic).³² The source of evil, then, is

²⁷ Wolfson, “Left Contained in the Right,” 31–32.

²⁸ Cf. Gottlieb, *Kabbala Literature*, 178–82; Y. Liebes, *Sections of the Zohar Lexicon* (in Hebrew; Jerusalem: Hebrew University, 1976) 147; M. Idel, “The Evil Thought of the Deity,” *Tarbiz* 49 (1980) 356–64 (in Hebrew). Idel compares the Zoharic notion of the emergence of the demonic powers as a result of the purgation of evil from the divine thought to the Zervanite myth of the birth of the evil Ahriman from the evil thought of Zurvan.

²⁹ See Zohar 3.292b (*Idra Zuta*); 2.254b; and cf. 3.48b, where the primordial forces of judgment, the 325 sparks that emerge from the “flame of darkness” (*bozina de-qardinuta*), are identified as the hairs which are on the head of supernal Man; when the hairs are removed, then the forces of judgment are ameliorated and the Man is purified. As a result the “man of war” (Exod 15:3) becomes the “perfect and upright man” (Job 1:1), the “righteous one” (Gen 6:9). It is significant that in this context it is one being—and not two—who is transformed from a state of impurity to purity, an idea substantiated by Job 14:4; see below, n. 46, where the relevant portion of the text is translated. From the further description of the head of this Man as being “red like a rose” and of the hair likewise being red, it is clear that the proto-demonic force is being portrayed in accordance with the scriptural account of Esau (see Gen 25:25). Cf. Zohar 1.153a where Esau is described in almost the exact terms as the primal Man is in this context. Similarly, the Bible (Gen 27:11) describes Jacob as being “smooth-skinned” in comparison to Esau who is hairy. Hence, just as Esau emerges before Jacob, the hairy one before the smooth-skinned one, so the forces of judgment, whence come the lower forces of impurity, emerge before the forces of mercy. On Esau as a symbol for the demonic, see further below, n. 35. On the Zoharic conception, *bozina de-qardinuta*, see Liebes, *Zohar Lexicon*, 145–51, 161–64; Matt, *Zohar*, 207–8.

³⁰ See Zohar 2.108b, 176b (*Sifra di-Zeni'uta*); 3.128b (*Idra Rabba*); 142a (*Idra Rabba*); 292a (*Idra Zuta*). Cf. Tishby, *Mishnat ha-Zohar*, 1. 138, 150; Liebes, “Messiah of the Zohar,” 219–21. As Liebes points out (219), the kabbalistic conception was probably influenced by the midrashic idea (cf. *Bereshit Rab.* 12.15) that initially God wanted to create the world with judgment but then combined mercy and judgment together. See following note.

³¹ Cf. *Bereshit Rab.* 9.2, 68; see Zohar 2.34b. The source for this mythical image is R. Isaac ha-Kohen, according to whom the ten emanations of the left comprise “three worlds which were created and destroyed,” corresponding to the three upper divine gradations and seven archons which do battle against the seven lower divine gradations. See Scholem, “The Kabbalah of R. Jacob and R. Isaac Kohen,” 194–95, 248–51. Cf. additional texts cited by Idel, “Evil Thought,” 359–60.

R. Eleazar of Worms likewise connects this midrashic image of “worlds created and destroyed” with God’s attempt to create the world exclusively by means of the evil inclination; see Joseph Dan, *The Esoteric Theology of Ashkhenazi Hasidim* (in Hebrew; Jerusalem: Bialik, 1978) 210–11; idem, “Samael, Lilith, and the Concept of Evil in Early Kabbalah,” *AJS Review* 5 (1980) 32–37.

³² Cf. Zohar 2.254b–55a; 3.292a. See Wolfson, “*Sefer ha-Rimmon*,” 2. 268:20, where the worship of idolatry or the belief in other gods (i.e., the demonic realm of the Other Side) is said to derive from the “refuse of Thought.” It is clear, moreover, from that context (*ibid.*, 269) that the belief in

in the dross contained in divine Thought.³³ For the purposes of this analysis it is important to bear in mind that the sphere of untempered judgment precedes that of the balanced and harmonious cosmos, the “Edomite” kings before the “Israelite” kings,³⁴ the destroyed worlds before the worlds that are sustained.

the other gods is identical with philosophical reasoning. Cf. Zohar 2.124a: ‘R. Hiyya said, ‘[Make no mention of the] names of other gods’ (Exod 23:13). This refers to one who is occupied with other books which are not from the side of Torah.’ It seems to me that “other books” here is a reference to books of philosophy. Yet, see Zohar 2.237a, and *Zohar Ḥadash*, 38a, where Greece is identified as that kingdom which is in closest proximity to the way of faith, i.e., Judaism. I assume that in these contexts there is a positive evaluation of philosophy. On the Zohar’s complicated relationship to philosophy, see the remarks of Isadore Twersky, *Rabad of Posquières: A Twelfth-Century Talmudist* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962) 300 n. 65. See also Scholem, *Major Trends*, 173, 183, 194, 203, and the text from *Sefer ha-Rimmon* cited on 397–98 n. 154; Matt, *Zohar*, 22–23.

³³ Cf. Tishby, *Mishnat ha-Zohar*, 1. 296; Liebes, *Zohar Lexicon*, 320.

³⁴ It should be pointed out that in one passage the Zohar (2.108b) tries to uphold the ontological priority of Israel as against the chronological priority of Esau: “Israel is the upper kernel [literally, brain] of the world. Israel arose in the [divine] Thought first [cf. *Bereshit Rab.* 1.4, 6]. The idolatrous nations, which are the shell, preceded [Israel], as it is written, ‘And there are the kings who reigned in the land of Edom before any king reigned over the Israelites.’” It is quite possible that the Zoharic interpretation of Gen 36:31ff. is a symbolic depiction of the historical relationship between the Church and the Synagogue, i.e., Christianity, which is symbolically Edom or the demonic power, reigns before Judaism. Cf. Baer, *Jews in Christian Spain*, 1. 246–47; Liebes, “Messiah of the Zohar,” 196–97. On the symbolic correlation of Edom and Christianity, cf. Louis Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1968) 5. 272 n. 19; G. Cohen, “Esau as a Symbol in Early Medieval Thought,” in A. Altman, ed., *Jewish Medieval and Renaissance Studies* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967) 27–30. On Esau (= Edom) as a symbol for the demonic power, see Zohar 1.137b–38a, 138b, 139a, 142b, 143a, 171b, 177a; 2.163b, 167a, 188b; 3.48b (see n. 29), 124a (*Ra’aya Meheimna*), 185a, 197a, 246b; *Tiqqunei Zohar*, § 59 (93a). Cf. the following text from MS Paris 859, fol. 16a, cited by Idel, “Evil Thought,” 358: “The forces of impurity emanate before the forces of purity, for at first the refuse is purified, and afterwards the forces of purity emerge. Thus it says, ‘The dross having been separated from the silver, a vessel emerged for the smith’ (Prov 25:4). So it is by Cain and Abel, Cain came out first from the refuse which is on the left side, and afterwards Abel who is from the side of mercy. And similarly by Esau and Jacob. And [it] says: Esau emerged from the dross of the gold. Therefore, Isaac loved Esau for he came from his dregs.” As Idel pointed out (*ibid.*, n. 8), the expression “dross of gold” betrays a Zoharic influence; cf. Zohar 3.50b. On the statement “Isaac loved Esau etc.,” cf. Zohar 1.137b, 139a. The temporal precedence of the demonic over the holy is reflected as well in the Zoharic interpretation of the rite of circumcision whereby the unholy foreskin is removed and the holy corona disclosed; see Zohar 1.13a, 32a–b, 95a–b; 2.40a, 255b; 3.72b–73a; *Tiqqunei Zohar*, “Introduction” (11a) and § 37 (78a). In this context, finally, it is of interest to consider the following fragment of the Ebionite *Kerygmata Petrou* that is extant in the Jewish-Christian Pseudo-Clementine *Homilies*, cited in *NTApoc.* 2. 121: “As in the beginning the one God, being as it were a right hand and a left, created first the heavens and then the earth, so also he assembled in pairs everything that follows. In the case of man, however, he no longer proceeded in this way, but he reversed every pair. For whereas he created what was stronger as the first and what was weaker as the second, in the case of man we find the opposite. . . . Thus from Adam . . . there sprang as the first the unrighteous Cain, as the second the righteous Abel. . . . And from Abraham . . . there issued two first, Ishmael first and then Isaac, who was blessed of God. From Isaac again there originated two, the

According to the second category, the demonic realm is viewed as a link in the continuous chain of being. There are no absolute gaps in nature and hence no complete break between the divine and the demonic. Indeed, in one place³⁵ the Zohar describes all of reality in terms of the image of a nut which is composed of the shell and the kernel: one grade is a shell to the grade above which, in relation to the grade below, is the kernel but in relation to the grade above a shell, and so on. This conception is clearly philosophic in nature, reflecting particularly, as Alexander Altmann has shown,³⁶ the neo-Platonic idea of the continuity of being that was well known to the kabbalists from various sources. Insofar as all of reality is one, the demonic cannot be viewed as being in absolute opposition to the divine. On the contrary, the former must derive from the latter. It is thus that the author of the Zohar, following the precedent set by other kabbalists, locates the source for evil in the left side of the divine.³⁷ Furthermore, an imbalance in the sefirotic world, a breaking of the harmony between right and left, ultimately eventuates in the coming-to-be of an "autonomous" left realm. With respect to the question, what creates this imbalance, again two lines can be drawn: the imbalance results from an internal process but can be reinforced as a result of human sin.³⁸ Hence, while the demonic structurally parallels the divine, the former is ontologically posterior to the latter.

Thus far there is a clear line of development from the earlier sources to the Zohar. In one pivotal notion, however, the Zohar went beyond these sources. As mentioned above, although the Castilian mystics affirmed that God created both the right and left, they posited no mediating principle by which the dark force could be incorporated into the path of light. In the case of R. Isaac, it

godless Esau and the pious Jacob." In the fuller version of the text (*ibid.*, 545–46) it is clear that the firstborn is identified as the feminine which derives from the "feeble left hand of God," i.e., the evil one. The chain of associations is very close to the later kabbalistic model. On the possible Jewish influence on the Pseudo-Clementine literature, see the references cited in Stroumsa, *Another Seed*, 30 n. 51, and Segal, *Two Powers*, 256–57. The correlation between the left hand of God and weakness and the right hand and strength is made in the following midrashic comment on Exod 15:6: "Thy right hand, O Lord, glorious in power, Thy right hand, O Lord, shatters the foe," in *Mekhilta de Rabbi Ishmael*, 2. 41: "When the Israelites do the will of God, they make His left hand to be like the right, as it is said, 'Thy right hand, O Lord . . . Thy right hand, O Lord'—two times. And when the Israelites fail to do the will of God, they make His right hand to be like the left, as it is said, 'He has drawn back His right hand' (Lam 2:3)." See Judah Goldin, *The Song at the Sea* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971) 149.

³⁵ Zohar 1.19b–20a; See Scholem, *Major Trends*, 239, and references given on 406 n. 114.

³⁶ Cf. Altmann, "Motif of the 'Shells,'" 117.

³⁷ There are basically three opinions in the Zohar as to the exact source of evil in the divine: *Binah*, *Gevurah*, or *Malkhut*. For references, see my "Left Contained in the Right," 32 and nn. 22–24.

³⁸ See Scholem, "Sitra achra," 69–72.

seems clear that the emanations of the left are accorded no place in the religious life. The demonic, though originating in the divine, remains outside it until such time that the emanation of the left will be altogether annihilated. In the case of R. Moses, while it is true that the forces of evil and darkness are accorded a place in the divine scheme as instruments through which the wicked are punished, he still does not assign to these forces any role whatsoever in the devotional life of the saintly or pious. The author of the Zohar, in contrast, does assign such a role to the underworld of darkness. Moreover, he provides us with a mediating principle, the containment of the left in the right, in virtue of which the demonic is restored to the right. This notion is an exegetical axis upon which much of Zoharic hermeneutics turns.³⁹ In many cases the reference is to an inter-divine process—the containment of the divine attribute of judgment in the attribute of love, the left hand within the right. However, it can also refer to the containment of the demonic left within the divine right. As we shall see, these two uses are dialectically interrelated in the Zohar.

DESCENT AS SPIRITUAL PERFECTION

The incorporation of the “Other Side” in the religious life is unequivocally affirmed by the Zohar in several contexts. There is, first of all, the Zoharic claim that the path of the spiritual adept is one of descent followed by ascent, that is, before one achieves the status of holiness one must descend into the realm of evil.⁴⁰ There is a clear connection, as Tishby has noted,⁴¹ between this theme and the idea later developed by Sabbatian theology on the basis of Isaac Luria’s teaching concerning the necessary descent into the demonic shells or, as formulated subsequently by the Ḥasidim: “descent for the sake of ascent.”⁴² In the Zohar the purpose of the descent, however, is not to raise the fallen sparks, to use the standard Lurianic term, but rather to purge the soul of all its impurities. It seems to me that the analogue for this notion of purgation in the Zohar is the cathartic view of the divine mentioned above: just as God had to discharge the impure forces in divine Thought before God could emanate the holy forces, so too the human soul must refine itself and remove all dross before it can attain the level of holiness. This image of spiritual transformation drawn from

³⁹ See my article cited above, n. 26.

⁴⁰ Cf. Zohar I.83a.

⁴¹ *Mishnat ha-Zohar*, I. 295.

⁴² On the Lurianic and Sabbatian roots of this idea, cf. Tishby, *Doctrine of Evil*, 88; Joseph Weiss, “Reshit Zemihatah shel ha-Derekh ha-Ḥasidit,” *Zion* 16 (1951) 73–75; Gershom Scholem, *The Messianic Idea in Judaism* (New York: Schocken, 1971) 78–141. For the development of this idea particularly in the school of Ḥabad Ḥasidism, see Rachel Elior, *The Theory of Divinity of Ḥasidut Ḥabad: Second Generation* (in Hebrew; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1982) 262–64. For Rabbi Naḥman of Bratslav’s particular use of this notion, see Arthur Green, *Tormented Master: A Life of Rabbi Naḥman of Bratslav* (University, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1979) 67, 264, 308.

alchemy is related by the Zohar to the verse "And Abram went down to Egypt" (Gen 12:10):

R. Simeon said, Come and see: Everything has secret wisdom. This verse hints at wisdom and the levels down below, to the depths of which Abraham descended. He knew them but did not become attached. . . . Come and see the secret of the word: If Abram had not gone into Egypt and been refined there first, he could not have partaken of the Blessed Holy One. Similarly with his children, when the Blessed Holy One wanted to make them unique, a perfect people, and to draw them near to Him: If they had not gone down to Egypt and been refined there first, they would not have become His special ones. So too the Holy Land: If she had not been given first to Canaan to control, she would not have become the portion, the share of the Blessed Holy One.⁴³

The esoteric meaning of Abram's descent into Egypt, as that of the children of Israel in the time of Moses, is spiritual purification by means of contact with the demonic (symbolized by Egypt). Moses Cordovero (1522–70) in his commentary to this section in Zohar says: "As silver is refined in lead, so holiness is refined through the power of the demonic."⁴⁴ Before partaking of holiness, of entering the sefirotic realm, it is necessary to go down to the depths of the unholy. Indeed, the land itself, according to the Zohar, could not become holy unless it was first inhabited by Canaan, the force of the unholy. This last sentence is all the more daring inasmuch as the "Land of Israel" is a mystical symbol for the *Shekhinah*. The Zohar's point then, is that even the *Shekhinah* must be purified through contact with the demonic.

In the passage above the role accorded to the demonic in the religious life is negative—one enters the world of darkness merely to purge one's own impurities, to remove the dross from the silver. The dialectic of the spiritual path, however, is established by the Zohar in various other ways. In one place it is related to the close proximity which the *Shekhinah*, the last of the holy emanations, has to the demonic world. Much of the struggle between the demonic and divine is played out with respect to the *Shekhinah* for She is the divine power

⁴³ I have used the translation of Daniel Matt in his *Zohar*, 63–64. The Zohar's identification of Egypt with the earthly representation of the demonic is based ultimately on the scriptural and rabbinic conception of Egypt as the seat of magical power (cf., e.g., Exod 7:12; 8:3, 14, 18–19; 9:11); *b. Sanh.* 67b; *b. Qidd.* 49b; *b. Menah.* 85a; for other references see Ginzberg, *Legends of the Jews*, s.v. "Egyptians, masters of astrology and magic") understood in the Zohar to be the force of the demonic. Cf. Zohar 1.81b, 83a, 249a; 2.30b, 35b, 38a, 191a, 192b; 3.50b, 69a, 70a, 207a. See my "Left Contained in the Right," 33–37, where I have worked this out in detail.

⁴⁴ Cited by Matt, *Zohar*, 220.

that borders on the demonic, indeed is a bridge between light and darkness.⁴⁵ She is thus described in the very first lines of the Zohar as a rose surrounded by thorns. This point is made clearly in the Zohar's commentary on Exod 3:2, "And the angel of the Lord [sc. *Shekhinah*] appeared to him [Moses] in a flame of fire out of the midst of a thorn-bush":

The thorn-bush [i.e., the demonic potency] was surely within that holiness [i.e., *Shekhinah*] and cleaving to it, for everything cleaves together, the pure and the impure; there is no purity except from within impurity. This is the mystery, "Who can bring a pure thing from what is impure" (Job 14:4). The shell and the kernel are together.⁴⁶

Just as the realm above shell and kernel, evil and good, are bound together, so too below in the human domain: the sacred emerges out of the profane.

Another hermeneutical context in which this dialectic is established is the Zohar's comment in response to the question, why was the Torah given in the desert, the place where the force of the demonic dominates:

The words of Torah reside only there, for there is no light except that which emerges out of darkness. When that [Other] Side is subdued the Holy One, blessed be He, ascends and is glorified. And there is no divine worship except amidst darkness, and no good except within evil. When a person enters an evil way and forsakes it, then the Holy One, blessed be He,

⁴⁵ Cf. Tishby, *Mishnat ha-Zohar*, 223–26. A striking description of this is given in *Zohar Hadash*, 1c (*Sitrei Otiyot*): "In the mystery of Enoch [it is said]: There is another *heh* below [the demonic] which is bound to this *heh* [i.e., *Shekhinah* symbolized by the last letter of the Tetragrammaton, the letter *heh*; in this context the *Shekhinah* is said to be symbolized by a *heh* for She is a point that is surrounded by four camps of angels, and the letter *heh* numerically equals five], and they correspond one to the other. Then it is time to cry [cf. Eccl 3:4]. The sign for this is אהה [i.e., an expression of grief; cf. Jer 1:6, and note that there is a dot in the second *heh*], for all the surrounding evil encloses [them] below in the form of a *dalet* [i.e., on all four sides, *dalet* = four]. It surrounds these four and the point [i.e., *Shekhinah*]. And the point stands within a hard shell which encloses it [symbolized by the dot in the second *heh* of the word אהה]. Then the Moon [*Shekhinah*] is eclipsed and its light is covered, and permission is given to judge the world with evil judgments."

⁴⁶ Zohar 2.69b. Cf. Zohar 3.48b: "From the 'flame of darkness' [see above, n. 29] there emerged three hundred and twenty-five inscribed sparks, and they were united in the side of Strength [the left side of Judgment] . . . and when they entered in a body they were called Man (מא) . . . the 'Man of War' [Exod 15:3]. . . . Since the lower judgments are united and joined to the hair of this one, it is called the severe Judgment. And when the hair on his head is removed, [the judgment] is ameliorated [literally, sweetened] and the judgments below are not summoned. And then he is called pure, as it is written, 'Who can bring a pure thing from what is impure' (Job 14:4). From the impure certainly!" Concerning this text, see n. 29. Whereas in Zohar 2.69b, the unity of the divine and the demonic is perceived from the perspective of the lowest divine gradation and its proximity to the unholy realm, in Zohar 3.48b, this unity is perceived from the perspective of the very first stages of emanation. It is noteworthy that the same text is cited as a scriptural locus in both cases.

ascends in His glory. Thus the perfection of all is good and evil together, and afterwards to ascend to the good. . . . This is complete worship.⁴⁷

The most perfect divine worship is only that which emerges out of darkness for only when one returns to the good from evil is the Other Side “subdued” and the Holy One “glorified.” Tishby sees in this passage a tacit affirmation of the Zohar’s dualistic stance, for the ultimate worship entails the victory of the human over the demonic.⁴⁸ It seems to me, however, that the notion of subduing the Other Side entails not the eradication but rather the reintegration of demonic energy to its divine source. I shall return to this point later.

CONTAINMENT OF THE DEMONIC IN THE DIVINE

The inclusion of the demonic in the spiritual path is also affirmed in connection with Job, whose fatal flaw, according to the Zohar, was that he separated good and evil instead of containing them together. Here the Zohar uses slightly different terminology which, as we shall see, holds the key to understanding the Zohar’s unique principle of mediation or synthesis:

Job never gave any portion to [the Other Side], as it is written “he offered up burnt-offerings according to the number of them all” (Job 1:5). The burnt-offering rises upward. He did not give any portion to the Other Side for had he given him a portion he could not have overcome him afterwards. . . . Come and see: Just as he separated and did not contain the good and evil [together], so in the exact manner he was judged: [God] gave him good and then evil and then returned him to the good. Thus it is fitting for a person to know good and to know evil, and then return to the good. That is the secret of faith.⁴⁹

In the Zohar the *mizwot* have one of two purposes: either to strengthen and sustain the realm of holiness by maintaining the flow of divine light from the uppermost grades to the lowest, or to neutralize the forces of evil so that they do not interfere with the unity of the holy realm.⁵⁰ Sacrifices in particular, according to the Zohar, are an instance where we quite literally “give the devil his due.” That is, a portion of every sacrifice is set aside for *Sitra Aħra*, the one exception being the *‘olah*, the burnt-offering, which according to Scripture is

⁴⁷ Zohar 2.184a.

⁴⁸ *Mishnat ha-Zohar*, 1.295.

⁴⁹ Zohar 2.34a.

⁵⁰ Cf. Faierstein, “‘God’s Need for the Commandments,’” 50–51; Daniel Matt, “The Mystic and the Mizwot,” in Arthur Green, ed., *Jewish Spirituality: From the Bible through the Middle Ages* (New York: Crossroad, 1986) 387–88. See above, n. 10.

burnt entirely for God. Job, however, offered up only burnt-offerings, thus depriving the demonic of its proper share.

The sin of Job is referred to as “not including evil and good together,” for had he offered a sacrifice with an allotted portion to the demonic he would have comprised the two together in one act. Job is, accordingly, described in Scripture as being “removed from evil” (1:8), that is, he had no portion in the Other Side.⁵¹ Paradoxically, by not participating in evil Job was overcome by evil; by separating evil from good Job strengthened the former. From the case of Job we can learn, therefore, the “secret of faith”: “one should know good and evil” and only then “return to the good.” This parallels the description of the “perfection of all” examined above: “good and evil together, and afterwards to ascend to the good.” But here, in contrast to the other passages we have cited, the Zohar speaks about containment.

The ideal state is one in which evil and good are contained together as one and not one in which evil and good are separated. Had Job contained good and evil together—in one sacrifice—then evil as an autonomous force would have been subdued, or, in the language of the Zohar, Satan would have been removed from the sanctuary (sc. the *Shekhinah*) and the side of holiness would have ascended upwards. The removal of Satan from the sanctuary cannot come about, however, by means of the total divorce of the demonic from the holy, for such a divorce is precisely what Job sought to accomplish. Satan is removed from the holy only when the demonic and holy are combined together by means of the proper human intention. The one who separates good and evil sustains the “quasi” independence of the demonic realm, whereas the one who contains the two together restores the demonic to its divine root. An act of separation or division merely increases evil, which by definition is separation and division.

It is interesting to note that this exegetical comment on Job occurs as part of the section of Zohar on Exod 10:1, “And the Lord said to Moses, ‘Go in to Pharaoh.’” According to the Zohar, the esoteric meaning of this verse is that God implored Moses to plumb the inner depths of the divine secrets concerning the demonic, symbolized by the kingdom of Egypt and especially its chief power, Pharaoh. Moses, unlike Job, did not flee from evil; rather he was commanded specifically to acquire knowledge of it. Such knowledge was considered by the Castilian kabbalists and by the author of the Zohar to be the most esoteric of all kabbalistic wisdom.⁵² It seems to me that, in the case of the Zohar, the claim that this knowledge holds the key to divine secrets can be explained by the fact that only one who knows both the demonic and the divine

⁵¹ Cf. Zohar 2.181b–82a; 3.101b; Tishby, *Mishnat ha-Zohar*, 1. 291.

⁵² See Liebes, “Messiah of the Zohar,” 125–26.

can understand the underlying unity of the two realms.⁵³ And only one who knows this can unify God, for by uniting the left with the right one regains an original wholeness or unity of opposites that is present in the Godhead before the process of differentiation unfolds. As it is expressed in one place in the Zohar:

R. Isaac said: When the Holy One, blessed be He, created the world and wanted to reveal the depth out of the hiddenness and the light from within the darkness, they were contained within one another. Therefore out of darkness emerged the light and out of the hiddenness emerged and was revealed the depth. One emerged from the other. . . . And all things were contained one with another, the good inclination and the evil inclination, right and left, Israel and the nations, white and black. All things were dependent on one another.⁵⁴

The ethical demand that evil be contained in the good mirrors the ontological principle of *coincidentia oppositorum*. To separate good and evil is ultimately to deny the unity of the divine.

The containment of the evil inclination in the good is developed most fully in the Zohar's interpretation of Deut 4:39: "And know this day, and consider it in your hearts, that the Lord is God." Here too, as we shall see, this idea has a direct bearing on the notion of *yihud*, unification of the divine:

R. Eliezer began to expound: It is written, "And know this day, and consider it in your hearts, that the Lord is God" (Deut 4:39). This verse should have been written as follows: "And know this day that the Lord is God, and consider it in your hearts." Moreover, it should have said "consider it in your heart" לבך. Yet Moses said: If you want to understand this and know that the Lord is God, then consider it in your hearts, לבבך, and you will know it. "Your hearts"—the good inclination and the evil inclination,⁵⁵ for one is contained in the other and they are one. Then you will know that the Lord is God for one is contained in the other, and they are one. Thus it is written "consider it in your hearts" in order to know the matter. Moreover, R. Eliezer said: the wicked make a blemish above. What [is] the blemish? For the left is not contained in the right, the evil inclination is not contained in the good inclination on account of the sins of

⁵³ See above, n. 29 and below, n. 73.

⁵⁴ Zohar 3.80b.

⁵⁵ This is based on the rabbinic interpretation of Deut 6:5, "And love the Lord with all your heart," לבבך, which they read in the plural, i.e., "hearts," and as a reference to the two inclinations, the good and the evil; see references above, n. 6.

humanity. . . . And thus it says, "And consider it in your hearts," to contain them as one, the left in the right.⁵⁶

The secret knowledge alluded to in Deut 4:39 concerns the unification of the two names of God: YHWH and Elohim. In kabbalistic terms, these two names correspond to the two divine attributes *Tiferet*, the Holy One, the sixth *sefirah*, and *Malkhut*, or *Shekhinah*, the tenth *sefirah*. This kabbalistic interpretation is based, in the final analysis, upon the rabbinic explanation of these names: YHWH referring to the divine attribute of *Rahamim*, mercy, and Elohim to the attribute of *Din*, rigor or stern judgment.⁵⁷ It is clear that in this passage the two names refer to the male and female potencies within the sefirotic world: the male vis-à-vis the female is merciful (overflowing, gracious), whereas the female vis-à-vis the male is judgmental (limiting, restricting). To know that the attributes of mercy and judgment are contained one within the other, that YHWH is Elohim—that is the esoteric knowledge imparted by this verse.

But how is such knowledge possible? The key to attaining this lies in the "consideration" of one's hearts, the two inclinations of the human spirit. When one examines the hearts within, one will discover that the two hearts, the good and evil inclinations, are contained one within another. It must be pointed out, however, that the two inclinations in the *Zohar* do not merely represent psychological principles of will or impulse as they do in the classical rabbinic sources;⁵⁸ they correspond respectively to the ontological forces of the divine and the demonic. The good inclination on the right side symbolizes the force of holiness rooted in the sefirotic realm, whereas the evil inclination symbolizes the force of impurity rooted in the demonic realm.⁵⁹ The point of this passage, however, is to establish the principle that the two forces are to be contained one within the other. Indeed, the wicked cause a blemish above for by doing evil

⁵⁶ *Zohar* 2.26b–27a. Moses de León refers to this Zoharic interpretation in his *Sefer ha-Rimmon*. See my "Sefer ha-Rimmon," 2. 100. It is interesting to note that de León gives two interpretations to the verse: according to the former the unity implied by Deut 4:39 involves the attributes of judgment and mercy, whereas according to the latter it involves the evil and good inclinations. In the *Zohar* both interpretations are combined. See my "Sefer ha-Rimmon," 1. 45.

⁵⁷ See, e.g., *Sifrei Deut.* pisqa 26; *Bereshit Rab.* 12.14. For a summary of the rabbinic doctrine, see Urbach, *The Sages*, 396–407. For a comparison of the Philonic and rabbinic views, see N. A. Dahl and A. Segal, "Philo and the Rabbis on the Names of God," *JSJ* 9 (1978) 1–28, and references to other scholarly literature cited there, 2 nn. 5–6.

⁵⁸ See references to studies by Schechter and Urbach cited above, n. 6. It should be pointed out that in some rabbinic statements, most notably that of the Resh Lakish (third-century Palestine), the evil inclination seems to be more than merely a psychological impulse. Indeed, in the case of the aforementioned rabbi, the evil inclination is identified with Satan or the Angel of Death; see *b. Baba Batra* 16a, and cf. Urbach, *The Sages*, 149, 416.

⁵⁹ Cf. Tishby, *Mishnat ha-Zohar*, 2. 88–90.

they cling exclusively to the evil inclination and consequently do not contain the left within the right.

The containment of the evil inclination within the good not only reflects the containment of Elohim within YHWH, but it serves as a foundation for deriving this higher esoteric knowledge, a knowledge described elsewhere in the Zohar as the “secret of faith.”⁶⁰ The verse thus reads, “And know this day, and consider it in your hearts that the Lord is God,” for in order to know that the Lord is God, that mercy and judgment are one, the person must consider the unity of his hearts, the evil and good inclinations. The containment of the demonic left within the divine right is thus an essential component of *yihud*, the unification of the divine left and right. In mythic terms, it is the feminine aspect of the divine that unites with the masculine. This unity, however, is threatened by the forces of evil, *Sitra Aħra*, which try to capture the *Shekhinah* and thereby cause a separation between the masculine and feminine. The one who does not unite evil with the good allows the evil to remain autonomous and, consequently, disrupts the unity of male and female within the divine. The ideal for the righteous is therefore to contain the left within the right; the wicked, by contrast, “separate the evil inclination from the good, and cleave to evil.”⁶¹ According to the Zohar, as we have seen, the sin of Job likewise was that he separated good and evil, not however by clinging to evil but rather by fleeing from it. Hence, to exclude evil absolutely is in effect the same as exclusively cleaving to evil: both bring about the separation of forces that should be united.

That the ideal state is one of containment rather than eradication of the demonic is suggested to me by two other passages. The first is the Zohar’s interpretation⁶² of Ps 51:20: “Do good in thy favour to Zion, build the walls of Jerusalem.” The verse refers to the restoration of Zion and the building of the temple in the future. The Zohar notes that at first God shall do good to Zion, the inner city, and only afterwards build up the walls of Jerusalem. This is a reversal of the ordinary human process in which the building of the wall (the shell) precedes that of the sanctuary (the kernel) so that the former can protect the latter. Why do we find a reversal here? The Zohar responds: “In the case of the building of the temple when the evil side will be removed from the world it will not be necessary [for the wall to precede and thereby protect the sanctuary] because the kernel and shell shall belong to Her [sc. the temple = *Shekhinah*].” Note carefully the exact language of the text: on one hand we are told that the evil side is removed from the world, *בִּישָׁא יַחְעֵבֵר מַעְלָמָא*, while on the other hand we are told that the shell and the kernel belong to the temple, *דְּהָא מִחָא וְקִלְפָּה דִּילִיָּה הוּי*. When the temple is not standing and the evil side has dominion

⁶⁰ See, e.g., Zohar 1.12a.

⁶¹ Zohar 2.26b.

⁶² Zohar 2.108a–b.

in the world, then there is a separation of inner and outer, the kernel and the shell; when, however, the temple is rebuilt and evil is removed from the world, then inner and outer both belong to the holy. The Zohar does not conclude by saying that there is no longer any shell in the time of the restoration of Zion,⁶³ it says rather that in that time the shell itself as the kernel will be part of the holy temple (symbolic of the *Shekhinah*). This is, according to the Zohar, the intent of the biblical expression, “the walls of Jerusalem,” that is, “that wall on the outside which is the shell verily belongs to her,” *היא חומה דלבר דאיהר קליפה דייליה היא ממש*.

There is finally an extraordinary passage that again affirms the ideal of the reintegration of the demonic in the divine. In Lev 23:17 it says that the people of Israel were ordered to bring as the firstfruits of the Lord on Pentecost two wave loaves baked with leaven. The author of the Zohar wonders: why is the biblical injunction to bring specifically leavened bread on Pentecost, the day that commemorates the Sinaitic revelation, the very ingredient forbidden on Passover, the day that commemorates the exodus from Egypt? To this query the Zohar responds:

Now we must look carefully. On Passover Israel went out from the bread which is called leaven, as it is written, “You shall not see any leaven” (Exod 13:7). . . . What is the reason? On account of the honor of that bread which is called unleavened. Now that Israel merited the highest bread, it was not appropriate for the leaven to be wiped out and not seen at all. And why was this sacrifice from leaven. . . . For on that very day [Pentecost] the evil inclination was wiped out because the Torah, which is called freedom, was to be found.⁶⁴

The Zohar goes on to give a parable in order to elucidate the point.⁶⁵ A king had an only son who was sick. When the son desired to eat it was necessary to give him only the prescribed medicine; after he ate the medicine and became healthy he could eat whatever he desired. “Similarly,” continues the Zohar,

when Israel left Egypt they did not know the essence or secret of Faith. The Holy One, blessed be He, said: Israel shall eat medicine, and until they eat the medicine no other food shall be shown to them. When they ate the unleavened bread, which was medicine in order to enter and to know the

⁶³ Yet, it must be pointed out that in the continuation of the text the Zohar contrasts the original process of emanation in which the shell, the kings of Edom, preceded the kernel, Israel, and the future restoration when the Holy One, blessed be He, “will put first the kernel without any shell.” For the background of this passage, see above, n. 34. For other contexts wherein the Zohar affirms the annihilation of the demonic in the future, see above, n. 12.

⁶⁴ Zohar 2.183a–b.

⁶⁵ For a variation of this parable, see Wolfson, “*Sefer ha-Rimmon*,” 2. 133.

secret of Faith, the Holy One said: from now on leaven shall be shown to them and they can eat it for it cannot harm them. And all the more so on the day of Pentecost which is the complete medicine.

In this passage two statements would appear to contradict one another. On the one hand, the author of the Zohar states that on Pentecost "it was not appropriate for the leaven [symbolic of the evil inclination]⁶⁶ to be wiped out and not seen," while on the other hand, relying on rabbinic sources,⁶⁷ he states that on that very day "the evil inclination was wiped out." This apparent tension can be resolved only if we understand the two assertions in terms of the dialectic that we have examined in the course of this paper. Upon leaving Egypt, where the people of Israel were immersed in the demonic shells,⁶⁸ they had to remove all vestiges of evil and enter the way of holiness. Hence the leaven, symbolic of the Other Side, had to be removed, and unleavened bread, symbolic of the first gradation of faith, the *Shekhinah*, had to be consumed.⁶⁹ After they received the higher type of bread, the bread of wisdom embodied in the Torah,⁷⁰ symbolic of *Tiferet*,⁷¹ this was no longer necessary. At the Sinaitic revelation the left side was reappropriated by Israel, for at that time it presented no danger to the people, its efficacy being undermined by the Torah, the "complete medicine."⁷² By means of the "higher bread" the unholy is restored to its source in the holy and no longer need be destroyed.

CONCLUSION

From all the texts that we have examined a clear pattern has emerged. The spiritual path that is most complete is one that incorporates evil as well as good. The conceptual framework for this ideal in the Zohar is the dialectical relation that pertains between the demonic and the divine. That is, the former is rooted and sustained by the latter. We have seen above, however, that there are basically two ways to explain this in the Zohar: the cathartic and the emanative

⁶⁶ Leaven was used allegorically as a symbol for that which is evil or impure in Jewish and Christian sources dating from the Greco-Roman period; see sources cited in Baruch Bokser, *The Origins of the Seder* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984) 120 n. 13.

⁶⁷ See, e.g., *Cant. Rab.* 1.2.

⁶⁸ See above, n. 43.

⁶⁹ Cf. Zohar 1.226b; 2.40a, 182a; 3.95b; Wolfson, "Sefer ha-Rimmon," 1. 121 and 2. 136, 328–29.

⁷⁰ The symbolic correlation of bread and Wisdom is an ancient haggadic tradition. See in particular the comparative study of the concept of manna in the Gospel of John and the Philonic corpus in Peder Borgen, *Bread from Heaven: An Exegetical Study of the Concept of Manna in the Gospel of John and the Writings of Philo* (NovTSupp 10; Leiden: Brill, 1965).

⁷¹ Cf. Zohar 2.40a, 61b, 183a; Tishby, *Mishnat ha-Zohar*, 2. 391; Matt, *Zohar*, 113–16, 245–47.

⁷² On the notion of Torah as a medicine or drug, especially against the malady of the evil inclination, see Schechter, *Aspects of Rabbinic Theology*, 273–75.

views. In either case the ethical ideal of inclusion of the left in the spiritual path follows logically. Yet, in one case the ideal is merely negative and in the other positive.

According to the cathartic view, just as in the divine the forces of impurity emerged prior to those of holiness, so too in the life of the human spirit the evil inclination precedes the good. Moreover, just as the initial stage in the divine process is a purging of evil so too by the human spirit purification of the impure is the preliminary stage in the path. This purification is achieved exclusively by means of contact with the impure. In terms of the Zohar's own symbolic language: one must go down to Egypt before one can enter the Holy Land.

According to the emanative view, on the other hand, the demonic force is said to have emanated from one of the grades in the upper realm. To contain evil in the good—that is the true affirmation of divine unity for in its ontic root the evil is bound to the good.⁷³ It follows therefore that even in the darkness there is a spark of light. This notion, which became a central motif in the kabbalah of Isaac Luria and subsequently in the writings of the Ḥasidim, is not stated explicitly in the Zohar, although it is implicit in various contexts, some of which we have already mentioned. In contrast to later sources, however, the task of *homo religiosus* in the Zohar is not the separation of the holy spark from the demonic shell⁷⁴ but rather inclusion of the latter in the former. Evil has no absolute existence in itself; it is ontologically posterior to the divine, for the life-force of evil derives from the divine attribute of judgment. The realm of evil is constituted by the unbalanced force of judgment that has, as it were, assumed an unwarranted autonomy. Hence the religious and moral task of the human being is to restore that energy to its divine source, to balance judgment with mercy, to temper the untempered force of severity with the effluence of love—to contain the left in the right.

The Gnostic sources imparted to the kabbalah the idea of two forces, light and dark, right and left, that structurally parallel each other. Both these forces have their origin in the one God. According to these sources, however, there is no principle by which to reintegrate the demonic into the divine. At best, there is an affirmation of the old apocalyptic idea, albeit in new symbolic terms, of the eventual uprooting of evil by the good. Even the characterization of the

⁷³ See in particular Moses de León, *Sefer ha-Mishqal*, ed. J. Wijnhoven (Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 1964) 148–49: “Good and evil are two causes, separate and distinct one from another. Yet the mystery of the Tree is one. . . . Thus it is a religious duty and obligation to know and seek out that very matter [sc. the forces of the demonic] to distinguish between good and evil but not to cleave to it.”

⁷⁴ Cf. I. Tishby, “Gnostic Doctrines in Sixteenth Century Jewish Mysticism,” *JJS* 6 (1955) 152. For a later kabbalistic development which, like the Zohar, emphasizes the incorporation of evil within the good, see B. Zak, “Ha-Qelippah Zorekh ha-Qedushah,” *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 3 (1983/84) 191–206.

demonic as God's instrument in punishing and purifying the wicked does not imply a restoration of the evil forces to their source in the divine. The Zohar, in contrast, although accepting the gnostic typology, introduced into the discussion a mediating principle, "the left contained in the right," and by doing so moved beyond gnostic dualism into theosophical monism. The theosophical doctrine, moreover, is reflected in the moral and religious sphere. That is, the ethical task of the human being is to contain the left in the right and thereby restore the former to its source in the latter. The idea of spiritual perfection as it is developed in certain Zoharic texts is one in which the person achieves holiness through contact with the unholy, and by means of such contact the unholy is transformed and contained in the holy. The purpose of religious life is not to liberate the spark of light from its demonic shell in order to separate the two realms. On the contrary, the one who separates the two, like Job, creates a blemish above. The goal, however, is to contain the left in the right. To see the light through darkness—that, according to the Zohar, is the ultimate perfection.