

**DANIEL MATT (2003)**

FROM: *The Zohar: Pritzker Edition, Vol. 1*, translation and commentary by Daniel C. Matt. ©2004 Zohar Education Project, Inc. Stanford University Press, ISBN 0-8047-4747-4.

[NOTE: Matt's footnotes in this edition are scholarly and extensive, primarily dealing with variant readings of the text. Only those notes offering substantive comments are re-typed here (though all notes are indicated in the text). Of particular importance are the third sentence, and footnote 7.]

From pp. 107-109, Parashat B'Reshit, (*Zohar 1:15a*):

At the head of potency of the King,<sup>1</sup> He engraved engravings<sup>2</sup> in luster on high.<sup>3</sup>

A spark of impenetrable darkness<sup>4</sup> flashed within the concealed of the concealed<sup>5</sup>, from the head of Infinity<sup>6</sup>—a cluster of vapor forming in formlessness, thrust in a ring,<sup>7</sup> not white, not black, not red, not green, no color at all.<sup>8</sup>

As a cord surveyed,<sup>9</sup> it yielded radiant colors.

Deep within the spark gushed a flow, splaying colors below, concealed within the concealed of the mystery of *Ein Sof*.<sup>10</sup>

It split and did not split its aura,<sup>11</sup> was not known at all, until under the impact of splitting, a single, concealed, supernal point shone.

Beyond that point, nothing is known, so it is called **רֵאשִׁית** (*Reshit*), *Beginning*,<sup>12</sup> first command of all.<sup>13</sup>

**NOTES:**

<sup>2</sup>**engraved engravings** These engravings eventually manifest as the *sefirot*. See *Zohar* 1:3b, 38a; 2:236b; 3:128a (*IR*)

<sup>3</sup>**luster on high** The brilliance of the first *sefirah*, *Keter*, represented in the *Zohar* as coeternal with *Ein Sof*.

<sup>4</sup>**spark of impenetrable darkness** [notes on variant readings omitted] The spark is so potently brilliant that it overwhelms comprehension. Many mystics convey similar paradoxical images: "a ray of divine darkness" (Dionysius, *Mystical Theology* 1:1); "the luminous darkness" (Gregory of Nyssa, *Life of Moses* 2:163) [ . . . ] Cf. Maimonides, *Guide of the Perplexed* 1:59: "We are dazzled by His beauty, and He is hidden from us because of the intensity with which He becomes manifest, just as the sun is hidden to eyes to weak to apprehend it."

Here the blinding spark is the first impulse of emanation flashing from *Ein Sof* through *Keter* and proceeding to delineate the various *sefirot* . . .

<sup>5</sup>**concealed of the concealed** The luster on high, the first and most hidden *sefirah*, *Keter*.

<sup>6</sup>**Infinity** Hebrew, **אֵין סוּף** (*Ein Sof*), "There is no end," the ultimate divine reality. On the evolution of this term, see Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 88-89.

<sup>7</sup>**cluster of vapor forming in formlessness**. . . **קוּטְרָא בְּגוּלְמָא** (*Qutra be-gulma*). *Qutra* means both "knot" and "smoke" in the *Zohar*. See 1:17a, and 30a, 33b, 94b, 106a, 161b, 2:80a, 124a; 3:45b, 51a–b, 107a, 289a, 295b (*IZ*).

Some commentators (Galante, *OY*, *Sullam*) suggest translating *qutra* as "form." Cf. **קְטוּרִין** (*qeturin*) in *Vayiqra Rabbah* 23:12; *Arukh*, s.v. *qtr*. The phrase would then mean: "a form in formlessness," which resonates with "a spark of darkness." The ring is *Keter*, the "Crown."

<sup>8</sup>**not white, not black**. . . These four colors are associated with four *sefirot*: *Hesed*, *Shekhinah*, *Gevurah*, and *Tiferet*, none of which appears until a later stage of emanation. . .

<sup>9</sup>**As a cord surveyed** The spark that is a vapor is also a cord (**מְשִׁיחָא** [*meshiha*]), referred to elsewhere in the *Zohar* as **קוּ הַמִּדָּה** (*qav ha-middah*), "the line of measure," based on Jeremiah 31:38.

[ . . . ] The cord, or measuring line, maps out the paths and stages of emanation, the spectrum of divine colors, each within its own wave-length.

<sup>10</sup>**concealed within the concealed** . . . The flow of emanation has just begun; everything is still hidden within the mystery of *Ein Sof*.

<sup>11</sup>**It split and did not split** . . . **בִּקְעָ וְלֹא בִקְעָ** (*Beqa ve-la beqa*). The flow somehow broke through, but the nature of the breakthrough is impossible to describe, so the act is stated and immediately denied.

[ . . . ] The aura (**אֵוִירָא** [*avira*], "air, space, ether, aura") is *Keter*. [ . . . ]

See *Sefer Yetzirah* 2:6: "Out of chaos He formed substance, making what is not into what is. He hewed enormous pillars out of ether that cannot be grasped." [ . . . ]

<sup>12</sup>**a single, concealed, supernal point . . . Beginning** The flow of emanation manifests as a point of light. This is the second *sefirah*: *Hokhmah* ("Wisdom"), which is called *Beginning* because it is the first ray of divine light to appear outside of *Keter*, the first aspect of God that can be known.

The identification of **רֵשִׁית** (*reshit*) *beginning* with Wisdom appears widely . . .

<sup>13</sup>**first command of all** According to M *Avot* 5:1, "The world was created through ten commands." Only nine explicit commands appear in Genesis 1, but the decade is completed by counting the phrase *In the beginning*.

[ . . . ] In Kabbalah the ten commands symbolize the ten *sefirot*, the first of which establishes the basis for the other nine.

### DANIEL MATT: 1983

From: *ZOHAR: The Book of Enlightenment*, (c)1983 Daniel C. Matt. (Paulist Press) ISBN 0-80901-2387-8

p. 49

In the Beginning

When the King conceived ordaining

He engraved engravings in the luster on high.

A blinding spark flashed

within the Concealed of the Concealed

from the mystery of the Infinite,

a cluster of vapor in formlessness,

set in a ring,

not white, not black, not red, not green,

no color at all.

When a band spanned, it yielded radiant colors.

Deep within the spark gushed a flow

imbuing colors below,

concealed within the concealed of the mystery of the Infinite.

The flow broke through and did not break through its aura.

It was not known at all

until, under the impact of breaking through,

one high and hidden point shone.

Beyond that point, nothing is known.

So it is called Beginning,

the first command of all.

### GERSHOM SCHOLEM:

From: *ZOHAR, The Book of Splendor: Basic Readings from the Kabbalah*, Edited by Gershom Scholem. (c) 1949 Schocken Books, ISBN 0-8052-0045-2

p. 28:

"In the beginning" [Gen. 1:1] – when the will of the King began to take effect, he engraved signs into the heavenly sphere [that surrounded him]. Within the most hidden recess a dark flame issued from the mystery of *eyn sof*, the Infinite, like a fog forming in the unformed – enclosed in the ring of that sphere, neither white nor black, neither red nor green, of no color whatever. Only after this flame began to assume size and dimension, did it produce radiant colors. From the innermost center of the flame sprang forth a well out of which colors issued and spread upon everything beneath, hidden in the mysterious hiddenness of *eyn sof*.

The well broke through and yet did not break through the ether [of the sphere]. It could not be recognized at all until a hidden, supernal point shone forth under the impact of the final breaking through.\*

Beyond this point nothing can be known. Therefore it is called *reshit*, beginning – the first word [out of the ten] by means of which the universe has been created.

\*This primordial point is identified by the Zohar with the wisdom of God [*hokhma*], the ideal thought of Creation.

**SONCINO ED., tr. Harry Sperling and Maurice Simon**

From: *The ZOHAR, vol. 1*, (c) 1984 Soncino Press Ltd., ISBN: 0-900689-39-0

p. 63:

At the outset the decision of the King made a tracing in the supernal effulgence, a lamp of scintillation,<sup>2</sup> and there issued within the impenetrable recesses of the mysterious limitless a shapeless nucleus<sup>3</sup> enclosed in a ring, neither white nor black nor red nor green nor of any colour at all. When he took measurements, he fashioned colours to show within, and within the lamp there issued a certain effluence from which colours were imprinted below. The most mysterious Power enshrouded in the limitless clave, as it were, without cleaving its void, remaining wholly unknowable until from the force of the strokes there shone forth a supernal and mysterious point. Beyond that point there is no knowable, and therefore it is called *Reshith*, (beginning), the creative utterance which is the starting-point of all.

<sup>2</sup>al. 'darkness'; al. 'measurement'.

<sup>3</sup>al. 'vapour'.

**NURHO DE MANHAR:**

From: *ZOHAR: An Expository Translation from Hebrew*. (c)1980 Wizards Bookshelf, ISBN 0-913510-35-1 (translated sometime between 1900-1914)

p. 85

"Brashith." "In the beginning" was En Soph, the Divine, the self-existent infinite Being, without likeness or reflection, the incomprehensible, the unknowable One, the blessed and only Potentate, the King of Kings and Lord of Lords, who only hath immortality, dwelling in Light which no man can approach unto, whom no man hath seen or can see, before whom the great archangel with face beneath his wings, bends in lowly reverence and adoration, crying, "Holy! Holy! Holy! Who art and was and evermore shall be."

Time had begun. Its great pendulum, whose beats are the ages, commenced to vibrate. The era of creation or manifestation had at last arrived. The *nekuda reshima*, primal point or nucleus, appeared. From it emanated and expanded the primary light, formless, colorless, being neither black nor green nor red. In it, latent yet potentially as in a mighty womb, lay the myriad prototypes and numberless forms of all created things as yet indiscernible, indistinguishable. By the secret and silent action of the divine will, from this primal luminous point radiated forth the vital life-giving spark which, pervading and operating in the great etheric ocean of forms, became the soul of the universe, the found and origin of all mundane life and motion and terrestrial existence, and in its nature and essence and secret operation remains ineffable, incomprehensible and indefinable. It has been conceived of as the divine Logos, the Word, and called Brashith, for the same was in the beginning with God.

**JERRY WINSTON**

From: *Colors from the Zohar*, (c)1976 Jerry Winston. San Francisco: BARAH: The Creative Center for American Judaism. LCC 75-45790

pp. 16-17

The Beginning  
In the beginning,  
there was only brightness,  
a flood of light so radiant  
as to blind the eye,  
or enable it to see  
from one end of the universe  
to the other.

Then the will of the Creator  
began to take effect,  
and a dark flame issued forth  
from deep inside the mystery of the EYN SOF\* --  
a flame that was more like a fog,  
for it was neither black nor white,  
nor red nor green,  
nor any color whatsoever.

And from the innermost center of the flame,  
there sprang forth radiant colors  
which showered everything beneath.

Still, nothing could be recognized at all,  
until, under the impact of the movement,  
a hidden, supernal point shone through.

This point is called *reshit*\* -- the beginning.  
Beyond this point,  
nothing can be known.

\*EYN SOF:

That which is without end, that which was before the beginning, before there was even space or time; above and beyond all human knowledge, having neither shape nor form, the absolute no-thing, the perfect unity, the Mysterious One, Incomparable, Unknown and Unknowable.

\*RESHIT:

The divine spark which contains within itself the potentiality of all creation; the wisdom of God which is about to unfold.