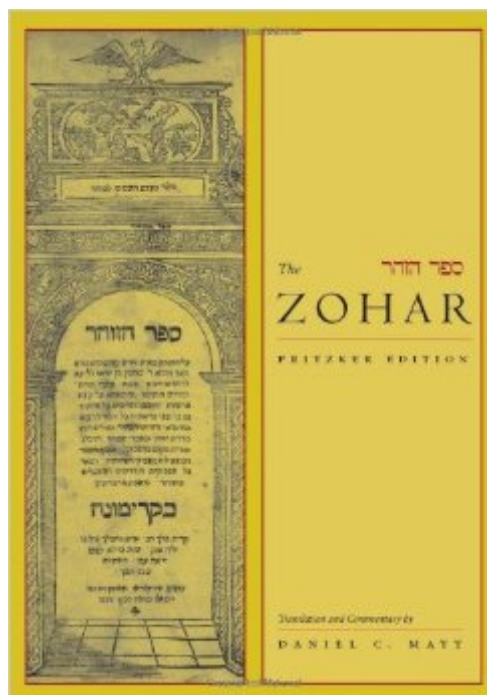


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The Zohar: Pritzker Edition, Volume Five



Synopsis

Sefer ha-Zohar (The Book of Radiance) has amazed and overwhelmed readers ever since it emerged mysteriously in medieval Spain toward the end of the thirteenth century. Written in a unique, lyrical Aramaic, this masterpiece of Kabbalah exceeds the dimensions of a normal book; it is virtually a body of literature, comprising over twenty discrete sections. The bulk of the Zohar consists of a running commentary on the Torah, from Genesis through Deuteronomy. This fifth volume of The Zohar: Pritzker Edition opens in the middle of Exodus immediately following the revelation at Mount Sinai. The first chapter features a famous narrative about two rabbis and an old donkey-driver they encounter on the road. This old man seems like a complete ignoramus and pesters them with nonsensical riddles, but he turns out to be a sage and explains to them one of the most tightly guarded secrets of Kabbalah: the reincarnation of the soul. In the course of his exposition, the old man entralls his two listeners with a romantic account of Torah as a maiden who reveals herself only to one who pursues her lovingly. The rest of this volume consists mainly of the Zohar's commentary on the biblical description of the mishkan, the Dwelling (or Tabernacle) in the desert. The mishkan symbolizes Shekhinah, the feminine presence of God who "dwells" on earth. Since the Dwelling was the center of worship, the Zohar explores here the theme of prayer. The volume concludes with one of the shortest yet most important sections of the Zohar—Sifra di-Tsni'uta (The Book of Concealment). This enigmatic and poetic composition contains a veiled description of God's body, focusing on the beard. Its few pages convey the central teachings of Kabbalah, including the balance between male and female energies, and how divine breath animates all that exists.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Perhaps the Stanford University Press will decide to change the color of each Zohar volume as each volume has a distinctive identity. Volume 5 contains "Sava de-Mispatim", an independent composition, says Daniel Matt in the introduction. It deals with "gilgul", (the re-incarnation and transmigration of the soul) with the biblical law of levirate marriage (Yibum). If a man dies and leaves a widow childless, the brother of the deceased should marry the woman and any children born are considered the off-springs of the deceased man. Volume 5 portable sanctuary built by Moses in the desert, called the Dwelling (Mishkan) that attracts the feminine presence of God, called "Shekhinah", considered the bride of Moses (Kallat Moshe), a controversial statement. The text of prayers is analyzed for words or letter that have spiritual potency, that can be activated only by human heartfelt utterances. But most dazzling content of the volume 5 is the text "Sifra De-Tsini'uta", the Book of Concealment, which further remind us that the Zohar is not really one book, but a compilation of texts. Professor Matt says in the introduction that the Zohar only became a book when it was printed in Italy in sixteenth century. Ronit Meroz from the University of Tel Aviv has provided unique research on the authenticity of the manuscripts composing the Zohar, that is reflected in Volume 5. As for the Book of Concealment, this perhaps one of the most complex texts to understand. It conveys in only 6 pages of Aramaic, the basic principles of Kabbalah. The text is so dense, that it is annotated almost every single word. Professor Matt did a superb work to clear the haze for the ordinary reader. Here is the original text: "The Book of Concealment, a book balanced on scales.

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