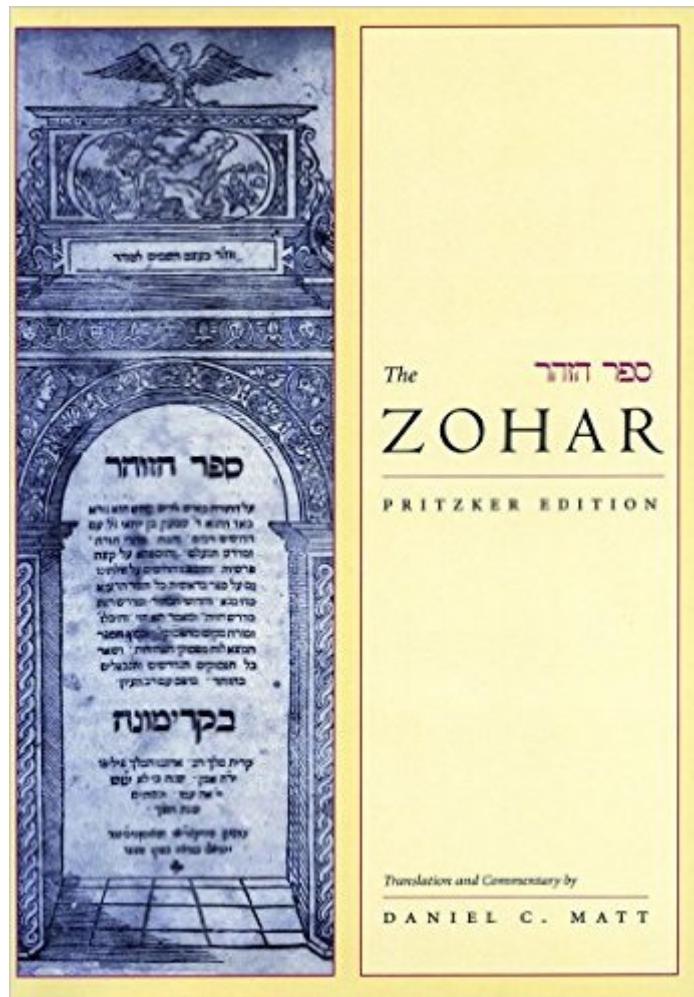


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The Zohar: Pritzker Edition, Vol. 1



Synopsis

The first two volumes of The Zohar: Pritzker Edition, translated with commentary by Daniel C. Matt, cover more than half of the Zohar's commentary on the Book of Genesis (through Genesis 32:3). This is the first translation ever made from a critical Aramaic text of the Zohar, which has been established by Professor Matt based on a wide range of original manuscripts. The extensive commentary, appearing at the bottom of each page, clarifies the kabbalistic symbolism and terminology, and cites sources and parallels from biblical, rabbinic, and kabbalistic texts. The translator's introduction is accompanied by a second introduction written by Arthur Green, discussing the origin and significance of the Zohar. Please see the Zohar Home Page for ancillary materials, including the publication schedule, press release, Aramaic text, questions, and answers. Further information on the Zohar: 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 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 translation begins and focuses here in what are projected to be ten volumes. Two subsequent volumes will cover other, shorter sections. The Zohar's commentary is composed in the form of a mystical novel. The hero is Rabbi Shim'on son of Yohai, a saintly disciple of Rabbi Akiva who lived in the second century in the land of Israel. In the Zohar, Rabbi Shim'on and his companions wander through the hills of Galilee, discovering and sharing secrets of Torah. On one level, biblical figures such as Abraham and Sarah are the main characters, and the mystical companions interpret their words, actions, and personalities. On a deeper level, the text of the Bible is simply the starting point, a springboard for the imagination. For example, when God commands Abraham, Lekh lekha, Go forth... to the land that I will show you (Genesis 12:1), Rabbi El'azar ignores idiomatic usage and insists on reading the words more literally than they were intended, hyperliterally: Lekh lekha, Go to yourself! Search deep within to discover your true self. At times, the companions themselves become the main characters, and we read about their dramatic mystical sessions with Rabbi Shim'on or their adventures on the road, for example, an encounter with a cantankerous old donkey driver who turns out to be a master of wisdom in disguise. Ultimately, the plot of the Zohar focuses on the ten sefirot, the various stages of God's inner life, aspects of divine personality, both feminine and masculine. By penetrating the literal surface of the Torah, the mystical commentators transform the biblical narrative into a biography of God. The entire Torah is read as one continuous divine name, expressing divine being. Even a

seemingly insignificant verse can reveal the inner dynamics of the sefirot; how God feels, responds and acts, how She and He (the divine feminine and masculine) relate intimately with each other and with the world.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The Zohar - Pritzker Edition (Vols. I and II so far) is a worthy addition to the ever expanding library of traditional Jewish literature in English. First, the translation. While I am disappointed that the Aramaic text is not integrated into the volumes (it's available online), this new translation is fresh, adventuresome and witty. It strives, and often succeeds, in capturing the playful language of the original text. Just as important, it is forthright in revealing the frankly erotic flavor of Moses DeLeon's vision of the divine dynamis. Then there is Daniel Matt's commentary, which is remarkable on several counts. First, it is an amazing compendium of the traditional sources that inspired the Zohar. Virtually the entire scope of Biblical, rabbinic, and mystical traditions that DeLeon drew upon in writing the Zohar is obsessively documented in the notes. It is a fantastic treasure trove of Jewish mythic and mystical teachings. These citations alone make the commentary worth reading through carefully. Second, while Matt does an outstanding job of clarifying the meaning of the extraordinarily cryptic language, it is nice to see that he is modest enough to acknowledge in some places that his interpretations are tentative and - in a few places - that he too cannot really get the sense of what DeLeon was trying to say. My only criticism of the commentary is the frequent repetition of

information already given earlier. In many places as one goes deeper into the volumes, the same entry is simply replicated. I realize this is the result of two things: First, the Zohar itself tends toward obsessive repetition of key ideas and images.

Professor Daniel Matt's Zohar translation provides the best scholarly interpretation. This is because of his objectivity and scholarly approach. Not being a Kabbalist he approaches the translation without "loading" the Zohar with his own interpretation. He provides the optimal and most probable translation. The reader needs to understand that this is very different from the Kabbalah Centre's translation. Why? Well if you are looking for the best technical translation Professor Matt provides this. His footnotes, which explain the derivation of the English translation by providing the Aramaic word, the Bible source, and its possible meanings gives the reader an in-depth understanding of the difficulty of the language and its potential understandings. However, this is much more difficult for the beginner who is simply looking for a translator they can trust to give them the basics. The Kabbalah Centre's is much easier to understand, however, not as accurate in that it has more interpretive opinions and might in parts be slanted towards a creed rather than allow the student to arise to the position. Furthermore, many students from other than Jewish backgrounds wish to "scan" or "meditate" on the Aramaic in the ecstatic Kabbalah tradition. Matt's version does not provide this as it provides only the English. I found this disappointing. On the other hand, the Kabbalah Centre's provides little on the Bible source as it has few footnotes to help the reader. Conclusion? If you want the easier version in English then the Kabbalah Centre's is the version to begin your study. If you want a more in-depth, scholarly understanding go to this version. If you want to meditate on the Aramaic-- skip the English go to the source document or use the Kabbalah Centre's for that purpose.

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