

## 108. THE FIRST CLOAK

Light was the very first creation on the first day; thus light was the first cloak in which God concealed His spiritual essence, as it is said, *Cloaked in light as with a garment* (Ps. 104:2).

Some say that God created the angels out of that primal light. For angels are a pure spiritual force radiating light, and the angels surround God the way a cloak envelops whoever wears it.

The extensive rabbinic tradition about the *or ha-ganuz*, the primordial light that has since been concealed, is frequently linked to Creation, in that the light is regarded as the first manifestation of the God's essence. Here the creation of light is directly linked to the creation of the angels, and the angels are viewed as being a spiritual essence consisting entirely of light. Psalm 104 contains fragments of ancient Jewish creation myths. See Psalm 104:1-9. Also, see "The Light of the First Day," p. 83, and "The Creation of Angels," p. 115.

Sources:

Ibn Ezra on Psalm 104:2; Ibn Yachya on Psalm 104:2.

## 109. THE TZOHAR

When the world was first created, God filled the world with a sacred light, known as the primordial light. This was the light that came into being when God said, "Let there be light" (Gen. 1:3). It was not the light of the sun, for that did not come into being until the fourth day, when God created the sun and the moon and the stars. It was a miraculous light by which it was possible for Adam to see from one end of the world to the other.

When Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit, the first thing they lost was that precious light. Without it, the world seemed dark to them, for the sun shone like a candle in comparison. But God preserved one small part of that precious light inside a glowing stone, and the angel Raziel delivered this stone to Adam after they had been expelled from the Garden of Eden, as a token of the world they had left behind. This jewel, known as the *Tzohar*, sometimes glowed brightly and sometimes was dim.

As he lay on his deathbed, Adam gave the jewel to his son Seth, who passed it down to the righteous Enoch. Enoch grew in wisdom until he was taken into Paradise in a chariot, and transformed into the angel Metatron, the heavenly scribe and Prince of the treasures of heaven.

Before departing this world, Enoch gave the *Tzohar* to his son, Methuselah. Methuselah slept in its glowing light, and some say that is why he lived longer than anyone else. Methuselah passed on the jewel to his son Lamech, who gave it to his son, Noah, who brought it with him on the ark. Indeed, God instructed Noah to do so when he said, "Put the *Tzohar* in the ark" (Gen. 6:16). Noah hung it on the deck, and for forty days and nights it illumined the ark. Noah determined whether it was day or night by gauging the brilliance of the stone. It was dim during the day, but it shone brightly at night.

When the ark landed on Mount Ararat, the first thing Noah did was to plant grapes, and when they grew ripe, he made wine and became drunk, and at that moment the *Tzohar* fell from where it had been hung in the ark, rolled into the water, and sank to the bottom of the sea. There it was carried by the currents until it came to rest in an underwater cave.

Years later, after the waters had subsided, the child Abraham was born in that cave. His mother had gone there to give birth, to escape King Nimrod's decree that all newborn boys be put to death. For Nimrod had seen a sign that a child born at that time would overthrow him. After giving birth, Abraham's mother grew afraid for the safety of

her family, and at last she abandoned the infant in the cave and returned home. Then the angel Gabriel descended to the cave and fed the infant with his thumb, through which milk and honey flowed, and because he was fed in that miraculous way, the boy began to grow at the rate of a year every day. And on the third day, while exploring the cave, he found a stone glowing in one of the crevices of the cave. Then the angel, who knew how precious it was, put it on a chain, and hung it around Abraham's neck.

Thirteen days later Abraham's mother returned to the cave, for she could not put the fate of the infant out of her mind. She expected to find that the child was no longer living, but instead she found a grown boy, who said that he was her child. She refused to believe it at first, but when he showed her the glowing stone and the sacred light it cast, she came to believe that a miracle had taken place.

Abraham wore that glowing jewel all the days of his life. Whoever was ill and looked into that stone soon healed, and it also served as an astrolabe to study the stars. Before his death, Abraham gave that glowing jewel to Isaac, and Isaac gave it to Jacob at the time he gave him the stolen blessing. For Isaac had intended to give the glowing stone to Esau, but Rebecca, who was a seer, knew well that it was destined to belong to Jacob.

Jacob was wearing the *Tzohar* when he dreamed of the ladder reaching to heaven, with angels ascending and descending on it. And he, in turn, gave the stone to his beloved son, Joseph, when he gave him the coat of many colors.

Jacob made Joseph promise to wear the stone at all times, but he did not reveal its power, which he knew well. And because Joseph's brothers did not know that the amulet was precious, they did not take it from him when they stripped him of the coat of many colors and cast him naked into the dark pit.

Now snakes and scorpions lived at the bottom of that pit. And when Joseph heard them slithering and creeping in the dry leaves, he shivered in the darkness at the bottom of the pit. All at once a light began to glow, and Joseph saw that it was coming from the amulet he wore around his neck. And as long as Joseph remained in that pit, the jewel continued to glow, so that he was never afraid. At last Joseph heard Midianite traders calling out to him from the top of that pit. They pulled him out of the pit and brought him to Egypt, where they sold him into slavery and to the destiny that fate held for him, which was to become Prince of Egypt.

When Joseph was imprisoned in the dungeon, he discovered that if he placed the *Tzohar* inside his cup and peered into it, he could read the future and interpret dreams. That is how he interpreted the dreams of the butler and baker, and later the dreams of Pharaoh that prophesied the seven years of famine. It was that same cup that Joseph hid in the saddlebags of Benjamin, about which his servant said, "*It is the very one from which my master drinks and which he uses for divination*" (Gen. 44:5).

That cup, with the precious jewel in it, was placed inside Joseph's coffin at the time of his death, and it remained there until Moses recovered Joseph's coffin and was told in a dream to take out the glowing stone and hang it in the Tabernacle, where it became known as the *Ner Tamid*, the Eternal Light. And that is why, even to this day, an Eternal Light burns above every Ark of the Torah in every synagogue.

This tale is a classic example of a chain midrash—a series of midrashim that are linked to each other by a common object or character. The object here is the glowing stone known as the *Tzohar*. This myth builds on that of the primordial light that God brought into being on the first day of Creation. See "The Light of the First Day," p. 83.

The word "*Tzohar*" only appears once in the Torah, when God instructs Noah on how to build the ark and tells him "*Put the Tzohar in the ark*" (Gen. 6:16). For this reason there is uncertainty about its meaning. Rashi's comments on Genesis 6:16 observe that some say the *Tzohar* was a window (or an opening, a skylight, or a dome—

implying that it should admit light into the ark) and others say that it was a precious stone. Virtually all other midrashim adopt the view that it was some kind of precious stone. *Targum Yonathan* paraphrases Genesis 6:16 to read, "Go to the river Pishon and take a brilliant stone from there and place it into the ark, to illuminate it for you." *Midrash Aggadah* states that God commanded Noah to bring a diamond with him on the ark, to give them light like midday, because the ark would be dark. "Tzohar" is probably linked to *tzoharayim*, the Hebrew word for "noon." The sound of the word is suggestive of *zohar*, which means "splendor" or "illumination," and is the title of the central text of Jewish mysticism. What seems clear is that it indicated some kind of light, whether shining through a window or reflected from a glowing jewel. The need for a jewel arises because of the likelihood that dark clouds covered the world during the days and nights of the Flood, and therefore no light would shine through a window. This follows the tradition that during the time of the Flood, day and night were indistinguishable (*Genesis Rabbah* 25:2, 34:11; Rashi on Genesis 8:22). Not only did darkness cover the earth during the 40 days and nights of the Flood, but the planets ceased to function. How is this known? Because at the time of the covenant of the rainbow, God promised Noah, "So long as earth exists ... day and night shall not cease" (Gen. 8:22). From this it can be deduced that day and night were indistinguishable for the duration of the Flood, and that the heavenly bodies ceased to function.

The legend of the glowing gem that Noah hung in the ark is found in *Genesis Rabbah* 31:11: "During the whole 12 months that Noah was in the ark he did not require the light of the sun by day or the light of the moon by night, but he had a polished gem which he hung up: when it was dim he knew that it was day, and when it shone he knew that it was night." Noah used this information to know when to feed the animals at their customary times. This jewel is linked to the myth that God gave a jewel to Adam and Eve at the time they were cast out of the Garden of Eden, to remind them of all they lost. The midrash then links this jewel to the genealogy between Adam and Noah, as well as that beginning with Abraham and the subsequent generations, until the time of the Temple.

The story of the precious stone of Abraham is found in *B. Bava Batra* 16b. This account offers an alternate fate for the precious stone, saying, "When Abraham passed away from the world, the Holy One, blessed be He, hung it on the wheel of the sun." The legend about Joseph in the pit is found in *Midrash Aseret Harugei Malkhut*. The story of Joseph's cup being carried off by his brothers is found in Genesis 44:5. The *Ner Tamid* or Eternal Light is first mentioned in Exodus 27:20: *You shall further instruct the Israelites to bring you clear oil of beaten olives for lighting, for kindling lamps regularly.* Every Jewish synagogue contains such a light which is kept lit at all times. For the link of the *Tzohar* and the *Ner Tamid* see *Pesikta de-Rav Kahana* 21.

This myth evolves out of an attempt to resolve two problems in the biblical text: the nature of the light of the first day of Creation, before the creation of the sun and moon and stars, and the meaning of *Tzohar* in the passage about building the ark. The midrash explains that the light of the first day was a sacred light, which, according to some accounts, was cast from God's garment of light, and, according to others, was reflected from the robe of the *Shekhinah*. See "The Light of the First Day," p. 83. The vehicle of the chain midrash makes it possible for it to be transmitted from Adam to Noah, and then from Noah to Abraham and the other patriarchs.

In *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer*, 10, a *Tzohar*-like pearl is described as having been suspended in the belly of the whale, where it was said to have shone as brightly as the sun at noon. It showed Jonah all that was in the sea and in the depths.

According to the *Zohar*, Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai also had possession of the *Tzohar*: "Our companion, Bar Yohai, has a jewel, a precious stone, and I have looked upon the light emitted by it, and it is like the light of the sun, illuminating the whole world. This light extends from the heavens to the earth, and will continue to illumine the world until the Ancient of Days comes, and sits upon His throne" (*Zohar* 1:11a-11b). The *Tzohar* also appears in various Jewish folk and Hasidic tales, usually in the form

of a glowing jewel found in some accidental way. It is possible that J. R. R. Tolkien made use of some of the legends about the *Tzohar* in *The Silmarillion*, in which the central motif concerns jewels containing the last of a primordial light.

Sources:

B. *Sanhedrin* 108b; Y. *Pesahim* 1:1; *Genesis Rabbah* 31:11; *Midrash Aggadah*; *Akedat Yitzhak* 4; *Targum Yonathan* on Genesis 6:16; Rashi on Genesis 16:6, Gen. 8:22; *Midrash Aseret Harugei Malkhut* in *Otzar ha-Midrashim*, p. 444; IFA 4382.

## 110. HOW LIGHT AND DARKNESS WERE CREATED

Before any visible beings came into existence, there were only invisible beings. Then God decided to create a visible creation. So God said, "Let one of the invisible things descend and become visible." And Adoil, one of the invisible things, descended. He was extremely large, and in his belly he had a great light. God said to Adoil, "Disintegrate yourself, Adoil, and let what is born from you become visible." And Adoil disintegrated himself, and out came a very great light. And God was in the midst of the light, and a light came forth out of that light and revealed all the creation that God had thought to create. And God saw that it was good. And God placed a throne for himself, and sat down on it. And then God spoke to the light and said, "You rise up and become the foundation for the highest things. For there is nothing higher than light, except for nothingness itself."

And God summoned the very lowest beings for a second time, and said, "Let one of the invisible beings descend and become visible." And Arkhas came out, solid and heavy and very red. And God said to Arkhas, open yourself up, Arkhas, and let what is born from you become visible." And Arkhas disintegrated himself, and a great darkness emerged from him, very large, bearing the creation of all lower things. And God saw how good it was. And God said to the darkness, "Descend and become the foundation of all lower things. For there is nothing lower than the darkness, except nothing itself."

Then God took some light and some darkness and mixed them together, and commanded them to thicken, and when they did, He wrapped them with light, and spread it out, and it became water. And God spread it out above the darkness and below the light, dividing the world above from the world below. And God made a foundation of light around the waters, with seven circles inside it, with the appearance of crystal. And he pointed out the route of each one of the seven stars to its own heaven. And God made a division between the light and the darkness, and said to the light that it should be day, and to darkness that it should be night. *And there was evening and there was morning, a first day* (Gen. 1:5).

This astonishing creation myth from *2 Enoch* dates from around the second century BCE to the first century CE. It portrays a version of the creation of light and darkness that is radically different from that found in Genesis. Here the earliest manifestation of existence occurs when God commands two invisible beings, Adoil and Arkhas, to give birth to light and darkness, which come to serve as the upper and lower foundations of the world. Adoil and Arkhas are primordial beings—not angels or gods, but invisible forces entirely under God's command. And it is God who commands that they descend and become visible. Of particular interest is God's command to Adoil and Arkhas that they disintegrate themselves, suggesting that their disintegration makes possible the subsequent births that take place. When they do, a great light comes forth from Adoil, while Arkhas gives birth to darkness. This myth is an interesting parallel to that of the Ari about the Shattering of the Vessels. In both cases a kind of breaking apart is required before anything can be created. See "The Shattering of the Vessels and the Gathering of the Sparks," p. 122.