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Bifurcating the Androgyne: Engendering Sexuality in the Zohar

1. Zohar 1:55b

R. Simeon said: Supernal mysteries were revealed in these two verses [Genesis 5:1-2]. “Male and female he created them,” to teach about the supernal glory, the mystery of faith, for out of this mystery Adam was created. . . . “Male and female he created them.” From here [we learn that] any image in which there is not found male and female is not a supernal image as is appropriate, and this has been established in the mystery of our Mishnah. Come and see: in any place where male and female are not found as one, the blessed holy One does not place his dwelling there, and blessings are not out found except in a place where male and female are found [Babylonian Talmud, Yevamot 62b], as it is written “He blessed them and called them Adam in the day he created them.” It is not written, “He blessed him and called his name Adam,” for even the name Adam is not invoked except when male and female are one.

2. Zohar 2:55a

R. Isaac said: Adam was created two-faced [*du parşufin*] as it has been established. “He took one of his sides” [*wa-yiqah aḥat mi-şal’otaw*] (Genesis 2:21)—the blessed holy One split him and two were produced, one from the east and one from the west, as it is written “You formed me from behind and in front” (Psalms 139:5). “From behind” [*aḥor*] is the west and “in front” [*qedem*] is the east. R. Ḥiyya said: What did the blessed holy One do? He adorned that female, perfecting her beauty above everything, and brought her to Adam, as it is written “And the Lord God fashioned the side that he had taken from the man into a woman” (Genesis 2:22). Come and see: What is written above? “He took one of his sides.” What is “one”? As it is said, “Only one is my dove, my perfect one, the only one of her mother” (Song of Songs 6:9). *Mi-şal’otaw*—“from his sides,” as it is said “And for the [other] side of the Tabernacle [*u-leşela ha-mishkan*] (Exodus 26:20).

3. Zohar 3:18b-19a

R. Simeon began to expound, “You carefree women, attend, hear my words!” (Isaiah 32:9). How much must a man [*bar nash*] contemplate the glory of his master, so that he will be found to be a perfect creature before the blessed holy One. When the blessed holy One created man, he created him perfect, as it says, “God made man straight” (Ecclesiastes 7:29). “Man” [*et ha-adam*]: male and female. And the female was contained in the male [*we-nuqva itkelilat bi-dekhura*], and thus it is written “straight” [*yashar*].

4. Zohar 1:35a-b

Come and see: Adam and Eve were created side by side [*da ve-sitra de-da*]. Why were they not created face to face [*anpin be-anpin*]? Because, as it is written, “for the Lord God had not sent rain upon the earth” (Genesis 2:5), and the pairing [*ziwwuga*] was not found in its arrayment [*tiqquneih*] as is fitting. When the ones

below were arrayed, and they turned face to face, then it was found above when it was established below, so it was established above. And because until now it was not arrayed above, they were not created face to face. The verse proves it, as it is written, “for the Lord God had not sent rain upon the earth,” and hence “there was no man,” for he was not in his arrayment. When Eve was perfected, Adam was perfected, and prior to that, he was not perfected. And the secret is that up to here there is no [letter] *samekh* in the portion [of the Torah] ... and the *samekh* is a helper [*ezer*]. And this is the helper above, for it turned above face to face, male and female, one supported [*istemakh*] by the other, certainly [as it is written] “supported for all eternity, wrought of truth and equity” (Psalm 111:8). “Supported” [*semukhim*]—male and female, for they are supported as one. ... From here on there is [the occurrence of the letter] *samekh*. What is it? “He closed up [*wa-yisgor*] the flesh at that spot” (Genesis 2:21). She was in his side, and the one was in the side of the other. The blessed holy One certainly uprooted them and transplanted them in another place, and they turned face to face for [the sake of] perdurance [*we-ithadderu anpin be-anpin le-qiyyuma*].

5. Zohar 2:231a

It is written “You formed me from behind and in front; you lay your hand upon me” (Psalms 139:5). This verse has been established, but come and see: When the blessed holy One created Adam, they were created male and female. And the two of them were bound together, the female in the back and the male in the front, until the blessed holy One split them apart. He arrayed her and brought her before Adam so that [they could] look [at each other] face to face. When they looked face to face, love increased in the world and they gave birth to offspring in the world, which did not happen previously, as we have established.

6. Zohar 1:49a-b

Come and see: when a woman is conjoined to her husband, she is called by the name of her husband, man (*ish*) and woman (*ishshah*), righteous one (*ṣaddiq*) and righteousness (*ṣedeq*). ... “Hence a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, so that they become one flesh”—everything to draw her in love to be conjoined to her.

7. Zohar 1:49a

Here everything was perfected in the right and in the left. We have thus established [the import of the words] “The Lord God formed”—the good inclination and the evil inclination. Why? The good inclination for himself, the evil inclination to be aroused for his female, and it is aroused always from the left side. The mystery of the matter that we learn from here is that the north is aroused always vis-à-vis the female and it is bound to her, and thus she is called *ishshah*.

8. Zohar 1:49b

“Hence a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, so that they become one flesh” (Genesis 2:24). Everything was to draw her in love and to cleave to her. When all of these matters were aroused what is written? “And the

serpent was the shrewdest [of all the wild beasts]” (Genesis 3:1). The evil impulse was aroused to seize her, in order to be bound to her in carnal desire, and arousing in her other matters in which the evil impulse delights. As a consequence, what is written? “When the woman saw that the tree was good for eating and a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable as a source of wisdom, she took of its fruit and ate” (Genesis 3:6)—she received it voluntarily, “and also gave some to her husband who was with her.” For now she was aroused in desire toward him, to bestow passion and love on him. This matter shows human beings how the act corresponds to what is above. Rabbi Eleazar said: If so, how can we establish that above the evil impulse seizes the female? He [R. Simeon bar Yoḥai] replied: We have already conferred about the good impulse and the evil impulse above and below. The good impulse is from the right and the evil impulse is from the left, and the left above seizes the female to be bound to her as one in her body, as it says “His left hand was under my head” (Song of Songs 2:6).