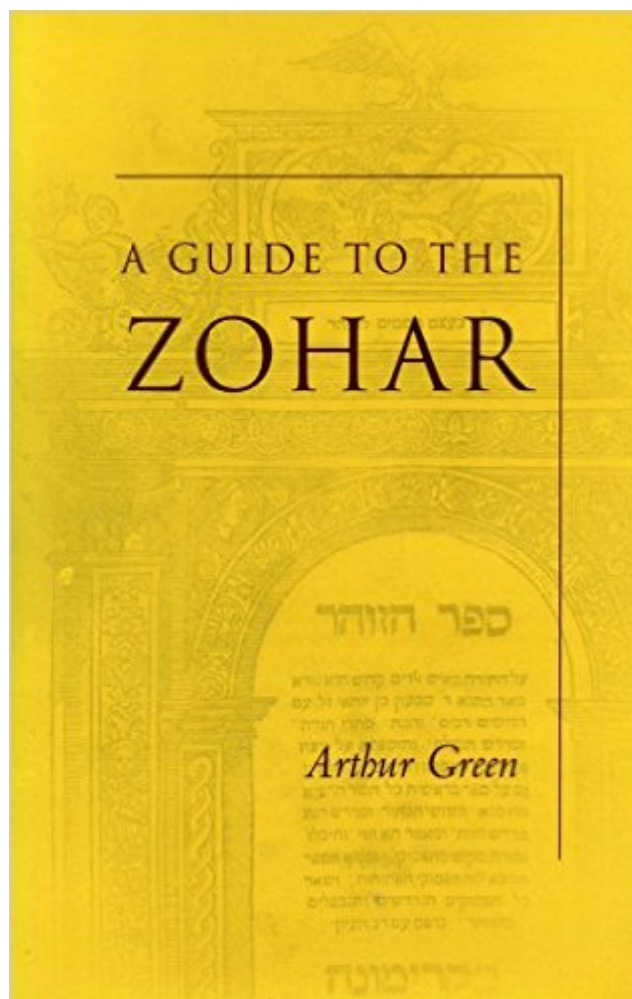


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A Guide To The Zohar



Synopsis

The Zohar is the great medieval compendium of Jewish esoteric and mystical teaching, and the basis of the kabbalistic faith. It is, however, a notoriously difficult text, full of hidden codes, concealed meanings, obscure symbols, and ecstatic expression. This illuminating study, based upon the last several decades of modern Zohar scholarship, unravels the historical and intellectual origins of this rich text and provides an excellent introduction to its themes, complex symbolism, narrative structure, and language. A Guide to the Zohar is thus an invaluable companion to the Zohar itself, as well as a useful resource for scholars and students interested in mystical literature, particularly that of the west, from the Middle Ages to the present.

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Customer Reviews

There are many books on Kabbalah and the Zohar in English floating around these days, but this one is understandable, accessible, profound and academic. Professor Green introduced Daniel Matt to Ms Pritzker, and got the ball rolling on the what probably will be a 15 year translation project for the Pritzker Edition of the Zohar. This book is a companion that has been published in time to coincide with Volume 2 of the Pritzker edition. When I opened Volume 2, and started with Parshat Lekh Lekha of the Zohar, I was lost after sentence two. Green's book is an invaluable aid. As promised on the back cover, Green unravels the historical and intellectual origins of the Zohar's rich text and provides an excellent introduction to its themes, complex symbolism, narrative structure, and language. Topics include: The Kabbalistic Tradition: A Brief History Until the Zohar; Teachings

of the Kabbalists: The Ten Sefirot; The Zohar: Midrash on the Torah; The Zohar Narrative; Mysticism of the Zohar; The Zohar in Historical Context; Selected Themes within the Zohar: Creation and Origins, Between Worlds, Evil and the Demonic, Torah and Revelation, The Commandments, Avodah : The Life of Worship, The Tsaddiq and the Life of Piety,; The Question of Authorship; The Language of the Zohar; and the Influence and Canonization of the Zohar. Chapter 5 on the narrative is a must read for anyone who dares to open a page of the Zohar.

This introduction is a well written and scholastic overview of the Zohar. I was satisfied that I was given plenty of information to better understand the history of the Zohar. I feel that I have enough information in the references to do further research if I choose to do so. I am reading Vol. 1 of the Pritzker Editions and having read the "Guide" I feel confident as I continue my study of the Zohar using Matt's work and even other Kabbalah writings. I recommend Green's Guide especially to those like myself who have little knowledge of the Zohar and the Kabbalah traditional writings. I think it is also a worthy vol. for those more experienced and informed in such studies. I think Green proves himself a learned scholar. To me it was well written and easy to read.

Arthur Green is exceptionally articulate and highly educated. Having said that, he is an academician. This means, among other things, that generally speaking his primary orientation is to start with the assumption that claims of classic Judaism are not true until proven otherwise. There is nothing objectively wrong with this per se. Nevertheless, it is an orientation. It is a choice. Everything begins with axioms ("Godel, Escher, Bach") and his axiom is that I don't believe the authenticity of something like the Zohar unless proven otherwise. There is controversy about the historicity of the Zohar even in classic Jewish circles. Is it actually the teachings of second-century sage, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and his contemporaries (or at least those in the ensuing generation or so after him)? The great 18th century sage, Rabbi Yaakov Emden, examined the question in detail and wrote an entire book the subject. Most or all of the essential claims of latter day academicians, in fact, can probably be traced to this book. Having said that, though, most of them have gone beyond Rabbi Emden and whereas he might present evidence that raises questions about parts of the Zohar they have turned his questions into conclusions and extended it to the entire body of the Zohar. Arguably the most extreme example of this is Gershom Scholem. He is the 20th century academician most responsible for disseminating the opinion that the Zohar is entirely a 13th century creation. In truth, it is hard to read Scholem and not be impressed with his arguments. But, more in truth, the matter is not as settled as Scholem and an uninitiated person reading

Scholem might suspect. (See below.) At the least there is an inbetween position between the assumption that the Zohar is literally the words of Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai and the invention of a 13th century scholar. This position would say, for instance, that some or even most of the Zohar goes back to Rabbi Shimon and his immediate followers, but includes later interpolations by various scholars for various reasons. Scholem knows nothing of that -- or admits nothing of that. Neither do his most ardent followers. In this regard, Arthur Green has not added anything new to Scholem. And this, in my opinion, makes his introduction to the Zohar here one-sided, if not highly faulted (I gave him two stars instead of one because he writes well). Here is not the place to go into detail about the other side of the coin. However, below is a link to a multi-part online essay that does. Specifically, it critiques piece-by-piece Scholem's claims, many of which are found in his Major Trends of Jewish Mysticism, that led him to his conclusions. (E.g. Scholem cites 18 places in the Zohar where a place called Kapotkia is mentioned and argues that no such place ever existed in Israel, and it was never mentioned in Talmudic or Midrashic sources as a place in Israel. This leads him to conclude that "the author had never so much as set foot in Palestine and that his knowledge of the country was derived entirely from literary sources which he misunderstood!" However, the place Kapotkia appears in Targum Onkelos, Targum Yonatan, Mishnah, Babylonian Talmud and several Midrashim!) In any event, if you want an Academic-oriented book that provides an overview of the Zohar and its major themes consider Isaiah Tishby's, "Wisdom of the Zohar" (translated from the original Hebrew). Tishby was Scholem's disciple and, not surprising, follows in his footsteps in terms of assuming late authorship of the Zohar. Nevertheless, his 3-volume "Wisdom of the Zohar" goes way beyond anything Scholem did or anything in English does regarding offering an overview of the Zohar and its major themes. If you really, really want to know what the Zohar says, however, I hate to be the one to inform you but there is really no short-cut -- other than learning it in the original and finding a genuine teacher and/or group of like-minded individuals who not only learn the Zohar but live it. Here's the link I

promised: http://www.chabad.org/kabbalah/article_cdo/aid/380749/jewish/Responses-to-the-Claims-of-the-Skeptics.htm

Before tackling Daniel Matt's translation and commentaries on The Zohar, this book is a must. It provides perspective and fundamental Kabbalistic principles.

If you want an excellent introduction to the Zohar, this is a good place to start. It is clear and informative. No prior knowledge needed.

A brilliant overview that provides context and insight.

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12 13 14 15 16 17 18 19 20

Very good intro.

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