

Parashat Kedoshim

The portion of the Torah read this week opens: “Every man should fear his mother and his father, and keep My Sabbaths, I am G-d, your G-d.”¹ Rabbi Chaim Vital will begin his exposition of the Arizal’s teachings by explaining why the word “Sabbaths” is in the plural when we would have expected the more usual singular form.

Now, [by understanding] the eighth king [as will be explained presently,] you will understand the two Sabbaths the Torah refers to. For whenever mention is made of the Sabbath, it is mentioned twice. For example: [this verse,] “keep My Sabbaths,” and “the children of Israel will keep the Sabbath to make the Sabbath,”² etc. From this [explanation, which will be given presently,] you will also understand how those who say that our present sabbatical [cycle] is the second actually erred.

According to the sages of the Talmud, our world is destined to exist for no more than seven thousand years: six millennia of normal existence, followed by a millennium of rest.³ This seven-millennium time period is envisioned as one, gigantic “week,” the six millennia of normal existence corresponding to the six workdays and the millennium of rest and reward corresponding to the Sabbath. In Kabbalah, this imagery is expanded to the sabbatical cycle of six years of field labor followed by a year when the land is to lay fallow. The six years of agricultural work correspond to the six workdays and six millennia of normal existence, and the seventh, sabbatical year to the Sabbath and the seventh millennium.

Furthermore, just as the agricultural cycle consists of seven sabbatical cycles totaling 49 years followed by an additional year of rest—the jubilee—so is the entire seven-millennium period of the world’s existence only one of seven such periods, which will be followed by a fiftieth, jubilee millenium.

Now, according to some opinions, our present seven-millennium period is the second such period since the creation of the world. This is why the Torah begins with the letter *beit*, the numerical value of which is 2. The Arizal, however, contends that this opinion is incorrect.

To explain: When G-d the emanated the ten *sefirot*, He first emanated the first three. After this was the [first,] supernal Sabbath.

The Arizal now begins to describe the creation of the primordial world of *Tohu* (“Chaos”). It is important to bear in mind that this imperfect version of creation was not a “mistake” or a miscalculation on G-d’s part, but rather a necessary stage in the unfolding of creation.

G-d did not create time, of course, until He created our physical world, but before time there was a sequential progression of spiritual steps leading to our universe. This sequence may be referred to as “proto-time”: although all these steps “occurred” simultaneously in the “instant” before the creation of the physical world, they followed a certain developmental order, which we as finite humans would experience eventually as real time.

In this context, we may speak of the process the creation of the spiritual worlds preceding ours as if it happened in the context of what we call time (since we have no other way of describing a sequential progression). We must bear in mind, however, that time, as we know it, did not yet exist.

¹ Leviticus 19:3.

² Exodus 31:16.

³ *Sanhedrin* 97a.

In any case, after G-d emanated the first three *sefirot* (*keter*, *chochmah*, and *binah*), the intellect, He emanated the next seven *sefirot*, the emotions. Whereas the emanation of the first three *sefirot* is described as occurring on the same “day,” the emanation of each of the seven latter *sefirot* is described as occurring on a different day. The last *sefirah*, *malchut*, was emanated on the seventh day. This was the first “Sabbath.”

When He emanated these [first] three, He did not do so in a wholly rectified manner, and they were not fully and properly rectified. Therefore, this day is not counted.

The exact nature of this not-fully-rectified emanation will be explained later.

Afterwards He emanated a different group [of *sefirot*], in seven other “days.” These are the mystical correlates of the kings who ruled in the land of Edom. On the Sabbath, [the seventh day of this primordial “week,”] the eighth king, Hadar, was [also] emanated.

The emanation of the next seven *sefirot* is spoken of as occurring in seven “days,” one day for each *sefirah*. But since, as we said, this all is occurring before the creation of time, what this essentially means is that each *sefirah* is a separate entity. These seven *sefirot* will, when time is created, manifest themselves as the seven days of the week, each *sefirah* dominating a particular day.

It is told in the Torah that there were eight kings who ruled the land of Edom before there was a king in the land of Israel.⁴ Of the first seven of these kings, the Torah states that they ruled and they died, while of the eighth, Hadar, it only records that he ruled, not mentioning his death.⁵ Since Edom symbolizes the unrectified existence of evil, the first seven kings are understood to refer to the primordial, unrectified version of creation described here, the world of *Tohu*.

Since the first three *sefirot* were not yet fully rectified, all these kings died. Since they were not rectified above, these kings could not bear the supernal light of the Emanator. Thus, since all these kings evinced strict judgement, they all died and were nullified.

The perfection of the emotions is dependent upon the rectification of the intellect, since emotional responses are primarily the result of some idea that is understood.

The rectification these *sefirot* lacked was their ability to contain or absorb the “light,” i.e., creative energy, of G-d. In their fragility, they shattered as soon as the higher light attempted to shine through them. The reason why these *sefirot* were so fragile was because they were immature and undeveloped. In this iteration, the *sefirot* were simple, one-dimensional manifestations of G-d’s attributes and did not inter-include any aspect of their sister-*sefirot*. They were therefore incapable of accepting any content other than their own intrinsic one. This rejection of anything not consonant with one’s own world-view is the mentality of strict judgement (*din*).

I have already explained [elsewhere⁶] regarding the supernal rectification [process], that it consists of separating screens that enable the lower [entities] to receive light greater [than their intrinsic level] without being blinded. This is similar to how someone [is blinded] by looking at the light of the sun. Thus, the dimming of the light is [not a bad thing, but] on the contrary, the rectification.

By screening the Divine light, G-d created a new, more stable world that could withstand and transmit the light it received. The intensity of each *sefirah* would be less, but this lack of intensity would enable each *sefirah* to

⁴ Genesis 36:31-39; 1 Chronicles 1:43-51.

⁵ His death is mentioned in Chronicles, but not in Genesis.

⁶ *Etz Chaim* 9:7-8.

accommodate the “personality” of its sister-*sefirot*. The combined strengths of each *sefirah* present in the others would enable the world comprising them to endure the Divine light shining into it.

Still, when the eighth king, Hadar, was emanated, he emerged more rectified than the others did. He manifested the *sefirah* of *yesod*; this was on the [first] Sabbath.

As we have said, the principal reason why the world of *Tohu* shattered was because the *sefirot* in it were too “egocentric” to interrelate. The reason this was so was because the predominant aspect of these *sefirot* was their *malchut*; each *sefirah* of *Tohu* was in effect nothing more than the *malchut* of that *sefirah* in general. *Malchut* is the *sefirah* of the ego, inasmuch as it expresses the drive to rule, to impose oneself on reality. The *malchuts* of the *sefirot* clashed, and therefore the entire structure collapsed.

The eighth “king” or emanation, in contrast, was constructed out of the *yesods* of the various *sefirot*. *Yesod* is the *sefirah* of inter-connection *par excellance*, since it expresses the drive and ability to relate and connect with another entity.

After this, the first three *sefirot* were rectified, as described in the *Zohar*. Then, the second week emerged, i.e., the seven lower *sefirot*, which we call nowadays *chesed*, *gevurah*, *tiferet*, *netzach*, *yesod*, and *malchut*. *Malchut* issued on the [seventh day, the] Sabbath.

Out of this emanation emerged a second set of seven *midot* (from *chesed* to *malchut*) which were more fully rectified than the first set of seven “kings.” This second set of seven constituted a second week, or Sabbath-cycle.

Thus we have two Sabbaths: the first being the first Sabbath, when Hadar was emanated, and the second Sabbath, when *malchut* was emanated the second time. This is the mystical meaning of the two Sabbaths that are mentioned in many places, [as we said above].

You will now understand the mystical reason why we call the seven millennia [we are presently living in] the “second” sabbatical-period. It is because they are the second [order of creation] after the “kings of the land of Edom.”

Thus, our present sabbatical-period (of seven thousand years) is not the second because it was preceded by another period of seven thousand *physical* years, but because it follows the *spiritual* “period” of *Tohu*, the emanation of the seven “kings” that preceded the present order, that of *Tikun*.

In this respect they [i.e., the earlier authorities] erred [as well]: They said that if this is the second sabbatical-period, then there must certainly be [in the end] a total of seven such periods.

Just as the agricultural jubilee-cycle consists of seven sabbatical-cycles, the macrocosmic jubilee-cycle should logically consist of seven sabbatical-cycles of seven thousand years each. In other words, after the seventh millenium of our time period, there will be (according to these opinions) another five sabbatical-periods (of seven thousand years each). The Arizal will now explain why this is not the case.

Understand, however, that Hadar, the eighth king, is entirely [composed of] *yesod*, even though he precedes the *chesed* that we nowadays call *chesed*.

When we refer to *chesed* we mean (unless we specify otherwise) the rectified *sefirah* of *chesed* in the world of *Tikun*. In the normal order of *sefirot*, *yesod* is the sixth emotion and *chesed* is the first, so *chesed* precedes *yesod*. When we consider the initial emanation of the *sefirot* of *Tikun*, however, and note that they all emerged from Hadar, who was constructed wholly out of the *yesods* of the primordial *sefirot*, *yesod* precedes *chesed* (and all the other *sefirot* as well).

After the [second set] of seven *sefirot* were emanated, those other “kings” came back to be rectified, and they were all absorbed into the [second set of] seven *sefirot*.

When the first set of seven *sefirot*, those of *Tohu*, collapsed, they didn’t just disappear. These *sefirot* were much more intense and powerful than those of the subsequent world of *Tikun*, as we have mentioned. Their shattered fragments were therefore “particles” of great energy and potential. The challenge of the world of *Tikun* is to assimilate and integrate these supercharged energy particles as far as possible. In fact, this is the whole reason why G-d created the world of *Tohu* in the first place and did not just create the world of *Tikun* from the beginning. Despite its name, *Tikun* is not the ultimate fulfillment and highest vision of creation. The goal is to integrate these two worlds and produce from them a third order of existence much greater than either of them in and of themselves.

After the element of strict judgement had been removed from them and they had been purified of it, like waste matter, the remaining [elements of these *sefirot*] were absorbed and sweetened in the [second set of] seven *sefirot*, each one in accordance with its nature.

The shattering of the vessels effectively neutralized the egocentricity of the *sefirot* of *Tohu*. Thus rid of their negative, judgmental aspects, they were able to be absorbed into the *sefirot* of the world of *Tikun*. This process is called “sweetening,” inasmuch as it evokes the imagery of some sour, poisonous substance being distilled and purified of its odious elements.

[This was possible] because those “kings” were themselves these [second] seven *sefirot*.

The *sefirot* of *Tohu* and *Tikun*, though radically different in their orientation, possessed the same “identities.” *Chesed* of *Tohu* was *chesed*, just as *chesed* of *Tikun*; the difference lay only in the way *chesed* was expressed. In this sense, the *sefirot* of *Tohu* may be considered simply immature, undeveloped versions of the *sefirot* of *Tikun*.

It follows that the statement in the *Zohar*⁷ that “some of them rectified and some of them were not” does not mean that only some of the “kings” were rectified and others not, for all eight of the “kings” were rectified. Rather, it means that in each of them, part of it was not rectified and part of it was.

As has been explained in our discussion of the 288 sparks, sparks of each [*sefirah*] fell [from *Tohu* into the subsequent, lower worlds of *Tikun*]. The lights remained in *Atzilut*, and then what fell from *Beriah* was rectified in *Yetzirah*, as is known.

The death of the seven “kings” of *Tohu* is alluded to in the Torah’s account of creation in the verse: “and the spirit of G-d was hovering over the water.”⁸ The word for “was hovering” (*merachefet*) may be split into two sets of letters: *mem-taf* and *reish-pei-chet*. The first set (*mem-taf*) spells the word for “died” (*meit*), and the numerical value of the second set is 288. This word may thus be read: “the 288 died.” This alludes, according to Kabbalah, to the 288 sparks of the world of *Tohu* that fell after the collapse of that world and the shattering of its *sefirot*.

Every *sefirah*, as we have mentioned previously, is composed of its “light” and its “vessel.” The “light” is the Divine creative energy that determines the nature and identity of the *sefirah*, while the “vessel” is the means through which this energy is expressed, the interface between the light and the rest of reality. When the *sefirot* of *Tohu* shattered, it was the vessels that broke.

The first world of *Tikun* created after the shattering of the vessels was the world of *Atzilut*. The consciousness of this world is one of total immersion in the awareness of G-d, and thus the lights were able to remain in this world.

⁷ 3:135b.

⁸ Genesis 1:2.

With regard to the broken vessels, however, only the more sublime aspects were able to remain and be assimilated into this world; the lower, more self-aware aspects were rejected and fell further, into the world of *Beriah*. There, the same process was repeated: the more sublime aspects were assimilated and the grosser aspects were rejected. This process continued in the worlds of *Yetzirah* and *Asiyah*, and finally, the coarsest aspects of *Tohu* became absorbed and embedded in our physical world.

This process set the stage for the process of “elevating the sparks,” or liberating the raw, great power of *Tohu* from the physical context into which it has become entrenched. The conclusion of this process is what will precipitate the cosmic Redemption of all reality and the coming of *Mashiach*.

Thus, after the redemption there will be no additional, physical sabbatical-periods akin to our present world, since physicality will already have been rectified. What will occur after the coming of *Mashiach* will be infinite ascents of the new physical-spiritual order of creation into higher and higher levels of Divinity and consciousness of G-d.

—translated and adapted from *Sefer HaLikutim*

Parashat Kedoshim

[second installment]

The following are the Arizal's teachings on some of the numerous commandments in the portion of the Torah read this week.

“Do not turn to idols, and do not make for yourselves molten gods; I am G-d.”¹

Know, that when someone looks and gazes at someone else, it has an effect [on the person looking], for the soul itself goes out via the faculty of sight to look.

Although we are accustomed to think of sight as the eye's reaction to light waves that enter it, we are here bidden to conceive of sight as an outward projection of the soul, through the individual's eyes, to “grasp” the image of the object being looked at.

If the object being looked at is good, [its goodness] will cling [to the soul] and it will have a good effect on the looker. If, on the other hand, it is evil, [the looker] will also take [some of its evil] and this will adversely affect his soul. This is the [mystical] meaning of this verse: “do not turn to idols”—lest “you make yourselves” into “molten gods”; if you look at impure things, you will be adversely affected and become like what you look at.

Similarly, it is [praiseworthy] to look at good things, as it is written: “And they gazed after Moses.”² [The people looked after him] because they could not gaze at his face, since he had spoken with G-d face to face. They were, however, able to look at him from behind and benefit from so doing. This is similar to what we are told about Rabbi Yehudah *HaNasi*, who said that all that he learned from his teacher, Rabbi Meir, was because he looked at him from behind, and that he would have learned even more had he looked at him face to face.³

Rabbi Yehudah *HaNasi* (“the Prince”) was the spiritual leader of the Jewish people in the 2nd century who performed the monumental task of recording the Oral Torah in writing (as the Mishnah). When he was studying under his teacher, Rabbi Meir, he sat in the rows of pupils behind him, rather than the rows facing him.

—from *Sefer HaLikutim* and *Ta'amei HaMitzvot*



¹ Leviticus 19:4.

² Exodus 3:8.

³ *Eiruvin* 13b.

“Do not steal....”⁴ “...Do not rob....”⁵

Know, that our sages said that “he who steals the slightest amount from his friend is as if he stole his soul.”⁶ The mystical significance of stealing and robbing is as follows:

Stealing [causes a blemish] in the upper third of *tiferet* of *Z’eir Anpin*, for it is there that the states of *chesed* become revealed, as is known.

As we have explained previously, the *yesod* of *Ima* envelops *Z’eir Anpin* as far down as the upper third of its *tiferet*. From that point downward, the states of *chesed* that make of *Z’eir Anpin* become revealed. Stealing is done clandestinely, so it causes a blemish in the upper, concealed third of *tiferet*, while robbing, which is done out in the open, causes a blemish in the lower, revealed two thirds of *tiferet*.

Chesed is the raw-material out of which all the emotions are built; it is thus the basic ingredient of all of *Z’eir Anpin*.

The inner dimension of *tiferet* is “mercy” or “empathy” (*rachamim*)—the ability of the soul to feel for another person. Stealing (or robbing) is obviously the direct antithesis of this: in order to steal, an individual must forget about the other person’s feelings. Stealing and robbing thus blemish, i.e., weaken, the power of *tiferet* above.

This is the mystical significance of the double restitution, for the thief causes a blemish above, in the concealed levels, while the robber causes a blemish in the revealed levels.

Unless he admits his crime on his own, someone who steals from his fellow must restore twice the amount he stole; in this way he suffers the loss he intended to inflict on his victim.⁷

When one steals “down below” [in this world], he causes the forces of evil to steal “up above” [in the spiritual worlds] the souls emerging from the supernal female, *malchut* [i.e., the *partzuf* of *Nukva d’Zeir Anpin*]. She acquired these souls by virtue of her coupling [with *Z’eir Anpin*].

The union of *Z’eir Anpin* and *Nukva* of a specific world produces souls possessing the state of consciousness of that world. This coupling is part of the process the soul undergoes as it descends from its Divine origin into a physical body. On the way, it must first descend through the various worlds to be “processed” and thus acquire the successively dimmer states of consciousness of those worlds. This process continues until it has descended in consciousness to the level of this physical world.

This supernal “kidnapping” or “crib-robbing” means that the forces of evil are empowered by the theft below to claim a certain amount of the souls being born into this world as their own. These souls will be born with less empathy or mercy than they would have otherwise. This means that the task of infusing the world with Divine consciousness and goodness will be slowed down or even suffer a setback.

As is known, coupling is known as [carnal] “knowledge,” as it is written, “And Adam *knew* his wife, Eve.”⁸ We are also taught that feminine knowledge is “light.” Therefore, the [thief must make] double restitution, for the numerical value

⁴ Leviticus 19:11.

⁵ *Ibid.* 19:13.

⁶ *Bava Kama* 119a. The original for “the slightest amount” is “the value of a *perutah*,” a *perutah* being the smallest coin; less than this amount is not considered money for legal purposes.

⁷ *Mishneh Torah, Geneivah* 1:4.

⁸ Genesis 4:1.

of the word for “double” [*kefel*] is the same as that of the word for “light” [*kal*, 130].

“Women have ‘light’ knowledge.”⁹ This generally means that although women possess *da’at*, their *da’at* is initially less objective than is men’s. This relative subjectivity is necessary for women to fulfill their task of manifesting Divinity in the world; men’s relative objectivity renders them unfit for this task.

In any case, by robbing *Nukva* of her offspring, the forces of evil are attacking her use of her “lightness” of knowledge.

Kefel: *kaf-pei-lamed* = 20 + 80 + 30 = 180; *Kal*: *kuf-lamed* = 100 + 30 = 130.

We will now see another reason for the double restitution.

Furthermore, when someone steals “down below,” he also causes the forces of evil to steal “up above” the souls ascending as “feminine water” to *malchut*; this further causes the descent of the [seminal] drop of “male water” from the male [*partzuf*, i.e., *Z’eir Anpin*].

“Male water” and “feminine water” (the imagery of rain and evaporation—or perhaps even that of geysers) are the Zoharic terms for “arousal from above” and “arousal from below,” respectively. When a soul completes its task (or a task) on earth, it (or the positive energy created by this good deed) ascends back through the spiritual realms into its source in *malchut*. This upward surge from below elicits a corresponding downward response from above, and causes a further revelation of Divine beneficence and goodness in the world.

When a person steals, however, the forces of evil are empowered to steal this upward surge for themselves, preventing the concomitant, downward “male” response from occurring.

[He thus causes] a double blemish, for which he must therefore make double restitution.

Now, as we said, when someone steals “down below,” he causes a blemish “up above” by causing the forces of evil to steal souls in the way we have described. This is the mystical meaning of our sages’ statement that “[he who steals the slightest amount from his friend] is as if he stole his *soul*.” They made a point of saying “he stole his soul” rather than some other expression [in order to include the mystical interpretation just cited]. May G-d preserve us [from this sin].

—from *Sefer HaLikutim*



“The wages of a hired worker shall not abide with you [through the night] until morning.”¹⁰

In another verse [that details this commandment] it is written, “You shall give [him] his wages on the day he [earns them].”¹¹ The initials of these words [*beyomo titein secharo*] spell *Shabbat*. This is because whenever a person performs any

⁹ *Kidushin* 80b.

¹⁰ Leviticus 19:13.

¹¹ Deuteronomy 24:15.

commandment or learns a lot of Torah on a weekday, he accrues an additional level of Sabbath holiness—even on the weekday. This applies to the [full] extent individuals are capable of accruing additional measures of Sabbath holiness.

Learning Torah and performing *mitzvot* increases the individual's Divine consciousness. Since Shabbat is the day of higher Divine consciousness, we may conceive of the additional measure of Divine consciousness attained by learning Torah and doing *mitzvot* as a “piece of Shabbat” that is added to the individual. This happens, of course, even in the case of Divine service performed on weekdays.

This accords with what Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai taught, namely, that Torah scholars possess on weekdays the [level of] soul that ignoramuses possess on the Sabbath.

Thus, the reward that G-d grants Torah scholars for their studies, or to those who observe the commandments, is likened to that of a worker who expects his wages. For such people earn their [spiritual] **deserts** daily—even on weekdays, when they accrue additional measures of Sabbath holiness. Therefore, the initials of these words allude to the Sabbath.

Furthermore, the wages mentioned in this verse can be understood as well to refer to the reward one earns each day [for his study and/or observance of the Torah]. These combine with the other [reward], the additional measure of Sabbath holiness that comes automatically with the Sabbath, as is known.

On Shabbat, every Jew's consciousness ascends a spiritual notch, no matter what.

Thus, these two additional measures [of Divine consciousness] are given to the person on Shabbat. In this sense, [both types of] “wages” paid to this type of “worker” are paid on the Sabbath. The Sabbath is therefore alluded to in this verse, and this is the mystical meaning of “he who toils on the day[s] before the Sabbath will eat on the Sabbath.”¹²

The physical sense of this statement is simply that if one prepares his meals and other needs before Shabbat, he will be able to enjoy them on Shabbat, but if not, he will have nothing to enjoy because the preparations he should have done beforehand are forbidden to do on Shabbat. The spiritual sense of the statement is that the extent of one's spiritual experience or level of consciousness on Shabbat is proportional to the amount of spiritual preparation for Shabbat one engages in during the preceding week. In more prosaic terms: one cannot expect to live (think, eat) like an animal during the week and suddenly turn into an angel on Shabbos; if a person doesn't want to be left out of the action on Shabbos, he'd better put some time into refining himself while he still can—during the week. True, as we said above, every Jew's spiritual consciousness ascends automatically on Shabbat, but without the prior weekday preparation, he cannot “cash in on” or “tune in to” this consciousness, since he has done nothing to prepare a vessel to receive it.

In any case, the point here is that in addition to whatever heightened spiritual consciousness an individual attains by learning Torah and doing *mitzvot* during the week, these acts also heighten his spiritual consciousness on Shabbat.

Additionally, [this verse implies] that specifically someone who fulfills the commandment of paying a worker [on time] acquires the ability to attain an additional level of soul the following Sabbath. This reward is given to him measure

¹² *Avodah Zarah* 3a.

for measure, for with regard to paying a worker [on time] it is said, “for...he lifts up his soul to you.”¹³ Therefore, in recompense [for granting him his soul, so to speak], the employer is likewise given an extra level of soul with which to sustain his [weekday] soul [on the Sabbath]. And therefore, the Sabbath is alluded to in the initials of this verse.

The idiomatic meaning of “he lifts up his soul” is “he looks expectantly” or “he directs his desire.”

Rabbi Chaim Vital now gives us an anecdotal illustration of the extent to which the Arizal took his own teachings seriously.

My teacher [the Arizal] was extremely careful regarding the commandment of paying a worker [on time]. He sometimes put off praying *Minchah* until he had paid [his worker]. This sometimes meant waiting to pray until sunset, if he did not have the cash to pay the wages and had to send people all over to ask others for money until he had enough to pay the wages. Only then would he pray *Minchah*, saying, “How can I pray to G-d when such a great *mitzvah* comes my way? Can I put it off and still face G-d in prayer?”

—from *Ta'amei HaMitzvot*

—translated

¹³ Deuteronomy 24:15.

Parashat Kedoshim [third installment]

In the portion of the Torah read this week, the commandment not to mix wool and linen (this mixture is known as *shatnez*) in garments is given.

The prohibition against *shatnez* is explained in the context of [the mystical dimension of] the sin of Cain and Abel. In this context, the [mystical] essence of wool and linen and their place [in the spiritual hierarchy] is also explained.

Cain and Abel were the sons of Adam and Eve. After the expulsion from the Garden of Eden, Cain worked as a farmer and Abel as a shepherd. Cain brought G-d an offering of his plants, and Abel an offering of his flocks, but G-d accepted only Abel's offering. There are a number of explanations why this was so, but here the explanation focuses on the fact that Cain's offering was of flax.

It is known that our sages said that if someone leases his field to another person for [under] seven years, [the latter] should not sow it with flaxseed.¹ The reason for this is explained in the Talmud: because flax depletes the power of the soil, and it takes seven years to replenish it.

Our sages further called the flax plant a type of “tree,” because it is written, “...and hide among the flax wood.”²

Mystically, [the power of the earth] the above statement refers to [is the inner power of] the *sefirah* of *malchut*, as it is written, “...an offering to G-d from the fruit of the earth.”³

One of the appellations of *malchut* is the “earth,” since *malchut* is the lowest *sefirah* and thus the “ground”-level of each world. Additionally, the Divine energy of the higher *sefirot* is “sown” in the “ground” of *malchut*, producing produce in the next world down.

Know that all vegetation and trees are manifestations of *malchut* of *Yetzirah*.

The four worlds (*Atzilut*, *Beriah*, *Yetzirah*, and *Asiyah*) correlate respectively to the four “kingdoms” of creatures: man, animal, vegetable, and mineral. Thus, the vegetable kingdom is rooted in the world of *Yetzirah*. Thematically, this is because *Yetzirah* is the world of the emotions, which “grow” and “mature” by virtue of the light of the intellect that shines on them.

Since the vegetable kingdom is allegorically the world of *Yetzirah*, the ground in which the plant life grows is allegorized as the *malchut* of *Yetzirah*.

[The power of the earth] is the spirit that *tiferet* leaves in her when he first makes her into a vessel.⁴

The sages say that “woman makes a covenant only with the one who turns her into a vessel,”⁵ i.e., with her first husband, who deflowers her and makes her into a vessel to receive his semen. The sages here allude to a

¹ *Bava Metzia* 109a.

² *Joshua* 2:6.

³ *Genesis* 4:3.

⁴ *Zohar* 2:101b

⁵ *Sanhedrin* 22b.

psychological transformation that occurs within the woman when she first experiences marital relations, which will be partially elucidated in this passage, in which this “spirit” is identified as *da’at*.

Tiferet here refers to *Z’eir Anpin* in general, and *malchut* to *Nukva*.

Specifically, it is the 52-Name, and it is in her *yesod*. That is why it is called a “tree.”

As has been mentioned previously, the inner energy of *Nukva* is the 52-Name of G-d (i.e., the Name *Havayah* spelled out such that its numerical value is 52).

Now Cain elevated the letters used to spell out this 52-Name present in *malchut* up to *tiferet*, as “feminine water.” The sin was that this Name must remain always in *malchut* in order to raise “feminine water” so that [*malchut*] can receive the supernal light as “male water,” both of them remaining within her.

“Male water” and “feminine water” are the Kabbalistic idiom for “arousal from above” and “arousal from below,” respectively. As we have seen previously, the female principle innately yearns for union with the male principle, in order to combine the female drive for concretization of Divine consciousness in the world with the male drive for ever more abstract and sublime levels of Divine consciousness in oneself. Without rejuvenation from the male, the female loses inspiration and succumbs to the “gravitational” pull of the very material reality she initially seeks to conquer.

But Cain did not [simply] intend to *raise* “feminine water,” but rather to *remove* it from [*Nukva*] entirely, returning it all the way to its source in *Z’eir Anpin* itself.

Cain sought to make the female into a male, so to speak, forsaking its Divine mission and destiny as the drive to concretize Divine consciousness in the world and remaining in the abstract realm of *Z’eir Anpin*, the emotions *per se*.

This is the mystical analogue of flaxseed that depletes the power of the earth for seven years. The “power of the earth” is this 52-Name, which is the inner [Divine] power of *malchut*. [Flaxseed] depletes the power of all the seven lower *sefirot* within her, alluded to here as seven years.

This is the [mystical] meaning of the verse, “And Cain brought from the fruits of the earth,” meaning [“from the produce] that is termed ‘*the* fruit of the earth’ because it saps all the power of the earth,” removing it from it and depleting it. Indeed, this is how our sages concluded that [Cain’s offering] was flaxseed.

[Cain] offered this plant as an offering to G-d, i.e., to *Z’eir Anpin*, returning it to its source and leaving *malchut* bereft of the 52-Name. This was Cain’s sin.

The word for “G-d” in this verse is the Name *Havayah*, which generally refers to *Z’eir Anpin*. Thus, Cain sought to elevate the flaxseed, the inner vitality of *malchut*, to *Z’eir Anpin*, instead of keeping it in *malchut* so it could inspire *Z’eir Anpin* to couple with it on its own level.

Abel [then] attempted to rectify Cain’s error, and brought an offering of wool. The [mystical] explanation of this is as follows:

The source of the *da’at* that *Z’eir Anpin* imparts down to *Nukva* is in the supernal *da’at* of the “beloved” *mazal*, as is known.

As we have seen previously, the word *mazal* refers in Kabbalah to a specific flow of Divine energy, particular to thirteen such flows that constitute the “beard” of *Arich Anpin*. These are known generally as the Thirteen Attributes of Divine Mercy. The eighth and thirteenth are the super-rational source of *Abba* and *Ima*, the *partzufim* of *chochmah* and *binah*.

[This *mazal* is called “beloved”] for through [this level of *da’at*], *Abba* and *Ima* unite, and from this [union] additional power is supplied to *Z’eir Anpin*, enabling it to couple with *Nukva* and impart some of this spirit to her, as is explained in our exposition of the liturgy of the *Shema* recited before going to sleep, whose purpose is to kill off destructive forces.

The flow of Divine consciousness from the super-rational will (*Arich Anpin*) into the intellect (*Abba* and *Ima*), enables them to couple and produce emotions (*Z’eir Anpin*). In common experience, this means that when a person experiences a true will to do or understand or acquire something, this will produces ideas in his mind about how to do, understand, or acquire this thing. The will drives his mind to gain new insight (by motivating the person to exhibit the selflessness that predicates new insight, as we have explained previously) and capture that insight in his conscious mind, reconstructing his worldview in its wake and thereby producing an emotional response to it. The now super-charged emotions are potent, and can produce “seed,” i.e., inspiration, to *Nukva*, the power of expression, in order to actualize the imperative originating in the will.

This purity of purpose neutralizes the power of the forces of evil, who seek to derail the new Divine energy for their own purposes, as we have seen previously. This is the theme of the nightly recital of the *Shema* before going to sleep, and in particular those sections added when it is anticipated that the couple will engage in marital relations.

It follows that [Abel] offered wool in order to restore the influx of supernal *da’at*, so that it also reach *Z’eir Anpin*, enabling it in turn to restore this strength that Cain removed from [*Nukva*], i.e., the spirit referred to above.

Therefore Abel offered some of the choicest of his flock. This is because, as we have explained, Cain’s sin [caused a blemish] in *malchut* of *Yetzirah*. So Abel had to elicit [Divine energy] from the supernal *da’at* of *Arich Anpin* of *Yetzirah*. And it is known that all the power [of this level of *da’at*] is present within *yesod* of *Yetzirah*, for *yesod* is called “alive.” Thus, the inner essence of *da’at* is *yesod*.

As we have explained previously, *yesod* is called “alive” because the male sexual organ (to which *yesod* corresponds anatomically) exhibits growth and quasi-independent movement. This, in turn, is so because the mind, emotion, and body’s power is concentrated here as it is prepare to be transferred to the feminine principle.

In order for the spirit of *malchut* to be replenished, *malchut* must receive from *yesod*. As we saw, the inner life force of *malchut* of *Yetzirah* is, allegorically, the power of the earth to produce vegetation. In order for this to be replenished, it must receive from the next higher form of life up, i.e., from the animal kingdom. Therefore, Abel had to bring an animal offering. *Yesod* is called “alive,” which is also the word for “animal” (both being translations of the word *chai*).

This is the mystical essence of sheep, because the word for “sheep” [*keves*] permutes to spell the word for “lie down” [*shachav*], indicating that it alludes to the supernal lying down. This is the mystical meaning of the verse, “...fill the world and subdue it [*kivshuah*],”⁶ and the allusion of the conquered one “who lies with her.”⁷

⁶ Genesis 1:28.

⁷ Deuteronomy 22:29.

Keves: kaf-beit-sin.

Shachav: shin-kaf-beit.

The “lying down” here is a euphemism for marital relations, as seen from the quote at the end of the paragraph.

The root “to subdue” [*kavash*] is related to the word for “sheep” [*keves*] because sheep are easily subdued and led. Here, however, the relation is seen in the opposite way: the sheep (*yesod*) is the male who “conquers” the female and “lies down” with her. Inasmuch as the word for “world” [*ertez*] alludes to *malchut*, the phrase, “fill the world and subdue it” evokes the interpretation, “fill the feminine principle [with male vital seed] in marital relations with her.”

Know as well that just as there is a higher [facial] beard, there is a lower [pubic] “beard” around the *sefirah* of *yesod*, and understand these great mysteries, because just as there are 13 tufts of the higher beard, so are there thirteen tufts of the lower beard around *yesod*. This is the mystical meaning of [the sages’ statement that] “Great is circumcision, for thirteen covenants were made concerning it.”⁸

In the Biblical passage⁹ in which G-d commands Abraham to circumcise himself and all his present and future male offspring, the word for “covenant” [*brit*] occurs thirteen times. Clearly, this redundancy is not necessary for the prose of the story, and exists only to allude to the fact expressed in the sages’ statement.

The inner meaning of the 13 “covenants” made concerning circumcision is that this rite evokes the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy, and brings the Jewish male child into this super-rational relationship with G-d. (Jewish females are considered innately, automatically circumcised,¹⁰ and therefore no rite is necessary to initiate them into this covenant.) Thus, there is an innate connection between the upper beard, the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy, and the lower “beard,” which surrounds the organ through which the individual is allowed to access the Thirteen Attributes of Mercy.

I have already told you [elsewhere] that *Z’eir Anpin* is formed out of the *netzach-hod-yesod* of *Arich Anpin*, and that the [facial] beard of *Z’eir Anpin* is formed out of the lower beard of [*yesod* of] *Arich Anpin*. This is the mystical meaning of the verse, “From the *strait* I called out to G-d,”¹¹ for the *Zohar*¹² refers this verse to the beard of *Z’eir Anpin*, which issued from the mystical correlate of the wool of the sheep, i.e., the supernal *yesod* of *Arich Anpin*. Thus, the word for “wool” [*tzemer*] permutes to spell the word for “strait” [*meitzar*], this being the mystical significance of “From the *strait* I called out....”

Tzemer: tzadik-mem-reish; meitzar: mem-tzadik-reish.

From this you can also understand what I have told you, namely, that the *yesod* of *Arich Anpin* couples with itself, and out of [this coupling] issues *Z’eir Anpin*, and for that reason it is called “from the strait.” Understand this.¹³

There is no explicit female counterpart to the *partzuf* of *Arich Anpin*, as there is for the *partzufim* of *Abba* and *Z’eir Anpin*. Instead, the feminine aspect is implicit. Thus, the *yesod* of *Arich Anpin* contains both male and female

⁸ *Nedarim* 31b.

⁹ Genesis 17.

¹⁰ *Avodah Zarah* 27a.

¹¹ Psalms 118:5.

¹² 3:295a, in the *Idra*.

¹³ See *Sha’ar Mamarei Rashbi*, in the exposition of the *Idra Zuta* of *parashat Ha’azinu*.

elements, and therefore the “coupling” at this level is intrinsic. Since the male-female aspects of *Arich Anpin* is not fully articulated, it is called a “strait,” a constricted version of this duality.

This is also the mystical significance of the *shofar*, which alludes to the verse “From the strait I called out to G-d; [He answered me in the broad places of G-d],” for, as is known, it is narrow on one side and wide on the other.

To explain: The coupling that produces *Z’eir Anpin* is in the *yesod* of *Arich Anpin*, but [when it first issues, *Z’eir Anpin*] only manifests a small *vav*, which comprises only three [*sefirot*], for [the other] three are folded within the [manifest] three. This is the mystical significance of the sound that issues from the *shofar*, which comprises only three [elements]—fire, air, and water.

Z’eir Anpin corresponds to the *vav* of the Name *Havayah*, as we have explained previously, and the numerical value of the *vav* is 6, alluding to the six *sefirot* from *chesed* to *yesod* that metamorphose into the *partzuf* of *Z’eir Anpin*. But a small *vav* alludes to the initial iteration of the emotions, i.e., the first three, principle emotions, in which the ancillary three emotions exist only implicitly.

Similarly, the simple, undifferentiated sound of the *shofar* alludes to the basic, primary emotions (as the world is renewed on *Rosh HaShanah*), in which the further development of the emotions exists only implicitly. The fourth “element,” earth, is missing, indicating that this stage of development is not yet at that of concretization; only the three relatively abstract “elements” are present.

To return to our topic: just as “the hair on the head”—of *Arich Anpin*—“is like white wool,”¹⁴ so is the hair surrounding his *yesod* also white. This is alluded to by the white wool of sheep, for all the hair of the holy Ancient One [*Arich Anpin*] is white. It was this wool that Abel offered as a sacrifice, as our sages said.

The “Holy Ancient One” is the term used in the Book of Daniel to refer to the vision identified in Kabbalah as that of *Arich Anpin*.

In contrast, the “wool” of *Z’eir Anpin* is black as a raven.¹⁵ It is only the upper [i.e., facial] beard and head hair that turns white when he grows old. He then emulates the supernal grandfather. But in his youth, his hair is black; his hair turns white only in his old age, as he approaches *Arich Anpin*, whose *yesod* produces [*Z’eir Anpin*]’s intellect.

As *Z’eir Anpin* matures, he ascends in spiritual level and approaches *Arich Anpin*. *Arich Anpin* is called the “grandfather” of *Z’eir Anpin*, whose father and mother are, of course, *Abba* and *Ima*.

But the lower [i.e., pubic] beard of *Z’eir Anpin* always remains black, even in his old age, for [even then] it remains distant from the whiteness of the holy Ancient One [*Arich Anpin*]. “And from my flesh shall I behold G-d.”¹⁶

This verse is used here (and throughout Kabbalistic literature) to mean that since the phenomena of our material world are derived from their spiritual antecedents, we can deduce things about the spiritual worlds by observing the material world (within given limits and parameters, of course). Here, the physiological behavior of our body hair as we age alludes to spiritual truths in the supernal worlds.

¹⁴ Daniel 7:9.

¹⁵ See Song of Songs 5:11.

¹⁶ Job 19:26.

It follows that Abel's offering aroused the supernal *da'at*, and this increased the power of *da'at* of *Z'eir Anpin*, and allowed the spirit of the 52-Name to return to *malchut*, i.e., to her *yesod*.

This is the mystical meaning of the verse, "And G-d *turned* to Abel and his offering, but to Cain and his offering He did not *turn*."¹⁷ To explain: This "wool" descended from the supernal *da'at* to *Z'eir Anpin*, which is [permeated by] the 45-Name. The combined numerical values of 45 and the word for "wool" [*tzemer*] is 375, the same as that of the word for "turned" [*sha'ah*]. Thus, "...to Cain and his offering He did not *turn*." But He did turn to Abel, for he brought it down into *malchut*.

As we have seen previously, *Z'eir Anpin* is associated with the 45-Name of G-d, i.e., the Name *Havayah* spelled out such that its numerical value is 45.

Tzemer: *tzadik-mem-reish* = 90 + 40 + 200 = 330.

330 + 45 = 375.

Sha'ah: *shin-ayin-hei* = 300 + 70 + 5 = 375.

This indicates that G-d's *turning* to (i.e., taking notice of and accepting) the offering was because it drew the "wool" (330, the *yesod* of *Arich Anpin*) into *Z'eir Anpin* (45). G-d did not turn to Cain's offering because he withdrew the wool from *Z'eir Anpin*, i.e., he subverted the process by which Divine consciousness and energy is transmitted into *malchut*.

Thus, it is written, "If you mend your ways, it will be forgiven."¹⁸ Meaning, "So far, you elevated the 52-Name of *malchut*, which is its "feminine water," and you uprooted them from their proper place. But if you mend your ways, it will be forgiven. That is, you can 'carry' and elevate "feminine waters" as is proper."

The word for "it will be forgiven" is *se'eit*, which literally means "it will be carried, born, lifted." The imagery is that of G-d carrying the weight of the sin and atoning for it, or of Him bearing the consequence of the sin, rather than it being born by the sinner. Here, the literal imagery of the word is "it will be lifted up," i.e., G-d tells Cain that he can, indeed, reconstitute the Divine order by repenting of his misconceived plans, submitting to G-d's vision of how male and female should function together, and thus allow the female to raise and elevate her yearning, her "feminine water," to the male, initiating the process of their coupling and ensuring the proper continuation of their continued existence and fulfillment of their Divine mission together.

From all this we can understand the prohibition against *shatnez*, and why it is permitted in performing the commandment of *tzitzit*.¹⁹

—translated from *Sha'ar HaMitzvot* and *Ta'amei HaMitzvot*

¹⁷ Genesis 4:4-5.

¹⁸ Genesis 4:7.

¹⁹ See *Peri Etz Chaim, Sha'ar HaTzitzit*.