

Metaphors of Sacrifice in the Zohar

by

T. A. Perry

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“...the circulation of the ‘Shower of Wealth,
the limitless, inexhaustible food of the God’
that falls from the Sky as Rain and is returned
from the Earth to the Sky in the smoke
of the burnt-offering...”¹

“The whole object of the sacrifice is to set blessings in motion”

(*Zohar* II, 248a).

From the point of view of the personal fate of the sacrificer, it may be safely said that the Zoharic doctrine is traditional and profound. All sacrifice is self-sacrifice; it is himself that the sacrificer makes sacred (*sacrum facere*).² At most, one could take note of a typically Jewish insistence on the ritual purity of the offering. Just as the animal victim was to be without blemish (Lev. 1.3), in the same way the sacrificer must be righteous. When this obtains, “the righteous man is, of a truth, himself an offering of atonement” (*Zohar* I, 65a, 214).³ In the theosophic universe of the *Zohar*, however, the relationship between God and the individual human being is but one of the

1. Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *Spiritual Authority and Temporal Power in the Indian Theory of Government* (New Haven: The American Oriental Society, 1942), p. 68. The text quoted is *Satapatha Brahmana* IX. 3.3.15,16. The wealth of Indian parallels as well as the unusually lucid grasp of patterns of mythological and ritualistic thinking make Mr. Coomaraswamy’s study a prime source of reference for the following paper.

2. Cf. *ibid.*, p. 10, n. 13: “Any initiatory rebirth, or indeed a birth of any kind, implies a previous death... Any Sacrifice is symbolic suicide; it is himself that the Sacrificer sacrifices to the Gods, to Agni.” And further: “The Sacrifice is a ‘devotion,’ and that is as much as to say a self-sacrifice” (p. 67, n. 47). Gershom Scholem finds the same notion in the kabbalistic author Isaac the Blind: “Par le sacrifice, l’homme s’offre soi-même; tout le reste n’est que revêtement symbolique” *Les Origines de la kabbale*, trans. Jean Loewenson (Paris, 1966), p. 232.

3. All references to *The Zohar* are from the English translation by Harry Sperling, Maurice Simon, and Dr. Paul P. Levertoff (London: Soncino Press, 1933-34), 5 vols. References indicate volume, page of the standard Mantuan edition, and page of the English translation.

relations affected by the sacrifice. As its Hebrew root implies, sacrifice or *qorban* is a “bringing near” (German *Nahebringen*), a notion applicable not only to God and man but also to heaven and earth, male and female, and even to various parts or grades (*sefirot*), as it were, of the Deity itself.⁴

The fact that sacrificial action, or *Nahebringen*, is a universal as well as merely human process accounts in part for the elaborately complex, and often contradictory, metaphorical system through which it is expressed. *Zohar* I, 35a, 131-132, for example, presents the paradox of an important exposition of the sacrifice in a text that has apparently little to do with such a notion. The passage begins as a commentary on Gen. 2:5 and seeks to develop a favorite argument of the author, namely that heaven and earth mutually support one another. The first part of the argument, that heaven supports earth, is demonstrated by the fact that there could be no vegetation on earth until God had caused it to rain. When the skies pour forth streams of rain upon the ground, however, the earth is made fertile and the two are brought together, just as in the sacred Indian text, after it has rained hard all day and night, men say that “Earth and Sky have united”.⁵ Secondly, while the heavens pour forth their blessings, a parallel and concomitant “support” arises from the earth herself, “it being necessary for the impulse from below to set in motion the power above” (I, 35b, 131). Corresponding to the rain, the earth sends up mists or vapors, and these are alternately said to respond to the impulse from above or even, as here, to initiate the higher impulse.

On a cosmological level a good description of the mutual support of heaven and earth through the medium of waters may be seen in the *Dialoghi d’Amore* of Leone Ebreo (16th century), who ascribes the doctrine to “the poets”:

Apollo loved Daphne, daughter of the river Peneus, she being the natural moisture of the earth which comes from the rivers which pass over it [the earth]. This moisture loves the sun; and, sending his ardent rays towards her, he tries to exhale her in vapors and draw her to him. And it might be said that *the goal of such exhalation is the support of heavenly beings* [nutrimento de’ celesti], *because according to the poets these latter are supported by the vapors that ascend from the globe of the earth*. And though this is metaphorical, the meaning is that especially the sun and the planets [among the heavenly

4. The present study limits itself for the most part to metaphorical expressions, rather than a strictly theosophic discussion, of sacrifice. For an excellent introduction to the theosophical system of the *Zohar*, see Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 3rd ed. (New York, 1961), pp. 205-243.

5. Coomaraswamy, *Spiritual Authority*, p. 68, quoting *Aitareya Aranyaka* III. 1.2. In the *Zohar* rain is often a synonym for blessings (I, 64a, 210; 115a, 360). In I, 62a, 202 it is specifically connected with sperm. Its connection with human sustenance, whether physical or spiritual, is upheld in II, 246a, 380-381 by an illusion to Ex. 16:4.

bodies] are maintained in their proper office, and consequently the entire universe, *by the means of the exhalation of the moist vapors*.⁶

Here the “lies of the poets” record naturalistic phenomena, with no allusion to sacrifice. The exegesis is a clever one: if the office of the heavens is to nourish the lower world, this can be brought about only if food (water) is first made available. This is the sense in which it is said, therefore, that the earth “supports” the heavens: she makes available the materials with which the sky carries out its designs. This level of argument seems to have traces in the Zoharic passage under consideration: “vapor first ascends from the earth to form a cloud” (I, 35a).

Far removed from such purely naturalistic interpretations, however, the *Zohar* describes how these exchanges of fluids result in the unification not only of heaven with earth but also of earth and especially of heaven itself. Thus, when heaven and earth are united, they are said to “face one another.” Secondly, when the rain descends and waters “the whole face of the ground,” the earth is said to be nourished or perfected, a state of things that rectifies the original separation of Adam and Eve, created side by side but not “facing” one another. Thirdly, when this happened, “the upper union was consummated.” In order to clarify these mysterious unifications, the author then offers an analogy, the only reference to sacrifice in the entire passage: “Similarly [i.e. similar to the cloud-forming vapor from the earth] the smoke of the sacrifice⁷ rises and creates

6. Leone Ebreo, *Dialoghi d'Amore*, ed. Santino (Bari, 1929), p.143, translation and italics mine.

7. A remarkable parallel to the metaphorical complexities of the “smoke of sacrifice” may be found in Philo’s interpretation of the three objects to be placed in the inner sanctuary of the Temple (Ex. 25 and 30), the candlestick, censer and table. Professor Harry Austryn Wolfson (*Philo* [Cambridge, Mass., 4th ed., 1968], II, 241-248) has discussed the meaning of sacrifice in Philo both in general and in the essential text of *De Vita Mosis* II, 106 ff., but he has neglected the important symbolical passage that precedes:

The altar of incense he placed in the middle [of the Sanctuary], a symbol of the thankfulness for earth and water which should be rendered for the benefits derived from both of these, since the mid-position in the universe has been assigned to them. The candlestick he placed at the south, figuring thereby the movements of the luminaries above; for the sun and the moon and the others run their courses in the south far away from the north... (104) The table is set at the north and has bread and salt on it, as the north winds are those which most provide us with food, and food comes from heaven and earth, the one sending rain, the other bringing the seeds to their fullness when watered by the showers. (105) In line with the table are set the symbols of heaven and earth, as our account has shown, heaven being signified by the candlestick, earth and its parts, from which rise the vapors, by what is appropriately called the vapor-keeper or altar of incense (Philo, *De Vita Mosis* II, 101-105, trans. F.H. Colson [Cambridge, Mass. and London: The Loeb Classical Library, 1950, II vols.]. VI, 498-502, italics added).

Whether or not the table with its food symbolizes heaven and earth, as Colson seems rightly to suggest (p. 500, n.b.), the first important parallel to be noted is the insistence, within a strongly ritualistic context, of the mutual action of heaven and earth in “bringing the seeds to their fullness”. Further, both this and the *Zoharic* passage place the sacrifice within a truly universal setting (the Temple being a replica of the entire universe). Finally, one notes the allusion to the earth as producer of vapors and the metaphorical

harmony above, so that all unite, and in this way there is completion in the supernal realm. The impulse commences from below, and from this all is perfected. If the Community of Israel did not give the first impulse, the One above would not move to meet her, for by the yearning from below completion is effected above.”⁸

The dual initiative of “above” and “below” comes to take on all the ambivalence of the paradox of man’s free will and God’s providence. Viewed negatively, man cannot sacrifice without an impulse from above, nor does God usually act without some movement from below. The problem is resolved or at least explained by the metaphor of a “chain” of impulse. Rain and mist form a closed system, a “circulation of wealth.” The *Zohar* uses another image to explain this “secret of sacrifice”, that of a candle: “The flame cannot rise save from some concrete body. Further, in the flame itself there are two lights: one white and luminous and the other black or blue”. After explaining that this is a symbol of the unification of the Holy Name (YHVH), the author continues: “This is the secret of sacrifice. The ascending smoke kindles the blue light, which then attaches itself to the white light”. When this happens, “the sacrifice is pleasing and the candle is completely alight; then, as in the case of Elijah, ‘the fire of the Lord descends and consumes the burnt-offering’ (I Kings 18:38), this being a manifestation that *the chain is complete...* Then there is peace in all worlds, and the whole forms a unity” (I, 51a-b, 163-164, italics added).

If blessings result from reunification of above and below, this is due to a characteristic definition of the opposing parts. In an astonishing psychological interpretation, the mist rising from the ground is said to signify “the yearning of the female for the male” (I, 35a, 131). As in Leone Ebreo the earth is female and the sky is male, and it is only from the sexual joining of the two that fertility or offspring or blessings flow: “Blessing does not reside save in a spot where there are male and female” (II, 165a, 132); “all blessings issue from male and female together” (II, 248a, 386; see also II, 182a, 197; IV, 17a, 357). The meaning is not limited to natural fertility

identification of these with the smoke of the sacrifice, both seen as rising upward toward the heavens or sun.

8. The emphasis on Israel’s duty to give the first impulse may seem purely homiletic, especially when compared with such contrary assertions as the following: “the desire of the female [Israel] toward the male [divinity] only awakes when a certain spirit enters into her and the flow ascends to meet that of the male” (I, 60b, 195). In fact, however, the *Zohar* expresses with striking boldness man’s efficacy and responsibility in the sacrifice. Noah “knew it was incumbent upon him to bring an offering,” having discovered “the basis on which the existence of the world depends, to wit, the sacrifices, without which neither the higher nor the lower world can endure” (I, 58b, 189). In another instance it is said that the heavenly King does not “eat” until his servants have finished, and this true eating occurs “in the place where it was when the savor of the sacrifices used to ascend” (IV, 7a-b, 339). But the righteous not only eat before the King; when the sacrifice is pleasant, “Israel feeds their Father in Heaven” (*ibid.*). Coomaraswamy gives interesting Indian parallels (*Spiritual Authority*, p. 66 and n. 47): “Because of the separation of Earth and Sky” the Gods are hungry. “The Gods to whom no offering is made do not eat” (quoting *Pancavimsa Brahmana* XIV. 6.8).

but is extended to cover all blessings whatever: “The soul has a father and a mother, just as the body has a father and a mother in this world. In fact, all things above and below proceed from Male and Female” (III, 12a, 37). This means that the entire universe is polarized in sexual symbols, the male being the active dispenser of God’s energy, the female being the passive recipient of the same. The earth, which depends on the heavens for rain and solar heat, is therefore female and passive, while “the upper world is of the male principle” (II, 246a, 381).⁹ Similarly, as the mist of desire ascends from the earth, “the burnt-offering rises from the female to the male” (*ibid*). We are now prepared to understand the meaning of this smoke of sacrifice: “it is the desire of each one to ascend above in order to please the Holy King” (IV, 32b, 389).¹⁰ Moreover, the sacrifice or effective reunion with the Male principle can be achieved only in man who has reintegrated the sexual ambivalence of his own nature: “It is incumbent on a man to be ever ‘male and female’ in order that his faith may be firm and that the *Shekhinah* [Divine Presence] may never depart from him” (I, 49b, 158). Since man was created after the bisexual pattern of heaven and earth (I, 55b, 177), “every figure which does not comprise male and female elements is not a true and proper figure... The male is not even called a man till he is united with the female” (*ibid*). Ritualistically this means, for example, that the High Priest may not perform the sacrifice in the inner sanctuary until he has fulfilled the union of opposites in his own life, that is to say, until he is married (see IV, 37b, 400). In a similar manner, it is incumbent on the pious *both* to unite sexually with their wives *and*, esoterically speaking, “to concentrate their whole thought and purpose” on the last *sefirah*, the Female *Shekhinah* (I, 50a, 159).

9. Although the syzygy sun and earth is common in the *Zohar* (“light being male and darkness female” I, 23a, 94), the author also establishes sexual opposition through the symbols of sun and moon. In the following passage, for example, the luminaries united by man’s sacrifice seem to refer to the *sefirot Tif’eret* and *Malkut*, the male Son and the female *Shekhinah*: “The Lord is blessed when the Moon is illuminated by the Sun and they draw near one another” (IV, 9b, 345); “it behooves us to bring the moon, as it were, into the sun and the sun into the moon so that there should be no separation between them, this being the portion of man by which he should enter the world to come” (II, 196b, 246). It should be observed that, although the upper world is male with respect to the lower one, everything in the universe is sexually ambivalent, male with respect to its inferiors and female with respect to its superiors. This applies to the angels (III, 4b, 12) and even to the *sefirot*: “For this King [*Tif’eret*], although supreme, is, in relation to the Highest Point [*Keter*], the most hidden One, feminine or receptive; but at the same time he is masculine or active in relation to the lower King [*Yesod*]; and this double relationship, to that which is above and that which is below, appertains to the whole supermundane world” (III, 4a, 9).

10. By the same token we are now able to understand other sexual symbols in our original passage (I, 35a) with the help of the following: “When the upper world was filled and became pregnant, it brought forth two children together, a male and a female, these being heaven and earth after the supernal pattern. The earth is fed from the waters of the heaven which are poured into it. These upper waters, however, are male, whereas the lower are female, and the lower are fed from the male, and the lower waters call to the upper, like the female that receives the male, and pour out water to meet the water of the male to produce seed” (I, 29b, 113-114). Here “heaven and earth” and “male and female” are, on the supernal level, *Tif’eret* and *Malkut* and, on the lower level, the “Adam and Eve” of our original passage.

While it is true that blessings flow only after upper and lower and Male and Female have been united, the actual process can be completed only through the unification of yet another pair of opposites: Right and Left, signifying the divine attributes of Mercy (*Hesed*, the fourth *sefirah*, represented by Abraham) and Stern Justice (*Geburah*, the fifth *sefirah*, represented by Isaac): “There are two crowns [*sefirot*] linked together, they being the gateway to all other Crowns; one is Justice and the other is Mercy, one male and one female, one white and one red” (IV, 14a, 351). Despite this apparent confusion of Right and Left with Male and Female, these pairs are usually related rather than identified in a strict sense: “for the heavens are male and the male comes from the side of the right, and the female from the side of the left” (I, 30a, 114).¹¹ The intention of the worshiper is thus to be focused on these, since “the union of the male and female is only to be brought about by Left and Right” (II, 244a, 375). The ultimate sense of this reunification seems to be regressive in that the two are not synthesized but rather reduced to Right, which originally contained both: “God is blessed with wine above all, because wine rejoices the Left side and in that joy merges itself in the Right, and *when the whole becomes Right the Holy Name is glad*, and blessings are everywhere diffused” (IV, 40a, 407, italics added).¹²

The *Zohar* describes with some detail the sacrificial aspects of the unification of Left with Right. The principle according to which the ritual is to be observed—and by extension the entire life of the pious man—is the imitation of divine forms: on earth as it is in heaven.¹³ Now, if it is

11. As often “female” here signifies this lower world of humanity. The meaning is that “this world was created by the attribute of Justice” (III, 22b, 75).

12. In the same way Adam and Eve are reunited when man recovers his original, androgynous nature (“all spirits are compounded of male and female, and when they go forth into the world [for birth into the body] they go forth as both male and female” V, 43b, 5); that is to say, when Eve is reduced to Adam. At least, this seems to be implied in the observation that the original Adam or man was both male and female (e.g. V. 46b, 12).

13. In the productive arts such as carpentry Plotinus enjoins the artists to “take their principles from that realm and from the thinking that goes on there” (*Enneads* V, 9, 11). Moses likewise is commanded to make all things of the Sanctuary “according to the pattern that is shown thee on the mount” (Ex. 25:40). There is thus no “mine” or “yours” in ideas but rather correct and incorrect, correctness being measured not by “originality” but rather by the extent that human thinking corresponds with divine archetypes. In consequence, “his” means “devoid of any blessing” (II, 144a, 62), and Rabbi Simeon explains concerning a youth’s sublime exegesis of a Biblical text that “one should not think that all this exposition was merely the youth’s own idea: it contains recondite thoughts which bear the seal of divine Wisdom” (II, 150b, 83; see also IV, 7a, 338 concerning Moses). The close correspondence between heaven and earth is commonplace in the *Zohar*: “whatever is on earth has its counterpart on high, there being no object, however small, in this world but what is subordinate to its counterpart above which has charge over it; and so whenever the thing below bestirs itself, there is a simultaneous stimulation of its counterpart above, as the two realms form one interconnected whole” (II, 156b, 102). Thus, in imitation of the seven days of creation (called the consecration or “filling” of the High Priest above), “there were seven days of

the function of priest and Levite to unite Right and Left (II, 244a, 375), this is because they somehow represent these entities: “The priest brings the offering with intent to unify the Holy Name and to awaken the side to which he is attached. The Levites by their song endeavor to rouse the side to which they are attached and to merge it in the side of the priest” (IV, 32a-b, 388).¹⁴ The reconciliation of Left and Right is to be achieved, therefore, through an actual and symbolic cooperation of priest and Levite at various levels of activity.¹⁵ In the chant, for example, the words or true doctrinal meanings come from the priest, while the intonation or “harps” (IV, 32a, 387) which serve as their vehicle come from the Levite.¹⁶ Or the opposition may be viewed in terms of inner and outer, the priest representing the innermost desire or thought and the Levite its expression through the mouth and *ad extra*.¹⁷ In another series of

consecration for the priest below, that the lower might correspond with the upper” (IV, 34b, 390). With characteristic daring the *Zohar* reverses the formula and pictures the altar service performed in heaven as on earth. With epic grandeur the author evokes “the six hundred thousand myriads in each corner, all under one commander, and all clad in an ephod, who are there to carry out the service of the altar in correspondence with those on earth” (IV, 30a, 382). The boldness is perhaps only apparent, however, since the humans involved are the pious whose behavior already corresponds to heavenly modes of action. It is in this idealistic sense that Israel is called a “Kingdom of priests” (IV, 34b, 391), or that all its practices are said to be “on the supernal pattern” (IV, 40a, 407).

14. Levi is explicitly assigned to the side of Stern Judgment (II, 172b-173a, 161; V, 62b, 50), whereas “the priest is from the Right” (IV, 27a, 381).

15. Not infrequently the *Zohar* states that three members are necessary to the sacrifice. In addition to the priest and Levite, for example, this passage calls for the “shepherds,” who are understood to be alternately the leaders of the people or simply pious Israelites and whose part in the sacrifice is to “make his heart contrite and humble before God the Holy King” (IV, 32a-b, 388). When the third party is a poor man, there are actually two offerings: “one is the actual sacrifice, and the other his own flesh and blood” (IV, 9b, 344-345). For just as the flour and oil are heated, the man’s own flesh and blood burn with hunger. The inner meaning is applicable to all: “a man should offer to God his desires and his passions” and thus endure their burning within him rather than seek their satisfaction.

16. “Song comes from the side of the Left, not of *Hesed*” (II, 230b, 338). In answer to the problem of how the contrite and sorrowful man can fulfill the injunction to “serve the Lord with gladness” (Ps. 100:1), the *Zohar* explains that “this was provided by the priests and Levites: rejoicing was carried out by the priest because he is far from chastisement and must ever show a more joyful countenance than the rest of the people. The singing, again, was carried out by the Levites, whose function it was. So the priest stood by him and found suitable words to unify in joy the Holy Name, while the Levites broke out into song” (IV, 8a-b, 341-342). The text goes on to show that, though there are no longer sacrifices (because of the destruction of the Temple), the worshipper still performs the unification within himself: “This is the completion of joy, for joy is in the heart and song in the mouth.”

17. See above, n. 17; also *Zohar* II, 200a, 259: “Desire, which is thought, is the beginning of all things, and Utterance is the completion.” This innermost thinking may be identified with the “still small voice, referring to the very innermost point, which is the source of all illumination” (II, 209a, 291). The dialectical opposition between inner and outer and the ontological priority of the former is common to most “primitive” forms of religious thinking and is implicit in such doctrines as the primacy of

images the priest is symbolized by pure oil or water, and the Levite by the fire or red wine of judgment.¹⁸ And in contrast with the severity of Judgment, the priest embodies the “oil of gladness” and must therefore always be joyful and serene.¹⁹ True joy, however, is deep in the silence of the heart, the place, as we have seen, where desire and thought originate, the locus of the “still small voice” (see notes 17, 18, 20). These motifs are also related to the morning and afternoon prayers, the former of which were instituted by Abraham (*Hesed*, the Right) and are to be recited in silent joy; the afternoon prayers, by contrast, were instituted by Isaac (Stern Judgment) and are chanted.²⁰

The essential characteristics of the “smoke of sacrifice” may now be considered with the proper perspective. Of the smokes that ascend on high, some have the effect of appeasement only. These are the burnt offerings, specifically related to Isaac (IV, 37a-b, 399-400) and the

contemplative over the active life, or, in art theory, the priority of the inner image over its external manifestation. Concerning artistic creation, whether of the world or a simple object, Eckhart distinguishes three stages: First an intangible word “springs up” in the mind; then the artist pauses in the word or idea and gives it shape; then it is spoken out as an outer expression of the inner word. See Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, *The Transformation of Nature in Art* (New York, 1934), pp. 76-77.

18. Reconciliation of Left with Right occurs at the time of sacrifice, when “fire and water are intermingled and become one” (II, 164b, 129).

19. These complex symbols are developed with extraordinary force in the *Zoharic* commentary on Lev. 9:1-11:47 (IV, 35a-42a, 394-411), an idea of which may be got from the following: “wine is of the side of the Levites, but the side of the priests is pure and clear water... Wine, oil and water issue from the same place [i.e. *Hokmah* or Wisdom, the second *Sefirah*]. Water and oil, which is joy first and last, as it is written: ‘Like the goodly oil upon the head that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron’s beard’ (Ps. 133:2). Wine, which is of the left, is inherited by the Levites that they may raise their voices in song and not be silent, for wine is never silent, but oil is always noiseless. The difference between them is this. Oil comes from the side of Thought [*Hokmah*, the origin of the supernal oil (IV, 34a, 390), is on the Right], which is always silent and unheard, whereas wine, which is for raising the voice, comes from the side of the Mother [*Binah*, which is of the Left]. Therefore the priest, when he entered the Sanctuary to perform divine service, was forbidden to drink wine, because his service was carried out quietly” (IV, 39a, 403).

20. “Observe that David in his psalms made allusion to the three periods of prayer, in the words, ‘Evening, and morning and at noonday do I meditate and moan’ (Ps. 55:28). Here we have allusion to the three periods, although David himself observed only two prayers, one alluded to in ‘do I meditate’ and the second in ‘and moan’. The first is the prayer of the morning, the period of mercy; hence ‘meditating’ suffices. The second is the prayer of afternoon, the period of rigor; hence ‘do I moan’” (*Zohar* II, 132b, 29-30). The text goes on to explain that the third belongs to Jacob and is of less importance than the first two. This assignment of the three daily prayers to the three Patriarchs goes back to the *Talmud* (*Berakot* 26b) and also occurs in the Gerona kabbalist Jacob ben Sheshet, quoted in Georges Vajda, *Recherches sur la philosophie et la kabbale dans la pensée juive du moyen âge* (Paris and the Hague, 1962), p. 369 and n.2. In *Zohar* IV, 27b, 381, the priest is specifically associated with the morning service, which is “the time when his own side *Hesed* is in the ascendant.” Again: “gladness and song correspond to the two prayers of morning and afternoon, and to the two daily sacrifices—gladness in the morning and singing in the afternoon” (II, 229b, 335).

mitigation of evil: “Burnt offering is brought only to counteract wrongful thoughts” (I, 70a, 233) or to obtain atonement by causing the “side of the evil spirit” (the Left) to depart (IV, 25b, 378). Here the focus seems to be on the fact that smoke is produced by fire, since “that unclean spirit is not burnt away...save through the fire on the altar” (IV, 27b, 381). Or the emphasis may be on the pleasing odor or perfume of the sacrifice. Perhaps recalling a linguistic ambiguity already exploited in the *Sefer ha-Bahir*, the author remarks how anger (*'af*) is soothed by the pleasing savor that ascends to the nose (*'af*) of the Almighty:²¹

It is written, “They shall put incense in thy nose” (Deut. 33:10), i.e. they shall act so as to cause the fire [Rigor] to recede to its place, since through the smell of the incense the nose contracts inwardly, till the whole odor is drawn in and brought near to thought, producing a pleasing sensation. Hence there results “a savor of appeasement” when anger is appeased and calm is restored... (I, 70a, 234-235).

The *Zohar* establishes a definite, though not always clear, gradation among various kinds of smoke sacrifices. Whereas burnt offerings appease wrath or atone for hidden thoughts, peace offerings “make peace between higher and lower and between the various quarters of the world... Of all the offerings, none are so well beloved to God as the peace offerings, because they bring harmony to upper and lower. Superior to all, however, is the incense, because it is brought not for sin or trespass, but for joy” (IV, 11b, 348). The idea seems to be that, beyond appeasement and harmony, the offering of incense is the most excellent of all offerings, for through it are blessed both those above and those below” (IV, 5b, 334); “it was through the incense that Aaron stayed the plague. Hence the incense symbolizes universal joy and universal union” (II, 230a, 336). The association of the incense offering with the High Priest and the “oil of gladness”, as well as the connection between burnt offerings and the avenging fire, evoke the now familiar opposition between Right and Left and all of their symbolic representations. The priest’s incense is now identified with the inner divine force of union among all things, the incense being that which “fastens the bond of faith” (IV, 11b, 348).²²

Since the destruction of the Temple and the Exile, Israel has offered up no formal sacrifices. To the author of the *Zohar* this disruption is haunting and deeply tragic: “Since the destruction of the Temple, there is no remedy; hence a man should be very careful” (V, 51b. 23). Yet, the

21. See *Das Buch Bahir (Sefer ha-Bahir)*, trans. G. Scholem (Berlin, 1923), 78 and p. 80. n.2.

22. Incense or *ketoret* is related to the Aramaic *Katar*, “bind” (see IV, 37b, 400 and n.1.): “There are two altars below and two altars above. Of the latter one, the innermost of all, is that on which is offered the inner fine incense, which is the bond of faith, and the most high-priest of all offers this incense with the bond of faith. This is called the Altar of Gold, the place where all the threads of faith are bound together” (IV, 30a-b, 382-383). Esoterically, Faith is the whole pleroma of the *sefirot*, the great mystery of the inner life of the Deity, so termed perhaps because faith “est supérieur aux structures que la raison peut appréhender par ses propres moyens” Georges Vajda, *L’Amour de Dieu dans la théologie juive du moyen âge* (Paris, 1957).

purposes of the sacrifice may be fulfilled by other means. To appease severity and remove punishment from the world, for example, a man must have a “broken spirit” (II, 198a, 252, and 202a, 267). Another alternative—this one particularly beloved to the author of the *Zohar*—is Torah study: “Now that they [Israel] are exiled from the Land and the offerings have ceased, it is the [study of the] Torah and good deeds that make atonement for them” (II, 191b, 228). Indeed, “he who studies the Torah needs neither peace offerings nor burnt offerings, since the Torah is superior to all and the bond of faith” (IV, 35a, 392). In another instance, after a typical description of the theosophical effects of the smoke of sacrifice, the author observes that “nowadays prayer takes the place of sacrifice, and a man should fittingly pronounce the praise of his Master, and if not, his prayer is no prayer. The most perfect form of praising God is to unify the holy Name in a fitting manner, for through this upper and lower are set in motion, and blessings flow to all worlds” (II, 244a, 375). In this and similar passages it becomes obvious that, though technically or ritualistically interrupted, in the *Zohar* the sacrifice retains its powerful symbolism²³ as one of the divinely ordained ways through which man can bring himself near to God and, by unifying the Holy Name, unify all worlds and cause blessings to flow.²⁴

23. See above, n. 17. This symbolic function is already evident in Rev. 5:8 and Ps. 141:2, where the rising smoke of sacrifice is pictured as a symbol or vehicle of prayer.

24. Theosophically speaking, both prayer and sacrifice unify the Holy Name of four letters (YHVH) in the same manner, by uniting the Son *Tif'eret* (“V”) with the Daughter (the Lower “H”, the Princess *Malkut*) and, by reconciliation of Rigor and Mercy, freeing the “Stream that flows from Eden” (the Mother *Binah* or Upper “H” that issues forth from the Father *Hokhmah* or “Y”) and allowing the waters of blessing, through the Son, to water the Female Garden of Eden and Israel. For an excellent description of the theosophical aspects of the unification of the Holy Name see Georges Vajda, *L'Amour de Dieu dans la théologie juive du moyen âge* (Paris, 1957), pp. 211-218.