

# Stanford

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*“Through the centuries, the potency of the Zohar’s language has mesmerized even those who could not plumb its secrets. While Kabbalists delved deeply, the uninitiated chanted the lyrical Aramaic, often unaware of its literal meaning. In the words of an eighteenth-century mystic, ‘Even if one does not understand, the language is suited to the soul.’”*

—Daniel C. Matt, from his introduction to THE ZOHAR: PRITZKER EDITION

**STANFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS AND ZOHAR EDUCATION PROJECT, INC.  
ARE PROUD TO ANNOUNCE THE PUBLICATION OF  
the authoritative new English translation of  
the masterpiece of the Jewish mystical tradition**

## **THE ZOHAR: PRITZKER EDITION**

Translation and Commentary by Daniel C. Matt

TO BE PUBLISHED IN 12 VOLUMES

Based on a newly constructed critical text—the only modern text that  
draws on many variants in the early Aramaic manuscripts

AT LONG LAST, LAY READERS, SPIRITUAL SEEKERS, SCHOLARS,  
AND THE JEWISH COMMUNITY CAN PLUMB THE SYMBOLISM  
AND SECRETS OF THIS CLASSIC, CANONICAL WORK OF KABBALAH.  
A HIDDEN TREASURE OF WESTERN CULTURE

Ever since it emerged mysteriously in Castile, Spain toward the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, the *Zohar* has enthralled, confounded, challenged, and enraptured readers. Composed mostly in lyrical Aramaic, the *Zohar* is a mosaic of Bible, medieval homily, spiritual fantasy, and imaginative commentary, or *midrash*, on the Torah written in the form of a mystical novel. In it a group of rabbis wander through the hills of Galilee, discovering and sharing secrets of Torah: at times they interpret the actions of biblical figures, and at other times, they take center stage themselves through their adventures on the road and their encounters with various astonishing characters. The scope of the *Zohar* is far greater than a single book; it is virtually an entire body of literature, whose central theme is the intimacy between human beings and God. In this lies one of the *Zohar*'s boldest propositions, the capacity of the human being to effect change in the divine realm. Awestruck by the profundity of its insights, symbolism, and dreamlike images, Jews in many lands over the centuries have come to accept the *Zohar* as revealed truth—no less sacred than the two other major texts of their religion, the Torah and the Talmud. And yet, until now, there has never been a fully reliable comprehensive, scholarly English translation of this revered work with line-by-line commentary.

In a monumental undertaking that has already stirred enormous interest and eager anticipation among scholars and various religious communities, Daniel C. Matt, one of the world's foremost authorities on Jewish mysticism, spent the past four years in Jerusalem completing the first phase of this immense project: a 12-volume, annotated English translation of the *Zohar*. The first two volumes of *THE ZOHAR: PRITZKER EDITION* are set to appear from Stanford University Press on November 7, 2003, with a new volume scheduled to appear approximately every year.

**Volume I** includes the *Zohar*'s very own introduction to the work and its explication of the stories of Creation and Noah's Ark in Genesis. In this volume there will also be an Introduction by world-renowned authority on Jewish thought and mysticism, Arthur Green, that traces the development of Kabbalah and the historical and literary significance of the *Zohar*; and a Translator's Introduction by Daniel C. Matt that describes how he was able to establish the Aramaic text and offers suggestions on "How to Read the *Zohar*."

**Volume II** consists of the next five portions of Genesis, as the wandering rabbis of the *Zohar* continue their travels throughout Galilee, sharing their insights into the Torah (extending through Genesis 32:3)—coming upon wisdom at times in the most astonishing ways from a colorful cast of characters they meet on the road.

Translating this keystone of Kabbalah presented enormous challenges. Not only was there no complete, reliable manuscript of the *Zohar* in the original Aramaic in existence anywhere in the world, but in all likelihood, none ever existed. Though the precise history of the *Zohar* is still shrouded in mystery, it originally circulated in fragments as a series of pamphlets or notebooks. Moses ben Shem Tov de Leon is thought to be the main creative force behind the *Zohar*—writing much of it himself, perhaps parts in collaboration with other

Kabbalists. No complete *Zohar* existed until the middle of the 16<sup>th</sup> century, nearly 300 years later, when the booklets were gathered and printed as a single work in Italy. Unfortunately the editors of the printed versions of the *Zohar* often rejected or revised original readings in the earlier handwritten manuscripts.

To prepare his translation, Daniel Matt had to pour over surviving Aramaic manuscripts and compare variant readings, seeking to restore both the content and lyrical flavor of the original, scraping away centuries of scribal errors and editorial doctoring of the text. Working from the critical Aramaic text that he reconstructed, Daniel Matt has produced the most authoritative translation we have ever had of the *Zohar*—a literal yet poetic rendering that is worthy of this mystical masterpiece.

Features that distinguish *THE ZOHAR: PRITZKER EDITION* from all other editions:

- It is the first translation into English of the *Zohar* by a recognized academic scholar.
- It is the only English edition that goes directly to the source—unearthing many *of the major surviving manuscripts in the original language*. Working with these, Daniel Matt was able to produce, in addition to the translation and commentary, the first modern critical, authoritative Aramaic text of the *Zohar*.
- It restores the sacred passion of the original, much of which was censored out of the genteel prose of the old English translation. A luxuriant garden of holy eros, the *Zohar* overflows with love between the souls of Israel and *Shekhinah* (God's lovely bride), and especially between the male and female aspects of God.
- It is faithful to the literal content of the *Zohar* yet true to the lush imagery and colorful poetic voice of the original.
- It provides a running commentary on the same page with the text that makes the mysteries of the *Zohar* accessible to the reader. The old English translation—composed in the 1930s—offers no running commentary, leaving the reader without any help in penetrating the *Zohar*'s unique terminology, multiple meanings, cryptic connotations, and esoteric symbolism.
- It corrects misunderstandings of the text — restoring terms and even entire sections that were omitted from the old English translation because they were unfamiliar or difficult.

In the *Zohar* the text of the Bible is the starting point, a springboard for the imagination. Daniel Matt notes that, in composing his commentary for *THE ZOHAR: PRITZKER EDITION*, he sought to elicit the meaning of the original without sacrificing its subtlety and ambiguity. “Remember that the *Zohar* was not intended to be easily understood, but rather to be deciphered. I want to inspire and compel the reader to struggle a little, to engage the text.”

Daniel Matt encourages the reader of the *Zohar* to be open to new ways of thinking and imagining. He points to the *Zohar*'s reading of the opening words of the Torah, traditionally rendered: *In the beginning God created*, but interpreted in the *Zohar* as: *With beginning, It (Divine Infinity) created God*.

“We all assume that the verse describes the creation of the world, but for the *Zohar* it alludes to something even more primal: the emanation of the *sefirot* (aspects of divine personality) from *Ein Sof* (Divine Infinity). God, it turns out, is the object of the verse, not the subject! The ultimate divine reality, *Ein Sof*, transcends and explodes our comfortable conception of ‘God.’ The *Zohar* transforms the familiar story of Creation into divine biography.”

The early years of the new millennium have seen a significant revival of interest in the Kabbalah and the *Zohar*, not only within Judaism but beyond it. Publication of *THE ZOHAR: PRITZKER EDITION* restores this great work to the Jewish people and to all people. Says Geoffrey Burn, Director of Stanford University Press, “Stanford is proud to be making a work of such literary and canonical significance available to scholars and spiritual inquirers of all traditions. The visionary force behind this project is Margot Pritzker, chair of Zohar Educational Project, Inc. (ZEPI), an organization devoted to the development of this translation and its dissemination throughout the world. The collaboration between ZEPI and Stanford University Press is based on a shared understanding of the importance of this work, and a shared sensitivity to its place in the tradition of great spiritual writing.”

To anyone seeking to explore spirituality, the Bible, and the intimate connection between humans and the Divine, these books offer a limitless source of ecstatic devotion — and a glorious adventure. Daniel Matt writes: “As you undertake this adventure, expect to be surprised, stay alert. The *Zohar*’s teachings are profound and intense. Follow the words to what lies beyond and within; open the gates of imagination.”

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#### THE ZOHAR: PRITZKER EDITION

Translation and Commentary by Daniel C. Matt

Volume One: November 7, 2003 - 536 pages - \$45.00 - ISBN 0-8047-4747-4

Volume Two: December 4, 2003 - 496 pages - \$45.00 - ISBN: 0-8047-4868-3

FURTHER INFORMATION, SAMPLE TEXT, PHOTOS & JACKET ART AVAILABLE AT

[WWW.SUP.ORG/ZOHAR](http://WWW.SUP.ORG/ZOHAR)

### About Daniel C. Matt

Daniel C. Matt, translator of *THE ZOHAR: PRITZKER EDITION*, is a leading authority on Jewish mysticism. For over twenty years he served as Professor of Jewish Spirituality at the Graduate Theological Union in Berkeley, California. He has also taught at Stanford University and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He has published six books, including: *Zohar: The Book of Enlightenment*; *Zohar: Annotated and Explained*; *The Essential Kabbalah*; and *God and the Big Bang: Discovering Harmony between Science and Spirituality*. He has spent the past four years in Jerusalem working on this translation and currently lives in Berkeley, California.

### **About Arthur Green**

Arthur Green, who supplied the Introduction on the Kabbalah and the literary and historical significance of the *Zohar*, is a leading Judaic scholar and author, and co-chair of the Academic Committee for the Translation of the *Zohar*. Dr. Green, the Philip W. Lown Professor of Jewish Thought at Brandeis University, has written several books and many articles on mysticism, Hasidism, Jewish spirituality, and contemporary theology. He lives in Newton Centre, Massachusetts.

### **About Margot Pritzker**

Mrs. Thomas (Margot) Pritzker chairs *THE ZOHAR: PRITZKER EDITION* project. Convinced by her studies in Bible and Rabbinic literature of the need for a scholarly English language edition of the *Zohar*, Mrs. Pritzker worked with the Pritzker Family Philanthropic Fund to undertake the development of this translation, and to assist in its dissemination throughout the world. She has a B.A. in Art History from Northwestern University, and an M.A. from the University of Chicago in Judaic Studies. She begins work this fall towards her doctorate in Bible at the University of Chicago.

### **About Stanford University Press**

Over the last 75 years, Stanford University Press has established a reputation as one of the nation's leading publishers of academic books in the humanities and the social sciences. The Stanford University Press list has won numerous awards and is highly respected throughout the scholarly community as a valuable source of new knowledge, pioneering inquiry, and innovative theories. Over the last decade, the Press has emerged as a leading English language publisher of Jewish studies. Stanford is committed to the continuation of this long tradition of service to scholars, and to the perpetuation of the Stanford University Press imprint as a benchmark of intellectual excellence.