

Ronit Meroz

The Story in the Zohar about the Grieving Dead¹

For Karl, with friendship

The present article deals with a very brief story from the Zohar (II,16a-b), one which apparently belongs to the literary stratum known as *Midrash ha-Ne'elam*.² The first part of the article draws attention to the fine literary workmanship of the story. The second part deals with a philological matter that sheds new light on the history of the composition of the Zohar. Finally we present a critical edition of the story with an annotated translation into English.

The story belongs to the genre of the *exemplum*, which was very common in medieval Europe. The term refers to stories that seek to demonstrate religious or ethical principles by means of an example.³ Although in recent years the literary aspects of the Zohar have received more attention than in the past, the appearance of this genre in the Zohar has not yet been noted.⁴ In the specific instance presented here, we see how two of the Sages of the Zohar learned concretely that it is possible to communicate with the dead, and that the souls of the dead pray for the living and help them.

- 1 This research has been supported by the National Science Fund, no. 897/01. I am very grateful to the Vatican library for giving me the permission to publish this text. I also thank Dr. Jeffrey M. Green for translating this article and Noa Dolev-Israeli and Rakefet Raz for their assistance in preparing the Zohar text. This version of the story and an introduction (in Hebrew) similar in content to the present article will be included in my book *Yuvalei Zohar* [Headwaters of the Zohar] – Research and Editions of Zohar, the pericope of Exodus. Tel Aviv (in print).
- 2 Regarding this attribution, see Tishby, Isaiah; Lachower, Fischel: *The Wisdom of the Zohar*. Translated by Goldstein David. Oxford 1987, Vol. 1, p. 2.
- 3 Much research has been devoted to this genre. On its appearance in the Zohar, see my *Yuvalei Zohar*. On the history of the genre, especially the great variety of its literary forms, see, for example: Bremond, Claude; le Goff, Jacques; et Schmitt, Jean-Claude: *L'Exemplum* (Typologie des sources du moyen âge occidental, no. 40). Turnhout-Belgium 1982; Lyons, John D.: *Exemplum. The Rhetoric of Example in Early Modern France and Italy*. Princeton 1989; Burgoyne, Jonathan: *Reading the Exemplum Right. Fixing the Meaning of El Conde Lucanor*. Chapel Hill 2007; Yassif, Eli: *The Hebrew Folktale. History, Genre, Meaning*. Trans. from Hebrew by Jacqueline S. Teitelbaum. Bloomington 1999, pp. 120-132, 283-297.
- 4 Let us mention a selection of studies written in this spirit: Liebes, Yehuda: *Hamashiah shel haZohar – lide-muto hameshihit shel R. Shim'on bar-Yohai*. In: *Hara'yon hameshihi beYisrael – yom Iyun leregel melot shmonim shana leGershom Schalom*. Ed. by Shemuel Re'em. Jerusalem 1982, pp. 87-234; Oron, Michal: *Motiv hayanuqa umashma'uto besefer haZohar*. In: *Hidushei Zohar: mehqarim hadashim besifrut haZohar*. Ed. by Ronit Meroz. *Te'uda*, 21-22, Tel Aviv 2007, pp. 129-164; Oron, Michal: *Midrash Ha-Ne'elam – muqdam umeuḥar*. In: *Kabbalah*, 22 (2001), pp. 109-148; Yisraeli, Oded: *Za'aqato hakevusha shel Esav – min hamidrash haqadum leshilhei haZohar*. In: *Hidushei Zohar*. Ed. by Ronit Meroz, pp. 165-198; Meroz, Ronit: *"Ve'ani lo hayiti sham?!" – Qovlanutav shel RASHBI 'al pi sipur Zohari bilti yadua'*. In: *Tarbiḥ*, 71 (2002), pp.163-193; Meroz, Ronit: *Der Aufbau des Buches Sohar*. In: *PaRDeS – Zeitschrift der Vereinigung für Jüdische Studien e.V.*, (2005) 11, pp. 16-36; Fishbane, Eitan: *Tears of Disclosure. The Role of Weeping in Zoharic Narrative*. In: *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy*, 11 (2002), pp. 25-47; Wolski, Nathan: *Those Who Know have Wings. Celestial Journeys with Masters of the Academy*. In: *Kabbalah*, 16 (2007), pp. 83-114. A Hebrew translation of most of the story discussed here appeared for the first time in Bin Gorion (Berdiczewski), M. Y.: *Mimeqor Yisrael*. Ed. by Bin Gorion. Tel Aviv 1966, pp. 246-247 (not included in the English edition of this book). Although Bin Gorion did not include a discussion of the character of the text, his inclusion of it in the anthology is evidence of his reading of the Zohar as a literary work.

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The story is about two Sages, Rabbi Yehuda bar Shalom and Rabbi Abba, who happen upon a grave. Unexpectedly, they are privileged to speak with a dead man who is buried there, and “awakens” for the first time in twelve years (§1). They try to take advantage of this opportunity to hear about the doings of the dead in the world to come in a general way (§3), and thus they find out about this through exposure to the private family story of this particular dead man.⁵ They hear that his son was kidnapped by a gentile when he was a small child and since then the kidnapper has been beating him every day.⁶ Because of his son’s misfortune, the father cannot rest in peace or dwell in the place reserved for him in the world to come: his sorrow prevents him from entering the Garden of Eden (§2). However, on that very day, so he had been told, he would be able to see his son (§3). Indeed, a short time after he “awakens”, the son appears. He has succeeded in getting free of his oppressor and has run away, still bleeding (§4). The Sages learn from this that the prayers of the dead man were truly answered, and now the son will be more tranquil in this world and the father, in the next. Thus the end of the story reverses the situations of the dead man and his son, because their distress has been alleviated. The situation of the Sages is also reversed, although in the opposite direction, and not to the same degree – from comfort to astonishment. They flee from the place in great alarm and are afraid to speak with the dead man again (§4). From their point of view, the conclusion of the event showed them how imperfect their knowledge was. The turning point in the story of these four protagonists takes place in the twilight zone between wakefulness and sleep: as he is about to attain the quiet he yearns for, when his son is redeemed from his suffering, the dead man awakens from his restless slumber, and this denies sleep to the Sages and brings disquiet into their lives.

As is apparent from the foregoing, the story is masterful in presenting parallels and contrasts.⁷ This is also true of the description of the protagonists. The two pairs are similar in having paternal and filial relations, which hint at the paternal function of the dead with respect to the living: on the one hand, the Sages represent father and son – Abba means “father”, and Bar Shalom means “son of peace”. On the other hand we have the dead man and his son, whose names are Livai (son of) bar Laḥma and Laḥma bar (son of) Livai, an indication of the chain of fathers and sons. The Sages conduct themselves in a relaxed manner, as shown by their sitting down to eat and by their taking for granted that they would be able to sleep soon. Tranquility and wisdom attend them. Their tranquility is indicated by the name Bar Shalom, while R. Abba’s name attests to his being “a father ... in wisdom and years.”⁸ The dead man and his son, by contrast, have no rest, for they are devoured by sorrow and grief. The dead man cannot enter the place he deserves, and the son is in constant flight. True, the father has awakened just now, which implies that he was

5 And even of this they learn in fragments. The dead man tells some of it, the son reveals another part, and they understand the rest on their own.

6 It is not impossible that the kidnapping took place when he was an infant, because he was Jewish. See below.

7 See also, the Sages flee about half a mile (§4). The parallel to this, according to some of the versions, is found in the same paragraph, for were it not for the dead, half of the world would not exist for even half a day. Similarly, in the same paragraph, the son flees from his captor, and the sages flee away from the grave. And also: the dead man has a vision of his son’s face (§1) but it is the sages who actually see him (§4).

8 According to another passage in the Zohar – I, 70b.

sleeping before then, but it was a troubled and worried sleep. The names of the father and son, Laḥma and Bar Laḥma are an ironic testimony to their situation, as one meaning of the word *Laḥma* is bread or food.⁹ Whereas the Sages actually sit down to eat, the dead father, whose essence is apparently bound up with eating, cannot be nourished by the brilliance of the Divine Presence (Shechina) like those who dwell in the world to come.¹⁰ Another meaning of the name, at least in Syriac, is suitable, fitting;¹¹ but, as noted, the father cannot enter his proper place in the Garden of Eden. A third meaning of the name is connected with warfare and threat, and, in fact, the son is constantly threatened, and the father identifies with him.¹² Thus, a short time after R. Abba and Bar Shalom are exposed to “warfare” (*Laḥma*) and “the son of warfare,” the latter obtain the food and peacefulness they deserve. Did Bar Shalom [the son of peace] make any contribution to this change? The story does not divulge this, but in any event the tranquility of the two sages is definitely disturbed.

In this discussion we saw that the message of the story is also constructed on the use of symbolism which is attached to names. In addition to this strategy we also find an allusion to a text from the Babylonian Talmud that deals with the question of the details of a public fast (Ta'anit 16a). There, whereas Rabbi Ḥanina presents the opinion that as part of a public fast, people should go out to cemeteries so that the dead will request mercy for the living, R. Levi bar Laḥma (or Bar Ḥama) hints at a metaphorical interpretation of that possibility: the only meaning of the visit to the cemetery is the declaration that “we are as good as dead before You.” It appears that our story brings up this name with ironical intent, since R. Levi bar Laḥma himself is revealed to the sages, thereby admitting his own “error” and assuring them that even he himself was now praying for the living! It seems that rather than interest in the historical figure, this protest uses that figure in a current controversy. It is an additional rhetorical means, which combines with the tendency of the entire story to prove that the dead do indeed pray for the living, and thereby they protect them.

In our text it is possible to find additional, though partial, intertextual structuring, and it alludes to the story of Joseph, who was also sold to gentiles, whose father did not know whether he was living or dead, and who wished to see his face before dying (and in the spirit of our story, we may say “before he truly died”, meaning, before he entered his place in the upper world).¹³ Are we meant to conclude from this that the father has the status of Jacob, the father of the People of Israel, and that his son could ascend to greatness like Joseph? This is certainly a possibility.

The two Sages happen upon the grave when (according to the manuscripts) they enter the *an Idra*, a threshing floor (in Aramaic) (§1).¹⁴ For the Sages this represents a closed and protected place where one can sleep. Some time after this they find that this is not the case, and they flee for their lives from the threshing floor. For the dead man and his son the

9 See Jastrow, Marcus: *A Dictionary of the Targumim, the Talmud Babli and Yerushalmi and the Midrashic Literature*. Jerusalem 1995, p. 704; Sokoloff, Michael: *A Dictionary of Jewish Babylonian Aramaic of the Talmudic and Geonic Periods*. Ramat-Gan 2002, p.622; Sokoloff, Michael: *A Dictionary of Jewish Palestinian Aramaic of the Byzantine Period*. Ramat Gan 1990, p. 280.

10 See for example Berakhot 16a.

11 Payne Smith, Robert: *Thesaurus Syriacus*. Oxonii 1879-1901, p. 240.

12 Payne Smith: *Thesaurus Syriacus*, p. 703.

13 See Genesis 46:30 – “And Israel said unto Joseph: ‘Now let me die, since I have seen thy face, that thou art yet alive.’”

14 See for example, Dan. 2:35; Jastrow: *A Dictionary of the Targumim*, p. 18.

threshing floor represents the flails – the whips from which the son suffers and the father’s disquiet. The Sages’ entry into the threshing floor signals the moment in which the fates of the dead man and his son are reversed the way grain is turned over on a threshing floor and the way the prayers of the dead can avert the evil decree, from *din* [judgment] to *rahāmim* [mercy].¹⁵

Just how the communication was made between the living and the dead in this case is not explained, but a clear aspect of reciprocal relations among three groups is evident in this story. We have already mentioned that the dead pray on behalf of the living who suffer. Meanwhile we have learned that the dead help some of the Sages by providing them with knowledge. But we also find that the dead need the living – at least the dead father here depends on his son.¹⁶ He cannot attain the goodness destined for him before the latter is redeemed from his suffering (and he might also have been dependent on the visit of the Sages).

As in other sources, it is also possible that one of the reasons why the father cannot rest is not only his son's suffering but also the fact that because of the conditions of his son's life, being in captivity among the gentiles, he cannot study Torah or pray.¹⁷ Perhaps this is also an indication of his age; it should be noted that the dead man awakens for the first time after many years – twelve according to some of the sources, and thirteen according to others.¹⁸ Thus it could be that the son was kidnapped as an infant, and now, if it were only possible, he ought to begin observing the commandments, since, according to Jewish law, he has come of age.

The motif of the “restless dead” links our story to a large group of folk tales found among many nations.¹⁹ A story like this is meant to “prove” the validity of certain values. Thus, for example, in some stories from the Christian context the dead person cannot rest in his grave since he did not confess before his death.²⁰ Most probably, our story not only advocates the possibility of communicating with the dead, but it also reflects a well-defined world of Jewish values: perhaps the story serves as example of the suffering of the Jews at the hand of their oppressors; and perhaps it is intended to emphasize the redemptive power

15 Cf. Breshit Rabba 63D, Albeck & Theodor’s edition, p.681, or Jastrow: *A Dictionary of the Targumim*.

16 Cf. Sanhedrin 1094a, A son exonerates a father, a father does not exonerate a son.

17 This is the case, for example, in the story “The Expulsion of the Angel of Death”, Zohar, I, 217b-218b. See also the story that appears in two versions: Zohar Hadash, 49a; *ibid.* 84, col. 2-3 (Midrash ha-Ne’elam, Ruth). For an analysis of it see Weiss, Yehudith: *Shtei girsaot ha'Zohar' leagadat 'Hatana vehamet*. In: *Tarbiz*, 78 (2009), pp. 527-554. Beside these versions, there are several different versions of the story “Hatana vehamet”; see the following studies: Kushelevsky, Rella: *Hatana vehamet handed*. In: *Enziklopedia shel hasippur hayehudi – sippur 'okev sippur*. Ed. by Yoav Elstein, Avidov Lipsker and Rella Kushelevsky. Ramat Gan 2005, pp. 281-296; Lerner, Myron B.: *Ma'aseh hatana vehamet – gilgulav hasifrutim vehahilkhatim*. In: *Asuppot*, 2 (1988), pp. 29-70; Yassif, Eli: *Shevarim geluhei zakan. hamaavak 'al hamitos shel Zefat bayamim hahem bazeman haze*. In: *Mikan*, 4 (2005), pp. 42-79; Landa, Luis: *Hamet hanoded vehamuyam*. In: *Sadan*, 6 (2007), pp. 157-172 (and see also the articles mentioned in the ample bibliographical references in these articles).

18 See n. 38 below.

19 See the extent of the material found in the following groups of motifs listed in Thompson, Stith: *Motif Index of Folk-Literature*. 6 vols. Copenhagen and Bloomington, 1955-1959: E750, E755, Q174, Q560.

20 Goldberg, Harriet: *Motif-Index of Medieval Spanish Folk Narratives*. Tempra 1998, p. 33, in the group of motifs E411 one can find a variety of ethical reasons for the restlessness of the dead.

of Torah or prayer (of which the son has been deprived against his will), as in other *exemplum* stories in the Zohar.²¹

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Let us return to the matter of the place where the Sages rested. Is it actually possible that a grave would be in a threshing floor? The testimony of the manuscripts (as opposed to the printed editions), on this point is of great interest. In the course of my research I have located more than 550 manuscripts of the Zohar, but of these only sixteen contain the story under discussion here.²² Significantly, *all* of these manuscripts state in the first paragraph of the text that the Sages entered *had* [one] *idra/edra* or *har* [a mountain of] *idra/edra*, whereas the printed editions read “*atra*” [place]. The entire uniformity of these manuscripts implies that it was the printers who changed the wording. Why do the manuscripts all agree on the word *idra/edra*, whereas the printed editions changed it?

A solution to this riddle is suggested by the hypothesis that the term *idra/edra* emerged from a play on words that depends on knowledge of both Aramaic and Greek. The Aramaic *idra* [threshing floor] is similar in sound to the Greek ἔδρα, which means:

sitting place, seat, chair, seat of honor, throne, abode, especially of the gods, sanctuary, temple, dwelling place of gods or men, quarters of the sky in which omens appear, sitting, especially of suppliant; sitting still, inactivity, delay, quietude, session of a council, assembly.²³

If we read the story in the light of this possibility, a certain change will take place in our understanding of it. According to the earlier reading, two Sages happened upon a grave. They were going from one place to another, and all they wanted was a safe place to sleep. Before they lay down in the threshing floor that they found on their way, they partook of some food, like any other person. While they were falling asleep, completely unexpectedly, a dead man awakened, burst into their world, and forced them into conversation. Surprisingly, they rapidly recover their composure and try to take advantage of this opportunity to find out just who the dead man is and what they can learn from him about the world of the dead. In the end, the dead man drives them away precisely at the critical moment when he manages to liberate his son from captivity; the manner in which this event takes place remains quite esoteric. Afterward, when they see the son, they realize that the miracle has actually occurred, and they are more alarmed and flee. The omniscient narrator makes certain to tell us that they never returned to the grave. But why would they go back there? If it had been merely a chance place to sleep, with nothing special about it, a stopover on the way to somewhere else, why would they return to it?

21 On the redemptive power of the Torah, see “The Story of R. Yosei ben Pazi.” One version is printed in the Zohar, I, 88a-b (Sitrei Torah, though it should be Midrash ha-Ne’elam). Two other versions are printed accompanied by an analysis (and reference to the Zoharic section to which it should belong) in Meroz, Ronit: *Zoharic Narratives and their Adaptations*. In: *Hispania Judaica*, 3 (2001), pp. 3-63, esp. pp. 16-34, 50-54. On the power of the Torah and of prayer, see the story that appears in Zohar ḥadash, 49 col. A; *ibid*, 84 cols. B-C (Midrash ha-Ne’elam Ruth) discussed above, in n. 17.

22 For a list of the Manuscripts see the table below, preceding the text.

23 See the Greek Lexicons available on the *Perseus Digital Library* website: www.perseus.tufts.edu/cgi-bin/resolveform.

By contrast, if we assume that the contexts of the Greek word are in the background of the story, then the story takes on new meaning. The two Sages were aware of the existence of a certain place that was sanctified, *hedra* in the Greek sense of the word, perhaps on a mountaintop, where it was possible to contact higher powers such as the souls of the dead, perhaps in some magic way. They did not arrive at that place by chance, while going somewhere else. They went there purposely and adopted appropriate means. Indeed they attained what they had sought. They managed to communicate with a dead person in order to learn about him and about the fate of the dead in general. Nevertheless – as with many other mystical or magical events (for example, the Four who entered the Orchard) the experience proved to be more difficult and frightening than expected. They could not stand it, so they fled. Now it is clear why the omniscient narrator emphasized that they never returned to the grave – although they would have liked to go back and continue practicing the techniques for which they had gone there, they did not dare to do so and had to be content with what they had learned and experienced. According to this reading of the story, we find that the Sages did not go to a threshing floor, but to a *hedra* – the threshing floor only enters the story through a cross-linguistic play on words between Aramaic and Greek by virtue of the richness of the associative realm.

This second reading of the story appears preferable to me, but it is not consistent with the opinion held by most scholars that the entire Zohar, including this story, was written in Castile in the late thirteenth century, because Greek was not commonly known there at that time. It is impossible to assume that there was a large enough audience for a story entirely based on a well-defined concept, the meaning of which was clear only to those who knew Greek. Thus, the claim advanced here is different: we argue that the story was written in the Greek speaking, Byzantine cultural sphere, *or that it preserves the influence of that sphere*. This possibility is quite consistent with our earlier hypothesis, that the beginnings of the Zohar date back to eleventh century Palestine, and that the text gradually migrated to thirteenth century Castile, and that, although most of the Zohar was written in Castile, it did preserve earlier strata.²⁴ At that time, the most important gateway between Palestine and Europe lay in the Byzantine realm,²⁵ and therefore the hypothesis of a passage through Byzantium is merely the most obvious and likely one. The impression that arises is that the text and its bearers passed through that area, and in the process the text was enlarged beyond its earlier strata and absorbed many Greek words. Many scholars have already noted the presence of these words in the text, but the matter has not yet been conclusively resolved. One suggestion is that the Zohar was written in Palestine during the first millennium, or even before that, so that the appearance of the Greek words would preserve Hellenistic influence. Other explanations maintain that the Zohar was written in Castile in the late thirteenth century, and that the Greek words entered under the influence of familiar

24 See Meroz, Ronit: *The Middle Eastern Origins of Kabbalah*. In: *Journal for the Study of Sephardic and Mizrahi Jewry*. Feb. 2007, pp. 39-56, available online: <http://sephardic.fiu.edu/journal/RonitMeroz.pdf>. See also Oron: *Midrash ha-Ne'elam*.

25 Zimels, Zvi J.: *talmidei hakhamim velimud hatorah bebizantion uveitalia*. In: *Hahistoria shel 'am yisrael*. Series 2, Pt. II. Ed. by Betsalel (Cecil) Roth and Zvi Baras Tequfat ha'ofel, Jerusalem 1973, pp. 103-111, 276-287, esp. p. 104; Bonfil, Reuven: *Bein erets-yisrael levein bavel. kavim leheqer toldot hatarbut shel hayehudim beltalia hadromit uveeiropa hanotsrit biyemei habeinayim hamuqdamim*. In: *Shalem*, 5 (1987), pp. 1-30.

writings of the Sages, or that the words were invented, and the similarity with Greek is merely coincidental.²⁶ In my book, *Yovalei Zohar*, I present other words whose presence in the Zohar can be explained by the hypothesis that at least some of the Greek words entered the text early in the second millennium, before it reached Castile. In any event, as we shall see below, examination of the text of the Zohar makes one aware of the changes that the word *edra/idra* and the phenomenon it describes underwent, and this, too, supports our claim.

As we have seen the Sages chose a place that stood out from its surroundings, most probably a mountain upon which was a grave.²⁷ Though they did not state this explicitly, it appears that they employed some kind of ritual for communicating with the dead. Although the Gemara states, “someone who consults the dead must starve himself and go and sleep in a cemetery,”²⁸ here they did not fast. On the contrary, they ate (§1), and this, too, might have entailed some magical intention. When they lay down to sleep, they naturally lowered their heads. Not surprisingly, they heard the voice of the dead, for according to *Midrash ha-Ne'elam*, the textual stratum of the Zohar to which our story belongs, this is the ordinary way and means to hear them. Thus, according to another story in *Midrash ha-Ne'elam*, R. Zmira “inclines” his ears or “bends over” the earth in order to hear the voices of the dead in Gehenna.²⁹ However, according to an early version of the “Story of R. Yosei Ben Pazi” R. Kahana bends over to the ground; probably in order to hear a still small voice or to hear the words of one of the righteous in the Garden of Eden.³⁰ Although in the following account, which is taken from the story of Rav Metivta, the matter is described with considerable reservations, one may infer from it that bending over was something well known in the literature of the Zohar in its various strata:

That voice [the voice of the dead when their souls leave their bodies] includes the spirit and the soul and the breath of the bones from the sadness of the flesh, and it wanders in the air.³¹ And every one [of these parts] is separated from the others, and when [each

26 Here are a number of publications that deal with these various possibilities: Scholem, Gershom: *Haim hiber R. Moshe de Leon et Sefer haZohar?* In: *Mada'ei hayahdut*, I (1926), pp. 16-29; and esp. p. 19; idem: *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*. New York 1974, pp. 162-166, n. 54; Huss, Boaz: *Biur hamlim hazarot besefer haZohar – mahadura mada'it*. In: *Kabbalah*, 1 (1996), pp. 167-204. Tishby; Lachower: *Wisdom of the Zohar*, Vol. I, pp. 66-67; Hoshen, Moshe; Hoshen, Dalia: *Leberur mispar leshonot besefer haZohar*. In: *Sinai*, 110 (1992), pp. 274-277, esp. p. 276. Liebes, Yehudah: *Hebrew and Aramaic as Languages of the Zohar*. In: *Aramaic Studies*, vol. 4.1 (2006), pp. 35-52.

27 Cf. for one example of a great many, on the matter of the burial of Samuel in Ramah, that is on a mountain; 1 Sam. 25:1.

28 Sanhadrin 65b. See also the story in Berakhot 18b about the pious man who slept in a cemetery and listened to the conversation of two spirits.

29 Zohar hadash, 84 col. B-C (Midrash ha-Ne'elam, Ruth). On this story see also n. 17.

30 The later version of this story is printed in the Zohar, II, 88a-b. The early version is found in the Munich MS 203, 114b-115a. These two versions were published and discussed in my article. See Meroz: *Zoharic Narratives*, esp. p. 51. On the possibility that the abode of the righteous (the Garden of Eden) is underground, see several passages in the Zohar, e.g. the story “Yo'ezer in the Cave” (II, 13a-14a). In the spirit of the second part of this article, it is significant that the later version of the story, “The Story of R. Yosei ben Pazi”, Rabbi Kahana does not “bend over”, but he “enters his room”. See near n. 36. This expression is also found in the Zohar, I, 89a-90a (Sitrei Torah). On him, also see below, near n. 36.

31 Before this passage it says (as an adaptation of an idea that appears in Yoma 20b) that the “voices of sorrow” that a person utters at the time of his death go on to wander around the world, from one end to another, and they enter crevices and underground tunnels.

part] reaches the place that it enters, it sits as though dead. And all of those witches and sorcerers know these places in their magic spells, and they bend over the earth and they hear that sound, when the spirit and the soul and the breath of the bones are joined together, and they announce something. This is “a ghost out of the ground” [Is. 29:4].³²

The criticism in the story of Rav Metivta relates to two elements: the bending over and the effort to make a connection among the various parts of the soul of the dead. It also seems to be directed inward, toward the circle of the Zohar itself, and not only at the magical customs of other nations,³³ since not only bending over is known in the Zohar, but there is also a similar process of connecting the various parts of the soul of the dead. This process is actually represented in the Zohar in a positive light (though without explicit use of the verb “to bend over”) as part of the action of the righteous when the world needs mercy.³⁴

Our text shares little information about the process of contacting the dead beyond the components eating, bending over, and lying down.³⁵ Thus, for example, we do not know whether this communication was part of a cult of a specific saint. The meaning of the partial nature of the description should be seen in the context of the genre of writing. Our text is neither a magic formula nor a book of magic. Nor, of course is it an account of a historical event. The text is an *exemplum*. Hence, it does not refer to the past, providing a technical or literary account of some event. It is a rhetorical text aimed at the future, for the purpose of conveying a moral. It assumes that knowledge of magic is self-evident, so there is no need to prove it. It is not concerned with going into detail. Magic for it is merely a component like any other possible component in constructing the moral.

Let us return to the word *edra/idra*. Among Greek speakers, this word could convey the meaning of sojourning in a holy place, where it was possible to communicate with supernatural beings, but in Spain that meaning was unknown. After the word penetrated the Zo-

32 Zohar, III,179a(Rav Metivta). The source reads:

“ההוא קלא איהי כלילא רוחא ונפשא והבל גרמי מעצבונא דבשרא ומשטטא באוירא. וכל חד מתפרש דא מן דא, וכד מטא לההוא אתא דעאל ביה יתבא כמיתא. וכל אינון חרשין וקוסמין ידעין אתרין אלין בחרשייהו, וגחנין לארעא ושמעין קלא דא, דמתחברן אינון רוחא ונפשא והבל דגרמי ואודעין מלה. ודא איהו **אוב מארץ** [יש' כט ד].”

On possible connections between this technique and the practice among Ashkenazi Jews, see for example the following: Ginsburg, Elliot: *The Sabbath in the Classical Kabbalah*. New York 1989, pp. 104, 106, 168 (nn. 183, 186, 189), 175 (n. 231), the works of Ta-Shema, Yisrael Y. such as: *Hannigle shebanistar – leheqer sheq'ei hahalakha besefer haZohar*. Tel Aviv 1995; Ta-Shema, Yisrael Y.: *Od leba'ayat hameqorot haashenaziim besfer haZohar. hashlamot venosafot lesifri 'Hanigle shebanistar'*. In: *Kabbalah*, 3 (1998), pp. 259-264, and Kanarfogel, Ephrayim: *On the Assessment of R. Moshe ben Nahman (Nahmanides) and his Literary Oeuvre*. In: *Jewish Book Annual*, 51 (1993-94), pp. 153, 159-172.

33 For other examples of self-critique see Meroz: *Yuvalei Zohar*; idem: *Mashiah akhshav? 'Amadot meshihiot shonot besefer haZohar*. In: *Migvan de'ot vehashqafot betarbut Yisrael – migvan de'ot vehashqafot 'al reshit veaharit*. Edited by Dror Kerem and Aharon Zion. Israel Ministry of Education, Jerusalem 2000, pp. 59-72.

34 Zohar, III, 70b-71b. The description is very well known, among other things, because it was one of the starting points for the technique of prostration practiced by the Rabbi Yizhak Luria (known by the acronym – ha-Ari). See the text cited in his name by R. Hayim Vital: *Sha'ar ruah haqodesh*. Jerusalem 1912, fol. 43a-b.

35 The processes of communication with the dead can have many varieties, which are dispersed along an entire range of characteristics, from popular festivals in rituals for saints (*zi'ara*) to fully magical practices for gaining knowledge (necromancy) or in practices with a more mystical aspect (such as what are called *yihudim* [unifications] in Lurianic Kabbalah). A certain tomb often has several functions, such as that of Rabbi Shim'on bar Yoḥai in Meron. It should also be pointed out that the meaning of the terms used in this area, as well as the value attributed to them vary with changes in the cultural context. This is the case, for example, in relation to central terms in Hebrew: *derisha el hametim* [appealing to the dead] and *ha'alaah beov* [raising spirits]. This is not the place to expand on the subject.

har circle in Spain, we note a gradual change in the way it was used. We may assume that the word appeared in texts that the members of the circle studied and to which they related as a sacred tradition, but the word itself, as a Greek word, was unknown. From its contexts they inferred the spirit of its use, until it became part of the jargon that characterized the circle. Sometimes the word *edra/idra* assumed the meaning of the Aramaic word “*idrona*” (room), especially if the context preserved the supernatural connotations that had previously been attributed to it. Thus “*‘ael le’idrei*” [he entered his room],³⁶ means that he withdrew to his room for prayer and for some sort of mystical process. An additional meaning that developed in the circle of the Zohar is a dramatic, ceremonial gathering with a mystical, messianic character – a group of Sages (whose number is always typological, such as ten or seven) who gather together to repair the godhead. One after another they give speeches that deal with the anthropomorphic characteristics of the divinity, while a divine fire surrounds them on all sides. The Sages experience this ceremony as an entry into the “Orchard”, and some of them do not emerge from it “safely”.³⁷ The two most important gatherings described in this spirit in the Zohar are *Idra Zuta* and *Idra Rabba*. For our purposes it is important to emphasize the dominance of this meaning in the Zohar and, even more, for its interpreters over the generations. In their eyes the *Idra* sections became the most pronounced representatives of the spirit of the Zohar, its literary, theological, and experiential peak. For that reason, for devotees of the Zohar, the other meanings of the term (now probably pronounced) *idra* were shunted aside not only because, in quantity, they are indeed fewer, but mainly because of the way the Zohar was perceived.

As noted, according to the manuscript evidence, the word *edra/idra* survived intact within our story until the printed editions of the sixteenth century. However, now we can understand that the printers were already influenced by the developments we have mentioned, and therefore it seemed alien and out of context to them here. Its meaning in the *idra* sections is not at all consistent with the spirit of our story: for we hear about only two Sages here and not about an entire group. Moreover, they flee from the place rather than gathering together, and from the start they have no intention of repairing the godhead but rather of practicing a magical technique. The solution of the printed versions was marvelously successful. By means of an extremely small emendation, changing a single letter, they turned *edra/idra* into *atra*, a place, an ordinary site. Thus, everything works out well. The printers’ adoption of this change in the text shows both the foreign origin of the word (in our opinion, it was from the Byzantine realm) and the dramatic change that it underwent with the development of the Zohar in thirteenth century Castile.

The Grieving Dead

The version of the story presented here is found in the Vatican Library MS 206 (sig. 5r) in Byzantine script, apparently from Candia, c. 1400, fol. 4b. The microfilm number of this MS in the Hebrew Manuscripts Library of the National Library of Israel, Jerusalem, is 264,

³⁶ As noted in the later version of “The Story of R. Yosef ben Pazi”; See n. 21, 30 above.

³⁷ See Liebes, Yehudah: *peraqim bemilon sefer haZohar*. Doctoral dissertation. Publications of the Institute for Advanced Studies of the Faculty of Humanities, the Hebrew University. Jerusalem 1982, p. 95; idem: *Hamas-hiah shel haZohar*.

henceforth referred to solely by that number. The other sources, both manuscript and printed, are listed below:

| | |
|-------------------|---|
| אזולאי/ Azulay | R. Abraham Azulay: <i>Or Ha-Hama</i> . Jerusalem 1876 |
| 2א | Oxford, the Bodleian library, Neubauer Cat. 1564, #16932, fifteenth century, North African script, fol. 207b |
| 3א | Oxford, the Bodleian library, Neubauer Cat. 1884, #17289, sixteenth century, Sephardic script, fol. 187 a-b |
| 17א | Oxford, the Bodleian library, Neubauer Cat. 2514, #22226, sixteenth century, Safed, Sephardic script, fol. 8b |
| 16ו | Vatican, Neofiti 23, #631, fifteenth century, Sephardic script, fol. 73b-741 |
| 3לי | Lyon 12, #5606, 1544 or 1549, Oriental Script, fol. 11 a-b |
| 5מי | Munich 20, #23110, sixteenth century, Sephardic script, fols. 211b-212a |
| מנ | Printed edition, Mantua, 1558-1560 |
| מר | Margalioṯ's edition, Jerusalem 1940 |
| 5מס | Moscow, Ginzburg 293, #47618, 1549, Pisa, Italian script, fol. 6b |
| 41נ | New York, The Jewish Theological Seminary 1930, #11028, 1553, Pieve di Cento, Italian script, fols. 17b-18a |
| 47נ | New York, The Jewish Theological Seminary 29076, #11174, sixteenth-seventeenth century, Oriental Script, fol. 5 a-b |
| 56נ | New York, The Jewish Theological Seminary 55367, #37301, seventeenth century, Oriental script, fol. 5 a-b |
| 2פ | Paris 779, #12560, fifteenth century, Byzantine script, fol. 118a |
| 5פ | Paris 782, #12563, fifteenth century, Sephardic script, fol. 306a |
| 1קט | Cambridge, Trinity College 12140, #12198, seventeenth century, Oriental script, fols. 168b-169a |
| 2קט | Cambridge, Trinity College 1844, #12199, sixteenth century (after 1553), Italian script, fols. 14b-15a |
| קר | Printed edition, Cremona, 1558-1560 |
| 2צ | Zürich, Heidelberg 83, #2641, 1500, Sephardic script, fol. 11 a-b |

The Aramaic Text

- [1] ר' יהודה בר שלום הוה אזיל באורח' ור' אבא הוה עמיה. עאלו להר אדרא ובתו תמן, אכלו. כד בעו למשכב שווי ראשיהון בההוא תלא דארעא והוה חד קברא. עד דלא דמכו קרא קלא מן קברא, אמ': זרעא לארעא אזלא! תריסר שנין הוה דלא אתערית בר האידינא! פרצופא דבני חמינא הכא!³⁸
- [2] א"ר יהודה: מאן את?
אמר: יודאי אנא, ואנא יתיב נזיפא דאנא לא בעינא למיעל בגין ההוא צערא דבני דגנביה ההוא גוי כד זעירא ולקי ליה כל יומא. וצערא דיליה דחי ליה למיעל בדוכתאי, ובהאי אתרא לא אתערית בר האידינא.³⁹
- [3] א"ל: ואתון ידעי צערא דחיי?
א"ל: שרי קברא, אי לאו בעותא דילן על חיי לא יתקיימן עלמא! והאידינא איתערית הכא, דהו אמרין כל יומא דלעול ייתי ברי הכא, ולא ידענא אי בחיי אי במותא.⁴⁰
- [4] א"ל ר' יהוד': מאי עבידתיכו בההוא עלמא?
אתרגיש קברא ואמ': איזילו קמי, דהאידינא ילקון לברי!
תנהו וערקו מתמן פלגות מיל. יתבו עד דנהיר צפרא. קמו למיזל, חמו חד גבר, דהוה רהיש וערק, והוה שתית דמא אכתפוי. אחדו ביה וסח להו עובדא.⁴¹
- [5] אמרו ליה: מה שמך?
א"ל: לחמא בר ליואי.
אמרו: ומה ליואי בר לחמא הוה ההוא מיתא ומסתפינא לאשתעי יתיר בהדיה. לא אהדרו.
א"ר אבא: האי דאמ' דצלוחא דמתייא מגיני על חיי, מנל' – דכת' ויעלו בנגב ויבא עד חברון [במ' יג כב].⁴²

English Translation

- [1] Rabbi Yehudah bar Shalom was walking on the road and Rabbi Abba was with him. They came to a mountain of *idra/edra*, lodged there [and] ate. When they wanted to lie down they lay their heads on a mound of earth⁴³ where there was a grave. Before they fell

38 § 1. להר [161 ועוד: לחד. אדרא] מן, קר, מן (בלבד): אתרא. חד קברא] מר ועוד: חד קברא תמן. דמכו] 51: נמנו, ותוקן ע"פ 161 ורוב המקורות. לארעא] 51: לדרע', ותוקן ע"פ 161 ורוב המקורות. תריסר] 161 ועוד: תליסר; וראו בסמוך להע' 18. פרצופא] 41 ועוד: דפרצופא. חמינא] 51: המילה מוכתמת והושלם ע"פ 161 ורוב המקורות; ל"3, קט"1: חזינא.

39 § 2. נזיפא] 2: כסיפא. בעינא] 51: מוכתם, והושלם ע"פ 161 ורוב המקורות. דבני] 161 ועוד: דברי. גוי] קר ועוד: עע"ז; מר: עכו"ם. ולקי] 41 ועוד: ואלקי. אתרא] 161 ועוד: דוכת'.

40 § 3. א"ל שרי] פירושו של ר' חיים ויטל לזוהר בתוך אזולאי, יט ט"ב: אל שדי (וראו להלן בהערות). עלמא] 161 ורוב המקורות: פלגות עלמ'; מ"5, מן ועוד: פלגות יומא (וראו בהע' 45 לעיל). דלעול] מן ועוד: דלעגלא (והנוסח מושפע אולי מן הקדיש).

41 § 4. איזילון] מ"5 ועוד: זילון; מן ועוד: אזילו. קמי] 161 ורוב המקורות: קומו. פלגות] 161 וכל שאר המקורות: כפלגות. גבר] מן, קר, מר: בר נש. וסח להו] 161 (בלבד): ושאלוהו.

42 § 5. ליואי] 51: לואי, ותוקן ע"פ 161 וכל שאר המקורות, וכן ע"פ שאר מופעיו של שם זה ב-51.

43 "A mound of earth": in the anonymous commentary, "Derekh Emet", which is attached to the printed common editions of the Zohar, we find, there: "they lay their heads on a small hill, where there was a grave."
"A seed is going into the ground": According to "Derekh Emet" there, the sentence describes a reversal in the situation of the dead man: until now, for twelve years, he himself was regarded as someone "who went into the ground," meaning that he returned to dust rather than entering the Garden of Eden, but now, upon seeing his son, he awakens and is about to enter the Garden of Eden. R. Hayim Vital, by contrast, quotes (in, Azulay: *Or Ha-Hama*, 19a-d) for everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose (Ecl. 3:1); hence there is a time for the seeds sown in the earth. Now the time has come for the father to awaken, for he was planted in the earth like a seed. At the same time, he claims that mention of the "seed" is merely a metaphor indicating that now the time has also come to liberate the father's seed, his son, from captivity. According to most commentators on the Zohar, the dead father referred to his son and not to himself by the term "seed". Thus, for example, R. Moshe Cordovero and R. Abraham Galanti (in Azulay) and others.

asleep a voice called from the grave, saying: A seed is going into the ground! It has been twelve years that I have not awakened except now! The face of my son I see now!

[2] Rabbi Yehudah said: Who are you?

He said: I am a Jew, and I sit [as if] rebuked,⁴⁴ for I cannot enter [the garden of Eden] because of the sorrow of my son who was stolen by a heathen when he was still small and he beats him every day. And his sorrow prevents me from entering my place and I have awakened just now in this place.

[3] He said to him: And do you know the sorrows of the living?⁴⁵

He said to him: [By the life of] those who dwell in graves, were it not for our supplications for the living they would not exist in the world. And now I have awakened here for today I was told to come in [since] my son would come here, but I know not whether alive or dead.

[4] Rabbi Yehudah said to him: What do you do in that world?

The grave rumbled and said: Go away! For now they are beating my son!

They were astonished and fled from there about a half a mile. They sat down until the morning light shone. They rose to go and saw a man who was running and fleeing, and he was bleeding from his shoulders. They gripped him and he told them [his] story.

[5] They said to him: What is your name?

He said to them: Laḥma bar Livai.

They said: And was not Livai bar Laḥma [the name] of that dead man? We are afraid to talk with him anymore! They did not return [to that place].

Rabbi Abba said: It is said that the prayers of the dead protect the living. How do we know this? Because it is written “And they went up into the Negev and came unto Hebron” [Num.13:22].⁴⁶

“I have not awakened”: according to R. Moshe Cordovero (in Azulay) this means that the soul of the dead man cannot visit his grave. See also Midrash Shim'oni, Esther, sig. 10057, where the son's sorrow causes “the sleep of the father's of the world to wander from the Cave of the Makhpela,” which is where they are buried.

44 §2 “rebuked”: In Galanti's opinion (in Azulay), this does not mean that the dead man was rebuked from above, but that he does not wish to enter his place in the Garden of Eden. Significantly, this argument is inconsistent with the general tendency of the Zohar regarding the son's ability to influence the father's fate. See n. 16-17 and in their vicinity.

“I cannot enter [the garden of Eden]”: Cf. Berakhot 18b, where Levi is excluded from the yeshiva in heaven.

45 “The dead know the sorrows of the living”: Cf. Berakhot 18a-b.

“By the life of those who dwell in the grave”: according to R. Hayim Vital (in Azulay) the correct wording is “el shadday”, meaning: “the dead man swears by the Holy One, blessed be He, who opens the graves of the Jews [that this is so].” In the opinion of Reuven Margalioṭ (in his commentary printed in his Zohar edition) the dead man is appalled by the words of the Sages, who doubt whether the dead even know about the sorrow of the living, and he therefore asks for “pardon from all the graves.”

“Whether alive”: that is to say, taking a cue from R. Moshe Cordovero (in Azulay): “that he will be rescued from his captivity and prostrate himself on my grave.” Either way, R. Moshe Cordovero hints at resentment toward the Sages, who did not “feel his sorrow, to redeem him,” that is to say, to redeem the son from captivity. Needless to say, this interpretation is different from the one presented in the present article.

46 §5. “Came unto Hebron”: this refers to the spies in the Bible. One of them was Caleb the son of Jephunneh, of whom it is said in the Talmud (Sotah 34b), that “he went and prostrated himself on the graves of the patriarchs: Fathers! Ask for mercy for me.”