

seeing it through to a successful completion. Bible scholars and students of medieval exegesis the world over should be eternally in their debt.

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GATES OF LIGHT: SHA'ARE ORAH. By Joseph Gikatilla. Avi Weinstein, trans. Pp. xxxiv + 401. San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1994. Cloth, \$30.00.

The most important contribution of the Kabbalists, both to the literature of mysticism in general and to the religious culture of Judaism, lies in the realm of language. The network of ten *sefirot* as they conceived them, each symbolized by a dazzlingly varied array of terms evoking the natural world, the Biblical narrative, and the realm of Jewish religious praxis, served to create a new language. Each of the *sefirot* is in effect a cluster of associations, and mention of any symbol-term from that group calls forth, by implication, the entire cluster. A highly enriched religious language is thus created, brimming with powerful associations. It is this new sort of symbolic speech that the Kabbalist uses to describe a reality otherwise beyond the reach of human language.

Every language needs a lexicon, and that is precisely the role filled by Joseph Gikatilla's *Sha'arey Orah*, written in Castille between 1280 and 1293, one of the most popular and readable books of the classical Spanish Kabbalah. Following the order of the ten *sefirot* from below, Gikatilla takes his reader up the ladder by providing a list of the symbol-terms, each accompanied by a sentence or paragraph explaining its usage and the reason why it is associated with that particular sefirotic cluster. Because language is so central to an understanding of Kabbalah altogether, it may be said that *Sha'arey Orah*, itself written in the limpid Hebrew prose of thirteenth century Spain, serves as an important introductory text to the study of Kabbalah, and it certainly has been used that way by many a modern student.

It is thus a joy to see the work translated into English, joining the growing list of Jewish mystical classics now available in translation. The book is published by none less than "The Sacred Literature Series of the

International Sacred Literature Trust," complete with an approbation from the Duke of Edinburgh. The volume, presented with the support of the Bronfman Foundation, has been handsomely produced. The book was translated by Avi Weinstein, a rabbi and educator who is not an academically trained student of Kabbalah. Thanks are due to Weinstein for undertaking this arduous task. He has produced a readable and essentially accurate translation and has made this important work accessible to the English reader.

That is not to say that the translation is without its rough points. Offering nothing by way of notes or commentary, Weinstein leaves the reader to fend for himself in understanding the material, while the fact of translation into English has already rendered it opaque in comparison with the Hebrew. For one who does not already understand the secrets, I fear that this English version of *Gikatilla* will not convey very much.

In quite a few places the translation is marred by significant clumsiness and inconsistency. Let us take a rather standard bit of Kabbalistic exegesis, that of Job 28:12, as an example. *מֵאֵין הַחִכְמָה מֵאֵין הַמַּצָּא* is taken by the Kabbalists to be declarative rather than interrogative, meaning that "*Hokhmah* [the second *sefirah*] is derived from '*ayin* [the first *sefirah*]." This reading is found at least four times in the book. Once (p. 158) the translator ignores its Kabbalistic meaning (and even its Biblical origins), simply translating: "But where can wisdom be found." Three pages later we are given the secret meaning, the verse rendered as: "CHoCHMaH will be found in AYN (nothing)," but with no explanation. Later (p. 330) this verse becomes, with no change of meaning in the Hebrew, "VHaCHoCHMaH you will find from AYN," and yet again (p. 360) as "You will find wisdom in AYN." In the latter two versions it seems that the *nif'al* has been misread as a *qal*; hence the improper insertion of the second person. A brief note at the first occurrence and some good record-keeping during the translation process would have avoided such difficulties.

There are places where the translator's lack of Kabbalistic knowledge simply causes him to miss the point. The fact (p. 44) that the tenth *sefirah* *מקבלה כל הצוים* refers to color symbolism. It is black, and that takes in all colors; "receives all aspects" simply will not do. Elsewhere, despite his obvious knowledge of classical Hebrew, he gets carried away by an unthinking literalism. Referring to a surprising interpretation by the rabbis, *Gikatilla* says *עצמו ראשיהם ומה נפלאו דבריהם ומה* ("How wondrous their words, how lofty their minds!") Do we really need (pp. 55f.): "What caused their words to be so far-fetched, what gave their heads the strength

to give this interpretation?" In still other cases the English itself leaves much to be desired, falling far short of the eloquence of Gikatilla's Hebrew. On the relationship of *shekhinah* to King David we read (p. 36): "She cleaved to David, and it was from her that David inherited the kingdom, and it was this attribute that David supplicated himself to and appealed to...." Gikatilla deserves greater eloquence.

These inadequacies do not make the translation unusable. Throughout most of the book one can get a sense of what Gikatilla intended, especially if one has some previous knowledge of the Kabbalistic system. Accompanied by other selections from Kabbalistic sources, I could imagine assigning this work to students in a course on Jewish mysticism.

From the Hebraist's point of view, the transliterations employed in this book, where virtually every noun is a *terminus technicus* and therefore has to be preserved in Hebrew, are a particular source of annoyance. The antiquated CH is used for both ך and ם; no designation at all is used for an initial or final ך or ם; in the medial position they are sometimes recognized, sometimes not. Capital letters are used to indicate some consonants (sometimes, but not always, these are root letters), but not others. Abominations abound. On page 90 "oath" is rendered SHeVuAh, the well-known place name is BE'eR SHeVa, and "they swore" is niSHBAu. Misguided attempts at consistency lead to such outright errors as ZiCHaRoN (p. 68) or maZCHiR (p. 69). Sometimes there are just careless mistakes like NOSEH AVON (p. 6) or EVeN GeDuLaH (p. 22). The transliterations detract greatly from the readability of the volume, and unnecessarily so. A little professional editing by someone with experience in English translations could have improved this volume a great deal.

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BE'UR SETUMOT BE-RASHI [INTERPRETATION OF DIFFICULT PASSAGES IN RASHI, PART III, NUMBERS]. By Pinehas Doron. Pp. xviii + 329. Brooklyn: Sepher, 1990. Cloth.

Doron's Hebrew volume explaining difficulties in Rashi's commentary to Numbers must be evaluated on the basis of the population he addresses, the theoretical assumptions he takes to his enterprise, and the intellectual