

Zera Shimshon

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Chapter I: Bereisheet (Gen. 1:1-6:8)

Essay 21. Sleep is one-sixtieth of death

בְּסֵפֶר הזוהר (ח"א דף ר"ז), שינה אחד מששים במיתה. והואיל דליכא מידי דלא רמינא באורייתא. יש לומר שהמיתה באה לעולם על יד אשה דהיינו חוה כדאיתא בפרק ב' דשבת היא גרמה מיתה לעולם לכך נתנו לה הדלקת הנר בשבת.

In the book of the Zohar (part one, page 207a), it's taught that sleep is one sixtieth of death.¹ Since there's nothing that hints about that in the Torah, it can be said that death came into the world at the hand of woman, that is, Eve, as it says in the second chapter of tractate Shabbat.² She caused death in the world by persuading Adam to eat of the Tree of Knowledge,³ extinguishing the "candle of the L-rd"⁴ and thus diminishing light from the world, and to atone for this, she was given the mitzvah of lighting candles for the Sabbath.⁵

ובמדרש אמרינו "ויסגר בשר תחתנה" אמר רב חיינא בר רב אידי מתחלת הספר ועד כאן אין פתיב סמ"ך כיון שנבראת האשה נברא סטן עמה. ואם כן, כשבאה אשה לעולם באה סמ"ך, והאשה באה על יד שינה, ונהו "ניישן... ויסגר" כשאדם ישן אז "ויסגר" באה הסמ"ך, ולמה כך אלא לרמוז שהשינה אחד מששים במיתה שגרמה חוה.

And in the Midrash (Gen. Rabbah 17:9), it says: “So the L-rd G-d cast a deep sleep upon the man; and, while he slept, He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh at that spot’ (Gen. 2:21): Rabbi Chinena⁶ bar Rabbi Idi said, from the beginning of the Book and until now, i.e., the word *vayisgor* (ויסגר) (“He closed up”) there was no [letter] *samech* (ס) written,

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¹ Zohar I:207a: “The secret is here, that here King David lives and exists forever and ever, and King David would keep all his days from tasting the taste of death, for sleep is one-sixtieth of death, and David, because his place is alive, would only sleep up to [but not including] sixty breaths [at a time], because up to sixty breaths missing one [i.e., 59 breaths] is alive, from thenceforth a man [who sleeps 60 or more breaths at a time] tastes a taste of mortality and is ruled by the side of the unclean spirit.” See also Berachot 57b, “[There are] five [matters in our world which are] one-sixtieth [of their most extreme manifestations]. They are: Fire, honey, Shabbat, sleep, and a dream. Fire is one-sixtieth of Gehenna; honey is one-sixtieth of *manna*; Shabbat is one-sixtieth of the World-to-Come; sleep is one-sixtieth of death; and a dream is one-sixtieth of prophecy.”

² Shabbat 32a quotes Rabbi Yossef that [errors regarding the laws of] menstruation, challah, and lighting the Sabbath lights can lead to death.

³ Gen. chapters 2-3.

⁴ Prov. 20:27, “The spirit of man is the candle of the L-rd . . .”

⁵ Gen. Rabbah 17:8, “Rabbi Yehoshua was asked . . . why was the precept of Sabbath lights given to her? Because she extinguished the soul of Adam, therefore was the precept of Sabbath lights given to her.”

⁶ The first edition has Rabbi Chanina. The translator has corrected this to Rabbi Chinena.

because when the woman was created, Satan, the tempter of mankind, was created with her.”⁷ That is, Adam had free will, but would not have thought of eating of the Tree of Knowledge, had not the snake and Eve led him to do so. The *samech*, which has a numerical value of 60, first appears in the Torah in Gen. 2:21, in the word *vayisgor*, in the sentence in which woman is created. **If so, when the woman came into the world, the *samech* came, and the woman came at the hand of sleep, and this is the meaning of the words, “while he slept, He took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh,” when Adam slept, then “He closed up,” and the letter *samech* came. Why is this? Only to hint that the sleep, by which Eve was created, is one-sixtieth of death, which Eve caused.**

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⁷ The first edition has “Satan” written with the letter *sin*, as שטן, which is the traditional spelling. However, the Midrash spells it with a *samech*, as שטס. The translator has changed the text of the Zera Shimshon to match that used by the Midrash, to more effectively make the point that correlates the letter *samech* with Satan.

The Midrash itself goes on to point out that the first *samech* in the Torah is actually at Gen. 2:11, *hasovev* (הסבב) (“winding through”), but that word refers to a river, while this appearance of the *samech* in Gen. 2:21 is the first time the letter is used to refer to man.