

"Four Entered Paradise"
(Hekhalot Zutarti)

Rabbi Aqiba said: We were four who went into the Paradise. One looked and died, one looked and was smitten, one looked and cut the shoots, and I went in in peace and came out in peace.

And these are they that went into the Paradise: Ben Azzai and Ben Zoma and Aher and Rabbi Aqiba.

R. Aqiba said to them: Beware! When you approach the pure marble stones of the sixth heavenly palace [which look like water], do not say, "Water! Water!" - according to that which is written: The speaker of lies shall not endure before my sight (Ps. 101:7).

Ben Azzai looked into the sixth palace and saw brilliance of the air of the marble stones with which the palace was paved, and his body could not bear it, and he opened his mouth and asked them: "These waters - what is the nature of them?" and died. Of him, scripture says: Precious in the eyes of the Lord is the death of his saints (Ps. 116:15).

Ben Zoma looked at the brilliance in the marble stones and thought that they were water, and his body could not bear that he did not ask them, but his mind could not bear it and he was smitten - he went out of his mind. Of him, scripture says: Have you found honey? Eat what is enough for you lest you be overfilled and vomit it up (Prov. 25:16).

Aher looked and cut the shoots. [They say when he went to heaven he saw Metatron to whom permission had been given to sit for one hour in the day and write down the merits of Israel. He said, "The sages have taught: On high there is no sitting. He entertained the thought that there might perhaps be two Powers in heaven.

R. Aqiba went in in peace and come out in peace.