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# The Doctrine of Sefirot in the Prophetic Kabbalah of Abraham Abulafia

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## II\*

### *The Doctrine of Sefirot in Abulafia's Writings*

Abulafia ostensibly follows the rationalist interpretation represented by Saadiah, Dunash ibn Tamim, Solomon ibn Gabirol, Judah Halevi, Abraham ibn Ezra, Judah ben Barzillai, and others, by assuming that the primary connotation of the term *sefirot* is mathematical.<sup>106</sup> Thus, to cite two of numerous relevant textual examples: in *'Oṣar 'Eden Ganuz* he writes: "If anything is said concerning the way of the *sefirot*, if they are considered to be numbers or entities, do not make this difficult in the eyes of those who see, for there are already in many books words that indicate that the primary intention in this, both specific and general, is that of number."<sup>107</sup> My second illustration is taken from the commentary on *Sefer ha-Melis*. Abulafia thus describes the object of his spiritual vision, the spherical ladder (*ha-sullam ha-kadduri*): "its appearance is the color of blue (*tekhelet*) like that of the sky that rotates on account of one known and unique purpose (*takhlit 'aḥat yedu'ah meyuḥedet*). A person rotates it by means of the twenty *sefirot*, five toes on his right foot and five on his left, and similarly five fingers on his hand to the south and five to the north, and they turn to the right

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\* Continuation of Part I published in previous issue.

<sup>106</sup> See Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, p. 349, n. 323. On occasion Abulafia employs the term *sefirot* with the primary intention of numbers without any connection to other entities. See, e.g., *'Imre Shefer*, MS Munich-BS 40, fols. 231b and 269b; *Shomer Miṣwah*, MS Paris-BN héb. 853, fol. 55b.

<sup>107</sup> MS Oxford-BL 1580, fol. 5a. Cf. *Sefer Mafteah ha-Shemot*, MS NY-JTSA Mic. 1897, fol. 65a; *Hotam ha-Haftarah*, MS Munich-BS 43, fols. 190a–b; commentary to *Sefer ha-Melis*, MS Munich-BS 285, fol. 14a.

and to the left.”<sup>108</sup> The conceptual background of this extraordinary vision has been discussed by Idel.<sup>109</sup> What is significant to note here is that in this passage Abulafia, no doubt influenced by the comparison of the ten *sefirot* to the ten fingers of the hands and the ten toes of the feet in *Sefer Yeširah*, uses the word *sefirot* to refer to these parts of the human body since the prime meaning of that term in his mind is numbers.

Beyond the philological question it can be said that the most significant and pervasive approach to the *sefirot* that emerges from Abulafia’s voluminous corpus, as I have already noted above, is the identification of the ten *sefirot* as the ten separate intellects of the standard medieval Neoplatonic-Aristotelian cosmology that Abulafia would have drawn most directly from Maimonides.<sup>110</sup> Thus, for example, in a poem included in his epistle, *Sheva’ Netivot Torah*, he describes God in these terms: *mošī’am ha-sekhalim ha-‘alulim / belimah hem shemam ‘eser sefirot / yedu‘im li-levavot ha-mahulim*.<sup>111</sup> In *Mafteah ha-Shemot* Abulafia compares the *sefirot*, which are identified as the separate intellects, with the crownlets on the letters of the Torah scroll, an interpretation that in all likelihood is suggested by the presumed philological connection of the words *sefirot* and *sofer*<sup>112</sup>:

<sup>108</sup> MS Munich-BS 285, fol. 15b. My translation differs from that of Chipman in Idel, *Mystical Experience*, p. 110, which in my opinion is flawed in some critical respects. Chipman’s rendering of the statement, ומראהו כמראה התכלת כדמות רקיע מתגלגל, as “and its appearance like that of bright blue, like the image of the sky which turns about for one known special purpose. And man turns about with [the help of] twenty Sefirot,” misses the essential point of this text, viz., the spherical ladder is compared to the rotating celestial sphere and it is human action that rotates this ladder through the extremities of the upper and lower part of his body. The decidedly activist role of man is completely obscured in Chipman’s translation.

<sup>109</sup> See above, n. 92.

<sup>110</sup> See M. Idel, “The *Sefirot* Above the *Sefirot*,” *Tarbiz* 51 (1982): 262 (in Hebrew) and further references given in nn. 113–114 ad locum.

<sup>111</sup> *Philosophie und Kabbala*, p. 5. A similar description of the separate intellects occurs in *Sefer ha-Ḥesheq*, MS NY-JTSA Mic. 1801, fol. 17a, but in that context the focus of discussion is the tenth *sefirah* or the Active Intellect, also called the tenth attribute (*middat ha-eser*) or the attribute of kingship (*middat malkhut*). See Idel, “Writings of Abraham Abulafia,” p. 91. The identification of the kabbalists’ *sefirot* and the philosophers’ separate intellects is found as well in thirteenth-century Spain in the writings of Isaac ibn Latif, a figure who stands on the cusp where kabbalah and philosophy meet. See S. O. Heller Wilensky, “Isaac Ibn Latif – Philosopher or Kabbalist?,” in *Jewish Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, ed. A. Altmann (Cambridge, MA., 1967), pp. 213–214. See also the comment of Asher ben David in his *Perush Shem ha-Meforash*, ed. M. Ḥasidah, *Ha-Segullah* 1, no. 5 (1934): 7, to the effect that philosophers call the ten *sefirot* the heavenly spheres, *galgalim*, and all of them collectively are called the “sphere of the intellect,” *galgal ha-sekhel*.

<sup>112</sup> See below n. 181 and especially the passage from *Geṭ ha-Shemot* mentioned there.

There is nothing on top except the intellects separate from all matter, and they are in the image of the king's crowns in the secret of the ten *sefirot* of the *Shekhinah*, for they are crowns like the crownlets of the Torah scroll that are not part of the letters but are the glory that dwells on the body. The proof is that the scribe initially writes the letter and afterwards he crowns it. ... The crown is a long straight line in relation to the letter and it is attached to it to instruct about the overflow that emanates from the potency that is separate from the body of the letter like the hand of the scribe, by analogy, that dwells and rests upon it. This is the secret of the *Shekhinah* resting upon him and this is the matter of the thread of mercy that extends from God upon us.<sup>113</sup>

The identification of the *sefirot* as separate intellects is expanded in the following passage from *Ḥayye ha-Nefesh*, one of Abulafia's commentaries on Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*:

The two letters *he'* in the name [YHWH] instruct about the five *sefirot* that are profane and the five that are holy. These may be compared to the ten fingers, five on the right and five on the left, the ones are holy and the others are profane. Regarding this secret we look at the fingernails at Havdalah and we bless "the one who creates the lights of fire," for the lights of fire (*me'ore'esh*) are the ten lights (*me'orot*) that are like the ten visions of prophecy (*mar'ot ha-nevu'ah*) and its ten names. And the matter is that the fingers are the ends of the body and it is appropriate to gaze upon them for they are the ends of the body. They are not comprehended without the light that shines upon them from outside of them, and it is separate from them and flows upon them. Concerning this it says in *Sefer Yesirah* "ten *sefirot belimah* [like] the number of the ten fingers, five corresponding to five," to show that they are the purpose of existence (*takhliyyot ha-meši'ut*) just as the fingers are the ends of the body (*takhliyyot ha-guf*) and they are ten corresponding to the separate intellects and the ten heavenly spheres like the hands and feet, the ones are causes and the others effects.<sup>114</sup>

In typical Abulafian fashion the strands woven together in this text derive from different intellectual traditions, to wit, *Sefer Yesirah*, theosophic kabbalah, Ḥaside Ashkenaz, and Maimonidean cosmology. Despite the obvious theosophic influence on Abulafia's characterization of the *sefirot*, particularly evident in the bifurcation of the ten *sefirot* into five holy powers on the right and five profane powers on the left,<sup>115</sup>

<sup>113</sup> MS NY-JTSA Mic. 1897, fol. 81b. In the commentary to *Sefer ha-Melis*, MS Munich-BS 285, fol. 14a, Abulafia links *mele'khet sofer*, "work of the scribe," with *sifrut mal'akh*, "angelic literature," for both expressions have the same letters. Interestingly enough, in that context as well the discussion is about the crownlets of the letters of the Torah scroll.

<sup>114</sup> MS Munich-BS 408, fols. 18b–19a.

<sup>115</sup> Cf. *Sheva' Netivot ha-Torah* in *Philosophie und Kabbala*, p. 10. And cf. the anonymous text in MS Oxford-BL 1920, fol. 16b, according to which the *sefirot* are divided into a group of five that are good and a group of five that are bad.

the fundamental assumption regarding these *sefirot* is that they correspond to the separate intellects. Indeed, the application of the term *sefirot* to the separate intellects is predicated on a mathematical connotation of the term. As Abulafia explicitly notes in *Oṣar 'Eden Ganuz*: “If you want to comprehend the *sefirot* as is appropriate, count them, for they are thus called *sefirot* and they are ideal thoughts. If you do not think you cannot count and if you do not count you cannot think. The *sefirah* is an enumeration and nothing else,” *we-’im tirṣeh lehavin ha-sefirot ke-ra’uy safram ki ‘al ken niqre’u sefirot we-hen maḥshavot we-’im lo’ taḥshov lo’ tukhal lispor we-’im lo’ tispor lo’ tukhal laḥshov we-ha-sefirah ḥeshbon hi’ lo’ davar ‘aḥer*.<sup>116</sup> Similarly, in another one of his commentaries on *Sefer Yeṣirah* Abulafia remarks: “the *sefirot* are ideal thoughts and they are the ideal intelligible forms, and these are the ten ideal intelligible *sefirot*,” *ha-sefirot ‘asher hen ha-maḥshavot hen ha-ṣurot ha-neḥshavot ha-sikhliyot we-hen ‘eser sefirot neḥshavot sikhliyot*.<sup>117</sup> The same point is reiterated in a third text, *Gan Na’ul*, but in that context the issue is cloaked in the symbolic language of theosophic kabbalah, perhaps drawn from *Sefer ha-Bahir*.<sup>118</sup> The passage appears at the conclusion of a relatively lengthy enumeration of the *sefirot* that I alluded to above:

The tenth [of the *sefirot*] that is first has the name *maḥshavah*, and it is called supernal crown (*keter ‘elyon*), and its secret interchanges with the first [*sefirah*] that is the tenth since her name is *ṣedeq*. Thus when a person has a correct thought (*maḥshavah ṣodeqet*) he receives a comprehensive force from these two *sefirot*, and the numerical value of *maḥshavah* is *sefirah*.<sup>119</sup> Thus the computation, enumeration, and number is the first root to bring forth

<sup>116</sup> MS Oxford-BL 1580, fol. 19a. The same nexus of ideas is apparent in Abulafia’s statement in *Sefer ha-Yashar*, MS Munich-BS 285, fol. 24b: על כן צריך לך לעיין על אמתת הנפשות מכל השמות עד שתדע כלל הספירות לכל המחשבות הנחשבות במיוחד ועליו תבנה כל מחשבותיך ובו תדבק ובשמו תשבע *sefirot* function as the contemplative means that facilitate conjunction with the divine. On this topic see further below. In *We-Zot li-Yehudah (Auswahl)*, p. 14) Abulafia contrasts the two sources of knowledge, the intelligible (*muskal*) and the sensible (*murgash*), in these terms: “the intelligible comprises at first the essences of the ten *sefirot* (*hawwayot ‘eser sefirot*), for they are the principle of all intelligibles that derive from the intelligible thought (*ha-maḥshavah ha-sikhliit*).”

<sup>117</sup> *Perush Sefer Yeṣirah ‘Almoni*, p. 42. Cf. *Ish ‘Adam*, MS Munich-BS 285, fol. 20a: והנה י ספירה נזכרה והוא הכח השני השכלי הספירי המחשבי שסודו אחר וקדם רוח העולם הבורא העולם.

<sup>118</sup> The relevant passages are *Sefer ha-Bahir* §§ 120 and 128.

<sup>119</sup> That is, both terms equal 355. Cf. *’Or ha-Sekhel*, MS Vatican-BA ebr. 233, fol. 105b: “Every thought (*maḥshavah*) is a *sefirah* according to the secret of computation and number. Everything depends on number and computation.” Cf. *Ner ‘Elohim*, MS Munich-BS 10, fol. 150a: ספירות מחשבות ספירות מחשבותיהן והן בכללן י ספירות והנהו על דמות המעלה כי סוד הדמות למעלה

through them the intellect from potentiality to the complete and true actuality.<sup>120</sup>

In Abulafia's thinking the phenomenon of number is intrinsically connected to the element of measure in the double sense of numerical measurement and hypostatic quality or attribute. Consider, for example, the following remark in *Mafteah ha-Shemor*: "Just as the inkstand of the scribe is a vessel for the ink that is the matter, so too the number one is a vessel through which every measure is measured. Thus it is said that there are thirteen attributes as the number one [i.e., the letters of the word 'ehad equal thirteen], and this is g"i matria for it is one matter."<sup>121</sup> The secret of the traditional thirteen attributes of God's mercy (*yod-gimmel middot rahamim*) is here related to the word for numerology, *gimatria*. By a clever exegesis employing Hebrew and Latin, Abulafia playfully breaks up the word *gimatria* (גימטריא) into two components, "gi" (גי), i.e., the Hebrew consonants *gimmel* and *yod*, which equal thirteen, and "matria" (מטריא) from the Latin *materia*, i.e., matter. Encoded in this word, therefore, is the notion that there is one matter or measure for the thirteen attributes.

In light of this understanding of the *sefirot* one can appreciate Abulafia's appropriation of the language of the kabbalists whom he ostensibly opposed, i.e., those who viewed the *sefirot* as hypostatic entities that constitute the divine nature. As I have noted, Abulafia himself acknowledges that it is correct to conceive of the ten *sefirot* as representing the divine unity. To speak in this way means that the intellects are the conduits that channel the divine overflow and thus act as the forces that unify God's energy in the universe. In one passage in *Shomer Miṣwah*, written in 1287, Abulafia utilizes the language of *Sefer Yeṣirah*, as mediated particularly through the prism of theosophic kabbalah, to describe the ten intellects:

The secret of the intellects is five corresponding to five, five from the right and five from the left, the ones on the right acquitting and the ones on the left condemning. The unique and simple one, which is the holy name, mediates between them, inclining this way or that way according to judgment and mercy together.<sup>122</sup>

<sup>120</sup> MS Munich-BS 58, fol. 320b. Cf. *Imre Shefer*, MS Munich-BS 40, fol. 273a: "Know that the 'alef, which is [numerically] one, is the matter for all the *sefirot* in thought until *yod*, which is ten, and it is their end. Therefore it is called *Shekhinah* for it is the end of thought (*takhlit la-maḥshavah*)." Underlying Abulafia's comment is the numerical equivalence of the words שכניה and למחשבה, i.e., both equal 385.

<sup>121</sup> MS NY-JTSA Mic. 1897, fol. 66b.

<sup>122</sup> MS Paris-BN héb. 853, fol. 46a. Cf. *Imre Shefer*, MS Munich-BS 40, fol. 242b: "the ten *sefirot* are divided [into] the scale of merit and the scale of demerit." And *ibid.*,

The *sefirot* are not mentioned explicitly in this passage, but it is obvious that behind the description of the intellects is the assumed identification of the latter as the *sefirot*. Significantly, Abulafia characterizes the intellects in terms of the two principal divine attributes, judgment and mercy. God is the force that mediates between the two sides.<sup>123</sup>

fol. 248a, where Abulafia remarks that the faces of the four angelic creatures of the chariot together with the image of a human that sits upon the throne refer to the “five thoughts that interchange with five corresponding to them, and the secret of the five thoughts is in the secret of the five *sefirot* in the image of the five fingers, which correspond to five, and they are balanced in the two hands in the secret of the scale of merit and the scale of demerit, right and left.” Cf. *ibid.*, fol. 249a, and fol. 251a: “The first verse [in Scripture] is divided into a right half and a left half, and there are fourteen letters on the right and fourteen on the left. This is the secret of the ten *sefirot*, five corresponding to five, according to the number of the ten fingers, and their secret is fourteen from one side corresponding to fourteen, in the secret of the Decalogue.”

<sup>123</sup> The notion that I have attributed to Abulafia is stated explicitly by his disciple in *Sha'are Sedeq*, p. 11: “The *yod* is a point that is very small in its quantitative form, but it is very big in terms of the level of the quality of its inwardness. It takes shape in the form of a half-circle in relation to the lower entities even though it is a complete circle in the upper entities. ... You already know that external pronunciation [of the letter] instructs about the internal [letters], and the internal divides into two [i.e., the *waw* and *dalet* of the *yod* when the name of this letter is spelled out in full as *yod-waw-dalet*, ך״ו״י] as is necessitated by the supernal reality known according to the kabbalah, and they are the attribute of judgment and the attribute of mercy. The *dalet-waw* (ך״ו) added to the *yod* (ך״י) instructs about them. There is a second division and they are the two occurrences of the letter *he* in the name [YHWH], and they are ten in truth, five corresponding to five, and they are the inner *sefirot*.” See below, n. 146. Cf. *Ner 'Elohim*, MS Munich-BS 10, fol. 130a: “The attribute on the right, which is the attribute of mercy, is in the head and in the end is the attribute of judgment in the tail. The priest receives the two powers through the ten *sefirot*, which are the number of the ten fingers, five corresponding to five, in the ten words, and the two faces correspond to the *sefirot* and the potencies. Therefore, [the priest] rotates from side to side to bless the people face to face, for the supernal providence is found face to face.” Cf. *ibid.*, fol. 133b: “[The priest] forms with [each of] his hands three divisions, two fingers in one division, two fingers in the second division, and one finger that corresponds to two in all of its powers. ... Thus there are six and similarly six on the left resulting in twelve, which correspond to the twelve diagonals in the world, twelve months of the year, and twelve leaders in the soul. All of this is to rotate the attributes (*legalgel ha-middot*) and to draw one after the other, the attribute of judgment after the attribute of mercy.” Cf. *ibid.*, fol. 134b: “[The priest] should raise his face, for to this the raising of the hands alludes, corresponding to the face between the ears and the eyes, on account of the matter of ‘know what is above you’ – an eye that sees and an ear that hears through the ten *sefirot*, for the complete providence is from them upon ten, for ten is the final, perfect number. ... Therefore, the power that is enumerated in the *sefirot* and the fingers is divided into parts that are known and the face of man is amongst them [to] the right and the left, mercy and judgment. Therefore peace comes at the end of everything [i. e., at the conclusion of the priestly blessing; cf. Num. 6:27] to place peace amongst the attributes.” On the rotating gesture of the priest, cf. the passages from Abulafia cited below in nn. 216 and 219. The division of the ten *sefirot* into the two attributes of mercy and judgment is also implied in *Ner 'Elohim*, MS Munich-BS 10, fol. 171b. In that context God is depicted as the judge that mediates between the right and left.

The *sefirot*, therefore, are the intellects that collectively represent the potency of God active in the cosmos.<sup>124</sup> In *Mafteah ha-Tokhaḥot* Abulafia states that the Torah is the word of God that comprises the ten *sefirot*.<sup>125</sup> As Idel already observed, in this passage the expression “word of God” refers to the Active Intellect and the ten *sefirot* to the ten separate intellects contained therein.<sup>126</sup> According to this text, therefore, the Torah is collapsed into the ten *sefirot*, or to put the matter somewhat differently, the unity of the ten *sefirot* constitute the divine word, which is the Torah.<sup>127</sup> In *Sitre Torah*, another one of his commentaries on Maimonides’ *Guide*, Abulafia expresses this view in the following way: “The human being in his creation should contemplate this form in the supernal realities as it says in *Sefer Yeṣirah* concerning the ten *sefirot belimah* whose appearance is like that of lightning.”<sup>128</sup> The same idea in slightly different terminology is affirmed by Abulafia in a passage from *Ḥayye ha-Nefesh* cited above.<sup>129</sup> Building upon the fact that the text in *Sefer Yeṣirah* itself speaks of ten fingers and ten toes (although the reference is still only to ten *sefirot*), Abulafia mentions both the separate intellects and the heavenly spheres. In the

<sup>124</sup> A more cosmologically oriented interpretation of the *sefirot* is found in earlier sources. Cf., e. g., *Midrash Tadsche*, § 2, in A. Jellinek, *Bet Midrash*, 3rd edition (Jerusalem, 1967), 3: 165. In my opinion this approach rather than the theosophical orientation (as suggested by Scholem, *Origins*, p. 81) underlies the reference to the *sefirot* in *Sefer ha-Bahir*, § 124. The cosmological interpretation of the *sefirot* is also accepted by various medieval philosophical commentators on the work, including Saadiah Gaon, Judah Halevi, Abraham ibn Ezra, Solomon ibn Gabirol, and Judah ben Barzillai.

<sup>125</sup> MS Oxford-BL 1695, fols. 16b–17a.

<sup>126</sup> *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics*, p. 33. On the identification of Torah and the Active Intellect see the material discussed by Idel, *op. cit.*, pp. 35–38, and 163, n. 33. See also Scholem, *Major Trends*, p. 141. This identification underlies the statement in *Ḥayye ha-Nefesh*, MS Munich-BS 408, fol. 50a: “In relation to us the Torah is in potentiality and it is prepared to be actualized.”

<sup>127</sup> On the relation of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet, the constituent elements of the Torah, and the Active Intellect, cf. the statement in *Mafteah ha-Shemot*, MS NY-JTSA Mic. 1897, fol. 67b: “Thus it is written in *Sefer Yeṣirah*, two stones build two houses, and these are the 231 (א“ל“א) gates whence derives all being (שׁי), and this is the secret of Israel our father who is called the Active Intellect, and he is Israel the Elder.” In this passage one of the traditional designations of Meṭatron, ישראל, is decomposed into א“ל“א and שׁי. This name thus alludes to the fact that all existence (שׁי) derives from the 231 (א“ל“א) combinations of letters. Cf. *Oṣar ‘Eden Ganuz*, MS Oxford-BL 1580, fol. 158b; Joseph Gikatilla, *Ginnat ‘Egoz* (Jerusalem, 1989), p. 356. Both of these texts are cited by M. Idel, *Golem: Jewish Magical and Mystical Traditions on the Artificial Anthropoid* (Albany, 1990), pp. 98, 114–115, n. 15. The influence of Abulafia is discernible in a passage from Reuven Ṣarfati’s commentary on *Ma‘arekhet ha-‘Elohut*, 97b, as noted already by Idel, *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics*, p. 41.

<sup>128</sup> MS Paris-BN heb. 774, fols. 133b–134a.

<sup>129</sup> See n. 114.



most precise sense, however, the ten *sefirot* correspond to the intellects. This identification is also implied in the following passage from Abulafia's *Sefer ha-Hesheq*: "These are the ideal *sefirot*, with joy they praise<sup>130</sup> the ten names for they are two witnesses concerning the tenth, which is *malkhut* in the east."<sup>131</sup> Abulafia has here appropriated the term *malkhut*, one of the standard kabbalistic designations of the *Shekhinah*, the last of the *sefirot*, and applied it to the Active Intellect, which comprises the other *sefirot* or separate intellects. Similarly, in *We-Zot li-Yehudah*, Abulafia writes that the *Shekhinah* "comprises ten *sefirot*,"<sup>132</sup> the implication of this statement being that the *Shekhinah* is the Active Intellect that includes within itself all of the ten separate intellects, which are the *sefirot*. In *Hayye ha-Nefesh* this idea is affirmed in the following passage:

The matter of the finger [of God] is one *sefirah*, and this without doubt comprises all of them for it is the tenth. Therefore ten commandments were written on the tablets, and the first commandment contains them all. Therefore [the Decalogue] begins with *'anokhi*, which starts with *'alef* (א) and ends with *yod* (י), and the word *ken* (כן) is in the middle to inform about this and that and to instruct about the beginning and end.<sup>133</sup>

The point is made as well in *'Oṣar 'Eden Ganuz*: "This is knowledge of God without doubt, and thus the ten *sefirot* are joined, and they are everything (*'eser sefirot meḥubberot hem ha-kol*)."<sup>134</sup> In the continuation of this text Abulafia notes that the tenth *sefirah*, i.e., the Active Intellect, is both first and last, the secret of the head and tail, the brain and the penis.<sup>135</sup> This description naturally calls to mind the mythic

<sup>130</sup> Abulafia here plays on the three words, *mahshavot*, *be-simḥot*, and *meshabbēhot*, since all three are made of the same consonants.

<sup>131</sup> MS NY-JTSA Mic. 1801, fol. 31b.

<sup>132</sup> *Auswahl*, p. 23. It is possible that the containment of the ten *sefirot* in Metatron is implied in Baruch Togarmi's statement in *Maṣteḥot ha-Qabbalah*, in Scholem, *Ha-Qabbalah shel Sefer ha-Temunah*, p. 234: "This is the angel of the intellect (*mal'akh ha-sekheh*) who is entirely computation (*kulo ḥeshbon*), the foundation of the Tetragrammaton (*yesod shem YHWH*), as was stated above, the *'alef* that mediates [between the *mem* and *shin*, merit and guilt]. ... Know that this is the secret of the world of intellects (*'olam ha-sekhalim*) and it is the light of His garment (*'or levusho*) whence everything was created."

<sup>133</sup> MS Munich-BS 408, fols. 42a–b.

<sup>134</sup> MS Oxford-BL 1580, fol. 7a. Cf. *Imre Shefer*, MS Munich-BS 40, fol. 231a: "This knowledge is knowledge that a person has of his Creator by means of knowledge of the explicit name upon which all names are dependent, and he is the first of all creatures and the Holy Spirit is engraved upon him, and he is the soul that comprises all souls." It appears that in this context Metatron is identified as the explicit name of God, i. e., the Tetragrammaton.

<sup>135</sup> MS Oxford-BL 1580, fol. 16a: "Thus you find that the head is joined to the tail, and when you know the truth that his name is his spirit and his spirit is his name you will

image of the uroboros, the snake eating its own tail, which symbolically represents the unity of the *sefirot*, for the first is the last and the last is the first. For Abulafia Meṭatron is both the first and last of the intellects and thus he is represented respectively as the elder (*zaqqen*)

discern the secret of the union of the head and the tail.” Cf. “Sefer ha-Öt,” p. 70. In this remarkable text Abulafia contrasts the “closed head” (*ro’sh satum*) upon which rests the crown of Torah (*keter torah*) and the “open tail” (*zanav patuah*) upon which rests the diadem of royalty (*‘aṣeret malkhut*). It would seem that Abulafia has here appropriated the symbolism of the first and last of the emanations, *keter* and *‘aṭarah*, from theosophic kabbalah; it is also likely that there is an implicit sexual connotation in the use of these symbols. (The phallic connotation of the word “tail” is evident from the description of the letter *gimmel* in *Sefer ha-Bahir* § 155 as that which “draws by way of the head and ejaculates by way of the tail.” See Wolfson, “Tree That is All,” p. 54.) Cf. “Sefer ha-Öt,” p. 71: “I have come first to place the diadem of splendor (*‘aṣeret tif’eret*) on the head of the first head and this is his name that is called the crown of Torah according to the Lord (*keter torah ‘al pi YHWH*).” On the identification of the Tetragrammaton and the crown of Torah, cf. the passage from *Sitre Torah*, MS Paris-BN heb. 774, fol. 147b, cited in Idel, *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics*, p. 162, n. 28. In *Sefer ha-Haftarah*, MS Munich-BS 285, fol. 30b, the crown of Torah (*keter torah*), which is the divine name (YHWH = 26, which is written out as *‘esrim wa-shishah*; cf. Gikatilla, *Ginmat ‘Egoz*, p. 27), is identified with the ten commandments (*‘aseret ha-devarim*). The expressions *keter torah*, *‘esrim wa-shishah*, and *‘aseret ha-devarim* all equal 1231. On the linkage of the Tetragrammaton and the first of the *sefirot* designated the supernal crown, cf. the anonymous commentary on the Torah in MS Oxford-BL 1920, fol. 6a: “The life-force (*ha-hayyim*) is greater than the crowns (*ha-ketarim*) for the [letters that complete the] full spelling (*milluy*) of the Tetragrammaton (א”ה”ו”י) equal eighteen [i.e., the *waw* (= 6) and *dalet* (= 4) of ו”י, the *‘alef* (= 1) of א”ה, the *waw* (= 6) of ו”י, and the *‘alef* (= 1) of א”ה, together equal 18 (6 + 4 + 1 + 6 + 1); this numerical equation only works when the *waw* of the Tetragrammaton is spelled as ו”י, and not as ו”א, which is how it appears in the manuscript; with that spelling there is an extra *‘alef* and thus the sum would be nineteen rather than the desired eighteen], and this is the life of the worlds (*hei ha-‘olamim*), and the [word] *hei* refers to the supernal crown from which the influx overflows to the other *sefirot*.” On the image of the head and tail applied to Adam, cf. *Maṣteḥ ha-Shemot*, MS NY-JTSA Mic. 1897, fol. 53b. Cf. *‘Oṣar ‘Eden Ganuz*, MS Oxford-BL 1580, fol. 160a. In the commentary to *Sefer ha-Meliṣ*, MS Munich-BS 285, fol. 16a, the images of the head and tail are applied to *Ḥokhmah* and *Binah*: “Thus you will find that *Ḥokhmah* and *Binah* are in the image of the sun and moon, the head and the tail and the tail and the head.” On the union of the head and tail, cf. Barukh Togarmi, *Maṣteḥot ha-Qabbalah*, in Scholem, *Ha-Qabbalah shel Sefer ha-Temunah*, p. 230: “This is the secret of making from the end the beginning and from the beginning the end, to join and unite one with the other in a way that there will be no divisions in the rotation, rather [it is] like the ‘dance of Mahanaim’ (Song of Songs 7:1), which is the secret of the name in its vocalization as is known. ... This is the beginning [that is] Israel (*re’shit yisra’el*), and this is the secret of ‘they shall strike at your head, and you shall strike at their heel’ (Gen. 3:15), and similarly there is mention of a head and a tail (cf. Deut. 28:44), which is either *keter* [crown] or *karet* [extermination].” (The wordplay between *keter* and *karet* is employed by Abulafia himself. Cf. *Imre Shefer*, MS Munich-BS 40, fol. 266b. On the use of the words *keter* and *karet* to characterize the dialectical nature of divine wisdom, cf. *Sefer ha-Ṣeruf*, MS Munich-BS 22, fols. 184a-b.) Cf. *Maṣteḥot ha-Qabbalah*, p. 237: “His beginning and His end are true, His end and His beginning are one.” On the correlation of the head and tail of the astrological dragon, the Teli, respectively with Meṭatron (or

and youth (*na'ar*), Israel and Jacob.<sup>136</sup> The title *kol* is appropriately applied to the Active Intellect inasmuch as it comprises within itself all of the separate intellects. In a second passage from the same work Abulafia writes: “Know that all the attributes (*middot*) are dependent upon the Holy Spirit to guide them for it is the guide of everything (*manhig ha-kol*). Therefore one *sefirah*, which is the Active Intellect, is called the All (*ha-kol*) ... and its name is the angel of the Lord, and it is the angel whose name is YHWH, and it is the one in whose hands are all the attributes, and the attribute of *malkhut* is attributed to the tenth attribute.”<sup>137</sup>

The interpretation of the *sefirot* as separate intellects underlies two other motifs connected to the *sefirot* in Abulafia's writings, viz., the immanentistic view of the *sefirot* as cosmic forces and the anthropocentric understanding of the *sefirot* as psychological states contained in the human being. Both of these approaches have been noted by Idel,<sup>138</sup> and for my present purposes I should like to focus only on some aspects of the latter that are particularly germane to this analysis. It is evident from several of his writings, particularly lengthy passages in *We-Zot li-Yehudah* and *Mafteah ha-Sefirot*, that Abulafia reinterpreted the theosophical understanding of the *sefirot* in light of a psychological model. In some cases Abulafia retains the language of kabbalistic interpretations of the *sefirot*, but he no longer viewed the latter as ontic grades emanating from the Infinite; the *sefirot* are understood as stages of the inner human experience. Thus, for example, in *We-Zot li-*

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Michael) and Sandalphon (or Gabriel), the right side or the attribute of compassion and the left side or the attribute of judgment, see the passage from *Ner 'Elohim* translated in Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, pp. 77–78. The interchangeability of the first and tenth of the *sefirot* is also emphasized by Gikatilla, *Ginnat 'Egoz*, p. 141. For Gikatilla, however, the ten *sefirot* comprise the four elements and the six cosmic directions. Cf. *ibid.*, pp. 134, 144, 153–154 (in that context Gikatilla draws a parallel between the ten *sefirot* and the letters and vowels, which are likewise divided into five corresponding to five), 333. A slightly different approach seems to be implied by Gikatilla, *ibid.*, pp. 329–332. In that context the *sefirot* are identified as the ten heavenly spheres, which are arranged in the following order: the moon, Mercury, Venus, the sun, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, the constellations, 'Aravot, and the tenth Intellect (or the sphere of the separate Intellects).

<sup>136</sup> See Wolfson, “Image of Jacob,” p. 149, n. 95.

<sup>137</sup> MS Oxford-BL 1580, fol. 71a. Cf. *Mafteah ha-Shemot*, MS NY-JTSA Mic. 1897, fol. 56b. In that context Abulafia designates the intellectual overflow from the Active Intellect by three names, the “splendor of the *Shekhinah*” according to the kabbalist, the “light of the intellect” according to the philosopher, and the “Holy Spirit” according to the righteous soul. On the identification of the *Shekhinah*, the tenth *sefirah*, as the Active Intellect in Abulafia, see Scholem, *Ha-Qabbalah shel Sefer ha-Temunah*, p. 157.

<sup>138</sup> *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, pp. 144–149; *Hasidism Between Ecstasy and Magic*, pp. 228–232.

*Yehudah*, he writes in language that seems to have been borrowed from the kabbalist Ezra of Gerona<sup>139</sup>: “From this you will know that the last compounded reality, that is man, comprises all the *sefirot*, for his intellect is the Active Intellect.”<sup>140</sup> Similarly, in *Ḥayye ha-‘Olam ha-Ba’* he comments that the “ten *sefirot* are in each person.”<sup>141</sup> In that context it is evident that the ten *sefirot* correspond to the five external senses and the five internal senses. Idel is correct to point out the “shift in focus from the theosophical to the human experience, from the Sefirot as divine to the Sefirot in man. ... What is novel and important about Abulafia is not his assumption of the existence of ten Sefirot in the human soul but his understanding of the names of the Sefirot, according to theosophical nomenclature, as processes taking place within man.”<sup>142</sup> It is certainly the case, therefore, that one should speak here of a “dehypostatization of the theosophical hierarchy” for the *sefirot* do not refer primarily to the potencies of the Godhead.

It must be pointed out, however, that in the relevant Abulafian texts an intrinsic connection is made between the supernal *sefirot*, which correspond to the separate intellects, and the lower *sefirot*, which correspond to human activities. As Idel himself recognized, mystical union is attained by knowledge of the ten *sefirot* internalized within human nature because these attributes facilitate the drawing down of the emanation that overflows from the supernal *sefirot*.<sup>143</sup> The point is made particularly well in a passage from *Gan Na‘ul* cited above.<sup>144</sup> According to that text divine unity is intrinsically related to the active unification of the ten *sefirot*, i. e., the ten intellects, on the part of the individual. Not to unify these ten entities is effectively to disrupt the divine unity, referred to here as elsewhere by the traditional idiom of cutting the shoots. The priority occupied by the *sefirot* over the letters is not a

<sup>139</sup> Cf. MS Vatican-BA ebr. 441, fols. 46a–b, and see Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, p. 146. See also Ezra’s formulation in the “Sodot Ma’aseh Bereshit,” included in his commentary to Song of Songs 6:2, in *Kitve Ramban*, 2:510: “The level of primal Adam is such that he completes the ten *sefirot*. ... The Holy Spirit will dwell upon him for he contains and is crowned and adorned by the ten *sefirot*.”

<sup>140</sup> *Auswahl*, p. 20. This passage is discussed by Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, p. 9.

<sup>141</sup> MS Oxford-BL 1582, fol. 21a.

<sup>142</sup> *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, p. 149.

<sup>143</sup> *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, p. 149; *Hasidism Between Ecstasy and Magic*, p. 231. See idem, “Historical Introduction,” p. xxviii: “For Abulafia, the Names of the Sefirot which are in fact the Divine Names, rather than knowledge of the Divine Powers or the attempt to influence them in theosophical Kabbalah, serve as part of his mystical technique in reaching the experience of ecstasy.”

<sup>144</sup> See n. 45.

mere concession on the part of Abulafia to other kabbalists, but reflects his commitment to the idea that contemplation of the *sefirot* results in the intellectual overflow that facilitates the attainment of prophetic consciousness. The point is affirmed as well in *Mafteah ha-Shemot*: “There is no doubt ... that prophecy does not come to anyone who prophecies in truth except by way of letter-combination (*derekh seruf ha-'otiyot*) in conjunction with knowledge of His ways, the paths of His configurations, the arrangements of His plans, and the pathways of the secret of the *sefirot* together with comprehension of the mysteries of the matters of the names.”<sup>145</sup> Similarly, in another epistle Abulafia writes that “a person can cleave to each and every *sefirah* from the aspect of the essence of the influx that overflows from its emanation upon His *sefirot*, which are His ten attributes. ... One must mentally concentrate to attain comprehension until the enlightened kabbalist will comprehend them, and a discernible overflow will emanate upon him.”<sup>146</sup> The unity of the *sefirot*, therefore, corresponds to a state of mystical union by means of which the individual receives the intellectual overflow from the supernal *sefirot* or separate intellects through the Active Intellect, personified either as the angel of the Lord who bears the Tetragrammaton or as the Torah. There is a perfect homology between the *sefirot* above and the internalization of the *sefirot* experienced as psychic states

<sup>145</sup> MS NY-JTSA Mic. 1897, fol. 91a.

<sup>146</sup> MS Sassoon 56, fol. 33a, cited by Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, p. 350, n. 333. For an alternative English rendering, see op. cit., pp. 148–149; see also *Hasidism Between Ecstasy and Magic*, p. 230. The ontic assimilation of the microanthropos, who comprises within himself ten *sefirot*, and the macroanthropos, which is the iconic form of the supernal *sefirot*, is emphasized by Abulafia’s disciple in *Sha’are Sedeq*, pp. 11–13, 20–21. See Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, p. 347, n. 303. In the relevant passages of that text the ascent and metamorphosis of the lower anthropos into the upper, enthroned anthropos is depicted particularly in terms of the unification of the two *yods* (which in fact are both contained in one *yod* for the plene spelling of that letter is *yod-waw-dalet*, and the *waw* and *dalet* together have the numerical value of *yod*; see above, n. 123). The joining of the *yods* in a complete circle signifies the conjunction of the human intellect and the Active Intellect. The mystical equivalent to this conjunction is the reintegration of the lower and upper *sefirot*. Cf. *Sha’are Sedeq*, pp. 20–21: “You already know that the *yod* is the limit of the ten *sefirot* and it comprises all the *sefirot* because it receives power from them all, and man is the last of the compounded entities. ... Therefore, he is a *yod* in this world for he has received power from everything and he comprises everything like the *yod* in [the realm of] the *sefirot*. Therefore, there is no difference between this *yod* and that *yod* except a hairsbreadth, that is, a very subtle, small matter from the side of spirituality. [The *yod* of the mundane man] is the completion (*milluy*) of the other *yod* [of the supernal anthropos]. ... And this is the secret of ‘and to Him shall you cleave’ (Deut. 10:20), the cleaving of the *yod* with the *yod* to complete the circle.” For a slightly different rendering, see Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, p. 63. See idem, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, p. 26, n. 57.

on the mystical path. The homologous relation is facilitated by the fact that through his intellect a person can be conjoined to, in fact united with, the Active Intellect and thereby gain knowledge of the ten *sefirot*. In the state of conjunction (*devequt*) there is a virtual ontic identification of the mystic and God through the agency of the Active Intellect.<sup>147</sup> This identification implies not only that the human becomes divine but also that the divine becomes human.

Unification of God through activation of the internal *sefirot* is presented by Abulafia as the unique calling of the Jewish people: "If you know what was said in the matter of the Megillah with respect to Esther and Mordecai the Jew you will comprehend from them the way of *yh, yod hem*. Thus it is appropriate for the way of the Jews to be *yod* according to the number of the *sefirot*, and it is called by the name Shaddai."<sup>148</sup> A special connection is thus made between the letter *yod*, which represents the ten *sefirot*, and the Jewish people, the *yehudim*. The reference to the name Shaddai also suggests that this connection is mediated through the tenth of the *sefirot*, the Active Intellect or Metatron (whose name has the same numerical value as Shaddai). The point of the passage, therefore, is that the distinctive role of the Jew is to be conjoined to the Active Intellect – indeed to be transformed ontically into the angelic being whose name is Shaddai<sup>149</sup> – and in that manner Jewish life is circumscribed within the circle of the ten *sefirot*. I surmise

<sup>147</sup> The point has been convincingly shown by Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, pp. 1–31. The homology of the upper and lower attributes is emphasized by Abulafia in "Sefer ha-Ôt," p. 83: "Rock of Israel, the one who governs the attributes and adjudicates upon the attributes (*shofet ha-middot we-dan ba-middot*), until the supernal ones become the lower ones of the earth and the lower ones the supernal ones of heaven." Cf. the explanation of the lifting of the ten fingers in the priestly blessing in *Ner 'Elohim*, MS Munich-BS 10, fol. 135a: "The secret will be that the ten will be equivalent to the ten, and the ten spiritual, divine attributes will be equal to and participate with the ten spiritual, human attributes through a shared reality and the reception of providence and governance from them (*be-shittuf meši'ut u-ve-qabbalat hashgahah we-hanhagah me-hem*), but they are not equal in gradation."

<sup>148</sup> MS Oxford-BL 1580, fol. 6b. On Mordecai and Esther, cf. also 'Imre Shefer, MS Munich-BS 40, fol. 230b. Mordecai is identified explicitly with Metatron in *Sefer ha-Haftarah*, MS Munich-BS 285, fol. 29a. In "Sefer ha-Ôt," p. 71, the name of the *hashmal* is said to be *yod* and it is clear from the context that the *hashmal* is identical with Metatron.

<sup>149</sup> On the transformation of the mystic into Shaddai, cf. the Abulafian texts cited and discussed by Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, pp. 10, 15–16. The special role accorded to the Jew in this process is also underscored by the fact that one of the names of Metatron is Israel, an older esoteric idea buttressed by the numerical equivalence of the expressions *yisra'el* and *sekhel ha-po'el*. See Scholem, *Ha-Qabbalah shel Sefer ha-Temunah*, p. 157.

that this is the implication of the following rationale that Abulafia offers in *Mafteah ha-Tokhaḥot* for the ritual of phylacteries:

Thus the matter of the binding of the phylacteries is on the weak hand (*yad kehah*).<sup>150</sup> “And they are a testimonial,” this is the secret of the unique sign (*’ot meyuḥedet*) and this is the *yod* that comprises the ten *sefirot belimah*. Understand this from the knot that is sealed with the letter *yod*. And thus the four sections, abg”d, are ten.<sup>151</sup> Thus this is alluded to [in the interpretation] “upon your hand” (*’al yadekha*), do not read “your hand” (*yadekha*) but “your *yod*” (*yodekha*).<sup>152</sup> ... Thus the secret of the phylacteries is ten, an allusion to the ten *sefirot belimah*, five corresponding to five.<sup>153</sup>

<sup>150</sup> The custom to bind the phylacteries on the left arm is linked exegetically to the interpretation of the word *yadkhaḥ* (Exod. 13:16) as the weak hand (*yad kehah*) in earlier rabbinic sources. Cf. B. Menaḥot 37a, and for other sources see M. M. Kasher, *Torah Shelemah* (New York, 1948), 12:139, n. 205.

<sup>151</sup> That is, the first four letters, which stand respectively for the numbers 1–4, together equal ten. Cf. *Oṣar ’Eden Ganuz*, MS Oxford-BL 1580, fol. 4b; *Sefer ha-Ṣeruf*, MS Munich-BS 22, fols. 200a, 202a.

<sup>152</sup> Cf. *Tiqqune Zohar*, ed. R. Margaliot (Jerusalem, 1978), Introduction, 7b.

<sup>153</sup> MS Oxford-BL 1605, fols. 44a-b. On the mystical rationale for the ritual of the phylacteries connected especially to divine unity, see *ibid.*, fol. 39a. In his writings Abulafia frequently discusses this ritual. Cf., e. g., *Mafteah ha-Shemot*, MS NY-JTSA Mic. 1897, fol. 67a: “The secret of phylacteries (תפילין) is [disclosed in the expressions] ‘wine is like bread’ (יין כפת) and ‘bread is like wine’ (פת כבין). Know that the ten *sefirot belimah* are in one circle and they are in the sign of meat, bread, and wine (בשר לחם יין). The secret is the ‘camp without rulers’ (מחנה בלי שרים) or ‘rulers without a camp’ (שרים בלי מחנה) and this is the ten *sefirot* minus [the numerical value] of Adam [i. e., the expression מחנה בלי שרים equals 695 and the expression יין לחם equals 650, a difference of 45, which is the value of the word אדם], and these are the ten thoughts (עשר מחשבות). ... He binds crowns on his Master by means of the ten *sefirot*. Every secret of ten is the secret of the phylacteries.” (Concerning the image of the ten *sefirot* taking shape within a circle, cf. the following passage in *Ma’ayan ha-Hokhmah* [Korets, 1784], 1a–b: “In *Keter* [the *sefirot*] were in a circle and this is what the ancients, their memory be for a blessing, said regarding the *sefirot* that they all were in a circle. ... R. Abraham Abulafia followed this way in *Sefer ha-Gilgulim* [according to the version of this text in MS Oxford-BL 1551, fol. 110b, the reading is: *Sefer ha-Galgal*].” This text is discussed by Idel, “Writings of Abraham Abulafia,” pp. 35 and 101, n. 211.) Cf. *Hayye ha-Nefesh*, MS Munich-BS 408, fols. 75b–76a: “Indeed, the phylacteries have four sections...and this comes to instruct us about the matter of the truth of existence and through it is revealed to us the secret of the tenth sphere that is called holy, and this is the sphere of the intellect, which is separate and unique among the spheres. Since he is exalted, separate and unique, it is called the holy crown, and merit and guilt emanate from him for they are the angels of matter and form ... He is the end of all existence and the limit of the world entirely. ... Therefore he is the one who guards the attributes (*shomer ha-middot*), that is, the attribute of judgment and the attribute of mercy, and through them he guides the world for he is the one who guards the image (*shomer ha-demut*) through which the world was created and renewed. ... Therefore there are four sections in the phylacteries of the head and four sections in the phylacteries of the hand. And the secret of the head and hand of the phylacteries is the two opposites. The secret of the phylacteries is the four allusions in the four sections which are ten, abg”d.” Cf. “*Sefer ha-Ot*,” p. 82: “The phylacteries (*toṭafot*) are inscribed on the top of the head with the potency of the black ink in accordance with

In an extraordinary passage from the same composition Abulafia interprets the religious obligation of unifying God through the recitation of the *Shema'* (Deut. 6:4) in light of this very process:

Indeed, from the order of the ten *sefirot belimah* the unity is discerned, for He is like one who counts them but He is not counted with them.<sup>154</sup> After the secret of the *sefirot* is contemplated, then it is possible that he who unifies God when he recites the *Shema'* will contemplate the matter of the separate intellect (*ha-sekheh ha-nifrad*), and he will discern the difference between the separate intellects that are caused by God, blessed be He, and God, blessed be He, who is the first cause for every existent, and the separate Active Intellect that is caused by the intellects and by God, blessed be He. Through him our intellects evolve from potentiality to prophetic actuality, and he is the steadfast spirit that is called the Holy Spirit. The prophet who recites the *Shema'* says to him, "Hear, O Israel," for its secret is "Hear, O Active Intellect," "the Lord is our God," that is, the Lord, who is the cause of us and you, is [He of whom it is said] "the Lord is one."<sup>155</sup>

One initially directs one's intention in the recitation of the *Shema'* to the Active Intellect who is referred to by the title Israel, one of the standard names of Meṭaṭron in some of the older esoteric sources that undoubtedly influenced Abulafia. The ultimate purpose of the *Shema'* is to affirm that God is the first cause of everything, yet one cannot help but note the trace of an alternative approach that assumed the object of prayer was none

the whitish red blood, and the potency ascends and descends from attribute to attribute. [The name] *yod-he'* is sealed in each and every attribute, a unique source is revealed and hidden in all of them, and according to the attributes of the source the potencies of the letters are hidden and according to them they are revealed." (In Abulafia's writings blood and ink respectively symbolize the imagination and the intellect; see Idel, *Mystical Experience*, pp. 97–98, 113.) Cf. *Oṣar 'Eden Ganuz*, MS Oxford-BL 1580, fols. 63b–64a: "It has already been made known that the secret of the *shin* of three heads from one side of the head phylacteries is to allude to the form that is submerged in them, and it is known that the secret of the *shin* of four heads from the other side of the head phylacteries is a law transmitted to Moses at Sinai, and it alludes to the form that protrudes on leather, which has four compartments in which are found the four [biblical] sections. ... The secret is that these four witnesses upon your head warn ... that you should know your head from your heart and your heart from your head. Therefore the phylacteries are in two places of the body, the head and the weak arm corresponding to the heart. They are like amulets without doubt and you already know their saying that the [name of the] Lord is upon those who wear phylacteries." Cf. *Sitre Torah*, MS Paris-BN héb. 774, fol. 124a: "The head phylacteries bear testimony to all that is found in the chariot. ... The matter of the phylacteries of the arm and the head is that they are two worthy witnesses on everything and they reveal to you the secret of the throne and the secret of the tablets." On the symbolism of the throne and the tablets in Abulafia's writings, see Idel, *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics*, pp. 42–46, 168–169, n. 77; idem, "Deus Sive Natura – Les Métamorphoses d'une formule de Maïmonide à Spinoza," in *Maïmonide et la mystique juive*, trans. Ch. Mopsik (Paris, 1991), pp. 111–112.

<sup>154</sup> Cf. the passage of Togarmi translated below in n. 163.

<sup>155</sup> MS Oxford-BL 1605, fol. 41a.



other than the highest angel.<sup>156</sup> Abulafia preserves that tradition but transforms its meaning by recasting it in a thoroughly monotheistic light. Nevertheless, according to Abulafia, the unity of God is dependent on the active unification of the ten intellects in the human intellect, which is actualized by the overflow of the Active Intellect. In that respect it may be said that the locus of divine unity is the self.<sup>157</sup>

<sup>156</sup> It should be noted, however, that in Abulafia's writings there is a deliberate ambiguity regarding the identity of the Creator and the Active Intellect. Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, pp. 7–11, has discussed this ambiguity in texts that deal more specifically with the phenomenon of *unio mystica*. Scholem, *Major Trends*, p. 140, notes the same ontological ambiguity in what he calls the mystical transfiguration of the individual. See idem, *Ha-Qabbalah shel Sefer ha-Temunah*, pp. 158–159. On the virtual ontic identity of God and the angel, cf. *Hayye 'Olam ha-Ba'*, MS Oxford-BL 1582, fol. 34b: "God only does the will of the angel and the angel only does the will of God. It is almost the case that God and the angel are one entity apart from the fact that the one is a cause and the other an effect." Cf. the interesting formulation in *Sefer ha-Seruf*, MS Munich-BS 22, fol. 186b: "I have already informed you that everything has been placed in [Meṭatron's] hand, and after you have reached that level of which I have informed you know that the names by which he is called are not unique to him but only their power has been placed in his hand. Then you will contemplate and apprehend the knowledge of the First Cause, and there will be no intermediary between you and it, no angel, no sphere, no obstacle, and no impediment. Then the true faith in the creator of everything, the Lord who is unique without any partnership, will be clarified for you. There is no intermediary between Him and us except from the perspective that one says to you that we do not have the capacity to attain the level of His knowledge lest the Active Intellect acts and consequently what is in the potentiality of the intellect will be actualized. As a result he will be of those who possess a great level and he will mount the cherub."

<sup>157</sup> This theme is expressed in slightly different terms in the following passage from *Oṣar 'Eden Ganuz*, MS Oxford-BL 1580, fol. 17a: "You will find the way of tradition ... and you will comprehend through this that all of the letters are engraved upon your heart, hewn from the Holy Spirit in your spirit ... the holy spirit that is engraved in you is from the Holy Spirit in itself. You understand on your own that the Holy Spirit is within you and it speaks in you and not outside you. From yourself you will discern all reality that is engraved in you." Cf. *ibid.*, fol. 161b: "The soul learns, gets wise, understands, knows, discerns, and comprehends its Creator through knowledge of the name, which instructs about the actions of each soul in every person according to his characteristics and actions and according to his effort in [attaining] the knowledge of the name." Cf. also the depiction of the spherical ladder (see above, n. 83) in the commentary to *Sefer ha-Meliḥ*, MS Munich-BS 285, fol. 16a: "This ladder is called the ladder of the world and it is [like the] scales for a person. ... When you contemplate the truth of yourself you will find that this entire ladder, in general and in particular, is formed between the eyes of your heart. Contemplate it a lot and you will know it." These passages, and others that could have been cited, confirm Idel's statement (*Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, p. 19) that Abulafia's mysticism has affinity with the Delphic maxim, "He who knows himself, knows his Lord." Regarding the evolution of this theme in medieval Jewish and Islamic sources, see A. Altmann, "The Delphic Maxim in Medieval Islam and Judaism," in *Biblical and Other Studies*, ed. A. Altmann (Cambridge, Mass., 1963), pp. 196–232. Alternatively, it is possible, as Scholem suggested (*Major Trends*, p. 142), to understand the notion of prophecy as self-confrontation in ecstatic kabbalah as a mystical interpretation of the ancient Greek oracle, "Know thyself".

*Abulafia's Interpretation of Sefirot and the Maimonidean Doctrine of Separate Intellects*

The ecstatic kabbalah has been aptly described as a combination of Maimonidean philosophy and Ashkenazi mystical techniques and esotericism.<sup>158</sup> Moreover, Abulafia (in fact emulating Maimonides' attitude to Scripture) proffered a dual approach to the *Guide of the Perplexed*, distinguishing between the philosophical reading (usually associated with the path of allegorical exegesis) as the simple meaning of the text and the kabbalistic reading (associated principally with gnosis of the divine names and meditative techniques that result in mystical experiences of illumination and union) as the hidden meaning that is concealed from philosophers and disclosed only to the initiates.<sup>159</sup> The complex merging of clashing intellectual currents, however, did not always produce a simple and harmonious synthesis. Scholem's claim that in the thought of Abulafia there is no antithesis between mysticism and the doctrine of Maimonides<sup>160</sup> needs to be qualified in light of the

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<sup>158</sup> See Idel, "Abraham Abulafia's Kabbalah," pp. 124–125. The influence of both Maimonides and Haside Ashkenaz on Abulafia has also been well noted by Scholem. Concerning the former see references in n. 160 and concerning the latter see n. 161.

<sup>159</sup> See Scholem, *Ha-Qabbalah shel Sefer ha-Temunah*, pp. 128–129; Idel, "Maimonides and Kabbalah," pp. 57–69; idem, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, pp. 16–17. It is obviously the case that Abulafia does not simply extend the scope of Maimonidean esotericism but in a fundamental sense distorts it through his own mystical interpretation, even though he is of the opinion that he is merely revealing that which is implicit in the philosophical writings of Maimonides. See A. Altmann, "Maimonides' Attitude Toward Jewish Mysticism," in *Studies in Jewish Thought: An Anthology of German Jewish Scholarship*, ed. A. Jospe (Detroit, 1981), pp. 200–219, esp. 207–209; M. Idel, "Sitre 'Arayot in Maimonides' Thought," in *Maimonides and Philosophy: Papers Presented at the Sixth Jerusalem Philosophical Encounter, May 1985*, ed. S. Pines and Y. Yovel (Dordrecht, 1986), pp. 79–91, esp. 89.

<sup>160</sup> *Major Trends*, p. 126. On the influence of Maimonides on Abulafia, see *ibid.*, pp. 138–139, 383, n. 76. See also idem, *Ha-Qabbalah shel Sefer ha-Temunah*, p. 107: "This new realm of prophetic kabbalah and the science of combination is not for him an addition to the kabbalistic knowledge according to the way of the Spanish kabbalists in theosophic matters (doctrines about the *sefirot* and the divine attributes), but all this is added by Abulafia precisely onto the teaching of the *Guide of the Perplexed*." On the presumed lack of contradiction between kabbalah and philosophy, see *ibid.*, pp. 127–128, 151–152. In *Kabbalah*, p. 54, Scholem similarly concludes that Abulafia "believed that his own system was merely a continuation and elaboration of the teaching of the *Guide of the Perplexed*," but he draws a contrast between Abulafia and Maimonides on the grounds that the former, unlike the latter, defended the possibility of attaining a state of prophecy through a specific mystical technique of letter-combination. In *Ha-Qabbalah shel Sefer ha-Temunah*, pp. 137–138, Scholem acknowledges that the technique of letter-combination, *hokhmat ha-seruf*, is a distinctive layer added by Abulafia that transcends the philosophical conception of rational comprehension. The intellectual vision attained

fact that Abulafia himself clearly recognized that in an essential way the kabbalistic path diverges from the philosophical approach. It is not simply the case that prophecy is a more subtle form of comprehension than philosophy. What is revealed to the prophet through the technique of letter-combination and permutation of the divine names does not only transcend but may ultimately contradict the dictates of philosophical reasoning.

The point of contention and divergence can be detected when one compares Abulafia's understanding of the *sefirot* and Maimonides' doctrine of the ten separate intellects. Abulafia is obviously indebted to Maimonides to the extent that he identifies the *sefirot* as these intellects. However, it would be incorrect to reduce Abulafia's thinking on this matter simply to an ecstatic interpretation of Maimonidean ontology and epistemology. The supernal *sefirot* indeed are the separate intellects, but how do these intellects function for Abulafia? One may be tempted to assume that the intellects in Abulafia have the same characteristics as they do in Maimonides, but that would be only partially correct. Abulafia, in stark contrast to Maimonides, carried the burden of Jewish esotericism on his shoulders, particularly the writings of the German Pietists. The influence of the latter can be seen not only in Abulafia's discussion of *qabbalat ha-shemot* and his adoption of meditative techniques based on letter-combinations and permutations,<sup>161</sup> but also in his views regarding *qabbalat ha-sefirot*. That is, just as in the literature of the German Pietists, particularly the writings of Eleazar of Worms, the *sefirot* are equated with the ten manifestations (*hawwayot*) of the divine presence that are comprised within the Tetragrammaton (signified by a play on the divine name יהוה = הרה = 'י),<sup>162</sup> so too for Abulafia the ten

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through this meditative technique cannot be acquired by ordinary rational means. See *ibid.*, pp. 147–148.

<sup>161</sup> See Scholem, *Major Trends*, p. 144; *idem*, *Ha-Qabbalah shel Sefer ha-Temunah*, pp. 87–90, 161, 164; *idem*, *Kabbalah*, p. 54; Idel, *Mystical Experience*, pp. 16–17, 22–24; *idem*, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, pp. 98–101. See also reference to Jellinek cited above in n. 58.

<sup>162</sup> Concerning this notion in the Pietistic writings, see G. Scholem, *Reshit ha-Qabbalah* (Jerusalem and Tel-Aviv, 1948), p. 118; *idem*, *Origins*, p. 281. In the latter source Scholem changed the view he expressed in the former, concluding that for Eleazar the *hawwayot* are not essences within the Godhead comparable to the notion expressed in Isaac the Blind and his Geronese disciples, but rather manifestations of God's presence immanent in the ten cosmic depths as specified in *Sefer Yesirah*. For a similar approach see J. Dan, *The Esoteric Theology of the Ashkenazi Hasidim* (Jerusalem, 1968), pp. 94–103 (in Hebrew); Idel, "Sefirot Above the Sefirot," p. 278; *idem*, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, pp. 144–145. In the latter reference Idel cites several sources related to Abulafian kabbalah that adopt an immanentistic perception of the *sefirot* similar to the view of Eleazar of Worms. In my opinion there are passages in Eleazar's writings that suggest

*sefirot* constitute the divine name. (Needless to say, the identification of the *sefirot* as the divine name is a hallmark of the theosophic kabbalah as well and it is clear that the various medieval kabbalists were drawing from common sources.<sup>163</sup>) The complex interweaving of the Pietistic

he adopted a theosophic interpretation of the *hawwayot* or the *sefirot*. Cf. *Sefer ha-Shem*, MS London-BM 737, fols. 288b and 302a. In my opinion a theosophic meaning of the term *hawwayot* is implied in the passage in the Ashkenazi *Shir ha-Yihud*, in A. M. Habermann, *Shire ha-Yihud we-ha-Kavod* (Jerusalem, 1948), p. 27: 'ein 'od zulat hawayotekha hai we-khol tukhal we-'ein biltekha. ... la-hawayotekha 'ein hissaron u-le-yihudekha 'ein yittaron. There is no reality but the essences of the omnipotent God, and hence in the second couplet the word *hawwayot* is parallel to *yihud*, for collectively these essences make up the divine unity. A similar but even more striking formulation is found in the anonymous Pietistic text published by J. Dan, *Studies in Ashkenazi-Hasidic Literature* (Ramat-Gan, 1975), p. 148 (in Hebrew): "The Torah preceded the world by two thousand years, and prior to these two thousand years He was occupied with His great wisdom (*hokhmato ha-rehavah*). ... Thus, transcendent to the world are the essences of His unity (*hawwayot yihudo*). ... Before He realized the deed of His action He was everything, and after His action His essence was not diminished, for had the essences of His unity been diminished and decreased He could not have performed [His] actions. ... And just as the essences of His unity were not diminished in His bringing about everything (*be-fo'alo ha-kol*), it is not possible to speak of additions. ... For there is no end or limit to His essence or to any attribute that is in Him (*le-khol middat she-bo*). It says, 'Would you discover the mystery of God? Would you discover the limit of the Almighty?' (Job 11:7). Concerning the attributes contained in Him (*ha-middot ha-kelulot bo*) it says, 'Who performs great deeds which cannot be fathomed, and wondrous things without number' (ibid. 9:10), 'His greatness cannot be fathomed' (Ps. 145:3), 'His wisdom cannot be fathomed' (Isa. 40:28), and it is written, 'none can equal You' (Ps. 40:6)." According to this passage the essences of the divine unity are identified as the attributes contained within God. (On the infinite nature of the divine essence, cf. ibid., p. 156.) It may be concluded, therefore, that the *hawwayot* are the *middot*. It is of interest to note, moreover, that there is a reference in this very passage to the attribute of the all (*middat ha-kol*) that can neither be augmented nor diminished; unfortunately, the manuscript is not entirely legible at this point of the text and thus it is difficult to know for certain to what this attribute refers. In this passage, moreover, the essences of God's unity constitute the "great wisdom" whence the Torah emerges. The linguistic dimension of God's involvement with this wisdom is emphasized by Eleazar of Worms, *Sode Razayya*, ed. I. Kamelhar (Bilgoraj, 1936), p. 38: "Prior to the world and prior to the two thousand years in which the Torah preceded it, the Holy One, blessed be He, was occupied with His great wisdom and He combined the letters (*hayah 'oseq be-hokhmato ha-rehavah we-širef ha-'otiyot*)." From these two texts it can be concluded that in an early stage of Pietistic speculation the *hawwayot* were clearly identified as the essences of God's unity and were also depicted as the divine attributes. On the *middot* of God see also *Shir ha-Yihud* in Habermann, *Shire ha-Yihud we-ha-Kavod*, p. 21: 'ein qisbah 'el gavhutekha we-'ein sof le-'omeq middotekha. The word *gavhut* in this context is used in the same way that the word *ga'awah* is used in older Jewish esoteric literature: the literal connotation of the word is "pride" but it signifies the corporeal shape of the divine (perhaps even more specifically the phallus). It is noteworthy, therefore, that the expression '*omeq middotekha*, the "depth of Your attributes," is parallel to *gavhutekha*, "Your pride." This passage from *Shir ha-Yihud* is referred to in the aforementioned anonymous Pietistic composition; see Dan, *Studies in Ashkenazi-Hasidic Literature*, p. 158.

<sup>163</sup> See the comprehensive study of M. Idel, "The Concept of Torah in the Hekhalot and its Metamorphosis in the Kabbalah," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 1 (1981):

esotericism (related especially to the interpretation of the ten *sefirot* as ten *hawwayot* comprised within the Tetragrammaton) and Maimonidean ontology (the doctrine of the ten separate intellects) is evident in the following text from *Sheva' Netivot ha-Torah* that parallels a passage from *Hayye ha-Nefesh* cited above.<sup>164</sup> Abulafia thus reflects on the statement in M. 'Avot 1:1 that "Moses received the Torah from Sinai," *mosheh qibbel torah mi-sinai*:

By their saying "from Sinai" and not "in Sinai" they have indicated the truth of the secret and it is that to which they have alluded by saying that the ladder that Jacob our forefather saw was Sinai. This secret was revealed by way of numerology<sup>165</sup>. ... It is known by us that the secret of Sinai is double (*kefel*) and that is the voice (*qol*),<sup>166</sup> and it emerges from the two holy names that are Adonai Adonai,<sup>167</sup> and it emerges from the five occurrences of the unique name [YHWH],<sup>168</sup> for the secret of each one of them is *kb"r* and after<sup>169</sup> five vocalizations it becomes the voice (*qol*). The five vocalizations

23–84 (in Hebrew). On the correlation of the *sefirot* and the divine names, cf. the interpretation of the expression '*eser sefirot belimah* in Baruch Togarmi's *Maftehot ha-Hokhmah* printed in Scholem, *Ha-Qabbalah shel Sefer ha-Temunah*, p. 231: "That is, ten names without substance (*eser shemot beli mahut*), for God Himself is not counted together with the *sefirot* and He is not on the level as anyone of them but He is above them all in everything. He is the one that brings them forth and it is impossible to bring Him forth from them. [In relation] to Him they are not for He is their being in all respects. He is in everything and everything is in Him."

<sup>164</sup> See above n. 114.

<sup>165</sup> That is, the word *sullam* = 130 = *sinai*. The numerology is already employed in classical rabbinic midrashim. See, e.g., *Genesis Rabbah* 68:12. This numerology recurs frequently in the writings of the German Pietists and it is likely that some of these sources influenced Abulafia. Cf. *Sefer ha-Hokhmah*, MS Oxford-BL 1812, fol. 77b; *Sode Razayya'*, p. 35; *Sefer ha-Roqeah* (Jerusalem, 1967), p. 106; the pseudo-Eleazar commentary published as *Perush ha-Roqeah 'al ha-Torah*, ed. Ch. Konyevsky (Bene Beraq, 1986), 1:222; the comment of Ephraim ben Shimshon cited in *Sefer Tosafot ha-Shalem: Commentary on the Bible*, ed. J. Gellis (Jerusalem, 1984), 3:99; and the commentary of *ba'ale ha-tosafot* printed in *Da'at Zeqenim* (Livorno, 1783), 14b (cf. *Sefer Tosafot ha-Shalem*, 3:103). The likelihood of an Ashkenazi influence on Abulafia in this context is enhanced by some of the other numerologies employed here whose origin also seems to be in the Pietistic sources. See following note.

<sup>166</sup> That is, Sinai (סיני) = 130 = *kefel* (כפל) = *qol* (קל). The identification of Sinai and the voice based on the numerical equivalence is found as well in sources of Ashekenazi extraction. See, e.g., *Perush ha-Roqeah 'al ha-Torah*, 1:222. The implicit meaning of Abulafia is made explicit in *Sha'are Sedeq*, p. 17: "It says [at the beginning of *Sefer Yesirah*] that there are three books ... and they are the three names that emanate five according to the first letters of [the expression] *ketav*, *lashon*, and *peh* [writing, speech, and mouth], which [spells] *kefel*, and they are the *sullam* [ladder] that is Sinai. These are the five names that are the five corporeal *sefirot*."

<sup>167</sup> That is, Adonai (אדני) = 65 x 2 = 130.

<sup>168</sup> That is, YHWH (יהוה) = 26 x 5 = 130.

<sup>169</sup> Jellinek, *Philosophie und Kabbala*, p. 38, n. 10 suggests to emend the text from *kb"r w'hr* (כבר ואחר) to *kaf waw* (כף וא"ו), that is, 20 + 6. The point of the passage

instruct about the first five essences (*hawwayot*) by way of the right and five by way of the left. This is the [implication of the text] “Ten *sefirot belimah*, the number of the ten fingers, five corresponding to five.”<sup>170</sup> Therefore, the name of God [YHWH] begins in general with a Y (*yod*), and the secret of every being [*hawwah*, spelled with the remaining letters of the Tetragrammaton, HWH] is the *he'*, the *waw* that connects, and the second *he'*, to divide the [ten] beings (*hawwayot*) into two *he'in*, five corresponding to five, and these are the causes in the image of the action of the fingers of the two hands. Know that the attribute of the hands refers to the substance of the attribute of judgment, and the ten toes refer to the attribute of mercy.<sup>171</sup>

It would appear from this text that the *hawwayot* are essentially identical to the *sefirot* since Abulafia quite freely moves from the use of one term to that of the other. It must be pointed out, however, that in a passage in *Sitre Torah* Abulafia clearly distinguishes the two:

Therefore, according to our faith it cannot be said that the *hawwayot* were created,<sup>172</sup> for they are the ten *hawwayot* from which were necessitated the ten *sefirot*, and one of them is the leader of the congregation, the one that governs, and this is the tenth. Indeed, the beginning of the *hawwayot* is God, blessed be He, and He Himself is the middle of the *hawwayot* and He Himself is the end of the *hawwayot*. There are supernal mysteries in the *hawwayot* as well as in the *sefirot*, in the chariots, and in man.<sup>173</sup>

In this passage the ten *hawwayot* are depicted as the ontic source of the *sefirot*, which are identified as the separate intellects, the tenth of these being the Active Intellect or Metatron, the “leader of the congregation” (*sheliah sibbur*) who is invested with providential care over the sublunar world.<sup>174</sup> The reader is told, moreover, that these *hawwayot* are not created and that the divine being is itself enframed within them, that is, God is the beginning, middle, and end of the *hawwayot*. In a second passage from *Sitre Torah* Abulafia again employs this image: “The secret is that the soul comprises ten supernal *hawwayot* from the celestial ones, and their reality is a”<sup>175</sup> [ט“א], that is, one is the leader

according to this reading would thus be that five times 26 equals the numerical value of the word *qol*.

<sup>170</sup> *Sefer Yesirah* 1:3.

<sup>171</sup> *Philosophie und Kabbalah*, p. 10, corrected in part by MS NY-JTSA Mic. 1686, fol. 138b. For a slightly different rendering of part of this text, see Idel, *Mystical Experience*, p. 116.

<sup>172</sup> Cf. *Mafteah ha-Shemot*, MS NY-JTSA Mic. 1897, fol. 66b: “Therefore it is said that the essences (*hawwayot*) were not created.”

<sup>173</sup> MS Paris-BN heb. 774, fol. 148b. The passage is quoted by Idel, “*Sefirot Above the Sefirot*,” pp. 260–261.

<sup>174</sup> On the designation of Metatron as the “leader of the congregation” (*sheliah sibbur*) who is the tenth, cf. *'Or ha-Sekhel*, MS Vatican-BA ebr. 233, fol. 88a, mentioned by Idel, “*Sefirot Above the Sefirot*,” p. 261, n. 109. Cf. *'Ozar 'Eden Ganuz*, MS Oxford-BL 1580, fol. 27b; *Mafteah ha-Shemot*, MS JTSA Mic. 1897, fol. 72a.

of the congregation and nine are the masses under him, and he leads them all. ... In the end, in relation to them he is like the captain of a ship.”<sup>175</sup> Commenting on this passage Idel noted that the precise significance of the ten *hawwayot* in the Abulafian composition is not clear, but apparently they are “uncreated suprasefirotic concepts.”<sup>176</sup> The significant point for the purposes of this analysis is that the *hawwayot* are related to the divine nature in a way comparable to the relationship between the ten *hawwayot*, the ten *sefirot*, and the Tetragrammaton in the mystical theosophy of Eleazar of Worms. It is reasonable to presume a direct influence of the Pietistic author on Abulafia even if it is the case that the latter deviates somewhat from the views expressed by the former.<sup>177</sup>

The connection of the *sefirot* and the divine name is also evident in another passage in *Sitre Torah* wherein Abulafia notes that the ten gates closed during the Ne'ilah service on Yom Kippur “correspond to the ten *sefirot* ... and in order to complete the secret of the name there are three yods, yyy, for in the three worlds you find the threefold sanctus that is clear testimony. The comprehensive intention is knowledge of God, blessed be He, for He is everything.”<sup>178</sup> Analogously, in *Oṣar 'Eden Ganuz* Abulafia comments:

It is known that the body of a person is created by the ten *sefirot*, and similarly the year and the world. Thus there are thirty *sefirot*. Concerning this we have received that the name is to be written with three yods, and His name is called 'el to indicate that He, blessed be He, is one with them all.<sup>179</sup>

<sup>175</sup> MS Paris-BN héb. 774, fol. 172a.

<sup>176</sup> *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, p. 147. See idem, “*Sefirot Above the Sefirot*,” p. 262.

<sup>177</sup> See Idel, “*Sefirot Above the Sefirot*,” pp. 261, n. 110 and 262, n. 115.

<sup>178</sup> MS Paris-BN héb. 774, fol. 128a. On the significance of the threefold sanctus in terms of divine unity, cf. the passage from *Shomer Miṣwah* quoted above in n. 101. On the connection of the divine name and the *sefirot*, cf. *Sefer ha-Haftarah*, MS Munich-BS 285, fol. 30b: “We have shown that the name is arranged in tens, that is, it evolves to ten *sefirot*.” In that context, however, the word *sefirot* is synonymous with *misparim*.

<sup>179</sup> MS Oxford-BL 1580, fol. 5a. Cf. *Or ha-Sekhel*, MS Vatican-BA ebr. 233, fols. 87b–88a: “Know that the priest would mention this twelve-letter name ten times on Yom Kippur corresponding to the ten days of repentance, and corresponding to the ten *sefirot*, the ten commandments (*dibberot*) and the ten sayings (*ma'amarot*), for all of them equal 'el [whose numerical value is 31]. This alludes to the one that emanates from reality to reality, from level to level, from matter to matter, from cause to cause until everything reaches the leader of the congregation, for the leader of the congregation is the *yod*, that is, the tenth, ‘and every tenth one shall be holy to the Lord’ (Lev. 27:32).” Cf. *Imre Shefer*, MS Munich-BS 40, fols. 258a–261b, where Abulafia delineates ten *sefirot* in each of the three spheres of being mentioned in the second part of *Sefer Yesirah*, macrocosm (*'olam*), microcosm (*nefesh*), and world (*shanaḥ*). In each of these planes, moreover, there is a threefold classification of the *sefirot*: written (*nikhtavot*), articulated orally (*nivṭa'ot*), and contemplated mentally (*nehshavot*). This classification reflects the

In Abulafia's thinking God is not ontically separated from the *sefirot*, for they comprise His essential name. Here we have gone beyond the assumptions of Maimonidean philosophy to embrace some basic elements of Jewish esotericism. The ontic continuity of God and the *sefirot* is underscored by the expression *sofer ha-sefirot* employed by Abulafia to refer to God. On the one hand, as we have seen above, this expression signifies that the one who counts is not identical to that which is counted.<sup>180</sup> On the other hand, inasmuch as the numbers represent the various grades of being that emanate from the one who counts there is an element of continuity.<sup>181</sup> The expression *sofer ha-sefirot* refers to the emanator for the intellects derive from God and in that sense they are enumerated by Him. Knowledge of the *sefirot* en-

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three forms of language – writing, speech, and thought – found in Abulafia's work, connected especially to three stages of the meditational technique. See Idel, *Mystical Experience*, p. 20; idem, *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics*, pp. 3–11. On the whole, then, one can speak of ninety *sefirot*, or ninety manifestations of the ten *sefirot*. Cf. *Imre Shefer*, MS Munich-BS 40, fol. 266b, where Abulafia explicitly refers to ninety *sefirot*. On the correlation of the *sefirot* and divine names cf. *Or ha-Sekhel*, MS Vatican-BA ebr. 233, fol. 100a: "Know that the [word] *ha-holam* comprises in its numerical value [the word] *ha-hokhmah* and its secret comprises three *sefirot* that are three unique names (*shemot meyuhadim*)."

<sup>180</sup> Cf. text from *Mafteah ha-Shemot* cited above in n. 113 and the passage from Togarmi in n. 163. Cf. *Ošar 'Eden Ganuz*, MS Oxford-BL 1580, fols. 15b–16a: "I have already informed you that the first cause is not called *sefirah* for he does not fall under [the category of] number in any manner except by name alone, which is included in the twenty-two letters. He is together with [yet] separate from them and he moves them all." Cf. also *Imre Shefer*, MS Munich-BS 40, fol. 227b. In that context the one who counts the ten numbers, *sofer yod misparim nisparim*, is not God but man, and the wisdom of numbers, *hokhmat ha-mispar*, is connected with prophecy. On the role of man as the *sofer ha-sefirot* in emulation of God, compare the text from *Mafteah ha-Sefirot* referred to in the following note.

<sup>181</sup> Cf. passage from *Mafteah ha-Sefirot*, MS Milan-BA 53, fol. 155b, cited in Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, p. 148 and the author's comments on p. 349, n. 326. Idel renders the expression, *sofer*, in this context as the one who counts based on the presumption that *sefirot* means numbers (see p. 349, n. 323). Cf., however, *Geṭ ha-Shemot*, MS Oxford-BL 1658, fol. 90a, where Abulafia explicitly relates the word *sefirot* to the scribe who inscribes, *sofer ha-meḥoqeq*. It is possible that the expression *sofer ha-sefirot* has the double connotation of one who counts and one who inscribes. See also *Shomer Mišwah*, MS Paris-BN héb. 853, fol. 41a, where it appears that the word *sofer*, understood as a scribe, is applied specifically to the procreative function: ועל כן היא טיפה סרוחה אשר סופה חדשה והיא פרוסה ספורה על פי הסופר שכתב זרע האדם ביד חוט השורה שהוא חווה השטר ושמו שרביט הזהב. Cf. *ibid.*, fol. 43b, where scribal activity is associated with the hands. On the description of the *sefirot* as the crownlets that the scribe draws upon the letters of the Torah scroll, cf. the passage from *Mafteah ha-Shemot* cited above in n. 113. It is likely that these references to the scribe are related to an idea expressed in much older sources concerning the scribal activity of Meṭatron, a view explicitly affirmed by Abulafia. Cf. *Mafteah ha-Shemot*, MS NY-



dows a person with positive knowledge about the source whence they emanate, i. e., the one who counts the numbers.

In the final analysis, Abulafia does not unequivocally or consistently adopt the *via negativa* of Maimonides. There are, to be sure, some passages that lean in this direction. Thus, for example, a selection from one of Abulafia's compositions reads like a succinct summary of Maimonides' position:

All the perfect sages and all the true prophets from Adam until today received one perfect and true tradition and this is the tradition of the [divine] unity (*qabbalat ha-yihud*). They all knew, comprehended, and also discerned the matter of the first reality who is called by one name that is unique to Him and no one apart from Him in all of the existents participates in it, for it is the matter of His essence and the truth of His substance. It is not possible that it should be known or comprehended by anyone outside Him. Therefore, it is impossible for man to comprehend anything but His existence alone, and that is that he knows by rational proofs that His privation is impossible since He is the necessary of existence in the aspect of His essence.<sup>182</sup>

In the following extract from *'Imre Shefer* it again appears that Abulafia's adaptation of Jewish esoteric motifs regarding the Tetragrammaton and the divine attributes, perhaps enhanced by theosophic kabbalistic literature, is mitigated by a Maimonidean approach:

The unique name is indicative of a single essence that is also threefold, and this triad is a unity. This should not pose a difficulty in your eyes for this is revealed from the secret of His names, blessed be He, for they are three and the three of them are one, signifying a single and unique essence. "I am that I am," *'ehyeh 'asher 'ehyeh* (Exod. 3:15), and thus [the threefold repetition in the priestly blessing] YHWH YHWH YHWH (Num. 6:24-26), and similarly [the threefold repetition in the sanctus] "Holy, holy, holy," *qadosh qadosh qadosh* (Isa. 6:3). According to the thought of the soul this secret comprises wisdom, understanding, and knowledge (*ha-hokhmah we-ha-binah we-hada'at*), for the wisdom of God is His understanding and His knowledge, and His understanding is His knowledge and His wisdom, and His knowledge is His wisdom and His understanding – one is not without the other. The names attest and indicate to us that all matters pertaining to God are not added to God but they are the divine essence. Even that which appears in relation to Him as qualities and attributes that change in accordance with the ones who receive them and that signify composition, multiplicity, and change is not ap-

JTSA Mic. 1897, fols. 72a-b. Cf. *ibid.*, fol. 82a where Mercury is described as the "scribe and he who forms the one who receives his power."

<sup>182</sup> MS Sassoon 290, p. 233. Regarding this work, see Idel, "Writings of Abraham Abulafia," p. 6. Compare the fragment from the circle of Abulafia in MS Oxford-BL 2047, fol. 68b, where in a radically apophatic manner it is emphasized that one can say neither something nor nothing with respect to God. Cf. *'Or ha-Sekhel*, MS Vatican-BA ebr. 233, fols. 120a-b; *Sefer ha-Seruf*, MS Munich-BS 22, fol. 191a.

plied to Him, blessed be He, but rather they are in relation to us in accordance with the limit of our wisdom, the diminution of our understanding, and the deficiency of our knowledge. Our intellects are not perfected so that we might comprehend the divine matter as it is but only in accordance with the actions of the Blessed One can we comprehend Him. All that which indicates composition must be removed from Him.<sup>183</sup>

In striking contrast to these texts (and others that could have been cited) wherein Abulafia unequivocally posits a negative theology, in other passages he clearly affirms the possibility of knowledge of the attributes or names of God that constitute the divine essence. One section of *Sefer ha-Meliš* is especially interesting for Abulafia embraces a paradoxical, if not contradictory, position. On the one hand, he wishes to maintain the Maimonidean claim that God is only known positively through His attributes of action, but, on the other, he insists that within the divine nature there is no substantial difference between the essence and the attributes: to know the attributes in some measure is to know the essence. Abulafia thus comments on the biblical expression “Lord, God of Israel,” *YHWH 'elohe yisra'el*:

The holy name is threefold in truth and it is the essential name (*shem ha'ešem*), and it is the name of the attribute of mercy and the name of the attribute of judgment. Therefore, there are three names and they are the one unified name (*shem 'ehad meyuhad*) in truth, for the essence of the name is not without its attributes nor are the attributes without Him, they are not added to His essence or removed from His essence because they are His potencies. His potencies are His essence and His essence is His potencies. No (human) creature can know the truth of this matter unless something of the truth of His qualities is known, for they are His attributes. That is, it is impossible for the nature of every intellect except His intellect, blessed be He, to know His essence. What is known from Him is only what God performs through His attributes.<sup>184</sup>

A similar antinomical position is taken by Abulafia in *Mafteah ha-Shemot*. That is, at first he adopts an apophatic orientation that seems to echo faithfully the viewpoint of Maimonides: “It is known to every enlightened person that we have no comprehension at all of the essence of the Creator, may He be exalted, since there is no one in existence who knows what He is but Him. However, His names instruct us somewhat about His characteristics, and it is sufficient for us to know them in accordance with the quiddity of human nature.”<sup>185</sup> In the continua-

<sup>183</sup> MS Munich-BS 40, fol. 238b. Cf. *Mafteah ha-Shemot*, MS NY-JTSA Mic. 1897, fol. 63a.

<sup>184</sup> MS Munich-BS 285, fol. 10a.

<sup>185</sup> MS NY-JTSA Mic. 1897, fol. 49b. Cf. *'Or ha-Sekhel*, MS Vatican-BA ebr. 233, fol. 119a: “The prophet does not comprehend God except through knowledge of the

tion of this text Abulafia reverts to a more positive theological standpoint based in part on an ancient theurgical conception of the divine names: "After this wonderful observation, however, it is necessary to indicate in what way the names can be mentioned and how one is to write them to compel by their means the evil spirits and demons, to snare them in the net of the intellect. ... It is appropriate to speak first of the intelligible image after we have spoken of the sensible and the imaginary, and afterwards the matter of the names and their virtues will be mentioned, and how those who know them are worthy of prophesying in the name of God, blessed be He, inasmuch as they know them in truth."<sup>186</sup> In this passage Abulafia departs from the strictly philosophical view articulated in the former text. That is, there is an esoteric knowledge of God that imparts gnosis about something more than the necessity of God's existence, and that gnosis is connected to the divine names. The same conclusion can be drawn from the following passage in *Hayye ha-'Olam ha-Ba'*: "Know that of all the holy sciences there is none like this science for it is the holy of holies, and it is the terminus of all the ways that a person can apprehend knowledge of God and comprehension of His actions, discernment of His ways and attributes, for His names, may He be elevated, are matters very close to Him, and they are verily the truth of His Torah."<sup>187</sup> The point is reiterated by Abulafia in *Oṣar 'Eden Ganuz* but in that context it is linked exegetically to the ancient *Shi'ur Qomah* speculation:

It is known in the tradition that R. Ishmael said, "Whoever knows the measurement of the Creator is guaranteed to inhabit the world-to-come."<sup>188</sup> The explanation of this is that ... His name instructs about His measurement

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name just as the perfect philosopher does not comprehend God except through His actions." According to this passage, the mystic's knowledge of the name is equated with the philosopher's comprehension of the divine attributes. Cf. "Sefer ha-Ôt," pp. 70 and 79–80. An interesting convergence of the apophatic and kataphatic positions is found in the following remark in *Mafteah ha-Shemot*, MS NY-JTSA Mic. 1897, fol. 68a: "By way of the word *'anokhi*, whose secret is *'einkha* and *we-hinakh* [i.e., the consonants אֵנְכִי are the same as אֵינִי and these are numerically equal to וְהִנֵּךְ], that is, when a person thinks that he can find Him, He is far away, but when he thinks that He is far away he finds Him, for he is close to Him, blessed be He."

<sup>186</sup> MS NY-JTSA Mic. 1897, fol. 57a.

<sup>187</sup> MS Oxford-BL 1580, fol. 41a. Cf. "Sefer ha-Ôt," p. 70: "ובתארי שמותיו יגלה פעולותיו ובהתיחד שמו יודיענו עצמו ושפע דברו ישמח לבבנו ובהכרינו רוח קדשו Cf. *Hotam ha-Haftarah*, MS Munich-BS 285, fol. 31b: "Knowledge of the name is that which brings out the intellect from potentiality to actuality. ... The knowledge of Him is the goal of human felicity for which he was created in the divine image and in His likeness."

<sup>188</sup> The tradition to which Abulafia refers is an oft-cited passage that appears in a fragment of the *Shi'ur Qomah* material. Cf. *Synopse zur Hekhalot-Literatur*, ed. P. Schäfer et. al. (Tübingen, 1982), § 953; and see Scholem, *Major Trends*, p. 64.

and about His attribute, and this is the truth. ... For the one who knows His name, "which is called by the name of the Lord of Hosts enthroned on the cherubim" (2 Sam. 6:3) in the secret of the "Lord, God of Israel," knows His attribute, and he who knows His attribute knows His activity, and he who knows His activity will discern [the truth of the verse] "The Rock! – His deeds are perfect" (Deut. 32:4), and justice will be necessitated from the flawlessness of His activity, "for all His ways are just" (ibid.).<sup>189</sup>

In the epistemic hierarchy affirmed by Abulafia, knowledge of the divine names exceeds the sensible, imaginary, and intelligible. Indeed, this gnosis is transmitted exclusively as part of a mystical initiation. To cite again from *Mafteah ha-Shemot*: "According to the ways of tradition (*darkhe ha-qabbalah*) I want to indicate that the tradition found in our hands today in this matter is the tradition itself that extends from Adam to Abraham our forefather, and from him to Moses our master, and from him it comes to us in writing and orally, and what comes to us in writing is divided into two types ... the matter of the names that are in the Torah ... and those names that are derived from the essential name."<sup>190</sup> "The prophetic, which is divine, does not include the whole human species, but it applies to a few of the members of that species and they are the elite of the unique nation, concerning whom it is said that they are capable of receiving prophecy and therefore the essence of prophecy is called tradition, as [the rabbis] blessed be their memory, said, 'Moses received the Torah from Sinai and transmitted it to Joshua, and Joshua to the elders, and the elders to the prophets, and the prophets to the members of the Great Assembly,' for the tradition derives from one who receives and transmits it to one who receives from him until this very day. Thus shall the matter be forever since the knowledge of the name is more hidden in its nature than all other knowledge."<sup>191</sup> In *'Oṣar 'Eden Ganuz* Abulafia speaks of three levels of human beings who are conjoined to the divine reality (*shalosh ma'alat 'enoshiyyot we-nidbbaqot ba-'elohiyyot*), the philosopher, sage, and pro-

<sup>189</sup> MS Oxford-BL 1580, fol. 152b.

<sup>190</sup> MS NY-JTSA Mic. 1897, fol. 55b.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid., fol. 56a-b. Cf. *Ish 'Adam*, MS Munich-BS 285, fol. 19a: "Thus the knowledge of the name is above all [kinds of] wisdom in level and grade, and blessing is dependent on it." Cf. the Abulafian text translated in Scholem, *Major Trends*, pp. 140–141 (the original is transcribed in ibid., p. 382, n. 75). See also idem, *Ha-Qabbalah shel Sefer ha-Temunah*, pp. 158–159, 209. On the extreme exclusivity of those who possess knowledge of the name, cf. *'Oṣar 'Eden Ganuz*, MS Oxford-BL 1580, fol. 158a: "The matter of the knowledge of the name is at the limit of concealment and hiddenness according to its nature, and our knowledge is short and weak. The sages who comprehend it add concealment to concealment on account of the secrets. Therefore, those who know it are few and, moreover, those who expound it are the select of the few."

phet. The philosopher (as the word in Greek indicates) is one who loves wisdom; the sage (*hakham*) one who has acquired wisdom; and the prophet, who encompasses both philosopher and sage, is one who has received the traditions regarding the divine names.<sup>192</sup> Mystical (or prophetic) gnosis, in contrast to philosophical wisdom, involves a direct transmission from master to disciple, whether through oral or written means. In an extraordinary passage in *Mafteah ha-Shemot* Abulafia exegetically relates the mystical praxis of transmitting the name to the ritual of pointing to the unleavened bread at the beginning of the Pass-over seder:

Its matter is like [the recitation of] “this is the bread of affliction,” for [transmitting the name] is like someone who says “behold, here is the bread,” that is, the bread of affliction from which our forefathers ate in Egypt, and we eat it now as a way of recalling the exodus from Egypt. One points to it with his fingers, and this matter is [like the verse] “This is my God and I will glorify Him” (Exod. 15:2), concerning which they said that it indicates that they pointed to Him with a finger.<sup>193</sup> This is the matter of the knowledge of the name, for they point to it with a finger just as a person teaches children by placing his finger on each and every letter, and he says to them, “the name of this letter is as follows and the name of that letter is as follows.” Thus they acted with respect to the instruction regarding the explicit name with its letters, vowels, and its pronunciation.<sup>194</sup> Thus God said concerning it, “This shall be My name forever, this My appellation for all eternity” (Exod. 3:15), just like one who points it out to his students with [his] fingers. He says to him, “This is My name,” for the knowledge of the name is transmitted in a tradition to the perfect sages in a way that returns them to the days of their youth, for they teach it to them from *'alef* to *taw*, embracing new matters that never arose in their minds to hear.<sup>195</sup>

<sup>192</sup> MS Oxford-BL 1580, fol. 150a.

<sup>193</sup> *Deuteronomy Rabbah*, ed. S. Liebermann (Jerusalem, 1965) 1:15, p. 15; *Song of Songs Rabbah*, ed. S. Dunaski (Jerusalem and Tel-Aviv, 1980), 4:3, p. 101. Cf. *Pirque Rabbi Eliezer* (Warsaw, 1852), ch. 42, 99b, and n. 53 of David Luria ad locum. On the use of the image of pointing with a finger to refer to comprehension and union that ensues therefrom, cf. the anonymous commentary on the Torah in MS Oxford-BL 1920, fol. 3a: “Furthermore, they said [B. Ta’anit 31a; *Midrash Tehillim*, ed. S. Buber (Vilna, 1891), 139a] that in the future the Holy One, blessed be He, will dance around the righteous and each and every one will point to Him with a finger. ... Concerning that which they said ‘with a finger,’ this is the comprehension (*hassagah*) and the pleasure of union (*’oneg hityahdut*) in what one comprehends, just as they said that the maidservant at the [Red] Sea saw that which Ezekiel ben Buzi the Priest did not see on dry land, for they pointed to God with a finger, as it says, “This is my God and I will glorify Him’ (Exod. 15:2).”

<sup>194</sup> Abulafia’s example may have been in part influenced by the midrashic comment that young children “would go to the schoolhouse and point to the divine names (*’azkarot*) with a finger.” Cf. *Tanhuma*, ed. S. Buber (Vilna, 1885), Bemidbar 10, 5b; *Numbers Rabbah* 2:3. In that context the word *’azkarot* parallels the expression *’iqonin shel melekh*, suggesting that the letters of the divine name function iconically.

<sup>195</sup> MS NY-JTSA Mic. 1897, fol. 65a.

The significance of the ritual of reciting the words **הא לחמא עניא**, “this is the bread of affliction,” is that it involves a sense of immediacy conveyed by the gesture of pointing directly to the unleavened bread with one’s fingers. The direct and immediate quality of the mystical gnosis is alluded to as well in the verse, “This is my God and I will glorify Him,” which according to one rabbinic interpretation involved the Israelites pointing to God with their fingers. According to this text, moreover, this immediacy is underscored by the fact that transmission of the name is compared to teaching the letters of the alphabet to children. Receiving knowledge of the name, therefore, is a retrieval of the simplicity and directness of the child’s learning the alphabet.<sup>196</sup> All of these examples intimate that mystical knowing involves a kind of visual apprehension of God that would theoretically be denied by the apophatic scepticism of Maimonidean rationalism.<sup>197</sup> Indeed, the epistemic

<sup>196</sup> Cf. *Sefer ha-Yashar*, MS Munich-BS 285, fols. 27a-b: “Thus when a person begins to study the letters of the Torah and he grows in their wisdom each and every day, he already participates with the elite who unify the name.”

<sup>197</sup> The principal object of that visual apprehension is the letters of the Tetragrammaton. Cf. Abulafia’s statement in *Ish ’Adam*, MS Munich-BS 285, fol. 18b: “This is [the meaning of] ‘And the image of the Lord he will behold,’ *u-temunat YHWH yabit* (Num. 12:6), that is, he would contemplate the letters of this name and their ways and they would tell him everything that is hidden. The proof is that [the expression] *u-temunat YHWH yabit* is numerically equal to [the expression] *be-shem YHWH yabit*, for the numerical value of the closed *mem* in the word *be-shem* equals 600.” Both expressions, therefore, equal 902. This numerical equivalence supports the claim that the image of the Lord, *temunat YHWH*, consists of the name of the Lord, *shem YHWH*, one of the central tenets of ancient and medieval Jewish esotericism. Cf. “Sefer ha-’Ot,” p. 80: “Therefore you are the people of the Lord, supernal holy ones who envision His name, contemplate the source of your intellects and see the image of YHWH within the form of your hearts.” And cf. *ibid.*, p. 81: “The Lord caused me to rise in my place to praise the name of His glory silently and openly, and He showed me the image of His name engraved within my heart.” See Idel, *Mystical Experience*, p. 103. Cf. *Sefer ha-Haftarah*, MS Munich-BS 285, fol. 30a: **אמנם היות שם המורכב שהוא יי"ד ה"א וא"י ה"א אדם שעל הכסא הנה זה אגלהו**. On the identification of the name and the glory, cf. *ibid.*, fol. 31a. On the association of the corporeal dimensions of the *Shi'ur Qomah* tradition and letters of the divine name, cf. the passage from *Oṣar 'Eden Ganuz* cited below at n. 213. The emphasis on the direct and immediate transmission of knowledge about the divine names contrasts with the more dialectical and circumspect approach taken by Abulafia in the commentary to *Sefer ha-Meliṣ*, MS Munich-BS 285, fol. 17a: “It is necessary that one should reveal and conceal in accordance with what the capacity of one’s wisdom attains. In this way did Raziel act. ... and similarly shall I, his disciple who explains his words, act for I shall hide and uncover.” A divine directive to reveal secrets in writing is given to Zekharyahu in “Sefer ha-’Ot,” p. 80. For a similar approach cf. Baruch Togarmi, *Maftēhot ha-Qabbalah*, in Scholem, *Ha-Qabbalah shel Sefer ha-Temunah*, p. 235; *Sefer ha-Šeruf*, MS Munich-BS 22, fols. 191a–b. The dialectic of concealment and disclosure espoused by Abulafia is a hermeneutic adopted by other thirteenth-century kabbalists, including Moses de León. See E. R. Wolfson, “Circumcision, Vision of God, and Textual Interpretation: From Midrashic Trope to Mystical Symbol,” *History of Religions* 27 (1987): 189–215, esp. 210; Liebes,

superiority of kabbalah over philosophy lies in the fact that by means of the former the Jew alone may be ontically transformed into an angelic or divine being. The apotheosis for Abulafia is linked exclusively to the mystical praxis transmitted as part of the tradition: "According to the kabbalah all the intelligibles (*muskallim*) will be transformed into divine realities (*'elohiyyim*) and through them truth will be distinguished from falsehood, life from death, and good from evil. [This takes place] initially in the human intellect and [then] in the divine through the aspect of the [letter-] combination."<sup>198</sup>

The tension in Abulafia is particularly evident in the following passage in *Hayye Nefesh* wherein he offers the following exegesis of the beginning of the Decalogue, "I am the Lord your God" (Exod. 20:1): "The word 'I' instructs about the necessity of His existence, blessed be He, and the words 'the Lord your God' instruct about what it is possible to comprehend of His essence by means of His names, and this is the knowledge of God."<sup>199</sup> According to Abulafia's reading, the first part of the verse accords with the apophatic orientation of Maimonides and the second part with the kataphatic orientation of Jewish esotericism. In another telling passage in his *Mafteah ha-Hokhmot* Abulafia remarks that the "kabbalist adds to that which is called *ma'aseh merkavah* the paths of the names and their combinations."<sup>200</sup> Similarly, in *Mafteah ha-Shemot* Abulafia notes that in addition to what the philosophers know through comprehension of the intellect (*hassagat ha-sekhel*) there are a "few matters that are not mentioned by them, and we do not know them from our knowledge but we have received them from the prophets. ... Those things that were added to their words in accordance with what we have received are what we call in the category of the account of the chariot in the knowledge of the names (*ma'aseh merkavah bi-yedi'at ha-shemot*)."<sup>201</sup> The view expressed in these texts represents an obvious departure from the strict Maimonidean approach that would identify *ma'aseh merkavah* with metaphysics, *hokhmat ha-*

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*Studies in the Zohar*, pp. 26–30. It is likely that the similarity between the respective hermeneutical approaches of Abulafia and Moses de León can be explained on the basis of a common source in the thought of Maimonides. See E. R. Wolfson, "Sefer ha-Rimmon: Critical Edition and Introductory Study," Ph.D. dissertation, Brandeis University, 1986, 1:22–27.

<sup>198</sup> *Mafteah ha-Shemot*, MS NY-JTSA Mic. 1897, fol. 87a. It must be noted that in other contexts the apotheosis is described in more strictly philosophical terms. Cf. the passage from the commentary to *Sefer ha-Melis*, MS Munich-BS 285, fols. 12b–13a, cited and discussed by Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, p. 16.

<sup>199</sup> MS Munich-BS 408, fol. 71a.

<sup>200</sup> MS NY-JTSA Mic. 1686, fol. 106a.

<sup>201</sup> MS NY-JTSA Mic. 1897, fol. 52b.

'*elohut*. Even though Abulafia appropriates Maimonides' identification of *ma'aseh merkavah* and *hokhmat ha-'elohut*, it is abundantly clear from his writings that his understanding of these terms goes beyond the philosophic interpretation.<sup>202</sup> Indeed, as Abulafia reminds the reader constantly in his compositions, the real content of *hokhmat ha-'elohut* is available only to one who has received the prophetic tradition of divine names and not to the philosopher who intellectually contemplates the principles of being. The "account of the chariot," *ma'aseh merkavah*, is above all else the knowledge of the combinations and permutations of the letters of the divine names (*harkavat shem be-shem*) that represents the authentic repository of oral esoteric traditions.<sup>203</sup> Abulafia insists that for the kabbalist there is this additional component that is not available to the philosopher.<sup>204</sup> Knowledge of secrets is reserved exclu-

<sup>202</sup> Idel, *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics*, p. 51, remarks that the one goal of Abulafia's discussions on the account of the chariot is the "reconciliation of the traditions he received from his teachers with the view of Maimonides, who saw *Ma'aseh Merkavah* as metaphysics." In my estimation the issue that emerges from the relevant material is not a reconciliation of the esoteric and Maimonidean views on the part of Abulafia, but the simultaneous appropriation and dialectical overturning of the Maimonidean perspective by the esoteric traditions regarding the divine names that are in great measure derived from the works of Haside Ashkenaz (the pronounced influence of the latter upon Abulafia has been well noted by Idel himself; for references see above n. 161). For a slightly different approach, and one more congenial to the one that I have adopted here, see Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, p. 17. According to Idel's analysis in that context, Abulafia's appropriation of Maimonidean philosophical terminology served the twofold purpose of allowing Abulafia to express the significance of his mystical experiences and to attract the philosophically acute readers to the esoteric wisdom of the divine names. See also Idel's elaborate analysis of Abulafia's complex relationship to Maimonidean philosophy in "Maimonides and Kabbalah," pp. 54–78. The relationship of philosophy and kabbalah in Abulafia has also been recently surveyed by S. Magid, "Hasidism in Transition: The Hasidic Ideology of Rabbi Gershon Henoch of Radzin in Light of Medieval Jewish Philosophy and Kabbala," Ph.D. dissertation, Brandeis University, 1994, pp. 83–101.

<sup>203</sup> See Scholem, *Major Trends*, p. 143; Idel, *Mystical Experience*, p. 21; idem, *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics*, pp. 18, 49–52. In addition to the play on words between *merkavah* and *leharkiv* Abulafia also explicitly identified the mystical orchard, *pardes*, and the divine name. Cf. *Mafteah ha-Shemot*, MS NY-JTSA Mic. 1897, fol. 67b: "Thus [the letters] *spr* [have the numerical value] of [the word] *shem* [name] and the [letter] *dalet* that remains [from the word *pardes*] is an allusion to the holy name and this is the secret of the Tetragrammaton, which is the foundation of foundations and the pillar of wisdom and everything depends on it. If you wish to enter *pardes* by means of this name know that I will open the gates of light for you."

<sup>204</sup> Cf. *Shomer Mišwah*, MS Paris-BN héb. 853, fols. 48a–b: "The way of tradition (*derekh ha-qabbalah*) is a way that participates with the simple meaning (*peshat*) and with [philosophical] wisdom (*hokhmah*), and it attests that both of them are true. It is necessary that the matter should be as such. However, in the tradition there is a supplement of ways (*tosefet derakhim*) that are not revealed from the simple meaning nor counted with wisdom; they are revealed in forms that are separate from these two



sively for the circle of kabbalists, which is not identical with the circle of philosophers.<sup>205</sup>

The transcendence of philosophical wisdom by kabbalistic gnosis is linked especially to the knowledge of the divine names.<sup>206</sup> Thus, in one passage in *'Imre Shefer* Abulafia criticizes the respective views of Abraham ibn Ezra and Maimonides related to the divine name for both present the issue in terms of rational discourse.<sup>207</sup> By contrast, Abulafia commends Nahmanides, who well understood that matters pertaining to the divine names are based on an authentic tradition transmitted orally and not on logic or supposition.<sup>208</sup> Most importantly, for the purposes of this study it must again be emphasized that mystical gnosis of the divine name for Abulafia implies insight into the divine nature, *hokhmat ha-'elohut*, which is the true *ma'aseh merkavah*. As he puts it in *'Imre Shefer*: “Knowledge of the letters of the explicit name instructs us about the divine characteristics, properties, measurements, and attri-

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ways and they are very removed from the two of them in an absolute distance, that is, removed from the literalists (*anshe peshat*) and masters of wisdom (*ba'ale ha-hokhmah*), for they cannot bear the truth in their intellects on account of their ignorance of the received truths. Therefore the kabbalist is not permitted to reveal them and explain them in his composition, but rather he should reveal a little and conceal twice as much. . . . The goal that will bring the ways of tradition to him is the reception of the intelligible, divine, prophetic overflow from God, blessed be He, through the intermediary of the Active Intellect and the drawing down of the blessing and providence in the name of God on the particular and on the universal.”

<sup>205</sup> Thus Abulafia achieves precisely what Maimonides could not inasmuch as the latter merely adopted the formal structure of esotericism without any positive mystical content. That is, Maimonides also tried to limit transmission of secrets to a special circle of disciples that was not identical with the circle of philosophers, but he could not justify this since the content of the secrets theoretically and practically could be discerned through the powers of intellection and natural reasoning. See Altmann, “Maimonides’ Attitude Toward Jewish Mysticism,” pp. 203–204.

<sup>206</sup> See Idel, “Maimonides and Kabbalah,” pp. 67–68.

<sup>207</sup> Cf. *Shomer Miṣwah*, MS Paris-BN héb. 853, fol. 45a where Abulafia mentions Maimonides’ discussion of the divine name in the *Guide of the Perplexed*, I.61–64, and then alerts the reader: “There is no need here to go over what the master already said in his book for my intention is not to copy the words of books. However, my intention in this composition is to reveal in it some of the mysteries of Torah regarding the matter of the knowledge of the name. It is not possible for me to reveal everything to everyone, but only to the elite.” Abulafia implies that his purpose is not to repeat what Maimonides has done but rather to disclose the esoteric gnosis of the name that is not found in the philosophical treatment. The attitude taken in this passage contrasts sharply with Abulafia’s description in *Sheva’ Netivot ha-Torah*, p. 20, according to which Maimonides’ allusions to combinations of the letters of the divine names corresponds to Nahmanides’ statement regarding the nature of Torah as a continuum of names. See Idel, “Maimonides and Kabbalah,” p. 74, n. 158.

<sup>208</sup> *'Imre Shefer*, MS Munich-BS 40, fol. 235b.

butes, and no other thing but them can indicate such matters.”<sup>209</sup> Through knowledge of God’s names one apprehends the divine attributes, an apprehension that in turn serves as a basis for the religious commandment of *imitatio dei*. Thus, in *Shomer Miṣwah* Abulafia interprets the verse, “You shall be holy, for I, the Lord your God, am holy” (Lev. 19:2), in the following way: “The world ‘holiness’ (*qedushah*) means ‘preparation’ (*hazmanah*), that is, you are prepared to receive My power because I am prepared to disseminate My blessing upon you when you imitate Me through your attributes. Therefore the Blessed One informed us about His names that instruct about His attributes. Even the essential name is an attribute for according to the tradition the name YHWH is the attribute of mercy and the name Elohim the attribute of judgment.”<sup>210</sup> In the continuation of this passage Abulafia affirms the position of Maimonides, to whom he refers directly: “In the end it is known demonstrably that God cannot be comprehended by anyone other than He and all that can be comprehended about Him is His existence and the fact that He has no privation in any manner. His creatures and their existence bear witness to His being and to His eternal existence and to His unity, blessed be He. There is no way to comprehend these comprehensions except by means of the truth of His actions to which His names, blessed be He, refer.”<sup>211</sup> The Maimonidean perspective adopted by Abulafia clashes in an essential way with the older traditions regarding the divine names (culled from both exoteric and esoteric literature) that he also affirms without equivocation or qualification. These traditions challenge fundamentally the negative theology of Maimonides and his conception of the attributes of action. The acceptance of these older traditions led Abulafia to slip into katephatic language about God that would be unacceptable to a strict disciple of Maimonides. This knowledge, as I have shown from a number of Abulafian texts, is attained not only through the letters but through the *sefirot*.<sup>212</sup> In a fundamental sense the *sefirot* facilitate that knowl-

<sup>209</sup> Ibid., fol. 223a. A similar conclusion may be derived from the anonymous work of prophetic kabbalah, *Sefer ha-Šeruf*, MS Munich-BS 22, fol. 191a: “This name instructs about the account of the chariot and according to the purpose of the [letter-] combination, which instructs in its intention about this wisdom, this is the goal desired by man in the knowledge of his Master and proximity to his Creator, blessed be He.” Although the author of this text, following Maimonides, identifies *ma’aseh merkavah* as *hokhmat ha-‘elohit* (fol. 190b), he clearly deviates from his philosophical sources by positing the content of this wisdom as knowledge of the divine name. Cf. *ibid.*, fol. 210a.

<sup>210</sup> MS Paris-BN héb. 853, fol. 63b.

<sup>211</sup> Ibid.

<sup>212</sup> Cf. *Mafteah ha-Shemot*, MS NY-JTSA Mic. 1897, fol. 87a: ‘י בהכחות שניות שהן י' ספירות נודעות על פי שם מפורש ומיוחד.

edge for only when one receives the intellectual overflow can one know the mysteries of the divine name.

Abulafia's blend of philosophical rationalism and an esoteric understanding of the divine attributes can be seen from the following description in *Shomer Mišwah* of a process that he refers to as the "inversion of the attributes," *hithappekhut ha-middot*, a central theme in his writings that has not been previously discussed in the scholarly literature. In this context Abulafia associates this process with the priestly blessing:

By way of secret, "the fiery ever-turning sword" (Gen. 3:24),<sup>213</sup> and by way [of the verse] "The Lord your God turned the curse into a blessing for you, for the Lord your God loves you" (Deut. 23:6). The inversion of the attributes is a matter that confirms the way of our redemption. ... The evidence

<sup>213</sup> Cf. *Mafteah ha-Shemot*, MS NY-JTSA Mic. 1897, fol. 65a: ועל דרך ההתהפכות ולהט שיררה על עניין להט החרב המתהפכת הוא עניין שוב הקר חם או שוב החם קר והו על דרך המרחק שבין דבר לדבר וכן סוד החרב הוא רחב הטלה שממנו יודע המהלך מפני שפניו פונים אל השמאל והליכתו לאחור לפי צורת המכתב. On the interchange of the attributes of judgment and mercy, connected especially to the process of creation, cf. *Mafteah ha-Shemot*, MS NY-JTSA Mic. 1897, fols. 54b–55a. This interchange is also associated with the dual character of Metatron as a good and evil force, symbolized respectively as the judgmental Satan and the merciful angel. Cf. the commentary to *Sefer ha-Meliš*, MS Munich-BS 285, fol. 15a: "This is the spirit of Samael and know that his opposite is the angel, and from him you will know that the one who is merciful is the judge and also that the judge is the one who is merciful." Cf. 'Ošar 'Eden Ganuz, MS Oxford-BL 1580, fol. 163a: "Thus I have combined for you combinations from which you will be able to change the attributes of the sun and moon that are changed in name. ... This is the name of *sar ha-panim yhw* who is constantly transformed for his name is *yhw metatron sar ha-panim*." On the dialectical relationship of Satan and Metatron, see Scholem, *Ha-Qabbalah shel Sefer ha-Temunah*, p. 167. In several passages Abulafia portrays the relationship of Satan (or Samael) and Metatron in terms of the imaginative and intellective faculties. See Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, pp. 35–36, 39. On the phenomenon of *hippukh ha-middot*, cf. *Sha'are Šedeq*, pp. 17–18. In that context (p. 18) the transformation of the attribute of judgment into the attribute of mercy is connected exegetically with the image of the "fiery ever-turning sword" that transforms the cherubim. The relevant passage is cited by Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, p. 340, n. 188. Cf. *Sefer ha-Šeruf*, MS Munich-BS 22, fols. 184a–b. In a second text in *Sha'are Šedeq*, p. 27, the "fiery ever-turning sword" is interpreted (perhaps on the basis of the *Guide of the Perplexed* I.49) as an allegory for the imaginative faculty (*koah ha-dimyon*) depicted as a polished mirror that reflects ever-changing forms. In that context as well there is discussion of the transformation of the back into the front. An English translation of this passage is found in *Major Trends*, p. 155. The activity of transformation is also affirmed in the visionary experience recounted in "Sefer ha-Öt," p.82: "I opened my eyes, I glanced and I saw, and behold a spring of seventy languages flowed from between the letter of his forehead. That man called the letter of his forehead the deadly poison (*sam mawet*) and I called it the elixir of life (*sam hayyim*) for I transmuted it from death to life. The man saw the transmutation that I performed for the glory of the God of Israel and he was very happy with me and he blessed me with an eternal blessing." For discussion of this vision see Idel, *Mystical Experience*, pp. 95, 97, 113.

that explains this secret is revealed from what is said concerning the matter of the priestly blessing. When the priests turn their faces to the congregation to bless them and when they turn their faces away from the congregation after they bless, they should not turn except by way of the right side in every place. Similarly, every turning that a person turns should be by way of the right side. The sages, blessed be their memory, already said that when Israel fulfill the will of the Holy One, blessed be He, the left becomes right.<sup>214</sup> And they said that there is no left above, but the ones on the right acquit and the ones on the left condemn.<sup>215</sup> From the fact that they said “he lifted his right hand and his left hand” followed by “and he swore” (Dan. 12:7) you can comprehend the secret of the lifting of the hands ... by the ten fingers of the hands, five corresponding to five.<sup>216</sup>

The influence of theurgic interpretations of the priestly blessing in kabbalistic sources, particularly *Sefer ha-Bahir* and Nahmanides, is evident here even though they are not mentioned explicitly.<sup>217</sup> Most significant, for Abulafia too the mystical secret of the priestly ritual of lifting the hands is to effect a change in the balance of power in the celestial realm, to transform the attribute of judgment on the left into an attribute of mercy on the right. The secret is enacted, moreover, in the bodily gesture of the priest turning toward and away from the congregation by facing his right. The key point to emphasize is the dynamic conception of the divine attributes implicitly associated with the *sefirot*. Indeed, given the implicit correlation of the ten fingers and the ten *sefirot*, and the further division of the ten fingers into the left and right hands, which correspond respectively to the attributes of judgment and mercy, it can be said that in a fundamental sense the sefirotic potencies represent these two divine qualities. Thus, in an interpretation of the priestly blessing in *'Ošar 'Eden Ganuz*, which is a highly condensed version of the discussion in *Shomer Mišwah*, Abulafia writes: “The raising of his hands is to straighten out the attributes by means of the *sefirot*.”

<sup>214</sup> Cf. *Mekhilta de-Rabbi Ishmael*, ed. H. S. Horovitz and I. A. Rabin (Jerusalem, 1970), Masekhta de-Shirah, ch. 5, p. 134; *Midrash Tanhuma* (Jerusalem, 1965), Beshallah 15.

<sup>215</sup> The midrashic passage to which Abulafia refers does not reject the use of anthropomorphic imagery in general but the positing of a left side above. The claim that there is only a right without left indicates that there is no demonic or impure force in the divine. Cf. *Song of Songs Rabbah*, 1:13, p. 13.

<sup>216</sup> MS Paris-BN heb. 853, fols. 52b–53a. Cf. *ibid.*, fol. 73b, and the passages from *Ner 'Elohim* cited above in n. 123.

<sup>217</sup> Cf. *Sefer ha-Bahir* §§ 123–124 and Nahmanides' commentary to Exod. 17:12, 30:19. In this connection it is of interest to consider Abulafia's explanation of the words, “thus his hands remained steady” (Exod. 17:12) in *Mafteah ha-Shemot*, MS NY-JTSA Mic. 1897, fol. 89b: “By the power of the ten *sefirot* of the fingers of the hands that are known to the kabbalists.” This explanation seems to be based on Nahmanides' commentary to this verse, which in turn reflects the influence of *Sefer ha-Bahir* § 138.

... The left hand pushes away and the right hand brings near,<sup>218</sup> and when Israel fulfill the will of the Holy One, blessed be He, the left becomes right, for righteousness is in His right and justice in His left, as it says, 'Righteousness and justice are the base of Your throne' (Ps. 89:15)."<sup>219</sup> Let me reiterate yet one more time that I am not suggesting that Abulafia adopted a theurgic interpretation of the divine hypostases akin to the theosophic kabbalists. Indeed, in the continuation of the passage from 'Ošar 'Eden Ganuz, Abulafia attenuates the force of the theurgic explanation of the priestly blessing by emphasizing that all language said with respect to the divine attributes (*middot ha-'elohiyyot*) must be interpreted allegorically (*derekh meshalim we-ḥiddot*), equivocally (*derekh shemot meshutafin*), as referring to imaginary forms (*šurot dimyonot*), or simply as reflecting the characteristics of human attributes (*derekh middotenu ha-nimša'ot*).<sup>220</sup> The point I am raising is simply that his conception of the divine attributes did not emerge solely on the basis of the philosophical notion of disembodied intellects. There is a genuine tension in his thought between the midrashic-theosophic notion of God's attributes and the rationalist approach.

It may be concluded that Abulafia's understanding of the *sefirot* departs in a significant way from Maimonides' conception of the separate intellects. Abulafia adopts the Maimonidean perspective for he identifies the *sefirot* as separate intellects, but he concomitantly appropriates older esoteric traditions, probably through the medium of Ḥaside Ashkenaz, according to which the *sefirot* represent divine attributes or names. The *sefirot*, therefore, impart knowledge of God to the initiate in a way that is not comparable to the function of the separate intellects in a strict philosophical system. The dialectical overcoming of the philosophical approach is underscored in Abulafia's claim that the glorious name, *shem ha-nikhbad*, "was revealed to Moses our master, peace be upon him, to indicate the potency of this great, powerful, and awesome name, and to indicate that the limit of its holiness and power is in ten and not less, and these are the ten souls and the ten intellects that discern the tenth soul of the ten souls, and they dwell within bodies that move on account of their will and follow the mind of the one guide, for he speaks and they answer him. Those that are led are the nine bodies and the one who guides them is the one, and it is known that the letter *yod*, the first letter of the name of God, has the numerical value of

<sup>218</sup> B. Soṭah 47a.

<sup>219</sup> MS Oxford-BL 1580, fols. 154b–155a.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid., fol. 155a.

ten.”<sup>221</sup> It is obvious that the *yod* symbolizes the tenth of the separate intellects, the *sekhel ha-po’el*, for it contains within itself all ten intellects. This potency, moreover, represents the divine name inasmuch as the latter begins with *yod* whose numerical value is ten. Apprehension of the Active Intellect, therefore, entails comprehension of the divine essence that is iconically concretized in the letters of the Tetragrammaton. The ancient occult teaching regarding the name is cloaked by Abulafia in the language of Maimonidean metaphysics and physics, but the logic of his own argument necessitates the acceptance of a sphere of knowledge that transcends the philosophical. Simply put, for Abulafia *hokhmat ha-’elohut* denotes divine wisdom (esoteric gnosis) rather than divine science (discursive metaphysics).<sup>222</sup> This wisdom, which comprises the two aspects of kabbalah, *qabbalat ha-sefirot* and *qabbalat ha-shemot*, underscores that irreducible aspect of Jewish esotericism characteristic of Abulafia’s voluminous corpus that cannot be homologized as a philosophical truth. Perhaps the point is best expressed by Abulafia himself in *’Oṣar ’Eden Ganuz*: “Indeed, I am informing you from now that the knowledge of God in truth cannot be known from *Sefer Yeṣirah* exclusively, even with knowledge of all its commentaries that have been mentioned, or from the *Moreh ha-Nevukhim* exclusively, even with knowledge of all its commentaries. The two [kinds of] knowledge of these two books must be joined together and the two wisdoms united

<sup>221</sup> *Imre Shefer*, MS Munich-BS 40, fols. 235b–236a. In the continuation of this text Abulafia relates the negative signification of the letter *yod* as the evil inclination. Indeed, Abulafia speaks of the transformation (*hithappekhut*) of the good into the evil. The Active Intellect is thus characterized as an androgynous being, a point related by Abulafia to the rabbinic notion that Adam was created two-faced (דין פּרָצוּפִין). For Abulafia these two faces correspond to matter and form related to *yod* and *he’*, the first two letters of the Tetragrammaton which have the same numerical value as the whole name. The androgynous quality is contained in the letter *yod* inasmuch as the consonants of ד״י are the same as those of the word ד״י.

<sup>222</sup> The distinction that I am drawing is reflected in the respective Arabic expressions *’ilm ilahi* and *hikmat ilahiyah*, “divine science” and “divine wisdom,” used in Islamic sources. The Arabic *hikmat ilahiyah*, as its Hebrew equivalent *hokhmat ha-’elohut*, is an exact rendering of the word “theosophy” derived from the Greek *theos*, “God,” and *sophia*, “wisdom.” Theosophy implies wisdom concerning God or things divine that is accessible through mystical insight or gnosis rather than through rational intellection or logical supposition. For many medieval Islamic thinkers *hikma* embraced and was almost identical to *’ilm*, but according to others the two must be distinguished for *hikma* transcends *’ilm* or *falsafa*. See A. M. Goichon’s entry on *hikma* in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, New Edition, ed. B. Lewis, V. L. Ménage, Ch. Pellat and J. Schacht (Leiden, 1986), 3:377–378; H. Corbin, *History of Islamic Philosophy*, trans. L. Sherrard with the assistance of P. Sherrard (London and New York, 1993), pp. xv and 5. In this connection it is important to recall Idel’s suggestion that Abulafia’s sevenfold method of interpretation may reflect the influence of Islamic sources. See *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics*, pp. 83 and 188, n. 5.

in one, which is the final purpose.”<sup>223</sup> The mandate is to unite two distinct forms of knowledge and not to reduce one to the other. Indeed, the combination of Jewish esotericism, represented by *Sefer Yeşirah*, which comprises the two forms of kabbalah, and philosophical speculation, typified by Maimonides’ *Guide of the Perplexed*, did not always entail a harmonious synthesis. On the contrary, in some instances the view espoused by Abulafia openly challenged a basic tenet of Maimonidean philosophy. In the final analysis, transmission of the divine names, which is the essence of kabbalah, is a matter that lies beyond rational discourse. What is true in Maimonides is so only insofar as it conforms to the canons of this tradition.

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<sup>223</sup> MS Oxford-BL 1580, fols. 16b–17a. See Scholem, *Ha-Qabbalah shel Sefer ha-Temunah*, p. 151.