

# Defining Kabbalah: The Kabbalah of the Divine Names\*

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## I Kabbalah as Theosophy in Modern Scholarship

The medieval form of mystical Judaism known as Kabbalah<sup>1</sup> is known mainly as a theosophical doctrine related to the ten *sefirot*. This theologically oriented description recurs often in modern scholarship, as we can learn from several scholarly discussions regarding the nature of this lore, mainly those following the lead of G. Scholem. The prevailing assumption in the academic field is that a relatively homogenous mystical phenomenon, more theoretical than practical, underlies the entire range of Kabbalistic literature, as it has already been proposed by the late Prof. Gershom Scholem. Let me start with one of his more explicit descriptions of Kabbalah:

“the mystical interpretation of the attributes and the unity of God, in the so-called doctrine of the Sefiroth, constituted a problem common to all Kabbalists, while the solution given to it by and in the various schools differ from one another.”<sup>2</sup>

Despite this scholarly attempt to propose the existence of a common core-question for all the Kabbalistic schools, which responded to it in various ways, we may safely assert that it would be much more cautious to see the theosophical question as one of the important ones, addressed by many, though not by all the Kabbalists. However, the absence of the theurgical element in this description may leave the impression, that is corroborated by the reading of the opus of this scholar, that theosophy is not only a central issue shared by “all” the Kabbalists, but it is also the single most important question in medieval Jewish mysticism. In other words, the gnosis of the divine attributes, rather than the experiential involvement in processes connected with them, by the means of theurgical, and sometimes mystical-theurgical performance of the commandments, was preferred by the abovementioned description.

Let us adduce another instance of Scholem’s description of Jewish mysticism, which is, indeed, very representative of his vision of Kabbalah; just before the above quote, after indicating that Jewish

mysticism is shaped by the positive content and values recognized by Judaism, Scholem writes on the Jewish mystics as follows:

"Their ideas proceed from the concepts and values peculiar to Judaism, that is to say, above all from the belief in the Unity of God and the meaning of His revelation as laid down in the Torah, the sacred law. Jewish mysticism in its various forms represents an attempt to interpret the religious values of Judaism in terms of mystical values. It concentrates upon the idea of the living God who manifests himself in the act of Creation, Revelation and Redemption. Pushed to its extreme, the mystical meditation on this idea gives birth to the conception of a sphere, a whole realm of divinity, which underlies the world of our sense-data and which is present and active in all that exists."<sup>3</sup>

The meditation on an idea, namely on the special nature of the deity as creative, revealing and redeeming, is conceived of as the source of the theosophical Kabbalah. In principle I agree to this view though I would propose a more variegated description of the Kabbalistic lore, which would be less theologically oriented. The theoretical approach to Kabbalah, prevalent in modern scholarship, has tended to conceive this mystical lore in more theological rather than experiential terms.<sup>4</sup> So, for example, we learn from R. J. Zwi Werblowsky, that "the fact remains, nevertheless,<sup>5</sup> that the discursive and even dialectical elements are so prominent in kabbalistic literature that we may almost speak of an intellectualistic hypertrophy. It often looks as if the sole difference between talmudic and kabbalistic literature resides in the different subject-matter."<sup>6</sup>

Though this stand seems to implicitly diverge from Scholem, "nevertheless", it seems that Scholem himself would subscribe to Werblowsky's view; indeed, in one of his latest formulations of his stand, Scholem has insisted that theosophical speculations

"occupy a large and conspicuous area in kabbalistic teaching. Sometimes their connections with the mystical plane becomes rather tenuous and is superseded by an interpretative and homiletical vein with occasionally even results in a kind of Kabbalistic pilpul. [casuistry]"<sup>7</sup>

The same emphasis on the centrality of the role of theosophy for the definition of Kabbalah is conspicuous in Isaiah Tishby's presentation of the Zoharic thought, and even of Kabbalah in general:

"At the very core and foundation of this teaching<sup>8</sup> is one particular subject of investigation: the mystery of the knowledge of the Godhead. The great themes of the Creation and the Chariot, the existence and activity of the angels, the nature of the spiritual worlds, the forces of evil in the realm of Satan, the situation and destiny of Man, this world and the next, the process of history from the days of creation until the end of time—all these topics are no more than the boughs and branches of the mighty tree of the mystery of the Godhead. The knowledge

of this mystery, which depends on man's spiritual level and on the root of his soul, is the basis of religious faith as seen by the Kabbalah."<sup>9</sup>

It should be noticed that the core of Kabbalah is not related, according to the above quote, to a mystical experience or to a mystical performance of the commandments, that can be designated as theurgical activity. A certain form of gnoseology, or a mystical theology, is conceived of as being the mystical core of Kabbalah. In a very similar vein we learn from the otherwise perceptive book of R. J. Zwi Werblowsky:

"until the advent of Lurianism, the doctrine of sefirot necessarily formed the core and bulk of almost all Kabbalistic writings . . . the mystery of the sefirot remained the unfaltering centre of their speculations and the absorbing focus of their contemplative exercises . . . nothing could ever compete with the theological significance and compelling fascination of that highly complex and dynamic image of the deity: the sefirotic pleroma."<sup>10</sup>

We may, therefore, summarize the above discussions as rotating around the theosophy as a defining moment in Kabbalistic lore. The modern vision of Kabbalah as proposed by the Scholemian school is therefore concerned with the Kabbalistic treatments of theosophical issues, which are part of a large picture of Kabbalah as a mythocentric type of lore generated by Gnostic and Gnostic-like types of religious mentalities. In the following discussions I would like to draw the attention to another view of Kabbalah, marginalized or totally ignored by most of the modern definitions of Kabbalah, as the esoteric tradition concerning the divine name[s] as well as to the emergence of the esoteric use of the term Kabbalah in this context. These discussions will serve as introduction to a discussion of Abraham Abulafia's different views of Kabbalah as being a lore focused upon divine names and—less crucial for our discussion here—as an experiential lore, which was presented as distinct and superior to the Kabbalah of the *Sefirot*. The following discussions are intended to serve both as a corrective and a complementing proposal to the present scholarly overemphasis on the theosophical, and therefore more theological, oriented vision of Jewish mysticism.

## II. Kabbalah and Transmission of the Divine Name: Earlier Sources

The Name of God is conceived as an esoteric issue already in archaic religions.<sup>11</sup> Its knowledge was understood as enabling one to have some power on the divine being, because of the possible link between the name and the designated entity. Indeed, in line with these

remarks, it is conspicuous that one of the most esoteric topics in ancient Jewish thought was the precise pronunciation, or the correct vocalization of the consonants of the divine names.<sup>12</sup> The assumption that the divine name stands for much more than the conventional appellation seems to underly the awe that is related to its pronunciation. In the most concentrated Talmudic text on this issue we read, inter alia, that

"Rab Judah said in Rab's name: The Forty-two lettered Name<sup>13</sup> is entrusted only to him who is pious,<sup>14</sup> and meek, of middle-aged, free from bad temper, sober, and not insistent on his rights. And he who knows it, is heedful thereof and observes it in purity, is beloved above and popular below, feared by man and inherits two worlds, this world and the future world."<sup>15</sup>

Indeed, the divine names were revered, and the pronunciation of the Tetragrammaton constituted the peak of the most sacred of the Jewish rituals; in the day of Atonement the High Priest would pronounce it, according to some sources, in a way that was not so distinct to those present, in order to preserve its precise vocalization from the wicked and from the vulgus.<sup>16</sup> Already in the *Heikhalot* literature the revelation of the divine names are part of the secrets from above, and in my opinion, there was a certain reading of the Torah in accordance to the divine names that can be extrapolated by various devices from the regular sequel of the letters in the biblical verses.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, these divine names are also part of the ancient Jewish magical and mystical techniques.<sup>18</sup> However, despite the ambiance of secrecy that surrounds the topic of the divine names, no detailed rite of transmission is detectable in ancient Judaism, and no specific term is known in connection to the traditions related to divine names. Though it may be assumed that the transmission of the pronunciation of the divine name, which according to another Talmudic text, took place once in seven years,<sup>19</sup> must have involved some solemn rite, the extant material does not permit a meaningful reconstruction of such a hypothetical initiation rite.

It is therefore of special importance, from our point of view, to notice that the first known uses of the term *Qabbalah* in connection to esoteric issues, is related to divine names. As pointed out very briefly already by Naftali Tur-Sinai<sup>20</sup> and B-Z. Dinur<sup>21</sup> it is reasonable to assume that the earliest cases of the use of the term *Qabbalah* as an esoteric lore can be traced to the gaonic period. However, this view was apparently not accepted by Gershom Scholem, though he did not refer to it explicitly. Instead, Scholem has offered another solution<sup>22</sup> namely that the term was definitively understood as involving mystical traditions in the writings of the students of R. Isaac Sagi Nahor,

who was, hypothetically,<sup>23</sup> the master who inspired his student to this effect. It would, therefore, be worthwhile to inspect again the extant texts, those adduced by Tur-Sinai, and others, in order to clarify the possibility that a secret doctrine related to the pronunciation of the divine names was designated as *Qabbalah* long before the first references to this term in relation to the doctrine of ten *sefirot*.

R. Hai Gaon, a tenth-century leading halakhic figure, who was not inclined to mysticism<sup>24</sup> indicates in one of his responses that:

"The explicit name<sup>25</sup> is that which consists of forty-two letters and it is still found in [our] academy by the way of an [esoteric] tradition<sup>26</sup>; and it is known to the Sages."<sup>27</sup>

The last phrase, assumes that this is an elitist issue, not open to the public, but cultivated in an important academy in the East. Since another spiritual activity was also related by Hai to the divine name, *Kavvanah*, without revealing the precise nature of it,<sup>28</sup> it may be assumed that the existence of an esoteric tradition dealing with the divine name might have been known by this author. In any case, even if we accept the assumption, found in the other responsum, that he did not know the pronunciation of the divine name, we still have there a fascinating description of the way of transmitting the name, which anticipates, at least in its atmosphere, the ritual of the Hasidei Ashkenaz.<sup>29</sup> I assume that despite the fact that the term *Qabbalah* does not occur, the details of the transmission may reflect the content of this term in the first quote. Let me adduce this highly interesting passage:

"We have already explained above that we do not know how to pronounce and recite correctly<sup>30</sup> it<sup>31</sup> and it was not transmitted to us<sup>32</sup> [by way of] a Rabbi from the mouth of another Rabbi, who, [at his turn] has received it from another Rabbi, a triple tradition<sup>33</sup> but we have heard it in an incidental manner<sup>34</sup> from the mouth of those who are divided<sup>35</sup> on its reading but not by [the way of] transmission.<sup>36</sup> And he needs the transmission and the *Kavvanah*, which is involved in it, and he transmits to him, in purity, in holiness, in a fixed<sup>37</sup> transmission<sup>38</sup> and *Kavvanah*. And whoever did not receive in this order, is considered as if he does not know it."<sup>39</sup>

Unfortunately, the meaning of some of the key terms in this passage is not as clear as we would like: what exactly is a "constant" versus an "incidental" transmission? Or what is the meaning of *Kavvanah* in this context? However, the oral component of the process is crucial here, and the authoritative factor, "Rabbi from the mouth of a Rabbi"<sup>40</sup> together with the assumption found in the first quote that the tradition is found in a *Yeshivah* and is transmitted to the

sages, is obvious. Does this last quote define the meaning of *Qabbalah* in the first one? If such a conclusion could be drawn, we would be in the position of having an important insight into the esoteric nature of the term *Qabbalah* long before the emergence of the European Kabbalah.

In another text of the same author, he mentions that the pronunciation of the Tetragrammaton is "transmitted from one to one"<sup>41</sup> while the name of forty-two letters, though its consonants are known, its pronunciation and recitation is not transmitted by *Qabbalah*<sup>42,43</sup>

This text was known to a 12th century author in Barcelona, who quotes it almost *verbatim*; it is found in the *Commentary on Sefer Yesirah*<sup>44</sup> by R. Yehudah ben Barzilai that we encounter, probably for the first time in Europe, this nexus between the term *Qabbalah* as an esoteric tradition and the divine name. However, according to another passage in this text, to which David Neumark<sup>45</sup> and G. Scholem<sup>46</sup> have drawn attention, some metaphysical issue, namely the creation of the Divine Spirit or the *Shekhinah*, is introduced as follows:

"The sages did not deal with it explicitly in order that men would not come to speculated concerning "what is above" and many other things related to it, and that is why they were transmitting this thing in whisper and in secret,<sup>47</sup> as an esoteric tradition to their pupils and their sages."<sup>48</sup>

Therefore, already by the middle of the 12th century the esoteric understanding of *Qabbalah* is related to two different topics: the divine name and the first creation, namely that of the Divine Spirit. Interestingly enough, the author assumes that the Rabbinic sources have spoken in an esoteric manner and it is he who explicates the meaning of their statements in an explicit manner.

It is therefore not a great surprise that R. Eleazar of Worms, has adduced in the name of this Gaon a short discussion related to the divine names as part of *Qabbalotav*, namely "R. Hai Gaon's traditions".<sup>49</sup> Given the fact that the Ashkenazi master mentions this tradition in his voluminous book on the divine names, it is possible that some material on the subject reached him from the East.<sup>50</sup> Indeed, the Ashkenazi Hasidic masters were immersed in numerous and diverse speculations and practices related to pronunciations of the divine names and R. Eleazar himself mentions the pronunciation of "depth<sup>51</sup> of the names" as connected to revelatory experiences.<sup>52</sup> However, what is more important is the existence of a relatively detailed description of a ritual for transmitting the divine name, which was preserved by an Ashkenazi master.<sup>53</sup> Though Dan assumes that this rite has a theological aspect alone, I would prefer to allow, on

the basis of the mentioning of the ecstatic uses of the divine names by R. Eleazar, that the transmission of the divine names was part of an initiation into a more mystical form of practices.<sup>54</sup> Therefore, it seems that in so far as this topic is concerned, there is no reason to doubt the fact that an oral medium was used in order to impart some forms of esoteric knowledge regarding the divine name. I would therefore propose to see in the Ashkenazi texts, and in their earlier antecedents, one of the major sources of the esoteric understanding of the term Kabbalah. In the 12th century Provençal Kabbalah the term seems to be absent and Scholem's assumption,<sup>55</sup>—actually inspired by D. Neumark,<sup>56</sup>—that the possible transition to an esoteric understanding of the term in an interesting text of R. Yehudah Barceloni<sup>57</sup> seems to me very doubtful.

### III. Early Kabbalistic Views

A younger contemporary of R. Eleazar of Worms, R. Moshe ben Nahman known as Nahmanides, indicates that he was acquainted with a tradition, referred to by him as *Qabbalah*, which asserts that the Torah is composed, on a more esoteric level, of divine names.<sup>58</sup> What is pertinent for our analysis here is the very fact that Kabbalah is understood as dealing with divine names.

By the middle of the 13th century, R. Hai and his father are mentioned in connection with magical and mystical traditions, apparently spurious, by R. Isaac ben Ya'aqov ha-Kohen in Spain. What seems to me to be relevant in this instance is the occurrence of the idea of oral transmission in phrases that are reminiscent of the above quotes from Hai Gaon:

"according to the *Qabbalah*, that was transmitted to the masters of this wisdom from the mouth of ancient sages. We have known that indeed R. Sherira and R. Hai,<sup>59</sup> blessed be their memory, were competent and have received this wisdom, as a tradition transmitted in their hands,<sup>60</sup> a Rabbi from the mouth of a Rabbi, an old man [*zagen*] from the mouth of an old man, a Gaon from the mouth of a Gaon, all of them have used the magical practice of *Heikhalot Zulfartei*, namely the *Shimmusha de-Sheidei*, in order to climb by its means the ladder of the prophecies and its powers [*sullam ha-nevot ve-kohoteiah*]."<sup>61</sup>

Though the divine names were not mentioned here I have no doubt that it was assumed that the magical books were based upon the magic of divine names.

Interestingly enough, still at the end of the 13th century, an esoteric tradition related to the divine name was presented as *Qabbalat Ashkenaz*; R. Bahya ben Asher wrote in his *Commentary on the Pentateuch*

on the vocalization of the divine name, which is apparently the content of the Ashkenazi Kabbalah which he has received it in a "whisper".<sup>62</sup> This quote, which is corroborated by some similar instances in R. Isaac of Acre's *Me'irat Eynayim*, wherein encounters with Ashkenazi masters are mentioned in connection to the divine names. Bahya, a resident of Barcelona, may be an important example of the arrival of Ashkenazi esoteric material to the city. He wrote his commentary in the 90's of the 13th century. Two decades beforehand, R. Abraham Abulafia has studied there Kabbalah, including some Ashkenazi esoteric texts.<sup>63</sup> Apparently in Castile, an anonymous compiler of *Sefer ha-Ne'elam*, mentions a tradition regarding the transmission of Qabbalah:

"from Daniel to Hillel, the father of Hillel the Old, and from the generation of Hillel the Old they [the sages] have begun to completely close up the issues of Kabbalah, and all these *Qabbalot* concerning the divine name, which is also the very hidden name, let the Glory of His Name be blessed for ever and ever. But when the sages of the Mishnah came, they have begun to explain the hints of *Qabbalah* concerning the secret of each and every name, with the exception of the divine name."<sup>64</sup>

Therefore, the Kabbalah of the divine names started, again, with the committing to writing of the oral Torah, the *Mishnah*.

#### IV. Theosophical Understandings of the Divine Name

Among the first Kabbalistic traditions extant from Provencal Kabbalah, a short text, introduced as the *Qabbalah* of R. Ya'aqov the Nazirite of Lunel, the letters of the divine name are interpreted as symbols of the Sefirotic system.<sup>65</sup> R. Isaac the Blind, one of the important masters of early Kabbalah, emphasized the importance of the mystical intention, *Kavvanah*, during prayer, especially when the Tetragrammaton is pronounced.<sup>66</sup> When inspecting the antecedents of this nexus between the Tetragrammaton and *Kavvanah*, it is possible to point out some parallels found in contemporary, though unrelated texts, and therefore establish that even one of the first Kabbalists did not invent it, and we can easily predate it by a few generations.<sup>67</sup> Moreover, according to the recent findings of Haviva Pedaya, the divine name, more precisely, the rupture between its various letters reflect, symbolically, the historical state of exile, and their reunification will reflect that of redemption.<sup>68</sup> The symbolical-theosophical and theurgical understandings of the divine name became, since the Geronese Kabbalah, topoi of a continuously growing literature. Immersed in theosophical speculations the Castilian

Kabbalists of the last decades of the 13th century envisioned with explicit suspicion a Kabbalah that will deal with the divine names; nonetheless eventually even they would approve some of the ecstatic implications of the practice of divine names.<sup>69</sup>

It is against the background of these views that an interesting definition of the divine name as symbolic of the theosophical structure is to be better understood; R. Todros ben Joseph ha-Levi Abulafia wrote in the eighties of the 13th century as follows:

"You should know that all the foundation of the true Kabbalah and all its cornerstones, are based on this Great and Holy Name, by the means of which the perfect unity is explicated, and this is the reason that it was called Shem ha-Meforash namely because it is explicated and displayed in its inner powers, and they become reified and they are unified in the essence of his holy and pure unity. Know that by the knowledge of the innerness of the structure of its letters, all the secrets of the Torah and the prophets<sup>70</sup> will be explained and revealed to whomever will know it, each one in accordance with what he will be announced from heaven, to understand one thing from another, and to return the thing to its [proper] essence. Happy is he who will be able to understand even one of the thousand of thousands of the mysteries and allusions that are inscribed in the innerness of the letters of the [divine] name for [the sake of] those who know. Oh for us, people who see and do not understand what we do see.<sup>71</sup> All the ancient and late masters of Kabbalah have sworn not to hint at issues [of Kabbalah] but they hint to their modest<sup>72</sup> disciples the notes of the chapters."<sup>73</sup>

According to another text of the same Kabbalist, we learn about a rather different attitude to the doctrines related to the divine names:

"There is no need to the words of those who allude to the seventy-two names in connection to 'Av 'Anan,<sup>74</sup> despite the fact that it is known to the masters of Kabbalah that seventy-two names surround the seat of glory.<sup>75</sup> This issue is distant from our intention concerning the hints which we have hinted, as west is distant from East. The Kabbalah of the sages of the divinity, [Hakhmei ha-'Elohut] regarding the secrets of the Torah is separated from the Kabbalah of the knowers of the names, except those that are not to be erased."<sup>76</sup>

The author explicitly acknowledges the existence of two different types of Kabbalah: one concerning the nature of the divinity and another one, concerned with the divine names, apparently those names which are not to be found in the Bible, and whose erasure is interdicted in the Talmudic prescriptions. Therefore, we may assume, on the basis of the two quotes from the same book that the theosophical understanding of the divine name, namely the Tetragrammaton, was conceived as the quintessence of Kabbalah, whereas the speculations about the diversity of divine names were conceived as a different kind of lore.

A much less liberal attitude is expressed in a contemporary of the abovementioned Todros Abulafia; in R. Isaac ibn Abu Sahulah's *Commentary on the Song of Songs* it is said that

"The illuminati should not pay attention to the words of the ignorant of their generations, who boast saying that they possess a Kabbalah of names [Qabbalat Shemot] and issues they have invented, by the means of which they have attained the knowledge of the future."<sup>77</sup>

The distancing from the Kabbalah of names is conspicuous in these two texts; they were composed in the early eighties of the 13th century, no more than a decade after Abraham Abulafia's visit in Castile. These Kabbalists seem to be reacting to the attempt he made to disseminate the ecstatic Kabbalah in this region. Part of this propagandistic effort concerned an unsuccessful attempt to teach his peculiar type of Kabbalah to R. Moshe of Burgos, the teacher of Todros Abulafia in matters of Kabbalah, and an acquaintance of ibn Abu Sahulah.<sup>78</sup> In any case, Abraham Abulafia's firm view as to the superiority of his Kabbalah based on practices of pronunciations of letters of the divine names, to which we shall turn immediately, was not shared by those who cultivated a more theosophical-theurgical one, namely the reigning Kabbalah in Castile since the beginning of the eighties. However it should be emphasized that both those who accepted the view of Kabbalah as related to the divine names or those who were reticent or even rejected it, were acquainted with such a view. It is therefore reasonable to assume that even in the theosophical Kabbalah the view of the divine name as a symbol of the divine structure is but an interpretation of an older esoteric tradition dealing with Kabbalah as concerned with the divine name[s].

## V. Abraham Abulafia's Kabbalah of Divine Names

If Nahmanides' description of Kabbalah as oral esoteric tradition is the most influential text on the later Kabbalists,<sup>79</sup> the following definitions of the younger contemporary of this Kabbalist, R. Abraham Abulafia, had some impact on some of the scholarly definitions of this lore. An inspection of Abulafia's earlier Kabbalistic writing demonstrates that at the beginning of his Kabbalistic activity he was not eager to delineate his special vision of Kabbalah as substantially distinct from that of the other Kabbalists. Different as his Kabbalah was from the most important sorts of 13th century Spanish Kabbalah,<sup>80</sup> the founder of ecstatic Kabbalah did not engage in a phenomenological comparison for its own sake but as the result of a bitter controversy.<sup>81</sup> As part of a response to the fiery assault of R.

Shlomo ben Abraham ibn Adret, Abulafia undertook the most elaborate exposition of his Kabbalah versus that of his opponent. In the first part of his epistle, the ecstatic Kabbalist indicates the existence of two types of Kabbalah as part of a more complex epistemological discussion. Each information is acquired either by sensual [*murgash*] or intellectual [*muskhal*] channels. The former are the five senses. The latter involves two different types of sources: the received one, *mequbbal*<sup>82</sup> and the wide-known [*mefursam*].<sup>83</sup> It is only when attempting to describe the two kinds of Jewish received tradition that he offers an explicit distinction between the two kinds of Kabbalah:

"It is not necessary to elaborate here about all kinds of receptions, but only about that of the persons of the Torah from among our nation alone, because for the reason of their receiving that tradition they were called masters of the [esoteric] Reception [Ba'alei ha-Qabbalah]. I shall indicate that this Kabbalah is unknown to the multitude of the Rabbis, who are immersed [only] in the wisdom<sup>84</sup> of the Talmud. It is divided into two parts: the one is that part that deals with the knowledge of God by the way of the ten Sefirot known as branches [neṭi'ot]; whoever uproots them is called the cutter of the branches [meqazzeṣ bi-neṭi'ot]<sup>85</sup>; these [branches] are revealing the secret of the unity. The other part [of Kabbalah] consists in the knowledge of God by the means of the twenty-two letters, out of which, and out of whose vowels and cantillation-marks, the divine names and the seals [hotamot]<sup>86</sup> are composed. They [the names and the seals] are speaking with the prophets in their dreams, in the Urim and Tummim,<sup>87</sup> in the Divine Spirit and during prophecy.<sup>88</sup>"

Abulafia's definition is ostensibly derived from the first paragraph of *Sefer Yezirah*, where the creation of the world is presented as accomplished by the agency of thirty-two paths: the ten *Sefirot* and the twenty-two letters. The definition of the first type of Kabbalah as focused on the ten *Sefirot* reflects a great amount of Kabbalistic material that deals with the ten divine manifestations. The second type of Kabbalah is basically that of the divine names. However, artificial as this distinction may seem, it reflects a crucial phenomenological difference between forms of thirteenth-century Kabbalah. The language as the main prime-matter for Kabbalistic manipulations is represented here by its less semantically active aspect: divine names and seals. Its main target is the transformation of the human mind, which is to be united with God's thought. This anthropocentric move diverges from the strong theosophical emphasis of the Kabbalah based on the ten *Sefirot*. While the theosophical Kabbalist unifies the upper, divine powers between themselves, the human intellect is the main object of transformation according to the ecstatic Kabbalist. The emphasis on mystical metaphysics, that can be called theosophy, so widespread in the main stream of Kabbalah, as well as the central-

ity of the mystical intention during the performance of the commandments<sup>89</sup> have been drastically marginalized by the ecstatic Kabbalist in the favour of the manipulation of language, that manipulates the soul.

Elsewhere in the same epistle, Abulafia proposes a three-stage division of speculative knowledge: philosophy, the Kabbalah of the *Sefirot* and the Kabbalah of the divine name. The relations between these three stages of study are compared by the Kabbalist to the relationship between the vegetal soul to the animal and the human, namely rational soul. According to the medieval concepts of these three souls, especially in its Aristotelian version of psychology, all the three souls are present in the higher one, while in the lower stages the higher souls are absent. Consequently, to follow this comparison, a good Kabbalist who believes in *Sefirot* must have passed through the study of philosophy. *Prima facie* such a view may appear as non-representative; indeed the first Kabbalists would hardly accept such a view. However, during the generation of Abulafia some of the most important Kabbalists, including the two most influential theosophical Kabbalists, R. Moses de Leon and R. Joseph Gikatilla, had started as students of more philosophical types of knowledge, and their earlier Kabbalah is deeply indebted to Aristotelian thought.<sup>90</sup> Other Kabbalists, like Abulafia and an anonymous ecstatic Kabbalist, underwent a philosophical stage before they became ecstatic Kabbalists. At least one of Abulafia's contemporaries, and someone acquainted with Abulafia<sup>91</sup>, R. Moses ben Shimeon of Burgos, described Kabbalah as standing on the top of philosophy.<sup>92</sup> Therefore Abulafia's description of the hierarchy between the two types of thought reflects a certain historical process of transition from the medieval philosophy to different forms of Kabbalah. The conceptual nexus between the two kinds of lore is the fact that they do provide ways to understand God: philosophy—by the means of his creatures, the Sefirotic Kabbalists—by the means of his attributes.<sup>93</sup> According to another important passage of Abulafia:

"Kabbalah does not contradict what the wisdom reveals because there is no [difference] between wisdom and Kabbalah, but [the fact] that Kabbalah was expressed from the mouth of the Agens Intellect, in a more profound manner than that in what the wisdom was expressed, though both were expressed from its mouth, nevertheless it [Kabbalah] is more subtle."<sup>94</sup>

## VI. Two Types of Kabbalah

However, from our vantage point the description of the relationship between the two different types of Kabbalah is much more important.

The Sefirotic one is allegorized as the vegetative soul when compared to the higher, ecstatic Kabbalah, the counterpart of the human soul. Though the medieval psychology would acknowledge a certain continuity between the two souls, the superiority of the human over the animal soul is not only a matter of degree but also of quality. It is a quantum jump that distinguishes the two; nevertheless, it is incumbent upon the ecstatic Kabbalist to study at the beginning of his Kabbalistic career, the Sefirotic one, before embarking upon the study of the higher form of Kabbalah. However, the feeling is that Abulafia assumes that there are no organic links between the two kinds of mystical discipline; while speaking about the *Sefirot* as part of the divine entity, he describes this topic as the lore of the others, *lefi darkam*, leaving the distinct impression that he does not agree to this stand.<sup>95</sup>

Another simile helps also to understand the relations between the three levels of study: each of these levels is compared, respectively, with the three degrees of the Jewish persons: Israel, Levi and Kohen. This simile may imply again the definitive superiority of the ecstatic Kabbalah. In another, earlier instance, in his *Sefer Shomer Mitzvah* Abulafia used the same simile of the Israel, Levi and Kohen in order to exemplify the relations between the three souls and three types of knowledge: that of the plain sense of the Scriptures, that of the philosophers and finally that of the Kabbalists.<sup>96</sup> The absence of the distinction between the two types of Kabbalah demonstrates that the emergence of this distinction is part of a later development, namely a religious struggle, an attempt to show the superiority of his Kabbalah over that of his detractor. Indeed in comparison to the calm tone of the book written in 1287, the epistle we shall analyze below betrays a much more belligerent spirit, which reaches its peak in a sharp critique of the Sefirotic Kabbalah, or at least one of its major forms. According to Abulafia:

"The masters of the Kabbalah of the Sefirot have thought that they will unify the Godhead<sup>97</sup> and evade the faith in Trinity; but [instead] they have caused His Decadization<sup>98</sup>. Just as the gentiles say that He is three and the three are one, so also some of the Kabbalistic masters believe and say that the Godhead is ten Sefirot and the[se] ten are one. Therefore they have multiplied God at its maximum, and they composed Him in the most extreme manner, since there is no multiplicity greater than ten."<sup>99</sup>

It may well be that this is the more extreme critique of the Kabbalistic theosophy coming from the pen of another Kabbalist.<sup>100</sup> The danger of introducing multiple divine powers was conceived as especially pertinent in connection to the Kabbalistic thought represented by Nahmanides' school, whose main exponent was no other

than Abulafia's critique: R. Shlomo ibn Adret. The view of the *Sefirot* as the essence of God, that was the fundamental theosophy of Nahmanides' school seems to be the major target of the above critique.<sup>101</sup> It is obvious that Abulafia does not attack all the theosophical Kabbalists, since he indicates that only "some of the Kabbalistic masters" are prone to fall into the theological "error"; therefore we may assume that other Kabbalists, I assume those who believed that the *Sefirot* are not the essence of the Divinity but His instruments,<sup>102</sup> are less endangered by their concept of the divine.

What are the fundamental differences between the two kinds of Kabbalah as Abulafia defined them? While the Sefirotic Kabbalah is conceived as a preliminary step, necessary for the advance to the higher one, the latter is radically different from the former. The lower, Sefirotic lore is the patrimony of those who are "prophets for themselves"<sup>103</sup> who, like the philosophers, possess a knowledge that is not imparted to the others. Their thoughts are sometimes illuminated by a feeble light, but they do not attain the experience of receiving the speech, *ha-Dibbur*.<sup>104</sup> It is the achievement of the higher Kabbalah, the ecstatic one, to ensure such an experience, by the means of the recitation of the divine names. Indeed, as Abulafia acknowledges, also the Sefirotic Kabbalists make use of the divine names, in order to point at the divine manifestations, the *Sefirot*. However, the ecstatic Kabbalist uses them in order to unite the human thought with the divine one.<sup>105</sup> While according to the first Kabbalah, especially as it was systematically exposed by Abulafia's former student R. Joseph Gikatilla,<sup>106</sup> the divine names are symbols of the divine attributes, hinting at the supernal divine reality and serving as epistemological tools, these names are intended by the ecstatic Kabbalist to bring about an ontic identification between the human and the divine.<sup>107</sup>

Abulafia's emphasis upon the divine names as the core of his Kabbalah recurs also in other instances.<sup>108</sup> However in his writings there are also other attempts to define Kabbalah, in purely linguistic terms, especially those related to the constitutive elements of language. So, for example he describes the three principles of Kabbalah as follows:

"The names of those principles are letters, combinations [of letters] and vowels. Their acronym is 'AZN,<sup>109</sup> which can be permuted as Zo'N<sup>110</sup> . . . The combination turns the letters and the vowels turns the combinations and the spirit of man, given by God, turns the vowels until they will cause the emergence and the illumination of the concept<sup>111</sup> that is proper to any intelligent Kabbalist."<sup>112</sup>

In fact, as it becomes clear from the sequel of the above text, it is the regular use of Abulafia's mystical techniques that are portrayed here as the principles of Kabbalah. Though indeed the acquaintance with these three principles of Kabbalah are involved here, there would be very unlikely that a theoretical approach is the main gist of Abulafia's Kabbalah. In fact, in many of his handbooks Abulafia proposes a very practical involvement in those practices. Though the definition of Kabbalah as proposed in the above quote has nothing to do with the experience itself, the latter is expressly mentioned as the result of the use of the techniques described there.

## VII. Three Sources of Kabbalah

In his *Sefer ha-Hesheq*,<sup>113</sup> Abulafia adduces the three different channels of receiving Kabbalah, as complementary ways:

"In order to understand my intention regarding [the meaning of] Qolot [voices] I shall hand down to you the known Qabbalot, some of them having been received from mouth to mouth from the sages of [our] generation,<sup>114</sup> and others that I have received from the books named Sifrei Qabbalah composed by the ancient sages, the Kabbalists, blessed be their memory, concerning the wondrous topics;<sup>115</sup> and other [traditions] bestowed on me by God, blessed be He, which came to me from ThY<sup>116</sup> in the form of the Daughter of the Voice, [Bat Qol], these being the higher Qabbalot ['Eliyonot]."<sup>117</sup>

Written in 1289, this passage is perhaps the first confession of a Kabbalist to the effect that contents revealed to him are Kabbalistic traditions higher than any others, received orally or extracted from written documents. However, it seems that we can propose a certain scale of authority of these three different channels; they can be arranged in an hierarchical order, the oral traditions being conceived as the lower one, and therefore referred as "known".<sup>118</sup> Apparently, Abulafia was well-aware of the importance of the oral traditions in the circle of Nahmanides' student; the traditions understood from Kabbalistic documents being conceived as higher; and, finally, the direct revelation as the highest source. We can assume that the strong personality of Abulafia comes to the fore by the assumption that *his* own experiences and their contents, rather than the *known* mystical traditions, were considered as a higher form of Kabbalah. Apparently, this discussion is part of the confrontation between him and R. Shlomo ibn Adret, the representative of the theosophical-theurgical Kabbalah, which he conceived, as we have seen above, as inferior to his own lore, namely the ecstatic Kabbalah.<sup>119</sup> The

superiority of the revealed content, which reaches the mystic in a distinct form, *Bat Qol*, reflects Abulafia's vision of his Kabbalah as conducive to the hearing of a speech, *Dibbur*.

In another, earlier text, Abulafia writes about the "human Kabbalah", [*Qabbalah 'enoshit*] then about the intellectual speculation, and finally about the influx descending from above.<sup>120</sup>

### VIII. The "Easy" Kabbalah

A *leitmotif* permeating Abulafia's views of his Kabbalah is the emphasis upon the easy access to extraordinary experience and knowledge that his Kabbalah allows; this peculiar view is worthwhile of a more detailed inspection. The ecstatic Kabbalist indicates that

"We and all these who follow our intellectual Kabbalah [*Qabbalah muskkelet*],<sup>121</sup> [attaining] prophecy by the means of the combinations of letters, he will teach us the essence of reality as it is, in an easier way in comparison to all the way in existence in the world, despite the fact that the knowledge of the essence of reality which is apprehended by much thought. What brings about it [the knowledge] is the combination [of letters]<sup>122</sup>, and this combination induces it [the knowledge] as immediately as a youth studies the Bible, then the Mishnah and Gemara, he will indubitably achieve it quickly, with perseverance, being better than any thought."<sup>123</sup>

Again, in a very concise way, Abulafia defines the goal of the Kabbalah that is based on the Torah [*Qabbalah Toriit*] as follows:

"to attain by it the knowledge of God. And it is known that Kabbalah is easy to be studied, more than any other intellectual study. God has intended to perfect us in an easy way, which is congenial to human nature."<sup>124</sup>

This emphasis on "easiness" or the accessibility of the experience is related, at least partially, to the medieval conception that transmitted tradition, sometimes referred as *Kabbalah*, is a much easier way to learn some issues, whose study would otherwise take a long time.<sup>125</sup>

The easiness of attaining an experience and its apprehension, the latter being but a result of the encounter with the agent intellect, is to be understood both in itself, as a genuine self-understanding, and as part of a propagandist effort. In itself, the proposal of a mystical technique which short-circuits the lengthy curriculum of the philosophers assumes that the combinations of letters is a higher form of logic, which is congenial to the study of the canonic scriptures, while the logic of the philosophers as being pertinent to the order of nature.<sup>126</sup> Abulafia's conception of Kabbalah was oriented toward

contemplation and manipulation of linguistic material, whose results were conceived as been immediate. In comparison to the lengthy way of the Sefirotic Kabbalah, which involves both the study of details of the commandments and both the intricacies of the theosophical system, Abulafia insists that his method is indeed the easy way.

To a certain extent, we can compare these two types of Kabbalah, and their respective mystical practices, to what Eliade and Staal designated as easy and difficult ways.<sup>127</sup> The Sefirotic way, with its nomian techniques, is a perfect example of a difficult path, in the manner that this type of mysticism was described by these two scholars. However, despite Abulafia's own use of the term "easy", in fact he proposes an anomian technique which is very complex, indeed one of the most complex mystical techniques I am acquainted with.<sup>128</sup> In lieu of the assumption proposed by Eliade, that the easy ways are vulgarizations or decadences of the difficult ways, in the case of Kabbalah the two ways stem from differently historical and phenomenological religious phenomena. In order to avoid prejudices of moral or religious kind, which apparently have affected Eliade's evaluation of the easy ways, like the drugs for example,<sup>129</sup> I propose to regard Abulafia's Kabbalah as an attempt to force the regular psychosomatic system of the mystic by the means of intensive and complex exercises which are indifferent towards the common Jewish way of life.

In conclusion, let me draw attention to what may be one of the implications of the above discussions. The emphasis on another content of the core of Kabbalah, the divine names and the permutations of their letters instead of the *Sefirot*, changes the more onto-theologically oriented vision of Kabbalah in modern scholarship, relying as it is solely on the theosophical Kabbalah. The turn toward language, that is so conspicuous in many of the above quotes, is reminiscent of the modern linguistic turn.<sup>130</sup> However, though this is somehow indeed implicit in the above discussions, we shall not be oblivious of the fact that the divine name, a linguistic entity indeed, is nevertheless conceived as being instrumental in revealing, or helping to reach a revelatory experience of its signified, God.

## Notes

- \* This study is part of a much more comprehensive survey of the various definitions of Kabbalah in the writings of medieval Kabbalists, Renaissance thinkers and modern scholars. This project evolved from an attempt to delineate the differences between Abraham Abulafia's Kabbalah and that of the theosophical-theurgical Kabbalah found in my Ph. D. thesis, *Abraham Abulafia's Works and Doctrines* [Hebrew University, Jerusalem, 1976] pp. 434-449. [Hebrew]
- 1 On the term Qabbalah see the very important observations of Gershom Scholem, *Kabbalah* [Jerusalem, 1974] pp. 3-7.
  - 2 *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, [New York, 1967] p. 13.
  - 3 *ibidem*, pp. 10-11. The emphasis is mine.
  - 4 See David Biale, "The Jewish Mysticism in the Sixteenth Century" in ed. Paul Szarmach, *An Introduction to the Medieval Mystics of Europe*, [SUNY, Albany, 1984] p. 314. See, however, Elliot R. Wolfson, "Circumcision, Vision of God, and Textual Interpretation: From Midrashic Trope to Mystical Symbol," *History of Religions* 27 (1987): 189-215, esp. concluding statement on p. 215; *idem*, "The Hermeneutics of Visionary Experience: Revelation and Interpretation in the Zohar," *Religion* 18 (1988): 311-345. In both of these studies Wolfson has emphasized the experiential underpinning of theosophical gnosis.
  - 5 Werblowsky refers to the views expressed by Scholem in *Major Trends*, pp. 15-16.
  - 6 See his *Joseph Karo, Lawyer and Mystic*, [JPS, Philadelphia, 1977] p. 40; compare also *ibidem*, pp. 158-159.
  - 7 *Kabbalah*, p. 4.
  - 8 That of the book of the Zohar.
  - 9 *The Wisdom of the Zohar*, [Oxford University Press, Oxford 1989] vol. I, p. 229.
  - 10 *Joseph Karo*, p. 189.
  - 11 *L'Analyse du langage theologique: Le Nom de Dieu* [Editions Mouton, Aubier, 1969], pp. 135-144.
  - 12 *BT, Sanhedrin*, fol. 90b. See also J. Petuchowski, "Judaism as "Mystery"—The Hidden Agenda?" *Hebrew Union College Annual*, vol. L11 (1981) pp. 141-152.
  - 13 See Lawrence Shiffman, "A Forty-Two Letter Divine Name in the Aramaic Magic Bowls" *Bulletin of the Institute of Jewish Studies*, vol. I [1973] nn. 97-102.
  - 14 *Zanu'a*: this term and those stemming from the same root are connected to the secret transmission in some ancient and medieval texts; see e.g. on the same page in the Talmud, in Ivan Marcus, *Piety and Society*, [Leiden, 1981] p. 85; *Sefer ha-Manhig*, ed. I. Raphael, [Jerusalem, 1978] vol. I, p. 85; and see note 47 below.
  - 15 *BT, Qiddushin*, fol. 71a; Tr. H. Freeman [London, 1966].
  - 16 See note 12 above.
  - 17 See M. Idel, "The Concept of the Torah in the *Heikhalot* Literature and Its Metamorphoses in Kabbalah" *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* vol. I [1981] pp. 23-84. [Hebrew]
  - 18 See M. Idel, *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia* [SUNY, Albany, 1987] pp. 14-15; *idem*, *Golem: Jewish Magical and Mystical Traditions on the Artificial Anthropoid* [SUNY, Albany, 1990] pp. 11, 13, 30-32.
  - 19 *Qiddushin*, fol. 71a.
  - 20 E. ben Yehuda, *A Complete Dictionary of Ancient and Modern Hebrew* vol. XI, [1946] p. 5700 notes 1, 3. Tur Sinai has suggested also an affinity between the magical term *Qiblah* and *Qabbalah* but this second suggestion was rejected by Gershom Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, tr. A. Arkush, ed. R. J. Zwi Werblowsky [Princeton, Philadelphia, 1987] p. 38 note 64.
  - 21 *Israel ba-Golah*, [Jerusalem, 1969] vol. II, 4 p. 418 note 40.
  - 22 *Origins of the Kabbalah*, pp. 38, 261-262 see also above note 20. Scholem's reliance on R. Meir ibn Avi Sahulah's 14th century description of Kabbalah as dealing with Sefirot and commandments cannot mitigate the importance of the Gaonic and Ashkenazi texts to be discussed below.
  - 23 As Scholem has mentioned, *ibidem*, p. 261 this term is not found in Sagi Nahor's extant writings.
  - 24 See Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, [New Haven, London, 1988] p. 90; *idem*, *Golem*, pp. 48-49.
  - 25 *Shem ha-Meforash*.
  - 26 *Be-Qabbalah*.
  - 27 *Otzar ha-Geonim*, [Jerusalem, 1934] ed. B. Levin, vol. VI, pp. 18-19; See also another text of R. Hai, where he indicates that the elders and pious men of his generation knew the names and used them for magical purposes; cf. Idel, *The Mystical Experience*, pp. 15, 42 note 3. See also another text attributed, correctly in my opinion, to R. Hai Gaon, printed in *ibidem*, p. 21: "[the high priest] was pronouncing explicitly the name of twenty-two letters and it was arranged [messudar. According to Tur Sinai (note 20 above) this is a mistake, for the form *masur*, since in Hebrew the difference between the two forms being minimal] by *Qabbalah* to the head of the Yeshivah." Therefore, again we have the idea that Kabbalah, divine name, and elite are connected to each other.

- 28 See *Otzar ha-Geonim*, vol. IX, to be quoted below beside note 39; Idel, "R. Isaac Sagi Nahor's *Kavvanah* of *Shemoneh Esreh*".
- 29 See below note 53.
- 30 *Be-'emunah*.
- 31 The divine name.
- 32 *Lo masru be-Yadeinu*.
- 33 *Masorah Meshuleshet*.
- 34 *Ela 'aray*.
- 35 *Mi-pi hatuqim be-Qeriato*.
- 36 *Lo bi-mesirah*. This term is crucial for the understanding of the whole text. At its end, a phrase indicates that without the event of transmission there can be no licit pronunciation; see *Otzar ha-Geonim*, vol. IX, p. 177: *mesirah me'akket*.
- 37 Or constant.
- 38 *Musoret geva'*. In classical Talmudic texts, the opposition between 'aray and *geva'* is well known.
- 39 See B. Levin, *Otzar ha-Geonim*, [Jerusalem, 1940] vol. IX p. 176; idem, [Jerusalem, 1931] vol. IV p. 23; Eliezer Ashkenazi, *Ta'am Zeqenim*, [Frankfurt, 1885] p. 57.
- 40 This issue is to be compared to Nahmanides' introduction to his *Commentary on the Torah*, ed. Ch. D. Chavel, [Jerusalem, 1961] vol. I pp. 15-17.
- 41 *masur me-ehad le-ehad*.
- 42 *'Eino masur . . . be-Qabbalah*.
- 43 *Otzar ha-Geonim*, ed. B. Levin, [Jerusalem, 1931] vol. IV, p. 23.
- 44 [Berlin, 1885] p. 128.
- 45 *Geschichte des juedische Philosophie* [Berlin, 1907] vol. I p. 192.
- 46 *Origins of the Kabbalah*, pp. 47, 261-262.
- 47 *Uvezin'ah*; see above note 14 and beside note 72 below.
- 48 *Commentary on Sefer Yezirah*, p. 189; my translation differs from the rendering found in Scholem, *ibidem*.
- 49 See Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, p. 262 n. 139, where he mentions also another instance of using the term *Qabbalah* by this author in connection to the angelic names. The divine names quoted by R. Eleazar in his *Sefer ha-Shem*, Ms.

- Munich 81, fol. 233b are found in the magical tract named *Sefer ha-Yashar*, Ms. Escorial, G. III 14, fol. 1b, and to Abraham Abulafia, *Sefer Otzar 'Eden Ganuz*, Ms. Oxford 1580, fol. 16a.
- 50 It is interesting to note that also in another case, discussions of the divine name of forty-two were mentioned by R. Eleazar as traditions of R. Hai, as well as theosophical issues. See Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, pp. 185-186; Joseph Dan, *The Esoteric Theology of Ashkenazi Hasidim*, [Jerusalem, 1968] pp. 119-128 [Hebrew]; idem, "The Emergence of Mystical Prayer" *Studies in Jewish Mysticism* eds. J. Dan - F. Talmage [Cambridge, Mass. 1982] pp. 112-115; Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, p. 195. Nevertheless I doubt very much the attribution of the magical names to a tradition stemming from Hai Gaon. In any case, at least the cultural image of the Gaon was informed by his authentic discussions of divine names.
- 51 On this term see Marcus, *Piety and Society*, p. 85 note 53; Moshe Idel, "Maimonides and Kabbalah" *Studies in Maimonides* ed. I. Twersky [Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1990] pp. 57, 62.
- 52 See Idel, *The Mystical Experience*, pp. 16-17; See also the tradition that connected R. Eleazar to the mystical experience of R. Ezra of Montcontour, adduced by Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, p. 239.
- 53 See Gershom Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*, [New York, 1973] pp. 135-136; Dan, *The Esoteric Theology*, p. 74; Marcus, *Piety and Society*, pp. 84-85. Also this quote is part of *Sefer ha-Shem*.
- 54 See Dan, *ibidem*, p. 75 and Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, pp. 99, 323 note 171. For other forms of revelatory experience cultivated by the Haside Ashkenaz, see Elliot R. Wolfson, "The Mystical Significance of Torah-Study in German Pietism," in *Jewish Quarterly Review* (forthcoming). On another tradition about the divine name in Haside Ashkenaz, connected especially to the phallus, see Elliot R. Wolfson, "Circumcision and the Divine Name: A Study in the Transmission of Esoteric Doctrine," *Jewish Quarterly Review* 78 (1987): 77-112, esp. 85-96.
- 55 *Origins of the Kabbalah*, pp. 259-260.
- 56 *ibidem*, p. 47.
- 57 *Commentary on Sefer Yezirah*, p. 189, discussed by Scholem, *ibidem*, p. 262 is indeed very fascinating, but it does not deal with the divine names as the content of the Kabbalah, while Rav Hai Gaon's text, not mentioned by Scholem, seems to be somehow related to the Ashkenazi tradition both from the point of view of the content and by the dint of mentioning the name of the Gaon.
- 58 Idel, "The Concept of the Torah" pp. 52-53.
- 59 On the traditions adduced by this author see our discussions above.
- 60 On this phrase in the context of the transmission of Kabbalah see Moshe Idel, "We Have No Kabbalistic Traditions on This" *Rabbi Moshe Nahmanides [Ramban]:*

- Explorations in His Religious and Literary Virtuosity* ed. I. Twersky, [Cambridge, Mass., 1983] pp. 52-54.
- 61 Printed by Gershom Scholem in R. Isaac ben Ya'acob ha-Kohen's *ha-'Azilut ha-Smalit, Mada'ei ha-Yuhadut*, vol. II [Jerusalem, 1930] p. 90. See also Scholem, *Le-Heqer Qabbalat R. Isaac ha-Kohen* [Jerusalem, 1934] pp. 119-120.
- 62 On Numbers 6, 27, ed. Ch. D. Chavel, p. 34. See also Bahya's discussion in his commentary on Leviticus 16, 30, where a view similar to the Ashkenazi rite of transmission is found. See also Scholem, *ibidem*, p. 136 note 1.
- 63 See Adolf Jellinek, *Bet ha-Midrash* [Leipzig, 1855] vol. III, p. XLII.
- 64 Ms. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale 817, fol. 56a. An interesting discussion about the transmission of the divine names from Moses to the later generations is found in one of the writings of R. Moshe of Burgos, see Gershom Scholem, *Tarbiz*, vol. V [1934] p. 52 and note 6.
- 65 See Scholem, *Reshit ha-Kabbalah* [Tel Aviv, 1948] pp. 73-74 [Hebrew]; *Origins of the Kabbalah*, pp. 209-210.
- 66 See M. Idel, "R. Isaac Sagi Nahor's Mystical Intention of the *Shemoneh Esreh*" *Ephrayim Gottlieb's Memory Volume*, eds. M. Oron—A. Goldreich [Jerusalem, 1993] [forthcoming]. [Hebrew].
- 67 *ibidem*.
- 68 See her "'Flaw' and 'Correction' in the Concept of Godhead in the Teaching of Rabbi Isaac the Blind" *The Beginnings of Jewish Mysticism in Medieval Europe* ed. J. Dan, [Jerusalem, 1987] pp. 157-285. [Hebrew].
- 69 See Scholem, *Kabbalah*, p. 179.
- 70 See also *Otzar ha-Kavod*, fol. 19d.
- 71 This form of exclamation is characteristic of the Zoharic style.
- 72 *Zenu'im*. See notes 14, 47 above.
- 73 *Sefer Otzar ha-Kavod* [Warsaw, 1879] fol. 13d; quoted by R. Meir ibn Gabbai, *Sefer 'Avodat ha-Qodesh*, [Jerusalem, 1963] fol. 16d.
- 74 Cf. Exodus 19, 9. The word 'Av, namely cloud, has the numerical value of seventy-two; the biblical divine epiphany in the cloud was transformed into a revelation by the means of the divine names.
- 75 This view of the ontological status of the divine names is found already in the Kabbalistic school that has influenced Todros Abulafia's thought, in the *Commentary on the Merkavah* of R. Ya'akov ha-Kohen.
- 76 R. Todros ben Joseph ha-Levi Abulafia, *Sefer Otzar ha-Kavod*, fol. 11c.

- 77 Ed. Arthur Green, "R. Isaac ibn Sahola's Commentary on the Song of Songs" *The Beginnings of the Jewish Mysticism in Medieval Europe*, ed. J. Dan, [Jerusalem, 1987] p. 412 and his note to line 22. See also Gershom Scholem, *Peraqim be-Toledot Sifrut ha-Kabbalah* [Jerusalem, 1931] pp. 60-61. By mentioning the knowledge of the future, the Kabbalist may hint at Abraham Abulafia's claim that he is a prophet. In any case, it seems that some concepts related to the technique of attaining a mystical experience by means of music, crucial in ecstatic Kabbalah, were known to ibn Avi Sahulah; see Idel, *The Mystical Experience*, pp. 59-60.
- 78 See Jellinek [note 63 above].
- 79 On this issue see his introduction to his *Commentary on the Pentateuch*, note 40 above.
- 80 For the phenomenological divergences between Abulafia's ecstatic Kabbalah and the theosophical-theurgical one see Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, pp. XI-XIV, 200-210; *idem*, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, pp. 18-20; *idem*, *Language, Torah and Hermeneutics in Abraham Abulafia*, pp. X-XVI.
- 81 I hope to devote elsewhere an elaborate study to this forgotten controversy which shaped the path of the development of Spanish Kabbalah.
- 82 See also below notes 114, 118.
- 83 *Auswahl kabbalistischer Mystik*, [Leipzig, 1853] pp. 14-15.
- 84 *Hokhmat ha-Talmud*.
- 85 On this phrase and its sources see Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, p. 394.
- 86 The seals are different combinations of the letters of the Tetragrammaton, conceived, according to *Sefer Yezirah*, as stamping the extremities of the universe.
- 87 On this technique of revelation as understood by Abulafia see Idel, *The Mystical Experience*, pp. 105-108, 158-160; *idem*, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, pp. 125-126.
- 88 *Auswahl*, p. 15, corrected according to Ms. New York, JTS, 1887, fol. 98b.
- 89 On this issue see Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, p. 38 as well as the scholarly description of Kabbalah adduced above.
- 90 See I. Twersky, "Religion and Law" *Religion in a Religious Age*, ed. S. D. Goitein [Cambridge, Mass., 1974] p. 74.
- 91 Idel, "Maimonides and Kabbalah" pp. 56, 61.
- 92 As quoted in R. Isaac of Acre's *Meirat Eynayim*; see Scholem, *Major Trends*, p. 24.
- 93 *Auswahl*, pp. 17-18.
- 94 *Sefer Muste'ah ha-Hokhmah*, Ms. Parma, de Rossi 141, fol. 19a; Scholem, *Major Trends*, pp. 143-144, 383 n. 90.

- 95 *Auswahl*, p. 20, corrected according to Ms. New York, JTS 1887, fol. 99b; Ms. Cambridge, Add. 644, fol. 3a; the version as printed by Jellinek is here very erroneous.
- 96 Ms. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale 853, fols. 49a-50a.
- 97 See above his definition of the Sefirotic Kabbalah.
- 98 *'Issruhu*.
- 99 *Auswahl*, p. 19.
- 100 See the analysis of the critique of another topic that is important for the Sefirotic Kabbalah, the Kabbalistic symbolism, in Abulafia's last book in Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, p. 202.
- 101 See Idel, *ibidem*, pp. 138-139.
- 102 *ibidem*, pp. 141-146.
- 103 *Auswahl*, p. 16.
- 104 On the reception of the mystical speech see Idel, *The Mystical Experience*, pp. 83-95; idem, *Language, Torah and Hermeneutics*, pp. 106-107.
- 105 On this issue see Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, pp. 5-8.
- 106 See especially his *Sefer Shu'arei Orah*.
- 107 *Auswahl*, pp. 16-17. On ontic versus epistemological union see Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, pp. 46-49.
- 108 Idel, "Maimonides and Kabbalah" pp. 67-68; *Sefer Imrei Shefer* printed in Jellinek, *Philosophie und Kabbala* [Leipzig, 1853] vol. I p. 36, etc.
- 109 *'Otiot, Nequddot, Zeruf*.
- 110 Namely sheep.
- 111 *Ziyyur*; on this medieval concept see H. A. Wolfson, "The Terms *Taşawwur* and *Taşdiq* in Arabic Philosophy and Their Greek, Latin and Hebrew Equivalents" *The Moslem World*, [April, 1943] pp. 1-15.
- 112 *Sefer Ḥayyei ha-'Olam ha-Ba*, Ms. Oxford 1582, fol. 45b. See also Idel, *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics*, pp. 3-11. On the influence of this quote on R. Mordekhai Dato's description of R. Moses Cordovero's Kabbalistic activity see Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, p. 137.
- 113 Ms. New York, JTS 1801, fol. 4b.
- 114 This is one of the few instances where Abulafia explicitly mentions the reception of oral traditions from some masters. On the reception of esoteric traditions concerning the secrets of Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed* see Idel, "Maimonides

- and Kabbalah" pp. 58-59 and note 90; p. 69. For the Renaissance misunderstanding of the identity of Abulafia's master as Maimonides himself see Chaim Wirszubski, *Pico della Mirandola's Encounter with Jewish Mysticism*, [Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1988] pp. 87-88, 91-98.
- 115 A list of ancient mystical books appears in a similar context in his epistle *Sheva' Netivot ha-Torah*, p. 21.
- 116 In the Ms. *MHTY*; it is possible that this is one of the many errors of the copyist of this manuscript that is, unfortunately, a unicum. If so, we should read the sentence as follows; "which came to me in the form of *Bat Qol*." However, it is possible that Abulafia alluded to the Greek form *THY*, namely God, and then *MTHY* would mean "from God". Abulafia uses the form *THYV* in order to point to God already in his earlier *Sefer Get ha-Shemot*, see Idel, *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics*, p. 24.
- 117 Compare to his epistle *Sheva' Netivot ha-Torah* p. 21, where he counts the revelation from the Agent Intellect as higher than the secrets he learned from various esoteric books. Cf. Idel, "Maimonides and Kabbalah", pp. 57-58.
- 118 I wonder whether the oral transmission as lower is connected also to Abulafia's own teachings to his Kabbalistic students. In one instance he mentions the "external Kabbalot", *Qabbalot Ḥizoniot*, in the context of the oral traditions concerning the mystical interpretations of the *Guide of the Perplexed*: See *Sefer Otzar Eden Ganuz*, Ms. Oxford 1950, fol. 164b.
- 119 The above quote is to be compared to another pertinent discussion of Abulafia, translated by Scholem in *Major Trends*, pp. 140-141. Though there are some divergences between them, the variety of channels for receiving Kabbalah is accepted also in this other, earlier, Kabbalistic text.
- 120 *Sefer Ḥayyei ha-'Olam ha-Ba*, Ms. Oxford 1580, fol. 52a.
- 121 See Yoḥanan Alemanno's view of Kabbalah as "understood by the intellect" in his ideal curriculum, cf. M. Idel, "The Study Program of R. Yoḥanan Alemanno" *Tarbiz*, vol. 48 [1978] p. 309. [Hebrew] See also below note 123.
- 122 *zeruf*.
- 123 *Sefer Otzar Eden Ganuz*, Ms. Oxford 1580, fol. 90a. See also *ibidem*, fol. 136a: "We have Kabbalistic ways which are bringing us to the *intelligibilia* in a easy way [*be-qalut*], without their [the philosophers'] ways". See also above note 121.
- 124 Abulafia's untitled text, Ms. Sassoon 290, p. 234. Compare also to the pseudo-Maimonidean *Epistle of the Secrets*, which stems from Abulafia's circle, where "the science of Kabbalah" has ways that enable someone to reach in a very easy way [*be-qalut nimraz*], whatever is within the scope of human apprehension; according to the epistle, this was the way of the prophets. Cf. *Ḥemdah Genuzah*, ed. Z. E. Edelman, [Koenigsberg, 1856] fol. 43a. See also Idel, "Maimonides and Kabbalah" p. 75, note 160.

- 125 See the views of R. Sa'adiya Gaon and R. Yehudah ha-Levi on the oral tradition as analyzed by respectively Harry A. Wolfson, *Studies in the History of Philosophy and Religion*, eds. I. Twersky and G. H. Williams [Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1973] vol. I pp. 584-597, Raphael Jospe, "The Superiority of Oral over Written Communication: Judah Ha-Levi's *Kuzari* and Modern Thought", *From Ancient Israel to Modern Judaism, Intellect in Quest of Understanding, Essays in Honor of Marvin Fox*, eds. J. Neusner, E. S. Frerichs, N. M. Sarna [Scholars Press, Atlanta, Georgia, 1989], vol. III, 127-156. On R. Yehudah ha-Levi's view of mysticism see Elliot R. Wolfson, "Merkavah Traditions in Philosophical Garb: Judah Halevi Reconsidered," *Proceedings of the American Academy for Jewish Research*, vol. LVII [1991] pp. 179-242.
- 126 See M. Idel, "Ma'aseh Merkavah: A Case of Intercultural Translations" [forthcoming].
- 127 See Mircea Eliade, *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* [London, 1964] p. 401; idem, *Images & Symbols, Studies in Religious Symbolism* [Sheed and Ward, New York, 1969] pp. 54-55; Frits Stall, *Exploring Mysticism* [Penguin Books, Harmondsworth 1975] pp. 100-101, 155-156.
- 128 See Idel, *The Mystical Experience*, pp. 13-52.
- 129 See Staal's critique *ibidem*, pp. 100-101.
- 130 See Idel, "Ma'aseh Merkavah" [note 126 above].