

THE SERPENT KILLS OR THE SERPENT GIVES LIFE

THE KABBALIST ABRAHAM ABULAFIA'S
RESPONSE TO CHRISTIANITY

Robert Sagerman

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The Serpent Kills or the Serpent Gives Life

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PREFACE

There is general agreement among students and scholars that Abraham Abulafia (1240–c. 1291) is one of the most enigmatic and intriguing—often vexing—figures in the history of Jewish mysticism. In the modern academic study of Jewish mysticism, much effort has been expended in the attempt to delineate the nature of the branch of kabbalah, referred to as the ecstatic or the prophetic kabbalah, which he founded. Scholars have pursued the difficult task of seeking to understand Abulafia's mystical aims, the methods employed in achieving them and the extent to which Abulafia's kabbalah differed from the so-called theosophic kabbalah, from which he distanced himself. Abulafia's messianic self-conception and colorful life story have also attracted considerable attention. His love of the abstruse and of the methodology by which to unearth secrets concerning the divine, as well as his penchant for cryptic and, at times, seemingly transgressive pronouncements, have made him an object of fascination. His open delineation of specific meditative techniques by which to attain transcendent experience has aroused great interest. The very obvious intensity of his personality, which shows through everywhere in his written work, and the passion with which he approached his mystical project have made him a compelling subject for study. In the religious sphere, he has frequently been the subject of prohibition and taboo, though the impact of his work has reverberated powerfully through the centuries.

In the academic arena, first Gershom Scholem and then Moshe Idel followed Abulafia's own lead in contending that his mystical praxis differed dramatically from that of the theosophic school. Abulafia, it was believed, was relatively disinterested in textual hermeneutics as the essence of his mystical undertaking, and particularly so with respect to the symbolism of the ten *sefirot* (divine emanations), in marked contrast to the pursuits of theosophic kabbalists, who plumbed esoteric, rabbinic and biblical texts for their sefirotic significations. Abulafia, by contrast, sought an ecstatic state of unity with the divine, the arrival at the level of prophesy, accomplished through systematic meditative procedures entailing the manipulation of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet, themselves rendered devoid of meaning or association.

Where Abulafia did have recourse to theosophic conceptions of the *sefirot*, they were primarily treated by Abulafia, not as hypostatic potencies to be fathomed and manipulated, but as elements, Idel noted, of an inner psychodynamic. Elliot Wolfson would soften considerably the scholarly distinction between the prophetic and the theosophic kabbalah. Abulafia's kabbalah, Wolfson observed, embodied trajectories that in many ways defied prior categorization, such as with respect to its hermeneutical focus and its relationship to traditional Judaism.

Wolfson as well moved past Scholem's earlier minimization of the importance of Christianity as an influence upon Abulafia, opening a new door to scholarship concerning the relationship of Abulafia's kabbalah to Christian doctrine. Wolfson observed that Abulafia's provocative recourse to triadic motifs was deserving of a reappraisal with respect to the question of Christian influence. Other key points of contact between Abulafia and Christianity, as in the arena of incarnation doctrine, have subsequently been fruitfully investigated by Wolfson. As well, an essay of Idel's on the subject of Abulafia's demonization of Jesus has contributed significantly to an understanding of the importance of Christianity for the prophetic kabbalist. Most recently, Harvey Hames has suggested that Abulafia's life and work evinces a still more active engagement with Christianity than was previously thought. Hames locates features common to both Abulafia's writings and those of the Christian monastic messianic tradition known as Joachimism.

At around the same time that Hames' important book on this subject, *Like Angels on Jacob's Ladder*, appeared in 2008, I was completing my dissertation at New York University, in which I was investigating those forces at work within Abulafia that had led him toward a seeming fascination with Christianity. This book is the result of that work. On the basis of Abulafia's considerable literary production, I seek to bring to light the internal dimension of Abulafia's relationship to Christianity. Hames' effort is of a somewhat more historical and externalized nature, one in which Abulafia's doctrines are evaluated against a Joachimite model, and in which a biographical treatment of Abulafia's life is plotted against apparent interactions with Christian thinkers. Of course, these characterizations of my and Hames' contributions are somewhat oversimplified. I devote much energy to locating Abulafia within his historical context, and Hames is quite involved in tracking Abulafia's feelings and experiences. But for the most part these general descriptions hold true. It appears to me that the two approaches, Hames' and my own, are mutually supportive at their

root, since they both point to the fundamental centrality of Christianity in Abulafia's life and thought. This I believe to be the case even though our conclusions differ significantly regarding Abulafia's motivations for his deep involvement with Christians and Christendom. Hames believes that Abulafia became engaged with a particular current of Christian doctrine as he sought to ingratiate himself to Christians, Joachimites in particular, in order to win their support for his messianic aspirations. By contrast, I focus here upon Abulafia's emotionally fraught inner dynamic, one characterized by both revulsion to and an inexorable draw toward Christianity. The pull toward the religious other, I maintain, operated for Abulafia at the deepest and most irresistible psychological level.

Abulafia bears witness in his writings to a tumultuous personal conflict. He was ensnared in a dynamic of attraction and abhorrence with respect to Christianity and its symbols, one which proved remarkably fertile in terms of the mystical speculation to which it gave rise. Abulafia's inner world, in this regard, bears examination from a couple of perspectives. First, Abulafia's plight suggests hallmarks familiar to students of anthropology and alterity theory. The permeability of the borders between different cultural groups, or groups that presume themselves to be distinct, has attracted much attention. The boundaries between these groups arise from a sense of separation, from the subjective differentiation between the self, the in-group, and the other, the out-group. Yet the anthropologist observes that mutual influence will frequently diffuse, sometimes unnoticed, back and forth across the imaginary line of demarcation between groups. A tension is latent here, then, with respect to the self/other dichotomy. A need to self-identify as distinct from the other jostles uncomfortably against the, in fact, provisional nature of the presumed distinction between one's familiar self and the supposedly alien other. The unsettled nature of the self/other dichotomy may have been particularly marked for medieval kabbalists, for they sought a reconciliation of opposites within themselves and in the divine world, a paradoxical eradication of precisely those lines of separation, those elements of identity, that constituted the indispensable basis of their project. From this perspective, Abulafia presents an especially striking, even poignant, case study.

Along with the avenue of approach suggested by alterity theory, a psychoanalytic perspective is fruitful in examining Abulafia's simultaneous attraction and revulsion toward Christianity. Abulafia's mystical psychodynamic may be elicited through rigorous attention to his

intensive hermeneutical activity. We are fortunate in that Abulafia has revealed much of his inner life in his writings, particularly with regard to the travails and hardships that he viewed to be part and parcel of the mystical project. Consistent themes pervade Abulafia's thought which, taken together, trace the contours of Abulafia's psyche. Knowledge of the various techniques by which Abulafia encrypts his doctrine is, naturally, requisite here. And, admittedly, it is a challenge for the reader who is not already steeped in kabbalistic writing to apply the analytical tools necessary to elucidate Abulafia's intended meanings. For this reason, I have made an effort in this book to track Abulafia's hermeneutical maneuvers in a very thorough manner. I seek to present the intent behind Abulafia's elusive formulations as well as the steps that he took in arriving at the proofs that he presents as prophetic revelation.

Frequently, synthesizing the results of these investigations and holding them up against psychoanalytic models makes it possible to arrive at a sense of the psychic matrix from which was generated Abulafia's innovative kabbalah. Significantly, even at the deepest level of this matrix, Abulafia appears, himself, to have been mindful of much of what we can uncover. His understanding diverges from our own only in that he approached questions concerning his own psyche, of course, from a medieval frame of reference. That is to say, Abulafia recognized both the allure of the forbidden other, Christendom, and the centrality of the tensions generated by the proximity—even internality—of this same other. Abulafia simply expressed this dynamic, in subjective terms, within a struggle for a divinizing perfection, and not, in (purportedly) objective terms, from either an anthropological or a psychoanalytic perspective.

As I have begun to suggest, although Abulafia's mystical doctrine is multifaceted, it was to a considerable extent propelled by the consuming nexus of emotions revolving around the issue of the Christian other. I do not believe that questions concerning the relationship of his own being to this problematic other were confined in Abulafia's thought and practice merely to a circumscribed set of themes and motifs. Rather, the traces left by such questions are virtually omnipresent in Abulafia's literary work. That issues revolving around Christianity are a core concern of Abulafia's comes notwithstanding Wolfson's observation regarding Abulafia's commitment to beliefs and practice that fall within, and seek to enlarge upon, historically normative rabbinic Judaism. The tension between a commitment to traditional

Judaism and the active absorption of Christian influence was, in fact, grist for the mill of exultation, guilt and anxiety that accompanied Abulafia's mystical career. For Abulafia, finding the means to release this tension constituted the essence of mystical fulfillment.

Thanks to those who contributed in so many ways to this undertaking are richly deserved. Among those who provided invaluable assistance are Professors Robert Chazan, Michah Gottlieb, Frank Peters and Lawrence Schiffman of New York University, whose responses to my doctoral dissertation have ultimately played a significant part in shaping this book, and whose influence is, I hope, perceptible. My thanks go to the anonymous peer reviewer of my manuscript, whose suggestions were most useful, and as well to Gidon Isaacs. My debt to Professor Elliot Wolfson, my former advisor at New York University, is inestimable. His own scholarly work is dazzling in its complexity and its incisiveness, and he has assisted me with an exceedingly rare level of generosity. Professor Wolfson is one whose kindness keeps pace with his brilliant intellect, and the debt that I owe him cannot be repaid. The love and support of my parents has been a treasured blessing, for which I will always be grateful. Finally, for the boundless goodness, understanding, humor and insight of my beautiful wife, Kathy, there cannot be sufficient thanks. She is an incredible gift in my life, as is our amazing little boy, Joseph.

INTRODUCTION

ABRAHAM ABULAFIA: A BRIEF BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Based primarily on scattered data furnished by Abraham Abulafia himself, modern scholars have assembled a relatively full accounting of his life.¹ He was born in Aragon in 1240 and lived in Spain until the age of twenty, at which point he embarked upon a journey to the Holy Land. Abulafia's later claim was that he sought the fabled River Sambatyon. Whatever the elusive motivations behind this undertaking,² one must recognize its extraordinary nature. Warfare in the Holy Land nevertheless brought Abulafia's quest to an end in Acre, and he subsequently changed his course for Greece. There he was married, and he continued on to Italy thereafter, where his study of Maimonides' *The Guide of the Perplexed* began in earnest.

Sometime in the 1260s, Abulafia returned to Spain, where, under the tutelage in particular of R. Baruch Togarmi, he turned to the mystical study of the ancient esoteric text *Sefer Yeširah*, (*The Book of Formation*). The year 1270 represents the onset of Abulafia's chief mystical experiences. He wrote of having undergone intense visionary encounters

¹ See Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, pp. 126–130; Idel, *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 2–3. Most recently, Hames, *Like Angels on Jacob's Ladder*, pp. 29–53, is comprehensive in his biographical approach to Abulafia. Needless to say, there are aspects of Abulafia's autobiographical account that should be taken with a grain of salt.

² Abulafia's mature thought is noteworthy for its messianic strain, and it is possible to see in his terse explanation for his youthful pilgrimage a messianic tinge. In Abulafia's day, and particularly among Sephardic Jews, the significance of the Holy Land as the locus for the onset of messianic redemption had become a motivating force for some to journey to Palestine. As part of the unfolding of the end time, the ingathering of the ten lost tribes was envisioned, and such an event was believed in some quarters to have been enacted with the arrival of the Mongols in the Near East. Yuval, *Two Nations in your Womb*, pp. 267–284; Hames, *Like Angels on Jacob's Ladder*, p. 32; Idel, *Messianic Mystics*, p. 63. Tradition had long held that the ten tribes had been exiled beyond the mythic river Sambatyon, so we may wonder, because of both his emigration and his allusion to the river, whether Abulafia had sought in his youth to participate in the drama of the messianic advent. For the eschatological justification for Nahmanides' journey to the Holy Land, see Cuffel, "Call and Response: European Jewish Emigration to Egypt and Palestine in the Middle Ages," p. 98.

with the divine Active Intellect³ beginning at this time and of being plagued by vengeful demons as a result. This torment, Abulafia would record in retrospect, persisted for fifteen years. Sometime in the 1270s, Abulafia returned to Italy, and his writings reveal that he had come to think of himself as the messiah. It is possible that these beliefs had already aroused the disapproval of R. Solomon ibn Adret, the leader of the Jewish community of Barcelona, and had brought about his departure, although documentary evidence from both sides clearly portrays a conflict between the Adret and Abulafia only at a later date, when Abulafia was active in Sicily.

Following his departure from Spain, Abulafia spent the remainder of his life in Greece, Italy and, primarily, Sicily. There he propagated the teachings that would ultimately come to comprise an enormously influential kabbalistic school. His prolific literary production imparts the letter combinatory practices that constitute one of the hallmarks of his meditative effort to commune with the Active Intellect and to engage in enlightened analysis of Scripture. Abulafia claimed to have ultimately sought an audience with the Pope, in fulfillment of a perceived messianic mission, in 1280, at which time he was summarily imprisoned. With the Pope's death soon thereafter, however, Abulafia was released. We must note that there is no corroborating evidence regarding Abulafia's account of this brazen undertaking. Abulafia would await the year 1290 as the time of redemption, to occur under his own aegis, but his fervent expectations were to end in disappointment. All traces of Abulafia disappear soon thereafter, his last known text being composed sometime in the year 1291.

³ Abulafia draws upon the Aristotelian terminology of the Active Intellect to refer to a divine emanation to which is ascribed the creation and sustenance of the sublunar world. In this regard, the Active Intellect is upheld by Abulafia over and above the other nine divine emanations, the separate intellects. Following upon Maimonides, who maintained that illumination had been achieved by the prophets through their contact with the Active Intellect, Abulafia believed that mystical communion with God was achieved by these same means. Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, pp. 39–40; Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 46–47. Prior mystical influences upon Abulafia in this regard included, among others, R. Ezra of Gerona and R. Baruch Togarmi, Abulafia's teacher in Spain. Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, pp. 371, 377–378; Idel, "The Writings of Abraham Abulafia and His Teaching," p. 88 (in Hebrew); Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 59 n. 167, 71 n. 217, 83 n. 264; Pedaya, *Vision and Speech*, pp. 96, 195–197 (in Hebrew).

CHAPTER ONE

ABULAFIA AND ALTERITY: THE OTHER IN THE SELF

Once I [R. Eliezer] was walking in the marketplace of Tsippori, and I found there Yaakov, the man of Kefar Sikhnin, and he recounted a saying of sectarianism in the name of Yeshu the son of Pantiri, and it caused me pleasure, and I was arrested by/for the words of sectarianism...

So reads *Tosefta Hullin* 2:24, composed roughly a millennium before Abulafia's day. As the story continues, R. Eliezer ultimately appears before the Jewish authorities and is acquitted. But what is of immediate interest is the notion that R. Eliezer committed an offense simply in his having been pleased by a Christian pronouncement. The actual nature of the sectarian utterance is not divulged, and so it is never made clear whether its actual content was or was not heretical by Jewish standards. We may infer that R. Eliezer's crime is in his having been swayed by a Christian on any point whatsoever. As Lawrence Schiffman puts it, the story reflects the rabbinic perspective that "even the most minimal contact" with the heretics posed a grave danger.¹ The story, then, reflects two elements, the first being the perceived threat to notions of normative Judaism constituted by the heretical Christian sect,² the second being the uncomfortable truth that aspects of Christianity may have held a certain appeal even to renowned rabbis. Boyarin, as he renders the story above, writes that it "...illustrates beautifully the hypothesis of simultaneous rabbinic attraction to and repulsion from Christianity."³

Boyarin observes a relationship between this story of R. Eliezer's encounter with the sectarian and the story of his excommunication in *Baba Mešia* 59a. There, his recourse to magico-mystical means to argue a halakhic (legalist) point appears to have been his principle offence. In particular, R. Eliezer is guilty of enlisting of a *bat qol*, or divine voice. In

¹ Schiffman discusses the historicity of the story in *Who Was a Jew?* pp. 71–73.

² Schiffman suggests that it was not until the Bar Kokhba war that Christians were no longer viewed by the rabbis as misguided Jews "...whose identity as Jews was [nonetheless] unquestionable." *Ibid.*, pp. 73, 76.

³ Boyarin, "The Close Call; or, Could a Pharisee Be a Christian?" p. 276.

Boyarin's estimation, rabbinic mistrust of such means was intertwined with the censure of Christianity, which, the rabbis maintained, was sorcerous at its root. In two ways, then, R. Eliezer was seen to bear a sectarian stigma in the two stories. Further, *Baba Mešia* relates that R. Eliezer wore tefillin on Sabbath, violating rabbinic law and marking him as deviant. This again appears to have contributed to the rabbinic suspicions of his seemingly sectarian tendencies. Ultimately, nevertheless, R. Eliezer answers with a well-framed response to the challenge posed to his orthodoxy, and he is vindicated. Boyarin relates that R. Eliezer's reply, "...because it is a rational answer based on a good halakhic principle," marks him as "within," that is, in the in-group of purportedly normative Jews, and not as "... 'out of his mind,' that is, suspect, in a mystical and perhaps sectarian state."⁴

The story of R. Eliezer's attraction to a Christian principle, Boyarin suggests, reveals that the rabbinic authorship was aware of the sometimes uncomfortable closeness of Christian to Jewish belief and practice. For this reason, distancing the self from the other, and cementing one's own identity in the process, became a necessary, difficult and sometimes anxiety-producing undertaking for the rabbis. Through the story of R. Eliezer's attraction to a Christian utterance, the authors were, as Boyarin puts it, "...marking out the virtual identity between themselves and the Christians in their world at the same time they are very actively seeking to establish difference." The possibility of a Jew's being attracted to elements of Christianity was not unexpected, due to the two groups' intimate relationship, but the *Tosefta* authorship insists that an irrevocable difference exists nonetheless between the groups, one which calls for R. Eliezer's censure. The marking out of this difference from Christianity by the authors of these stories from the life of R. Eliezer comes in the form of his condemnation, while the fact that the charges levied against him never seem to stick, and that he is ultimately not merely exonerated but honored as a great sage, illustrates the awkward ambiguity in determining the real difference between heresy and piety, in-group and out-group. R. Eliezer, as he is characterized in these tales, threatens to destroy the illusion of clarity that underlies the self/other dichotomy. Chimerical as this oppositional framework may be, as suggested by the figure of R. Eliezer, Jewish normativity is its champion. One may sense from these stories

⁴ Ibid., p. 288.

that the grappling with notions of a normative Jewish framework, lying at the heart of rabbinic Judaism's literary project, operates in response to an impulse to reify the self/other dichotomy.

R. Eliezer poses a particularly acute challenge to the orderliness of this dichotomy. He is marked by the stigma of the other, while at the same time he is a venerated exponent of normative Judaism. His possession of supernatural faculties only serves to magnify this contradiction.⁵ R. Eliezer exceeds the normative specifications of rabbinic Judaism through his magical or mystical gifts, and it becomes difficult, consequently, to gauge his real status. The added supernatural element heightens the anxiety surrounding the question of where R. Eliezer stands, with the "us" of rabbinic Judaism or with the "them" that includes Christians and other heretics.

R. Eliezer, as Boyarin describes his appearance in these stories, "...is the very figure of liminality."⁶ The same should be said of the thirteenth century kabbalist Abraham Abulafia. It is worth contemplating some of the points of contact between these two figures, bearing in mind that the one character is largely a rabbinic construction, while the other emerges from our limited source material as chiefly self-constructed. We may start by noting that Abulafia wore tefillin during his self-devised mystical rituals, including at night.⁷ This closely parallels R. Eliezer's offense of wearing tefillin at another non-prescribed time, on the Sabbath. Abulafia's modification of the rules concerning the wearing of tefillin was in keeping with his view that all of his mystical practices were expansions upon normative rabbinic activity.⁸ Abulafia's elucidations of mystical subtexts for the *mišvot* conform as well to this tendency. These investigations into the *mišvot* demonstrate Abulafia's intense interest in halakhah, validating in the process the acceptability

⁵ Ibid., p. 287.

⁶ Ibid., p. 281.

⁷ Idel, *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 29, 39, 50 n. 114, 120.

⁸ Wolfson observes that Abulafia viewed the crucial mystical practice of letter permutation to be "hypernomian," that is, an extension of practice prescribed by the rabbinate. *Abraham Abulafia*, p. 209. See also *ibid.*, pp. 197–204, 225. Idel views the *mišvot* (commandments) as occupying a lesser position in Abulafia's mystical system. Although he notes Abulafia's frequent prescription of study of the commandments, their performance, Idel suggests, is at times seen by Abulafia as secondary or even unnecessary. "Inner Peace through Inner Struggle," pp. 76 n. 31, 80. Nevertheless, Idel observes that, in other places in Abulafia's writings, halakhah is still to be heeded even subsequent to mystical attainment. *Ibid.*, p. 77. As well, the commandments were seen by Abulafia to be crucial in the overcoming of the evil inclination. *Ibid.*, p. 81.

of his own ritual activity. Such a result squares well with the model of R. Eliezer's self-vindicating halakhic argument. By demonstrating the depth of their insight into normative practice, both cemented their insider status and legitimized their departures from strict halakhah.

The echo of R. Eliezer comes as well from the fact that Abulafia's self-professed authoritative status came with a supernatural component. Abulafia vouchsafed his reception of revelation through a *bat qol*, much as was the case with R. Eliezer. Abulafia also at times laid claim to the capacity to work wonders.⁹ Boyarin, we may recall, referred to R. Eliezer's capacities as magical or mystical in nature, and the same is certainly true with respect to Abulafia's claims for himself. For both, superior insight into halakhah (and many other matters, in the case of Abulafia) came with the divine imprimatur represented by the *bat qol*.

Abulafia went so far as to assign to his own achievements a messianic dimension. For his apparent brazenness in this regard, he incurred the penalty of excommunication at the hands of his contemporary rabbinic authorities.¹⁰ R. Eliezer, at least initially, met with the same condemnation in the rabbinic literature, although his offenses related to supernatural and "sectarian" predilections, and not to messianic pretensions for himself. Nevertheless, a heretical messianism did play an obviously prominent role in the group, the Christians, with whom R. Eliezer was linked by the rabbis. Here marks the final crucial parallel between Abulafia and R. Eliezer. At the core of this book is the contention that a passion for Christian doctrines is discernible in Abulafia's writings. What we can detect from the strong resemblance between R. Eliezer and Abraham Abulafia surrounding issues of Jewish normativity and the dangers posed by the Christian neighbor is that they both invoke an archetype of the troubling figure who threatens the stability of the boundary between in-group and out-group.

⁹ Idem, *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics in Abraham Abulafia*, p. 105; "The Writings of Abraham Abulafia and His Teaching," pp. 129–130, 135 (in Hebrew). Abulafia refers, for instance, to the ability to perform signs and to "act upon matter and form." *Sitrei Torah* (*Secrets of the Torah*), MS NY-JTSA Mic. 2367, fol. 23b; printed edition, p. 33. Notwithstanding his own claim, Abulafia criticizes the "Masters of Names" for their own use of names to work wonders. See *Sefer ha-Melammed* (*The Book of the Teacher*), MS Paris-BN héb. 680, fols. 292a–b; printed edition, p. 13, following Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed* 1:61. Altmann, "Maimonides' Attitude Toward Jewish Mysticism," p. 201. Scholem refers to Abulafia's preference for a "magic of inwardness." *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, p. 145; *The Kabbalah of Sefer ha-Temunah and Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 177, 181 (in Hebrew).

¹⁰ Hames, *The Art of Conversion*, p. 78.

Theories of Alterity and Kabbalah in Medieval Europe

The dubiousness of the distinguishing characteristics upon which the category of “other” so often depends is generally noted in the modern study of alterity. Certainly the perspective that conceptions of the other’s “otherness” may be uncomfortably unjustified is apparent in the stories of R. Eliezer. The other is designated as such based upon distinctions between in-group and out-group that are fragile and mutable.¹¹ The truth of the matter is that the interface between cultural groups, even—or especially—in the case of rival groups, is to some extent open. Beliefs, doctrines and customs are often held in common among these groups in unexpected ways, and influences may travel in both directions. The tenuous legitimacy of the category of “other” may generate an acute sense of insecurity; the suspicion, whether conscious or unconscious, that the presumed criteria for a group’s purportedly unique identity may be fictitious is, naturally, deeply unsettling. Frequently, the disorientation that ensues with the dawning of this sense of the fragility of one’s identity generates an emotional response, as the bare necessity of the category of “other” for the strength of in-group identity yields to intensified xenophobia and hostility.¹²

Wolfson has contributed an important examination of these questions of alterity for the theosophic kabbalah, of which the thirteenth century Castilian text, the *Zohar*, is the chief and most influential exemplar.¹³ He has observed that the category of “other” is one that cannot persist in the face of the mystic’s endeavor to commune with the

¹¹ Notes Jonathan Z. Smith, “‘Otherness’ is not so much a matter of separation as it is a description of interaction . . . the relation to the ‘other’ is a matter of shifting temporality and relative modes of relationship.” “What a Difference a Difference Makes,” p. 10. See also Biale, “Confessions of an Historian of Jewish Culture,” pp. 44–45.

¹² Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, pp. 10, 15.

¹³ In general terms, the theosophic branch of kabbalah has been distinguished from the ecstatic or prophetic kabbalah of Abraham Abulafia on the basis of the perception that the former was more intent than the latter upon engaging in textual hermeneutics as the essence of its mystical program. Such hermeneutical activity was oriented chiefly toward discerning the esoteric meaning of Scripture, the liturgy and the commandments. In particular, the theosophic kabbalists pursued secrets pertaining to the nature of the ten *sefirot* (supernal emanations; see below, p. 40 n. 48), through which the encounter with the divine, often achieved by theurgical means, could be achieved. By contrast, Abulafia has been thought to have oriented his own school toward non-theurgical meditative techniques, by which to attain an ecstatic experience of communion with God. See in particular, Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, pp. xi–xx. As mentioned in the preface, these distinctions between the theosophic and the ecstatic kabbalah have been tempered. Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 94–114.

Godhead; in the theosophic kabbalah, the thwarting of the category of “other” stands as part and parcel of the mystic’s objective for enlightenment.¹⁴ I refer most specifically to Wolfson’s observations concerning the feminine element in theosophic kabbalistic speculation.¹⁵ To these we should add similar observations concerning the all-important alterity of Christendom.¹⁶ It is not surprisingly that these categories of “other”—the feminine and the Christian—are frequently rendered equivalent in kabbalistic discourse, as was the case in Abulafia’s writings.

Some further discussion of the conception of the feminine as other is in order. In the case of two distinct and adjacent social groups, notions of the out-group’s otherness serve to justify the distinctive identity that the in-group assigns to itself. But otherness persists *within* social groups as well. As a result, the idea of the presence of truly distinct social groups, of an “inside,” is further problematized. Medieval Europe is a comprehensibly delineated socio-cultural entity, but it is comprised of relative insiders and outsiders—given nationalities relative to each other, for instance, or faith communities. These groups as well are comprised of groups of insiders and outsiders—heretics, for instance, or, to a considerable extent, women.¹⁷ The status of any group or individual as an insider or an outsider is ever dependent upon the frame of reference that one adopts.

Nirenberg’s work is useful in illustrating the elusiveness of answers to questions of who is “inside” and who is “outside” with respect to a specific social dynamic. When one considers medieval “Christian Europe,” the Jews are instantly designated, by definition, as other. As non-Christians, no spatial proximity can suffice to suggest inclusion in the Christian religious sphere. The violent attacks to which the Jews were at times subjected seem to perfectly demonstrate their designation

¹⁴ Idem, “Woman—The Feminine as Other in Theosophic Kabbalah,” p. 167.

¹⁵ Regarding the overcoming of the self/other, male/female, dichotomy, see *ibid.*, pp. 167–168. See also idem, *Language, Eros, Being*, chapter two, “Differentiating (In) Difference.”

¹⁶ Idem, “Woman—The Feminine as Other in Theosophic Kabbalah,” p. 169; “Ontology, Alterity, and Ethics in Kabbalistic Anthropology,” p. 135; “Light through Darkness: The Ideal of Human Perfection in the *Zohar*,” pp. 76, 88.

¹⁷ See idem, *Language, Eros, Being*, p. 58, where Wolfson notes a passage from the *Zohar* that “extends the external distinction between Israel and the nations to an internal distinction between Jewish men and women.”

as other. This is all the more clear when such attacks resulted, at least in the case of Holy Week violence, from religious motivations.

Yet Nirenberg observes that these instances of violence toward Jews were carefully controlled and ritualized; the violence served a specific function, but did not express the wholehearted othering that unrestrained attacks would have suggested. Rather, the approach taken in these instances toward the Jews was first modulated by an apparent awareness that the Jew's function in the Christian social order, albeit marginal in certain key respects, was thought of as entrenched; the Jew could occupy a specific place within the secular functioning of Christian society.¹⁸ As well, the casting of the Jew as villain served a valuable role in the cyclical reaffirmation of Christian identity. The result of this negotiation of religious impulses with social realities was that, in purely religious terms, the Jew came to be a participant (unwillingly, admittedly) in a ritualized Christian behavior. The Jew here is at once an "insider" and an "outsider" in both religious and social terms. The Christian attitude here reflects an implicit acceptance of the other that is situated within.

Within what we construct as a distinct social unit, those who are marginalized culturally, are politically disenfranchised, and are placed in a position of vulnerability to social inequity are those who most consistently are designated, in religious terms, as the other.¹⁹ To some extent, European Jewry certainly confronted these conditions. We may also see that, according to a different frame of reference, these conditions describe as well the social position of the medieval European Jewish woman within the larger Jewish community. For the medieval kabbalist, the reflex to render the feminine as other was not simply accepted as a social commonplace. Rather, as demonstrated by Wolfson, it was projected into a conception of the hypostatic realm as well. We see here how notions of the other coalesce, with their concretization of identity, into all-encompassing pictures of reality itself.

Nevertheless, the theosophic kabbalists sought to radically modify, despite its axiomatic status with respect to their own identity, this

¹⁸ Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, pp. 201, 210–212.

¹⁹ See, for instance, the studies of Asad, who is concerned with "...the sense in which power constructs religious ideology." It is such power, he relates, that "...produces religiously defined knowledge." This principle constitutes the basis of Asad's critique of Geertz' anthropological definition of religion, to be discussed below. "Anthropological Conceptions of Religion: Reflections on Geertz," p. 237.

attribution of the feminine to the category of both terrestrial and supernal other. The perfected man, as the kabbalists perceived him, was one who no longer experienced the feminine, both within himself and in a transcendent sense, as other. The feminine was to be conceived of as an essential element in a reconstituted—though avowedly still masculine—whole. The onus was upon the kabbalist to both incorporate this element, the feminine, within himself and to theurgically unite it with the divine masculine element. Any sense of division was to be elided, any difference experienced as illusory. In this way liminality was repositioned as perhaps the central issue within kabbalistic discourse. The hypostatic feminine element of which the kabbalist conceived was as well understood as the demonic or idolatrous element in the divine world, but the kabbalist went yet further, representing Christianity, in keeping with the polemics of the day, as this feminine, demonic other. The implications of kabbalistic mystical rectification are remarkable, then, in that a spiritual unification with the Christian element of the divine is called for. Certainly, notions of a fully realized and perfected Jewish identity were rendered complex for those kabbalists who propounded this view.

We may readily situate Abulafia in this discussion of the tenuousness of the alterity of the other. There was a demonstrable conflictedness on his part regarding the appropriate perspective to take toward the religious other, the Christian. This conflictedness manifests itself in several ways. First, there are, in Abulafia's writings, contradictions to an ostensibly uncompromising anti-Christian polemical posture. These take the form of anomalous and surprising mitigating statements. Second, there is to be considered Abulafia's frequent cooptation of Christian doctrines, reflecting an influence which flies in the face of Abulafia's relentlessly polemical anti-Christian posture. Lastly, there is the perspective that Abulafia synthesized from his mixed feelings, in which he saw himself as possessing internally an indispensable but dangerous Christian element. Abulafia charged himself with the task of somehow embracing and assimilating this element. Through this last manifestation of Abulafia's conflictedness we can see how central his complex relationship to Christianity was to his entire mystical system. The latter came to be founded on the effort to achieve individual perfection through a reconciliation of the so-called good and evil inclinations.

We observed earlier that an ambiguity in the status of the other as such jeopardizes one's own identity and generates deeply-seated

emotional responses. It should come, then, as no surprise that Abulafia's conflict in confronting the religious other resulted in a tumultuous internal crisis. We would do well to see it as a crisis of identity. Very literally, Abulafia was plagued by inner demons. These demons were representations of the alien, forbidden other. Abulafia sought to overcome the crisis that the attack by demons represented in a fashion reminiscent of the pattern discussed above with respect to the theosophic kabbalists. That is, Abulafia sought an internal reconciliation, one which would annihilate the distinction between self and other.

This paradigm recalls vividly the observation of Kristeva that the othering performed upon a given out-group reflects a deep internal battle with the foreigner who, it must be recognized, "is within us."²⁰ Kristeva describes this phenomenon with respect to Biblical Jewish identity: "If David is also Ruth, if the sovereign is also Moabite, peace of mind will then never be his lot, but a constant quest for welcoming and going beyond the other in oneself."²¹ David is obliged to confront not only the non-Jew within that challenges his own identity, but as well the female within. On both of these scores, the example of David is appropriate as an analogy for the struggles faced by Abulafia. The coming into true Davidic messiahship signified, for Abulafia, the transcendence of the dichotomies that threaten to fragment individual identity.²²

Earlier I noted that conceptions of the other coalesce into all-encompassing pictures of reality. The statement recalls Geertz' famed definition of religion, and much of what I have written to this point presumes an anthropological perspective more or less aligned with that of Geertz.²³ It is to this that we ought now turn. Geertz conceived of a religion as a set of "sacred symbols" that construct both models of and models for reality, symbols imbued with "a people's ethos...and their world view."²⁴ The dynamic between ethos and world view is that of mutual reinforcement. The former consists primarily of emotional and aesthetic responses, the latter of reasoned formulations. Both coalesce

²⁰ Kristeva, *Strangers to Ourselves*, p. 191.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 76.

²² Wolfson points to another, parallel kabbalistic conception of messiahship. *Language, Eros, Being*, p. 94.

²³ Frankenberry and Penner review the remarkable influence of Geertz on subsequent academic work. "Clifford Geertz's Long-Lasting Moods, Motivations, and Metaphysical Conceptions," pp. 617–618.

²⁴ Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*, pp. 89, 93.

to reify a sense of the “‘really real.’”²⁵ That is to say, they comprise the medium through which a human being experiences the world and formulates its perceived nature. As suggested above, Geertz conceives of this medium as embodied in a network of symbolic structures. The latter act circularly upon the members of a society that first constructs them, distilling the essence of a reality that is subsequently projected outward to constitute the larger world.²⁶

Implicit to this point has been the view that identity is constructed through a trafficking in culture. Most importantly here, identity is a construct. It is built out of processes of group self-definition from which result the cultural edifice, a network of symbols, within which the participant is situated. The extent to which religious symbols, through which religion exerts its power, acted in the Middle Ages to construct identity is the extent to which a religious “ethos” and “world view” prevailed. It is difficult to challenge this contention, which is, simply, that religious symbols shape perceptions of reality by acting upon both the hearts and the minds of believers. Identity is constituted in the process, although it is identity which shapes the nature of these symbols as well.

If culture—and religion in particular—engages identity in this fashion, then we may say just as decisively that it does so as well with respect to the identity of the other. That is, culture delineates, through recourse to the power entailed in subscription to its symbol systems, the location of its own margins.²⁷ Those who believe in the force of a given set of cultural symbols are confirmed as participants, while the force of the symbols themselves is dedicated in large measure to indexing the status of those who do not believe. In this sense, Geertz’ theory of religion offers a serviceable theoretical superstructure for the notions of alterity that have been suggested here.

However, a problem in this approach to religion and alterity lies in our observation that the other lies within. This we have seen to occur in two ways: The other exists within the individual as a challenge to

²⁵ Ibid., p. 124.

²⁶ “They [culture patterns] give meaning . . . to social and psychological reality both by shaping themselves to it and by shaping it to themselves.” Ibid., p. 93.

²⁷ Durkheim had noted that such identity was deliberately constructed, not autonomously, but in dialog with the external other, where cooperation was present between groups in the synthesizing of distinctive identities. Notions of self were constructed by a kind of mutual agreement with the other, whose identity was likewise so constructed. *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, p. 156.

self-differentiation and identity, and the other exists within the bounds of a society in the form of groups occupying various levels of disenfranchisement. In these cases, Geertz' notions of culture and identity suffer a damaging blow. For we can say that the breach running through culture in the form of the presence of the other is what defines culture as such. The result of this approach to culture is that it can truly be found nowhere.

Asad dispenses almost entirely with Geertz' approach to the power of cultural symbols. He observes that it is through coercion—and he looks to Medieval Europe in particular in this regard²⁸—that religion finds its strength.²⁹ The relationship between discourses of othering and disenfranchisement here becomes most palpable. It is not simply that othering results from someone's being perceived, because of a compromised social status, to exist in a corresponding fashion within a society's symbolic superstructure. Such an interpretation could flow from Geertz' approach. Asad observes that religion operates materially and politically as a disenfranchising force, exceeding the sense intended by Geertz when he discussed it as projecting a model *for* reality. The meaning-generating faculty of religious symbols does not fundamentally fuel this dynamic on its own, holds Asad. An engagement in meaning-making as a means to relate to perceived reality he sees as an insufficient explanation for othering discourses.³⁰ Rather, the political might and the socio-economic interests of religion fuel both the meanings of its symbols and the weight of its edicts.³¹

Asad's perspective on religious institutions such as the Church seems well grounded in observation. Nevertheless, when we approach an individual like Abulafia, political or self-interested motivations alone are not adequate explanations for such a fervent religiosity and deeply-seated inner struggle. Though Abulafia's messianic pretensions certainly betray a considerable narcissism, and though his life was

²⁸ Asad, "Anthropological Conceptions of Religion: Reflections on Geertz," p. 238.

²⁹ Writes Asad, "...power constructs religious ideology." *Ibid.*, p. 237.

³⁰ Writes Asad, "What I want to emphasize is that social life is not simply a matter of systems of meaning (whether conventional or intentional), even if it is true that communication between human beings is necessarily present in every domain of social activity—that social life is not identical with communication, although communication is necessary to it." "Anthropology and the Analysis of Ideology," p. 618.

³¹ Asad is particularly concerned here with the actions of the medieval Church taken in response to the threat to power posed by those subsequently deemed to be heretics. "Anthropological Conceptions of Religion: Reflections on Geertz," p. 244.

not untouched by the political vicissitudes of medieval religiosity,³² it is equally clear that he was firmly under the sway of the meaning-generating forces perceived by Geertz, caught by the imperative to locate himself within what was in fact a network of overlapping cultural systems.

Asad's approach to religion, for all of its cogency, does not suffice to achieve a thorough understanding of the forces at work here. In fact, both Geertz' and Asad's approaches suffer from certain inadequacies. Asad offers a materialist functionalism, Geertz a psychological and cognitive one. For all of his efforts to the contrary, Geertz' approach to religion, like Asad's, stresses chiefly what the religious phenomenon accomplishes.³³ Nevertheless, it does appear that Geertz' functionalism goes further to account for the particular types of forces acting upon the individual, Abraham Abulafia, than does Asad's.

Sewell offers a pertinent explanation as to why this may be so. He considers why Geertz' influence has been so profound and widespread upon historians, while anthropologists have been comparatively much more resistant to it. Sewell observes that Geertz' anthropological approach to religion recalls that of the social historian; it "focused not on the practices of political leaders and intellectuals but on those of ordinary people." Further, "it revealed—in their rituals, social conventions, and language—lives rich with complex symbolism and overflowing with meaning."³⁴ It is this same frame of reference, that of social history, that appears to me to be most conducive to an analysis of a person such as Abulafia, one whose tumultuous religious inner life demonstrates a tremendous degree of absorption of diverse cultural influences.

³² We may think, for instance, of his purported messianic mission to the Pope and of his excommunication by R. Solomon ibn Adret.

³³ In the case of Asad, a functionalist perspective is readily apparent. For Geertz', see Frankenberry and Penner, "Clifford Geertz's Long-Lasting Moods, Motivations, and Metaphysical Conceptions," p. 627. These authors observe that, although Geertz sought to resist the charge of relativism, he sought as well to eliminate any evaluations of objective truth quality in the assertions upon which a given religion is built. The result is a religious functionalism: "When symbols are thought not to have truth-conditions, the criterion of meaning shifts to use, and from there easily becomes relativized to the context of what it *does*... Human beings [for Geertz] create religion (and other cultural systems) out of a *need for meaning*." See also *ibid.*, pp. 629, 633.

³⁴ Sewell, "Geertz, Cultural Systems, and History: From Synchrony to Transformation," p. 38.

For all of its merits, our approach to Abulafia still entails some further problems. Earlier we observed that a threat to Geertz' view of the hegemony of cultural symbols is posed by the fact that the other "is within us." This occurs on two levels. One is that of the disenfranchised social group persisting uneasily within and threatening the identity of its host, a larger cultural system. The other concerns the level of the individual psyche, where the other lurks as a threat to personal identity. Geertz' notion of the sway of cultural symbols accounts poorly for these phenomena.

On the level of the individual in particular, we must ask why it is that the pull of cultural symbols is insufficient in maintaining boundaries of orthodoxy. What accounts for the inexorableness of the destabilizing attraction to the other, when, as was the case for Abulafia, this attraction can bring with it considerable anguish? One answer is provided by the case of R. Eliezer. For him, there in fact *was* no attraction to the other, this because there really *was* no other in the sense that we presume. In his case, identity was built out of delineations of otherness that were, in essence, arbitrary. It was for this reason that he found some element of his own self on the other side of the dividing line separating him from the other, the sectarian.

Although the consequences for the very notion of identity are grave, we must recognize that if assigning the status of other is, in fact, groundless, then attraction to the seeming other is not different than attraction to the same.³⁵ The membrane separating in-group from

³⁵ We have yet to fully address the sense in which the contingency of identity calls into question identity's fundamental reality. Is the very premise that identity actually exists as an entity which can be threatened a false one? Khare approaches this question when he examines Hindu responses to the notion of alterity, observing that, in Hindu discourse and praxis, the elimination of the perception of a self-other dichotomy is of the greatest import, this constituting the only means to an authentic apprehension of reality. This is accomplished through the dissolution of any sense of "I-ness," of self identity. "The Other's Double. The Anthropologist's Bracketed Self: Notes on Cultural Representation and Privileged Discourse," p. 10. On a related note, Wolfson discusses his approach to the reading of kabbalistic texts with respect to Derrida's conception of the coincidence of sameness and difference embodied in textual deconstruction. That this occurs in the context of a chapter concerning the kabbalists' effort to overcome the self-other dichotomy is important. The coincidence of sameness and difference put forth by Derrida, Wolfson observes, nevertheless does not occur without the essential preservation of the text's "trace." *Language, Eros, Being*, pp. 90–92. This trace we may consider in terms of a relationship to some minimum essential preservation of what Khare refers to as "I-ness." Referring to the nature of "the infinite," Wolfson writes of a mode of "textual reasoning...that affirms the identity of the nonidentical by discerning the nonidentity of the identical." Here,

out-group is, then, entirely conventional, and the constructed identity itself is illusory. We must then recast our observation of the phenomenon to say, simply, that the imposition of the status other in the construction of identity does not eliminate attractions. Once the category of other is imposed, however, and that which is rendered as other is also rendered as forbidden, quiescent internal forces may be set in motion. The attraction to the presumed other may be intensified beyond what it had been initially, an attraction to what was really the same. It may be that othering instigates the fetishization of attraction. The designation as other and as prohibited may stir or refocus the oedipal impulse. For us, the relationship of Abulafia's attraction to the forbidden other with the oedipal model will be of great interest.

For the present, we should note that the introduction of a psychoanalytical element to these anthropological concerns raises further methodological complexities. These relate to what is broadly referred to as a "colonialist critique."³⁶ In the thirteenth century, as now, one's other could only be perceived through the prism imposed by one's own culture, that is, through a web of cultural symbols and conventions. This prism may be understood to both reflect and shape one's particular psychological needs as well as one's own politico-economic interests. It encompasses all of those elements through which one's place in culture and the world is mediated and generated. Both the analyst and the modern religious anthropologist, naturally, are as much subject to such a contextual prism as is their object of study. This simple fact generates seemingly intractable problems in practice, this due to the fact that the social scientist remains wedded to an unattainable paradigm, the injunction to step outside of his or her subjective self.

Along these lines, Geertz' approach to anthropological investigation may be seen to presumptuously posit modes of universality, exhibiting a "colonialist" mentality. In fact, the very exercise of contriving a

seeming difference conceals likeness, and vice versa. He points to Schelling's notion of the *Ungrund* as suggestive of kabbalistic modes of thought. With this *Ungrund*, preceding Nicholas of Cusa's state of coinciding opposites, we find the "indifference" of opposites, a state of "opposites coexisting as nonopposites," where "identity and indifference" are preserved in a unity. Ibid., pp. 99–102. For the kabbalistic objective of achieving "non-dual consciousness," see idem, *Venturing Beyond*, p. 7. See also, for example, ibid., p. 212.

³⁶ For the increasingly expansive range of applications of this terminology, see Said, "Representing the Colonized: Anthropology's Interlocutors," p. 207.

general definition of religion seems already to entail such an offense.³⁷ So, for instance, as part of his critique of Geertz, Asad notes the intrusion of a modern secularized perspective within the former's efforts to define religion in terms of the power exerted by the meaning of cultural symbols. Asad points to Geertz' emphasis upon religion's cultivation of a state of mind, of *belief*, rather than its sway over the field of actual *knowledge*. It is belief that, in Geertz' estimation, activates the mutual reinforcement of "ethos" and "worldview." This, Asad observes, results from Geertz' own sense that bona fide knowledge falls under the purview of secular science.³⁸ In short, Geertz, according to Asad, is unable to escape his own cultural context in the very act of attempting to describe others'. If we have become sensitized to the fact that identity results, in part or in whole, from processes of othering, then our own identities—that is, those of the anthropologist or the student of religious studies—must be similarly constituted. This realization precipitates a methodological crisis, and the question that arises is an appropriate one: How do we study anyone if our sense of who we are is infinitely contingent?³⁹ As Khare suggests, one can only approach this vexing limitation with the best of intentions and in a spirit of self-examination.⁴⁰

Linge pointed to Gadamer as one who, in the realm of historiography, did not shy away from the inevitability of the intrusion of the historian's own identity into his or her investigations.⁴¹ Gadamer

³⁷ As Kondo writes, following upon the work of Asad and Said, among others, "...colonial hubris seeps into the very process of cultural representation, leading the ethnographer to affirm that 'I know you better than you know yourselves.' We intrude; we perpetrate symbolic violence; we satisfy our needs; we leave; we achieve a final domination of the Other in the text." "Dissolution and Reconstitution of Self: Implications for Anthropological Epistemology," p. 83.

³⁸ Asad, "Anthropological Conceptions of Religion: Reflections on Geertz," pp. 247, 249.

³⁹ Khare, "The Other's Double. The Anthropologist's Bracketed Self: Notes on Cultural Representation and Privileged Discourse," pp. 3–5.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁴¹ Following upon the observations of Dilthey, Linge notes that "...the mode of being of the thinker himself is radically historical. The historian is no less immersed in history than his subject matter. If the claims of other men are silenced by the relativity of their perspectives, how can the historicist hope that his own claims will fare any better?" "Dilthey and Gadamer: Two Theories of Historical Understanding," p. 538. Not surprisingly, the solution to the problem offered by Dilthey, as paraphrased by Linge, is tantamount to Geertz' notion of "thick description," which seeks to thwart the observer's subjectivity. Dilthey, Linge writes, believed that "...objectivity in historical knowledge means immersing oneself in the object, in adopting its horizons,

dismissed efforts to derive methodologies that could thwart this state of affairs, and he declined to see the historian's subjectivity as simply a limitation. Rather, he perceived a constructive element in the historian's participation in historical-hermeneutical currents.⁴²

Understanding is an event, a movement of history itself in which neither interpreter nor text can be thought of as an autonomous part. "Understanding itself," Gadamer argues, "is not to be thought of so much as an action of subjectivity, but as the entering into an event of transmission in which past and present are constantly mediated. This is what must gain validity in hermeneutical theory, which is much too dominated by the idea of a procedure, a method."

As Schweiker observed, Gadamer moved against the current of those who would seek to first purge one's self of subjectivity in order to then engage in historiography:⁴³

...self-understanding is won only through interpreting what is other and not simple reflexive introspection. That other may be a text, person, or even our own past and culture... Interpretation is, first, an interactive conversation with a text. Within this activity there is a temporal fusion of horizons between interpreter and 'text' that marks the historicity of consciousness.

The ability to perceive one's own rootedness in history, to include the apprehension of one's own subjective and mediated perceptions and their sources, is seen to come always as a consequence of historical investigation, and not prior to it. The model posited by Gadamer, however, has not dampened the colonialist critique of both Western anthropology and history, to say nothing of the psychoanalytic critique to which we alluded earlier. Brickman, for instance, observes in Freud's psychoanalytic approach to religion all of the biases of nineteenth century Europe.⁴⁴ Although this in itself should not dissuade us from seeking a psychoanalytic perspective purged of these prejudices, Brickman also maintains that modern efforts to do so have not escaped this specter of colonialism.

not in reducing it to a manifestation of something beyond it." It entails "...the *self-transposition* or *imaginative projection* of the knower into the horizon of his subject matter." Ibid., pp. 543, 544.

⁴² Ibid., p. 549.

⁴³ Schweiker, "Beyond Imitation: Mimetic Praxis in Gadamer, Ricoeur, and Derrida," p. 26.

⁴⁴ Brickman, "Primitivity, Race, and Religion in Psychoanalysis," p. 55.

At its root, Freud's approach to religion, Brickman relates, is linked inseparably with Freud's discussion of human personality development. As a consequence, nineteenth century colonialist theories of the racial other as "primitive" are wedded by Freud to the idea that religious thinking represents a regression to an early developmental psychological state, one that is as well "primitive."⁴⁵ In this way we may see how Freud's theory of religion acted historically in the service of colonialist discourse, evoking the notion that non-Western cultures lacked the psychological development of Westerners.⁴⁶ Freud's approach was such that neurosis could be understood as a regressive psychological condition that was akin to the normal (though lamentable) state of affairs of the typical non-Western, "primitive" adult.⁴⁷ Since neuroses, in Freud's estimation, were to be considered the products of an unresolved oedipal conflict, the "primitive" exercise of religion could be seen as the neurotic reflection of a stunted personality development. As Brickman puts it, "...barbarians, who propitiated gods, were correlated with the oedipal child in thrall to loving and powerful parents..."⁴⁸ As to modern adaptations of Freud's psychoanalytic framework, which dispense with the *cultural* evolutionary model, the developmental framework that persists for the individual psyche, Brickman maintains, "remains susceptible" to the culturally biased modality out of which it was born.⁴⁹

A related question, that of anachronism in the application of psychoanalytic approaches to medieval kabbalists, is an important one. It bears as well upon the issue of colonialist discourses in psychoanalysis. Wolfson's and Idel's opinions diverge sharply as to the viability of such

⁴⁵ Writes Brickman, "By adopting the evolutionary framework of his day, Freud conceived of primitive levels of the psyche in terms drawn from colonialist discourse. The double burden of meaning the term 'primitive' continues to hold in psychoanalysis—earliest infancy and cultural others—points to the residue of this colonialist inheritance in psychoanalytic thought." Ibid., p. 55.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 56.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 58.

⁴⁸ Ibid., p. 59. Psychoanalysis, then, could serve as an antidote both for neuroses and for religion. Ibid., p. 64.

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 73. Though I do not believe that agreement with Freud on the oedipal complex's status as a subconscious paradigm need in our time lead to any particular viewpoint with respect to the non-Western psyche, I do believe that Brickman's study well illustrates the intrusion of this prejudice into Freud's view of non-Western religious culture. It offers thereby an instructive example of the projection of biases, that is, the "I" of the investigator, upon the investigated subject, a projection that may occur in psychoanalytic work as insidiously as in anthropological or historical work.

approaches in kabbalistic studies. Notwithstanding Brickman's critique of the developmental notion of the oedipus complex and its perceived colonialist, othering discourse, it is indeed to an oedipal accounting for Abulafia's evident neuroses that I will ultimately turn. My reason for doing so is straightforward. The terms in which Abulafia articulates his own intense and long-standing fear of castration, we will see, lead inexorably in this direction. Abulafia testifies to his fear of dismemberment at the hands of demonic avengers. The latter are bent upon robbing him of his phallic, covenantal insignia as a punishment for his attraction to idolatry. These idolatrous proclivities Abulafia tropes time and again in terms of sexual desire. The dynamic we will encounter, then, is one in which Abulafia fears that the penalty of castration will be meted out as a divine punishment for illicit sexual longings directed toward the forbidden other. The sheer persuasiveness of the correlation between this dynamic and the oedipal complex delineated by Freud is, in my opinion, unavoidable.

The nature of the evidence that constitutes the basis for this study is crucial. Abulafia is not on our couch. We have at our disposal only an impressive quantity of Abulafia's writing, which in many ways cannot afford us the advantages presented by psychoanalysis. But Abulafia's writing, because of the technical quality of the mystical apparatus employed in its composition, is of a particular character. Scholem suggested that the methods by which Abulafia spontaneously derived insights and made fresh exegetical discoveries bore a noteworthy resemblance to the psychoanalytic tool of free association. Scholem gave testimony that "...the modern reader of these writings will be most astonished..." by this similarity. Abulafia's way, Scholem wrote,

...is not wholly the "free play of association" as known to psychoanalysis; rather it is the way of passing from one association to another determined by certain rules which are, however, sufficiently lax. Every "jump" opens a new sphere, defined by certain formal, *not* material, characteristics. Within this sphere the mind may freely associate.⁵⁰

This is not to overlook that, even in the best of circumstances, psychoanalyses may be subject to misinterpretation and error. It is only to indicate that, in the case of Abulafia, we are not as constrained as far as the availability of data is concerned as we would be if we sought to access the unconscious, for instance, of one of his contemporaries.

⁵⁰ Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, pp. 135–136.

I will make no effort to discuss Abulafia's psychological state in terms of the childhood developmental model against which Brickman cautions. And it appears to me that, at least in this case, it is possible to make productive use of the oedipal model without recourse to particular developmental assertions. Nevertheless, I grant that my observations concerning Abulafia's psychological state carry with them implications concerning Abulafia's childhood or concerning his relationships with his parents. These implications may, however, be left aside. The data is not available to evaluate Abulafia's early life in these respects, but it is not necessary to do so in order to observe the relationship, in Abulafia's case, between the oedipal dynamic and the attraction to the other, the eroticism of which played so central a role in his mystical thought and practice. It is sufficient to take note of the fact that Abulafia's mystical efforts stirred anxieties that fit a psychoanalytic paradigm. We may say that Abulafia's undertaking laid bare his own inner dynamic, much as does psychotherapy, at least ideally.⁵¹ And again, as far as the leaving aside of questions concerning Abulafia's childhood, modern psychoanalytical theory frequently approaches the oedipal dynamic in just such a fashion, deemphasizing its recurrence as a reversion to a predevelopmental stage. It is a psychiatric commonplace, one that follows upon Freud's own view, that traces of an oedipal conflict are a latent and permanent feature of the mature psyche. If one considers, then, that this conflict is never fully eradicated from the subconscious, it need not be approached as a reversion to an earlier developmental state, but rather as a typical feature of adult personality structure.⁵²

⁵¹ In the forward to *The Analyst and the Mystic: Psychoanalytic Reflections on Religion and Mysticism*, x, Kakar notes the inherent affinity between mystical and psychoanalytic processes: "Mysticism, I try to show in this book, is a radical enhancement of the capacity for creative experiencing, of the ability to experience 'with all one's heart, all one's soul, and all one's might.' It requires that the mystic undergo a creative immersion in the deepest layers of his or her psyche, with its potential risk of phases of chaos and lack of integration. The mystical regression is akin to that of the analysand, an absorbing and at times painful process at the service of psychic transformation. It differs from most analyses in that the regression is deeper."

⁵² Fisher and Greenberg, *The Scientific Credibility of Freud's Theories and Therapy*, p. 227 n. 22: "However, he [Freud] did indicate in his clinical essays and elsewhere that resolution of the Oedipal dilemma was rarely perfect and that most persons continue to be faced throughout their life span with tensions and conflicts radiating from inadequate and incomplete Oedipal adaptations."

Abulafia believed that his bitter contention with inner demons might occasion an inner reconciliation. This reconciliation was to take the form of a reconstitution of self, one concomitant with mystical attainment and actual divinization. Ricoeur's perspective on the paradigms offered by Freud is here salient. In his turn to Ricoeur (in the service of a Freudian approach to St. Augustine), Rigby notes that Ricoeur contended that the flaring up of the subconscious—that is, “regression,” in traditional psychoanalytical thought—is as well the occasion for *progression* of the highest order, a type, we should note, that fits perfectly the contours of that sought by Abulafia. Wrote Ricoeur,⁵³

The progressive order of symbols is not exterior to the regressive order of fantasies; the lunge into the archaic mythologies of the unconscious brings to the surface new signs of the sacred. The eschatology of consciousness is always a creative repetition of its own archeology.

Ricoeur eliminated from his discussion of the recurrence of subconscious patterns the developmental element emphasized in Brickman's discussion of Freud. This is so because the very notion of such a development suggests a linear temporality to human consciousness. As Wolfson observes, Ricoeur's thought may serve as a springboard to a model of time that is both cyclical and inseparable from subjective consciousness. Wolfson, moving past Ricoeur's conception of time, notes:⁵⁴

Time of consciousness can awaken only as consciousness of time, and consciousness of time only as time of consciousness. Precisely because of this circularity in thinking about time, and the reflexivity of consciousness that it implies, we cannot say what time is without being caught in a web of self-referentiality.

For Abulafia, it was the progression in regression of the oedipal crisis, acting through an “archaic mythology,” that occasioned an inner rectification within an “eschatology of consciousness,” as Ricoeur put it, one by which the self/other distinction was obliterated. For Ricoeur, the summoning of archetypes from the subconscious is interwoven with the act of symbolization. This process, he asserts, continues to “...take place in the field of the Oedipal complex.”⁵⁵ The act of symbolization,

⁵³ Ricoeur, *The Conflict of Interpretations*, p. 334, in Rigby, “Paul Ricoeur, Freudianism, and Augustine's *Confessions*,” p. 94.

⁵⁴ Wolfson, *Alef, Mem, Tau*, p. 50. See also *ibid.*, pp. 206 n. 12, 208 n. 19.

⁵⁵ Rigby, “Paul Ricoeur, Freudianism, and Augustine's *Confessions*,” p. 100.

then, is as fundamental to humanity as the oedipal complex itself. And, just as is the latter, symbolization is as well inherently bound to the themes of defilement, guilt and sin.

Far from being an act of simple representation, there is, on the one hand, a dimension to symbolization that “assimilates us to the symbolized,” such that the symbol serves as a vehicle for internal transformation. Symbolization is as well that through which a cosmological extrapolation takes place, such that evil comes to be envisioned as a basic feature of the world, a “concrete universal.”⁵⁶ In Ricoeur’s complex modeling of symbolization, we find again an apt expression of the psychodynamics operative for Abulafia. For the evil that Abulafia envisions as the vengeful demon without, projected upon “the field of the Oedipal complex,” is as well the symbolic mechanism through which, by a process of assimilation, regression is recast as progression. Just as human consciousness, for Ricoeur, ever internally assimilates itself with its symbols, so too did Abulafia proclaim the redemptive incorporation within his own being of that outwardly projected other. Abulafia’s understanding of the messianic dimension of this moment dovetails as well with Ricoeur’s aforementioned reference to it as one of the “eschatology of consciousness.” The eschaton here is not the singular one of linear time but the recurrent one of circular time, as Wolfson suggested.

We may note in conclusion the resemblance between this notion of subjectivized time, rooted as it is in the resurgence of the archetypal, that is put forward by Ricoeur, and Gadamer’s sense, discussed earlier, that there is in historiography a “temporal fusion of horizons between interpreter and ‘text’ that marks the historicity of consciousness.” Ricoeur, on the one hand, provides us with a psychoanalytic model remarkably close to what we see in Abulafia, one that will render useful for our purposes the oedipal complex as a constructive framework. Gadamer, on the other, helps us locate within the historian’s subjective psyche the very processes of identity formation, of othering discourses, that we would seek to examine in others. The historian must embrace these processes, not simply as inevitable, but as the means by which to come to a “self-understanding” within a “temporal fusion” with the

⁵⁶ Ricoeur, *Symbolism of Evil*, pp. 10–11, 16–17, 162. See Alexander, “Ricoeur’s *Symbolism of Evil* and Cross-Cultural Comparison,” p. 706.

subject. This renews, within the historian's own historical context, a cyclical sense of the "historicality of consciousness."

Ricoeur's model of psychoanalytic investigation presents us with a useful perspective by which to appreciate Abulafia's travails and their oedipal subtext. Gadamer's approach to historiography, offering a related type of subjective, cyclical temporality, highlights for us the nature of our own scholarly endeavor. Both of these thinkers help as well to resolve some of the methodological problems discussed earlier with respect to psychoanalytic and historiographic investigation. They provide theoretical touchstones to which we will return. The theoretical models broached in this chapter are challenging in some respects, requiring us to reevaluate the legitimacy of notions of individual and group identity against the backdrop of presumptions of alterity. In the process they demonstrate the mechanisms by which the psychological pitch is raised in encounters with the supposed other. The usefulness of theoretical models is not always to be measured in terms of simplicity, and we will see as we continue the applicability of these complicated perspectives to the case of Abraham Abulafia.

CHAPTER TWO

REFUTATION AND ABSORPTION: ABULAFIA'S RESPONSE TO THE CHRISTIAN CONTEXT

Modern scholarship on medieval Jewish mysticism has paved the way for a thorough investigation of Abraham Abulafia's complicated relationship toward Christianity. Prior studies have demonstrated the fruitfulness of exploring contemporary Christianity's impact upon the theosophic kabbalah,¹ and more recent work has already suggested the value of undertaking such a study with respect to Abulafia's oeuvre.²

Scholem delineated, in *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, a position on Abulafia's relationship to Christianity that subsequent scholarship has challenged. Scholem briefly articulated the views that Abulafia was openly hostile toward Christianity and that traces of Christian doctrine in Abulafia's work should not be taken as suggestive of any

¹ I refer most specifically to the chapter, "Christian Influences on the *Ẓohar*," in Liebes' *Studies in the Ẓohar*. The chapter investigates two key features of this quintessential textual example of medieval theosophic kabbalah. One of these concerns zoharic representations of a tripartite divine unity, to include a notion of a messianic "son" as Logos. The other concerns formulations, applied to the zoharic sage R. Simeon bar Yoḥai, that are suggestive of a traditional representation of Jesus as the *ṣaddiq*, or demiurgic righteous one. Both of these features are as well deeply important in Abulafia's work. Wolfson has elucidated the presence of a closely related Jewish-Christian stratum to the foundational theosophic work, the *Bahir*. See *Along the Path*, p. 84; *Alef, Mem, Tau*, p. 146. Wolfson's more recent work concerning Jewish mystical conceptions relating to the Christian notion of the enfleshed Logos will be analyzed in detail in the next chapter. See for instance, *Language, Eros, Being*, pp. 236–242, which concerns Abulafia specifically. Green asserted that medieval Jewish kabbalists' characterizations of the *Shekhinah*, the feminine manifestation of the divine presence, were constructed in response to Christian conceptions of Mary. "*Shekhinah*, the Virgin Mary, and the *Song of Songs*," pp. 1–52.

² I allude most specifically to Hames' *Like Angels on Jacob's Ladder: Abraham Abulafia, the Franciscans and Joachimism*. Though he had begun to broach the issue in some earlier work, this book presents a thorough study of what the author perceives to be Abulafia's relationship to the Franciscans of his day and to Joachimist eschatology; Hames believes that Abulafia had close contact with these groups and that their influence may be detected in Abulafia's own messianic doctrines. Hames contends that prior work on Abulafia has tended to eschew contextual investigation in favor of a "primarily phenomenological" approach, with the result that "...the milieu in which he lived and developed his teachings is, surprisingly, almost totally ignored." See p. 4.

favorable disposition toward Christianity. Scholem, criticizing the view of Landauer, who in 1845 ascribed fully Christian beliefs to Abulafia, insisted that Abulafia's writings suggest no real attraction to Christianity.³ "On the contrary," wrote Scholem, "his [Abulafia's] antagonism to Christianity is very outspoken and intense." Scholem did not consider what we had begun to see in the last chapter, that the villanization of the other may stem from complicated internal processes.

Idel would observe later that Jesus figured prominently in Abulafia's thought. Idel referred to Jesus' presence within Abulafia's conception of a bifold messiah. Nevertheless, Idel continued to emphasize in Abulafia's thought a traditional Jewish hostility to Jesus, one influenced by the polemical text *Toledot Yeshu*.⁴ Abulafia, Idel indicated, grafted a mystical dimension to this ancient, hostile Jewish perspective on Christianity. Idel provided little or no indication that Abulafia was actually influenced by Christian notions of Jesus. Berger, by contrast, had already suggested in a very brief article the notion that, for all of his animus to the latter, Abulafia's messianic self-conception was deeply influenced by the Christian image of Jesus.⁵ This perception that the influence of Christian doctrine on Abulafia was profound would be carried forward in the work of Wolfson, who noted the important place that trinitarian doctrines occupy in Abulafia's mystical thought.⁶ More recently Wolfson has observed the presence of an incarnational doctrine in Abulafia's thought.⁷ And subsequently Hames suggested that Abulafia had close ties with Franciscans with Joachimite eschatological predilections, that he was influenced by them in the formulation of his messianic conceptions, and that he sought to influence them in that regard as well.⁸

No modern study of Abulafia can ignore Scholem's observation that Abulafia expressed hostility toward Christianity. Abulafia's derogations

³ Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, pp. 129, 377–378 nn. 35, 43. See Raz-Krakovitzkin, "'Without Regard for External Considerations'—The Question of Christianity in Scholem and Baer's Writings," pp. 73–96 (in Hebrew).

⁴ See Idel, "Abraham Abulafia on the Jewish Messiah and Jesus," in *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, to be analyzed in detail in chapter four, below.

⁵ Berger, "The Messianic Self-Consciousness of Abraham Abulafia."

⁶ See Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 131–133 n. 101.

⁷ See above, n. 1.

⁸ See above, n. 2.

of Christianity are readily found.⁹ When we begin to investigate Abulafia's complex relationship toward Christianity by first considering his cultural context, it becomes apparent that the often harsh tenor of Jewish anti-Christian polemics is echoed in his own writings. Yet even in the midst of his vituperations against Christianity, Abulafia not infrequently proffers a nuanced perspective on the relative status of the gentile world vis-à-vis Judaism. Lying behind his open antagonism, clear traces of Abulafia's wider range of attitudes toward Christianity also emerge persistently.

It must be noted that Scholem himself seemed to have been aware, at least at times, that simple animosity somehow did not fully encapsulate Abulafia's attitude toward Christianity. Scholem ascribed Abulafia's penchant for Christian motifs and doctrines to what he referred to as Abulafia's "predilection for paradox." Scholem did not explain this view in detail, but he seemed to be suggesting that Abulafia's interest in key Christian touchstones resulted from a larger impulse to juxtapose elements in seeming contradiction.¹⁰ Toward that end alone, Scholem maintained, Abulafia interspersed Christian-sounding ideas alongside his attacks upon Christianity. Scholem, in this regard, specifically addresses the appearance of trinitarian doctrines in Abulafia's corpus. But Abulafia, Scholem suggested, always provided clues to his ultimate disinterest in such Christian principles: "He sometimes, indeed intentionally makes use—among many other associations—of formulae which sound quite Trinitarian, immediately giving them a meaning which has nothing whatsoever to do with the Trinitarian idea of God."¹¹ As noted, Wolfson's study of these tendencies suggests, to the contrary, that they must be taken seriously, that answers should be

⁹ Abulafia's outward position toward Christianity is consistent with that of the theosophic kabbalah, wherein the non-Jewish nations are conceived of as demonic. Wolfson, "Ontology, Alterity, and Ethics in Kabbalistic Anthropology," p. 135.

¹⁰ This perspective appears very much in keeping with remarks of Brammer concerning de Certeau's conceptualization of mysticism generally. Writes Brammer, "DeCerteau hypothesizes that perhaps mysticism is itself a paradoxical relationship between the particular and the essential, the exceptional and the universal, the manifest and the hidden, the phenomenal and the invisible, the surprising and the familiar: 'Mysticism cannot be reduced to either of the aspects that always comprise this paradox. It is held within their relation. It is undoubtedly this relation itself. It is therefore an object that escapes.'" "Michel de Certeau and the Theorization of Mysticism," p. 34. See also Scholem himself, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, p. 14.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 129. See also idem, *The Kabbalah of Sefer ha-Temunah and of Abraham Abulafia*, p. 184 (in Hebrew), where Scholem describes Abulafia's trinities as "anti-Christian."

sought for their wide proliferation in Abulafia's extant corpus, and that a mere "predilection for paradox" on Abulafia's part does not suffice as an explanation.

The appearance of these trinitarian doctrines in Abulafia's writings will ultimately provide us with a springboard, via their interconnectedness to other themes prevalent in Abulafia's work, to a broader reappraisal of his relationship to Christianity. It is appropriate to begin our investigation into Abulafia's attitudes toward Christianity by first placing his anti-Christian rhetoric within its contemporary socio-cultural context. Following this we may focus upon the reasons why Abulafia paradoxically availed himself of Christian motifs. This predilection, we will come to see, informs an understanding of the very basis of Abulafia's mystical thought and practice.

An Uneasy Conviviality

There is little that we can say for certain regarding Abulafia's personal encounters with Christians beyond what he himself tells us (and even there a healthy skepticism is in order). Abulafia relates that, following his departure from Spain, he was imprisoned by the Pope's forces but, through a fortuitous circumstance, was released shortly thereafter.¹² He also tells us that he had theological discussions with Christians, and, following his departure from Spain, he had some Christian students, of whom he had a favorable impression.¹³ Assuredly, these reports from Abulafia relate two radically different modes of experience, occurring within two different social contexts. The former experience bore a violent, coercive cast; indeed, Abulafia, as he relates it, very nearly lost his life in the episode. Contrariwise, the latter

¹² Scholem summarizes Abulafia's account of these events. *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, p. 128.

¹³ Hames' *Like Angels on Jacob's Ladder* puts forth the thesis that Abulafia's contacts with Christian monks and clerics were close enough that Abulafia was able both to learn much about Joachimist apocalypticism and to attempt to influence his Franciscan neighbors, particularly in southern Italy and Sicily. Regarding Abulafia's stated interactions with Christians, see pp. 43, 100–103. Scholem had observed Abulafia's attestation to some level of intellectual discourse with Christians and had noted as well some surprisingly favorable appraisals of some Christians on Abulafia's part. *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, p. 129. Idel had noted Abulafia's apparent interest in interacting with Christians. *Messianic Mystics*, p. 99. See also idem, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, p. 47. See also Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 188–189, to be discussed below.

encounters, because they did not bring Abulafia into conflict with the Christian political apparatus, appear to imply a courteous intellectual discourse, one that seemingly produced positive results from Abulafia's perspective. Christians in these instances were favorably impressed by some of Abulafia's pronouncements, at least in his own estimation.

These two very different types of encounters with Christianity, undergone by Abulafia, dovetail well with a more broad picture of Abulafia's cultural milieu, one wherein Jews seem to have met with the gamut of possible experiences in their interactions with Christians, ranging from outright violence and religious persecution, on the one hand, to friendly and mutually beneficial contacts, on the other. We should be reminded of Nirenberg's observations regarding the othering of the Jew in Christian Europe. The Jew, Nirenberg noted, served a number of roles significant to Christians. As a result, the Jews occupied a confusing territory, functioning simultaneously and to varying degrees as in-group and out-group. Met with such ambivalence, Jews such as Abulafia partook of this same ethos in their own shifting attitudes.

Of particular interest to us should be that context within which Abulafia found himself in the crucial moments leading up to his revelatory experiences of the 1270s. Although religious tensions were on the rise in Spain during this period,¹⁴ one cannot overlook the level of

¹⁴ Chazan suggests that these tensions, stemming from the increasing aggressiveness of the Christian proselytizing in Spain, may have influenced Abulafia in his development of messianic predilections. Although Abulafia's mysticism, Chazan observes, was naturally disposed to a messianic element and although he was to a certain degree simply a participant in the messianic fervor of the day, "Abulafia also may have been reacting to the new challenges posed by a militant missionizing Christianity..." as may have been the case for the theosophic kabbalists in Spain as well. *Barcelona and Beyond*, pp. 190–191. Lasker suggests that the translation of the Jewish polemical work *Sefer Nestor ha-Komer* into Hebrew from Arabic in Spain sometime before 1170 already suggests its need; that is, Christians were already beginning to increasingly apply religious pressures to the Jews at this date. "Jewish-Christian Polemics at the Turning Point," p. 166. By 1170, the Jewish polemical works *Milhamot ha-Shem* and *Sefer ha-Brit* had both appeared. Another perspective on the tenor of religious debate at this time may be provided by looking to intrafaith controversies. Rising internal tensions are apparent within both Judaism and Christianity. In the Christian sphere, at the extreme, we may note the violent elimination of communities deemed heretical. In the Jewish community, conflict raged over questions of Jewish normativity, centering around the explosive Maimonidean controversy. Caputo perceives in the latter a larger issue concerning the question of whether contemporary Judaism was to be monolithic or whether difference was to be accepted. Nahmanides, ultimately one of Abulafia's great influences, advocated a position of accommodation to local opinion on contentious issues, perceiving a Jewish tradition of flexibility in this regard.

inter-religious cordiality and cooperation also present in daily life. The picture that Nirenberg presents regarding Aragon in the fourteenth century seems to have held for the late thirteenth as well.¹⁵

Despite repeated ecclesiastical condemnation, Christians, Muslims, and Jews drank together, gambled together, went to war together, lived in

Nahmanides in Medieval Catalonia, pp. 24–25, 29, 37, 44. Such questions of toleration were played out in a personal fashion for Abulafia, who was placed under a ban by R. Solomon ibn Adret, Nahmanides' successor as the leader of the Jewish community of Barcelona.

¹⁵ Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, p. 157. Nirenberg notes the cosmopolitan, urban and thoroughly acculturated quality of the Jews of Barcelona during this period, a quality heightened by the close ties between the Jewish community and the king. *Ibid.*, p. 27. Indeed, such was the level of this acculturation that Nahmanides viewed it as excessive. *Ibid.*, p. 28 n. 33. See also Baer, *The History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, p. 239, regarding the similar sentiment of Todros Halevi. Maimonides had been fearful that intermarriage would too often result from intercourse with gentiles. Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, pp. 133–134. Ray notes that many Spanish Jews sought and were able to somewhat suppress and conceal their Jewish identities at this time, to the alarm of their elite leadership. "Beyond Tolerance and Persecution," pp. 10–12. Economic interdependence was a significant social force. Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, p. 38. For the increasing level of close interaction between Christians and Jews at this time, see also Marcus, "Jews and Christians Imagining the Other in Medieval Europe," pp. 209, 223. Elukin contends that the violence and invective to which Jews were subjected by Christians should be examined relative to a wider European milieu in which physical and verbal attacks were a cultural commonplace. *Living Together Living Apart*, pp. 90–93. Nirenberg suggests that violence against Jews was at times more a result of their insider than their outsider status; as the king's legal property, the Jews became targets for violence focused indirectly upon the king in both France and Spain. *Communities of Violence*, pp. 48, 72. The level of influence of the Jewish community upon monarchs who benefited economically from their presence is apparent in King James' reversal of policy concerning forced preaching by Christians in synagogues. Chazan posits Jewish lobbying as the reason for James' prohibition of compulsory Jewish attendance at these sermons. *Barcelona and Beyond*, p. 85. Chazan observes a broad level of popular hostility toward Jews, one which governments frequently worked to temper. *Church, State and Jew in the Middle Ages*, p. 10. As economic conditions worsened toward the end of the thirteenth century, Chazan observes, resentment toward the Jews rose and their influence over the authorities in western Europe increased. *Ibid.*, pp. 313–314. As well, the protected status of the Jew, which came in large measure from Augustine's doctrine of the Jews as witnesses to Christianity's veracity, was called into question in the 1240s, when the Christian examination of the Talmud, commissioned by the papacy, resulted in the decision that the Judaism propounded by the rabbis was not the Judaism of Scripture, and therefore was not deserving of the protection advocated by Augustine. J. Cohen, *Living Letters of the Law*, pp. 326–329. See also idem, "The Muslim Connection," p. 161. Cohen relates this new critique of the contemporary Jew to the rising cosmopolitanism of the High Middle Ages, where closer contacts between Jews and Christians led to a new Christian scrutiny of the Jewish neighbor. "Scholarship and Intolerance in the Medieval Academy," pp. 319–325. As well, the Christian encounter with Islam contributed to the subsumption of Judaism with the larger category of infidel. Idem, "The Muslim Connection," p. 162.

the same neighborhoods (sometimes in the same house), established business partnerships, engaged in all forms of commercial exchange, even watched each other's religious ceremonies and processions.¹⁶

Burns discusses a similar state of affairs for Mediterranean Europe more generally, as against the less tolerant and less well-integrated northern Europe. For the former region, Burns relates, the Jew was "valued...as a significant and active component of its central activity."¹⁷ Burns describes an intensely dynamic, energized and pluralistic culture, particularly during the thirteenth century, before religious tensions multiplied.¹⁸ The thirteenth century he sees as a time in which, "The equilibrium between Jew and Christian, and the factors of shared experience, for the moment outweighed the elements of difference and hostility."¹⁹ The Jew's role in the vibrant economy of the region at that time was, as in many other phases of life, an integrated one.²⁰ The picture of the Jew as isolated from cultural discourse and relegated to the status of pariah in his designated role as money-lender is, Burns says, an inaccurate one for Valencia:²¹

He [the Jew] was not so isolated a figure as he once seemed, cut off in an onerous financial role, presumably an object of resentment and envy...Even as financier and tax collector in Valencia, the Jew was in the mainstream of a common Christian activity. His operations there assimilated him to, rather than divided him from, his fellow Valencians.

¹⁶ Interested in Jewish kabbalistic absorption of marian themes, Green noted the degree to which such Christian devotional symbols would have been visible to Jews on churches, in shrines, and in religious processions, among many other places. Green, "Shekhinah, the Virgin Mary, and the *Song of Songs*," pp. 27–28. Writes Green, "All this was seen by the Jews, who could not but have been aware of this new outgrowth of pious devotion among their Christian neighbors. While they might have been theologically offended by what seemed like worship of an admittedly human woman...I would suggest that there might also have been an attractive side to the love, beauty and simple piety associated with the cult of the Virgin." See Idel, *Kabbalah and Eros*, p. 46, for the perspective that the marian cult could have been influenced by much older Jewish conceptions of the *Shekhinah*.

¹⁷ Burns, *Muslims, Christians, and Jews in the Crusader Kingdom of Valencia*, p. 126.

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 127.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 136.

²⁰ Burns relates several accounts of Jews and Christians amicably doing business together, and of Jews accumulating impressive wealth in the process. Ibid., pp. 141, 144–145, 148. Baer notes the resemblance between the lifestyles of Spanish Christians and Jews at this time. *The History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, p. 197. In a number of Spanish towns at this time, there was no separate quarter for the Jews. Ibid., p. 198. Baer also describes wealthy Jews attended to by both Jewish and Christian courtiers. Ibid., p. 238.

²¹ Burns, *Muslims, Christians, and Jews in the Crusader Kingdom of Valencia*, p. 133.

The picture of thirteenth century inter-religious relations in Italy and Sicily—the two most important locales for Abulafia's creative literary output, outside of Spain—is, as was the case of Spain, a complicated one. There is ample evidence for both conviviality and hostility between Jews and Christians at both the popular and governmental levels in the region.

David Abulafia observes that, during the time of Abraham Abulafia's sojourn in Sicily, Jews continued to speak in Arabic there, despite the Christian accession. This we would naturally suspect to be symptomatic of a level of alienation between Jews and Christians. Nevertheless, "...they [Jews] do not seem to have been socially or economically isolated from their Christian neighbors, at least in the smaller towns, until the mid-fourteenth century."²² Jews engaged in the same range of occupations as Christians. In the case of the Sicilian town of Erice, Jews lived side by side with Christians until the turn of the fourteenth century, when, as with other communities in the region, hostilities began to deepen.²³ Prior to this, the general picture was one of vibrant interaction as well between Christians and Catalan Jews, who came to Majorca and then to Sicily in increasing numbers.²⁴

A similar picture holds for southern Italy prior to the 1290s. As David Abulafia writes, "There is little evidence for popular hostility to the Jews, whose communities in Apulia were very ancient. All the signs are that this campaign was led from the front by the royal court and by the Dominicans..."²⁵ The campaign to which Abulafia refers was one of mass conversion of the Jews of the region, instituted by Charles II on the heels of his expulsion of the Jews from Anjou and Maine in 1289. Charles' justification for these new policies was threefold. First, Jews sought to lead Christians from their religion. Second, they committed usury. And, third, they engaged in the seduction of Christian maidens.²⁶

²² D. Abulafia, "The End of Muslim Sicily," pp. 117–118. Roth notes that the Jews of Sicily spoke not only Arabic, but Italian and Greek as well. "Jewish Intellectual Life in Medieval Sicily," p. 319.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

²⁴ *Idem*, "Una comunità ebraica della Sicilia occidentale: Erice 1298–1304," p. 162.

²⁵ *Idem*, "Monarchs and Minorities in the Christian Western Mediterranean around 1300," p. 253.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 234, 250–251. Chazan, *Church, State and Jew in the Middle Ages*, pp. 314–315.

We may wonder if there was something to Charles' fear of sexual promiscuity between Jews and Christians. We do find contemporary evidence for it in both Italy and Spain.²⁷ Toaff writes that, in Italy, this phenomenon resulted from a high level of Jewish acculturation to Christendom: "...the Jews of late medieval Italy were dispersed throughout hundreds of small and isolated communities, immersed in a Christian society whose power of attraction could make itself felt well in excess of an already crushing numerical superiority."²⁸ Though there is comparatively less surviving textual evidence, Toaff writes that, given the greater level of conviviality in the thirteenth century, as opposed to later, one would expect that the degree of sexual interaction between Jews and Christians would have been greater during the earlier period.²⁹ As far as the later testimony is concerned,³⁰

Almost everywhere in Umbria we find Jews sentenced to financial punishment for having sexual relations with Christian women... A survey of the other Italian regions with centers of Jewish settlement reveals a similar picture at this time... Only rarely did there seem to be any possibility that the accusation might be punished by anything more than a fine.³¹

Toaff writes that "extent and frequency of these relations... is a fact that cannot be ignored by anyone who wants to form an accurate picture of everyday relationships between Jews and Christians in late medieval Italy."³² We can see from the nature of Charles II's charges against the Jews that anxiety had grown in certain Christian quarters as a consequence of the close interactions between Jews and Christians in the thirteenth century. Two of Charles' accusations pertained to Jewish modes of seduction. The notion that intimacy between Jews

²⁷ For the situation in Spain, see above, p. 30 n. 15.

²⁸ Toaff, *Love, Work, and Death: Jewish Life in Medieval Umbria*, p. 143. In *Sefer Hasidim*, we find a similar characterization of the situation in northern Europe. When Jews settled in Christian towns, the text records, they have a tendency to adopt local mores, whether for good or ill. Biale, *Eros and the Jews*, p. 77.

²⁹ Toaff, *Love, Work, and Death: Jewish Life in Medieval Umbria*, p. 7. For the same state of affairs with respect to documentary evidence in Spain, see Burns, *Muslims, Christians, and Jews in the Crusader Kingdom of Valencia*, p. 135.

³⁰ Toaff, *Love, Work, and Death: Jewish Life in Medieval Umbria*, p. 8.

³¹ Toaff does point to a mid-thirteenth century legal ruling in Perugia. There, a Christian woman took up with a Jew and abandoned her family. The woman's Christian husband found his recourse to legal authorities futile, with the result that he attacked the Jewish man. The court in this case fined the Jewish man one hundred lire for adultery, the Christian man twenty-five lire for assault. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 11.

and Christians could cause Christians to stray from their faith certainly reflects the dynamic discussed in the last chapter. A growing awareness of the fragility to the group boundaries by which identity is defined can be deeply unsettling. With Jews and Christians living together as neighbors, we can understand how an inkling of the relative sameness of the other would have been threatening to some. Christian identity was dependent upon Judaism's otherness, an element which, Charles II likely sensed, was being undermined in his day, although we should not dismiss political exigencies as motivating forces as well. Charles implicitly recognized the danger of the unchecked attraction to the other. It is significant that, so visceral was his sense of the allure of the other, that his charges elicit its sexual component. Naturally, this allure ran in the opposite direction as well, threatening Jewish identity. The sexual undercurrent of this dynamic would exert a great impact upon Abulafia.

In other phases of life, Toaff points as well to a level of harmony between Jews and Christians in Italy. Fourteenth century friars were treated by a Jewish doctor, with whom they also drank wine.³³ The keeping of Christian servants by Jews was a seemingly widespread and commonly accepted practice.³⁴ On the whole, Toaff maintains that, despite resistance from governmental and religious authorities, "...in daily practice their relations [those of Jews and Christians] were marked by a familiarity and respect..."³⁵ Again, it would appear that this tendency would have been much more prevalent in the Italy of Abulafia's day, the thirteenth century, than in the fourteenth or fifteenth centuries.

The thirteenth century saw the rise of rationalistic theological debate between Jews, Christians and Muslims.³⁶ Barcelona in the 1270s, the

³³ Ibid., pp. 79, 166.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 249.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 78.

³⁶ On the role that an intensified rationalism played in the polemical religious discourse of the thirteenth century, see Chazan, *Daggers of Faith*, pp. 15, 17. Glick observes that Christian-Jewish debate appears often to have been impromptu, good natured and cordial. Such an inference is in accord with some of Abulafia's claims regarding his own interactions with Christians. See Glick, "'My Master, the Jew': Observations on Interfaith Scholarly Interaction in the Middle Ages," pp. 158, 160, 178. For the rise of rationalistic polemics beginning with Anslem of Canterbury, see Funkenstein, "Changes in the Patterns of Christian Anti-Jewish Polemics in the Twelfth Century," pp. 129-132. Lasker notes the countering of Christian *ratio* with Jewish *sekhel* already in twelfth century Jewish polemical works. Lasker, "Jewish-Christian Polemics at the Turning Point," p. 169.

apparent time and place of Abulafia's initial and most seminal mystical experiences, was a key nexus for this mode of discourse.³⁷ It was as well one of the locales for occasional forced preaching by Christians in Jewish synagogues.³⁸ Given that Abulafia's self-characterized battle

³⁷ It is interesting to note J. Cohen's surmise that, in the aftermath of the Barcelona Disputation, it was R. Solomon ibn Adret who debated with the Christian polemicist Friar Raymond Martin. "The Christian Adversary of Solomon ben Adret." This is significant in that it was Adret who placed the ban on Abulafia for his heretical doctrines. Regardless of whether Cohen's contention is correct (see the cautionary remarks in Chazan, *Daggers of Faith*, pp. 139–140), it is apparent that Adret was perhaps the single most key figure of his generation in parrying Christian argumentation directed toward Jews. Hames notes that Adret was also involved in theological discussion with the Christian Ramon Lull, who exploited kabbalistic trinitarian themes in his efforts to convert Jews. *The Art of Conversion*, pp. 109–115. Lull as well presented Christian sermons in synagogues. Adret as well reportedly debated with a Muslim, contending that the messiah had not yet come. Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, p. 198. Nahmanides had argued the same point in the Barcelona Disputation. For Adret's views of Abulafia and Abulafia's response, see Hames, *Like Angels on Jacob's Ladder*, pp. 44–46. A further word on the *herem*, a ban or excommunication, may be helpful in contextualizing Abulafia's sentence. Epstein, *Studies in the Communal Life of the Jews of Spain*, pp. 71–78, characterizes the picture of the *herem* as a complicated one during Adret's tenure in Barcelona. It was often a political tool, which could be compelled by powerful figures, such as Adret, or, more typically, imposed by an assembly vote. It could be imposed with relative impunity, as for an insult. External forces, the courts or the King, could order one. Some bans were executed only when the accused would not repent of his actions. Either a term could be applied, or the ban could be instituted indefinitely, until the guilty repented. At times, the *herem* seems to have been an abused power, the subject of great contention, and sometimes a ban was revoked due to extreme objections. At times, a unanimous committee vote was required to annul a ban. At times, a *herem* was understood as simply a censure, while other punishments, such as fines, would accompany the verdict. With a specifying clause a *herem* could require complete isolation of the guilty from the community.

³⁸ Chazan notes that such forced preaching took place following the Barcelona Disputation of 1263 and that there are additional accounts of such preaching in Barcelona and elsewhere in the 1270s and as early as 1242. *Daggers of Faith*, pp. 43, 46; "Confrontation in the Synagogue of Narbonne," pp. 439, 457. Assis highlights the role of the Crown of Aragon in blunting the effects of the Church's campaign to win the Jews over to Christianity. Regarding the Church's efforts, Assis writes, "The Disputation of Barcelona was not an isolated public performance of missionary propaganda, but part of a well-planned anti-Jewish campaign that began in the early 1240s and continued throughout the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The Judeo-Christian polemics continued on various levels and in different forms throughout the period." *The Golden Age of Aragonese Jewry*, p. 51. King James adopted a nuanced approach in balancing the Church's wishes with his own stake in maintaining the Jews' status and financial role. He permitted the Disputation and mandated Jewish attendance during Christian preaching in synagogues, but subsequently allowed Jews to forgo such attendance, authorized new synagogue foundation in Barcelona and saw to it that Jews were protected from the violence that sometimes accompanied incidents of Christian synagogue preaching. *Ibid.*, pp. 49, 50, 52. On the whole, Assis notes that the Church's effort to convert the Jews in the region was relatively ineffective. *Ibid.*, p. 51. See also above, p. 30 n. 15, concerning King James and the Jewish community.

with his idolatrous inner demons began at the same time and in the same place as did synagogue preaching by Christians, one must at least entertain the possibility that Abulafia may have been influenced by what he may have heard in the synagogue context. We must hasten to add that such a scenario as regards Abulafia is purely conjectural. Furthermore, it is not even necessary to imagine any episode as dramatic as this in Abulafia's life; he could have been subtly affected by the voices of Christians around him in his daily life. Nevertheless, Abulafia's thought may be seen in certain respects to reflect the argumentation propounded by Nahmanides in the famous Barcelona Disputation of 1263, so there is some evidence that Abulafia was aware of the polemical discourse in his immediate vicinity.

Abulafia's Anti-Christian Invective

Against this backdrop, we may constructively analyze some key passages from Abulafia's oeuvre. What are most immediately apparent are those overtly negative and hostile appraisals of Christianity of which we have spoken. These conform well to those attitudes that seem to have prevailed elsewhere in the larger Jewish community. Nevertheless, although more tempered and somewhat more approving remarks Abulafia reserves primarily for Islam,³⁹ two tendencies mitigate against the ostensibly antagonistic stance that Abulafia takes toward Christendom. One is the type of credence that Abulafia accords to the wisdom possessed by the sages of the seventy nations. Christians were the gentiles with whom Abulafia had the most contact, so we may understand that they figure prominently in his mind whenever he discusses the seventy nations. The other mitigating feature against his hostility was, of course, the intense influence that Christian theological principles had upon Abulafia's own formulations.⁴⁰

³⁹ See *Sefer ha-Melammed*, MS Paris-BN héb. 680, fol. 304a; printed edition, p. 37. The probable influence of the Sufi doctrine of Ibn al-'Arabi upon Abulafia has been discussed by Hames. "A Seal within a Seal." A tempered position regarding Islam is occasionally apparent in the *Zohar*. See Wolfson, "Ontology, Alterity, and Ethics in Kabbalistic Anthropology," pp. 135 n. 14, 150 n. 56. Lasker notes that, on the whole for this period, there are relatively few Jewish anti-Muslim polemical statements, either because the two groups lived cooperatively together, or "...because theologically there is not such a great disparity between Judaism and Islam." "The Jewish Critique of Christianity under Islam in the Middle Ages," p. 122 n. 3.

⁴⁰ As regards the relationship between cultural interactions and the inevitable penetration of doctrines belonging to the other into one's own religious identity, see Marcus,

In terms of the rationalistic thrust of the contemporary polemical discourse, it is noteworthy that Abulafia's mystical system operates within a philosophical framework, that of Aristotelianism filtered through Maimonidean influence. Abulafia's approach lends itself from the outset to the notion that Jewish mystical revelation is of a rational and intellective nature.⁴¹ Abulafia strives for the ultimate realization of rationality, nothing other than a conjunction of his own human intellect with the divine Active Intellect. Insofar as such a conjunction is possible for Jews, Abulafia positions Judaism in utter contrast with the carnality and animalism of Christianity.⁴² Several interrelated passages from Abulafia's literary corpus approach these issues. Abulafia constructs an utterly dichotomous picture of Israel and the other nations; while the former is intellective to the point of being angelic, the latter is brutish and demonic. These passages merit examination.

To begin, Abulafia explains that *Hayyei ha-Nefesh* (*The Life of the Soul*), one of his commentaries to Maimonides' *The Guide of the Perplexed*, stemmed from⁴³

...my observing that the root is forgotten, and the inconsequential is remembered; and the root is the knowledge of the name, and the apprehension of His actions, and the preservation of His *misvot*, may He be blessed. Because from this the enlightened one will inherit the final reward, and this is the life of the soul, the eternal life to come. And the inconsequential is all that stands against this, and which obstructs its existence, [so that he] seeks power and honor and pursues pleasure, the sphere of food and drink and sexual intercourse and the cleaving to things of the body. And these are matters which are not natural or necessary; rather they damage and kill the soul, and neither do they sustain the body. And thus they are all evil. And this is as the holy Rav [Maimonides] perceived this evil matter, which is very foreign from

"Jews and Christians Imagining the Other in Medieval Europe," p. 210, where the author proffers the notion of "inward acculturation," in which alien doctrines are internalized without any damage to one's own identity. Marcus points to the example of a contemporary medieval Jewish text which, he observes, stylized a rabbi as a Christ figure. Ibid., p. 212. This observation is noteworthy in terms of the suggestion that Abulafia stylized himself as Jesus. See Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb*, pp. 36–37, for precedents concerning Jewish internalization of messianic motifs related to Jesus.

⁴¹ Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia*, p. 79.

⁴² Wolfson observes the zoharic contention that the distinctive marker of Judaism, the covenant of circumcision, renders the Jew fully human, while the other nations, consequently, are beasts. See, for instance, *Venturing Beyond*, pp. 83, 89. Christians, of course, levied the same charges at Jews, referring to them as utterly given over to instinct, as gluttonous and as irrational. Sapir Abulafia, "Bodies in the Jewish-Christian Debate," pp. 125, 127.

⁴³ *Hayyei ha-Nefesh*, MS Munich-BS 408 fols. 4a–b; printed edition, p. 5.

our united nation, which was chosen by God in the good days of old. And he [Rav] saw the mass of people who became wise from it, who had already returned the evil sphere mentioned (*‘asher kevar shav ha-galgal ha-ra’ ha-nizkar*), that is, the sphere of the evil inclination, over lusts. And their sphere is like the sphere of the other nations of the world, which were not chosen by God. Concerning this, the necessity of that true supernal efflux impelled him (*heniy’u ‘al zeh hekhrah ha-shefa’ ha-hu’ ha-‘amyty ha-‘elyon*), which chose us from every people and language, to compose that honored book [*The Guide of the Perplexed*].

That base and non-intellective sphere to which Abulafia refers is that of those who do not heed the *mišvot*. Those who do, pious Jews, are those who are enlightened and who merit eternal life. Those who partake of the lower sphere are “obstructed” from receiving the beneficence of the divine sphere. They are wholly given over to carnal matters such as food, drink and bodily pleasures. These indulgences, Abulafia relates, are actually deadly to both soul and body because of their detachment from the intellective sphere, that upon which true and eternal life, that of the soul, depends. The lesser and carnal sphere Abulafia identifies with the evil inclination, which is the province of the other nations of the world. Maimonides himself, as Abulafia explains here, exemplifies the intellective status of the Jewish people, because the inspiration for his composition of *The Guide of the Perplexed* stemmed from “that true supernal efflux” whose source is the Active Intellect. Insofar as a conjunction with the divine Active Intellect is at the root of Abulafia’s conceptualization of his own mystical praxis, we may understand his activities, in his own estimation, to represent the very quintessence of the maximization of human intellective capacity.

Much later in *Hayyei ha-Nefesh*, Abulafia returns again to the theme of Christendom’s carnality. Here, the issue is cast in terms of the Jew’s covenantal relationship with God, as against the submission to the idolatrous impulse, the latter exemplified by Esau. Recourse to the figure of Esau as a reference to Christendom is a commonplace in Abulafia’s writing.⁴⁴ Concerning Deuteronomy 32:8, which refers to the portions allotted to the nations, Abulafia writes,⁴⁵

⁴⁴ See, for instance, *Sefer ha-Melammed*, MS Paris-BN héb. 680, fol. 304a; printed edition, p. 37. For Edom and Esau as Jewish representations of Christendom, see G. Cohen, “Esau as Symbol in Early Medieval Thought,” Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb*, p. 10.

⁴⁵ *Hayyei ha-Nefesh*, MS Munich-BS 408 fols. 70a–b; printed edition, p. 123.

Regarding this, it already instructs us concerning the secret of providence with respect to the whole world, and concerning the image of Jacob our father engraved on the Throne of Glory... And I will explain to you this secret. The image of one father, simple and whole, and his bed is complete, and he “dwells in tents” (Gen. 25:27), meaning a house of study, that is, he studies and teaches Torah. And he had one brother who was born with him from his mother’s womb, and thus it reads (Hos. 12:4), “He took his brother by the heel in the womb, and by his strength he strove with God,” because of his dwelling in tents. And from the womb there was between them strife and warfare... “And the Lord said to her, ‘Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples shall be separated from your bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger’” (Gen. 25:23). These are Metatron and Sandalfon, who are the two ministering angels, one good and one evil; the name of the righteous one is Jacob, and the name of the wicked one is Esau. And Esau went forth first by means of the blood, and thus (Gen. 25:25), “he was red all over like a hairy garment (*ke-’aderet sayar*),” powerful (*’adir*), mighty and strong like the image of a goat (*se’ir*) and the image of a demon and Satan and the destroyer of all, lord of the storm wind. He is a hairy man. “And after that came out his brother, and his hand took hold of Esau’s heel” (Gen. 25:26). “His hand” is his strength (*gevurato*) and power, it attaches to and is connected with and grasps the wheel (*galgal*) of his brother Esau. He is the lord of action [or, perhaps, actualization; *ba’al ma’aseh*]. “Heel” (*’aqev*) should be read “cubic” (*me’uqav*), and it is the end of the supernal ones. “A hairy (*sa’ir*) man” (Gen. 27:11): He attacks (*mista’er*), and his end is to die. “[And Esau said, ‘Behold, I am at the point of death,] and what profit shall this birthright do to me?’” And it was because of this that his end was to die. And although he was first-born, “Behold, I am at the point of death,” and he had no birthright and no blessing.

Abulafia’s initial allusion to a rabbinic motif, the image of Jacob engraved upon the Throne of Glory, requires some explanation.⁴⁶ By referring to Jacob’s veritable enthronement, Abulafia invokes the superior—in fact, divine—status of the Jewish people, the nation with whom Jacob is identified as the passage continues. Abulafia derives his allusion to the image of Jacob in a somewhat convoluted manner. He states that Deuteronomy 32:8 “...relates the twelve diagonal boundaries to the twelve tribes.” The reference to the twelve diagonal boundaries is derived from a cosmological conception found in the

⁴⁶ See Wolfson, “The Image of Jacob Engraved upon the Throne,” in *Along the Path*. See also idem, “By Way of Truth,” pp. 149–150, for this motif as it appears in Nahmanides’ thought.

pre-kabbalistic, esoteric text *Sefer Yeṣirah*. There, twelve diagonal lines are said to extend infinitely between the six directions north, south, east, west, above and below, thus comprising a cube which constitutes the created world.⁴⁷ Abulafia states subsequently regarding Jacob, “He is the lord of action [or, perhaps, actualization; *ba’al ma’aseh*]. ‘Heel’ [*‘aqev*, from Genesis 25:26] should be read ‘cubic’ (*me’uqav*), and it is the end of the supernal ones.” Jacob is associated by Abulafia with that which is “cubic” on the basis of a manipulation of the letters of the word “heel.” The meaning for this association, Abulafia relates, is that Jacob is linked with “the end of the supernal ones.” The “supernal ones” are the *sefirot*, the ten divine emanations of the theosophic kabbalah.⁴⁸ The last, or “end,” of these is *Malkhut* (Kingdom). Jacob is the “lord of action” because he represents the Active Intellect, reigning over creation; Abulafia understood the *sefirot* to be the ten intellects, with the last *sefira*, *Malkhut*, standing as the Active Intellect.⁴⁹ Taken together then, Jacob’s (Israel’s) heavenly overlordship over the universe is expressed in terms of divine rulership over *Malkhut* and in terms of mastery of the three dimensional lower world. The latter is characterized as a cube with twelve edges, which Abulafia describes

⁴⁷ *Sefer Yeṣirah*, Gruenwald ed., 5:1 (para. 47).

⁴⁸ The term *sefirot* (singular, *sefira*) makes its first appearance in *Sefer Yeṣirah* in antiquity. There, the *sefirot* were presented as hypostatic entities, “ten elementary and primordial numbers,” as Scholem characterizes them in that text. *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, p. 76. Along with the letters of the Hebrew alphabet, the *sefirot* were understood in *Sefer Yeṣirah* as the means by which God enacted creation. The influence of evolving doctrine concerning the *sefirot* would prove formative upon a Jewish mystical school that coalesced in Provence in the twelfth century. This school, the theosophic kabbalah, would elaborate upon the *sefirot* in terms that Scholem characterized as mythic. Ibid., pp. 224–230. See above, p. 7 n. 13 for theosophic kabbalah. Each *sefira* was characterized by a particular set of distinguishing attributes; *Hesed* (Mercy) and *Gevurah* (Strength), for instance, were *sefirot* seen to embody opposed natures, the former linked with kindness and goodness, the latter with severity and with the forces of evil. See below. Among the theosophic kabbalists, the *sefirot* were understood in a variety of different ways. At times they were seen to be aspects of God’s own being, His *middot* (attributes). At other times they were understood as vessels that channeled divine sustenance down to the created world, into the *sefira* *Malkhut*. The *sefirot* were described as interacting with each other in a complex fashion, and theosophic kabbalists conceived of their mystical practice as a theurgical effort to perfect the alignment and interrelationships of the *sefirot*. Successful results yielded the flow of blessings into the lower world, it was believed, and led to the mystic’s ascent to a state of communion with the *sefirot*.

⁴⁹ For the Active Intellect as *Malkhut*, see Idel, “The Writings of Abraham Abulafia and His Teaching,” p. 89 (in Hebrew). As well, Abulafia, following in the theosophic tradition, frequently links the *sefira* *Tif’eret* (Beauty) with Jacob. See, for instance, *Ve-ẓo’t li-Yehudah* (And this is for Judah), in Jellinek, *Auswahl kabbalistischer*, p. 23.

in terms of the twelve tribes stemming from Jacob. Abulafia issues an esoteric declaration of Judaism's exalted status with respect to the other nations, as dominion is assigned to Jacob and the universe to the twelve tribes over which he rules.⁵⁰

That Abulafia has in mind a sefirotic conception of Jacob is next reinforced by his emphasis on Jacob's "dwelling in tents." As Abulafia relates elsewhere,⁵¹ he keeps with kabbalistic tradition in taking this scriptural phrase to refer to Jacob's reconciling within himself the two opposing attributes embodied in the *sefirot* *Hesed* (Mercy) and *Gevurah* (Strength), such that Jacob stands as the perfected androgynous man, reconstituted in the image of Adam, represented by the *sefira* *Tif'eret* (Beauty).⁵² In the current context, the motif of the tents is employed by Abulafia to express the perfected intellective status of Jacob/Israel, the Active Intellect; the tents symbolize Jacob's endeavors in the *bet midrash*.⁵³ Jacob's status as the supernal intellective principle is then reasserted with the statement that Jacob is Metatron. This angelic and demiurgic entity Abulafia regularly identifies with the Active Intellect.⁵⁴ The identification of Esau with Sandalfon is telling in that this angelic entity Abulafia understands as the demonic component of the Active Intellect.⁵⁵ While the Jewish people partake of divine

⁵⁰ Elsewhere Abulafia frames the relegation of the nations to the physical world, with Israel assigned a higher status, in terms of the attribution of matter to the nations but form to Israel. *Maftelah ha-Shemot* (*The Key of Names*), MS NY-JTSA Mic. 1897, fol. 53a; printed edition, p. 25.

⁵¹ See *Maftelah ha-Tokhaot* (*The Key of Rebukes*), MS Oxford-BL 1605, fols. 57a-b; printed edition, pp. 61–62.

⁵² Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 118–121. See above, nn. 48, 49.

⁵³ See, for instance, Rashi on Genesis 25:27: Jacob studied Torah while Esau pursued idolatry.

⁵⁴ Abulafia was preceded in this identification, in Jewish mystical circles, by Jacob and Isaac ha-Cohen, by members of the *Tyyun* Circle, and by his teacher, Baruch Togarmi. Idel, "The Writings of Abraham Abulafia and His Teaching," p. 88 (in Hebrew). Pedaya, *Vision and Speech*, p. 96 (in Hebrew). See also Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 59 n. 167, 71 n. 217, 83 n. 264. It is noteworthy in the current context that Israel is an alternate appellation used by Abulafia to refer to the Active Intellect. *Ibid.*, p. 89.

⁵⁵ Elsewhere, Abulafia forges the identification of Israel with Metatron and the nations with Sandalfon through a *gematria*; that is to say, he adds up the numerical values of the letters composing particular words and then draws connections between words or phrases possessing the same numerical value. The phrases "Israel, nations (*goyim*)" and "Metatron and Sandalfon" have the same numerical value (six hundred). *Hotam ha-Haftarah* (*The Seal of the Addition*), MS Munich-BS 285 fol. 33b; printed edition (*Masref ha-Sekhel*), p. 127. For Sandalfon as the demonic component of the Active Intellect, see Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, p. 77; Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia*, p. 144 n.

intellection, then, Esau (Christendom) is of an explicitly satanic cast in the current instance.

Esau's demonic nature is as well animalistic. So we find an emphasis placed on the scriptural discussion of Esau as hairy. Esau is also linked here with vaginal blood: "Esau went forth first by means of the blood," writes Abulafia. The significance of this statement rests on two levels. First, to be associated with blood is to be seen as under the sway of the animal impulse. This notion of man's base nature as rooted in the heat of his blood is a common one in medieval literature, based upon ancient medical conceptions. Both Christians and Jews traded in accusations that the other was to be linked with attributes associated with blood, and particularly the most unclean blood of all, that of menstruation.⁵⁶ Such notions, in turn, were coupled with accusations concerning a proclivity for bloodshed.⁵⁷ Elsewhere, Abulafia reinforces

135. Sandalfon is referred to as the Prince of the Backside (*Ahor*), as against Metatron, the Prince of the Countenance. Idel, "The Writings of Abraham Abulafia and His Teaching," p. 106 (in Hebrew).

⁵⁶ For the Christian side of this argument, see Johnson, "The Myth of Jewish Male Menses," p. 275, where anal bleeding, ascribed to some Jewish men and to heretics by Christians, is related to the Christian conception of the Jew as responsible for Jesus' murder. One tradition thus had it that Jewish men bled annually at Easter. The *Zohar* relates that during their sojourn in Egypt, Israelite men and women alike bore the stigma of menstrual impurity. Koren, "The Woman from Whom God Wanders," pp. 147–148. We see here both the potential again for men to be associated with the impure feminine blood and for the religious other—in this case, Egypt, a symbol of Christendom for the medieval Jew—to also be associated with feminine impurity; the Israelite men were so afflicted only when in Egypt.

⁵⁷ The connection between the impurity of menstrual blood and murder may be seen in the thought of one of Abulafia's chief influences, Eleazar of Worms. Although not specifically referring to the gentiles in this instance, Eleazar relates the blood of the menstruant to murder; menstruation stems from Eve's sin, which led to the mortality of Adam. Ibid., p. 121. In terms of a murderous nature linked specifically to Christians, Abulafia states that the Christians failed to heed his own message to them because of their violent tendencies: "But they did not return to God because they trusted in their swords and their bows..." Jellinek, "Sefer ha-Ôt," p. 76; Hames, *Like Angels on Jacob's Ladder*, p. 43. Nahmanides weds the notion of Christians' perceived murderous nature to their terrestrial ascendancy, essentially debunking the Christian effort to use their power as a proof-text for their having won God's favor. As well, he relates their murderous nature to their broader carnality: "Indeed the Christians spill blood more than the other peoples, while at the same time they are sexually promiscuous." Chazan, *Daggers of Faith*, p. 95; Roth, "The Disputation of Barcelona (1263)," p. 130. See also Marcus, "Jews and Christians Imagining the Other in Medieval Europe," pp. 212–213, for a contemporary Jewish discussion concerning an instance of Christian persecution of Jews. There Esau, Christendom, is characterized as violent in nature. See Cuffel, "Filthy Words/Filthy Bodies," pp. 182, 405, 442, for the discussion of Christians as bestial and violent. Nirenberg notes one rabbi's claim, delineated in graphic terms, that Christian sexual skills were superior to those of Jewish men,

the animalistic associations for Esau, characterizing him as murderous. In this other context, not only is Esau a killer, but, more particularly, he represents the idolatrous world in its engagement in child sacrifice.⁵⁸ Abulafia's line of argumentation, we see, is consistent with the wider polemical milieu, and, on the face of it, Abulafia's abhorrence of Christendom is unequivocal. Abulafia conceived of blood, following in the Aristotelian tradition, as the locus of the imagination, the source of man's evil nature; his linkage of Esau with blood, therefore, epitomized what for Abulafia was the irrevocably base nature of Christendom.⁵⁹

Another signification of Esau's going "forth by means of the blood" has a further polemical basis. Some Jews targeted what they saw as the unclean nature of Jesus' birth for anti-Christian invective. These polemicists placed a strong emphasis on the presence of blood during childbirth, and they insisted that Jesus was born like any other child, in a state of impurity. In this way they sought to counter the Christian doctrine that Jesus' birth represented the corporealization of the divine. How, it was argued, could the divine be born into what they characterized as a filthy state?⁶⁰ This objection formed the basis

to the point where Jewish women are lured to Christian men. *Communities of Violence*, p. 157 n. 111. In this we can see both associations of Christians with the carnal and anxiety regarding the sexual temptations posed by the religious other. This anxiety appears to have been a significant feature of the thirteenth century Spanish cultural landscape. See *ibid.*, pp. 134–135, 142, 152, 158.

⁵⁸ *Maṣṭeah ha-Tokhaḥot*, MS Oxford-BL 1605, fols. 56b, 57b; printed edition, pp. 60, 61–62. Biale notes the traditionally intimate connection between idolatry and bloodshed. "Idolatry, like homicide, is quintessentially a blood crime," he writes. *Blood and Belief*, p. 17.

⁵⁹ Idel, "The Writings of Abraham Abulafia and His Teaching," p. 102 (in Hebrew).

⁶⁰ For Abulafia's like perspective, see *Maṣṭeah ha-Hokhmot* (*The Key of Wisdom*), MS NY-JTSA Mic. 1686, fols. 123b, 122b; printed edition, pp. 83–84, where the womb is described as a filthy place. See also *ibid.*, p. 82, where the body is described as "evil" and it is said that life is more properly called "death." See Cuffel, "Filthy Words/Filthy Bodies," pp. 118, 137, for a discussion of this polemical strategy as it pertains to the conception and birth of Jesus. The polemical *Milḥemet Miṣvaḥ* also points both to the unclean state of Jesus in the womb and to Jesus' own unclean bodily functions. This Christian rootedness in the unclean carnal is there contrasted with Judaism. Jews are focused upon the purely spiritual nature of the *miṣvot*, according to the text (in marked contrast to the Christian perspective that Jewish literalism, as exemplified in their adherence to the *miṣvot*, reflects their carnality), while Moses' fasting is contrasted with the fact that Jesus "defecated, urinated, and flatulated." Chazan, *Daggers of Faith*, pp. 60, 62; Lasker, "The Jewish Critique of Christianity under Islam in the Middle Ages," p. 128. For the Christian polemical response, see Sapir Abulafia, "Jewish-Christian Disputations and the Twelfth-Century Renaissance," pp. 115–116. Christian women

for the contention that Christian doctrine was not only irrational but also dishonored God. Abulafia follows this polemical tack closely here, in that the figure of Esau, linked with the blood of childbirth, stands for him as a symbolic representation of Jesus.⁶¹ Abulafia counters the Christian claims for Jesus' state of divine purity by suggesting here that it was Jacob who was born free of the blood of childbirth.

Abulafia leaves off by pointing to the end that awaits carnal Esau. He gives a fresh turn to Esau's statement that he was hungry to the point of death and had no need for his inheritance in such a state (Gen. 25:32). Esau, as "a hairy (*sa'ir*) man" (Gen. 27:11), writes Abulafia, "...attacks [*mista'er*, a play on *sa'ir*], and his end is to die." That is to say, because of Esau's barbarity, "...his end is to die...and he had no birthright and no blessing." Abulafia's contention is that, because Esau is of a base and purely corporeal nature, he will not inherit the spiritual life of the world to come. The "birthright" and "blessing" bequeathed to Jacob is understood by Abulafia as spiritual redemption in the afterlife, while only death awaits Esau. Abulafia here enters into another of the polemical exchanges of the day, that concerning who will merit resurrection at the end time. Abulafia's words may be read as an implicit response to Christian argumentation. All things linked with the body, he suggests, such as Christendom's physical nature—that is, its strength—are to be associated with this world alone, and not with the reward of heaven, which is granted instead to those who are like Jacob.⁶² The earthly conquests achieved by Christians through their brutishness, consistent with Esau's nature, should not be read as an

were the targets in Abulafia's day of Jewish invective for their purported uncleanness. Nirenberg, "Love between Muslim and Jew in Medieval Spain," p. 131. See Wolfson, *Venturing Beyond*, pp. 136–140, for kabbalistic associations of Christendom with the menstruant. Charges of physical repulsiveness or uncleanness were levied against the other on both sides of the religious divide. For the Christian perspective, see Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, p. 62; Sapir Abulafia, "Bodies in the Jewish-Christian Debate," p. 125. The linkage of Jews with lepers is noteworthy in that leprosy was regarded as a sexually transmitted disease stemming from an impure womb. *Ibid.*, p. 96. In rabbinic literature as well we find the notion that a child contracts leprosy when his mother conceives him while menstruating. Koren, "The Woman from Whom God Wanders," p. 92 n. 88. Christianity itself was linked with leprosy. Cuffel, "Filthy Words/Filthy Bodies," p. 128.

⁶¹ For another example of this tendency, see Weinstock, *Perush Sefer Yetzirah 'Almoni mi-Tesodo shel Rabbi 'Avraham 'Abul'afiya'*, p. 28.

⁶² In the *Zohar*, Esau is associated with gluttony at table. By contrast, the food consumption of the pious Jew is of a spiritual nature. Hecker, "Each Man Ate an Angel's Meal," p. 221.

expression of God's favor.⁶³ Abulafia's remarks concerning Christianity's terrestrial prowess are interesting when we consider that *Hayyei ha-Nefesh* was written just before Abulafia came calling upon the Pope in 1280. Although it is tempting to see Abulafia's perspective here specifically in terms of his immediate mission, the arguments that he makes sound a recurring theme that runs through his literary output.

Circumcision, Mišvot, and Ambiguous Polemics

One of the main sources for Abulafia's implicit charge of Jesus' impurity, as it was for many Jewish polemicists, was *Toledot Yeshu*. There Jesus was characterized as the bastard son, by a pagan father, of a menstruant woman.⁶⁴ The influence of this notion on Abulafia is apparent as well in the following discussion from *Sefer ha-Hayyim* (*The Book of Life*), written in the early 1280s. Here Abulafia is most interested in portraying himself in messianic fashion, a characterization which he seeks to cast into stark contrast with the traditional attacks that he directs toward Jesus.

To set the stage, the discussion immediately preceding Abulafia's mention of Jesus in *Sefer ha-Hayyim* is primarily concerned with the angel Raziel and with the enlightened figure who is privy to revelation therefrom. Both of these are to be understood as Abulafia himself, or as his alter ego.⁶⁵ As a result of prophetic experience derived from

⁶³ Chazan, *Daggers of Faith*, p. 11, notes Augustine's argument that the lowly status of the Jew and the rising power of Christendom were indicative of the passage of God's favor to the latter. The twelfth century Jewish texts *Milhamot ha-Shem* and *Sefer ha-Brit* had both addressed this issue, maintaining that the power distribution of the day was merely a temporary state of affairs, pending the messiah's arrival. Ibid., p. 20. See also ibid., pp. 53, 65 and 64, where Chazan notes that the task of rebutting Christian arguments concerning their ascendancy is a "major preoccupation" in *Milhemet Mišvot*. One Jewish strategy was to point out that the Christians once argued the opposing perspective, that their willingness to suffer marked the truth of their beliefs. Lasker, "The Jewish Critique of Christianity under Islam in the Middle Ages," p. 130. See also above, pp. 42–43 n. 57.

⁶⁴ Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, p. 45. Charges of sexual impurity are heaped upon Jesus in the Talmud as well. There it is stated that Mary was a prostitute, that Jesus entertained lascivious thoughts as a student and that the Christian cult was based upon orgiastic and occult rites. The Talmud relates that Jesus is condemned to sit in boiling excrement forever, along with Titus, who is eternally burned, and Balaam, who is eternally immersed in boiling semen. Schäfer, *Jesus in the Talmud*, pp. 10–13.

⁶⁵ Idel, *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 140, 200–201; Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 56, 81–82, 167 n. 197, 196.

the permutation of letters, Abulafia relates that it became apparent to him that “the messiah who was already born now will come.”⁶⁶ This messiah, the messenger of Raziel, is the seventh of the prophets, who is commanded to go to Rome to “...do all that he did, and if it is revealed it is clearly concealed.” That is to say, there is an esoteric dimension to the messianic mission to the Pope that Abulafia saw as assigned to himself.

Abulafia continues, relating that at the age of forty he was shown the likeness of the messiah. The secret of this likeness, Abulafia relates, is the divine name Shaddai. At this point, Abulafia begins to address himself to the essential nature of his messianic encounter with the gentile world. Abulafia refers to Balaam’s prophetic recognition of Shaddai in Numbers 24:4, invoking thereby the gentile revelation that Abulafia expects will ensue with his mission to Rome. Abulafia subsequently contrasts this gentile revelation regarding the Jewish messiah, Shaddai himself, with his own reciprocal recognition of the purported gentile messiah:⁶⁷

For forty years Raziel ben Samauel punished his limbs, recognizing the blessing and the curse, recognizing the bastard son of the menstruant,⁶⁸ recognizing Jesus/Muhammad, the measure of the moon in the border of the sun, and upon them you will build and you will quadruple in threefoldness, and you will understand wonders from it, and the honey that flavors it is the wisdom of the names.

In association with prophetic revelation, Abulafia suggests, comes insight concerning the nature of the composite “Jesus/Muhammad.” The numerical value of these two names is equivalent to the phrase “bastard son of the menstruant.”⁶⁹ That Abulafia has made use of the traditional Jewish derogation of Jesus is not surprising, but in the current context he has gone further by impugning Muhammad as well. It would appear that Jesus and Muhammad are here considered to be one twofold demonic entity. But Abulafia provides a further dimension to these associations: The phrase “the blessing and the curse” from the same passage clearly operates in connection with the phrase

⁶⁶ *Sefer ha-Hayyim*, MS Munich-BS 285 fol. 22a; printed edition (*Maṣref ha-Sekhel*), p. 83.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, MS Munich-BS 285 fol. 22a; printed edition, pp. 83–84.

⁶⁸ See the same phrase in, for instance, *Maṣleah ha-Shemot*, MS NY-JTSA Mic. 1897, fol. 81b; printed edition, 130.

⁶⁹ Both equal four hundred and eight.

“Jesus/Muhammad.” And, indeed, these two phrases as well share the same numerical value. If we were to parse the two names with respect to blessing and curse, to positive and negative associations, the traditional Jewish linkage of Jesus with the phrase “bastard son of the menstruant” must be given its due weight. If, then, Jesus represents the curse, then in what sense does Muhammad stand as a blessing?

The answer is a complicated one. In subsequent chapters I will explore the manner in which Abulafia ascribes a mercurial nature to the twofold Active Intellect: It becomes at different times wholly good and wholly evil, although it never loses its fundamental feature of possessing two opposed natures. In the current context, then, Abulafia seems to consider the Jesus/Muhammad composite to be the evil manifestation of the bipartite Active Intellect. Muhammad stands, then, as the positive element within the nevertheless demonic constitution of the Active Intellect, which, in the current context, is linked wholly to the world of the gentile nations.

The sense in which Muhammad may be understood in somewhat positive terms conforms to a discussion of circumcision to be found in *Sefer Melammed* (*The Book of the Teacher*), written in 1276. There, Esau’s (Christendom’s, or Jesus’) circumcision is described as fully corporeal and devoid of any spiritual element, while Islam is possessed of a circumcision seen to be at least somewhat spiritual, to the extent that that faith ascribes to monotheistic beliefs.⁷⁰ The covenant of the Jews is fully twofold and complete in nature, being both physical and spiritual. There is an irony to the assertion that the covenant linked, via Esau, to Christendom is described as purely physical by Abulafia, for Christianity, alone among the three faiths, practiced no form of

⁷⁰ *Sefer ha-Melammed*, MS Paris-BN héb. 680, fol. 304a; printed edition, p. 37. The passage reads in part, “...such as our being sons of Jacob our father, peace be upon him, and the uncircumcised being sons of Esau, he who was circumcised in the phallus and uncircumcised of heart, and the Ishmaelites, sons of Ishmael, who also are circumcised in the phallus and somewhat of heart, with respect to their belief in the unity...” For zoharic evaluations of Islamic circumcision, see Wolfson, “Ontology, Alterity, and Ethics in Kabbalistic Anthropology,” p. 135 n. 14. Judah Halevi had sought to dismiss Muslim circumcision for the reason that they have no intellectual understanding thereof. See Lasker, “Proselyte Judaism, Christianity, and Islam in the Thought of Judah Halevi,” p. 85. On the vexing question of the gentile who upholds God’s unity, Jewish opinions divided. Ibn Gabirol demonstrated a tolerant attitude concerning gentile sages. According to Gluck, he “...leaves open the possibility of different but still valid approaches to God... This is underscored by his acknowledgement that even idolaters attempt to worship God.” “The King in His Palace: Ibn Gabirol and Maimonides,” p. 344.

physical circumcision. The two that did practice some form of physical circumcision, Judaism and Islam, are described, contrariwise, as possessing in varying degrees a spiritual circumcision. We may perceive here a counterthrust to the traditional Christian charge that Jewish devotionism is carnal. Christians maintained that the Jews sought to forge a base, physical covenant with God via circumcision as against a spiritual one, the one possessed by the Christians themselves.⁷¹ Abulafia reverses this argument completely.

Abulafia's reference to Jewish circumcision's superiority goes to the larger issue of adherence to the *mišvot*. In *Hayyei ha-Nefesh*, where Abulafia referred to the hot-blooded nature of Esau, Abulafia enunciated an implicit contradiction to the Christian perspective that it was they who served God out of love. The age-old Christian position stood that service out of love rendered obsolete the literal adherence, embodied in rabbinism, to legalistic intricacies. Writes Abulafia,⁷²

Worship of God out of love is the most desirable worship and the one received in truth, and it is the most perfect and quintessential, because of which all intellectual life was created, and which makes man man. And it is known and apparent to all who possess knowledge that this true worship is nothing other than the knowledge of wisdom and the soul's becoming acclimated to the knowledge of this inner knowledge.

Abulafia contended that love underlies the worship practiced by the pious. Love is correlated with a mode of worship consisting of the

⁷¹ As noted by Hames, Abulafia elsewhere adopts a more charitable assessment of both Islam and Christianity, saying that these faiths as well believe in God's unity. Hames, *Like Angels on Jacob's Ladder*, p. 60. See also *ibid.*, p. 64, concerning a passage to be considered below.

⁷² *Hayyei ha-Nefesh*, MS Munich-BS 408 fol. 69b; printed edition, p. 117. Parallel formulations are present in both rabbinic and zoharic literature. See Wolfson, "Ontology, Alterity, and Ethics in Kabbalistic Anthropology," pp. 138–141. In *Mafteah ha-Hokhmot*, MS NY-JTSA Mic. 1686, fols. 107b–108a; printed edition, p. 48, Abulafia indicates his awareness of the Christian position on the *mišvot*: "And the Christians say that their messiah said to them, together with his disciples, that the Torah is truthful and that it is proper to honor its words, because its words are the words of the living God, except that some of the *mišvot* that are in it should not be understood literally (*she-'einam ke-feshutam*)." Abulafia suggests that he had conversations with Christians who saw the matter properly, meaning that they understood that there were three levels to a thorough understanding of Torah, the literal, the allegorical and the prophetic: "And there is no doubt that there are among the Christians some sages who know this secret and they spoke with me secretly and revealed to me that this is their understanding without a doubt." *Ibid.* See Wolfson's discussion of these passages, *Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 188–189. For medieval Christian anti-legalistic polemics, in which Jewish halakhah was seen as carnal, see Sapir Abulafia, "Jewish-Christian Disputations and the Twelfth-Century Renaissance," pp. 109–113.

acquisition of wisdom and knowledge, that is, with Torah study, Jacob's activity in the *bet midrash*, as we have seen. The basis for this amorous worship is to be found, then, in the relationship of the Jew to the Torah. The Jew's love, Abulafia explains, moves beyond the carnality of Esau discussed earlier. It is at once amorous, intellective and obedient.

Let us return to the discussion in *Sefer ha-Hayyim*, where we encountered the Jesus/Muhammad composite. The passage read in part, as we recall,⁷³

...recognizing the bastard son of the menstruant, recognizing Jesus/Muhammad, the measure of the moon in the border of the sun, and upon them you will build and you will quadruple in threefoldness, and you will understand wonders from it, and the honey that flavors it is the wisdom of the names.

The reference to the moon and the sun may be understood in terms of the traditional kabbalistic associations of these two heavenly bodies with the female and male elements, respectively, and thus with the evil and good components of the Active Intellect.⁷⁴ The parsing discussed earlier of Jesus and Muhammad, the curse and the blessing, respectively, is consistent then with these notions of the sun and moon. Abulafia's recourse to the phrase "quadruple in threefoldness" augments the theme of the Active Intellect's bifold composition. In this phrase, Abulafia alludes to the Tetragrammaton, YHWH, the divine name that he identifies with the Active Intellect.⁷⁵ The Tetragrammaton, Abulafia observes, is a triad of letters (YHV) that comprise a

⁷³ *Sefer ha-Hayyim*, MS Munich-BS 285 fol. 22a; printed edition (*Maṣref ha-Sekhel*), p. 83.

⁷⁴ Wolfson, "By Way of Truth," p. 168.

⁷⁵ Writes Wolfson, "Apprehension of the Active Intellect...entails comprehension of the divine essence that is iconically concretized in the letters of the Tetragrammaton." *Abraham Abulafia*, p. 176. See also *ibid.*, pp. 142, 147, 154, 159, 172 for the interconnectedness of the Active Intellect, the *sefirot* and the Tetragrammaton. For the Active Intellect in its relationship to the *sefirot* and, particularly, to the *Shekhinah*, see Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, p. 143. The link of the Tetragrammaton to the *sefirot* and, hence, to the Active Intellect is apparent from Abulafia's writings. See, for instance, *ʿOṣar ʿEden Ganuz*, MS Oxford-BL 1580, fols. 23b–24a; printed edition, pp. 47–48; *Imrei Shefer*, MS Munich-BS 285 fols. 71a–b; MS Munich-BS 40 fols. 240a, 241b; printed edition, pp. 77–78. The link of the Tetragrammaton with the *sefirot* is suggested in the current passage as well, where the reference to the sun and moon encrypts a sefirotic allusion, to be investigated more fully below. For the link of the Active Intellect with divine names, see Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, pp. 235–237.

quaternity (YHVV). To “quadruple in threefoldness,” then, is to unite the Tetragrammaton.

Abulafia launches subsequently into a consideration of the meaning of circumcision. He elaborates upon the meaning of two sets of letter permutations, writing that the secret of their permutations concerns the “commandment to all of the world to guard the covenant of circumcision.” The secret of the phrase “their circumcision,” Abulafia writes, is “their learning;” the two phrases have the same numerical value (five hundred and twenty). This learning, referring, presumably, to the Torah, is possessed by the Jews alone; it “...is the cause of the circumcision of the heart, which is that which circumcises the blood. And regarding this it says ‘overthrow the flesh.’”⁷⁶

We see here again the polemical overtones discussed earlier with respect to the inferior circumcisions of the gentile nations and to Esau’s rootedness in the corporeal. As in the case of the passage which discussed the circumcisions of the Jews, Christians and Muslims, Abulafia’s interest in a universal conception of circumcision is carried forward in the current context, where he relates that the whole world is commanded to engage in circumcision. The circumcision possessed by the Jews here represents the fullest spiritual circumcision, that of the heart, such that the carnal impulse is “overthrown.”⁷⁷ “Flesh and blood obstruct apprehension,” Abulafia explains, referring no doubt to prophetic access to the Active Intellect. The numerical value of the phrase “flesh and blood” is equivalent to that for “angels of death” (five hundred and fifty-two), and the two of them, flesh and blood, are just that, deadly, demonic opponents, in Abulafia’s estimation.

Despite the polemical thrust here with regard to carnality, as against the spiritual circumcision, there is some nuance in the contrast that Abulafia seemingly seeks to draw between the Jews and the gentile nations. This is in keeping with his earlier association of Jesus and Muhammad with curse and blessing, respectively, in that some positive connotations were there conceded to the gentiles. We noted that the Active Intellect, for Abulafia, possessed a polarity of good and evil. So too do we now find this to be the case with

⁷⁶ מפיל בשרא.

⁷⁷ Wolfson notes Maimonides’ perception that circumcision tempered the carnal impulse. *Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 90, 219–220. The issue will be discussed more fully in chapter five, below.

respect to circumcision; Abulafia indicates that the numerical value of the phrase “their circumcision” (five hundred and twenty), is to be equated to that for “life and death.”⁷⁸ Along similar lines, despite their demonic nature, flesh and blood, which forestall apprehension of the divine, nevertheless are vessels that “bear the potential for apprehension.”

It is not entirely clear whose circumcision Abulafia refers to as “life and death” in the current context; he may be referring to circumcision purely of the flesh and blood. And perhaps the latter are vessels for the apprehension that they ultimately obstruct in that cognition begins with the senses. Regardless, what is important to note is that, in that same way that, among the gentile nations, there was blessing and curse, positive and negative, so too with circumcision there is life and death. Abulafia thus undermines the sense of an utter polarity between the spiritual Jew and the carnal gentile.

A Nuanced Position

In his determination to see the Pope, we can already detect Abulafia’s active interest in interacting with the Christian world. It may be that Abulafia took note of the Christian side of some of the contemporary discourse concerning the messiah, and that this influenced his formulation of a mission to Rome. In this connection, some attention should be paid to the Barcelona Disputation of 1263. The Disputation marks the real beginning of opportunistic Christian engagement with rabbinic literature. As is apparent from the extant accounts of the Disputation, there was a Christian eagerness to perceive, in a rabbinic story concerning the messiah’s prior presence in Rome, a literal truth.⁷⁹ Friar Paul contended that the aggadah, which relates that the messiah had been found outside the gates of that city, was to be taken literally. This Christian approach resonates with Abulafia’s apparent feeling that a mission to Rome was to be central to his own messianic calling.

⁷⁸ *Sefer ha-Hayyim*, MS Munich-BS 285 fols. 22a, 23b; printed edition (*Maṣref ha-Sekhel*), p. 85.

⁷⁹ See BT. *Sanhedrin* 98a. Berger, “Captive at the Gate of Rome,” pp. 3–4, 12–13.

From a certain perspective, however, Abulafia's conception of the messiah's appearance in Rome was actually closer to that of Naḥmanides than to that of Friar Paul. Despite the nonliteral reading of the aggadah that he framed during the Disputation, Naḥmanides accepted the tradition, prevalent in Jewish circles of the day, that the messiah was ultimately to appear in Rome.⁸⁰ And Abulafia, in line with Naḥmanides, would naturally have maintained that the messiah had not already appeared in Rome in antiquity in the person of Jesus; rather, the coming messiah (Abulafia himself, in his own estimation) was to do this. As noted by Berger, Naḥmanides' nonliteral reading took its place within a lineage of such Jewish approaches to this aggadah, undertaken precisely because of the fodder a literal interpretation offered for christological readings.⁸¹ Naḥmanides had also maintained that the messiah would perform signs when in Rome, a notion which Abulafia also related to his own mission.⁸²

Nevertheless, at times Abulafia deviates from the view of the messiah offered by Naḥmanides, seeming to hold a view more in keeping with the approach taken by Friar Paul in the Disputation. Naḥmanides sought to blunt the Christian claim that the messiah possesses an ontological status above that of the angels, asserting that all of Israel, in fact, enjoys this lofty status. This disagreement concerned, of course, the pivotal question as to the human or divine nature of the messiah.⁸³ Abulafia, quite to the contrary of Naḥmanides, held as a core doctrine the notion that he himself had achieved, through his mystical practice, a state that was at once angelic, divine and messianic.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ Idel, *Messianic Mystics*, p. 61. Roth suggests that the notion of a messianic mission to Rome must have been in wide circulation at this time, and that Abulafia need not have been "necessarily influenced" specifically by the Disputation. Roth, "The Disputation of Barcelona (1263)," p. 130 n. 24. Of course, the Disputation, which was widely attended, as Roth notes (*ibid.*, p. 135), would most assuredly have played a large role in disseminating this conception, particularly in Abulafia's town of residence in the 1270s, Barcelona. See also Chazan, *Daggers of Faith*, pp. 69, 87. Here, R. Isaac b. Yedaiah's *Commentary on the Aggadot of the Talmud* is discussed. This mid-thirteenth century text also suggests that there was a widely disseminated Jewish belief, following after the talmudic reference to which Naḥmanides addressed himself, that the true messiah would present himself in Rome.

⁸¹ See n. 80.

⁸² See Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, p. 128; Idel, *Messianic Mystics*, p. 61; *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, p. 55 n. 7.

⁸³ See Chazan, *Daggers of Faith*, pp. 91–92 for Naḥmanides' argumentation on this subject.

⁸⁴ That Abulafia's messianic conception was influenced by other aspects of the contemporary discourse may also be apparent from his prediction that the redemp-

If we have seen that Abulafia both allowed for some redeeming merit in the gentile world—as in the case of Islam, given what Abulafia perceived to be the nature of that faith’s covenant with God—and that Abulafia may have allowed himself to be influenced by Christendom, in the case of the messiah’s mission to Rome, then we would do well to look for more evidence that Abulafia’s polemical stance with respect to the non-Jew possessed nuance. Despite his very harsh appraisal of Christianity, Abulafia does make some surprising mitigating statements when referring to the sages of the nations more generally. Such conciliatory notes are actually consistent with a more gracious, even admiring, view of the religious other that does appear, at times, in wider contemporary literature.⁸⁵

All the more surprising are these concessions when one observes that Abulafia created a strictly ordered and hierarchical epistemological

tion was to occur in 1290. The timeframe of 1,290 years, taken from the end of the Book of Daniel, had traditionally been read as the length of Jewish exile, as, for instance, in Rashi’s conception, which was taken up by Joseph Kimhi. Chazan, “Joseph Kimhi’s *Sefer Ha-Berit*,” pp. 427–428. It is noteworthy, however, that Abulafia adhered to the Christian calendar in positing the year 1290, rather than 1358, as the onset of redemption. In other words, Abulafia’s dating proceeds, not from the destruction of the Temple, but from the birth of Jesus. This may be due, not so much to Christian influence, as to the fact that Abulafia was to turn 50 in 1290. Berger, “The Messianic Self-Consciousness of Abraham Abulafia,” p. 58. See also Chazan, *Barcelona and Beyond*, p. 177. Hames suggests that Abulafia held to the year 1290 as that of the redemption not only because of the traditions surrounding the 1,290 years and because of his own age, but also because Abulafia’s Joachimite neighbors believed that date to have momentous eschatological significance, and Abulafia sought to interest them in his messianic mission. *Like Angels on Jacob’s Ladder*, p. 28. See Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb*, p. 291, for an example of medieval Jewish calculations of the end time that hinge upon the date of Jesus’ crucifixion. See *ibid.*, p. 293, for possible Joachimite influence on this conception. See Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, p. 179, for what Scholem considers to be the simultaneous development, among theosophic kabbalists and Joachimites, of closely parallel conceptions of world history and eschatological expectation.

⁸⁵ Saperstein points out that there were instances in the thirteenth century of positive evaluations of Christians by Jews and Jews by Christians. The impact of these statements on the modern historian in appraising the inter-religious ethos of the time, he suggests, tends to be muted by the more numerous polemical texts and historical chronicles of violent interactions. The positive statements occurred especially in the context of exhortations to an individual’s own group to elevate their level of conduct. Saperstein, “Christians and Jews: Some Positive Images,” pp. 236–237. So, for instance, we find a thirteenth century Jewish appraisal of Christians as being more schooled in philosophy—even in Maimonides—than Jews, and another of Christians being more fervent in prayer than Jews. *Ibid.*, pp. 241, 243. Similarly, we find Christians praising Jews for their veneration of the Sabbath and holy days, for their moderate speech, for their devotionism to the point of martyrdom and for their commitment to education. *Ibid.*, pp. 237, 239, 240.

taxonomy concerning the ability of the sages of the nations, as against the Jewish kabbalist, to apprehend the divinity. Frequently Abulafia contrasted the level of intellective attainment of Jewish recipients of esoteric doctrine (the *mequbalim*) with that of the philosophers and “scientists.” Although often he spoke in only general terms of the latter categories, such that Jewish philosophers or scientists may also be included within this taxonomy, it nevertheless becomes apparent that Abulafia sought to contrast the intellective and spiritual potential of Jews with those of the other nations. In the case of the nations, the highest possible attainments are confined to the philosophical arena, as against the prophetic conjunction with the Active Intellect that may be attained by the Jews.⁸⁶

⁸⁶ In the case of Jewish philosophers, the *potential* is at least ever-present for them to penetrate the divine realm more deeply via recourse to Jewish esoteric doctrine. For gentile philosophers, however, the latter doctrine is entirely out of reach. In *Sheva' Netivot ha-Torah* (*The Seven Paths of Torah*), the fourth of the seven methods of scriptural exegesis is represented as that of the philosophers, while the first four levels as a whole are common to both Jews and Christians. Idel, *Language, Torah, Hermeneutics*, p. 93. Nevertheless, while it is quite apparent that a Jewish philosopher may well progress to yet higher levels of insight by embracing kabbalah, as Wolfson notes, not even all of the first four levels of interpretation are truly accessible to the gentile, presumably since halakhah and other Jewish modalities figure into these methods. *Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 76–77. It is clear that Abulafia at times intends for Jewish philosophy to be understood as a step on the path of mystical attainment. Nevertheless, Wolfson notes that a tension is present in Abulafia's doctrine, as kabbalah is at times perceived as philosophically grounded, while at others the two fields are rendered as distinct from one another. *Ibid.*, pp. 73, 79. Chazan notes the claim of Abulafia's rival, Solomon ibn Adret, also a kabbalist, that even some philosophers acknowledged the superiority of prophetic revelation to their own. Chazan, *Daggers of Faith*, p. 146. Adret cites Plato and Aristotle in this regard, but one might recall as well the argument passionately made by Judah Halevi in the *Kuzari*. Significant is Halevi's contention that it is specifically an apprehension of the Tetragrammaton that is out of reach of the philosophers; the lesser cognomen 'Elohim is apprehensible by them, but the Tetragrammaton may only be grasped by the prophet. H. Wolfson, “Maimonides and Halevi,” p. 318. E. Wolfson has observed that this conception of Halevi's is carried yet further: For Halevi, the prophet, who he equates with the one who has learned the secrets of the *merkavah* (the divine chariot seen by the prophet Ezekiel), is one who has an actual vision of the Tetragrammaton, an experience beyond that which a mere philosopher may attain. E. Wolfson, “*Merkavah* Traditions in Philosophical Garb,” pp. 185, 237–238. Wolfson has demonstrated Halevi's indebtedness to hekhalotic mysticism. Halevi's rejection of philosophy is apparent as well in his elimination of the Active Intellect, and its influence upon the human intellect through the imagination, from his notion of prophecy. For Halevi, that which the prophet sees is a real entity in its own right and not an imaginative product, although apprehension of it is nonetheless still channeled through the imagination—the “inner eye”—and the intellect. *Ibid.*, pp. 205–207, 211. Of course contemporary tension over the status of philosophy in Judaism became centered around Maimonides' work. Ravitzky observes that Moses

The philosophers and scientists of the other nations are denied the access to the divine afforded by the methods open to the kabbalist.⁸⁷ Writes Abulafia,⁸⁸

And because this supernal wisdom is the pinnacle of all wisdom and knowledge, because it is divine wisdom, it depends upon *'alef bet gimel*, that is, the alphabet, because from it the divine powers are known, which are powers in the body that are called *Šva'ot* (Hosts) of God. This wisdom is hidden from all scientists (*hokhmei ha-meqar*), who, when they see the matter, it immediately seems to them from the first that within it is much confusion. And this matter is that the human intellect is not able to grasp them...

As Abulafia informs us slightly earlier, the name *Šva'ot* indicates the Prince of the Countenance, that is, the angel Metatron, or the Active Intellect.⁸⁹ The other nations, thus, are, in Abulafia's estimation, bereft of the intellective principle with which the Jewish people may engage. Apparent once more is the relevance of the contemporary polemical ethos to Abulafia's own formulations. The laying claim to intellective exclusivity is key in both the polemical and mystical arenas.

Along similar lines, Abulafia relates that, due to their deficient intellects, the nations misconstrue the status of the source of intellection, the Active Intellect itself, as the divine son. Abulafia explains that the metaphor of sonship with respect to God is appropriate for Metatron, or the Active Intellect, but that it is just that, a metaphor, and nothing more. Clearly Abulafia alludes here to the Christian conception of Jesus as the son of God.⁹⁰

ibn Tibbon rejected, in favor of an approach that always inclined toward the traditional religious perspective, the approach of his father Samuel toward *The Guide of the Perplexed*. The latter had sought to balance Maimonides' more Aristotelian assertions against sometimes contradictory religious ones. For ambivalence among early kabbalists toward philosophy, see Dan, "Gershom Scholem's Reconstruction of Early Kabbalah," pp. 45–46. See also E. Wolfson, "Hebraic and Hellenic Conceptions of Wisdom in *Sefer ha-Bahir*." Philosophical and mythological notions are here seen to be present side by side, and the reaction of kabbalists to philosophy is seen to manifest itself in both a positive and a negative fashion; pp. 152–154. For Isaac of Acre, a second generation disciple of Abulafia, and his perception of philosophy's inferiority to mysticism, see E. Fishbane, *As Light before Dawn*, p. 89.

⁸⁷ See, for instance, Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 73–80.

⁸⁸ *Hayyei ha-Nefesh*, MS Munich-BS 408 fols. 67b, 67a; printed edition, pp. 113–114.

⁸⁹ Ibid., MS Munich-BS 408 fol. 66a; printed edition, p. 112.

⁹⁰ It is worthy of note here that, at least by implication, Abulafia leaves open the possibility for the identification between Jesus and the Active Intellect. Christians, he suggests, understand Jesus (or the Active Intellect) as the divine son; it is simply

It is not that there is between them [the Active Intellect and God] a closeness at all like that of a father to a son, and understand this, because several nations err. And even if the intellectuals [of these nations] enter into this, they are unable to bear the subtlety of the matter, because the senses somewhat prevail over them, and they are destroyed. And understand this.⁹¹

It is the essential carnality of Christendom, their subjugation to the senses, that affects even its sages, Abulafia contends, leading to their ultimate downfall. Their being “destroyed” likely alludes to the conception discussed earlier, in connection with Esau, that failure to apprehend the Active Intellect consigns one to death, as against the life of the world to come.

Key to the distinction, for Abulafia, between the gentile sage and the Jewish kabbalist is the Hebrew language. This is already apparent from the earlier passage’s placing of emphasis on the importance of the Hebrew alphabet for wisdom concerning Metatron. More particularly, a facility with the kabbalistic methods of letter permutation, which a knowledge of Hebrew makes possible, distinguishes the Jewish kabbalist from the gentile sage. Nevertheless, it is significant to note that Abulafia believes it possible for the sages of the other nations to engage in letter permutations of a lesser order by making use of the letters of their own alphabets.⁹² We must presume that some form of lesser engagement with the Active Intellect results from such a process, which does seem to go beyond the bounds of what Abulafia understands as philosophy and science. Abulafia’s strict taxonomical, indeed ontological,⁹³ distinction between the Jewish kabbalist and the gentile

that they misguidedly take literally this appellation. Abulafia himself to a certain extent identified Jesus with the Active Intellect, as we have already seen in connection with his association of the Jesus/Muhammad composite with the curse and blessing, respectively, harbored therein.

⁹¹ *Sefer ha-Šeruf* (*The Book of Refinement*), MS Munich-BS 22 fol. 219a; printed edition, p. 130. Abulafia explains somewhat earlier in the text that the son to which he refers is the Active Intellect and the Prince of the World, that is, Metatron. Ibid., MS Munich-BS 22 fol. 219a; printed edition, p. 129. See also ibid., MS Munich-BS 22 fol. 218a; printed edition, p. 127. For Metatron as Prince of the World in Naḥmanides, see Abrams, “The Boundaries of Divine Ontology,” pp. 312–313. See also Idel, “The Writings of Abraham Abulafia and His Teaching,” p. 88 (in Hebrew).

⁹² Idem, *Language, Torah, Hermeneutics*, p. 101; Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia*, p. 62. Wolfson notes a statement by Abulafia concerning the fact that languages aside from Hebrew also carry an esoteric dimension. Idem, *Venturing Beyond*, p. 188.

⁹³ It is, in fact, the linguistic superiority of the Jews, endowed as they are with the only language that is natural, and not conventional, that gives rise to their quasi-angelic status. Idem, *Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 61–62.

sage must be understood as more qualified, then, than it appears in Abulafia's more harshly worded declarations. Though Abulafia would never have conceded that a gentile sage might attain the intellectual heights possible for the Jewish kabbalist, still, both of their efforts may apparently proceed in kind. It is simply that the Jew has at his disposal unique tools. He has the language of creation itself, Hebrew,⁹⁴ and he has as well the *mišvot*, adherence to which brings a distinct covenantal relationship with God and a wisdom of a higher order than that possible for the gentile.⁹⁵

In this regard, Abulafia's assertion should be noted that, at the apogee of mystical attainment, the efflux from the Active Intellect enables the Jewish kabbalist to prophesy in all seventy of the gentile languages. There is a great significance, and perhaps an irony, to the fact that the most distinguishing achievement of illumination of which the Jew is capable, for Abulafia, manifests itself in the ability to acquire a divine facility with languages of the gentiles.⁹⁶ In his drawing of the languages of the nations into such proximity to the Jew's unique moment of revelation, we must observe that Abulafia demonstrates again an intense interest in bringing the larger world into his kabbalistic messianic discourse. One can see how Abulafia's perspective inclines toward the view that revelation, or mystical union, overcomes the self/other dichotomy.

Abulafia's sense of the connectedness between Hebrew and the other languages also implies a historical messianic dimension to his thought. Abulafia felt that the diaspora of the Jews among the nations was divinely orchestrated for the purpose of diffusing the Hebrew language among the nations. Through this global proximity of Hebrew to the other languages, the latter could ultimately be returned to the

⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 63.

⁹⁵ As Wolfson summarizes Abulafia's view, "...one may speak of the *mišvot* as the mystical means to attain knowledge of God." Ibid., p. 192. Idel adopts the view of the *mišvot* as essential preliminaries, for Abulafia, to the mystical project. "Inner Peace through Inner Struggle," p. 81. See above, p. 5 n. 8.

⁹⁶ Wolfson observes the tension between Abulafia's notion of the ontological distinction between Hebrew and the other languages and the idea that the "...latter are thought to be contained in the former." It is this containment of the other languages within Hebrew that justifies the possibility for the attainment of revelation through a language other than Hebrew; when one achieves revelation through a non-Hebrew language, one has located something of the primordial essence that still survives in that corrupted language. That is to say, one has hit upon something that in its essence is reflected only in Hebrew. *Venturing Beyond*, p. 64.

former, primordial tongue, with redemptive consequences.⁹⁷ The exclusivity of Judaism, and of Jewish mysticism most particularly, seems, for Abulafia, to provide fuel for the fascination that he has with engaging the larger religious world. This, of course, was the same fascination which must have precipitated his revelation concerning a mission to the Pope. It is the intensity of Abulafia's interest in the Christian world that frequently undermines the ontological barriers that he erects between gentile sage and Jewish kabbalist.

Questions Concerning the Uniqueness of Jewish Attainment

Abulafia appears to suggest that there are difficulties that arise with regard to the distinctions that he seeks to draw between the enlightened Jew, who cleaves to the Active Intellect, and the gentile sage, for whom pure divine intellection is impossible.⁹⁸ In one passage from *Ḥayyei ha-Nefesh*, Abulafia laments what he perceives to be a confused state in the religious sphere with respect to what constitutes true revelatory intellection. The improper beliefs held by the gentiles, Abulafia professes, may be difficult for all but the truly enlightened Jew to distinguish from true and pious beliefs, and so the former may come to pervade the latter. There is, Abulafia observes, a cross-pollination among religious faiths, to include Judaism, which arises from difficulties in distinguishing that which is intellective, and thus divine, from that which is corrupted. Abulafia's sense of this fluid inter-religious

⁹⁷ Idel, *Language, Torah, Hermeneutics*, pp. 23, 108.

⁹⁸ Idel and Hames offer similar interpretations of Abulafia's story of a pearl that is the inheritance of a man's son, as against his two servants, a variation on the medieval story of three rings for three sons. The single pearl here is the inheritance of the Jews, God's favored ones, as against Christians and Muslims. Idel views the story as implying that Christianity and Islam "...are a vain pretense, having no theological basis at all," this because of their status as servants, without rings or pearls of their own, and not as sons. Idel observes that the fact that the pearl is hidden away in Abulafia's telling of the story reveals the sentiment that even the Jews lack full enlightenment. Ultimately, however, with the recovery of the pearl, an ingathering of the nations into Judaism will occur, as Idel reads the story. *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, pp. 48–50. Hames as well sees the story as suggesting that the Jews enjoy a uniquely superior position, although in the present they are not living up to it, due to their lack of understanding of Scripture. In the eschatological future, through knowledge of the divine name, this understanding will be realized, and universal forgiveness and unity will be possible. *Like Angels on Jacob's Ladder*, pp. 66–69. Idel observes that, for Abulafia, Jewish identity is contingent upon knowledge of the name. "'The Time of the End,'" p. 172. Given that Abulafia considered his generation to be lacking in knowledge of the name, we may see that he understands Jewish identity as unconsummated.

engagement, and of a permeability to Judaism in particular, is striking, given our goal here of perceiving precisely this phenomenon in his own thought. Abulafia drives home by his own example the inscrutability of the fragile distinction between that which is intellective and that which is imaginative, according to his terminology, or, put another way, between that which is “authentically Jewish” from that which is debased. Concerning God’s imparting of the Torah to the Israelites, Abulafia writes,⁹⁹

And behold, the nearest nations who heard the great good that God, may He blessed, did with us and with our fathers endeavored with all their ability to copy the Torah from one writing to another and from one language to another. Until they found that they copied according to their knowledge and they did not observe whether or not they changed a word of God’s. And you know that the matter of the confusion of the religions and bodies of knowledge and faiths is dependent upon matter and forms and times and places and incidents that arise, because it is impossible for any man among men to be apart from these matters... Until many among our nation muddled up and confused even the holy religion, until they say this and that... and they say that this for them is an intellective matter, that God did not command the *mišvot* that are in the Torah as the men of our Torah and our sages explain them. But they have an explanation that is explained as they wish. And if this circumstance happens with that which everyone believes to be divine, derived from the Torah and prophetic, that is, the confusion and changing of beliefs and division of final divine intentions which are not in doubt for any enlightened one, how does this not happen for that which is believed by its writer to have been written from his own great wisdom, but none of which he was commanded in a prophetic state to write?

Abulafia explains that the nations’ efforts to absorb the Torah resulted in errors due to their own dearth of illumination and to the vicissitudes of human existence. The errors perpetrated by these nations were apparently reabsorbed into Jewry at times, until Jews in some respects came to misunderstand their own Torah. What results is that some challenge, in their ignorance, proper performance of the *mišvot*. Were it not for the fact that he refers to Jews, it would appear that Abulafia implicitly levels this charge against Christian interpretation of the *mišvot*, that is, against the Christian notion discussed earlier that prescriptions in the Torah concerning the *mišvot* should not be taken literally. Torah, for those who misinterpret it in this fashion, Abulafia writes, is explained capriciously as regards the *mišvot*; it is explained

⁹⁹ *Hayyei ha-Nefesh*, MS Munich-BS 408 fols. 44a, 45b; printed edition, p. 78.

“as they wish (*k’ṣonam*).” Abulafia states here that these errant ones mistakenly claim to be proceeding in an “intellective” manner, which recalls all the more the Christian polemical perspective that the Torah should be interpreted more spiritually and freely with respect to the *mišvot* and less carnally, that is, literally, as is the rabbinic approach.

It appears that Abulafia alludes here to nascent Christianity within the Jewish community in antiquity; these were Jews who erred with respect to the *mišvot*, from Abulafia’s perspective. Perhaps, in terms of their having been led astray by other nations, he intends to evoke a hellenistic or pagan influence upon these wayward Jews. Alternatively, Abulafia may be referring to Jews of his own day, who are swayed by contemporary Christian perspectives concerning Jewish legalism. Regardless, it does appear that Abulafia views Christianity as a threat to Jews precisely because of the commonality that there is between the two faiths, resulting from the fact that they both draw upon the same textual source. A destabilizing effect ensues, as misinterpretation cannot be easily distinguished from proper readings. Abulafia may have Islam in mind as well, particularly since he offers a reverse argument to Muslim claims that Jews had in places distorted the Scriptures.

Interestingly, Abulafia goes on to refer specifically to even greater problems with respect to the Oral Torah. There, confusion is magnified because the composition of these texts did not originate from a prophetic state. The result, Abulafia will go on to indicate, is that the Talmud is full of conflicting opinions emanating from different sages on numerous issues. When one adds to this, he writes, misunderstandings on the part of the readership, confusion only worsens. Abulafia views, he writes, the entire corpus of Maimonides’ work as directed toward erasing this confusion, although he singles out *The Guide of the Perplexed* in this regard. It is certainly conceivable that Abulafia is aware here of the tack taken by Nahmanides in the Barcelona Disputation with respect to the aggadot that Friar Paul brought to bear as evidence for the notion that the rabbinic literature attests to the messiah’s having already arrived. Among other points, Nahmanides had maintained that these aggadot were easily misinterpreted, and that they were not to be taken as authoritative.¹⁰⁰ Both Nahmanides and Abulafia suggest the danger posed by Christian misreadings of rabbinic literature.

¹⁰⁰ Chazan, *Daggers of Faith*, pp. 96–100. See also *ibid.*, p. 140 for the similar concerns regarding aggadot raised by Solomon ibn Adret.

The misunderstandings that are perpetrated by the nations or by misguided Jews result, it is apparent from Abulafia's prior pronouncements, from a human susceptibility to carnal modalities. That is, in the absence of a link to the divine, which is lacking among the gentile nations, human reason may be diverted by the imagination or by the senses. Such is the case even among the greatest sages of the other nations. Abulafia addresses some important ramifications of this doctrine in another discussion of the shortcomings of the philosophers.

Concerning the question of the soul's relationship to the body, the question that "...is the first peg from which the Torah hangs and the pillar upon which the knowledge of man rests," Abulafia declares that "...there is a great need for every true intellectual to investigate all of this through clear proofs."¹⁰¹ Such proofs, he asserts, are beyond the purview of those who do not draw inspiration from the divine. That is to say, philosophers, be they gentile or Jewish, do not have sufficient tools to arrive at true knowledge. He writes,¹⁰² "There is no way to bring a proof concerning what is investigated scientifically (*be-hokhmah*) except through sensory and intellective [and] divine proof received from the Torah, that is, from secrets of the Torah." Science can not rival the insight that is open to the kabbalist. It is interesting to note, in passing, that the kabbalist's modality is in part sensory; one must somehow distinguish between carnal sensation and sensation that operates in service of the divine, certainly no easy task. Regarding the proofs that are derived from the secrets of the Torah, to which the kabbalist alone may gain access, "...not one of them is understood by the masses, and even from most sages they are hidden... And they are received, prophetic, divine proofs from the Torah, and the philosophers do not know these proofs."

Abulafia holds that the uninspired sage or philosopher does not access knowledge through the Active Intellect. Thus, his recourse to reason does not exceed the level of apprehension that is offered by the imagination. In polemical terms, even the intellective efforts of such a one are essentially carnal, and, hence, evil. Writes Abulafia,¹⁰³

And do not let vain ideas sway you, and reasoned opinions concerning what you already apprehend truthfully (*ve-da'ot mahshaviyot mi-mah*

¹⁰¹ *Hayyei ha-Nefesh*, MS Munich-BS 408 fol. 32b; printed edition, p. 47.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, MS Munich-BS 408 fol. 32a; printed edition, p. 48.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, MS Munich-BS 408 fol. 33b; printed edition, pp. 48–49.

she-kevar 'alah be-yadkha be-'emet)... [There should be no] true proof for you except faith and imaginative thought, not a sensory image and not intellectual apprehension and not knowledge received from the people I mentioned. And because of this your reason may be confused, because it may not be in any respect that a true proof contradicts another true proof. Thus you must believe the truth in all that is sought, and no doubt should persist...

Abulafia relates here that peril awaits those who fall victim to the ratiocination of the philosophers. It may be that the anxiety that Abulafia manifests here is grounded in the fact that it is difficult to discern the difference between an “imaginative thought” which is inspired by the intellect and a “sensory image” that is not, the latter being the product of man’s own mental capacities alone. Indeed, even the type of “intellectual apprehension” that Abulafia mentions is not, in fact, derived from the Active Intellect, and is therefore not credible.¹⁰⁴ The difficulty here is similar to that mentioned earlier, where one must somehow distinguish between carnal and divinely inspired sensation. In this respect, Abulafia’s uneasiness regarding the confusion and doubt that are easily engendered by “vain ideas” and “reasoned opinions” seems well-placed.

According to Abulafia, the gentile intellectual threatens to throw the Jew’s reason into confusion, while “faith and imaginative thought” counter this threat. Despite the fact that the imagination, at least in part, then, is to be harnessed in order to attain proper understanding, it is nevertheless the imagination that is at the root of the threat posed by the gentile nations, as is apparent elsewhere in *Hayyei ha-Nefesh*. This is suggested in the context of a discussion of the risks faced during the visionary encounter with the divine. The passage begins as follows:¹⁰⁵

And thus I report to you that the obstruction to apprehension is the material that is clothed in form and which strips off form. And if it is clear and illumined it is called “speculum.” Thus it is divided into two kinds in place and height, supernal and terrestrial, shining and not shining. And all of the prophets saw in the speculum that does not shine, and Moses our rabbi, may peace be upon him, saw in the speculum [that shines]. And the name of the vision [*mar'eh*, or, “mirror,” *mar'ah*] in the

¹⁰⁴ Hames notes Abulafia’s awareness of the difficulties involved in discerning true revelation, which rises above any proofs that may be advanced from reason alone. *Like Angels on Jacob’s Ladder*, p. 61.

¹⁰⁵ *Hayyei ha-Nefesh*, MS Munich-BS 408 fols. 51b, 51a; printed edition, pp. 88–89.

language of the idolators is “speculum,” and the name of the Glory in the language of the idolators is “cluriya,” and so too the name of the brilliance in the language of the idolators is “claro.” Thus the name for prophecy is “vision” (*mar’eh*). And the image, in the apprehension of the prophets and visionaries and seers and the pure of knowledge and the sages of the intellect and the like, is like him who sees the form of the face of a man in clear water, and another sees it in cloudy water, and another sees it in a clear vision, and another sees it in a muddy vision, and another sees it in the light of a candle by night, and another in the light of the stars, and another in the light of the moon, and another in the light of lightning, and another in the light of a clear stone shining in the night, and another in the light of the sun on a cloudy and foggy day, and another nearby, and another at a distance, and another always in the brilliant light of the sun at midday. And this [last one] is alone the level of Moses our rabbi, peace be upon him...

Abulafia first references a tradition concerning the perceptual modality of the prophets and of Moses during their revelatory experiences.¹⁰⁶ Telling here is that each of the two specula through which the prophets and Moses would apprehend the divinity is referred to by Abulafia as an obstruction (*ha-monei’a*). This is apparently so given that the specula, to differing degrees, occlude perception, and as well because of the sensory basis through which the specula and the prophetic experience operate. We will see shortly that Abulafia repeatedly uses the same term, “obstruction,” to refer to the demons who seek to interfere with the mystic’s efforts to encounter God. That Abulafia would apply this term to the specula themselves reflects the tension that results from the fact that both imaginative and intellective impressions are mediated through the same sensory faculties, which are in their essence of a low, or even evil, order. The specula, then, are at once the media of apprehension and filters of a sort, impediments to pure apprehension.

What we have already perceived to be an anxiety-producing difficulty in correctly understanding the nature of one’s sensory impressions, that is, of discerning whether they are divine or demonic, is heightened through Abulafia’s lengthy elaboration here upon the multiform and subjective nature of the prophetic experience. In the current context, Abulafia considers only prophecy, and so his interest is not to suggest any ready way to discern whether a visionary experience might perhaps be of a “muddy” yet still prophetic type or whether it is of the idolatrous type to which a gentile would be

¹⁰⁶ Wolfson, *Through a Speculum That Shines*, pp. 26, 147–148, 151, 214, 344, 353.

subject. Nevertheless, we may see from what he has written here that the problem is a nagging one.

It is significant that in the current context Abulafia actually points to three words of the gentiles—*especlaria*, *cluriya*, and *claro*—in order to better illustrate the connection between the Hebrew words *mar'eh*, or vision, the *Kavod*, or Glory, and the *ziv*, or brilliance. We may be reminded of Abulafia's point that letter manipulations may be conducted in any language. Recourse to the language of the gentiles in the very context of what will prove to be an effort to establish Jewish exclusivity in the prophetic arena is both ironic and characteristic of Abulafia. For if gentiles are denied true prophecy based on their linguistic inadequacies, how could it be that their language is more conducive to an understanding of prophecy, in the current passage, than is Hebrew? We can sense how Abulafia's fear regarding the attractiveness of what he refers to as idolatrous influences was, again, well-founded. Abulafia was a participant in what we should observe to be a rising level of paranoia on both sides of the Jewish-Christian cultural divide, as the perceived threat of being led astray by the other found expression in a variety of modalities.¹⁰⁷ A recognition of the fragility

¹⁰⁷ Chazan notes the more concerted efforts made by the Church in the thirteenth century to constrain Jewish-Christian daily interactions. The perceived need to mark the Jew as the potentially threatening other by means of mandatory distinctive garb, exemplified by the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, is one facet of this development. Chazan, *Daggers of Faith*, p. 31. In Spain, the Church institution of distinctive Jewish dress was seen as a preventive against inter-religious sexual relations. Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, p. 133. Christian taboos against sexual intercourse with Jewish women, Nirenberg suggests, resulted from the anxiety engendered by the two groups' relative theological proximity, as against Islam, while there was less hesitancy among Christians toward intercourse with Muslim women. *Ibid.*, p. 140 n. 49. As the pitch of Jewish anti-Christian polemic rose, prohibitions against the Jews' blaspheming against Christianity were also instituted. Chazan, *Daggers of Faith*, p. 32. These one may see in terms, not merely of the need to prevent such disrespectful conduct, but as well of the sensed need to prevent the Jewish perspective in its most emphatic forms from reaching the ears of any susceptible Christians. It was this impulse on the part of the Church that led ultimately to the Talmud trial of 1240. *Ibid.*, p. 34. Nevertheless, the Christian polemical discourse also involved giving credence to those Jewish teachings which could serve as fodder for Christian contentions. *Ibid.*, p. 68. Such a strategy dates back to the very origins of Christian exegesis of Scripture, but the Jewish witnessing doctrine of Augustine serves as a particularly significant touchstone for medieval Christian polemicists. Nirenberg observes that the Jewish witnessing doctrine did hold sway in Aragon, resulting in the Jews' being protected. *Communities of Violence*, p. 21. See the contrasting view of J. Cohen above, p. 30 n. 15. One can see that a precarious position was upheld by Christians who sought to uphold only certain aspects of Jewish theological literature, a position which perhaps served to heighten the level of anxiety of some Christians. Chazan notes that the attention of the Church, in the

of constructs of alterity is certainly at work in the case of Abulafia's unease, which seems to have been heightened further by an awareness of the latent attractiveness of the other.

Abulafia continues in *Hayyei ha-Nefesh* by referring to two other groups of people aside from the prophets. Next among them are the sages, below the level of the prophets but still noteworthy for their observance of the *mišvot*. They perceive God like one in a dream, in a purely imaginative fashion. Following these comes the final group, the common folk, who do not obey the *mišvot*. They "...are very far below those mentioned, and they are neither man nor beast, but demons, because they are below the level of man and above the level of beasts in their nature." Abulafia is not completely clear on whether he intends certain Jews in his mention of the common folk who forsake the *mišvot*, or whether he considers all Jews to be either prophets or sages. But a danger is certainly implicit for Jews who leave aside the Law, and it is clear elsewhere that Abulafia does adopt a trifold categorization of the Jewish nation.¹⁰⁸ There is an analogy to be drawn between the discussions of the gentile philosophers in the earlier passages from *Hayyei ha-Nefesh* and the current consideration of those who do not observe the *mišvot*. The former had been seen to lead the Jews into evil with their "reasoned opinions," while the latter are themselves classified as demonic;¹⁰⁹ both groups are identified with the forces of evil. Regarding those who do not observe the *mišvot*, Abulafia continues,¹¹⁰

And these masses see God with their evil imaginations, like he who sees the form of the face of a man drawn on a wall in colors, and it is a partial form. Or like one who sees it drawn impressed or raised upon a seal of gold. And regarding this, it is necessary for most of the nations to draw the vision of the nature of God, may He be blessed, from their evil imagination and their deceitful image, [in] forms of different bodies, upon tree and stone and silver and gold, in their courts and fortresses

face of the perceived threat posed by Judaism, was directed in the first place toward protecting its own, followed thereafter by polemical and missionizing efforts directed toward a Muslim and Jewish audience. *Daggers of Faith*, p. 35.

¹⁰⁸ See, for instance, *ʿOšar Eden Ganuz*, MS Oxford-BL 1580, fol. 92b; printed edition, p. 190, although in that context the lowest echelon among the Jews is still ranked above the nations.

¹⁰⁹ See *The Guide of the Perplexed* 1:7, regarding this notion and Adam's three sons, to which Abulafia will allude subsequently.

¹¹⁰ *Hayyei ha-Nefesh*, MS Munich-BS 408 fols. 52b, 52a; printed edition, pp. 89–90.

and palaces and houses of idolatry, in the tops of mountains and hills. These [three types of men, the prophet, the sage, and the commoner] then are the three kinds of sons of Noah, and from them originated all of the world. And they are righteous, intermediate and wicked... And they parallel three groups of ministering angels. One group says "Holy," another says "Holy, holy," and another says "Holy, holy, holy" (Is. 6:3). And this is the very terrible praise, and its matter is that these feel, [these feel and imagine], and these feel, imagine and intellectualize; this among the lower ones. Indeed in the supernal ones these are the intellectualized, these are the intellectuals and the intellectualized, [and these are the intellectuals and the intellectualized and the intellects]. And the sons of Noah are Ham, Shem and Japheth. The sons of Shem are angels, and the sons of Japheth are men, and the sons of Ham are demons. And those who resemble angels are intellective and are called completely righteous... And those who resemble men are spiritual and are called intermediate... And those who resemble demons are corporeal, and are called completely evil...

He who does not observe the *mišvot* sees God through his "evil imagination," as opposed to that imaginative faculty to which the prophetic specula relate.¹¹¹ Recourse to the evil imagination results in idolatrous tendencies, so that anyone who falls victim to it sees images of God that are tantamount to the graven images found, among other places, in pagan temples.

Abulafia's earlier interest in the words *especlaria*, *cluriya*, and *claro* becomes apparent here; they relate to the Hebrew triad *sekhel maskil muskal*, intellect, the intellectualizing, and that which is intellectualized. The prophet is the one who unites all of these qualities within himself, or is the one who corresponds to such an angel above. He as well is able to "feel, imagine and intellectualize." That is, his sensory faculties receive the stimuli that are then imprinted upon his imagination, to in turn be analyzed by the intellect, all operating in the service of prophecy. This is the dynamic which was first conveyed through the motif of gazing into the speculum. The observant Jew is either capable

¹¹¹ See also *Mafteah ha-Hokhmot*, MS NY-JTSA Mic. 1686, fol. 126a; printed edition, p. 92, regarding the conception of the *mišvot* as that which distinguishes the Jews from the other nations. See also *ibid.*, MS NY-JTSA Mic. 1686, fols. 124b–125a; printed edition, p. 89, where Abulafia places in the mouth of a gentile the assertion that if a single gentile can achieve a state of completion without the Torah—that is, without observance of the *mišvot*—then the Torah is unnecessary. Wolfson suggests that the gentile nations alone, and not the nonobservant Jew as well, are consigned to the lowest category. *Venturing Beyond*, pp. 61–63. Wolfson does observe, though, that Abulafia will on occasion classify some Jews as beasts. *Ibid.*, p. 63 n. 95.

of this, as a prophet, or of a lesser order of imaginative experience, as a sage. The latter's recourse to the imagination is no longer ultimately intellectual; regarding such ones Abulafia writes, "these feel and imagine," but they do not intellectualize. Nevertheless, their imaginative encounter with God is still neither impious nor transgressive; they are simply human in their essence, and correspond to the intermediate level of spirit.

By contrast, anyone who does not observe the *mišvot* is wholly evil. He partakes of a sensory and carnal nature and is configured as a demon. Abulafia frequently cautions against the risk of falling victim, during the mystical encounter, to the idolatrous temptations posed by demons, and in the current context we see this concern articulated in more polemical terms. The gentile world is wholly demonic and devoted to the flesh, and the Jew who forsakes the *mišvot* has been subjugated by its forces, which are rooted in the senses and the imagination. Jews are distinguished from gentiles based upon a certain mode of conduct, Abulafia suggests, one which prevents their relating to God in a demonic fashion. But Abulafia, in many of the passages that we have considered thusfar, demonstrates considerable discomfort concerning the possibility of a Jew crossing the line, whether through confusion, misunderstanding or even a disregard for the *mišvot*. There is an apparent unease concerning the other's threatening (demonic) nature, rooted, in turn, in a fragility latent in Jewish identity. This fragility is apparent in that the loss of one's Jewish identity appears to be an ever-present threat.

Abulafia's Vying Perspectives on the Gentile Nations

In a closely related passage from *'Ošar 'Eden Ganuz* (*The Hidden Treasure of Eden*), Abulafia has a great deal more to say concerning the nature of the other nations. Abulafia's discussion begins in a familiar vein, but the thrust of this passage will ultimately mitigate against the thesis that to be gentile is to be, like a nonobservant Jew, an idolator, possessed of a demonic nature. Abulafia possesses two competing impulses, one to accord the gentiles a more equitable status vis-à-vis the Jews, the other to react against this possibility because of the threat it poses to Jewish distinctiveness. We have already noted some qualifying taxonomic distinctions in Abulafia's sense of the Jewish world, and we have also discerned some nuance to Abulafia's appraisal of the non-Jewish

world, particularly as regards the covenant possessed by Muslims. That of the latter harbored something of the intellectual or spiritual, we may recall.¹¹² The current passage reflects as well this more congenial attitude, along with its opposite.

Before exploring *ʿOṣar ʿEden Ganuz*, it is worth investigating whether Abulafia's relatively ungenerous view of the nations in *Ḥayyei ha-Nefesh* can be explained in the light of his personal saga. Hames puts forth the view that, beginning around 1285, when *ʿOṣar ʿEden Ganuz* was composed, Abulafia's messianic project, though still present, had become more "tempered."¹¹³ This was the moment that Abulafia described as a turning point in his life, when he overcame the idolatrous forces that had assailed him for fifteen years. It is possible to construe the less tolerant spirit of *Ḥayyei ha-Nefesh*, reflective of what I have referred to as Abulafia's anxiety and feeling of vulnerability with respect to the demonic, as the product of this prior period of besetment, composed as it was in 1279. By contrast, with *ʿOṣar ʿEden Ganuz*, it could be said that Abulafia had entered a period of greater confidence, having, he maintained, overcome the demonic threat.

This orderly picture is disrupted, however, when we consider the evidence of *Sefer ha-Melammed*, composed in 1276, also during Abulafia's period of demonic trial. This text, we have seen, enunciates a more moderate position with respect to the status of the nations than that presented in *Ḥayyei ha-Nefesh*.¹¹⁴ In order to make sense of this data, then, we might construct a different narrative, saying that Abulafia's mission to the Pope, in particular, was characterized by a critical perspective on Christendom. *Ḥayyei ha-Nefesh* was written while Abulafia was en route to Rome, so this would then explain his less charitable disposition. However, we might have expected an attitude from Abulafia, at this momentous juncture in his life, more in keeping

¹¹² Abulafia's more favorable disposition toward Islam, as against Christianity, is reflected as well among Abulafia's kindred Spanish Jews. See, for instance, the notion conveyed by Todros Abulafia that Christian women are unclean while Muslim women are not. Nirenberg, "Love between Muslim and Jew in Medieval Spain," p. 131. The trend was matched on the Christian side, where Muslims were often seen as less odious than Jews. Ibid., pp. 142, 151. See also idem, *Communities of Violence*, p. 195. See also Glick, "My Master, the Jew," p. 162. Jews engaged with Muslims in scientific and intellectual interchange at the highest levels. Occasionally, however, the same was true as well of Jews and Christians. Ibid., pp. 164–165, 167, 169.

¹¹³ Hames, *Like Angels on Jacob's Ladder*, p. 31.

¹¹⁴ See above, pp. 47–48.

with that found in *’Oṣar Eden Ganuz*, given the pull that he felt toward Rome, and since he later described himself as having been tempted at this time. The truth is, in this instance we are left to grasp at straws, to piece together a coherent story based on scant (and not completely reliable) evidence.

It is demonstrably difficult to superimpose Abulafia’s life story upon his works in an effort to trace the development of his doctrines, and, in the current discussion, the effort is highly conjectural. This is not to say that Abulafia was not influenced by his circumstances. Of course, he must have been. Abulafia, clearly, was consistent on many doctrinal points throughout his career, and he was changeable on other points. We will notice, as we proceed, that there are some motifs that engage Abulafia’s attention more than others during particular chronological periods. We must expect that his tumultuous life story, in tandem with his complex inner life, played a role in this. As to the current context, it is instructive for our purposes to observe that Abulafia’s perspective on questions concerning the evaluation of the religious other was mutable. This fact reflects a bona fide internal tension. This tension, I would maintain, is a relative constant in Abulafia’s literary corpus. This is particularly apparent when contrasting perspectives appear even in the same text, sometimes within a few sentences of each other, as we are about to see. This conflictedness, as is apparent even in his last known work, *Imrei Shefer* (*Sayings of Wisdom*), does not appear to have been finally resolved at any particular point in Abulafia’s life.

In *’Oṣar Eden Ganuz*, we see that Abulafia first indicates that the gentile nations differ from one another in terms of the degree to which they are pious or impious. To evaluate a nation along these lines, one must scrutinize it in accordance with the three modalities discussed earlier, the intellective, spiritual and corporeal: “...one must examine if their intellect prevails over spiritual matters. And their soul if it prevails over material matters. And their body if it presides over that which is outside of it, or if the thing is reversed.”¹¹⁵ Each successively higher faculty within the human being must subjugate and control the impulses of that level immediately beneath it, while the lowest level, the corporeal, must remain in control of those material things that are external to the

¹¹⁵ *’Oṣar Eden Ganuz*, MS Oxford-BL 1580, fol. 92a; printed edition, p. 189. The passage is also discussed by Hames. *Like Angels on Jacob’s Ladder*, p. 62.

body. By suggesting that not all nations are alike, Abulafia has already conceded that it must be that not all nations are wholly demonic and carnal. Abulafia suggests that the higher two levels of attainment are to some extent accessible to gentiles. This view represents a decided departure from what we found in *Ḥayyei ha-Nefesh*.

Abulafia explains that one must examine representative individuals from each of the three categories within a given nation, observing the¹¹⁶

...good ones that are intellectuals (*she-be-ba'alei ha-sekhel*) among the nation's people, that is, some of their sages (*miqṣat ḥakhmeiah*), knowing the secrets of the nation; and the good ones that are soulful (*she-be-ba'alei ha-nefesh*), that is, the righteous sages (*ha-saddiqim ḥakhamim*) such as those who fear sin; and the good ones from among the physically oriented (*she-be-ba'alei ha-guf*), that is, those who preside over their money and love their bodies more than it.

Abulafia allows for the existence of intellective sages among the gentile nations, although he makes no mention here of an even higher order, that of gentile *prophets*. Still, it is clear that to a gentile sage, as he is described here, neither demonic nor idolatrous traits can be ascribed; in some way he partakes of a proper comportment toward God. These individuals, Abulafia suggests, are in possession of the given nation's "secrets," by which, given the context, Abulafia certainly must intend esoteric knowledge concerning the divine. To grant to a gentile nation the possibility of hidden, pious and intellective revelation concerning the divine is remarkable and far exceeds Abulafia's appraisal of the gentiles in *Ḥayyei ha-Nefesh*.

We should also observe that Abulafia states, with respect to the lowest strata of humanity within a given gentile nation, that one should evaluate whether control over money is demonstrated. Polemical charges flew back and forth between medieval Jews and Christians concerning the other's inability to bridle his avarice and hedonistic proclivities.¹¹⁷ It is noteworthy here again that Abulafia, at least in this instance, is tolerant of the notion that a gentile nation may be capable of manifesting proper conduct in regard to the human temptation toward greed.

¹¹⁶ *ʿOṣar ʿEden Ganuz*, MS Oxford-BL 1580, fol. 92a; printed edition, pp. 189–190

¹¹⁷ In *Milhemet Miṣvah*, the notion that Christians may be absolved of their earthly sins through baptism or donations is attacked. Chazan, *Daggers of Faith*, p. 62. Marcus refers to the "well-known images of the Jew as usurer or as an embodiment of pride." "Jews and Christians Imagining the Other in Medieval Europe," p. 217.

Abulafia next indicates that he is aware that some will object to the specific evaluations made of a given nation. In fact, he will go on to make direct mention of the inter-religious polemical discourse. Regarding the tripartite composition of the Jewish people, Abulafia first writes,¹¹⁸

...we have strong proofs from every side that we are divided into three human levels, and they are the level of *kohen*, *levi*, and *yahadut*... And just as the Israelite nation is God's treasure above all the nations, so the *levi* is God's treasure above all of the other Jews. And so the *kohen* is God's treasure above all the levites... And the head of the heads of the Israelites is the king. And the head of the heads of the levites is the sage. And the head of the heads of the *kohanim* is the prophet.

The tripartite method of evaluating the structure of a nation is here applied to the Jewish nation itself. The Jewish mystic as prophet—Abulafia himself, in his own estimation, being the chiefmost exemplar of this group—stands at the intellectual pinnacle of all humanity, at the uppermost height of the loftiest nation. Abulafia continues,¹¹⁹

And there is no doubt that none of the nations will deny the loftiness of our nation and of our Torah and of our language and of our writing. Rather all attest to these four heights and also attest to what necessarily results from them, that is, in terms of thought and knowledge and action. However, they say that this was so before, but all of that has passed and it is not so today, because there are already other nations who have been brought closer to God than our nation, and thus are closer to Him.

That the Jewish people were uniquely endowed by God, Abulafia says, is universally accepted. The special status of the Jews, he suggests, is distinguishable when one observes their national character, as well as their literary and intellectual distinction. These hallmarks manifest themselves in terms of superiority in “thought and knowledge and action,” arenas that conform to the prophetic, sagacious and kingly spheres, respectively. Jewish superiority to the gentiles at every level was at one time universally accepted, according to Abulafia, although many now claim that this distinctiveness to the Jewish people has passed on to other nations.

¹¹⁸ *ʿOṣar ʿEden Ganuz*, MS Oxford-BL 1580, fol. 92b; printed edition, p. 190.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, MS Oxford-BL 1580, fol. 92b; printed edition, p. 191. See Hames, *Like Angels on Jacob's Ladder*, p. 63.

Two streams of Christian thought are perceptible in this contention, as Abulafia frames it. One of the earliest doctrinal tenets of Christianity finds expression here, that God transferred His covenant from the Jewish people to those who seek salvation in Jesus. The new covenant of the Christians supplanted that of the Jews, and, for the Christian thinker, Christians became God's chosen people. Second, there is a suggestion that the nation that has "been brought closer to God" is the nation whose status on earth is higher. It is "closer to Him," meaning that God bestows His beneficence on that nation which is most deserving of it, according to this line of Christian reasoning. Since Christendom is manifestly dominant from a politico-economic perspective, as against the downtrodden, wayward Jews, Christendom must exceed the Jewish nation in merit.

Abulafia next seems to manifest some sensitivity to the intention of the Christian polemical campaign of his own day, that being the conversion of the Jews to Christianity:¹²⁰

And their [the gentiles'] belief concerning our status neither raises it nor lowers it for us. Because since the truth is with us, what addition [will result] when he reports anything to us, since the truth is with us? And what subtraction [will result] from anything that he does not report to us? But the use in it is for those who recognize, turning from the lie to the truth. And the harm is for him who stands and holds to this and does not examine himself to find the truth. And know that these who believe bring the Torah to prove what they believe for us concerning our status. And indeed, we bring not only the Torah to this knowledge, but the Active Intellect reports this to us in two intellective ways, and this is by way of the utterance which comes from it in a hidden fashion and the utterance which comes from it in a revealed fashion.

The Jew, Abulafia professes, should be indifferent to the gentile's opinion concerning his standing. Implicitly, then, the Jew should be immune to the gentile's efforts to sway him to the perspective that God's favor has passed from the Jewish people. Indeed, the efforts of such a gentile should serve only to alert the listener to the fallaciousness of such a challenge to Judaism, for the gentile perspective is an unexamined one. "These who believe"—that is, the gentiles, whose "belief" was Abulafia's initial concern—may have recourse to the Torah, according to Abulafia, seeking proof there regarding the status of the Jews. Abulafia appears fully cognizant here of the extent to which Torah

¹²⁰ *ʿOṣar ʿEden Ganuz*, MS Oxford-BL 1580, fol. 92b; printed edition, p. 191.

interpretation had, from the beginnings of Christianity, come to serve as a polemical battleground; the mining of Torah for prooftexts of Jesus' messianic status and of the Jews' ultimate condemnation by God were a Christian staple from that religion's first days.

Abulafia seeks the means by which to unequivocally defeat the Christian line of argumentation, and, not surprisingly, he turns to the Maimonidean approach to Judaic revelation for this purpose. For Abulafia takes it as self-evident that the Jew may access the Active Intellect in the service of his own prooftexts. By this circular argument, the Jew is not dependent solely on prooftexts from the Torah in order to verify the superior intellective status of his religion, since the Jew alone, and not the gentile, may access the truth through his superior intellective endowments.¹²¹ Abulafia explains that the revelations from the Active Intellect occur in both concealed and revealed utterances.¹²² But Abulafia departs here from his prior opinion, from earlier in the same passage, that even a gentile nation may be in possession of intellectual secrets. We may see here how Abulafia's polemical assertions come to the fore when his ambivalence toward the religious other triggers insecurity with respect to Jewish identity.

Abulafia concludes in traditional fashion. The Jews' access to the Active Intellect, synonymous with their higher status among the nations, stems from "Abraham's, and his sons' after him, hearing the voice of God and preserving His laws and commandments and rules and teachings." The Jewish commitment to halakhah renders the Jewish people distinctly privileged. This position, of course, contradicts directly the Christian perspective (not specifically enunciated in the current context) that Jewish adherence to the law serves only as an impediment for them, rendering the Jewish people non-intellective and carnal.¹²³ Continues Abulafia,¹²⁴

We know this chief status because it is the first cause of our being distinguished from the other nations. So that we say that even today any

¹²¹ The use of the Active Intellect by the Jew in elucidating Torah is intimately related to Abulafia's conception of the Torah as identical with the Active Intellect. See Idel, *Language, Torah, Hermeneutics*, p. 33; Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia*, p. 141.

¹²² For *dibbur*, or "utterance," as an appellation for the Active Intellect, see Idel, "The Writings of Abraham Abulafia and His Teaching," p. 92 (in Hebrew).

¹²³ Chazan notes that Barcelona during this period saw an intensification of Christian attacks on the illogicality of Jewish legalism, and of a concomitant response from Jewish quarters. *Daggers of Faith*, pp. 145–146.

¹²⁴ *ʿOṣar ʿEden Ganuz*, MS Oxford-BL 1580, fol. 92b; printed edition, p. 191.

who is from him [Abraham] and does not follow his way [that of the *mišvot*] is not of his seed. But there are no flaws in it, and he who believes otherwise errs. And this is since it is explained to all of us in received doctrine that this chief's [Abraham's] father, along with all of his family and nation, was an idolator, and he [Abraham] was separated and distinguished from all of them and brought to the true service of God...

The Jews, Abulafia reiterates, are distinguished by the covenantal *mišvot* received by Abraham. Abulafia once more appears to refer to Jews who do not preserve the *mišvot*, suggesting again that they are to be likened to gentiles; such Jews are not truly of Abraham's seed.¹²⁵ From this we may understand Abulafia's demonization of the Jew who neglects the *mišvot*, along with the psychological imperative that Abulafia felt to utterly exclude the nonobservant Jew from in-group status. We can only speculate as to the degree to which the Christian argumentation to which Abulafia alludes may have led to the wavering of some Jews' dedication to upholding the *mišvot*. There is, it should be noted, no clear evidence that these Christian efforts had a substantial impact on their Jewish targets.¹²⁶ But they did lead to a notable concern on Abulafia's part.

Abulafia enunciates another logical proof-text for the distinctiveness of the Jews: Since Abraham was set apart from the idolators all around him through the *mišvot* bestowed upon him by God, so too is the Jewish nation set apart through the *mišvot*, and is brought into "the true service of God." The polemical challenge posed by Christians in regard to the Jews' historical separateness is subsequently addressed by Abulafia in terms of the Jews' lowly status:¹²⁷

But the intellectual ideas are that since it is just for this nation [that of the Jews] to be the most lofty with respect to God of all the nations, and closer to Him, may He be blessed, and more considerate of His concerns and His attributes and His actions, and it is as distant as can be from Him, the secret of the judgment is for it to be humble and lessermost of all the nations and to be ruled and taunted by all who see it. And thus

¹²⁵ It is possible that Abulafia alludes to Muslims here; they are sons of Ishmael, Abraham's son, but they do not follow the *mišvot*, and so they are not truly, in Abulafia's estimation, of Abraham's seed.

¹²⁶ Chazan, *Daggers of Faith*, p. 159. Marcus, however, points to a passage from *Sefer Hasidim* which suggests a Jewish anxiety that Jewish-Christian polemics could lead to the less sophisticated Jew's being led astray. "Jews and Christians Imagining the Other in Medieval Europe," p. 215. Marcus also points to a rise in anecdotal evidence for Jews' conversion to Christianity by the mid- to late twelfth century. *Ibid.*, p. 216.

¹²⁷ *Oṣar Eden Ganuz*, MS Oxford-BL 1580, fol. 93a; printed edition, p. 192.

there is no validity to those who challenge us by eliciting the idea of our lesser, humble and lowly status.

Abulafia maintains that the lowly status of the Jews in exile is not to be taken as a proof of their having fallen from their superior relationship to God. Rather, he indicates that the Jewish people continue to enjoy a privileged relationship to God in potentia, if not in actualization. For the moment, the judgment upon the Jewish nation is that it deserves to be downtrodden with respect to the other nations, but this judgment has not stripped from it its potentiality for intellectual actualization, which is the ultimate seat of the nation's uniqueness. "This is the potentiality that is near it with respect to its tools, which are its Torah and language and writing, whose divine loftiness has not and will not depart," writes Abulafia. That which rendered the Jews a nation apart from the time of Abraham continues to do so even in the present day. The fact that the nation is indeed "humble and lessermost of all the nations" in no way conflicts with this essential status. Abulafia's recourse to Jeremiah 24:9 with respect to the "ruled and taunted" state of the Jews in the latter's day implicitly points to an anticipated redemption.

Abulafia goes on to reference once again the challenge posed to Judaism by Jesus and Muhammad:¹²⁸

And if you say, "Did not Jesus and Muhammad also, in what they innovated, [seek] only to unify the name?" I will say to you that you speak the truth to him, if you will show, in what they innovated, corporeal, spiritual and intellectual utility in what distinguishes them. But the two of them were from our nation and innovated matters that diverged from God in these three ways. And it is known that they were not fathers who conducted their sons in the ways of God, but they found nations full of deviant men and released from them the bindings that were there, and they rejoiced in them as if they were released from prison. Because he found every lion and wolf and bear, himself lacking knowledge and swelled with his fat; so that today they are the fair ones (*ha-tovim*), enlightened ones, according to the masses, among whom they are great charlatans, pursuers of money and haters of the intellectual souls. And for all this, anyone who finds peace through them already recognizes the truth, and with his recognizing the truth he comes to be included among those who are drawn after our nation. And they are those who are called the pious of the nations of the world, who possess a portion in the world to come.

¹²⁸ Ibid., MS Oxford-BL 1580, fol. 93a; printed edition, pp. 192–193. See also Hames, *Like Angels on Jacob's Ladder*, p. 64.

Abulafia again manifests an awareness that Christians and Muslims will make counterclaims for their own faiths. They will maintain that their respective faiths both uphold the monotheistic paradigm and are exemplary in the terrestrial, spiritual and intellectual spheres. Abulafia does not evince any new line of argumentation to counter these rival claims. Rather, he simply asserts the fallaciousness of these positions, suggesting that these two faiths were based upon the flouting of the *mišvot*, and professing that their adherents, likened to criminals, were decadent and libertine, reveling wantonly in their new-found freedoms, animalistic, ignorant, gluttonous, deceitful and greedy. It is clear once again that central to his entire conception of the distinguishing features of Judaism are the *mišvot*, by which men are “conducted...in the ways of God.”

Nevertheless, Abulafia concludes with some interesting remarks. He suggests that for all of the misguidedness embodied in Christianity and Islam, it is nevertheless still possible to derive from these faiths some measure of the truth. The gentile who is able to attain this truth is appropriately termed a pious one, and he does have opened for him a share in the intellectual afterlife of the world to come. This is a remarkable position for Abulafia to take, where before he stated that Esau’s lot was only death. Abulafia navigates this apparent difficulty by suggesting that the intellectual attainments of the pious gentile will inevitably lead him toward Jewish modalities; he is “drawn after our nation.” Abulafia’s remarks mitigate again here, albeit in a qualified fashion, against the strictly demonic and idolatrous conception of Christianity and Islam.

In a related discussion from *Sitrei Torah* (*Secrets of the Torah*), written shortly after his escape from Rome in 1280, Abulafia again considers the issue of sectarian innovation as it bears on questions of national identity. He approaches the phenomenon in general terms, examining when sects may be seen to have retained their original collective national identity. Interestingly, Abulafia deems the patriarch Abraham to have been an innovator.¹²⁹ However, Abraham differed from Jesus, in Abulafia’s estimation, because he innovated for the good and did not spread confusion through trickery, as did Jesus. Abulafia denounces Jesus as one who “...gathered many men and confused their minds

¹²⁹ *Sitrei Torah*, MS Paris-BN héb. 774, fols. 142a–b; printed edition, pp. 93–96.

and knowledge with strange wonders,”¹³⁰ and he once more refers to Jesus as a would-be “liberator of prisoners.” Jesus, Abulafia writes, only appeared to have mercifully lightened the legalistic burden of the masses, causing much mistaken rejoicing.

In truth, however, Jesus exchanged circumcision for baptism, and in so doing “...he transformed their form from that of men to that of women, and returned the foreskins of their hearts and the foreskins of their flesh, like women.”¹³¹ Abulafia subsequently derives a proof-text for Jesus’ truly idolatrous nature. He does so through a *gematria*, adding up the numerical values of the letters composing particular words and drawing connections between words or phrases possessing the same numerical value. The numerical value of the letters of the Hebrew name for Jesus, “Yeshu,” is the same, Abulafia observes, as that for the Biblical phrase “alien gods.”¹³² The accusation that Jesus feminized his disciples taps into that larger theme of the evil, feminine power of the religious faith of the other. This theme occupies a central position in the medieval polemical discourse.¹³³ We can sense that Abulafia perceives that femininity can be spread among the misled like a kind of contagion. Through his final proof, the *gematria* that references idolatry more generally, the sense is conveyed that femininity can be contracted from idolatry. This conception recalls that implied by the rabbis concerning R. Eliezer’s chance encounter with a sectarian, which led to his being beguiled and drawn into heresy.

¹³⁰ The traditional charge of Jesus as a sorcerer was one taken up by Abulafia. It is reflected as well in the contemporary polemical discourse, occurring in the context of the Jewish effort to end forced Christian preaching in synagogues. If the Pharisees charged that Jesus was a sorcerer, it was argued, then the Jews could not legally be forced to violate their own laws by listening to Christian preaching. Chazan, “Confrontation in the Synagogue of Narbonne,” pp. 442–443.

¹³¹ *Sitrei Torah*, MS Paris-BN héb. 774, fol. 142b; printed edition, p. 97.

¹³² *Ibid.*, MS Paris-BN héb. 774, fol. 142b; printed edition, pp. 96–97. This passage is mentioned by Hames, *Like Angels on Jacob’s Ladder*, p. 134 n. 20. See also *ibid.*, p. 140 n. 28.

¹³³ See Kruger, “Becoming Christian, Becoming Male?” Gilman, in *Jewish Self-Hatred*, pp. 4–5, notes the Christian ascription of menstruation to Jews. Johnson, “The Myth of Jewish Male Menses,” p. 274, maintains that earlier Christian contentions regarding Jewish male anal bleeding did not turn into a doctrine of Jewish male femininity until the early modern period. Nevertheless Johnson points to at least one Christian source from as early as 1302 which refers to Jewish male monthly bleeding. See above, p. 42 n. 56.

In general terms, we can sense in this passage a similar tendency to the one observed earlier in *’Oṣar Eden Ganuz*. In the current instance, Abulafia first somewhat undermines the sense of a distinctiveness to the Jewish people, given that he describes both Abraham and Jesus as innovators. Abulafia, to be sure, has it as his purpose to assert that the former innovated for good and the latter for evil, but it may be the implicit analogy between these two leaders that incites Abulafia to launch into his bitter polemic against Jesus. Insecurity engendered by threats to distinctive identity precipitates again and again discourses of othering. Abulafia is caught between two impulses concerning the other, between which he often oscillates.

*Prophecy and Messianic Deliverance
as Polemical Responses to Christianity*

As in the earlier passage from *’Oṣar Eden Ganuz*, Abulafia’s awareness of the Christian line of polemical reasoning is matched in another passage, this in *Maṣteah ha-Tokhaḥot* (*The Key of Rebukes*), composed in 1289. In this instance, however, Abulafia assumes a much more univocal stance, one that is harshly critical of Christianity. The passage bears analysis because it responds forcefully to anti-Jewish Christian argumentation, addressing in the process Jewish doubts triggered by these attacks. In the end, Abulafia ties together his conception of the meaning of his own mystical practice with a scathing rebuke of Christendom and, as well, with expectations for Jewish redemption.

Abulafia begins in *Maṣteah ha-Tokhaḥot* by laying out a set of rationalistic refutations to a familiar Christian argument, this being that it is historically manifest that God has transferred His favor from Jews to Christians. Abulafia directly equates the evil dimension of the Active Intellect, encountered by the Jew who seeks prophecy, with the nations who persecute the Jews. The inherent contention between Judaism (as intellective) and Christianity (as bestial) is thus drawn into a close connection with Abulafia’s most fundamental concern, individualized mystical praxis. It is suggested that essentially Christian potencies seek to thwart the would-be prophet.

Following this drawing of a stark divide between Judaism and Christianity—and the two components of the human psyche for which they

stand—Abulafia transfers his conceptions to the arena of human history. He continues,¹³⁴

Know that from the days of Abraham, these nations [the gentile nations inhabiting the Holy Land] were at the extreme of wickedness and served idolatrously only the divine attribute that leads each nation. Thus its way [that of each nation] is according to what it apprehends with respect to the Torah, with God, may He be blessed, restraining His anger to the tenth generation. Because thus we found from Adam to Noah that He was angered by idolatry and He restrained [His anger] from them until all the flesh upon the land had corrupted its ways, and He brought upon them the flood. And so too from Noah to Abraham there were ten generations, and were it not for Abraham the world would have been stricken in his generation as had been Sodom and Gomorrah and their ilk in fire. And pharaoh and his people were stricken in the days [of Moses], and seven nations in the days of Joshua. And the sages of blessed memory say that it says ten generations to announce how He restrained His anger. Not because of there being four or ten as a fixed sum, rather to announce that the restraint of His anger stands for many years. And sometimes He avenges immediately, in particular or in general, according to this or that action. And sometimes upon the sinner himself and sometimes upon his progeny, sometimes near and sometimes distant. And sometimes He restrains Himself greatly, and He extends our exile that stands to this day by a number of years whose sign is “the law of repentance” (*huqat teshuvah*)...

Abulafia is concerned with explaining how it is that the Jewish exile of his day has lasted for so many centuries, that is, how it could be that God would show such forbearance to the wicked gentile nations, given that He showed similar such restraint for only ten generations' duration in the examples enumerated.¹³⁵ The immediate context for this discussion concerns another question, "...how is it possible to think that the seven nations mentioned in the Torah were punished with the arrival of the Israelites in their land with destruction, and behold, they to this day are sunk in idolatrous worship and have not been eliminated from it [the Holy Land]."¹³⁶ Abulafia explains that their punishment will be carried out upon their descendants. Ultimately, the cause of their destruction will be their idolatry:

¹³⁴ *Maftelah ha-Tokhaḥot*, MS Oxford-BL 1605, fols. 48b–49a; printed edition, pp. 46–47.

¹³⁵ See *Masekhet Avot*, 5:2, and Maimonides' commentary, ad loc.

¹³⁶ *Maftelah ha-Tokhaḥot*, MS Oxford-BL 1605, fol. 48a; printed edition, p. 45.

...if idolatry is not first purged from the heart it is impossible to hear the voice of God. And it is the cause of the destruction of those who worship [idolatrously], like all of the nations, as if they are completely corporeal, because they worship idolatrously while they are not drawn after the opinions of the souls of the enlightened ones.

Naturally, Abulafia is of this same opinion in regard to the fate of Christendom. Abulafia refers further to Deuteronomy 9:5, "It is not out of your own righteousness and the rectitude of your own heart that you inherit their land, but it is out of the wickedness of these nations that the Lord your God bequeaths them to you, and for the sake of the thing that He swore to your fathers." Abulafia recognizes two explanations in the verse for the Israelites' reward, the oath to the fathers and the wickedness of the gentile nations. These two explanations pose a problem for Abulafia, however, in fathoming the ultimate reason for the Israelites' inheritance:¹³⁷

And here there is a difficulty, for if God decreed upon them in the days of the fathers to annihilate and destroy them, this was not due to their wickedness, but rather due to love of the fathers. And if it was thus because of their wickedness, then it was not due to love of the fathers. And if it was due to the two causes from the days of the fathers, behold, not one of them remains alive in the days of Israel.

Abulafia is not fully satisfied with these two explanations. He appears to object to the uncertainty as to whether, in terms of the Jews' inheritance, God is motivated by the desire to reward the Jews or to punish the nations, and he further seems to question the relevance of either motivation, since they are both based on God's response to an era and a cast of characters that are in the past. Abulafia will have recourse to a more recondite accounting for God's judgment upon the Israelites, one that encompasses both reward and punishment.

As we saw earlier, Abulafia explains that God's restraint need not conform precisely to ten generations' time. It may be of any duration, and His vengeance may be enacted in any way He sees fit, directly or indirectly, generally or upon particular individuals. Implicit here is the opinion that the duration of the Jew's exile should not cause a loss of faith among Jews. The fact that the end of exile does not in this case coincide with the ten generations timeframe does not mean that it is not destined to come to pass. Nor, similarly, should the length of the

¹³⁷ Ibid., MS Oxford-BL 1605, fol. 48b; printed edition, p. 46.

exile provide fodder for Christian argumentation.¹³⁸ Abulafia implies that there is a meaning behind God's choice for the duration of the exile of his own day. It will, he suggests, last for a duration equal to the numerical sum of the phrase "the law of repentance" (*huqat tes-huvah*), that is, for one thousand two hundred and twenty-one years. As in another text, *Gan Na'ul* (*The Locked Garden*), Abulafia fixes the time of exile at one thousand two hundred and twenty-two years.¹³⁹ By the *Gan Na'ul* accounting, Abulafia anticipated redemption in the year 1290, with the starting point for exile being the year 68.

The "repentance" that Abulafia implicitly conceives of as crucial to this redemption is to be understood as being that of the Jews. It stands, we may surmise, for their coming into a fully intellective state.¹⁴⁰ The contrast is apparent between this potentiality of the Jews and that of the gentile nations, whose idolatry places them under only one particular divine attribute¹⁴¹ and whose knowledge of Torah is inherently limited. The onus is upon the Jews for their deliverance; that Jewish "repentance" marks the end of exile signifies that the lofty status of Christendom does not negate the fact that the gentiles are merely passive agents of God's judgment upon the Jews for their own transgressions.

Concerning the apparent difficulty raised by the fact of the persistence of Jewish exile, Abulafia continues,¹⁴²

And we see today that the Christians worship idolatrously, and they do not recognize a word properly; and thus it is not proper [for them] to say that there is a difficulty concerning these matters [of the dispensation of reward and punishment], unless [they do so] because of a deficiency in the apprehension of the gift of the divine attributes. Because the one

¹³⁸ Chazan notes that, "A number of sources indicate that precisely this theme [the extraordinary length of the Jewish exile] lay at the heart of the energetic Christian missionizing of the middle decades of the [thirteenth] century." Such an argument was apparently raised during the forced Christian sermonizing in the synagogue of Narbonne in the late 1250s or early 1260s. "Confrontation in the Synagogue of Narbonne," pp. 451, 457.

¹³⁹ *Gan Na'ul*, MS Munich-BS 58 fol. 327a; printed edition, p. 37. See Hames, *Like Angels on Jacob's Ladder*, pp. 75–76.

¹⁴⁰ See Idel, *Messianic Mystics*, pp. 65–67, for the relationship in Abulafia's thought between the messiah, the Active Intellect and redemption. Abulafia conceived of the messiah as the Active Intellect itself, both as an internal human faculty through which an individual may achieve salvation and as an agent effecting historical redemption.

¹⁴¹ We might suspect the *sefirah Gevurah* here, which is associated with evil and with God's harsh judgment.

¹⁴² *Maftelah ha-Tokhaḥot*, MS Oxford-BL 1605, fols. 49a–b; printed edition, p. 47.

who recognizes them [the attributes] will not err and will not seek to judge his judge, only will he study the Torah as is proper, and it will explain to him all of its difficulties in matters like these, as we explained this [apparent] difficulty for him [that is, for such a one]. And regarding this it says (Deut. 9:6), “Understand that it is not out of your own righteousness [that the Lord your God gives you this good land...]” and it testifies (Deut. 6–7) “...for you are a stiff-necked people. Remember and do not forget how you provoked the Lord your God in the desert...” And therefore Moses wished to announce to us that it was not through their righteousness that the good land came to them as an inheritance, but because of another thing. And this is the idea that there is a reward that is not [appropriately given] in respect to its being properly possessed by the one who receives it, but in another respect [is it given], and like the sentence of reward so too is judgment and punishment. And this is a great secret that the Torah reveals, and with the admission of the disputant there is no need for witnesses. And thus Moses relates to them the anger and the judgment that infuriated him. And how could God seek to destroy them given his prayers and requests concerning the secrets of the attributes?

Abulafia seeks to explain that divine punishment and reward need not follow a scheme whose logic is readily apparent to humanity. Just as Israel’s reward, the Holy Land, was not accorded to them out of their own merits, so too is their punishment not simply understood in terms of their conduct. Israel does not receive reward and punishment because it deserves one or the other simply and in an obvious way. And in fact, the one who seeks to evaluate the justice dispensed by God in such a fashion is one who seeks to “judge his judge.” This, Abulafia suggests, is what the idolatrous Christians do by approaching the problem as they do, that is, by drawing conclusions from their own observations pertaining to the question of what judgment is appropriately meted out for Israel. Such an approach suggests an estrangement from the divine attributes, by which Abulafia likely intends the *sefirot*. Likewise, in the passage immediately preceding this one, idolators were adjudged by Abulafia to engage only one of these divine attributes. True attunement to the divine attributes will lead only in the direction of inquiry. The one who communes with the divine attributes investigates the Torah to understand the nature of issues such as the meaning of Jewish exile. He does not judge God’s actions but seeks out their explanation in Torah. And from the latter he will discern the reality of a “great secret” concerning the exile. Abulafia provides the example of Moses as one who plumbed the Torah’s secrets. It is because, Abulafia explains, of Moses’ “prayers and requests concerning

the secrets of the attributes” that God restrains His anger against the Israelites. To be attuned to the divine attributes is to refrain from judgment of God’s actions, which defy normal logic, just as to seek this attunement is to merit God’s mercy.

Abulafia does not ultimately elaborate upon the nature of the “great secret” of God’s imposition of such a lengthy exile upon the Jews. The phrase may refer either to his own calculations concerning redemption, which are indebted to kabbalistic hermeneutics based upon the Book of Daniel,¹⁴³ or it may refer simply to the perspective that the vicissitudes of the Jewish people are comprehensible not through any surface logic but, rather, that they result from the fact that the Jews possess a covenant whose nature transcends apparent justice. Regardless, the Christian approach to the question of the fate suffered by the Jewish people reveals only their own insubordination and detachment from the divine. By contrast, conjunction with the Active Intellect stands in direct opposition to the nature of the gentiles. This is apparent from an earlier statement of Abulafia’s, in fact his point of departure for the discussion of the destiny of the nations: “See and understand that the aim of the intention is to always hear the voice of God through the secret of prophecy that I told to you. And we learn from its words that if idolatry is not first purged from the heart it is impossible to hear the voice of God.” It is precisely because they do not commune with the divine after the fashion of the Jewish kabbalists that the gentiles, regardless of their current status, will be annihilated, while the Jews will be redeemed: “And it is the cause of the destruction of those who worship [idolatrously], like all of the nations, as if they are completely corporeal, because they worship idolatrously while they are not drawn after the opinions of the souls of the enlightened ones.”¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³ Abulafia follows the precedent set by Nahmanides in this regard. Caputo, *Nahmanides in Medieval Catalonia*, p. 145.

¹⁴⁴ Elsewhere Abulafia suggests that it is the high status itself of Christendom that will be responsible for its downfall. In *Maftelah ha-Shemot* Abulafia explains that the success of Christendom is at least the partial cause of its impiety. Abulafia writes that Christians commit the same error as did pharaoh, who thought, due to the extent of his power, that he “was the first god of all creatures.” Christians will be subjected, at the hands of the true messiah, to “harsh judgment” for their idolatrous beliefs, writes Abulafia, for which reason, he contends, the Christians refer to the messiah as “anti-Christ.” *Maftelah ha-Shemot*, MS NY-JTSA Mic. 1897, fols. 81b–82a; printed edition, p. 130. The analogy that Abulafia draws between pharaoh and Jesus will be discussed further. Note that the same analogy is also drawn in the Jewish response to forced

Speaking in Tongues

In all of their complexity, Abulafia's perceptions of Christianity reflect his contemporary context, as we have seen. Within the wide spectrum of his attitudes, we have noted a charitable streak, wherein Abulafia concedes a level of wisdom to the gentile sages, even to the point of allowing them some limited form of divine revelation. This acceptance of gentile wisdom is consonant with a deeper tendency that runs irrepressibly through Abulafia's thought, which is to imitate and emulate, whether consciously or unconsciously, Christian modalities. As mentioned, such a tendency has been discerned within the medieval European Jewish community by, among others, Liebes, Marcus, Wolfson and Yuval. This observation moves beyond the more commonly noted fact that influences from without impacted both Jews and Christians simultaneously. For instance, both faiths, following upon the example of Islam, intensified their engagement with philosophy, particularly during Abulafia's lifetime. Often, a seeming ease in the flow of influence—to the point of apparent simultaneity—is present, such that it may not even be possible to determine whether one religious faith borrowed from another or whether they both responded in kind to the same external stimulus. However, the case is more clear when one considers the appearance of specifically Christian doctrines and conceptions within the Jewish mysticism of Abulafia's era, and, indeed, in Abulafia's own corpus.

Two such proclivities in Abulafia's writing, observed already by Wolfson, concern, as mentioned, trinitarian doctrine and christological incarnationism. In addition, as discussed, Hames has explored the apparent borrowing by Abulafia of Joachimite paradigms. For the moment, I will investigate further Abulafia's absorption of Christian trinitarianism, which Abulafia has a tendency to pair with another motif culled from Christian tradition, that of prophetic "speaking in tongues."

Wolfson, in his monograph concerning Abulafia, observes that Abulafia maintained that God exists in a threefold state. This doctrine is particularly noteworthy in that Abulafia took theosophic kabbalists

Christian sermonizing in the synagogue of Narbonne. Chazan, "Confrontation in the Synagogue of Narbonne," p. 449. Abulafia's reference to himself as the Antichrist is discussed by Hames, *Like Angels on Jacob's Ladder*, p. 26.

sternly to task for propounding a sefirotic doctrine that, in his opinion, contradicted the notion of God's singular unity. Abulafia, while impugning those around him, sought vigorously to deflect from himself any charge of polytheistic beliefs. Yet the divine triad that Abulafia posited was—ironically, considering his critique of his rival kabbalists' view—seemingly sefirotic in nature. His own sense of a difference to his doctrine inhered in the professed view that this triad is wholly a unity. That Abulafia's doctrine echoes the Christian Trinity, clear enough on its face, is reinforced by the fact that Abner of Burgos identified the same three kabbalistic hypostases with which Abulafia was concerned—*Hokhmah* (Wisdom), *Binah* (Understanding) and *Da'at* (Knowledge)—as the entities which comprise the Christian Trinity.¹⁴⁵

Wolfson observes as well that Abulafia was critical of the Christian notion of divine sonship. This fact renders all the more surprising a particularly suggestive formulation that is elaborated upon at some length in Abulafia's *'Oṣar 'Eden Ganuz*.¹⁴⁶ There, a divine triad is directly analyzed in terms of the identities of the three persons of the Christian Trinity.

Abulafia's conceptions are imbedded within a convoluted set of letter operations. He writes as follows:¹⁴⁷ "...And the sum of 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10 combined is 'son.'¹⁴⁸ Because there is no 1, 2 there [that is, the letters *'alef* and *bet*, which together spell the Hebrew word for

¹⁴⁵ Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 131–133 n. 101; Baer, "The Kabbalistic Doctrine in the Christological Teaching of Abner of Burgos," pp. 280–284 (in Hebrew); Liebes, *Studies in the Zohar*, p. 142. Jewish convert to Christianity and fourteenth century polemicist Abner of Burgos turns as well to *Midrash Tehillim* for a proof-text of God's triadic essence, referring to three divine names in this regard, which are troped as attributes of God. Related triadic doctrines are present as well in both the *Zohar* and the work of Joseph Gikatilla. See other related triadic doctrines in Idel, "Notes on a Jewish-Christian Debate in the Middle Ages," *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 3 (1984), pp. 689–698 (in Hebrew). See also Hames, *The Art of Conversion*. Hames notes Ramon Lull's acquaintance with kabbalah, and observes the place of trinitarian doctrines and their affinities to kabbalah in Lull's efforts to woo Jews to Christianity. See also Idel, "Ramon Lull and Ecstatic Kabbalah: A Preliminary Observation." Idel maintains that Lull's affinity with kabbalah was primarily formal and not conceptual. After the Barcelona Disputation, Friar Raymond of Penafort engaged in synagogue preaching in which he continued to describe the Trinity in terms of Wisdom, Will and Power. Roth, "The Disputation of Barcelona (1263)," p. 133; Chazan, "Confrontation in the Synagogue of Narbonne," p. 454. See also above, p. 36 n. 39.

¹⁴⁶ *'Oṣar 'Eden Ganuz*, MS Oxford-BL 1580, fols. 14a–15b; printed edition, pp. 27–31.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., MS Oxford-BL 1580, fol. 14a; printed edition, p. 27.

¹⁴⁸ The sum of these digits is fifty-two, the same as that for the numerical values of the two Hebrew letters comprising the word for "son," *ben*.

‘father’], because it is hidden in the secret of YH, which is in the likeness of ‘father’ in reverse.”¹⁴⁹ Subsequently, Abulafia discusses the counting of the *sefirot*, indicating that they are not to be counted in a simple sequential fashion, but in a cumulative one; that is, the second *sefira*, for instance, possesses two “forms,” and so on up until the tenth, which contains ten “forms.” He continues,¹⁵⁰ “...See as well what is essential from the number of the two first *sefirot*, which are 1, 2 [again, *’alef* and *bet*, spelling the word ‘father’], and behold, regarding the one, which is the first, it is said regarding it that it is the Holy Spirit, also called ‘the spirit of the living God’...”¹⁵¹ Not long thereafter, Abulafia continues,¹⁵²

And indeed it [*Sefer Yeṣirah*] says that the first, which is one, is the Holy Spirit, and it is called the first *sefira*. And with the second their sign is “one, two” [that is, *’alef* and *bet*, spelling the word “father,” as above]. And from the third to the tenth their sign is “son,” whose sign is “Adonai” in general,¹⁵³ and he who thinks otherwise cuts the plantings and will be judged, because he has cut the wheel and the plantings. Because the plantings are planted in the wheel, and it is their root. And the secret is “five father five son,” and behold the hint “the son of David comes” and brings in his hand “prophecy”...

Throughout this portion of *’Oṣar Eden Ganuz*, Abulafia identifies the numbers one through ten as the *sefirot*.¹⁵⁴ These Abulafia equates with the Holy Spirit, the father and the son, in descending order. It is worth reviewing the mechanism by which this is accomplished: The third through the tenth *sefirot* together comprise the “son,” given that the sum of the numbers three through ten is numerically equivalent to the Hebrew word *ben*, “son.”¹⁵⁵ The letters comprising the word “father”

¹⁴⁹ That is, the sequence YH, whose letters represent the numerical values of ten and five, is the reverse of the sequence of the numerical values of the letters comprising the word “father,” one and two; five is one half of ten and one is one half of two.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., MS Oxford-BL 1580, fol. 14b; printed edition, p. 28.

¹⁵¹ *Sefer Yeṣirah*, Gruenwald ed., 1:9 (para. 10).

¹⁵² *’Oṣar Eden Ganuz*, MS Oxford-BL 1580, fol. 15b; printed edition, p. 31.

¹⁵³ The divine name “Adonai” has a numerical value of sixty-five, that is, fifty-two plus three (the first number in the set of three to ten) plus ten (the last number in this set), although see the continuation of this discussion below.

¹⁵⁴ For the *sefirot* as numbers in Abulafia’s thought, see Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, p. 349 n. 323; Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia*, p. 135. Abulafia’s amplification upon the significance of the *sefirot* reveals that he conceives of them as essentially synonymous with the Aristotelian separate intellects. See *ibid.*, p. 136.

¹⁵⁵ Note that this formulation is not far afield from the theosophic kabbalists’ identification of the *sefira Tiferet* as the son. Tishby notes the zoharic sefirotic configura-

have the numerical values one and two, respectively, although Abulafia notes that the first *sefira* is to be identified as the Holy Spirit, in accord with *Sefer Yeširah*.¹⁵⁶ The resulting parsing of the ten *sefirot* into Holy Spirit, father and son is a truly remarkable hermeneutical gesture on Abulafia's part.¹⁵⁷

Abulafia nonetheless hastens to affirm his own adherence to the monotheistic ideal, certainly intending here to disavow any relationship between his own trinitarian formulation and Christianity. Abulafia suggests that he who misunderstands the nature of the *sefirot* as he himself presents it transgresses in positing a breach or a multiplicity in the divine realm, effecting a "cutting of the plantings,"¹⁵⁸ precisely the accusation that Abulafia, elsewhere, levies against Christianity.¹⁵⁹ Abulafia presents similar cautionary notes in the context of a parsing of the divine into a triad similar to that found in *'Ošar 'Eden Ganuz*. This discussion, written around the same time as the latter, is accompanied by an imagined polemical exchange with a Christian:¹⁶⁰

Guard your soul...lest you think that this instructs that the divinity is threefold, and you will be destroyed with those who are destroyed in faith from humankind. And if [such a] man will say to you that the divinity is threefold, say to him, "lie and deceit," and indeed "three" by *gematria* is "lie and deceit" [having a numerical value of six hundred and thirty-five].

Abulafia's recourse to mystical hermeneutical methods—that is, to *gematria*—is one that we will continue to see as he attempts to adduce revelatory, and thus unassailable, prooftexts for these arguments. It is apparent that Abulafia attempts to counter with anti-Christian

tion wherein the *sefirot* *Hokhmah*, *Binah*, *Tif'eret* and *Malkhut* represent, respectively, the father, mother, son and daughter. *Wisdom of the Zohar*, pp. 281–282. *Tif'eret* is the sixth *sefira* in descending order, but it is often identified as embodying collectively the fourth through the ninth *sefirot*. Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being*, p. 358. See also Green, "Shekhinah, the Virgin Mary, and the *Song of Songs*," p. 38 n.150. See also *ibid.*, p. 40 n. 160.

¹⁵⁶ Thus the "father" is presumably relegated to the position of second *sefira*, again in accord with certain theosophic traditions, which also identify the third *sefira* as the mother. See previous note.

¹⁵⁷ Abulafia will return to this same overall formulation near the end of *'Ošar 'Eden Ganuz*. MS Oxford-BL 1580, fol. 158a; printed edition, p. 354.

¹⁵⁸ For a survey of scholarly approaches to this enigmatic phrase, see Abrams, "The Boundaries of Divine Ontology," pp. 293–298.

¹⁵⁹ See Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 131, 133.

¹⁶⁰ *Sefer ha-Hesheq (The Book of Desire)*, MS NY-JTSA Mic. 1801, fol. 27a; printed edition, p. 54. See Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, p. 380 n. 37.

assertions of piety the recognition that he has adapted a patently Christian doctrine. Certainly Abulafia seeks to divert from himself the real or prospective aspersions of his fellow Jews on this point. As well, Abulafia quite possibly is attempting to contradict the assertions of Christians, aware of his teachings, that he professes Christian truths. To observe the truly unitary quality of the trinity that he presents in *'Oṣar 'Eden Ganuz*, Abulafia suggests, is to recognize its stature as “Adonai.” This, he implies, forestalls the Christian misreading of the nature of the divine.¹⁶¹ That is to say, given the proper understanding, the *sefirot* are configured in a wholistic fashion as “five opposite five,” again in keeping with *Sefer Yeṣirah*.¹⁶² This doctrine manifests itself in the current passage in the form of a *gemaṭria*; the numerical values for the words “father” and “son,” added to five and five, yield the numerical value for the name “Adonai” (sixty-five).

Subsequently Abulafia invokes a messianic dimension to this proper apprehension of the triadic sefirotic array. To understand the *sefirot*—or to properly configure them, in theurgical terms—is to bring about the coming of the son of David.¹⁶³ We may well understand this to indicate that the mystic who grasps the nature of the *sefirot* himself is or becomes this son of David, the messiah. With the onset of this messianic identity comes as well prophecy.¹⁶⁴ All of these notions are consistent with Abulafia’s contention elsewhere that communion with the Active Intellect—to be identified, as well, as the Holy Spirit¹⁶⁵—brings the

¹⁶¹ This being the same misreading, that of a divine multiplicity, that is proffered by the theosophic kabbalists, according to Abulafia.

¹⁶² *Sefer Yeṣirah*, Gruenwald ed., 1:3 (para. 3).

¹⁶³ The phrase “the son of David comes” has a numerical value of sixty-nine, equal to the numerical value of the phrase “five father five son,” *he’ 'av he’ ben*, when the number of elements here, four, is also included in the sum.

¹⁶⁴ The numerical value of the word “prophecy” is sixty-nine. See previous note.

¹⁶⁵ Later in *'Oṣar 'Eden Ganuz*, Abulafia writes, “Know that the attributes depend upon the Holy Spirit to lead them, which is the leader of all. Thus it is called the first *sefira*, and it is the Active Intellect of all, which is the Prince of the World... And its name is ‘Angel of YHVH’ and it is the angel whose name is YHVH. And this is because all of the attributes are in its hand. And the attribute *Malkhut* is assigned the name ‘the tenth attribute’ and the attribute *Keter* (Crown) is the attribute that contains three comprising heights (*shalosh ma’alot kelaliyot*) and one specific comprising one is above all of them... And it is said, David already received *Keter Malkhut* [one of these three heights, referred to as crowns], that is, at the end of all the generations, *Malkhut* will be given to the tribe of Judah by an oath from God, and to the family of the house of David. That is, to his sons and to his sons’ sons until the messiah.” *'Oṣar 'Eden Ganuz*, MS Oxford-BL 1580, fol. 71a; printed edition, pp. 139–140. Here we see that the Holy Spirit is to be identified with the angel Metatron, Abulafia’s alter ego, who

mystic to a state of prophetic revelation, a state which harbors messianic implications.¹⁶⁶ It is apparent that, in the current passage, fraught as it is with Christian overtones, Abulafia intends to usurp the identity of Jesus, as it is conceived of by Christians, as this selfsame messianic son of David. Abulafia suggests here that he alone truly understands the nature of the trinity, a fact which accords him his messianic status. At the same time, Abulafia maintains that his apprehension of the true nature of the trinity places him at the utmost opposite extreme from the Christians, from whom he nevertheless manifestly borrows this very trinitarian doctrine. Such is the nature of his ambivalence toward Christendom. Abulafia contends that it is he himself who is in possession of the true doctrine of the trinity, and not the Christian.

We may gather that Abulafia perceives his own messianic status to have resulted from a communion with one party in particular of the collective sefirotic trinity that he presents here. This element of the trinity is that one from which, according to Abulafia, prophetic speech emanates.¹⁶⁷ Prophetic communion results, we learn, from the apprehension of the trinity as an unbroken unity, one to be encapsulated in the divine name “Adonai.” It is not surprising, then, to learn that the name ³Adonai indicates for Abulafia not only the ten *sefirot* conceived as a trinitarian unity but, as well, the demiurgic and messianic element within the sefirotic realm, the Active Intellect or Holy Spirit.¹⁶⁸

It is important to note that the Holy Spirit is likewise described in the New Testament Acts of the Apostles as the agent through which

comes into possession of the *sefirot Keter* and *Malkhut* (even though Metatron is here already identified as the first *sefirot*, the Holy Spirit, nevertheless he comes into possession of *Keter*, also to be understood as the first *sefirot*, in its aspect of union with the last *sefirot*, *Malkhut*), with messianic repercussions. Abulafia describes the sensation of being anointed—being rendered *mashiah*—that occurs at the time of receiving prophetic revelation. Ibid., MS Oxford-BL 1580, fol. 162b; printed edition, pp. 365–366. See Idel, *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia*, p. 127. For Metatron, see also above, pp. 41–42 n. 55, 56 n. 91. For Metatron as first and last of the separate intellects—that is, the *sefirot*—See also Wolfson, “Kenotic Overflow and Temporal Transcendence,” pp. 155–156. Idel suggests that Abulafia’s identification of the Holy Spirit with the Active Intellect comes from al-Farabi. “The Writings of Abraham Abulafia and His Teaching,” p. 88 (in Hebrew).

¹⁶⁶ See previous note.

¹⁶⁷ Abulafia refers to prophecy as “speaking in the Holy Spirit.” *’Oṣar Eden Ganuz*, MS Oxford-BL 1580, fol. 32b; printed edition, p. 66. Idel notes that Abulafia conceived of prophetic utterance as the Active Intellect’s transmission of revelation, and of the speech through which it is expressed, to the soul of the prophet. Idel, “The Writings of Abraham Abulafia and His Teaching,” p. 299 (in Hebrew).

¹⁶⁸ *’Oṣar Eden Ganuz*, MS Oxford-BL 1580, fol. 33a; printed edition, p. 68.

the apostles were empowered to speak in inspired fashion. Their prophetic speech, according to this source, came in the languages of the nations. We find in Acts 2:4–12:

All of them [the apostles] were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the spirit gave them ability. Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, “Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.” All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, “What does this mean?”

In a similar fashion, Abulafia time and again discusses his achievement of mystical revelation via the permutation of letters in terms of mastery of the seventy languages of the nations. This is surprising at first blush, given Abulafia’s opinion that the seventy languages are profane, as compared with the *lashon ha-qodesh*, or sacred language, Hebrew. But Abulafia, as mentioned, considers all of the profane languages to be rooted in Hebrew. In this sense, letter permutations in Hebrew may be thought of already as tantamount to letter permutations in the seventy languages. But Abulafia articulates other conceptions of his practice with respect to the seventy languages. In some instances Abulafia’s conception of the connection between letter permutation and the seventy languages is relatively simple. He will do little more than to suggest that letter permutation may be performed in any of the seventy languages. We find, for instance, in *’Oṣar ’Eden Ganuz*:¹⁶⁹ “And understand what you wish from the permuted words that go out from your mouth, and in any language that you wish. Because you must return every language to its prime matter.” Abulafia intends here that the mystic permute the letters of the language of his own choosing, with the goal of attaining to a communion with their common source, the *prima materia* of the ten *sefirot*. The *sefirot* were thought of by

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., MS Oxford-BL 1580, fol. 162a; printed edition, p. 364. See also *ibid.*, MS Oxford-BL 1580, fol. 33a; printed edition, p. 67; MS Oxford-BL 1580, fol. 69b; printed edition, p. 137.

Abulafia as the originary hylic matter of creation, to which, he felt, the letters of the Hebrew alphabet should be reduced during letter permutation. Success in this, he professed, facilitated a communion with the divine.¹⁷⁰ From the current passage, it is apparent that Abulafia was of the opinion that there is a connection between every human language and the *sefirot*, such that he did not consider Hebrew to be a necessary practical intermediary.

Abulafia elsewhere expresses his belief in the intimate connection—indeed, the virtual synonymy—between recourse to the seventy languages and the practice of letter permutation. He makes his point, aptly enough, by means of a letter operation: “...And the name of this path contains the secret of ‘seventy languages,’ which is, by *gematria*, ‘letter permutation,’¹⁷¹ and it is the return of the letters to their prime matter in utterance and in thought through the ten *sefirot belimah*...”¹⁷²

But, in other writings, Abulafia puts forth a different sense of the connection between letter permutation and the seventy languages, one that moves beyond the view that any language is suitable for letter permutation. Abulafia contends that, with the achievement of communion with the Active Intellect, the mystic is accorded the miraculous capacity to understand and to prophesy in all of the seventy languages. It is here that we find a direct parallel to the phenomenon presented in the Acts of the Apostles.

Abulafia begins one passage in *Sitrei Torah* by discussing the threefold nature of speech.¹⁷³ He parses its tripartite quality in terms of three features, intellection, the intellectualizing, and that which is intellectualized. These, he says, conform to the “appearance of the man upon it [the throne] above” (Ez. 1:26), the “wheel” (from Ezekiel’s vision as well), and the man below, respectively. The mystic must actualize each. We can see that there is a certain parallelism with the trinitarian passages discussed earlier. There, prophecy was thought to come

¹⁷⁰ Idel, “The Writings of Abraham Abulafia and His Teaching,” p. 226 (in Hebrew). Idem, *Language, Torah, Hermeneutics*, p. 33. Wolfson points to a passage from *Imrei Shefer* (*Sayings of Wisdom*), to be cited below, which refers to the *sefirot* as “the root of all principles,” which contain and give rise to the letters. *Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 108–109 n. 44.

¹⁷¹ Both phrases yield a sum of one thousand two hundred and fourteen. See Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, p. 381 n. 53; Idel, *Language, Torah, Hermeneutics*, p. 101; Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia*, p. 108.

¹⁷² *Sheva’ Netivot ha-Torah*, in Jellinek, *Philosophie und Kabbala*, p. 4.

¹⁷³ *Sitrei Torah*, MS NY-JTSA Mic. 2367, fols. 38a–b; printed edition, p. 88.

to the mystic who properly fathoms the nature of the tripartite divine world. In the current passage, speech is seen as essentially tripartite, but it is implicitly equated with mystical attainment via recourse to motifs drawn from Ezekiel's vision. The earlier observation that mystical practice takes the form of communion with that element of the trinity which is the source of divine speech, the Holy Spirit, dovetails well with the thrust of the current passage, which is wholly concerned with the tripartite nature of speech.¹⁷⁴ There is a certain logic to the granting here to threefold speech the position that the divine trinity assumed in the earlier passage. This substitution conforms with our earlier observation that the name 'Adonai indicates for Abulafia both the entire trinity and the potency governing speech. Abulafia continues in *Sitrei Torah*,

And from this matter [that of the divine nature of speech] you will know that the linguistic potency that is found in humankind is the highest potency in all of this terrestrial existence, and because of this it is said that he was created in the image of God and the likeness of God... And when he brings forth one of these [three] actualizations found in him in potential, from potential into actuality, the three of them are found in him as one in a final, whole actualization. And he prophesies... And it is one thing without separation at the time of this actualization... And thus we sanctify the name with a threefold sanctification, and bless the people through the *kohanim* with a threefold blessing, to announce this great secret, and for the preparation of the matter that bears the utterance prepared in the form of the *prima materia*. Because he who bears the utterance speaks in every language, and this language prepares his primary understanding to receive each and every language, and every language's permutation... And thus it comprises all languages, which contain letter permutations, whose concern is seventy languages.

Again, as in the case of the trinity of Holy Spirit, father and son, the culmination of the mystic's endeavor is to forge a tripartite unity. This task is reflected as well, in an esoteric fashion, in the *Qedushah* and in the priestly blessing,¹⁷⁵ Abulafia reports. The result of the mystic's effort at unifying the trinity is prophecy, conceived of as divine speech.

¹⁷⁴ Speech assumes a tripartite nature as well in its finding expression in writing, utterance and thought. *Mafteah ha-Shemot*, MS NY-JTSA Mic. 1897, fol. 56b; printed edition, p. 37.

¹⁷⁵ The former, the "Sanctification," is based upon Isaiah 6:3, the latter on Numbers 6:24–26.

The latter we know to be a communion with the Holy Spirit, within which the other two components of the trinity become subsumed.

The result of this actualization and unification of the divine triad is that the mystic acquires the ability to speak in the languages of the nations, that is, to “speak in tongues.”¹⁷⁶ When he “bears the utterance,” or receives the linguistic *prima materia*, he “speaks in every language,” as Abulafia puts it. The mystic is able to “receive each and every language,” of each of which the mystic gains an “understanding.” The triadic configuration that Abulafia conceives of in the current passage conforms to the one composed of Holy Spirit, father and son in the earlier passage, so we may say that, for Abulafia, when one achieves a communion with this Christian-derived trinity, one acquires a Christian-derived prophetic capacity.

A network of interrelated themes significant to the current context appears in a passage from *Imrei Shefer*. Abulafia addresses the practice of permuting letters in sets of three.¹⁷⁷ He refers to *Sefer Yesirah* as setting out this method of permutation, and he also indicates that Hebrew grammar itself suggests this method.¹⁷⁸ The letters that are permuted derive—as does language itself—from the *sefirot*, which, Abulafia explains, bear the numerical values one through ten.¹⁷⁹ The *sefirot*, as Abulafia understands them, underlie both the alphabet and the numerical values of its individual letters.

The triadic method of letter permutation is evocative in its own right, given what we have observed thusfar. It is, after all, letter permutation that gives rise to the prophetic state wherein is revealed the trinitarian structure of the sefirotic world. So it is logical that the letters, built as they are from the *sefirot*, reveal something of their source when they are assembled into sets of three. But, in addition to this significant tripartite method, there is also an important twofold signification at work in the passage.

¹⁷⁶ See also the following related remark from *Mafteah ha-Shemot*: “And the secret of the seventy languages instructs that they concern three, and also they are threefold in contemplation.” MS NY-JTSA Mic. 1897, fol. 54a; printed edition, p. 28.

¹⁷⁷ *Imrei Shefer*, MS Munich-BS 285 fols. 109a, 110b, 110b; printed edition, pp. 180–181, 183.

¹⁷⁸ Regarding the significance of this mode of permutation, Abulafia writes here, “I will begin by saying that the first great encompassing order of permutations is that of three letters, because it is complete. And this is because the complete verbal roots contain three foundational letters in the holy language...”

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, MS Munich-BS 285 fols. 107a, 107b; printed edition, pp. 175–176.

Abulafia permutes the letters of the ten commandments, a gesture which ensues from his allusion to the ten *sefirot*. Concerning the significance of the permutation of the letters of the ten commandments, Abulafia writes, “And you must know that all revolves from ‘El’ to ‘El.’ And the sign for all of these is (Ps. 22:2), ‘My God, my God (*’Eli, ’Eli*), why have you forsaken me?’” It is likely that the letters *’alef* and *lamed*, comprising the divine name *’El*, are elicited by Abulafia because *’alef* begins the first half of the alphabet, while *lamed* begins the second half.¹⁸⁰

Abulafia analyzes the numerical values of the two words for these letters, *’alef* and *lamed*, observing that they are equivalent to the numerical value of the words “generation and destruction.” These, it is explained, are phenomena of the created world, and God enjoins us to engage in letter permutation in order to learn and to study (*le’elof ve-lilmod*) them. Such study yields an understanding of “the identity of the encompassing formation of all of the world and its creation and the secret of its renewal and the extent of its edges...” The two letters *’alef* and *lamed* are subsequently the springboards for discussion of the dichotomies matter and form, earth and heaven, and the separate intellects as against the Active Intellect. The “generation and destruction” which Abulafia equated with *’alef* and *lamed* come to be located in the earth, comprised as it is of the four elements, which are ever in flux.¹⁸¹

As Abulafia continues, we should bear in mind the possibility that his exploration of the numerical signification of the phrase “El, ’El” may have been inspired by Christian recourse to the Biblical passage that Abulafia cites, “My God, my God (*’Eli, ’Eli*), why have you forsaken me.”¹⁸² Abulafia subsequently refers to the natural scientists, that is, the gentile sages, whose sphere is that of all things comprised of matter and form.¹⁸³ These sages err in two ways, Abulafia says. The first is that the Jews have it as received wisdom that the world is continually renewed by God, while the gentiles, following in the Aristotelian

¹⁸⁰ Indeed, Abulafia elsewhere lays out a permutational method of letter pairs beginning from the first set of *’alef* and *lamed*. *’Oṣar ’Eden Ganuz*, MS Oxford-BL 1580, fol. 37a; printed edition, pp. 76–77. See also *Sefer ha-Šeruf*, MS Munich-BS 22 fol. 194a; printed edition, p. 43.

¹⁸¹ *’Imrei Shefer*, MS Munich-BS 285 fols. 107b, 108a; printed edition, pp. 174, 179.

¹⁸² Matt. 27:46.

¹⁸³ *’Imrei Shefer*, MS Munich-BS 285 fol. 109b; printed edition, p. 179.

tradition, believe only in its antiquity.¹⁸⁴ The second is that "...they testify to the order of conduct and supervision from the intellect upon man, and we establish it." The latter assertion appears to invoke the idea that the Jews proceed on the basis of divinely imparted wisdom, while the gentile proceeds only from that which he may logically infer. Abulafia continues,

The wonder is that we who transgress attest to it with our exile and all of our misfortunes. And they who rule atone for it with their dominion and rule, and it is not my intention to explain this here, but it is my intention to reveal the wonderful divine order in permutations, and from them the perfect one will recognize that all is ordered and arranged as is fitting.

The vexing question reemerges as to how it could be that the Jews, for all of their superiority, are consigned to a lowly fate.¹⁸⁵ Abulafia declines to answer the question directly here, but he suggests that recourse to the "wonderful divine order in permutations" allows "the perfect one" to surmise an answer. It appears that Abulafia's recourse to letter permutations vis-à-vis Psalm 22:2 contains within it the seeds of that polemic response to which he hints. He discerns within the words "My God, my God" an allusion to the words "generation and destruction," as observed earlier, but these he associates only with the lower, created world, this being the province of the gentile natural philosophers. He seems to be aware of the great significance of the verse for Christians, seeking, in contrast to its meaning for them, to employ the verse in connection with an affirmation of the limitations of the gentile sage, who is denied revelation and is consigned to the corporeal.¹⁸⁶ Abulafia may also render here an implicit critique of the notion of Jesus' resurrection. Abulafia reinforces a sense of the base and corrupted nature of the corporeal with the same phrase that Christians ascribed to Jesus at the moment of his own destruction.

To return to our starting point, the discussion of the twofoldness hinted at in the words "My God, my God" is accompanied by one of

¹⁸⁴ Davidson, "Maimonides' Secret Position on Creation," pp. 20–21.

¹⁸⁵ Earlier in *ʿImrei Shefer* Abulafia had presented a related point. He indicated that Israel's seeming downtroddenness among the nations runs counter to the actually lofty status of those who possess the unique knowledge of the divine name. *ʿImrei Shefer*, MS Munich-BS 285 fol. 49a; printed edition, p. 8. It is this most lofty status that renders Israel the "soul" of the nations, who are, not surprisingly, relegated by implication to the role of the body. *Ibid.*, MS Munich-BS 285 fol. 61b; printed edition, p. 48.

¹⁸⁶ See preceding note regarding this conception's occurrence elsewhere in *ʿImrei Shefer*.

threefoldness. Beginning with the delineation of the significance of the permuting of letters in sets of three, Abulafia presents a permutational method based on three sequences of the Hebrew alphabet, comprising sixty-six letters in total, a number that is rendered meaningful, among other ways, by its correspondence to the numerical value for the phrase “your God” (*Eloheikha*) and to that of the word “revolution” (*galgal*), the latter invoking the revolving of letters during permutation.¹⁸⁷ The three variations on the entire alphabet together comprise a “complete whole,” as Abulafia describes them; they are both three and one. Such is the case as well for each of the letters within a given triad. Writes Abulafia,¹⁸⁸

And with the complete triads that are revolved you will render threefold every letter, and you will place each at the end, middle and beginning. And all of them are joined in this way. And thus every letter possesses three forms as it is arranged, but in its essence it possesses only one form.

Each of the letters, understood in this fashion, is both threefold and unitary, just as with the threefold permutation of the alphabet. In this connection, Abulafia considers three letter triads, proceeding from the beginning of the alphabet, *’alef/bet/gimel*, *bet/gimel/dalet*, and *gimel/dalet/he’*. Their numerical sum (twenty-seven), Abulafia observes, is equal to that for the word “my goodness” (*toviy*) from Exodus 33:19, “I will make all My goodness pass before you.” Regarding this, Abulafia explains that “He [God] showed him [Moses] all of existence and its knots, which are the back of God and the face of Moses.”

Abulafia suggests here that the permutation of these first triads of the alphabet is unitary in its essence, alluding to creation in its entirety. As well, he implies that the permutation of these triads constitutes the means by which the mystic may apprehend the posterior of God.¹⁸⁹ The fathoming of the threefold unity—which Abulafia delineates, to this point, in terms of three different permutational methods—constitutes the means by which mystical communion, defined here in visionary terms, may take place. By truly grasping the essence of this

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., MS Munich-BS 285 fol. 110b; printed edition, p. 182.

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., MS Munich-BS 285 fol. 110a; printed edition, p. 184.

¹⁸⁹ The latter notion derives from an older Jewish mystical conception that the vision of the divine Glory (the *Kavod*) is equivalent to the seeing of the divine from behind. That formulation was derived in turn, in part, from the continuation of the Exodus theophanic account, which reads (33:23) “...you shall see My back, but My face will not be seen.” Wolfson, *Through a Speculum That Shines*, pp. 26, 131, 133.

threefold unity, the mystic may approach the divine. That Abulafia again invokes this Christian influenced motif in tandem with the anti-Christian polemic that we observed earlier, which was based upon the words “My God, my God,” should no longer surprise us. We have seen before how Abulafia, in his usage of polemics, recoils from the Christian influence to which he was so susceptible.

Emphasizing the significance of the tripartite essence to the divine in yet another manner here, Abulafia explains that the threefold unity is the “secret” behind the structure of a man’s soul, which “...possesses one unique form in its singular essence, in the truth of its identity, and it is arranged in a threefold order...” The three components of the soul are to be found in the head of the liver, the center of the heart, and the rear of the brain, but each is found as well in the head, center and rear of each of these organs, yielding, once again, an additional three triads.

The notion that man is constituted in the divine likeness is evoked here, and Abulafia will go on to reinforce this impression. Concerning this arrangement of the components of the human soul, he writes, “And this is the wisdom of the divine order of permutation, to apprehend thereby the identity of man.” That is, the essential structure of man is as well constituted in terms of the “divine order of permutation.” From this structure of the soul one may discern hints alluding to divine “laws and righteous judgments and deep secrets,” and from these, in turn, “...you may apprehend something of the divine configuration in its complete arrangements.” One comes to understand the nature of the divine by plumbing the depths of one’s own tripartite soul.

From here Abulafia directly relates the seventy languages of the nations to this same threefold unity:¹⁹⁰

And after I relate to you the way of the great [threefold] permutation, I will tell you that the letters that are called the beginnings of words may all be written from their beginning to their end, their beginnings first, because they may not be exchanged and they may not be changed in any of the permutations of the twenty-two threefold alphabets. You will complete twenty-two complete heights, each of which contains four hundred and eighty-four¹⁹¹ threefold words, mixing every utterance that may be spoken in seventy languages, in words comprised of three letters. Regarding this we say that “letter permutation” by *gematria* is “seventy

¹⁹⁰ *Imrei Shefer*, MS Munich-BS 285 fol. 111b; printed edition, p. 185.

¹⁹¹ The square of twenty-two is four hundred and eighty-four.

languages.” And we thus bring about unity in this way (*ve-yahadnu ‘al zeh ‘otah ha-derekh*) with the unique name, reading seventy languages in the secret (*liqro’ be-sod shiv‘im lashonot*), and the secret is “secret,” whose name is seventy, that is sixty-six letters in the threefold alphabet, and it is one alone. Thus the sign of three and one is “secret,” that is ס"ג א'¹⁹² And understand this also well.

The three that are one comprise a secret in their tripartite unity, contends Abulafia, and their “secret” is the number seventy. Letter permutation, conducted in a tripartite fashion, one that alludes to the divine threefold and unitary order, thus evokes the secret of the seventy languages that encompass prophetic revelation, also understood here as the unification of one’s self with the divine name. Abulafia suggests that one should engage in letter permutation in seventy languages, “mixing every utterance that may be spoken in seventy languages.” The tripartite method of permutation parallels the divine order itself, and so too do the seventy languages reflect the essence of the divine, for they partake of a threefold essence and they are the means by which to unify one’s self with the divine name, they being thus the “secret” aspect of letter permutation. Thus, the essence of prophetic revelation, for Abulafia, is encompassed in seventy languages, a notion which parallels strikingly the New Testament conception of the apostles as engaging in revelation from the Holy Spirit in every language.¹⁹³

As Abulafia describes it, the multilingual act of letter permutation is paralleled by the efflux of prophetic revelation in the seventy languages. The one appears to bring about the other, as the mystic, who may permute letters in the language of his choice, achieves full linguistic facility in every language with the onset of prophecy. This

¹⁹² That is, “sixty and three [and] one.” The numerical value of the letter *vav*, which is also the Hebrew prefix indicating the meaning “and,” is six, so that a sum of seventy results.

¹⁹³ In a related passage in *Sefer ha-Yashar* (*The Book of the Righteous*), Abulafia writes that, during his mystical encounter with the angel Raziel, he received ten utterances. These he links to the ten *sefirot*. Regarding the utterances themselves, Abulafia writes that they were received “from one voice, and seven languages are in each.” We see here, first, that the seventy total languages are again linked with the structure of the divine world and, second, that Abulafia’s notion of the speaking in seventy languages is not simply a matter of prophesying in any language that one knows, but, rather, that the reception of prophecy in the seventy languages is a revelatory aspect of the mystical experience. *Sefer ha-Yashar*, MS Munich-BS 285 fol. 26b; printed edition (*Maṣref ha-Sekhel*), p. 99. Hames cites this passage in *Like Angels on Jacob’s Ladder*, p. 40.

principle finds expression in *Sefer ha-Hesheq* (*The Book of Desire*), written sometime in the early 1280s.¹⁹⁴

And you will attain the preparation appropriate for the soul, which is the knowledge in the thought of the image of the contemplation of the letters, and he who draws through them thinks that they speak with him as a man speaks to his friend, and as if they are in their essence a speaking man who brings forth words from his mouth. And this man knows seventy languages, and knows the known intention intended in every letter and every word...

Abulafia maintains that when one has achieved the capacity to contemplate the letters sufficiently deeply and vividly, the act of letter permutation is transcended and prophetic speech, in the form of the seventy languages, comes to the mystic from a divine source, that is, from the Active Intellect. The latter is cast in anthropomorphic terms here. In general, when Abulafia enters the prophetic state and speaks in Hebrew, he believes that he is speaking in all of the seventy languages; this follows from his contention that Hebrew contains all of these languages. In the current context, however, Abulafia does not mention Hebrew at all, only the seventy languages. He has in mind here a revelatory knowledge of the seventy languages; the meaning of “every letter and every word” imparted in these languages is made known to the mystic through revelation.

His claims aside, Abulafia, to be sure, was not actually speaking in seventy languages during his prophetic states. The idea that he actually engaged in prophetic speech in any language besides Hebrew, aside from his occasional elaborations upon particular non-Hebrew words, is doubtful. It is important to ask the question, then, as to why Abulafia makes this claim to revelation in seventy languages. He pointedly moves beyond the contention that Hebrew encapsulates all of them. The answer can only be that Abulafia is emulating the linguistic achievement described in the Book of Acts.

In a passage from *Hayyei ha-Nefesh*,¹⁹⁵ Abulafia elaborates further upon the intimate connection between the seventy languages and revelation. He first discusses God’s concealment of the secrets of the Torah, necessitated by the sinful nature of the world. The mystic must

¹⁹⁴ *Sefer ha-Hesheq*, MS NY-JTSA Mic. 1801, fol. 8b; printed edition, p. 13.

¹⁹⁵ *Hayyei ha-Nefesh*, MS Munich-BS 408 fol. 69a; printed edition, p. 121.

undergo trials before he is rendered sufficiently righteous to be able to unearth these secrets, which are hidden from the unworthy. These trials, Abulafia maintains, pose challenges with respect to adherence to the *mišvot*. Continues Abulafia,

And it is what I explained to you, that this world is like a “refining pot,” through the Torah, because the truth of existence is the permutation of the letters, whose secret, by *gematria* is [seventy] languages, through the permutation of letters that are called by seventy names and written in seventy writings, and every writing is “seventy.”¹⁹⁶

The righteous adherent to the *mišvot*, who goes through a process of refinement through his fidelity to Torah, becomes able to apprehend “the truth of existence” via letter permutations. Put another way, the act of letter permutation is a process of refinement, one in which the mystic must be careful not to stray from his righteous adherence to the *mišvot*. Revelation is achieved through the act of letter permutation, which is itself “the truth of existence.” This is particularly so, it would seem, with respect to the permutation of the letters of the Torah. Abulafia plays here upon the word *mašref*, or “refining pot,” from Proverbs 17:3, drawing it into a connection with the word for permutation, *šeruf*.¹⁹⁷

Abulafia implies the essentially Jewish nature of the enterprise of letter permutation, but he goes on to again embrace an engagement with the other languages during this practice. He then goes further, writing enigmatically that the seventy languages are paralleled by seventy “names” and seventy “writings.” These seventy names, by which, he says, letter permutation is called, as well as the seventy modes of writing in which letter permutation is practiced, are linked with “...seventy names written in the *hashmal* and sealed in its name and in the names of its seal.” Abulafia suggests here that the seventy languages are not merely the practical means through which prophetic vision is achieved. Rather, they are ontologically linked to the object of prophetic revelation. The *hashmal* is the radiance or so-called “electrum” seen by Ezekiel in the midst of his chariot (*merkabah*) vision, the prototype for mystical experience.¹⁹⁸ By writing that the names that

¹⁹⁶ The numerical value of the sum of the letters of the word “writing” is the same as that for the word “seventy” (four hundred and twenty-two).

¹⁹⁷ Scholem, *Kabbalah*, p. 180.

¹⁹⁸ Ez. 1:4.

correspond to the seventy languages possess a hypostatic nature, written as they are in the *hashmal*, Abulafia suggests that the languages are part of the stuff of revelation itself. From this we may better understand Abulafia's contention that the seventy languages are bestowed upon the mystic at the moment of prophetic experience.

Abulafia may likewise be suggesting that the seventy hypostatic names in the *hashmal* are themselves apprehended during mystical revelation, taking the form of speech in the seventy languages. In fact, fathoming the divine name is a crucial aspect of Abulafia's conception of the essence of the secrets of the Torah.¹⁹⁹ In this Abulafia proceeds from Nahmanides' doctrine that the Torah is, in its entirety, comprised of divine names.²⁰⁰ This notion is as well recalled in the above passage, where mastery of the secrets of the Torah is achieved through both seventy languages and seventy names.

A closely related notion emerges in *Sitrei Torah*. There, Abulafia relates that the fullness of the revelation of the divine name cannot be achieved without recourse to the seventy languages. From this we may understand the imperative to identify so closely the phrases "letter permutation" and "seventy languages." It may be that, just as the seventy languages are embodied within Hebrew, so are the seventy names mentioned earlier in *Hayyei ha-Nefesh* to be understood as embodied within the single divine name; it is worth recalling that the seventy names inscribed in the *hashmal*, according to *Hayyei ha-Nefesh*, were "sealed in its name," that is, the single name of the *hashmal*. Writes Abulafia in *Sitrei Torah*,²⁰¹

And indeed, in your investigation into the received doctrine and intellection of the matter of the secrets of the Torah, know in truth that you may apprehend from it what no philosopher in the world from the nations may apprehend. And you do not need to see their books at all, and you may understand through it all wisdom and knowledge, and you may grasp the intention of God, may He be blessed, in the giving of the Torah and the *misvot*, and you may succeed and inherit two worlds, this one and the one to come. And knowledge of this thing depends upon knowledge of the explicit name, which is known through the knowledge

¹⁹⁹ For the significance of the knowledge of the divine name for Abulafia, see Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 73, 77, 89, 93, 164, 166, 172, 191, 216, 222.

²⁰⁰ See *ibid.*, pp. 74, 200. For earlier precedents, see *idem*, "The Mystical Significance of Torah Study," pp. 48–51. For possible Christian influence on Nahmanides, see *idem*, *Language, Eros, Being*, p. 543 n. 433.

²⁰¹ *Sitrei Torah*, MS Paris-BN héb. 774, fols. 125a–b, printed edition, pp. 37–38.

of the permutation of letters, within which are contained seventy languages, and it is a mighty secret. And in this manner you will find that this secret is the basis of all wisdom and intellective thought... And you will know from the secret of "letter permutation" that "all of the *mišvot* are the Holy Spirit," and in truth all of the world depends upon it.

Abulafia begins with the familiar assertion that the sages of the gentiles are denied authentic revelation. It is adherence to the *mišvot* that constitutes the bedrock of the comprehension of the secrets of the Torah, which are realized through letter permutations. These permutations are the keys to the knowledge of the divine name; we may understand that knowledge of the secrets of the Torah and knowledge of the name are synonymous. Letter permutations, the basis for esoteric revelation, contain the seventy languages, Abulafia tells us, which "is a mighty secret." The nature of this secret is amplified in the *gemaṭria* that follows. The phrase "letter permutation" is numerically equivalent to "all of the *mišvot* are the Holy Spirit."²⁰² Here the conception is revisited that the Holy Spirit imparts a facility in the seventy languages. The revelation that ensues from letter permutations, that is, the communion with the Holy Spirit, is oral in nature, that is, it consists of prophetic speech. The "secret" that Abulafia invokes is that knowledge of the divine name is realized in prophetic speech in the seventy languages. The notion that the Holy Spirit, part of a hypostatic trinity, as we have seen, imparts the capacity to speak in tongues, a theme manifestly borrowed from Christian doctrine, is recast by Abulafia as essentially Jewish. This is accomplished by means of a *gemaṭria*, which establishes a synonymy between the *mišvot* and the Holy Spirit.

Another passage from *Sitrei Torah* expands further upon the interconnections between knowledge of the divine name and communion with the trinity, conceived of as linguistic potencies. Abulafia here suggests that language is tripartite, after the fashion of time, which is composed of past, present and future.²⁰³ Every language is comprised of one component which concerns things' essential names,²⁰⁴ one which concerns names which relate things to one another,²⁰⁵ and

²⁰² Both phrases equal one thousand two hundred and fourteen.

²⁰³ Ibid., MS NY-JTSA Mic. 2367, fol. 35a; printed edition, p. 75.

²⁰⁴ "...one of it is the essential name, wherein the name instructs concerning the thing's identity and truth in each and every language..."

²⁰⁵ "And one is the name that joins the thing to another and joins the matter of one existence or the understanding of one of the matters, and instructs concerning the connection..."

one which concerns names which realize the potential latent within things.²⁰⁶ Abulafia writes,

And concerning this, I will not speak of the matter of the connection nor of the matter of the actualization, rather of the necessity that instructs concerning the preexistence of God, may He be blessed, and concerning His truth and His eternity, and it is the permutation of the name. Because the secret of the name times three is “lion” and it is “the mighty one” (*ha-gibbur*) and it is “cloud cloud cloud,” and each of them is “revolution,” and upon it “the holy language is completed,” that is, upon the “apprehension of the name and its numeration.” Because from it may a man approach his Creator and then desire Him and long for Him with a strong longing.

Abulafia reports that he will discuss only the first of the three linguistic components, which concerns the explicit name of God. Nevertheless, he immediately sets about indicating the tripartite whole of which the explicit name is one part. The divine seventy-two letter name, it becomes apparent, is that name with which Abulafia is concerned. He explains that it constitutes one third of the word for “lion” and for “the mighty one,” each of which has a numerical value of two hundred and sixteen. Similarly, the word “cloud” has a numerical value of seventy-two, so that a threefold repetition of the word constitutes a whole. From this whole stems the consummation of the linguistic faculty—that is, from the assemblage of the three components into a whole whose value is two hundred and sixteen, “the holy language is completed.”²⁰⁷ The latter presumably is accomplished through what he alludes to as “revolution,” that is, letter permutation. The completion of the holy language is synonymous with the knowledge of the name, or the “apprehension of the name and its numeration.”²⁰⁸ This knowledge of the name, Abulafia suggests at the close of the passage, is the vehicle for mystical communion with God. Once more, it is the apprehension of the trinitarian nature of the divine, expressed here in terms of the threefold name, that culminates in prophecy. Just as,

²⁰⁶ “And one is the name that actualizes the thing, instructing concerning the time of actualizations to which is hinted.”

²⁰⁷ This phrase may be seen to have a numerical value of two hundred and sixteen. In fact, its value is one thousand two hundred and fifteen, but by transposing the number one thousand and converting it into the number one, a fairly common practice in Abulafia’s *gematriyot*, one derives the value of two hundred and sixteen.

²⁰⁸ This phrase has as well a value of one thousand two hundred and fifteen. See previous note.

earlier, the divine trinity was conceived of as essentially linguistic, so now it is language itself that is tripartite, the vehicle, via letter permutation, to the apprehension of its tripartite object.

Abulafia consistently asserted that prophetic speech comes to the mystic from the divine in a supernatural fashion. He maintained that the mystic acquires, through divine inspiration, uncommon capacities, of which speech in the seventy languages is one. Regarding the transcendent nature of the achievements afforded through mystical practice, Abulafia described elsewhere a threefold nature to mastery of the letter permutational method.²⁰⁹ The latter, he repeated, may be practiced in any language. Mastery is achieved first in written form, then orally and lastly in an intellective fashion. Abulafia, we have seen, was tireless in his recourse to triadic conceptions of the divine and of the means to commune therewith. Upon attaining the last of the three levels of mastery enumerated, Abulafia related, it will seem to the mystic as if speech is imparted to him by the divine. The mystic's role, thereafter, is to transmit to others what he had been told without reservation, even if it appears to him as if "very strange matters" had been reported to him. Rather than question revelation, one should "receive what is heard from the mouth of your teacher, even if he says to you that right is left and left is right..." To do otherwise is to "judge your judge," the transgression, we may recall, of the gentiles, who lack access to such direct revelation.

This passage illustrates what was a central point for Abulafia, that letter permutation opens the mystic to intellective capacities that are normally beyond him.²¹⁰ This central aspect of Abulafia's view of

²⁰⁹ *Shomer Miṣvah* (*Keeper of the Commandment*), MS Paris-BN héb. 853, fol. 51b; printed edition, pp. 16–17. See also *Maṣteah ha-Hokhmot*, MS NY-JTSA Mic. 1686, fol. 95a; printed edition, p. 22, where utterance occurs "in the divine Holy Spirit, joined with the human Holy Spirit."

²¹⁰ See also *Maṣteah ha-Shemot*, MS NY-JTSA Mic. 1897, fol. 48a; printed edition, p. 9, where Abulafia writes, "He who apprehends the prophetic utterance recognizes that the word that he apprehends is not from him, rather it is from the actualization within the word that he receives..." In *Sheva' Netivot ha-Torah*, Abulafia refers to the "utterance that comes from the Active Intellect upon the verbal potency," again emphasizing that prophetic speech is received from the divine. It is because the Active Intellect bestows upon the mystic a divine linguistic faculty that the prophetic speech that ensues takes the form of seventy languages. Jellinek, *Philosophie und Kabbala*, p. 4. See also *ibid.*, pp. 7–8, where Abulafia writes, concerning Hebrew, that prophecy is "the utterance that arrives to the prophet from God by means of the complete language that contains under it seventy languages, and it is the holy language alone..." In this instance, although we find Abulafia suggesting that utterance comes by divine

prophetic speech was the basis for his claim that he received his revelations in seventy languages. Abulafia sought to create the impression that he acquired the supernatural ability to speak in every language, replicating in this claim the achievement ascribed to the apostles in the Book of Acts. Consistently, Abulafia evinces an irresistible impulse to claim as his own features garnered from the reviled religious other. Absorption and abhorrence are deeply interwoven features of Abulafia's relationship to Christianity.

agency, he seems to intend that it occurs only in Hebrew. Since Hebrew comprises within itself all of the languages, the prophet who imparts his revelations in Hebrew in fact imparts them in every language.

CHAPTER THREE

ABULAFIA'S DEMONS: THE PSYCHOLOGICAL DIMENSION OF ABULAFIA'S RELATIONSHIP TO CHRISTIANITY

Writes Abulafia in *'Oṣar 'Eden Ganuz* concerning his momentous first arrival at the level of prophecy,¹

And I saw many terrible and wonderful visions through signs and wonders, and because of them jealous spirits gathered around me. And I saw imaginings and errors and my reason was panic-stricken, because I could not find a single man who would teach me the way to go. And so I was like a blind man groping at midday for fifteen years, with Satan standing at my right to mislead me.

To contextualize within his wider corpus Abulafia's account of his own initial, protracted struggle against demonic assailants is to observe that this recounting constitutes one of many discussions on Abulafia's part of the mystic's encounter with the demonic element. Confrontations with the malevolent "evil inclination" from the left—personified variously as Satan, Samael, the serpent, Lilith, Sandalfon or a bloodthirsty demon—occupy an important place within the conceptual framework of Abulafia's mystical system as a whole. And the implications of Abulafia's perspective on and experiences with the demonic element are, for our purposes, significant. An understanding of Abulafia's demonology does much to illumine his relationship to Christianity.

Recent scholarly work has opened the way for an extended consideration of the connection between Abulafia's demonology and Christianity. Wolfson has written at length about the zoharic authorship's view of the Jewish mystic's succumbing to the idolatrous and demonological temptations posed by the Christian other.² In regard to Abulafia, Wolfson, following upon the work of Scholem and Idel, has as well investigated Abulafia's conception of the bipartite composition

¹ *'Oṣar 'Eden Ganuz*, MS Oxford-BL 1580, fol. 165a; printed edition, pp. 369–370. See Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, p. 127.

² See above, pp. 7–8, 27 n. 9.

of the Active Intellect, and in particular of the nature of the demonic element.³ As we have already begun to see, these latter observations concerning Abulafia's sense of the Active Intellect relate closely to his conception of Christianity as demonic.⁴

Permutation as Refinement

A propitious starting point for a discussion of Abulafia's demonology and of its relationship to Christianity lies in Abulafia's conception of letter permutation as a test or a trial. Purification and the refinement of the mystic's own being were the stakes in this struggle, in Abulafia's estimation. With respect to the notion of "refinement," Scholem has observed Abulafia's dual usage of the term "*seruf*," which signifies both "permutation" or "combination" and "refinement." We encountered

³ Scholem contends that Abulafia viewed the engagement with demons on the part of the mystic as a falling victim to temptation. *The Kabbalah of Sefer Temunah*, p. 179 (in Hebrew); *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, p. 145. Idel, in *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, devotes a chapter to the kabbalists' *Mundus Imaginalis*, wherein he observes the threat posed to the mystic by demonic phantasms; pp. 73–89. Wolfson observes the parsing of the Active Intellect, on Abulafia's part, into a number of binaries, all conforming to a division into good and evil components. The latter component is to be identified with the demonic element, to be associated with the human imaginative faculty. The imagination must be harnessed by the mystic, and not simply defeated. Until this is accomplished, good and evil forces within the human psyche are continually at war with one another. "Kenotic Overflow and Temporal Transcendence," pp. 150–155. See also Idel, *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 97–100.

⁴ Wolfson may have had Abulafia in mind in more recent discussions of kabbalistic conceptions of the demonic. For example, Wolfson refers to the demonic female's manifestation in the guise of "a rageful warrior wielding a sword of vengeance," a motif employed by Abulafia. *Language, Eros, Being*, p. 347. See as well, idem, *Alef, Mem, Tau*, pp. 102–103, where, in the context of a discussion of the revelatory moment's duplicitous quality, straddling as it does both piety and idolatry, Wolfson references the zoharic motif of the "ever-turning sword" (Gen. 3:24). This sword figures prominently in Abulafia's work, as Wolfson has noted elsewhere. *Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 172–175. Abulafia takes the sword to refer to the letter manipulations through which the mystic engages with the Active Intellect. See also idem, *Language, Eros, Being*, pp. 234–235. The presence in the *Zohar* of anxiety stemming from the erotic temptation posed by Christianity had been noted by Baer, *History of the Jews in Christian Spain*, vol. 1, pp. 256–257, 259–260, as Wolfson notes. *Alef, Mem, Tau*, p. 101. Regarding the connection between Abulafia and the zoharic circle, Scholem had perceived a close relationship between Joseph Gikatilla, Abulafia's one-time prized student, and Moses de Leon, whom Scholem had posited as the sole author of the *Zohar*. *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, pp. 127, 173, 194, 212, 218, 391 n. 81, 395 n. 133. Hames, following Blickstein, offers conjectures regarding possible contacts between Abulafia, Gikatilla and de Leon. *Like Angels on Jacob's Ladder*, pp. 142–143.

this word play already in a passage from *Hayyei ha-Nefesh*, where Abulafia made use of the similarity between the word *mašref*, or “refining pot,” and the word for “permutation,” *šeruf*.⁵

In its synonymity with “refinement,” Abulafia conceived of letter permutation as the esoteric subtext to the rabbinic prioritization of the striving toward purity and piety. Abulafia tied into his discussion of “*šeruf*” as “combination” and “refinement” the rabbinic assertion that the purpose of the *mišvot* is to “purify” (*lešaref*) the human being.⁶ As Wolfson recognized, letter permutation itself is thereby understood by Abulafia as a “hypernomian” exercise, one representing “the grafting of non-halakhic rituals onto the skin of halakhah.”⁷ For Abulafia, the mystical project of refinement was the utmost extension of normative rabbinic halakhah. Thus, success in the struggles that ensued upon undertaking letter permutations was seen by Abulafia to represent the quintessential consummation of Jewish identity.⁸

The refinement of the mystic’s being, in Abulafia’s estimation, comes from the successful passage through the trials posed during the encounter with the Active Intellect, which contains an unrestrained demonic element. In fact, the latter’s presence is justified in terms of such trials. In this respect, the trial has a purificatory capacity.⁹ At other times, Abulafia considers the mystical trial to be a mechanism by which the level of the mystic’s refinement, which is achieved through his larger efforts, is to be gauged. If the mystic passes through the trial and is found to be worthy, illumination may be imparted to him. The assessment of the degree of the mystic’s refinement may be left either to God or to the aspirant’s spiritual guide, who is faced with the weighty decision as to whether it is appropriate to proceed in the imparting of secrets to his student.¹⁰ We can see from Abulafia’s autobiographical statement in *’Ošar Eden Ganuz*, with which this chapter began, the

⁵ *Hayyei ha-Nefesh*, MS Munich-BS 408 fol. 69a; printed edition, p. 121. See above, p. 100; Scholem, *Kabbalah*, p. 180.

⁶ Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia*, p. 199.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 209. See also pp. 197–204, 225.

⁸ Note again *Hayyei ha-Nefesh*, MS Munich-BS 408 fol. 69a; printed edition, p. 121, where refinement and permutation were seen to operate “through the Torah.”

⁹ Idel, for instance, writes of Abulafia’s conception of the binding of Isaac as a trial imposed upon Abraham, representing “...the intellect overpowering the imagination, or by the overpowering of the positive inclination over the evil inclination.” *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics in Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 61, 67.

¹⁰ Additionally, Idel adduces a passage from *Mafteah ha-Hokhmot* which states that the purpose of the trial is for the mystic to acquire self-knowledge. *Ibid.*, p. 122.

magnitude of the hazards that loom from too deep an immersion in the divine efflux too soon and with too little preparation—that is, internal “refinement.” In considering the intense concern evinced by Abulafia with respect to the mystic’s level of refinement, we should be mindful of Abulafia’s lamentation that he had no master to guide him through his own very difficult and protracted period of trials. It appears that Abulafia looked back on this period as one in which he had prematurely progressed too far in his mystical exercises with too little personal refinement, rendering him ill-equipped to contend with the demonic threat.

In *Hayyei ha-‘Olam ha-Ba’* (*The Life of the World to Come*), written in 1281, still in the midst of what he would later call his fifteen year trial, Abulafia engages in a thoroughgoing discussion of the issue of refinement and the nature of the mystical trial. The trial is seen to proceed in at least two fashions. One pertains to the examination of the mystical aspirant’s character and personal attributes, another to that which transpires in the actual midst of the mystical encounter. In the context of a discussion of Metatron, the Prince of the Countenance, we find:¹¹

...And from all of this you may understand who the ruling Prince is whom we mentioned, whether he is wholly good. There is in some of his actions evil with respect to the individuals (*ha-peraṭim*)¹² and those things which are acted upon (*ha-niṣṭalim*), and this evil is good for the perennial beings (*havvayot matmiddot*), and it is improper to dismiss much good because of a little evil. And thus he will see that that good is evil for the individual (*ba’avor ha-peraṭ*), when the individual is a fool and not a sage, and he seeks to judge his judge...And the sage will apprehend in these secrets the reality of God and His unity; then he recognizes in truth who the Prince of the World is and he recognizes who is created from the root. And if He is God, he is not God, and the secret is that it is one spirit, and it is called the “Holy Spirit,” and it in its essence is the Satan (*maṣṭin*)¹³ of every satan (*kol saṭan*). And it is not its way to be the Satan of every angel, because its way is only to be a trial, and so, by *gemaṭria*, it is “Holy Spirit,” the spirit trying every righteous one, because the trial is not enacted if he does not seek the ways of the righteous one, and in his seeking the ways of the righteous one it is fitting to try them

¹¹ *Hayyei ha-‘Olam ha-Ba’*, MS Oxford-BL 1582, fols. 32b–33a; printed edition, pp. 114–115.

¹² Or, perhaps, “the particulars,” although “the individuals” seems to better reflect Abulafia’s intention as he proceeds.

¹³ Or, “the accuser.”

in every respect, [to see] whether or not it is proper to make of him a righteous one (*lehasdiqo*).

The discussion of the good and evil actions of Metatron here refers to the angelic and demonic aspects of the efflux received by the mystic from the Active Intellect.¹⁴ The perception of evil in the demonic aspect of the efflux from the Active Intellect, Abulafia suggests, is due only to a superficial understanding of its nature.¹⁵ In fact, the Active Intellect is imbued with evil in order that the mystic may be tried, and the utility of evil in this regard explains why it is not truly evil in its essence.¹⁶ To suggest that this evil is really as it appears, in fact, is, in Abulafia's view, to pass judgment on the divine, to judge ones judge, the same egregious transgression that, we have seen, Abulafia ascribes to the gentiles.¹⁷ The nature of this offence is further elaborated to the effect that it represents a heretical rupturing of the divine unity. The sage, as against the fool, recognizes God's unity and understands the place of both Metatron and Satan.

We may understand, then, that the failure to see the divine efflux's evil as a genuine good is tantamount to falling victim to idolatry by failing to uphold God's unity, the transgression which Abulafia and other kabbalists refer to as "cutting the plantings."¹⁸ Abulafia enjoins the mystic to perceive properly that that which is of God and that which is not—that is, that which is satanic—are united in the Holy

¹⁴ Idel discusses Abulafia's, and his disciples', conception of Metatron as comprising good and evil aspects. *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 117, 166 n. 219. Wolfson discusses Metatron's identification as both judge, or Samael, and as merciful one. As well, he stands at once for the first and tenth of the *sefirot*. *Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 59 n. 167, 83, 172 n. 213.

¹⁵ So it is that Abulafia reports that "the demonic efflux," which is the "strange fire," is "the first power" that the mystic receives. *Sefer ha-Melammed*, MS Paris-BN héb. 680, fol. 292a; printed edition, p. 12. For the further significance of this "strange fire," see below.

¹⁶ Abulafia consistently upholds general principles (*kelalim*) over particulars (*pera'im*) in his writings, suggesting that the former partake of a supernal nature, while the latter are terrestrial and illusory. Thus the human individual, by which I understand his usage of the term *perat* here, is lost in false appearances and does not recognize evil for good, while the hypostases, the *sefirot*, recognize evil for what it is in its essence, good. See *Mafteah ha-Shemot*: "...it [matter] is good in general but it is called evil in the examination of its particulars..." MS NY-JTSA Mic. 1897, fol. 51a; printed edition, p. 18.

¹⁷ See above, pp. 82, 104.

¹⁸ Wolfson connects this motif directly with his forecited discussion of the representation of the demonic threat as a sword-bearing combatant. *Language, Eros, Being*, p. 347.

Spirit. The *raison d'être* of the evil component of the Active Intellect is to test the mystic, and if the latter fails to recognize the true nature of the satanic element that he encounters, then he has failed his test.

The phrase “trying every righteous one,” used by Abulafia to describe the activity of the Holy Spirit, is numerically equivalent to the word “one” in the phrase “and the secret is that it is one spirit,” as well as to the words “Satan” (*maṣṭin*) and “every satan.” Satan is here identified with the efflux from the Active Intellect in a way that emphasizes the latter’s function, “trying every righteous one.” Of interest as well is the fact that the word “one,” which referred to the unified status of the bipartite Holy Spirit, is drawn into a numerical equivalence with the words “Satan” and “every satan.” We see here that, so important is the trial at the hands of the demonic element that, in the current instance, the Holy Spirit is implicitly identified wholly with Satan. This status subsequently seems to be qualified, when Abulafia ambiguously reports that this demonic element is not satanic with respect to the angels. Ultimately, if the aspirant passes through his trials successfully, righteousness is a status which is accorded. That this individual is described as tried “in every respect” (*mi-kol ṣad*) emphasizes the intensity and gravity of the encounter with the demonic element.

As Abulafia continues in *Hayyei ha-'Olam ha-Ba'*, he abruptly shifts from a discussion of the Holy Spirit’s trying of the mystical aspirant to that of the trial undergone at the hands of the teacher. The distinction between these two types of trials is, nevertheless, not a very sharp one for Abulafia. “And as it happens for him with his teacher, so it will happen for him with God,” writes Abulafia regarding the test to which the student of mysticism is subject. Although Abulafia writes of having not had a teacher at the proper time in his own mystical initiation, he did nonetheless have an angelic instructor, his alter ego Raziel. And the latter’s method of instruction does seem to have corresponded with what Abulafia prescribes for the mortal teacher, as Wolfson has observed.¹⁹ Essentially, this method is one of partial and gradual

¹⁹ Idem, *Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 81–82, 167 n. 197. It is apparent that Abulafia had parted ways with Baruch Togarmi, his teacher in the secrets of *Sefer Yeṣirah*, by the time his own period of trials had begun. Togarmi himself writes of the need for caution in imparting secrets. Concerning, for instance, the eroticism of divine rectification, Togarmi writes, “...and this is the secret upon which it is not possible to elaborate in writing, nor to transmit mouth to mouth until its root is first apprehended, after which it may be transmitted in *kabbalah* to those who contemplate His name in fear...” *Sefer Maṣṭehot ha-Kabbalah*, p. 232.

disclosure, of concealing essential secrets in revealing their outer aspects and of revealing their true natures in the maintaining of their esoteric essences.²⁰

That Abulafia's trial was such a protracted and dire one suggests that recourse to a worthy human guide might have afforded Abulafia a greater degree of guidance and safety than did his reliance on his own abilities or on Raziel, in fact a projection of his own consciousness. We should be reminded that, by his own testimony, Abulafia's trial lasted for another four years or so following his writing of *Hayyei ha-'Olam ha-Ba'*. As to Raziel, we find in *'Oṣar 'Eden Ganuz* that it was only when God took pity on Abulafia and intervened on his behalf that he was guided to safety. Abulafia seemingly lacked the assistance of Raziel during the period when his initial encounter with the heretical threat posed by Satan within the Active Intellect commenced. Or perhaps Abulafia required a particularly arduous trial and a difficult purification. Put another way, Abulafia may have felt himself to be impious with respect to his own response to the demonic threat. In an important way, this course would have been self-inflicted, since, as Raziel, Abulafia was his own mentor.

That Abulafia's difficult trial resulted from a paucity of instruction may present a clue as to why he produced such an unusually prodigious literary corpus. Abulafia would have been keenly aware that a mystical aspirant may find himself in a position where he lacks necessary guidance, and Abulafia may have been moved to write with such a student in mind. Yet, in Abulafia's estimation, the oral method of imparting wisdom from teacher to student was always preeminent over written transmission.²¹ Indeed, so extreme was this preference, and so encrypted does Abulafia's writing appear without guidance, that it is not completely clear what role Abulafia's written work was meant to serve for other kabbalists if it was not intended to supplement oral instruction. In the absence of a teacher, the student of kabbalah might have found Abulafia's writing incomprehensible.

Abulafia goes on in *Hayyei ha-'Olam ha-Ba'* to shed some light on the nature of his written mystical instruction. Following his statement, "And as it happens for him with his teacher, so it will happen for him

²⁰ Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia*, p. 82.

²¹ Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, pp. 119–120; Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 56, 70, 73.

with God,” Abulafia explains, “...and thus I felt it appropriate (*ra’iti be-da’ati*) to write explicitly regarding the ways of the trial, why they are thus (*eikh hem ba-niṣayon*), so that he might endeavor with all his heart and all of his ability to be faithful to his Creator...” Abulafia feels the need here to justify his imparting in explicit written form knowledge concerning the nature of the mystical trial. His explanation he links to the insight that God tries the student just as does the teacher. From this we may understand that Abulafia has divulged information concerning the mystical trial for the student who is being tested by God and who apparently does not have a teacher to explain the nature of his ordeal to him. Abulafia is of the opinion that his own imparting of information concerning the trial to a mystical aspirant in such a circumstance will assist the latter in being “faithful to his Creator.” And it is faith to the Creator in the face of the demonic threat that is the ultimate mark of passage through the trial.

Abulafia demonstrates sensitivity here to questions concerning the prudence of relating such knowledge in written form. Yet the teacher’s decision to reveal secrets orally Abulafia portrays, as well, as a most delicate one.²² It should be closely tied, he explains, to the student’s progress in his trials. Writes Abulafia subsequently in *Hayyei ha-‘Olam ha-Ba’*, “But if his teacher examines him and he is found to be faithless in all of his trials, it is forbidden from the first to reveal [even] a small

²² Wolfson suggests that the primary reason for secrecy in transmission of kabbalistic learning is not an elitist posture but a recognition of the material’s essential ineffability. See, for instance, *ibid.*, pp. 14–15. This well explains Abulafia’s frequent tendency toward circumspection in spite of his prolific literary production. Nevertheless, Wolfson observes that caution regarding transmission of secrets to the unworthy was a hallmark of kabbalists in general, and this is a tendency that we see Abulafia address specifically. Wolfson adduces Abulafia’s cautionary remarks along these lines to the kabbalistic teacher to be found in *Shomer Miṣvah*. *Ibid.*, pp. 70–71. See also *ibid.*, pp. 80–81, where further cautionary remarks, addressed to the teacher, are evinced from *Hayyei ha-‘Olam ha-Ba’*. Wolfson suggests an explanation for Abulafia’s extensive literary production that is well-founded: Abulafia believed himself charged with renewing esoteric doctrine regarding the divine names that had been all but lost. *Ibid.*, pp. 54–56. Such a motivation on Abulafia’s part would be consistent with a concern for the mystical aspirant who lacked proper instruction. Idel explains that Abulafia reveals such doctrine because of his sense of the approaching eschaton. *New Perspectives*, p. 101. Wolfson observes Abulafia’s feeling that “chapter headings” are sufficient for the worthy, who may employ their intellective capacity and letter permutation skills to plumb their fuller meanings. *Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 68–69, 75. Wolfson cites a passage from *Sitrei Torah* wherein Abulafia admits to the inadequacy of writing in the conveying of kabbalistic secrets, although such writing may be able “to arouse the intellect.” *Ibid.*, p. 81.

part of this wisdom; all the moreso a secret thing, for which death would be requisite for the teacher by the hand of heaven." Premature exposure to mystical secrets is dangerous to the student, we have already seen. One must be tried only to the limit of one's abilities. Here we learn further that the teacher must take care to properly evaluate the results of a student's trials. Imparting secret knowledge to the unworthy is an offense for which the teacher is to be held responsible. Perhaps this is due, not only to the peril met with by the student, but as well to the dishonoring of the divine that results from the heretical errors that such a student will perpetrate.

Just as the student is to be insulated from the secrets of which he is unworthy, conversely, the student must be initiated to the full limit of his abilities:

...And if he is found to be faithful, it is incumbent upon his teacher to transmit to him all that he knows to the limit of his knowledge, and not to conceal from him even the last, very deep scintilla. And if he is able to receive it, he will write them for him in hints sufficient for his understanding, and he will transmit them to him in chapter headings mouth to mouth, and he will clarify them explicitly.²³

The determination of worthiness in the aftermath of the trial is crucial for the teacher with respect to the student. We may surmise that Abulafia understood himself as having been deemed worthy enough by God to be shown the way to the subjugation of the satanic element only after his fifteen years of torment.

It remains to investigate the nature of the trials themselves. In what manner and by what means may faithfulness to God, as the criterion for the passage of the trial, be appraised? One dimension to the trial hinges upon the student's character. Abulafia maintains that the student must demonstrate to the teacher his worthiness through his possession of traits such as forbearance, patience, compassion, generosity, honesty, modesty and the like. As well, the student must make it apparent that he is motivated only by a love of learning and not by any ambition for worldly gain. It is this love of learning for its own

²³ Wolfson cites this particular sentence in discussing Abulafia's perspective on esotericism. Writes Wolfson regarding Abulafia's view, "The two extremes of revealing what must be concealed and concealing what is appropriate to reveal must be avoided." *Ibid.*, pp. 80-81.

sake which Abulafia terms learning “for the sake of heaven.”²⁴ The student is tested repeatedly for these attributes, and if he is found to be deficient, no secrets may be transmitted to him, and the examination must proceed until the student is at last judged to be fully repentant.²⁵

Such a trial appears to be preliminary to the trial that is the “refinement” (*seruf*) that results from esoteric practice, that is, from letter permutation. In a significant passage from *Sefer ha-Hesheq*, Abulafia refers to a rabbinic assertion that Bešalel, knew how to “combine (*lešaref*) the letters through which heaven and earth were created.”²⁶ Abulafia elaborates upon this position, indicating that such a practice, letter permutation, is enjoined “to purify (*lešaref*) human beings.”²⁷ Abulafia goes on to write,²⁸

And a man may not understand and grasp the height of the true examination except according to what you will hear: And it is that you must first believe in your heart, in every way that you are able to believe, that the letters are signs and hints in the likeness of attributes and allegories in their essences. And they are found to be tools for man, to instruct in the way of apprehension. And for us they are in the likeness of strings of a lyre, which, from the bringing out of its voice, with the drawing of the bow in the hand upon the strings, and in the changing of this bowing from string to string, and in the permutation (*seruf*) of the sounds that are born from it, rouses to joy and pleasure the soul of the man who seeks to rejoice. And it [the soul] will receive from its [the instrument’s] delight, and great enjoyment of the soul results from this, because the joy is natural for every man. And if he is not roused to it from the image of thought, the soul will not be moved to joy. And if the man is sorrowful and indolent at the time of the movement of his heart to the goal of receiving the joy, he will not receive it at all. Because the sorrow and lassitude that are engraved in his thought, in one way among others, are very strong, and they are the opposite of joy. And if the opposite is well-founded and strong, how will it be possible to find the opposite in actualization, whose potentiality is in utmost weakness?

²⁴ *Hayyei ha-‘Olam ha-Ba’*, MS Oxford-BL 1582, fol. 34a; printed edition, p. 116. Wolfson mentions the modes of perfection delineated by Abulafia for the worthy student. *Abraham Abulafia*, p. 69.

²⁵ *Hayyei ha-‘Olam ha-Ba’*, MS Oxford-BL 1582, fol. 35a; printed edition, p. 117.

²⁶ BT. *Berakhot* 55a. For the craftsman Bešalel, see Exodus, chapters 31, 35 through 39.

²⁷ Wolfson adduces this passage in order to demonstrate that Abulafia understands letter permutation to be suggested by the rabbinic sages as a *mišvāh*, through which a person may be purified. *Abraham Abulafia*, p. 199.

²⁸ *Sefer ha-Hesheq*, MS NY-JTSA Mic. 1801, fols. 32a–b; printed edition, p. 63.

Abulafia extends the notion of “permutation” further here, applying it to musical notes. These are seen as analogous to letters and, likely, their intonations during meditative practice.²⁹ Abulafia places a noteworthy emphasis on the psychological and emotional states relevant to mystical practice. He suggests that the mystic must from the outset place himself in a state of unmitigated belief with respect to the notion that the individual letters bear meaningful implications within themselves. There can be no doubt for the mystic but that the letters all embody significations that must be plumbed.³⁰ Belief in the potency and significance of letters activates the combinatorial, and, ultimately, hermeneutical practice in which the mystic engages. The results of this proper psychological mindset are intensely emotional experiences.

Notwithstanding the emphasis that we have seen Abulafia place upon the human intellect and on the interpretive faculty with respect to the conjunction with the Active Intellect, Abulafia is clear here that the emotional dimension of letter permutation is the trigger to prophetic experience. Overwhelming joy is not simply an accompaniment to the mystical experience, as might seem to be the case from some of Abulafia’s other descriptions of the attainment of prophecy.³¹ Here we see that the mystic’s engagement with the letters and their significations is aimed specifically toward the consummation of an ecstatic state. The level of prophecy, an intellective and hermeneutical outpouring, flows from this ecstasy. Thus Abulafia avails himself of *Shabbat* 30b, “Prophecy does not prevail within grief or lassitude, only within joy.” Writes Abulafia regarding those attributes associated with such a state of well-being, “These are without a doubt the attributes appropriate for every prophet before the fact (*re’uyot lehiyotan*

²⁹ Scholem has noted Abulafia’s keen interest in this analogy, pointing to its being indicative of Abulafia’s removal of the letters from any sense of literary or interpretive context. *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, p. 133. They become, as Scholem describes them, “meaningless,” and they come thereby to comprise a “music of pure thought.” Idel also notes Abulafia’s comparison of letter permutation and music. This stems from the harmony produced between two elements (two letters, or two instruments), from the joy that results from either, and from the fact that each is an external activity that brings about internal effects on the soul. “The Writings of Abraham Abulafia and His Teaching,” p. 278 (in Hebrew). Prophecy, Idel notes, is for Abulafia like the hearing of music, while music may also serve as a vehicle for prophecy. *Ibid.*, pp. 279–280. See also the parallel discussion, “Music and Ecstatic Kabbalah,” in, *idem*, *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 55–73.

³⁰ This flies in the face of Scholem’s perspective, I believe, on the musical analogy found in the preceding note.

³¹ Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, pp. 123, 134.

qodemot).³² Prophetic experience results from a proper psychological orientation, one in which the mystic possesses an unshakeable belief in the significations of the letters of which he makes use and in which a joyous state of mind is cultivated during letter permutation. Both of these internal qualities, it will emerge shortly, are bulwarks against the potency of the demonic element.

An impediment in the mystical undertaking, it is apparent, is a state of doubt.³³ Another, which Abulafia next references, is a state of sadness. Abulafia takes it as a simple fact that the ecstatic state cannot be achieved if the mystic embarks upon his undertaking with a downcast psychological disposition. He asks the reader how it could be otherwise. Referring to the “attributes” appropriate to the prophet mentioned above, that is, those pertaining to joy, Abulafia writes, “Their complete opposites are their obstructions (*monēi’hem*).” These obstructions to joy and, thus, prophecy, are, once more, grief or lassitude.

The choice of the word “obstruction” for these emotional states is a significant one. It is the same word which Abulafia uses to refer to the demons who beset the mystic during his attempted conjunction with the divine. In *Maftēah ha-Tokhahot* we find, for instance:³⁴

Behold the wonders of Torah and how it reveals our nature with respect to the matter near to the animal and with respect to the form of the matter that is near to that which is a power from the powers of demons. And one must atone in them known atonements in order that no harm to the intellective soul will come by means of them because of their being obstructions (*mon’im*) to the power of apprehending the Creator and His attributes and His actions through His names...

Abulafia suggests that demons and their associated powers are hindrances to the apprehension of God, obtained via His names.³⁵ We have already examined Abulafia’s perspective that communion with divine names is the route to prophetic knowledge. Such knowledge

³² *Sefer ha-Hesheq*, MS NY-JTSA Mic. 1801, fol. 32b; printed edition, p. 64.

³³ Abulafia also emphasizes the importance of the elimination of all doubts to success in mystical practice in *Maftēah ha-Shemot*, MS NY-JTSA Mic. 1897, fol. 64b; printed edition, p. 66.

³⁴ *Maftēah ha-Tokhahot*, MS Oxford-BL 1605, fol. 56a; printed edition, p. 59.

³⁵ See Scholem, *The Kabbalah of Sefer Temunah*, p. 179 (in Hebrew). Wolfson presents a passage from *Maftēah ha-Shemot* which presents the flipside of this formulation: One must make use of one’s intellect to ensnare these demons by means of an “intelligible image.” *Abraham Abulafia*, p. 163.

comes through the permutation of the letters of these names. The internal psychological states, such as lassitude, that we understood earlier as “obstructions” to successful letter permutation in *Sefer ha-Hesheq* are externalized and personified in demonic terms here in *Maftelah ha-Tokhaḥot*. We may see in Abulafia’s own choice of words what, from a modern perspective, we may already be predisposed to surmise: The demons against whom Abulafia strives are projections of his own psychological landscape, embodying the doubts to which he alludes and his moments of dispiritedness. We have noted Abulafia’s framing of the demonic element in terms of idolatry and heresy, so we may also understand his demons as embodiments of the temptations with which he apparently grappled.

The Battle against the Demons of Idolatry

On the subject of demonic “obstruction,” Abulafia writes elsewhere as follows:³⁶

...all that is written, whether according to its contextual sense or its secret, or whether it is said as an allegory and riddle, and even the rules of signs, or in the Torah’s being all names, also every utterance and every creature in their being holy names, its use and its truth and its aim are perfected with our being drawn after the divine unique intentionality alone, which in truth is the intention of truth. And it is a thing possible for us to perform and there is no obstruction (*monei’a*) for us except for the will of Satan alone and his power and his knowledge when he prevails upon our knowledge and power and will. Because in [the] three [of them] we bless the name in the nature that impresses within us what it impresses in Satan himself, and it weighs our knowledge and power and will on a scale balanced with his will and power and knowledge, his name against our essence, to fight with us, and our name against his essence, to fight with him, and the tools of its battle are in our hands. And they are the twenty-two moist, fine letters...

Abulafia informs us that the only obstruction to successful attunement to God’s will, achieved through the divination of secrets embedded within holy names, is the will of Satan.³⁷ On a technical level, Abulafia alludes again to letter permutation, to which names are to be

³⁶ *’Oṣar Eden Ganuz*, MS Oxford-BL 1580, fol. 28a; printed edition, pp. 57–58.

³⁷ Elsewhere, *Maftelah ha-Tokhaḥot*, MS Oxford-BL 1605, fol. 69b; printed edition, p. 82, it is the demonic entity Sandalfon who is referred to as the obstruction.

subjected in this instance. The battle of wills—literally so, here—that is joined against Satan is waged with the letters serving as weapons, as is specified in the closing reference to the alphabet.³⁸ There is again an interplay at work here between the portrayal of this struggle as an internal one and its characterization as a war with an externalized entity, Satan. The battle of wills seemingly takes place in the mystic's mind and in Satan's, so that there is present an inward struggle against an outward opponent. At times, elements of a confessional character are prevalent in Abulafia's discussions of such battles. This we might well expect, given Abulafia's position that an imperfect or unworthy psyche renders one susceptible to demons. The connection between Abulafia's generalized discussion of the mystic's battles against demons and his own monumental internal struggle, to which we saw him give voice in discussing his fifteen years of torment, should be recognized.

In a noteworthy passage from *Mafteah ha-Tokhaḥot*, Abulafia discusses at some length the battle against the demonic enemy. He frames this confrontation as a mercurial internal dialog carried on within the mind of the mystic. The true nature of the enemy is elicited here with persistence and clarity. Writes Abulafia,³⁹

...And then you will find that He, may He be blessed, will cause all of your enemies to fall beneath you, as He did to pharaoh and to his people. And the cause of your enemies falling beneath you is (Deut. 7:21), "...because the Lord your God is among you, a mighty and terrible God." And study its speaking of a lofty hint concerning the ban on idolatry in the matter of the [destruction of the idols of the nations, whose] (Deut. 7:25), "...silver or gold that is on them [you should not desire], or take it for yourself, lest you be snared with it; because it is an abomination to the Lord your God. And you shall not bring an abomination to your house..." etc. "All the commandments (Deut. 8:8)..." etc. See what I have said to you, that all is contained in the name of one *miṣvah*. And see its mention of the matter of the trial [of the Israelites in the desert] in its saying (Deut. 8:2), "...to humble you, and to try you, to know [what was in your heart], whether you would keep His commandments or not." ...And its explanation is to know in the trial of your essence what is in your heart, established in the keeping of the special *miṣvah* which we mentioned above, which is the goal of man, whether you will keep it in the turning over upon you (*ba-hithafah*

³⁸ Idel as well observes the martial cast with which Abulafia imbues the struggle against his evil inclination. "Inner Peace through Inner Struggle," pp. 66–74.

³⁹ *Mafteah ha-Tokhaḥot*, printed edition, MS Oxford-BL 1605, fols. 46a–b; printed edition, pp. 42–43.

'aleikha) of evil in the time of the trial of your essence, which is a time of action, and not a time of thought alone. And this is because of what you see externally, from the many obstructions (*ba-rov ha-mon'im*), and internally, from the many thoughts in the heart. Because, "The heart is in the soul like a king in battle,"⁴⁰ and the owner of the heart will not recognize its power until he enters the battle in actualization and he defeats those who stand against him in battle. And this is the secret of every trial, and do not believe that a thing is hidden from God, may He be blessed.

The enemies that Abulafia mentions in the beginning of the passage, who are compared to pharaoh and subsequently to the idolatrous nations, are those who the mystic encounters during his psychic trial.⁴¹ The temptation posed by idolatry is the root challenge faced by the mystic at the hands of his would-be "obstructions." Abulafia musters Deuteronomy 7:25 to demonstrate this point. The passage enjoins the Israelites not to fall victim to idolatry by coveting the precious metals from which idols were made. These are referred to as snares in the passage, and Abulafia seeks to suggest that the enemy encountered during mystical practice seeks to lay snares of the same type.

Counterpoised by Abulafia against this danger are the *mišvot*. They are referenced in Deuteronomy 8:8, a passage which, Abulafia suggests, actually alludes to one overarching *mišvah*. The latter Abulafia has discussed earlier in the text: It is the injunction to pursue what is the "final aim" of man's existence, "the prophetic, intellective apprehension; that is, the endeavoring to apprehend it all the days of the life of man."⁴² Abulafia perceives the trial of the Israelites in the desert, seen as thrust upon them in order to test their fidelity to the commandments, as identical with the testing of the mystic as he seeks to resist the idolatrous threat. The *mišvot* to which the Israelites were to remain faithful run parallel to the mystic's *mišvah*, to cleave to the Active Intellect.

We have noted the autobiographical dimension to such discussions on Abulafia's part. A question begins to emerge as to how to reconcile Abulafia's call to resist the lure of the nations with the observation that his writings are replete with Christian borrowings. One possible resolution to this problem is that Abulafia failed in the trial that he

⁴⁰ *Sefer Yeširah*, Gruenwald ed., 6:1–2 (para. 59).

⁴¹ Idel notes this with respect to pharaoh. *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics in Abraham Abulafia*, p. 67.

⁴² *Maṣleḥ ha-Tokhaḥot*, MS Oxford-BL 1605, fol. 45a; printed edition, p. 41.

describes, having fallen victim to an attraction to idolatrous teachings. And there is evidence, some of which we have seen, that Abulafia saw himself as having succumbed, at certain junctures in his life, to this fate.⁴³ Another possibility is that Abulafia defeated the demons that he encountered, wresting from them and redeeming their idolatrous teachings. In this we can sense that mystical objective discussed earlier, to subsume the forbidden other within the self. It may be that Abulafia engaged in a kind of flirtation with the heretical for the purpose of taming and absorbing it.

As he continues in *Mafteah ha-Tokhaḥot*, Abulafia describes the trial of the mystic as one of action and not merely of thought. We may understand this performative aspect of the trial in kind with Abulafia's focus upon the *mišvot*.⁴⁴ Since he views these as contained within the one *mišvah* of conjunction with the divine, it is apparent that the action that Abulafia has in mind is mystical practice. That he discusses the "turning over upon you of evil" suggests that he is concerned with the activity of letter permutation, which he describes with regularity as a "turning over" of the letters.⁴⁵ The result of such practice is the appearance of evil elements, the basis for the mystical test. These take two forms, Abulafia relates: visions, the products of the evil obstructions, and thoughts, which lead to an internal struggle. Abulafia's portrait of the mystic is one of a human being plunged into a psychic crisis. This carries with it a hallucinatory component, although Abulafia, we have noted, insists upon the ontological reality of the demonic forces encountered.⁴⁶ The reference to the visual products of the struggle as

⁴³ Hames suggests that Abulafia retrospectively viewed his mission to the Pope, which occurred during his fifteen year period of trial by demons, as a misconception on his part as to the nature of his messianic project. Hames, "Three in One or One that is Three," p. 186. If this interpretation is correct, then we might view the visit to Rome against the backdrop of the threat of demonic temptation. That is, perhaps Abulafia later felt that the idolatrous impulse, obscuring his righteous inclination, had led him to seek out the Pope.

⁴⁴ Idel makes note of a passage in *Hayyei ha-'Olam ha-Ba'* wherein Abulafia prescribes breathing methods which kill Satan and other demons. *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia*, p. 27. Given Abulafia's perception of the "one *mišvah*," the achievement of prophecy, even such a seemingly technical exercise comes into conformity with Wolfson's notion of a hypernomian basis to Abulafia's project. His emphasis in the current passage on performative action as part of the trial by demon could readily include such breathing practices.

⁴⁵ The locution is discussed by Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 172–173, with respect to the "inversion of the attributes."

⁴⁶ Idel observes the link between the threat from demonic phantasms, to be associated with Sandalfon, and the imaginative faculty. Both Idel and Scholem observe the

well as to the performative dimension of the mystical *misvah* begins to suggest that the struggle transcends thought alone; it is in a certain sense physical.

With regard to the inward dimension of the battle, Abulafia continues,⁴⁷

...And know that as the heart has two thoughts concerning every matter, and they are the first ones and the opposite ones, it says "yes" regarding one matter in your first thought, and immediately your heart changes to "no," or "no" before "yes," because it changes from the prior "yes" to "no." ...And because of the "yes" and the "no" being in the likeness of the affirmation and the negation in the matters that are thought, the thought requires an arbiter between the two that are borne that are thought as opposites. And sometimes the imagination is sufficient to be the arbiter between "yes" and "no." And sometimes they require the intellect to arbitrate between them....because of the thoughts of the heart being very many, and they change and are replaced continually, from moment to moment. And they are changed from "yes" to "no" and from "no" to "yes" until it is improper to be certain of imaginative thought, but it is proper to be certain of intellective [thought], because it establishes a strong existence, like the perfect sensory existence in the truth of its apprehension. And regarding this the Torah says concerning the manna (Deut. 8:3), "...in order that He might make it known to you that man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord does man live." And near to this (Deut. 8:5), "Know in your heart, that as a man chastens his son, the Lord your God chastens you."

We may understand that Abulafia proceeds here upon the basis of self-reflection. Given his other discussions of the mystic's psychic conflict, including his own, there is good reason to infer that his internal dialog was of a deeply unsettled and equivocal nature. His remarks here point to the confounding quality of this dialog, to the enormous difficulty with which his thought processes were to be reined in and the dialog ultimately silenced with a proper judgment.

same tendency in Sufi thought. Idel notes the presence of images, in *Likkutei ha-Ran*, linked to both Metatron and Sandalfon, the former being good images, the latter evil. *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, pp. 74–76. See also Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, p. 147. Idel observes as well that, in *Sha'arei Sedeq*, written by a disciple of Abulafia, Sandalfon obstructs successful manipulation of names and that he stands behind the demonic threat. *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, p. 78.

⁴⁷ *Maftelah ha-Tokhaḥot*, MS Oxford-BL 1605, fols. 46b–47b; printed edition, pp. 43–44.

Abulafia explains that he places his faith in intellective thought, as against imaginative thought. This attempt at clarity poses its own obvious problems, however. It appears that one is left with the difficult task of determining whether one has engaged the former or the latter mode of thought. And not only do both the intellect and the imagination employ thought, as is apparent here, but, as elsewhere, both employ imagery as well.⁴⁸ In fact, the current passage is as well tinged with such a view. In offering an epistemological evaluation of the intellective thought, Abulafia suggests that “it establishes a strong existence,” one which corresponds to “the perfect sensory existence.” Intellective thought, then, conforms to a true apprehension of reality, one with a sensory component. The mystic is left to determine whether that which is apprehended by the senses is perfect and of an intellective nature or whether it is imaginative and false. One cannot escape the sense that the tenuous reliability of one’s conclusions during mystical practice attests to the difficulty in thwarting that aspect of the internal dialog which threatens to lead one in the direction of heresy.⁴⁹ Distinguishing the idolatrous, discerning the imaginative as against the intellective component of the Active Intellect, is the primary pitfall and ultimate challenge in mystical practice as Abulafia delineates it.⁵⁰

In the present passage, manna serves as an example for Abulafia of that which is sensate yet purely intellective. Deuteronomy 8:3 affords Abulafia the means to effect a connection between words received from God—that is, prophetic revelation—and the sensory product of the intellect, manna. The degree to which this conceptualization of manna is in accord with contemporary Christian ones is striking.

⁴⁸ See *Maftelah ha-Ra'ayon* (*The Key of Speculation*), MS Vatican-BA ebr. 291, fols. 21a–b; printed edition, p. 5, for a discussion of the “intellective image.”

⁴⁹ Idel evinces a passage from *Hayyei ha-'Olam ha-Ba'*, in which Abulafia indicates that Satan attempts to create phantasms to distract the mystic, and even to generate physical illusions that may disrupt the mystic’s concentration. Nevertheless, because of the rigors required of the mystic in Abulafia’s technique, Idel believes that it would have been “almost impossible” for the mystic’s attention to wander, for which reason “this danger is not emphasized much in Abulafia’s works.” *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia*, p. 121.

⁵⁰ Maimonides pointed to the difficulty in distinguishing imaginative from intellective “mental representations,” writing, “...one individual claims that they are intellectual representations, whereas another affirms that they are imaginative representations.” *The Guide of the Perplexed* 1:73.

For Christians, the eucharistic wafer, the enfleshed Logos,⁵¹ was taken to symbolize manna as the objectified divine essence. For his part, Abulafia discusses manna as materialized divine intellection in a fashion remarkably in keeping with the Christian perspective on the eucharistic wafer.⁵² The literary device, manna, by means of which

⁵¹ Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, pp. 130, 143; Marcus, *Rituals of Childhood*, p. 85; Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being*, p. 342. The implicit equation between materialized intellection and the enfleshed Logos is summed up in a suggestion by Altmann that there is a relationship between Maimonides' notion of the Active Intellect and earlier notions of the Logos: "...the medieval Jewish philosophers substituted for it [the Philonic Logos] either Plotinus' second hypostasis...or Aristotle's Active Intellect...Since he [God] is (in Aristotelianism) the supreme Intellect, the essence of man, namely, his intellect, has been stated by Scripture to be in the image of God and in his likeness." Altmann, "Homo Imago Dei in Jewish and Christian Theology," p. 254. Regarding the Philonic notion of the Logos, for which, Altmann indicates, Maimonides substituted the Active Intellect, Stroumsa points to mythological associations; it is referred to by Philo as "Man after the Image" and "he who sees God," among other things. Stroumsa, "Form(s) of God," p. 279. The thrust of Stroumsa's argument is to suggest pre-Christian Jewish origins for the notion of the anthropomorphic demiurge, which would ultimately coalesce around a notion of Metatron in Jewish circles and would also influence early Christianity. *Ibid.*, pp. 277, 281. See also Idel, *Messianic Mystics*, pp. 86–87, for possible traces in Abulafia's work of earlier doctrine connecting Metatron with Jesus. See also Box, "The Idea of Intermediation in Jewish Theology," pp. 106, 115–116, for a discussion of targumic representations of the divine word, *memra*, as a physical and spiritual intermediary potency. Box relates this to *3Enoch's* according of the name "Dibburiel," ("Divine Word") to Metatron as one of his seventy names. See also Boyarin, "The Gospel of the *Memra*," where he suggests that assertions of difference between Christians and Jews based on Logos theology are revisionist, because various aspects of Logos theology were indigenous to the hellenized Judaism of the early Christian period. See also idem, *Border Lines*, pp. 89, 92. For the perspective that Philo's notion of the Logos was influenced by Gnostic conceptions of the luminous body of heavenly Adam, see Fossum, "Jewish-Christian Christology and Jewish Mysticism," pp. 266–267. Fossum notes a further parallelism between Jewish-Christian notions of the Son and hekhalotic conceptions of the *Kavod*, as well as the *Shi'ur Qomah* tradition of the divine body. See *ibid.*, pp. 273–274. For conceptions of the *Kavod* in the doctrine of the German Pietists, see Dan, *The Esoteric Theology of Ashkenazi Hasidism*; Wolfson, "Metatron and *Shi'ur Qomah* in the Writings of Haside Ashkenaz." See also idem, "Hebraic and Hellenic Conceptions of Wisdom in *Sefer ha-Bahir*," p. 169, for the notion of the embodied Logos "in a sensible form" in *Sefer ha-Bahir*.

⁵² A similar conception is present in the *Zohar*. There, manna represents materialized illumination whose source is the sefirotic realm. Hecker, "Each Man Ate an Angel's Meal," p. 99. The consumption of manna was seen to result in communion with hypostatic wisdom, while at the same time leading to the indwelling of blessing in the body. Idem, *Mystical Bodies Mystical Meals*, pp. 60–61. For Isaac of Acre, as in the *Zohar*, manna was also to be linked with the *sefirah Tiferet*. *Ibid.*, pp. 65–66, 83–84. The *Zohar* associated the bread and wine of the Sabbath meal with the written law (*Tiferet*) and the oral law (the *Shekhinah*), respectively. *Ibid.*, pp. 83–84. A connection with both symbolic elements of the Last Supper is here apparent. A conception related to that of manna holds for *masah* as well in the *Zohar*. Idem, "Each Man Ate an Angel's Meal," p. 97. Both are seen as symbols of the Torah, *ibid.*, p. 114. Torah

Abulafia upholds the intellect over the transgressive potentiality of the imagination can be said to have led him into the domain of the transgressive, where the influence of those whom he refers to as idolators prevails.

Given what we can sense in Abulafia's recourse to the motif of manna, we may wonder about the above passage's next allusion to the mystical trial: "And near to this [verse concerning manna, we find] (Deut. 8:5), 'Know in your heart, that as a man chastens his son, the Lord your God chastens you.'" The passage, as Abulafia recontextualizes it, comes to read that the mystic is tried by God in the same way that a man chastens his son. God's chastening of the son might strike the ear as another christological allusion, given that this interpretation is in keeping with the immediately preceding discussion of manna as perfect materialized intellection. The Christian doctrine that Jesus stood as materialized divinity runs parallel with a conception propounded by Abulafia, that the Jewish mystic can achieve divinization with his coming to prophecy. Implicitly invoking the Christian notion of divine sonship, then, would further Abulafia's purpose in the current passage. It would serve to suggest that the mystical discernment that is this passage's general subject leads one to a prophetic state of materialized intellection.

Abulafia will go on to again relate the mystical trial to the performance of the *mišvot*, following Deuteronomy 8:6. He subsequently cites portions of Deuteronomy, from 8:11 to 9:1, with little comment of his own, concerning God's testing of the Israelites and His injunction to them to remember the *mišvot* and to not follow after other gods. We may understand that Abulafia implicitly recasts this entire section in terms of his conception of the single mystical *mišvah* and of the challenge that idolatry represents for the mystic. This portion of Abulafia's

was in turn upheld in its own right as a materialization of the divine Logos. Thus, the consumption of both manna and *mašah* among the zoharic authorship runs in parallel to the traditions described by Marcus regarding the magical efficacy of the eating of foods marked with letters or with words from the Torah. Marcus, *Rituals of Childhood*. See Yuval, *Two Nations in Your Womb*, pp. 72–75, 158–169, 243–245, for the idea that the Passover haggadah was formulated in parallel with Christian motifs concerning the Last Supper. The conception of the *mašah* as the "bread of affliction" is seen here to have been developed, for instance, under such an influence, as was the ceremony constructed around it. Biale notes a parallel between the Palestine Talmud's association of the *haroset* with the blood of the paschal lamb and the Gospel motif of the eucharist. *Blood and Belief*, p. 65. For a polemic by Abulafia against the eucharist, see Hames, *Like Angels on Jacob's Ladder*, p. 81.

discourse ends as follows:⁵³ “See and understand that the aim of the intention is to always hear the voice of God in the secret of prophecy that I told to you. And we learned from His words that if you do not first remove idolatry from the heart, it is not possible to hear the voice of God.” Abulafia concludes here with a clear statement that the mystic’s obstructions, his subject at the passage’s outset, partake of an idolatrous essence.

Names, Demonic, and Divine

A more focused elucidation of the means by which the mystical trial is undertaken and the attendant obstructions overcome is presented in a passage from *Maftelah ha-Ra'ayon* (*The Key of Speculation*), written much earlier, in the first half of the 1270s. There, Abulafia begins,⁵⁴

Every enlightened one, within whom is the Holy Spirit, is obligated, from the perfect Torah and from the efflux of the truth of wisdom, to investigate and inquire as to which thing brings him to the enjoyment of the splendor of the *Shekhinah*, and to live forever in the life of the world to come, and which thing it is that obstructs him (*mon'o*) from this. And it is also proper for him to look and to contemplate within himself by which power among his powers and by which spirit among his spirits he is able to grasp this.

Abulafia avers that the mystic must distinguish properly, at the time of his reception of the efflux from the Active Intellect, between those things that lead him toward the realization of his goal, cast here in terms of communion with the *Shekhinah*,⁵⁵ and those which are obstructions. In this connection, the mystic must as well examine features of his own psyche, some of which will enable him to make this distinction and some of which will not. This discussion runs parallel,

⁵³ *Maftelah ha-Tokhahot*, MS Oxford-BL 1605, fol. 48a; printed edition, p. 45.

⁵⁴ *Maftelah ha-Ra'ayon*, MS Vatican-BA ebr. 291, fol. 21a; printed edition, p. 4.

⁵⁵ Literally, “Indwelling,” the *Shekhinah* was understood by the theosophic kabbalists to be the hypostatic feminine principle of the divine, manifested terrestrially and equated with the lowest of the *sefirot*, *Malkhut*. The mystic was to seek erotic union with the *Shekhinah*, by which as well the *Shekhinah* would be unified with the upper *sefirot*, particularly the masculine *Tiferet*, through the agency of the phallic potency *Yesod* (Foundation), which served as well as the conduit for divine sustenance. Abulafia equated the *Shekhinah* with the Active Intellect. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, pp. 143, 229–235.

then, to the one we just examined in *Mafteah ha-Tokhaḥot*, where the intellective thought was to be privileged over imaginary thought in the resolution of the inner dialog's many twists and turns. As he continues, we can sense that Abulafia is aware of the problems that we discussed in that connection. These concern the proper distinguishing of intellective from imaginative thought, a process which, we saw, had momentous consequences in terms of the mystical trial and the shunning of idolatry. In the current context, the mystic is to seek the proper inner "spirit" or "power." Of this he is to then avail himself in discerning what within the efflux from the Active Intellect assists and what obstructs him. That which obstructs, we have already noted, is demonic in nature. Abulafia continues,

And in finding it [the proper power or spirit within the mystic], the one who apprehends then may apprehend in it that which is apprehended. And it is known that in this person who apprehends, in the being of the person who investigates its secret and finds it, in it he will apprehend who it is who apprehends (*bo hasig mi hu' ha-masig*). And when he apprehends who it is who apprehends in the apprehension of his intellect, then the success of his apprehension is perfected, with that which is apprehended for him according to the utterance, [which happens] only when he calls the one who apprehends or that which is apprehended (*lavad ke-she-yigra' le-masig 'o le-musag*) a name among the names, like most men who call by a name a thing among things that are found in their imagination and not in reality; and they do not know to distinguish the matter of that name from that upon which it falls.

At the outset, the consequences of mustering the proper inner quality are expressed in a manner which recalls the unification of knower, knowledge and known, a formulation applied by Abulafia to the unification of the mystic with the divine Active Intellect during *devequt* ("cleaving" or "adhesion").⁵⁶ The mystic will come then to an insight regarding the true identity of the one "who apprehends," that is, himself. Likely, Abulafia has in mind the realization of the mystic's self-identification as Metatron or as Raziel, a phenomenon that expresses the mystic's uniting within himself knower, knowledge and known.⁵⁷ This may happen, Abulafia relates here, only when the mystic assigns

⁵⁶ Idel, *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia*, p. 126.

⁵⁷ Scholem discusses Abulafia's description of his visions of his own self projected before him and imparting revelation. *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, pp. 141–142. See also Idel, *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia*, p. 90; Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 56, 81.

a name to the one who apprehends and to the object of this apprehension. These, again, are to be identified as the mystic himself and as his divine alter ego. The motif of the proper identification and utilization of names during mystical practice, one which we have already encountered in other contexts, begins here to emerge as central to Abulafia's efforts to distinguish the evil and idolatrous component of the Active Intellect and to fend it off.

Abulafia next refers above to the misconceptions of "most men" with respect to the names applied to things. They tend to assign names to things that exist only imaginatively, and then they confuse the name for the imaginative thing itself. Abulafia implies an analogy here to mystical apprehension, where those things which exist imaginatively, as opposed to intellectually, are demonic. As Abulafia will clarify shortly, the naming of imaginative things refers to the naming of demons. Abulafia suggests here that this is a misguided undertaking. In the continuation of this passage, we will see that Abulafia is dismissive of demonic names, which, in his estimation, themselves have only an imaginative existence.⁵⁸ Abulafia appears to suggest that, when the thing named is itself an imaginative product, whose essence lacks reality, the identification of the name with the thing's essence is misconceived. Of course, a problem presents itself here, in that Abulafia maintains that demons *do* possess an ontological essence, *as* imaginative; this too he will discuss as the passage continues. The critique of confusing the name of the demon for the entity itself very likely relates to Abulafia's excoriations of those who manipulate demonic names because they believe them to possess an innate magical efficacy. The backdrop of the kabbalistic perspective that names possess an essential substance⁵⁹ provides Abulafia with the means to attack demonic magical practice. Abulafia continues along these lines:

Because this matter that is sought is not from the truth of wisdom, and two like opinions are not found in the truth of the telling of a master of that name regarding the name of a demon. Because there are those that

⁵⁸ Abulafia apparently senses in this habit of "most men" a corruption of a time-honored Jewish mystical principle, that Hebrew, as the sacred *prima lingua*, proffers the names of things that embody their essence. As Wolfson observes, this notion encapsulates the sense that word and matter are essentially correlated through the sacred language. *Language, Eros, Being*, p. 197. The further sense of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet as components of the body, just as they are participants in the divine name, is relevant here as well. See *ibid.*, pp. 208–209.

⁵⁹ See previous note.

say that it possesses this ability, and possesses a will in this form, until it is changed from what it is to what he wishes; sometimes he portrays it in the form of a real man, sometimes in the form of a man flying in the air, sometimes leaping from one end of the world to the other in a brief moment, sometimes in the form of a real woman, sometimes in the form of a woman flying in the air, sometimes in the form of a small fly, sometimes in the form of living, burning fire. And the like to these imaginary forms, among deficient people who think that they are truthful, has no end or limit. But the truly enlightened one knows in truth, by a proof and a sign, that any change to everything that is altered is a deficiency in the examination of the truth of its existence.

Part of the reason, we learn, for the error of assigning names to demons is that the names themselves are so variable for any given demon. This is due to the dubious reality of the demons themselves, which are ascribed many and conflicting fanciful characterizations and attributes according to men's imaginations. Abulafia is clear here that this chaotic situation results from the fact that the demons themselves are imaginary.⁶⁰ The proof of this status lies in their changeability; they do not possess the hypostatic nature of those entities which possess a bona fide reality to their existence. The demons' possession of what should be called an imaginary or false existence does not mean, however, that they are nonexistent. Regarding the imaginary forms of demons, Abulafia goes on to write,

And if it [the imaginary form] is above with respect to those beneath in some matters, such as a change in degradation above, this is nothing but a deficiency of [its] matter, which is generated and destroyed in its particulars. Indeed, [for] the supernal matters, in truth, change among them is a degradation, so that no change may be found at all in the separate intellects. Because every movement is a change, and every change is a deficiency and an actualization of potential, and there is not among them a thing such as this.

The imaginary forms of demons are unreal to the degree that they are subject to generation and corruption, just as are the things of the terrestrial world, though there is a difference. This difference stems from the imaginary form's status as "above," referring to its incorporeality,

⁶⁰ Abulafia identified the demonic element with the imagination itself. Idel, *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics in Abraham Abulafia*, p. 56. Idel notes Abulafia's play on the words *dimyon*—"imagination"—and "daemon," consisting as they do of the same Hebrew consonants. Ibid., p. 56.

or to the difference between its matter and that of the terrestrial world. Nevertheless, the status of the imaginary form is below that of the separate intellects, which possess no defect or changeability. The deficient nature of the demonic coincides with its status as imaginary and non-intellective. Nevertheless, by implication here, demons possess an existence after the fashion of those other things which we perceive around us as real, which are also subject to generation and corruption. The imaginary nature to the demonic element coincides with the existence of demons in a compromised status; it is this status that makes them a very real and external threat at the same moment that they remain products of the imagination.

The imaginative status of demons carries important implications for their names. Regarding this, Abulafia next writes,

And when we speak in the name of a demon, the same is said of he who mentions with his mouth the name of God or the name of an angel or the name Active Intellect or *Da'at* or *Binah* or *Hokhmah* or *Maḥshavah* (Thought) or *Raṣon* (Will) or similar such names without an intellective image, and their like, because, to the enlightened person, the words are insufficient in the calling of their names. But the enlightened person pursues true apprehensions and does not rest until he apprehends what is possible for him to apprehend of them, time after time, with many investigations... thus it is obligatory to investigate, in every respect, every name regarding its subject or its meaning.

As with the discussion from *Maḥteah ha-Tokhaḥot*, where an “intellective thought” was necessary for the generation of a perfected sensory apprehension, here it is an “intellective image” that is required in the utilization of names by the mystic. Abulafia gathers together for one critique those who adjure demons and those who occupy themselves in an improper manner with angelic names and with the names of *sefirot*, names such as *Da'at*, *Binah*, *Hokhmah*, *Maḥshavah* or *Raṣon*. An appropriate engagement with sefirotic names, we learn, must entail recourse to an intellective image.

There is a significant relationship between these remarks concerning the *sefirot* and some of Abulafia's hostile claims regarding those kabbalists who “cut the plantings,” that is, commit the same heresy with respect to the divine unity that is committed by the idolators, the Christians. In *Ve-Ẓo'it li-Yehudah* (*And this is for Judah*), written much later, in the latter half of the 1280s, Abulafia warns of the danger risked by sefirotic kabbalists of disrupting the divine unity, while in *Imrei Shefer* he explains that the sefirotic kabbalists assign names to the

sefirot but are confused as to the nature of the *sefirot* themselves.⁶¹ In disrupting the divine unity, these kabbalists are, in fact, kinsmen with those who manipulate demonic names; the latter are to be understood as sorcerers, and hence as idolators as well. An equivalence is present, then, between those who manipulate demonic names (that is, sorcerers), theosophic kabbalists and Christians.⁶² They all fall victim to the demonic, imaginative element, a fate avoided by the mystic who proceeds with proper discernment.⁶³ Abulafia is clear that names in their own right, be they demonic or sefirotic, are not efficacious either for mystical purposes or, presumably, for magical ones. Names must be examined intellectually by the mystic in order to forestall the type of malpractice and slippage into heresy that will ensue from a purely imaginative engagement. "Time after time, with many investigations,"

⁶¹ Idem, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, pp. 55 n. 8, 139; Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 105, 111–112, 131 n. 101, 133 n. 104. As Wolfson notes, Abulafia does not reject the doctrine of the *sefirot* in total, but only that approach that we understand as theosophic, in which the *sefirot* are conceived of as hypostases from the divine, in a manner which threatens the unity of the divinity. Ibid., p. 102. Abulafia frequently understands the *sefirot* as embodying God's unity. Ibid., pp. 131, 218. From this it is evident that only the improper, non-intellective understanding of the *sefirot* and their names threatens the unity, not the belief in the *sefirot* itself. Wolfson observes that Abulafia accords legitimacy to a kabbalah of the *sefirot*, but assigns to it a status beneath that of the kabbalah of names. Ibid., p. 107. Wolfson makes note of a passage from 'Oṣar *Eden Gamuz* in which Abulafia attacks sorcerers who feel that they have mastered both kabbalah and knowledge of the names. Ibid., p. 100 n. 24. There, Wolfson observes Abulafia's embattled posture with respect to his contemporaries, relating it to his condemnation by Solomon ibn Adret. As well, there may be a sensitivity on Abulafia's part to the fact that he places as much emphasis on the mastery and manipulation of names as do the magicians whom he disparages. See also *ibid.*, p. 103 n. 29.

⁶² Nevertheless, Wolfson does note that there are occasions in which Abulafia refers to sefirotic or theosophic kabbalists with no trace of a critique. Ibid., pp. 113–114.

⁶³ In this regard, it is appropriate to note Idel's observation that Abulafia tends to perceive the *sefirot* as rooted in the subconscious constitution of the mystic's psyche. *New Perspectives*, pp. 144–9, 204. Logically then, recourse to these *sefirot* in a non-intellective fashion would be tantamount to a falling victim to another element of the mystic's psychological landscape, his evil inclination. The failure to understand the psychological essence of the *sefirot* is logically tied in with the heresy of "cutting the plantings." Unification with the divine, the result of the mystic's upholding of the divine unity, as against the "cutting of the plantings," is contingent upon acting upon one's own inner sefirotic configuration, so as to assume the divine likeness. See also Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 119–122, 145–147, where this point is articulated. See also *ibid.*, p. 152 n. 157, where the psychologization of *devequt* is expressed, after the work of Altmann, in terms of the maxim, "Know thyself." Distinguishing Abulafia's mysticism from the sefirotic kabbalists' theosophy with respect to the former's psychologization of the *sefirot* is consistent with Jonas' distinction between myth and mysticism as objectification and interiorization, respectively. "Myth and Mysticism," pp. 315, 318.

names must be subjected to a mystical hermeneutical process by which insights into their nature and meaning may be elicited.

Elsewhere, in *Sefer ha-Melammed*, written not long after *Mafteah ha-Ra'ayon*, Abulafia also considers the proper mystical uses of names. He writes of being scandalized by certain magical practices, and he relates, by contrast, how names ought to be enlisted by the mystic. Abulafia here appears to be clearly of the opinion that any esoteric activity that is not directed toward the mystic's ultimate objective falls under the heading of idolatry. That objective, the fusion of knower, knowledge and known, is the quintessential affirmation of, to include the self-identification with, God's unity.⁶⁴ Abulafia, in *Sefer ha-Melammed*, leans heavily upon the views of Maimonides in attempting to create a sharp differentiation between mysticism and idolatrous magic. Writes Abulafia,⁶⁵

Rav said one exceptional thing, and this is what it is. He said,⁶⁶ "There is no name with us that is not derived except this, and it is *Yod He' Vav He'*, which is the complete explicit name; do not think anything besides this. And let not arise in your thought the madness of the writers of amulets, and what you have heard from them or will find in their strange books from the names that they have composed, and they will not instruct regarding any matter and not in any respect, and they will call them names and think that they require holiness and purity, and that they will perform wonders. All of these things, it is not fit for a man to hear them, all the moreso to believe them." Thus are the words of Rav, blessed be his memory, in our language.⁶⁷

At the outset here, Abulafia's chief objection to magical texts has to do with the demonic or angelic⁶⁸ names that they use. He points out, by way of contrast, that only the Tetragrammaton is an essential and

⁶⁴ Writes Idel, "While combining letters, the mystic is likely to be inadvertently turned into a magician, by means of the incorrect use of the Names: such an act is a serious distortion of the goal of the Names, and brings about the sinking of the sinner into the material over which he wishes to rule." *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia*, p. 122. Magic in this context appears to be synonymous with idolatrous practice, particularly with respect to its materialistic orientation.

⁶⁵ *Sefer ha-Melammed*, MS Paris-BN héb. 680, fols. 292a-b; printed edition, p. 13.

⁶⁶ *The Guide of the Perplexed* 1:61.

⁶⁷ Altmann addresses Maimonides' distaste for "practical" mysticism, astrology and the magical use of amulets. "Maimonides' Attitude toward Jewish Mysticism," p. 201.

⁶⁸ The distinction in this context is not a significant one, in that, in such texts, a demon is most often not deemed to be satanic but is simply viewed as a potency or a messenger, that is, a *daemon*.

not a derived name. The latter's essential quality is what, we may presume, grants it a completely intellective character. Abulafia continues by citing the opinion of Maimonides to the effect that the writers of magical handbooks are "mistaken or misguided men." This reference to Maimonides' view dovetails with our earlier observation that Abulafia considers demonic names to be of a dubious nature, resulting from the chimerical character of the demons themselves. Abulafia goes on to render an example of a dubious magical formula, one that makes use of a series of letter triads that derive from the seventy-two letter name of God. He writes,⁶⁹

And it is that I found written, in a book among books whose name I do not wish to mention, that anyone who wants to bring after him a woman and cause her to love him will utter the name **והו ילי סיט עלם** forward and backward seven times on the fourth night at the first hour of the night, which is the hour of Saturn. And he will adjure Katzpiel, who is the angel who rules over this star, with the aforementioned name. And he will write at this hour the four names upon a deerskin parchment without pausing in the utterance, and he will hang that parchment as an amulet upon his neck. And then the woman, whose name and the name of whose father he uttered, will love him through the power of this name with a very excessive love. And I found very many to the like to these things, almost without limit to their number.

Abulafia goes on to harshly criticize the "great rabbis" who hide such texts as if they were gems and fear them as if they were powerful. He writes, following again the influence of Maimonides,⁷⁰ that such rabbis lead themselves to madness and death. Abulafia confines himself solely to the names used in the magical formula above, not concerning himself with the elaborate rituals prescribed, taking to task, rather, those who believe that these names are "holy of holies." He refers to Maimonides' opinion that these names are not in the least instructive; they contain no "divine wisdom of use to the soul, nor to the corrupt body."⁷¹ Here Abulafia suggests that names must be subjected to analysis in order to extract intellective teachings from them, an idea that was already implicit in *Maftelah ha-Ra'ayon*. Demonic names are, naturally, incapable of providing such an intellective experience, but

⁶⁹ *Sefer ha-Melammed*, MS Paris-BN héb. 680, fol. 292b; printed edition, pp. 13–14. See Idel, *Kabbalah and Eros*, p. 44.

⁷⁰ *The Guide of the Perplexed* 1:61–62.

⁷¹ *Sefer ha-Melammed*, MS Paris-BN héb. 680, fol. 293a; printed edition, p. 15.

only an imaginative one. Concerning the subjecting of names to mystical hermeneutics, Abulafia continues,

And there is no understanding regarding these holy names [the twelve, forty-two and seventy-two letter names of God], which instruct in the divine wisdom, in what the fools think, that they are names to be spoken alone, with an utterance lacking the image of knowledge (*šiyur yediy'ah*). But the most exceptional intention is the image in what they teach with their eyes. And the next intention is also the utterance in them, like the utterance of the holy words in terror and trembling among those who fear God.

The names are not simply to be spoken, as if the utterance alone invoked their power; such would be a magical usage, devoid of an intellectual content. Rather, they must be used by one who possesses an “image of knowledge.” Proper utterance of these names, according to this passage, is to be accompanied as well by their visualization. Esoteric teachings, Abulafia relates, are imparted through the perceived image of the names, resulting in an intellectual experience.⁷² How one properly analyzes names, through an intellectual image, in order to extract the wisdom that they possess is delineated by Abulafia as follows,⁷³

And indeed what I announce to you in the matter of the secret of the permutation is that in your uttering the permuted words, the spirit of God will rest upon you within the warming of the heart, even though you will not understand what these words teach that you will utter. Also, that this is true there is no doubt, but not in the way of uttering the names to perform through them deceitful bodily deeds, but to awaken the soul to the warming of the exceptional learning. And know in truth that he who does not know how to permute the letters properly, if he boasts to you regarding prophecy, do not believe it in any respect, and even if he performs signs. And take this as a rule, all who are not accustomed to permutation and do not know it are not able to know a thing

⁷² There is something of a conflict here with Abulafia's earlier assertion that only the Tetragrammaton was essential. In order for these other names of God to embody some intellectual truth concerning Him, we should expect them to have some essential nature. We should expect that something of that which is named ought to be embodied, in these cases as well, in the names themselves, since they do impart truths concerning the named, God. For another example of Abulafia's instruction concerning the visualization of names, this one in *Hayyei ha-'Olam ha-Ba'*, see Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, p. 136. See also Idel, “A Unique Abulafia Manuscript,” pp. 13–14; Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 166–167, to be discussed more fully below.

⁷³ *Sefer ha-Melammed*, MS Paris-BN héb. 680, fols. 293a–b; printed edition, pp. 15–16.

of the secret of the four letter name, and not of the twelve letter name, and not of the forty-two letter name, and not of the forty-eight letter name, and not of the seventy-two letter name, and not of anything that is called a name, which teaches regarding the divine wisdom, that is known from the twenty-two letters. And after you prove that he is not adept in permutation, know that he does not know the name. And he who does not know the name, know that prophecy among us will be impossible for him to grasp in its truth.

A facility in letter permutation, Abulafia explains, is requisite for prophetic attainment. The intellective content of divine names is brought forth only in this manner. Throughout this passage from *Sefer ha-Melammed*, Abulafia attempts to suggest that there is a clear distinction between foolhardy magical manipulation of names and proper mystical practice. At least in the current context, he confines the latter to an engagement with names of God alone, and then only in an intellective manner. It is entered into solely for the purpose of obtaining wisdom, and it is pursued only via letter permutations.⁷⁴

But the strongly emphasized distinction that is based on the practitioner's usage of the permutational technique is a fragile one. The misguided magician, in fact, may also make use of permutations, as in the example of the love philter that Abulafia cites above. There, not only are letter permutations employed, but they are themselves based, as Abulafia points out, upon the seventy-two letter name for God.⁷⁵ A further difficulty lies in distinguishing between the non-intellective approach of the magician and the intellective approach of the mystic in that, as Abulafia says, what the mystic garners of esoteric wisdom may not be properly understood by him. If it is not understood, then it may be exceedingly difficult in practice, we may suspect, to distinguish the intellective from the imaginative. An unsettling precariousness results with respect to the effort to determine whether the encounter with the Active Intellect has been prophetic or idolatrous and, ultimately, sorcerous.

Certainly, Abulafia felt compelled to outline a clear division between his own mysticism and heretical, demonic or idolatrous practice. Nevertheless, he ventured into terrain in which such distinctions

⁷⁴ Idel makes mention of Abulafia's concern with the mystic's falling into the "temptation to make magical use of the Divine Names." *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 121–121.

⁷⁵ *Sefer ha-Melammed*, MS Paris-BN héb. 680, fol. 293a; printed edition, p. 15.

are implausible, given their ultimately subjective basis. An infirm footing to those regions which Abulafia felt called upon to explore gave rise to unease. This, then, called for repeated efforts at an absolving distinction between the orthodox and the heretical, efforts which may not always have proven satisfying. And yet, it was the inherent fuzziness to such a distinction in practice that opened up possibilities for Abulafia to pick and choose features from the "idolatrous realm" for use in his own doctrine. This practice was, inevitably, to be accompanied by inner questioning. The struggle in Abulafia's psyche, to which he himself attested, resulted from the doubts engendered by the lack of clarity that I seek to underscore here.

In terms of the mystic's manipulation of names, we have been limited in our discussion to names of God, given Abulafia's contention that these alone possess an intellective content. Abulafia has more to say, however, on the subject of the permutation of names other than those for God. In this regard, several interrelated discussions from *Sitrei Torah*, written following Abulafia's abortive effort to meet with the Pope, merit analysis. Taken together, they speak to the mystic's need to apply his hermeneutical methods to the demonic component of the efflux from the Active Intellect. They also introduce the notion that grave physical danger threatens the mystic in his efforts at *devequt*. Here, another facet of Abulafia's anxiety over the pitfalls of mystical heresy presents itself.

Given what we have seen to this point concerning Abulafia's doctrine of the hidden content of names, we may understand that a name ought to be subjected to letter operations in order to determine its intellective content, if in fact it possessed any.⁷⁶ This might apply, then, to names other than those for God. Regarding the bringing forth of the esoteric content of names, Abulafia writes,⁷⁷

...if we desire [to inquire] of the letters of that name one matter that is exceptional or a secret or the teaching of why this man is called by this name that is in accord with him, this permission is in our hands to do it. [Here follow the examples of the names "Adam," "Eve," "Cain," and "Abel."]...And the end of the thing is that the sages of blessed memory

⁷⁶ Regarding the necessity that a name possess some intellective content, see also *Sitrei Torah*, MS NY-JTSA Mic. 2367, fol. 35b; printed edition, p. 77. Wolfson discusses Abulafia's belief that the names of things, assigned during creation, conceal secrets. *Abraham Abulafia*, p. 63.

⁷⁷ *Sitrei Torah*, MS NY-JTSA Mic. 2367, fols. 20b-21a; printed edition, p. 24.

called them [referring to Cain and Abel] spirits, and Rav explained them to be demons.⁷⁸ And so [it is regarding] the name of his [Adam's] first wife, who fled from him, [and who] had an existence [reflected in her name], and they taught regarding her that she was Lilith. And this is a received tradition, but she does not have an existence according to the contextual meaning of the Torah. Because we do not have in it a contextual meaning that instructs regarding her, and perhaps it is [intended] as a secret, and it is a name taken from "wailing" [*yelalah*, as in Zeph. 1:10] and from "night" (*laylah*), and if it is [to be understood] as a secret, its number is "the soul of the man," and understand it. And so too Noah... [Here follow explanations for the names "Noah," "Abraham," "Isaac," "Jacob," "Israel," "Reuven," "Shimeon," "Levi," and "Yehudah,"]... And in this way there are wonders in the Torah deeper than the sea and instructing in many of its mysteries.

Abulafia here discusses a series of names,⁷⁹ and among them he demonstrates an interest in demonic names. He takes as a springboard Maimonides' usage of the word "demons" with reference to Cain and Abel, and subsequently explicates the name Lilith, whom Maimonides does not mention. Abulafia observes that Lilith is nowhere explicitly mentioned in Scripture, but he indicates that teachings about her may be unearthed on the basis of words in Scripture that bear a likeness to her name. Thus, the secrets of Lilith are part and parcel of the hidden mysteries of Torah; likewise, the letters of her name may be investigated in order to bring forth their hidden teachings. Abulafia seeks to illustrate that the letters of a given name reveal something of the nature of the entity that is called by this name. Here we may modify Abulafia's earlier position: A demonic name may contain an intellectual content after all, but it will be one that betrays the demonic status of the being who bears it. In this, our basic sense of the exercise remains intact. A name must be analyzed in order to discern whether it is purely imaginative, and hence profane and proscribed. Similarly, a name must be analyzed so that, if it is found to be demonic, the entity with which it is associated may be unmasked and thwarted. It is apparent how this procedure may be applied to the mystical encounter,

⁷⁸ *The Guide of the Perplexed* 1:7. Maimonides refers to these demons, the sons of Adam prior to Seth, as lacking the former's complete image. Thus, for Maimonides, they are human beings who wrought mischief through their imperfection.

⁷⁹ Idel notes Abulafia's view that the names of the patriarchs should be subject to analysis in order to discern the presence of divine names therein. *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics in Abraham Abulafia*, p. 113.

within the efflux from the Active Intellect, with entities whose natures are veiled and must be determined.

In another passage from *Sitrei Torah* Abulafia is clear that the hermeneutic that accompanies letter permutation is conducted in the midst of the mystical experience. He clarifies further that the hermeneutical exercise is directed toward recognizing the nature of that which the mystic encounters:⁸⁰

And beware in all of your contemplation of the Teli, the Slanderer, in whose hand is the name of the king, and he casts a spell with it. And know that every hill (*tel*) [is a] soul (*nefesh*), and from its power in you is repose (*nefishah*), and she is a sorceress, but the sorceress does not live, because she is death and not life. And so too, her powers are like her, and understand this well. And always beware of the accuser, and this will be in every case in your studying of words that are uttered in wisdom. And no evil power will be able to tempt you, to remove you from the truth so long as you place God between your eyes, and trust in Him and He will do it, because all is in His hand, may His name be praised. "In all your ways acknowledge Him, and He will direct your paths" (Prov. 3:6). And whenever you wish to study and to look into the paths of the permutation of letters that contain the paths of the seventy languages, focus your attention upon understanding what comes to you from the permutation, whether good or evil, whether truth or lie. But understand that [in the case of] the evil, the evil inclination is speaking to you; and desire the good and the good [inclination] will also speak to you, because in truth the two of them are good as one, if you also know how to recognize the path of stripping one's self of every evil thing. And, "Depart from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it" (Ps. 34:15).

The passage begins with a discussion of the Teli, the astrological figure of the cosmic serpent or dragon that is discussed, among other places, in *Sefer Yeşirah*.⁸¹ Abulafia identified the Teli with the Active Intellect, possessing a good and an evil nature, embodied in its head and tail, respectively. Nevertheless, in the context of the current passage, the Teli, as the Slanderer or evil serpent, represents only the demonic

⁸⁰ *Sitrei Torah*, MS NY-JTSA Mic. 2367, fol. 50a; printed edition, p. 144.

⁸¹ *Sefer Yeşirah*, Gruenwald ed., 6:1–2 (para. 59). There are several understandings for the precise definition of the astrological Teli. Most often, the Teli was not conceived of simply as a star or a constellation. One prevalent way to conceive of the Teli was to imagine two celestial spheres, one traced by the annual apparent motion of the sun in a geocentric orbit, the other represented by the moon's course. These spheres were seen to intersect at two points, sometimes referred to as the two poles of the universe. These two nodes were also referred to as the head and tail of the cosmic dragon.

element within the efflux from the Active Intellect. In the passage as a whole, Abulafia is keenly interested in the significance of demonic names, so it is worthy of note that he claims at the outset that the Teli itself engages in sorcery, directed against the mystic, through the power of a name.

Abulafia embarks upon an examination of the Teli's own name. He suggests that the word *tel*, hill or mound, is to be derived from the name "Teli." *Tel*, in turn, is numerically equivalent, Abulafia notes, to the word *nefesh*, soul.⁸² The power embodied by the Teli may thus be said to exist within the human being, surmises Abulafia. Through the numerical equivalence of the words "the Teli," "repose" (*nefishah*, stemming from the prior reference to man's soul, *nefesh*) and "sorceress,"⁸³ Abulafia draws Lilith into the discussion. Although he never mentions her by name, there is an indication in the passage that she is the sorceress to whom Abulafia refers. We may recall that, in an earlier passage from *Sitrei Torah*, Abulafia had, by a numerical equivalence, identified the name Lilith with "the soul of man."⁸⁴ This link between man's soul and this particular sorceress is operative in the current context as well. Here, Lilith is seen to be a "power" present "in you," the mystic who contemplates the Teli.

Abulafia urges caution whenever one engages in mystical contemplation of the cosmic serpent, who seeks to "tempt" the mystic and deceive him, presumably in an effort to lead him into idolatry. The mystic is protected against this threat by God, or, more precisely, by His name, which is to be placed between the eyes. An allusion is present here to the talismanic power of the head tefillin. This power was understood traditionally to stem from the name of God "Shaddai," the latter being suggested by the letter *shin* inscribed on the head tefillin.⁸⁵ To this point, then, we have found that the Teli attacks by means of a name, while the mystic defends himself by the same means.

⁸² Each has a numerical value of four hundred and thirty.

⁸³ Each has a numerical value of four hundred and forty-five.

⁸⁴ The name and the phrase each have a numerical value of four hundred and eighty. The *gematria* is likely derived from Baruch Togarmi, *Sefer Maṣteḥot ha-Kabbalah*, p. 237.

⁸⁵ BT. *Minahot* 35b, *Berakhot* 6a. Wolfson notes the tradition wherein the name Shaddai and the tefillin, mezuzah and circumcision were all perceived as apotropaic with respect to the demonic threat. "Circumcision and the Divine Name," pp. 78–82.

The mystic is exhorted to analyze that which comes to him as a result of his letter permutations. He must determine whether he is making contact with the good or the evil inclination within the Active Intellect. This prescription is closely related to the mystic's requirement, discussed earlier, to plumb the intellectual content of names, also by means of letter permutations. In the current instance, names are not specifically mentioned; rather the passage seems to refer to the analysis of what is said to the mystic. Nevertheless, the passage does earlier emphasize the analysis of a demonic name. The mystic is directed to focus upon "what comes to you from the permutation," which, we may surmise, can include the names of entities encountered and also what the entity appears to embody or the intellectual content—if there is any—of that which it imparts to the mystic. The mystic must divine the presence of evil in order to ward it off, avoiding the deception that threatens to delude him and lead him into idolatry. Evil is seen here, as earlier, to be ultimately for the good. The evil component of the Active Intellect is present in order to try the mystic, from which may result his refinement, and so its presence is positive.

The Nature of the Demonic Threat

Despite his positive appraisal of evil, soon after in *Sitrei Torah*, Abulafia begins to flesh out the grave danger to the mystic of the demonic entity. Serious consequences result from a failure to properly make the elusive distinction between the good and intellectual products of the Active Intellect and the camouflaged, imaginative stumbling blocks set in place by demons.⁸⁶ Cautions Abulafia,⁸⁷

And, God forbid, if you see within yourself a strong and mighty power, alien to you, calling you by name, do not answer like a humble man, and do not give to it your wholeness, but rely upon God and God will be with you. Only be on guard, and guard your soul greatly, lest much more than what your understanding may bear should come upon you from the intellectual efflux. Because you will not receive it, and you will not fear its power, but the Lord your God you will fear. And with you

⁸⁶ Idel, "The Writings of Abraham Abulafia and His Teaching," p. 322 (in Hebrew).

⁸⁷ *Sitrei Torah*, MS Paris-BN héb. 774, fol. 157b; printed edition, p. 145.

seeing the greatness of His goodness and the loveliness of His splendor in your heart, hide your face. And afterwards, answer His question to a small extent, and from this you will ascend to Him, because the great fire guards the gate. And thus the prophets said (Ex. 20:16–17), “‘Speak with us, and we will hear, but let not God speak with us, lest we die.’ And Moses said to the people, ‘[Fear] not, for God has come to test you, so that fear of Him will be on your faces, so that you may be without sin.’”

Abulafia advocates great care when coming into contact with an “alien” entity “within yourself,” presumably a demon.⁸⁸ His characterization of the demon as existing within the mystic and as being alien to him reaffirms its dichotomous nature. The demon is both a feature of the mystic’s internal psychological landscape and it is a bona fide entity with an autonomous existence. Interestingly, the demonic threat takes the form of the overwhelming of the mystic’s intellect from too great an influx of knowledge. It inundates the mystic with “more than what your understanding may bear”. We had noted earlier Abulafia’s caveat that the result of the encounter with the Active Intellect may not be immediately comprehensible, but here we see that there is a threatening dimension to this situation. One must not allow one’s self unrestrained exposure to the efflux that one does not understand, because it could have a malevolent basis. Abulafia’s urging great caution during the mystical encounter seems well advised when we consider the great difficulty in making a reliable determination regarding the nature of an efflux that one cannot understand.

The connection between a demon and an overpowering intellectual influx seems, on the face of it, to be a strange one, given the demon’s characterization as purely imaginative. However, we have already noted other intellectual ramifications to encounters with demons. That which is learned through the analysis of a demonic name, as in the case of Lilith, for instance, is intellectual in nature.⁸⁹ A demon, as a component of the Active Intellect, does have wisdom to impart, but he seeks to do so in an injurious fashion. Abulafia professed that there was

⁸⁸ Idel cites the “great fire” here vis-à-vis the danger faced by the mystic. “The Writings of Abraham Abulafia and His Teaching,” p. 323 (in Hebrew).

⁸⁹ Abulafia implies a connection between demons and intellectual inundation in still another fashion elsewhere. We have seen that the demon, for Abulafia, is to be understood as an “obstruction” (*monei’a*) to the mystic. The same appellation, we noted, was assigned to the specula through which the prophets experienced revelation. See above, pp. 62–64.

wisdom within the Active Intellect that exceeded human intellectual capacities, and which thus could be misunderstood, with dire consequences. Demons sought to doom the mystic with such intellection.⁹⁰ Since we know that the main risk with which the demon threatens the mystic, in Abulafia's view, is the fall into heresy, we can surmise that Abulafia was of the opinion that something of the wisdom latent in the Active Intellect took one dangerously close to transgression. To view Abulafia's cooptation of Christian doctrines from this vantage point is to perceive that it was to transgressive wisdom that Abulafia was himself drawn.

On this point, there is more to be said concerning Abulafia's view that one must shun the demonic incomprehensible efflux, as against the positive efflux that is not immediately understood. Abulafia, it seems, is not uniformly of this opinion. Not much earlier in *Sitrei Torah*, Abulafia writes,⁹¹

And if an understood matter comes to you [during mystical practice], guard it and remember it, and if not [that is, if it is not understood], remember it by its number, because it is the Holy Spirit, and it will direct you to one understood thing. And if you do not understand it today, you will understand it tomorrow, because it is not a vain thing, and if it is vain, it is vain because of you [plural], it is vain because of you [singular]. But it is all holy, and even the evil that is in it is good.

Abulafia reiterates the theme that the evil within the efflux from the Active Intellect is, in fact, good, since it emanates from the Holy Spirit. He relates that that which is evil (or "vain") in the received efflux is perceived as such only because it is not understood. That which is received and not understood, but is perceived to be evil, is to be remembered and subjected to later analysis. Abulafia clearly suggests here that delving into potentially demonic matters is not to be shied

⁹⁰ From a passage in *Maftelah ha-Ra'ayon*, one may derive a connection between the conception of the demon as an "obstruction" (*monei'a*), one which can inundate the mystic's intellect, and the particular intellectual investigation which is "barred" (*nimna'*) from the mystic because it exceeds his capacities. "The barred is that which is not in the soul's nature to apprehend at all in any way of the ways of apprehending the nature of God, may He be blessed. Because this is barred naturally from all creatures." In this context, it becomes apparent that too rarefied an investigation is "barred" because it comes to rely too heavily upon the imagination. From this we may sense a relationship to the demonic threat that takes the form of potentially damaging intellectual inundation. *Maftelah ha-Ra'ayon*, MS Vatican-BA ebr. 291, fols. 22a–23a, printed edition, pp. 6–8.

⁹¹ *Sitrei Torah*, MS NY-JTSA Mic. 2367, fol. 49b; printed edition, p. 141.

from. It is only possible to square this less anxious approach to the evil efflux with his much more cautionary approach if we are to understand that the danger to the mystic is that he is susceptible to being led into heresy during his mystical experience. Examining received wisdom later in order to better understand its seeming transgressiveness is, apparently, a safer course. Still, the opinion that an idolatrous appearance to the efflux from the Active Intellect invariably results from a misperception reads as uncharacteristically cavalier against the backdrop of Abulafia's other remarks. This more relaxed posture well explains Abulafia's apparent willingness to test the margins of what defines distinctly Jewish doctrine.

By contrast, the mystic is directed by Abulafia, in the somewhat later passage from *Sitrei Torah*, to resist that intellectual efflux which has a demonic source and "not receive it."⁹² He must turn instead to God's direct influence within the efflux. Caution is called for here too. When the mystic sees God's Glory, he must hide his face and proceed in his intellectual investigation only with great caution.⁹³ Abulafia in this context elicits two references to Exodus, one of which suggests the threat of death from such a mystical theophany, the other of which is employed to indicate that this theophany is in the nature of God's test of the mystic. The nature of the threat looming over the mystic is, then, substantially multiplied. He may be overwhelmed both by a trial instigated by a demon and by one taking the form of a revelatory theophany. There are moments in this passage and its continuation where it is not possible to determine of which dangerous trial Abulafia is speaking, the demonic or the divine.

Following his exhortations to, first, turn to God and away from the demonic influx and, second, to avoid too great an inundation from the divine influx, Abulafia writes,⁹⁴

And beware always of the trial, because it stands between your eyes and your heart, like Satan, who dances between the horns of the ox when it rises in Nissan from the reeds. Because it is in the nature of your creation to be examined by him and tried by his hand. And if you are able, answer properly before him, standing before your enemy, who seeks your soul. Because (Prov. 17:3), "The refining pot is for silver, and

⁹² Ibid., MS Paris-BN héb. 774, fol. 157b; printed edition, p. 145.

⁹³ Similar cautionary remarks are present in *merkabah* literature. See *Hekhalot Rabati*, section 159, translated in Schäfer, *The Hidden and Manifest God*, pp. 16–17.

⁹⁴ *Sitrei Torah*, MS Paris-BN héb. 774, fols. 157b–158a; printed edition, pp. 146–147.

the furnace for gold, but the Lord tries the hearts.” And these natural and divine letters, that are drawn in all of the world, are the explicit “pot” (*mayref*) and the unique “furnace” for this action, to distinguish (Mal. 3:18), “...between he who serves God and he who does not serve Him.” And thus, if you are a man of God in truth, faithful to Him with all of your heart and all of your soul, (Prov. 1:10–11) “...if sinners entice you, do not consent. If they say, ‘Come with us, let us lie in wait for blood, let us lurk for the innocent without cause...,’” (Prov. 1:15) “...do not walk in the way with them, restrain your foot from their path, for their feet run to evil, and they make haste to shed blood.”

Here the satanic trial is fully identified with the divine one, so that Satan’s trial is understood as an instrument of God, who (Prov. 17:3) “tries the hearts.” The mystic is enjoined to stand against his demonic enemy through the power of letter permutations. That God’s name is to be employed in this activity is suggested through Abulafia’s usage of the words “explicit” and “unique” in referring to the “pot” and “furnace” of the verse from Proverbs—both “explicit” and “unique” are adjectives applied regularly to the Tetragrammaton. It appears that the mystic is to refute his demonic inquisitor, to “answer properly before him” by embracing only acceptable hermeneutical conclusions from his permutations and by resisting any that are heretical. In this fashion he may remain a “man of God in truth, faithful to Him.”

This trial is framed, via the passage from Proverbs, in terms of the enticements posed by sinners, who engage in bloodshed. The deceptions of demons, as earlier in the passage, are likely alluded to here again. Abulafia speaks to the metaphorical dimension of his reference to these “sinners” when he writes, “And you should know and understand that if you are obliged to guard yourself from spilling strange blood (*dam zar*), all the moreso you are obliged against spilling the blood of your soul.” Regarding the spilling of the blood of the mystic’s own soul, the threat of Satan, who “seeks your soul,” is recalled. To fall into the temptation that the “sinners” pose is to allow Satan to inflict harm upon one’s soul.

The above phrase, *dam zar*, is likely intended by Abulafia to mean “strange blood,” as against rendering it, “the blood of the stranger.” The phrase recalls scriptural expressions, such as “strange fire” (Lev. 10:1, Num. 3:4, 26:61) or “strange incense” (Ex. 30:9). These phrases refer to prohibited sacrifices, and it appears that Abulafia intends much the same meaning in the current context. He reinterprets the bloodshed discussed in Proverbs so that it suggests the bloodshed of prohibited sacrifices, and the fall into the temptation to spill blood is

thereby recast as the descent into idolatry.⁹⁵ The threat of committing heresy plagues the mystic, and only his faith and his discernment in the face of a daunting hermeneutical challenge can redeem him.

In a significant passage from *Sefer ha-Hesheq*, Abulafia discusses further the peril of misconstruing the efflux from the Active Intellect. Abulafia begins with a discussion of conceptions that may emerge for the mystic from the manipulation of letters tied to the contemplation of the *sefirot*. We have noted before Abulafia's concern with erroneous approaches to the latter. In this instance, he proceeds to discuss the particular type of misconception that may ensue for the mystic who receives insights concerning the *sefirot*. Writes Abulafia,⁹⁶

...And examine it well, and look into the form of these *sefirot* according to these, their levels, and understand their secret... [Here Abulafia writes the first ten letters of the Hebrew alphabet.] And here is this unique, simple arrangement of its number in its tripartite totality, and it is necessarily called from three heads according to the teaching of this form... [Here Abulafia writes a sequence of the letter 'alef alone; first appears a row of ten 'alefs, then one of nine, etc., down to a row containing one 'alef.] When you begin to count this number from one side, you begin from 'alef, because it instructs regarding one simple, unique head. And once more you begin from 'alef as well, and once more you begin from 'alef from a third side. Thus they comprise in your hand three beginnings, whose secret is one plus two (אב), and the remaining are fifty-two (נב). And this is the secret of "my" great "God" ('Elohi), and if God bestows upon you "one spirit," which is "spirit of nine" (ruah טת) and it is the "Holy Spirit." And its secret contains "three spirits" in the secret of the fourfold triad, about which it is said, three times are one.

The thrust of this complicated passage is somewhat familiar, although Abulafia is less clear and seemingly more reticent on the subject of the trinitarian signification of the *sefirot* than we have seen elsewhere. What is clear is that he refers to a triad of letter 'alefs. These he parses as one and two (totaling three), thus "אב," the Hebrew word for "father." The 'alefs that remain from the ten descending rows of 'alefs, representative of the ten *sefirot*, are fifty-two in number. This latter number

⁹⁵ It is worth recalling the connection drawn earlier between Christianity, the idolatrous sacrifices that Abulafia linked with Esau, and the shedding of blood, which was also linked to Esau's violent nature. See above, pp. 42–43. Idel notes that the nature of the mystical trial, for Abulafia, may be conceived of as the battle to defeat the blood, representative, as we have seen, of corporeality and the imagination. Idel, *Absorbing Perfections*, p. 343.

⁹⁶ *Sefer ha-Hesheq*, MS NY-JTSA Mic. 1801, fols. 26b–27a; printed edition, p. 54.

Abulafia represents as “נב.” Abulafia partially conceals here that he actually intends “בן,” the Hebrew word for “son,” that emerges if the order of ב and נ are reversed. This word “son” is numerically equivalent to “my God,” “*Elohi*.”

As we might have expected, Abulafia next references the Holy Spirit, the last member of the Christian Trinity. It is said here to be bestowed upon the mystic by God. Via numerical equivalences, Abulafia indicates that it is one spirit which nevertheless contains three spirits, a mode of thought that is consistent with Christian notions of the unity of the Trinity.⁹⁷ This combination of three and one, however, Abulafia suggests to be representative of a “fourfold triad.” In this, we have already noted, we may recognize an allusion to the Tetragrammaton, a triad of letters (YHV) that comprise a quaternity (YHVH).⁹⁸ Abulafia here also renders the Holy Spirit as the “spirit of nine” (*ruah* טט). From this we may recognize an allusion to the Active Intellect, identical with the Holy Spirit, as encapsulating the other nine separate intellects.

To summarize, Abulafia has wedded some readily apparent references to the Christian Holy Trinity to a Jewish mystical framework, one which centers upon the apprehension of the divine name, the Tetragrammaton, and upon communion with the Active Intellect, the tenth *sefirah*. On the heels of his presentation of his trinitarian conceptions, Abulafia writes,

You will know immediately that God reveals this, His secret. Only be warned from the error that destroys the souls in this and in its like, because already many have erred in it and been destroyed. And guard yourself and your soul well, lest your reason be unable to bear the secret of the unity, and you think that this instructs on the divinity's being threefold, and you be destroyed with those destroyed in the faith from the sons of men. And if a man should say to you that the divinity is

⁹⁷ Bonadventure, for instance, conceives of Jesus as consisting of all three persons of the Trinity. Hayes, *Hidden Center*, pp. 59–60. Such a notion is particularly consistent with Abulafia's here with respect to the Holy Spirit because, in Abulafia's system, the Holy Spirit, representing the Active Intellect, is the Jewish mystic's intermediary with respect to God, the same role occupied by Jesus in Bonadventure's thought.

⁹⁸ See above, pp. 49–50. Abulafia alludes as well to this notion a bit earlier, where the letters YHV are seen as a fourfold triad insofar as their numerical total is equivalent to that of the four letters that make up the divine name 'Eheye (AHYH). *Sefer ha-Hesheq*, MS NY-JTSA Mic. 1801, fol. 26a; printed edition, p. 52. Along similar lines, Wolfson has noted a zoharic tradition wherein this quaternary quality to the Tetragrammaton is implicitly seen to be superior to the Christian Trinity. Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being*, p. 286.

threefold, he speaks a falsehood and a lie to you, because “three” by *gematria* is “falsehood and lie.”⁹⁹

Given the treacherous nature of Abulafia’s hermeneutic with respect to the threefold unity, threatening as it does to throw the ignorant into idolatrous heresy, it is apparent that a test or trial the likes of which we have seen Abulafia discuss before is exemplified. Abulafia appears to suggest again that the mystic’s intellectual faculty is here threatened by an overwhelming efflux, one in keeping with the nature of the demonic trial. He advises caution, “...lest your reason be unable to bear the secret of the unity.” The overpowering quality to the insight contained within the efflux stems from the revelation that the divine unity is tripartite, the danger being that the mystic might fail to recognize that the divine unity is in no way discontinuous. The threat is clearly that of “cutting the plantings.” Abulafia’s own self-perceived preservation of the unity of the tripartite divinity and of the quaternary divine name suggests that he views himself to have navigated the trial successfully.

There can be little doubt from this example that the idolatrous threat is understood to signify Christianity.¹⁰⁰ Abulafia’s own seemingly irresistible attraction to this transgressive terrain appears to require of him that he risk the destruction of his soul, as he understands the danger. It is possible to see the current passage as exemplifying the position that the mystic must welcome the demonic trial. Equally possible, however, is that Abulafia’s irresistible attraction to Christian doctrine precedes and requires the justificatory doctrine that the mystic must pursue the challenge of heretical temptation. The view that one must draw near to one’s own idolatrous proclivities in order, paradoxically, to redeem them could be nothing more than a rationalization of the attraction to the forbidden other. Abulafia’s position here, however, constitutes just one example in a larger current in Jewish mystical thought. It holds that engagement with evil is requisite to the mystical/theurgical quest to reconstitute both one’s own being and God’s as whole and androgynous. We are left to ask whether the need to justify

⁹⁹ This *gematria* is cited by Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, p. 380 n. 37. See also Hames, *Like Angels on Jacob’s Ladder*, p. 82.

¹⁰⁰ Hames refers to Abulafia’s inner struggle between intellect and imagination, framed as the battle between two kings in *Sefer ha-Meliṣ* (*The Book of the Interpreter*). Hames links the imagination here to the Pope, though elsewhere he suggests Jesus as a party to this inner battle. *Like Angels on Jacob’s Ladder*, pp. 87–88.

the attraction to the other could have influenced many other Jewish mystics both before and following Abulafia,¹⁰¹ or whether this current of thought stems purely from a shared conviction regarding the means to commune with God.

Danger to Life and Limb

During the fifteen year long demonic trial described in *ʿOṣar ʿEden Ganuz*, Abulafia was apparently faced with Christian-based deceptions seemingly related to the “falsehood and lie” discussed in the passage from *Sefer ha-Ḥesheq*. Abulafia writes of that trial in terms of both physical and psychological beleaguerment by demons. He writes that they “gathered around” him, so that he was “panic-stricken” from the hallucinations that they precipitated.¹⁰² Elsewhere in Abulafia’s written works, the threat of idolatrous conceptions again finds a physical style of expression to accompany the more internalized mode. Abulafia manifests, at times, a very real anxiety concerning bodily harm inflicted by demons.

Near the beginning of *Sefer ha-Ḥesheq*, a linkage is forged between the hazards, familiar to us from later in the text, of being overwhelmed by the efflux from the Active Intellect and physical danger. Abulafia initially frames his discussion as a preparation to which the soul is to be subjected prior to the articulation of the divine name.¹⁰³ He writes,

And the soul is the potency prepared to bear all of these burdens by means of the body, which is the dwelling for all, and the final matter to all. And its limbs are the tools of the smelter (*šoref*) who refines (*mešaref*) with them the intellect that is refined (*mešuraf*) in the permutation (*šeruf*) of letters, because it is the power that is called soul, and within which is the power to enact all these enacted things.

Abulafia conveys a close connection between the body and letter permutations. Within the body is housed the soul, the potency fueling the

¹⁰¹ As a similar example, in an early kabbalistic text analyzed by Wolfson, failure to integrate the evil female element within the self leads to the mistaken belief that there are two powers in heaven. Wolfson, “Woman-The Feminine as Other,” pp. 173–174. As for later Jewish mystical currents, Sabbatianism most dramatically represents the doctrinal approach to the other articulated by Abulafia.

¹⁰² *ʿOṣar ʿEden Ganuz*, MS Oxford-BL 1580, fol. 165a; printed edition, pp. 369–370. See Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, p. 127.

¹⁰³ *Sefer ha-Ḥesheq*, MS NY-JTSA Mic. 1801, fol. 8a; printed edition, pp. 12–13.

letter permutation activity that refines the intellect. Abulafia suggests that both the limbs of the body and the letters making up the permutations are the “tools” used in this process of refinement, and both are manipulated by the soul. The limbs and the letters are essentially synonymous here.¹⁰⁴ Abulafia continues,

Because it [the tool that is employed by the mystic’s will, namely, the letters] is a tool [with which is] drawn what he wants and what he does not want, that is, [it is] drawn in his understanding, and he examines whether it [his understanding] suffers that the drawn in him goes out into actualization, or his understanding does not suffer [it], but leads the will from bringing out the thing...

The mystic’s “understanding,” a component of his intellect, serves as a censor in the meditative process. It determines whether the imaginative product of permutation, that which is “drawn,” carries with it a content that should be cultivated further by the mystic and allowed to emerge, actualized. This is analogous to the determination of whether an efflux from the Active Intellect is imaginative and demonic or intellective and divine.

Abulafia goes on to suggest an analogy between the bringing out of the intellective products of letter permutation and the bringing forth of different types of bread from the earth. The motif of intellective bread recalls Abulafia’s earlier investigation of manna as materialized intellection, which we saw to parallel the Christian concept of the eucharistic bread as Jesus’ body and the corporealized Logos. Abulafia will proceed, in the current context, to describe a process wherein the mystic perfects his body in accordance with his formation of intellective products from the letters. This bodily perfection ensues because the letters, we recall, correspond to the bodily limbs. The representation, in Christian thought, of the eucharistic bread as Jesus’ body finds, then, a further analog in Abulafia’s formulations. The limbs of the body parallel the letters, while the perfection of the body of the mystic parallels letter permutation. The latter, in turn, parallels the bringing forth of intellective bread, so that the perfected body shares the same essence as this intellective bread, as is also the case in Christian doctrine with respect to Jesus and the eucharistic wafer. Abulafia’s intellective bread

¹⁰⁴ For the connection between limbs of the body and letters of the alphabet see, for example, Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, p. 138; Idel, “The Writings of Abraham Abulafia and His Teaching,” p. 145 (in Hebrew); Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being*, p. 285.

is the perfect materialization of that which had existed in divine form in the linguistic plane, the locus as well of Christianity's Logos.¹⁰⁵

To consider the converse of the mystical operation described here is to begin to conceive of the physical jeopardy to which the mystic subjects himself during his permutation activity. For flawed letter permutation, or a hermeneutical error, could be expected to have reciprocal bodily ramifications, given the correspondence between letters and limbs. This conclusion is closely aligned with the notion that demons, who seek to bring about such errors, intend to injure the limbs of the mystic's body during his time of trial.

The damaging of the mystic's body at the hands of demons constitutes the counterpoint to the mystical goal of achieving the divine likeness. The latter, held to have been the form with which Adam was endowed initially, prior to Eve's being physically separated from him, was understood to consist of the balanced mingling of masculine and feminine aspects.¹⁰⁶ Abulafia recognized this ideal union of man's two component parts, male and female, as erotic in nature, and he conceived of it as operating in concert with the erotic union of man with God.¹⁰⁷ The converse of this conception was widely held; idolatry committed by Jews was seen to signify sexual infidelity with respect to God.¹⁰⁸ Given the erotic essence to mystical union, there is a certain

¹⁰⁵ Marcus notes the Jewish awareness at this time of Christian conceptions regarding the significance of the eucharist. "Jews and Christians Imagining the Other in Medieval Europe," pp. 211, 221. Stacey notes that, by the early twelfth century, with the Christian conception having begun to solidify that the eucharist represented the actual body of Christ, Jews began to be thought of in the Christian sphere as enemies of Christ's body as it was manifested in the eucharist. This would ultimately lead, by the end of the thirteenth century, to Christian charges of Jewish host desecration. "From Ritual Crucifixion to Host Desecration," p. 13. Looked at from a different angle, we can detect in this fanciful charge a Christian belief that the Jews recognized the theological significance of the eucharist (reacting to it with hostility), although we cannot be sure to what degree their assumption was correct.

¹⁰⁶ Wolfson notes the zoharic contention that the Torah, the embodiment of the divine name, is the model for Adam's bipartite image, composed as he is of male and female, written and oral aspects, or of male and female sets of commandments. Wolfson indicates that this conception constituted a polemical response to the Christian notion of the enfleshed Logos. *Language, Eros, Being*, pp. 257–260.

¹⁰⁷ Scholem had noted already Abulafia's predilection for seeing God, during *devequt*, as groom, with the mystic, or his soul, more particularly, as bride. *The Kabbalah of Sefer Temunah*, p. 165 (in Hebrew). See also Idel, *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia*, p. 205.

¹⁰⁸ Wolfson, *Language, Torah, Hermeneutics*, pp. 341, 258, 374; *Alef, Mem, Tau*, p. 102. This erotic perspective on idolatry—that is, on the Christian temptation—was taken up in the Jewish leadership's response in Narbonne to forced Christian preaching in a

logic to the expectation that Abulafia would posit sexual deficiency in particular as the physical consequence of a demonic attack resulting from a fall into idolatry, and a kind of justice to the notion that the mystic stood to be punished for the transgression of idolatry at the physical site of his infidelity.

Wolfson has observed a matrix of interconnected themes in the *Zohar* that run remarkably parallel to those that we are beginning to note in Abulafia's doctrine.¹⁰⁹ The particular zoharic text in question concerns Nadab and Abihu, sons of Aaron, who were destroyed for bringing "strange fire" as an offering to God (Lev. 10:1). The zoharic authors elaborate upon the meaning of this scriptural expression, which we observed earlier to signify the bringing of an idolatrous sacrifice. Ultimately they relate it to Leviticus 16:2, "...do not come at any moment to the shrine." Priests are to present their offerings at the proper moment, that of the *saddiq*, or righteous one, according to the zoharic authorship, a moment which coincides in some way with the *sefira Yesod* (Foundation) in the theosophic schema.

Nadab and Abihu, the zoharic authors relate, chose the "other moment," *'et ahra'*, to present their offering, a phrase whose resemblance to the *sitra' ahra'*, the "other side," that is, the side of the demonic element, is readily discernible.¹¹⁰ Thus, Nadab and Abihu, as Wolfson parses the zoharic discussion, were guilty of supplanting the *Shekhinah*, the virtuous feminine potency that is united to the divine phallus, the *saddiq*, as the theurgical consequence of the bringing of the pious offering. In fact, they substituted the demonic feminine potency, typically represented as Lilith in zoharic discourse, in this act of unification, resulting, as Wolfson explains it, in the prohibited intermingling of the holy with the unholy.¹¹¹

synagogue in the late 1250s or early 1260s. Chazan, "Confrontation in the Synagogue of Narbonne," pp. 443, 457. For the rabbinic antecedents of this conception, see Koren, "The Woman from Whom God Wanders," p. 67 n. 19. This conception of idolatry operates hand and hand with the notion that the Jewish people's relationship to God is erotic. Idel points to a midrash, which describes the *misvot* as amorous seductions on Israel's part directed toward God, as exemplifying the rabbinic conception of the erotic relationship between a hypostatic Israel and God. "Rabbinism versus Kabbalism: On G. Scholem's Phenomenology of Judaism," p. 287. For biblical and rabbinic themes relating to the erotic relationship of Israel and God as antecedents of kabbalistic conceptions, see idem, *Kabbalah and Eros*, pp. 16–35.

¹⁰⁹ Wolfson, *Alef, Mem, Tau*, pp. 99–105.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., p. 100.

¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 101.

Wolfson goes on to observe that the zoharic authors related the “strange fire” to the “estranged woman” of Proverbs 7:5. Here, the demonic female comes to assume an additional valence. Writes Wolfson,

In the symbolic imaginary of the zoharic kabbalists, the expression from Proverbs *’ishah zarah* [estranged woman] alludes more specifically to the Christian woman, for Christianity, the prototypical idolatrous religion (the faith and piety of *sitra’ ’ahra*), is associated with sensual lust, the power of eros from the left, which parallels the power of eros from the right...¹¹²

The zoharic authorship, as understood by Wolfson, interpreted the story of Nadab and Abihu in such a manner that “...the meaning of their offering a ‘strange fire’ was that they cohabited with gentile women.” Thus, “...symbolically, having intercourse with an estranged woman is on a par with offering a strange fire on the altar.”¹¹³ Wolfson points to the erotic temptation posed by Christian women as being the zoharic authorship’s concern here.¹¹⁴

It is now worth recalling our earlier discussion of *Sitrei Torah*,¹¹⁵ where we surmised that the “strange blood” to which Abulafia referred alluded to prohibited idolatrous sacrifices and to demonic temptations. We have already observed that such idolatrous acts and demonic influences represent, for Abulafia, the lure of Christianity. And we are just entering upon a discussion of the sexual dimension to these threats.

¹¹² Ibid., p. 101.

¹¹³ Ibid., p. 102. See as well, idem, “Woman-The Feminine as Other,” pp. 168–169. There, a zoharic discussion concerning the Edomite kings—that is, Christianity—is analyzed. Christendom is presented as emasculated or feminized by dint of its being idolatrous. We may recall that Abulafia makes the same charge against Christians, that Jesus has brought about their feminization.

¹¹⁴ Among other evidence for such anxiety, we see that Nahmanides had contended that Jewish men who had sexual relations with gentiles “desecrate the covenant of Abraham.” Nirenberg, “Love between Muslim and Jew in Medieval Spain,” p. 129. Nirenberg makes note as well of the *Zohar* 2:3a–b, 87b, in this connection. See also idem, *Communities of Violence*, pp. 134–135. For anxiety on the part of the Jewish elite in Spain concerning the phenomenon of Jews having sexual relations with Christians, see Biale, *Eros and the Jews*, p. 88. Eleazar of Worms prescribed penances for sexual intercourse with a Christian consisting of forty days with no meat, wine or bathing. Penances were somewhat more tempered for intercourse with a Christian servant. Ibid., p. 75. Marcus observes the evidence that Jews and Christians were sexually attracted to one another. See “Jews and Christians Imagining the Other in Medieval Europe,” p. 211.

¹¹⁵ See above, pp. 145–146. *Sitrei Torah*, MS Paris-BN héb. 774, fol. 158a; printed edition, p. 146.

The parallel here to what Wolfson observes of the zoharic view on the demonic, idolatrous and erotic temptation of Christendom is striking.¹¹⁶

Earlier I began to discuss the interconnectedness, in Abulafia's thought, of notions of idolatrous transgression, infidelity to God, demonic retribution, letter permutations and the mystic's body. I suggested the presence of a logical connection between an expectation of physical punishment for the mystic who committed the transgression of idolatry and a concern for the corporeal locus of his erotic offense. That locus, the phallus, is as well the physical site of the Jewish male's covenant with God, the circumcision. A transgression against the erotic relationship to God was seen as a dishonoring of the covenant of the phallus.¹¹⁷ Abulafia was manifestly fearful of the implications, for his covenant, of infidelity to God, committed as a result of the temptations posed by demons.

Writes Abulafia in *Hayyei ha-'Olam ha-Ba'*,¹¹⁸

And the messiah is the priest higher than his brothers, and is he who knows the name and blesses Israel through the explicit name, as he writes it in the sanctuary, and with its epithets in the country, according to the received tradition (*qabbalah*) and this divine path of the name, which is written and permuted with ten permutations, five opposite five. And every path instructs in the explicit name, which is wholly perfect, and

¹¹⁶ Elsewhere, Wolfson refers to a related and equally pertinent zoharic formulation regarding Nadab and Abihu, wherein the zoharic authorship comes to the conclusion that the sin of these sons of Aaron rested in their offering a sacrifice while being yet unmarried. Nadab and Abihu were thus in an incomplete state, one which precluded proper erotic unification with the *Shekhinah*; the sacrifice that they offered was consequently a "strange fire," one which fractured the divine unity after the fashion of our prior discussion of their sin. The rectification of the sin of Nadab and Abihu came, as the zoharic authorship recounts, in their reincarnation together in the person of Pinchas, who, Scripture informs us, avenged Zimri's cohabitation with a "strange woman." Here too, the sense is confirmed that the idolatrous transgression of Nadab and Abihu must have been their cohabitation with gentile women, by which they defiled their covenant with God and disrupted the divine order, in a manner akin to the "cutting of the plantings" to which Abulafia makes mention. Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being*, pp. 266–267.

¹¹⁷ See above, n. 114. Wolfson notes that the zoharic authorship suggested that the erotic transgression committed by Nadab and Abihu was situated within the letter *yod* of the Tetragrammaton, the letter linked by tradition with the phallus and with circumcision. Thus, their sin, and by extension that of those Jewish men who fall to the lure of Christian women, represented a debasement of the covenant. Idem, *Alef, Mem, Tau*, p. 5. See also idem, *Language, Eros, Being*, pp. 266–267.

¹¹⁸ *Hayyei ha-'Olam ha-Ba'*, MS Oxford-BL 1582, fols. 13a–b; printed edition, p. 67. The beginning of this passage is discussed by Wolfson. *Abraham Abulafia*, p. 206.

indeed the five paths go out from the five, and five of them are understood. But they are uttered with one vowel not understood, according to their vocalization, and the one who wishes to utter it must guard his mouth from error with respect to any of its letters, lest he come, God forbid, to danger from his error, according to what I will write of the wheels [of letter permutations¹¹⁹] by way of explication.

Abulafia discusses the permutation of the letters of the divine name. The mystic here is modeled after the Temple high priest, and his yet higher status as messiah is seen by Abulafia to be conveyed through his acumen in permutations.¹²⁰ An allusion is operative to *Sefer Yeṣirah*, to the idea that the *sefirot* are configured “five opposite five.”¹²¹ Through Abulafia’s reference to the high priest, this sefirotic arrangement is seen implicitly to correspond to the gesture of the *kohen*’s outstretched arms during the priestly blessing,¹²² so that a first connection between the mystic’s body and the divine configuration is established.

That five paths are understood while five are not is somewhat obscure. But we may suspect that Abulafia, synthesizing from *Sefer Yeṣirah* a linkage of five *sefirot* with the right side and with merit, and five with the left side and with liability,¹²³ associates the five that are understood with the good inclination. We have seen in Abulafia’s thought already a connection between evil and that half of the efflux from the Active Intellect which poses a threat to the mystic by dint of its incomprehensibility. Regardless, Abulafia goes on to affirm that danger comes to the mystic when he mispronounces any of these permutations of the name. The fact that they must be properly enunciated even when one each of their vowels is unclear accentuates the sense of peril perceptible in the project.

It is worth observing that, immediately before this current passage from *Hayyei ha-‘Olam ha-Ba’*, Abulafia engages in a closely related discussion. He first relates that it is incumbent upon the Jew to honor the divine name; those who “know this explicit name and guard it in sanctity and purity” will inherit the world to come. Conversely, he warns,

¹¹⁹ Idel discusses these “wheels,” based on the seventy-two letter name, and their probable derivation from Ibn Ezra. *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia*, p. 23.

¹²⁰ For Abulafia’s conception of himself as priest and messiah, see idem, *Messianic Mystics*, pp. 94–97.

¹²¹ *Sefer Yeṣirah*, Gruenwald ed., 1:3 (para. 3). See above, pp. 86–88. Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 135, 140 n. 122, 142.

¹²² Ibid., pp. 140 n. 123, 207.

¹²³ Compare *Sefer Yeṣirah*, Gruenwald ed., 1:3 (para. 3) and 2:1 (para. 23).

“But he must beware greatly that he not change a letter or a vowel from its place, because he will alter the limb that was created in that letter from the place of its creation, from your body...”¹²⁴ Abulafia is clear both regarding the threat to the bodily limbs that stems from the mystical error and regarding the source of this threat, the parallelism between the letters and the body.

In Abulafia’s allusion to the apparent bodily risks attendant upon the mystic’s permutation of the divine name, the correspondence between the mystic’s body and the letters of the divine name is operative. Closely associated with that correspondence is another, that between the body of the Jewish mystic and the Torah. The latter, Abulafia frequently insists, after the teaching of Naḥmanides, is entirely comprised of names for God.¹²⁵ Thus, in the current discussion, the correspondence between the mystic’s body and the letters of the divine names that he pronounces implicitly evokes the successful mystic’s coming into the physical likeness of the Torah.¹²⁶ On a similar note, Abulafia upholds the traditional position that the two hundred and forty-eight limbs of the body conform to the same number of positive commandments in Scripture.¹²⁷ The identification of the human body with the Torah’s essence, its commandments, is clear in this conception. In this, a further parallel to the model proffered by Christianity is present. For, while Jesus represents the enfleshed Logos, the Jewish mystic, from Abulafia’s perspective (and that of other kabbalists as well), comes to stand as the embodied Torah.

To return to *Hayyei ha-‘Olam ha-Ba’*, Abulafia next proceeds to draw again from *Sefer Yeṣirah*, referring to its consideration of the three so-called “mothers” within the Hebrew alphabet, the letters *’alef*, *mem*

¹²⁴ *Hayyei ha-‘Olam ha-Ba’*, MS Oxford-BL 1582, fol. 12b; printed edition, p. 64.

¹²⁵ See Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 74, 200. For earlier precedents, see idem, “The Mystical Significance of Torah Study,” pp. 48–51. For possible Christian influence on Naḥmanides, see idem, *Language, Eros, Being*, p. 543 n. 433.

¹²⁶ The Torah is also equated by Abulafia with the Active Intellect and with the *sefirot*, with both of the latter two being equated as well with the mystic whose intellect has been actualized. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, p. 141; Idel, *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics in Abraham Abulafia*, p. 33; Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia*, p. 141. See idem, “The Mystical Significance of Torah Study,” p. 55, where the Torah is characterized as the *Kavod*. The mystic’s coming into the likeness of the Torah is conceived of as a type of reactivation of the covenant of circumcision, by which his flesh had originally been imprinted with the divine name. See also idem, *Venturing Beyond*, p. 151, *Language, Eros, Being*, p. 237. See also *ibid.*, p. 241, where Metatron is equated with the Torah.

¹²⁷ Idem, *Abraham Abulafia*, p. 225; *Language, Eros, Being*, pp. 246, 248.

and *shin*.¹²⁸ These, Abulafia explains, are assigned to the head, stomach and trunk of man's body, respectively, also following *Sefer Yeṣirah*.¹²⁹ Abulafia departs from the latter text in indicating, first, that the three mothers are to be permuted with the letters *yod*, *he'* and *vav* of the Tetragrammaton, and, second, that fire, water and air, assigned, respectively, to the three mothers in *Sefer Yeṣirah*, are actually angels. Regarding these, Abulafia writes,

Be most wary, my son, as your fathers warned you, concerning the fire, that you not be burned, and from the water, that you not drown, and from the air, that you not be harmed, that you not make use of the crown. And all who use the explicit name for his own purposes transgresses against the commandments of God, because it is proper to use it only for His glory, may His name be blessed.¹³⁰

It is apparent from the immediately preceding discussion, that of the linkage of letters to body parts, that the danger presented by these three angels to the mystic, described in terms of specific types of physical harm, is posed to the particular part of the body with which each entity has been linked.¹³¹ Abulafia proffers here a permutation exercise, based on the three mothers and the Tetragrammaton, that necessarily entails the involvement of these angels. And they are avowedly avenging angels, if things should go awry for the mystic, such that they serve the same role as do demons in Abulafia's more prevalent parlance. As well, the mystic's body becomes actively involved in the exercise.

A trial by demon of a physical nature is thus encapsulated. Passing successfully through the trial is a testimony to the one proper objective of mystical activity, discussed here as an intention directed solely towards God's aggrandizement. We know from our earlier observations that this single goal may also be expressed as the fathoming and upholding of God's transcendent unity, resulting in the mystic's *devequt*,

¹²⁸ *Sefer Yeṣirah*, Gruenwald ed., 2:1, 3; 3:2–5; 6:1 (paragraphs 23, 17, 24–31, 36).

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, 3:4 (para. 30).

¹³⁰ *Hayyei ha-'Olam ha-Ba'*, MS Oxford-BL 1582, fols. 12b–13a; printed edition, pp. 64–66. The transgressive use of the crown is referred to in *Masekhet 'Avot* 1:13, 4:5. See also Maimonides' commentary, ad loc. See also *'Avot de-Rabbi Natan*, ch. 12; BT. *Megillah*, 28b.

¹³¹ Idel evinces several passages from Abulafia which refer to the danger of being burned by fire, while the idea of being drowned by water is ascribed to Abulafia's students. *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 121–123. Wolfson discusses the purificatory role of fire in the mystical trial. *Abraham Abulafia*, p. 200. Scholem mentions the danger of being burned by fire in connection with the *Hagigah* discussion of engaging in speculation on the *merkabah*. *The Kabbalah of Sefer Temunah*, p. 179 (in Hebrew).

the coming into direct participation in this unity. To do otherwise, we have seen, is to “cut the plantings,” as do the Christians and the theosophic kabbalists. We saw these two groups drawn into an association with sorcerers, in that those who fall victim to the imaginative portion of the efflux, making use of demonic names without recourse to the intellect, are likened to those who make similar use of the names of the *sefirot*, a use likewise devoid of intellection. These three misguided approaches to the divine—sorcery, Christianity and theosophic kabbalah—all bespeak a challenge to the unity, and thus signify idolatry.

A further dimension to the peril facing the mystic is present here in that, in the current instance, Abulafia advises that the letters of the name be combined with the letters designating potentially dangerous angels. The misuse of demonic names—sorcery—runs dangerously parallel to the mystical practice that Abulafia delineates here.¹³² Once more the flirtation with idolatry is pointedly proffered, and it is the focus on God alone that may obviate the threat that idolatry presents, which is evoked here as a menace to the mystic’s body.

During Abulafia’s discussion, in *Hayyei ha-‘Olam ha-Ba’*, of the high priest and of the vocalization of the divine name, he had promised the reader an explanation of the dangers that come from errors with respect to the name. I suspect that Abulafia may have had the following subsequent passage in mind:¹³³

And if he utters the letter and errs, God forbid, in the calling of the letter that rules over that limb, which is in the head of the man who called,¹³⁴ God forbid, that limb will be cut off (*hayyah netoq*), and he changes its place and he changes its nature immediately, and gives it another form, and the man, because of this, becomes a cripple, and thus the name VHV [the beginning of the seventy-two letter name of God] is sealed with the word MVM [the end of this name, *mum* being the Hebrew word for “crippled”], in order to warn concerning its utterance, and [it is] also the secret of “Elohim” who judges concerning this matter of the

¹³² In this regard, it is worth noting Abulafia’s assertion that the pious kabbalist must embrace the claim of the sages of the nations that nature itself is essentially sorcerous; “*ha-teva’ mekashef*.” This perspective is “true without a doubt,” writes Abulafia. It is only that prophetic revelation affords further insights to the kabbalist which are denied to these sages, whether they be Jewish or gentile, so that science, linked here with sorcery, is but a step in the kabbalist’s progression. *Mafteah ha-Sefirot* (*The Key of the Sefirot*), MS Milan-BA 53, fol. 180b; printed edition, p. 90.

¹³³ *Hayyei ha-‘Olam ha-Ba’*, MS Oxford-BL 1582, fol. 14b; printed edition, p. 70.

¹³⁴ “...*’asher be-ro’sh ha-adam ha-gore’*...” Alternatively, one might read this as “...which at first the man who called [it]...”

glorious and awesome divinity, and thus you will utter them only after you become very expert in them, in the permutation of letters and in all of its divine paths.

Here we see that the threat to the limbs of the body is linked directly to the letters in which the mystic errs. Abulafia may first suggest that the injury to the mystic is of an internal nature (the limb “is in the head of the man”), but the discourse quickly changes in tenor, to where physical affliction is plainly described. The phenomenon is closely related to the status of demons, who exist both internally within the mystic’s psyche and externally as autonomous beings. The corresponding limb is said to be “cut off,” and the man, far indeed from assuming the divine likeness, “becomes a cripple.”

Abulafia forges a connection between the divine name *’Elohim* and the word “crippled” based upon their numerical equivalence, and the introduction of this divine name lends a clear sense that a judgment is rendered upon the mystic for his error. In theosophic parlance, the name *’Elohim* represents the divine attribute embodying stern punishment, for which reason Abulafia writes here that *’Elohim* “judges.” Thus, there is not simply a causal relationship between the defective letter and the damaged limb. Rather, as Abulafia describes it here, a sentence is imposed upon the man who is unskilled in letter permutation, and he is punished for his error, which represents failure in the mystical trial. We should not be surprised to learn that the execution of this punishment falls to the hand of a demon, as was the case above with respect to the entities corresponding to the three elements, fire, water and air, represented by the three mothers.

Idolatry and Castration Anxiety

It is appropriate to inquire more deeply into the nature of the injuries described by Abulafia. We have noted the principle of parallelism, in a demon’s cutting off of a limb, to the offense committed or to the letter misused. When we recall that the demon’s overarching task is to tempt the mystic into and exact vengeance upon him for idolatry, a specific punishment for this specific offense is elicited. As I have already suggested, the severance from the mystic of that which marks him out as distinct from the idolatrous nations, that which indicates his covenantal relationship to God, was understood by Abulafia to be called for. This, again, is the mark of circumcision borne upon the

phallus.¹³⁵ Abulafia's warnings about the danger of one's covenantal status being cut off should alert us to a deeply held fear on his part, a castration anxiety.

Yet Abulafia's anxiety reflected the presence of ramifications to this punishment that included but, as I have suggested, moved beyond physical emasculation, entering the arena of the transcendent. Along with its covenantal significance, circumcision for Jewish mystics epitomized the potential to emulate the divine form and, in so doing, achieve *devequt*. The phallus was acknowledged as the locus for the all-important unification of male and female attributes, given its role in sexual union, and circumcision came to express in particular the hypostatic dimension to this union.¹³⁶ The removal of one's circumcision, then, represented not just physical emasculation, but signified as well the severance of a covenantal relationship with God and the preclusion of any prospect for mystical union.

On the relationship between circumcision and castration, Wolfson indexes Lacan's thought as a point of departure for an investigation of the theosophic kabbalah. Wolfson refers to Lacan's thesis that the phallus cannot be conceived of in isolation from its relationship to castration. As well, the phallus, to be conceived of as signifier or insignia, evokes the mark that it bears, that of circumcision.¹³⁷ Thus, the significance of the phallus is tied to both castration and circumcision. This connection between circumcision and castration has a further dimension. The phallus is fully realized in its virile, signifying status only in its disappearance, as in intercourse. Its ultimate expression, Wolfson notes, after Lacan, is thus to be found in castration.

It is in this, observes Wolfson, that one may locate the significance of the symbol of the phallus in kabbalah. There, the notion of revelation through occlusion, because of the ineffability of secrets concerning the divine, and occlusion in revelation, for the same reason, is linked particularly to the phallus. The latter is associated with the *sefira Yesod*,

¹³⁵ Given the tradition of interpreting circumcision as the inscription of the divine name upon the human body, we can see that the association between letters and the phallus served Abulafia's sense of a punishment suitable to the crime. Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 87, 89, 216–217.

¹³⁶ See idem, *Language, Eros, Being*, pp. 133–141, 381–384. See also idem, *Through a Speculum That Shines*, pp. 357–377.

¹³⁷ Idem, *Language, Eros, Being*, pp. 128, 129.

the hypostatic locus of circumcision.¹³⁸ And a similar notion is manifest in terms of circumcision itself, in that, with the exposure of the corona, comes as well the revelation of ineffability. Wolfson points to the zoharic conception of the kabbalists' metaphorical castration during the weekdays as corresponding with the sefirotic condition of disunity, where male and female potencies do not partake in erotic conjoining at the hypostatic locus of circumcision, the *sefir* *Yesod*.¹³⁹

This connection between human castration and hypostatic disunity was important as well for Abulafia. We have already noted that, for Abulafia, the thwarting of unification with the divine due to the fall into transgression finds expression in the maiming that results from an error during letter permutation. As well, Abulafia's view of Christianity is telling in this regard. He held that the Christian idolatrous heresy of "cutting the plantings" was a disuniting of the divine realm, and he also considered Christianity to be fundamentally castrating, as in the example of Jesus' removal of his disciples' circumcisions. In the latter case, a situation of absence, that of the foreskin, signifies revelation, while presence evokes occlusion.

That Abulafia refers to a particular threat to each of man's limbs, and not strictly to the phallus, in the passages that we have inspected thusfar in no way problematizes the surmise that a castration anxiety is operative in these instances. Put another way, the maiming that coincides with the disuniting of the hypostatic realm is inherently a castration. We will shortly see the threat specified more overtly, but we would do well now to make note of a commonplace of contemporary psychology:¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ Ibid., pp. 131, 132–5. *Yesod* is referenced in the theosophic kabbalah as the "All," a designation adopted by Abulafia as well. Abulafia refers to the Active Intellect, embodying all of the separate intellects, as the "All" as well, such that he implicitly identifies *Yesod* with the Active Intellect. Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 144–145, 218 n. 119. As well, both the Active Intellect and *Yesod* are assigned the divine name Shaddai by Abulafia. The theosophic kabbalists also apply the name Shaddai to *Yesod*. Abulafia, as we shall see, is explicit in connecting the name Shaddai with the Active Intellect, while his equation of the name Shaddai with the phallus is strongly suggested in his emphasis on the name's procreative propensity. By a *gematria*, the name Shaddai is equivalent to the name Metatron, who represents the Active Intellect. Ibid., pp. 204–205.

¹³⁹ See Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being*, p. 319. See also idem, *Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 130–131.

¹⁴⁰ Muskin, "The Medical Hospital," p. 73.

As we know, both men and women experience castration anxiety, or the fear of losing a part of one's body. However, the phenomenon is often not as simple as the actual loss of a body part. The loss of function, alteration, or even temporary dysfunction of a body part may also be experienced as a castration threat. Whereas the underlying fantasy may connect to fears of genital injury, this concern is often deeply buried and inaccessible to the adult patient. Any loss of power or strength—regardless of its relation to a surgical procedure or to actual threat of damage or loss of a body part—potentially constitutes an intensely stressful castration threat for some patients. This broader conception of castration fears does not mean that some patients do not sexualize their injuries, treatments, or diagnostic procedures. These patients experience such events as threats to their genital integrity or sexual potency.

The text above describes the psychological state of patients undergoing medical procedures. It indicates how the intensity of the anxiety relating to the perception or reality of a threat to various parts of the body emerges from the deeper, psychologically more primary fear of genital injury. The text emphasizes a broad conception of castration anxiety, suggesting that “Any loss of power or strength,” can initiate fears that are expressive of a feeling of emasculation. This view prevails as well in consideration of the formative childhood stage of castration anxiety, where the fear of emasculation is rendered diffuse and may fixate in any place throughout the child's body.¹⁴¹ We may recall Lacan here, who suggested that the phallus is the quintessential signifier, and that castration is its ultimate expression.

I do not believe it anachronistic to recognize much the same psychological mechanisms operative for Abulafia as are described in modern psychoanalytic theory.¹⁴² The testimony provided by Abulafia in his

¹⁴¹ See, for instance, Arlow, “The Structural Model,” pp. 69–70; Coen, “Sexual Disorders,” p. 365; Melchiodi, “The Patient with a Neurosis,” p. 202.

¹⁴² On this topic, a critique offered by Idel bears analysis. Although Idel refers primarily to a purportedly homogenizing anachronistic approach to medieval kabbalah, wherein psychological modalities, explicable through modern theories, are perceived as currents prevailing widely among groups of kabbalists, there is a critique in his perspective that applies as well to the application of modern psychoanalytic theory even to a medieval individual. *Kabbalah and Eros*, pp. 100–101, 129–131. As Wolfson observes, the critique is twofold, comprising not just generalization but anachronism as well. “Structure, Innovation, and Diremptive Temporality,” p. 155. My approach to the latter question raised by Idel, that of anachronism, is a relatively straightforward one. If the psychological dynamic that Abulafia manifests appears to conform with precision to a modern psychological model, then we would be remiss if we failed to explore the latter for what it might offer as a mode of explication of the former. In this case, the theme of attraction/repulsion to the forbidden other is well served

writings is in accord with the clinical perspectives cited above. And the latter are helpful in coherently conceptualizing Abulafia's internal dynamic. My intention here is to establish a relationship between Abulafia's castration anxiety, the kabbalistic conceptions through which it finds expression, and the ultimate thesis that Abulafia's castration anxiety is most evident in his kabbalistic discussions of the nature of the threat posed by idolatry—that is, by Christianity. Abulafia's conflicted feelings toward Christianity may be better understood, along with their attendant anxiety, through recourse to a Freudian conceptual framework. Castration anxiety, and the guilt feelings with which it is associated, is seen to be fostered, from that perspective, by a deeply seated erotic desire for that which is forbidden.

Psychoanalytic notions of castration anxiety and the mystical understanding of what it means, with respect to one's relationship to God, to be rendered emasculated are, as I have suggested, closely related. In examining their parallelism, it is worth noting that, just as we have seen that psychoanalytic conceptions of castration anxiety may not involve the physical phallus on an immediate level, so too do we see in Abulafia's thought that the physical phallus, the insignia of circumcision that it bears and the potential for their loss possess a commutativity with respect to their immaterial hypostatic counterparts and significations. Our examination of the psychodynamics of Abulafia's castration anxiety must consider his testimony on the level of his relationship to the physical phallus, and it must also trace the connections from there to the associated network of mystical symbols and concepts from which he draws.

The model offered above of the patient undergoing a medical procedure and redirecting a castration anxiety toward the body part under treatment is particular apt in describing the meaning accorded by Abulafia to the mystic's coming into a state of mutilation. The procedure undergone by the fallen mystic, understood as vengeance appropriate to his transgression, renders him, in distancing him from

by plumbing its apparent psychoanalytic affinities. Wolfson responds to the question of anachronism by indicating that kabbalistic production possesses a crucial atemporal component. Innovation takes the form of traditionalism in kabbalah, and vice versa. Indeed, Wolfson points, among other figures, to Abulafia in this regard. And likewise does the scholar of kabbalah immerse himself or herself in this atemporal milieu, where the old is the new and the new the old, in his or her own confrontation with the open text. In such a milieu, as Wolfson puts it, "the charge of anachronism itself becomes anachronistic." *Ibid.*, p. 159.

the divine, unable to achieve a truly masculine form. This punishment, in Abulafia's conception, represents paternal retribution for the sins that, we have seen, amount to idolatry. We have noted that the erotic nature of this latter offense is evident within the context of Abulafia's religious tradition, and Abulafia does himself broach this connection between idolatry and sexual transgression. We have, then, a dynamic in which a fear prevails of retribution, coming from the father, for a covetousness of the forbidden female on the part of the son.¹⁴³

That Abulafia understands Christianity as both feminine and feminizing has been established. The figure of Jesus stands at the fore of these associations for Abulafia. And in fact, Abulafia, in this regard, shows an affinity with his Christian contemporaries, for whom Jesus stood as Mother.¹⁴⁴ The conception of Jesus as Mother for Christians, of course, carried with it the most reverent connotations, while, for Abulafia, maternal associations with the figure of Jesus found expression at the rhetorical level in distinctly negative declarations.¹⁴⁵

The Christian doctrine regarding Jesus' maternalism may have furnished Abulafia with ready psychological fodder, fueling both his attraction and his repulsion to the religious other. Abulafia's negative reaction to Jesus' maternal status constitutes a parallel to that of other kabbalists in their response to monastic asceticism.¹⁴⁶ The model of monasticism, understood by Christians in terms of masculinization

¹⁴³ For the notion of God as father within the oedipal dynamic, see Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, pp. 182–183, 187; *The Future of an Illusion*, p. 24; *Civilization and Its Discontents*, pp. 22, 88.

¹⁴⁴ Imagery of the suckling and nurturing by Jesus of the faithful constitutes an important element in his being conceived of in maternal terms. See, for instance, Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, pp. 115, 117. See also Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being*, p. 456 n. 231. The femininity with which Abulafia imbued Jesus was of a piece with that with which he associated Eve, the archetypal mother. Abulafia saw them both as partaking of an intimate relationship to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; Abulafia wrote that Jesus hanged himself on this tree. In this sense as well, then, Jesus bore a maternal and evil association for Abulafia. See Berger, "The Messianic Self-Consciousness of Abraham Abulafia," p. 57.

¹⁴⁵ Bynum points out that the maternal imagery associated with Jesus neither resulted from nor did it cause an increased valuation of women by Christian men. *Jesus as Mother*, p. 143. Abulafia, then, merely extended the negative assessment of femininity that prevailed in his day to include Jesus within it.

¹⁴⁶ Bynum observes that "...it seems clear that the psychological needs of religious males provide a partial explanation for the Cistercian theme of mother-Jesus and the concern for union that it expresses." *Ibid.*, p. 162. What I mean to suggest here is that Abulafia reacted as well to the theme of mother-Jesus in terms of a psychological need. He was able to redirect a range of emotions onto this figure of Jesus.

through a kind of spiritualized castration, one expressed through asceticism, was seen, from the Jewish mystical perspective, as a form of emasculation and feminization.¹⁴⁷ And indeed, a similar model of spiritualized castration might well be seen to underlie the conceptualization of Jesus in feminine terms formulated by Christians.¹⁴⁸ Such a notion would have borne an interesting relationship to the age-old argument to the effect that Christendom had embraced spiritual circumcision.

It is tempting to speculate that Abulafia's invective against Jesus' femininity, and his conflicted response to Christianity, arose from an earlier mix of unresolved feelings. But not enough is known about Abulafia's childhood to make any judgments about whether his attraction and aversion to the femininity embodied in Jesus and Christianity actually represented a transference of feelings originally associated with his mother. Fortunately, it is not necessary for us to make such a determination. We can recognize that Abulafia's intense conflict is a hallmark of the oedipal complex, and we can cast our minds back to Ricoeur's remarks. The latter noted how the act of symbolization was intertwined with the oedipal complex through the themes of defilement, guilt and sin. Abulafia's descent into an "archaic mythology" in order to achieve an inner rectification was, as Ricoeur would see it, fated inevitably to "take place in the field of the Oedipal complex."¹⁴⁹

Abulafia's struggle therein is dramatically evidenced in his evocation of the themes of defilement, guilt and anxiety in one particular section

¹⁴⁷ Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being*, pp. 302–3, 307, 309–12. See also idem, "Eunuchs Who Keep the Sabbath," pp. 152, 154. Wolfson notes that the *Zohar* links Christianity, and Satan as well, with impotence, femininity and castration. Ibid., p. 153. Idel notes that an extreme asceticism, one within which sexual abstinence would figure prominently, would have been antithetical to Abulafia's approach to the imaginative faculty. *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 143–144. Wolfson observes the significance of marriage and sexual intercourse for the Jewish mystic; reconstitution in Adam's image, and thus God's, is dependent upon these. "Eunuchs Who Keep the Sabbath," pp. 154–156. Nevertheless, Wolfson does observe that a reining in of the sexual impulse, a curtailment connected by Abulafia with circumcision, does bear at least some resemblance to the ascetic attitude. Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 90, 219–220. A further Jewish attack leveled against the Christian ideal of monastic celibacy consisted of the charge that it led to clandestine licentiousness. Biale, *Eros and the Jews*, p. 98.

¹⁴⁸ Though the connection is not drawn explicitly, Bernard of Clairvaux, for instance, spoke of both monks and Jesus in terms of the feminine. Bynum, *Jesus as Mother*, pp. 115, 128.

¹⁴⁹ Rigby, "Paul Ricoeur, Freudianism, and Augustine's *Confessions*," p. 100. See above, pp. 22–24.

of *Sitrei Torah*. There Abulafia writes with surprising directness concerning the nature of the physical threat with which demons confront man. Abulafia begins on familiar ground. Making distinctions between the good and evil aspects of the efflux from the Active Intellect, he writes, is enacted via letter permutations, first in the imagination but eventually through the intellect.¹⁵⁰ Ultimate success Abulafia portrays as the assumption of the divine likeness, "...until the partial, human and prophetic returns in the comprehensive, perennial eternal form of his Cause, like him; and he and He will be one thing." *Devequt* is understood here to be effected with the mystic's coming into a precise resemblance to God. The divine likeness is achieved—or rather, reassumed, as Abulafia puts it, likely referring to Adam's original androgynous state—through the hermeneutic by which the mystic recognizes the deadly lies, as Abulafia describes them, of the demonic aspect of the efflux from the Active Intellect. Abulafia continues,

And after I announce this to you, I will show you the entirety of its path, so that you will never forget it. And so it is when you know of your essence, that it is perfected in the perfection of the good attributes that testify to the form of the imaginative potency and to the truth of its identity for you, and you know that it is perfected in the knowledge of God's attributes, within which, it is known, the world is forever conducted; and you constantly pursue your knowledge according to your intellect, to resemble Him in them according to your ability, and you recognize in your intellect that already it cancels the powers that are called superfluous (*mularot*) from you, and your entire intention is for the sake of heaven, and you fear God to the utmost true fear, as you would fear the angel of death in your seeing him, entirely full of eyes, and in his left hand a burning fire and in his right a double-edged sword (Lev. 26:25) "exact[ing] the vengeance of the covenant," and in his mouth torches of fire consuming fire.

Abulafia first concentrates upon the resumption of the divine likeness, here described as the perfection of the mystic's essence, achieved through the knowledge of God's nature and through the pursuit of *imitatio dei* in one's actions. The perfection of one's essence, Abulafia writes, is oriented toward an imaginative form, which is perfected through ratiocination. Abulafia, as will become further apparent, is concerned in this passage with both the bodily and intellective aspects of the interaction with the efflux from the Active Intellect. It is likely,

¹⁵⁰ *Sitrei Torah*, MS NY-JTSA Mic. 2367, fol. 49a; printed edition, p. 138.

given Abulafia's close identification of the imagination with the corporeal, that the imaginative form referenced here is a bodily one. "The perfection of the good attributes," with respect to the "form of the imaginative potency," very likely refers here to the perfection, in one's imaginative faculty, of one's own bodily form. A type of visualization is apparently alluded to here, an intellectual exercise framed around an imaginative consciousness of one's own body.¹⁵¹

Abulafia shifts from the discussion of striving to resemble God to that of fearing Him. Introduced here is an analogy to the threat of an avenging angel, described in lurid terms. As we had observed, the path of "distinguishing between life and death," the latter now embodied in terms of the angel of death, is to be navigated via skillful discernment in letter permutations. In addition to an intellectual approach, proper intentionality must be brought to bear in this undertaking. This intentionality includes the fear of God, which must be as intense as would be the case if the mystic were confronted by the angel of death.

This visual device of the vengeful angel demonstrates Abulafia's view that the failure to properly honor and fear God during the mystical experience results in the mystic's being overcome by the demonic. We can better understand this thrust to the current passage by looking

¹⁵¹ There is a strong connection between such a visualization and Abulafia's discussions of his visions of a human figure, his own, before him during mystical revelation. Scholem discusses the latter vision; *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, pp. 140–142. Regarding these bodily visions, Idel writes, "...we may reasonably assume that the human form is no more than a projection of the soul or intellect of the mystic, who carries on a dialogue with it at the time of pronouncement." This projection Abulafia also characterizes as "a corporeal intermediary, which is the angel." Idel, *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 90, 95–100. Wolfson cites a discussion of Abulafia's from *Imrei Shefer* in which he describes the visualization of the *sefirot*, as if in a mirror. *Abraham Abulafia*, p. 114 n. 55. Wolfson establishes the link between beholding the *sefirot* configured as anthropos, beholding the divine name and the divine body of the *Shi'ur Qomah* tradition. *Ibid.*, p. 167 n. 197. See also *ibid.*, pp. 207–208, where the figure envisioned is God manifested as Metatron. See also *idem. Language, Eros, Being*, pp. 238, 241 regarding the imagining of the prophetic body, conjunction with an angel, and the connection between the letters permuted and one's own body. Wolfson traces the notion of the vision of the divine name, as a manifestation of the *Kavod* (the Active Intellect, for Abulafia), from *merkabah* literature through the work of Eleazar of Worms. "The Mystical Significance of Torah Study," p. 59. See also *idem, Through a Speculum that Shines*, pp. 192, 212, 227, 246–248, 255, 263, where the vision of the divine anthropos among the German Pietists is emphasized. Wolfson observes the identification of the body of the Divine Presence with Metatron as well in *Tiqunei Zohar*. See *Along the Path*, p. 16. Scholem observes that the effort to behold a vision of one's self was taken up by Abulafia's disciples. "*Sha'arei Šedeq*," p. 129. See also Gotlieb, "*Hearot, Devikut v-N'vuah b-Sefer Otzar ha-Hayyim*," p. 247.

back to another case where a similar prioritization of the mystic's proper intentionality was present, this being during the permutation of the name of God with the three letters that correspond to the three elemental angels. There, the intent of the mystic had to be fixed upon God's aggrandizement alone, lest he be physically injured.¹⁵² This intent was closely related to what Abulafia describes as the lone appropriate mystical objective, the upholding of God's unity, to be contrasted with the idolatrous alternative pursued by sorcerers, Christians and some kabbalists.¹⁵³ In the current passage, the angel of death is an evocation of the fear of God, but it also threatens to execute God's vengeance upon those who do not honor Him properly, likely by upholding His unity. To do otherwise with respect to God is to fall into idolatry.

The angel's prospective vengeance corresponds with a rejection of the mystic's efforts to identify experientially with God. This identification had been presented, in bodily terms, as the achievement of God's likeness. And, appropriately, the angelic threat is depicted here as a bodily one. Most noteworthy in this regard is the sword in the avenging angel's right hand, with which the "vengeance of the covenant" is exacted. Recalling our discussion of the locus of this covenant, the phallus, should arouse our suspicions that castration anxiety is manifest in the description of this sword-wielding entity. The connection of the demonic threat, actualized by the idolatrous intentionality of the wayward mystic, to the loss of the mark of the covenant is vividly apparent here. Regarding the specter of this avenging angel, Abulafia continues,

And he comes upon you and asks you to give to him his portion from yourself, and he is half of your existence, speaking allegorically, and he seeks to cut off your limbs, one after the other, and you see it all with

¹⁵² See above, p. 157.

¹⁵³ Other cases that we have examined also contrast proper intent with idolatry as the alternative. In *Maftelah ha-Tokhahot*, we had encountered a discussion in which the "aim of the intention" was to hear God's voice, a goal that could not be attained "...if you do not first remove idolatry from the heart." MS Oxford-BL 1605, fol. 48a; printed edition, p. 45. In *Sefer ha-Hesheq*, demons threatened to overthrow the mystic's capacity to bear the "secret of the unity." MS NY-JTSA Mic. 1801, fol. 27a; printed edition, p. 54. In this context, demons may be understood with respect to the "errors that destroy the soul" by overwhelming the rational faculty. And in *Sefer ha-Melammed*, the appropriate "intention" was akin to "...the utterance of the holy words in terror and trembling among those who fear God," as against the idolator's usage of the names without any intellectual approach or understanding. MS Paris-BN héb. 680, fol. 293a; printed edition, p. 15.

your eyes. And thus you despise all of your limbs and all of their bodily powers because of the fear of God who gives to the angel of death his fixed portion that is hinted at [in] that he is Satan and he is the angel of death and he is the evil inclination and he is the imaginative power in the heart that rules over your mind, and he is clever in doing evil, and he does not know the doing of good. And he besieges your heart in the matter of confounding (*bilbul*) heart and heart (*lev ve-lev*). And sometimes he is revealed to you to kill you and to devour your circumcision (*livloa' milatkha*) if Zipporah, the wife of Moses, does not help you to be (Ex. 4:26) "a bloody bridegroom because of the circumcision;" and she circumcised the foreskin of her son in the taking of a sharp stone and in the cutting of the covenant. And sometimes he is hidden from you until you think that you will not die until you grow old, although he stands before you and sees your essence, and you do not see him, and all of a sudden he turns upon you and asks his portion. And so it is always, time after time, day after day, until the day of your death.

Abulafia explains that the avenging angel is actually a feature of the mystic's own inner being; it is his evil inclination.¹⁵⁴ In this is recalled our observation that demons possess, for Abulafia, a quasi-existent status. The threat that they pose is genuine and mortal, but they nevertheless embody the mystic's own inner predilection toward idolatrous tendencies.¹⁵⁵ In this, Abulafia adopts a view of the imagination that contrasts with the one propounded earlier. Initially, the imagination had been seen as utilized in the modeling of the mystic's attributes after God's likeness, a notion that we took to represent the imaginative bodily resumption of Adam's perfect form. Here, the angel, now understood as Satan, is itself identified as the mystic's personified imaginative faculty, with the result that the mystic's body, inextricably linked to the imagination, as we have suggested, is to be despised. By the same token, Satan, we are informed, is actually entitled to a

¹⁵⁴ Idel refers to another passage, from *Sitrei Torah*, regarding the battle within the mystic between good and evil angels. *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 96–97. In another context, Idel writes, "Those descriptions and interpretations of visions which have reached us belong to the 'positive' type of experience." Idel here expresses the belief that the demonic visions that came to Abulafia during his fifteen year ordeal are not of the type that we find in his writings, that only those visions which bear an intellectual content were preserved by Abulafia. *Ibid.*, p. 145.

¹⁵⁵ Altmann observes that a fundamental difference between medieval philosophy and mysticism rested in respective attitudes toward evil and the demonic, such that mystics saw demons as real, with the result that they adopted a dualistic perspective. "Maimonides' Attitude toward Jewish Mysticism," p. 210. From this observation, we may perhaps understand Abulafia's assigning of a qualified reality to demons, in that Abulafia's attitudes frequently straddled the two worlds of philosophy and mysticism.

portion of man's limbs; we may understand this to indicate that Satan may claim that which shares his nature in its corporeality.

Satan seeks to sever the mystic's limbs from his body "one after the other." Nevertheless, despite referring to some number of limbs, only one is specifically referenced. We learn that Satan seeks to "devour" the mystic's circumcision. There is here a high level of conformity with the psychoanalytic perspective that assumes that the anxiety associated with bodily maiming expresses a more deeply seated threat to the genitals in particular. The threat that Satan poses to the mystic's circumcision is in keeping with that described earlier, where the sword that the angel of death bore was intended for the exacting of "the vengeance of the covenant." With respect to Satan's threat, castration occurs when the mystic falls under evil's sway and becomes confused: "...he [Satan] besieges your heart in the matter of confounding heart and heart."¹⁵⁶ Certainly this confusion alludes to the mystic's falling victim to temptation of an idolatrous nature. What ensues is the father's castrating reprisal, which takes the form of the removal of the circumcision, resulting in the loss of one's identity as a participant in the covenant and as a perfected man, capable of communion with God.

In the latter of the two castration scenarios, that of Satan as opposed to that of the angel of death, Abulafia describes a threat that is apparently of an oral nature—the mystic is threatened with having his circumcision "devoured" by Satan. This is a castration topos familiar to psychoanalysis. The construal of the mouth as a castrating threat is akin to the same anxiety expressed in terms of the vagina, which not uncommonly is also described by the patient suffering from castration anxiety as possessing threatening teeth.¹⁵⁷

Satan is described here by Abulafia as masculine, but Satan's links to the imaginative faculty, the evil inclination and the body are quite strong in this passage, all of these being distinctly feminine attributes, in Abulafia's estimation. Indeed, as was also the case with Jesus, Satan epitomizes femininity. Nevertheless, despite Satan's feminine nature, his description here as masculine makes it also possible to consider the anxiety-fraught dynamic as homoerotic. Just as the relationship

¹⁵⁶ Idel makes reference to Abulafia's disciple, Isaac of Acre, with respect to the efforts of demons to come to the mystic and attempt to confuse him. *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia*, p. 167 n. 226.

¹⁵⁷ Coen, "Sexual Disorders," p. 365.

of the mystic to God may be conceived of as homoerotic, notwithstanding the femininity of the mystic's soul, so too may the relationship described of the heretic with Satan be understood as homoerotic, despite Satan's femininity.¹⁵⁸

The fear of the castrating female—Satan here specifically, but, we should bear in mind the motif of Jesus as the tempting mother—is countered (or sublimated) in Abulafia's subsequent turn in *Sitrei Torah* to the theme of Zipporah. The circumcision performed by Zipporah stands here as an apotropaic talisman against the satanic threat of castration.¹⁵⁹ Abulafia refers to the mystic here as the "bloody bridegroom," that is, as Moses in the Exodus story. Moses is saved from God's wrath by Zipporah's circumcision of his son and by her touching of Moses' genitals with the son's circumcised foreskin (Ex. 4:25). Here, for Abulafia, a righteous woman serves as standard bearer for salutary, approved, and normative circumcision, diffusing the castration threat represented by the forbidden female element. Along similar lines, we should observe that Freud viewed circumcision as an enactment of castration engaged in by the father. This served the function of forestalling a fully realized castration of the son.¹⁶⁰ In kind, then, with what we have seen of the two possible modes of erotic union enacted by the mystic, one with respect to Lilith and one with respect to the *Shekhinah*,¹⁶¹ so too is the mystic susceptible to two possible circumcisions at the hands of the female element, one—a castration—executed by the feminine male, the demon, and one—of the halakhic variety—executed by the masculine female, Zipporah here.

Nevertheless, despite Zipporah's redemptive act, the demonic mortal threat may lie permanently in wait, as Abulafia informs us at the

¹⁵⁸ See Wolfson, "Crossing Gender Boundaries in Kabbalistic Ritual and Myth," pp. 312–321, for the construal of the mystic's relationship to God in homoerotic terms. In that context, zoharic texts are considered in which the feminine element within the divine is located in the phallus, such that "...the female images related to God must be transposed into a masculine key." Ibid., p. 312. See also idem, "Eunuchs Who Keep the Sabbath," p. 170. See idem, "Crossing Gender Boundaries in Kabbalistic Ritual and Myth," p. 322 for one of several examples in which the zoharic authors conceive of the mystic as feminine with respect to the divinity.

¹⁵⁹ Biale notes the Targum Pseudo-Jonathan's contention that Zipporah's act saved Moses from the destroying angel. *Blood and Belief*, p. 72.

¹⁶⁰ Freud, *Complete Introductory Lectures*, pp. 165, 550–551; *Moses and Monotheism*, p. 156; *Totem and Taboo*, p. 189 n. 61. See also Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being*, p. 485 n. 173.

¹⁶¹ See above, p. 152.

end of the passage. It remains unabated and is imperceptible to the human being. Given Abulafia's prior assessment of this threat as an internal one, indeed, as one half of the mystic's internal makeup, we may understand that what Abulafia suggests here is that the inner struggle is one that may never be resolved. This suggests that, in psychoanalytic terms, the complex and the anxiety that it engenders likewise may never subside.¹⁶² Given that Abulafia identifies himself elsewhere as Moses, or even as his better,¹⁶³ it is apparent that Abulafia viewed himself, at least at times, as one who had assumed the status of the "bloody bridegroom" and had put the internal crisis behind him.

The Signification of Identity

The loss of the talismanic covenantal insignia of circumcision merits examination from one final perspective. I began this book with a discussion of the theme of the marking out of identity, but I have concentrated, to this point, primarily on the demonic threat as a manifestation of anxiety stemming from the guilt of erotic attraction to the forbidden female. Demons inflict castration upon the one who falls into temptation, in Abulafia's judgment, and with that castration comes severance from intimacy with God, the father. It must be observed that the psychic unease accompanying the threat to identity that results from attraction to the other is at the root of this dynamic.

Castration, in the context of Abulafia's thought, is synonymous with the effacing of the mark that epitomizes the identity of the Jewish male, that is, his circumcision. We have discussed how the attraction to Christianity engendered doubt for Abulafia, and we recounted some of the methods by which he sought to eliminate those doubts and buttress the clarity of his Jewish identity. Abulafia came, somewhat paradoxically, to view the trial, the temptation toward the other, as a Jewish imperative. To overcome it became, for Abulafia, the utmost realization of Jewish identity. Abulafia's internal doubts concerning the impeccability of his identity, coming as a consequence of his illicit attraction, manifested themselves in anxiety concerning the potential

¹⁶² See above, p. 21.

¹⁶³ See, for instance, Idel, *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 140–141.

for failure in this trial. They reached their quintessential expression in the theme of retributive castration.

The loss of the insignia of circumcision was understood by Abulafia as commensurate with the loss of the ability to demarcate one's own activities and beliefs from those of the nations. This theme is broached by Abulafia through a discussion of the sins of Adam and Eve. Writes Abulafia in *Hayyei ha-'Olam ha-Ba'*,¹⁶⁴

And the joy will awaken again your heart to add inversion and understanding and joy and great pleasure, and you will hasten to turn around (*lehafokh*), like one who turns around the flaming sword that turns to every side, to wage war with the enemies that surround. Because the imaginings and image of the void thoughts, which are born from the spirit of the evil inclination, are what first go out towards the calculation and surround it like murderers and confound the knowledge of the humble man in the sin of Adam and Eve...

At the outset of this passage, Abulafia refers to the act of letter permutation and to the rising ecstasy that ensues therefrom. The enemies to which he alludes are again the demons who threaten the mystic with bodily harm.¹⁶⁵ These demons, besetting the mystic from all sides in their effort to thwart his attempt to rationally apprehend the products of his permutation activity, are, Abulafia says, "like murderers." Abulafia's description of them as threatening, in particular, the "calculation" (*heshbon*) of the mystic suggests that they aim to impair his ability to perform operations dependent upon the numerical values of letters. They seek to "confuse" him, as did Satan in the earlier passage from *Sitrei Torah*.

Abulafia does not mention the precise nature of the sin of Adam and Eve, but we may piece together its nature by turning first to a passage from elsewhere in *Hayyei ha-'Olam ha-Ba'*.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁴ *Hayyei ha-'Olam ha-Ba'*, MS Oxford-BL 1582, fol. 31a; printed edition, p. 112.

¹⁶⁵ Wolfson has discussed the motif of the revolving flaming sword (derived from Genesis 3:24) in its relatedness, for Abulafia, to the "inversion of the attributes," the transformation of the demonic attributes of the left into the pious ones of the right. *Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 172–175. The revolving of the sword is a motif that suggests the revolving of letters by the mystic. Wolfson also understands the revolving sword with respect to the mystic's vision of his projected self, accompanied as this is by its converse, the internalization of that which is external. *Language, Eros, Being*, pp. 234–235.

¹⁶⁶ *Hayyei ha-'Olam ha-Ba'*, MS Oxford-BL 1582, fols. 6b–7a; printed edition, p. 53. The first portion of this passage appears in Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia*, p. 194.

And the secrets of sexual transgression (*sitrei 'arayot*) are the fornication of the serpent with Eve, because he is the adulterer and is he who projected pollution into her. And Israel when they stood before Mount Sinai terminated their pollutedness, [while] the nations who did not stand upon Mount Sinai did not terminate their pollutedness... And it is said as well that the Other Side (*Sitra' 'Ahra'*), who is Satan, is he who rides upon the serpent and who carries the woman... And he entices the human intellective power before its going into actualization, and prevents him from grasping the truth... Indeed the truly enlightened one who is the man in truth will not be seduced after the knowledge of the woman who is seduced by the serpent, who was bitten and killed from the poison of death that is in his mouth, but is ever drawn after the *mišvot* of God, may He be blessed...

One aspect of the sin of Adam and Eve, we learn, has to do with *sitrei 'arayot*, or the secrets of sexual transgression.¹⁶⁷ Abulafia concentrates on Eve's illicit fornication with the serpent, which he implicitly equates with idolatry. The serpent is associated here with the enticement of the mystic who seeks an intellective experience. The serpent assumes the role of a demon, whose goal, we have seen, is to bring about the fall into idolatry. As to the poisoning and death inflicted by the serpent, Abulafia elsewhere refers to non-intellective beliefs as resulting in "death," that is, the denial of entry into the world to come, while attainment to the latter signifies *devequt*.¹⁶⁸ This is the subtextual meaning, for the mystic, of the poisoning and death described by Abulafia, which, on the surface, refers to Eve's being rendered mortal as part of her punishment. Abulafia's allusion to death from the serpent's bite recalls as well the bodily threat embodied by the demons encountered by the mystic.

Another indication of the equation of fornication with the serpent and the fall into idolatry lies in Abulafia's discussion of the other nations of the world. They, who are idolatrous, in Abulafia's estimation, bear the impurity that results from Eve's sin, while the Israelites, with the reception of the Torah, had it expunged from their natures. To be a Jew, then, is to be free from the idolatrous taint that results from Eve's sexual transgression. In keeping with this view, the mystic's replication of the purified state of the Israelites at Sinai can apparently only occur if he refrains from consorting with the demonic component

¹⁶⁷ For *sitrei 'arayot* in Abulafia's thought, see *ibid.*, pp. 192–195, and see below.

¹⁶⁸ *Sitrei Torah*, MS NY-JTSA Mic. 2367, fol. 31b; printed edition, p. 62.

of the efflux from the Active Intellect. To be seduced is to fall into Eve's sexual sin.

In a closely related passage written slightly earlier, in *Hayyei ha-Nefesh*, Abulafia writes,¹⁶⁹

And the serpent did not approach the man and there was no speech between them, but his approach and his speech was with Eve alone. And Eve murdered her husband through the cunning of the adulterous serpent... And the adulterer hates her because he was cursed because of her, and the adulteress hates him in that she committed adultery, and necessarily received death for her adultery, because of his seduction; because her death was not from the sin of transgressing against a commandment, because she was not commanded, but the man was. As it was said (Gen. 2:16), "And the Lord God commanded the man..." The man and not the woman... And Adam acted evilly, until he transgressed God's commandments and engaged in idolatry... And thus three kinds of sin were comprised in the beginning of creation, idolatry, the secrets of sexual transgression and the shedding of blood,¹⁷⁰ and so too in the secret of circumcision are these three, because from it is the beginning of the creation of the species and its perpetual continuance.

Abulafia describes Eve's death as resulting from her role in Adam's coming into sin, from which he too received a death sentence. Distinguished, but essentially identical at their root, are the two types of sin against which Abulafia cautions with respect to the demonic temptation. Eve consorted sexually with the demonic element, while Adam committed idolatry. That their sin in Genesis is the same, in that they both ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, reinforces our understanding that the two sins enumerated by Abulafia are two sides of the same coin.¹⁷¹ The third type of sin referenced, the spilling of blood, is seemingly encapsulated in the deaths that ensued from

¹⁶⁹ *Hayyei ha-Nefesh*, MS Munich-BS 408 fols. 10b, 10a; printed edition, pp. 14–15.

¹⁷⁰ BT. *Sanhedrin*. 74a; Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed* 2:30.

¹⁷¹ Abulafia characterizes the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in terms of the sensory and of lust. *Maftelah ha-Hokhmot*, MS NY-JTSA Mic. 1686, fol. 111b; printed edition, p. 56. Idel offers a similar assessment from 'Ozar Eden Ganuz. *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia*, p. 204. Maimonides describes Adam's sin as a transgression against the 'arayot restrictions; that is, he gave in to his imagination and to sensual pleasures. Idem, "Sitre 'Arayot in Maimonides' Thought," p. 82. Abulafia's conception of the sitrei 'arayot is clearly related to Maimonides', but Maimonides' tendency is, in fact, to rid the 'arayot restriction of the tinge of esotericism, at least in *The Guide of the Perplexed*, while Abulafia accords the sitrei 'arayot pride of place among esoteric doctrines.

Eve's act. As well, earlier we noted that Abulafia's reference to the spilling of "strange blood" was a locution for idolatry.¹⁷² Likely the spilling of blood here carries the same connotation.

Abulafia does not clearly explain how the three types of sin, assigned to the beginning of creation, manifest themselves in circumcision, but he appears to allude, in this regard, to the three esoteric fields of the secrets of sexual transgression, the secrets of the chariot, and the secrets of creation.¹⁷³ Abulafia gathers together the essentially synonymous sins of idolatry, sexual transgression and bloodshed and associates them with circumcision, where the latter serves an apotropaic function. He refers to circumcision as a source of creation and of perpetuation, that is, of life, as against the sins of idolatry and sexual transgression, which, we saw, amounted to death. Abulafia's reference to circumcision as the source of persistent life is evocative of our prior discussion of the phallic *sefira Yesod*. Likely Abulafia indicates the mystic's entry into the eternal life of the world to come, an accomplishment that results from the mystic's assumption of the divine likeness as the perfected man, reconstituted in Adam's original image at the locus of his fecundity, the phallus.

Death, which represents failure in this effort, we see, results from the loss of the distinguishing mark of the Jewish people, of which the mystic is stripped through idolatry, synonymous with the giving in to forbidden demonic—that is, Christian—seductions. This death is equivalent to the pollutedness of the gentile nations, who did not stand upon Mt. Sinai, and it is irrevocably feminine in nature—it represents being tempted "after the knowledge of the woman," as Abulafia puts it. The link between femininity, physically violent demons, and the stripping from one's person of his circumcision evokes clearly enough once more the castration motif. Noteworthy it is that this place of castration, the demonic Other Side, is the domain of the other nations.

¹⁷² See above, pp. 42–43, 145–146. See also Biale, *Blood and Belief*, p. 28, for the further link of bloodshed and idolatry with sexual infidelity with respect to God.

¹⁷³ In fact, it appears that the latter two of these revolve around the secrets of sexual transgression as the most primary of the three. Wolfson analyzes a closely related passage from *Sitrei Torah*, where circumcision, signifying the secrets of sexual transgression, is seen by Abulafia to comprise within itself as well the head phylacteries, signifying the secrets of the chariot, and the arm phylacteries, signifying the secrets of creation. Wolfson demonstrates that circumcision thereby stands as "the mark of esotericism par excellence," a distinction encapsulated as well in the exposure of the corona during the procedure. *Abraham Abulafia*, p. 88. See also *ibid.*, pp. 192–195 for several similar examples.

For Abulafia, Jewish identity required resistance to the deadly threat of the demonic encounter, of which the endurance of the phallus was symbolic. To circumcision's more traditional signifying role was added a mystically transcendent one. Abulafia found recourse to this familiar marker of identity as the standard borne in the mystic's war against the temptation of the other.

CHAPTER FOUR

ABULAFIA AND JESUS: METATRON AND SANDALFON

We have touched upon the importance, for Abulafia, of the doctrine that the mystic must face the task of reconstituting his own essential being in order to render himself fully whole and perfected, a replication of God's own being and of the hypostatic model of the *sefirot*. *Devequt* resulted, in Abulafia's conception, from success in this project, which represented the reconciliation of opposites within the mystic. We have noted this theme with reference to man's male (that is, pious) and female (that is, idolatrous) features, as well as to his intellect and imagination and his good and evil inclinations. The principle of mystical reconstitution of the opposites within the self recurs in multiform guises in Abulafia's writings, in motifs which intertwine to form an overarching network of impressive intricacy. The theme's prevalence in Abulafia's writing, apparent in a complex edifice of hermeneutical elaboration built upon it, serves to demonstrate the centrality of the mystical obligation, in Abulafia's estimation, to reconcile the opposites within the self. We will explore some of these themes in this chapter, with an eye toward their impact upon Abulafia's relationship to Christianity.¹ The theme's many recurrences dovetail, most often consciously and deliberately, with the subject of Abulafia's stance toward the latter.

One sustained discussion from *'Oṣar 'Eden Ganuz* presents a cluster of motifs, each of which is pivotal in Abulafia's wider corpus to this theme of mystical reconstitution. As is frequently the case in Abulafia's discourse, these motifs intersect, with the result that an extended

¹ Wolfson notes a recurring theme in the *Zohar*: "...one must incorporate evil, even the demonic side, into one's spiritual path." "Light through Darkness: The Ideal of Human Perfection in the *Zohar*," p. 76. This principle manifests in two ways in the *Zohar*. One is through a process of "purgation and refinement" and the other is through "containment and unification." We have already taken note of Abulafia's interest in the issue of "refinement." The zoharic authorship, as Wolfson perceives them, sought a state "in which evil and good are contained together as one and not one in which evil and good are separated." *Ibid.*, p. 88.

analysis of this passage will be helpful at the outset of our effort.² We may pick up the thread of Abulafia's thought in the aftermath of some mathematical elaboration upon the numbers one through ten, tied to his conceptions of the *sefirot*, as we have seen.³ Abulafia writes,⁴

...And this for us is the secret of "forbidden and permitted," because it "binds the seed," "and releases the ten words [or "things," *devarim*]." ⁵ And revealed from it is the "knot of the arm" ⁶ of the left that is called the knot of tefillin, which are strings called "threads of the sins" and they are created from "food" of wheat, and it is "thread and blood" and their secret is "raw matter, *Hokhmah* [the second highest *sefira*, Wisdom] and *Binah* [the third highest *sefira*, Understanding]," ⁷ "raw matter, sun and moon," and from there "the mind and the heart and the blood" ⁸ and the liver and all the limbs, one in the other; and this was revealed before in the matter of the cycle (*ibbur*). And know that if you wish to release the order (*'erekh*) that is made straight (*nehlaf 'el ha-yashar*), you decrease the first number (*ro'sh misparo*) from the second, and remaining in your hand will be three, which are equivalent, or configured upon one root, which is near to equivalent [here follow mathematical operations based on the numbers one, two and three]... And so all the configurations, when you release the knots and their exchange, return to the straight configuration. And from here the sages said that this hints to man in the knots of the world, year and soul, because he is connected to them by nature, and if he will release their knots from him he will cleave in him who is above them, with the preservation of his soul... [Those who accomplish this] are called scattered singular ones, sequestered (*mitbodedim*) to know God, blessed be His name, and they subdue themselves from pursuing

² In differing contexts and for divergent purposes, a number of these motifs have been observed by Scholem, Idel and Wolfson, as will be noted as we proceed. Idel, *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia*, p. 135, translates a portion of this passage.

³ See above, pp. 85–87.

⁴ *Oṣar Eden Ganuz*, MS Oxford-BL 1580, fols. 23b–24a; printed edition, pp. 47–48.

⁵ "Forbidden and permitted" shares the same numerical value as "binds the seed," eight hundred and eight-eight. "And releases the ten words" has a numerical value of one thousand eight hundred and eighty-seven; however, Abulafia will frequently take the value of the number one thousand and transpose it, adding it to the single digit position, which in this case would yield the value of "forbidden and permitted," eight hundred and eight-eight. For another example of this practice, see above, p. 103 n. 207.

⁶ Having as well a numerical value of eight hundred and eight-eight.

⁷ The numerical values of "threads," "the sins," "food of wheat," "thread and blood," "raw matter," "*Hokhmah*" and "and *Binah*" are all seventy-three.

⁸ The numerical values of "sun and moon" and "the mind and the heart and the blood" are one hundred and forty-six and one hundred and fifty-one, respectively. The difference could be the result of a scribal error, where a definite article, whose numerical value is five, may have been added to the second phrase.

worldly desire and guard against being bound in it, like a dog with his mate. And regarding this, when he is accustomed to the isolation (*perishut*) he will add separations and unifications and he will know to unite the one, singular, unique name, “YHVVH is one.” And then he will say in truth, “Hear, o Israel, YHVVH is our God, YHVVH is one.” And he will answer himself quietly, to bring his heart to think with focus (*lahshov libo be-kavvanah*), “Blessed be the name of the glory of His kingdom now and forever,” the last letters of which are “His blood, your blood,” the first letters being “בשכמל,” whose secret is “with all His name” (בכל שמו). Therefore, His name is “Your Blood, His Blood;” therefore, “His Blood, Your Blood” is His name. And the secret of the beginning and the end [that is, the first and last letters of the phrase, “Blessed be the name of the glory of His kingdom now and forever,”] is “fifty and one half” (חמשים וחצי), and thus “Blow of the Arrow” is His name (מחי חצי שמו).⁹ And thus His name is “The Source of Life for Life,”¹⁰ in the likeness of the “weaving” bound “in the Tanin,” front and back, in the secret of twenty-two letters, from which is created “my flesh (בשר).”¹¹ And the hint is (Job 19:26), “from my flesh (מבשרי) I will see God,” which is “Prince in me (שר בי).” And when the perfect man arrives at the straight region, “directly” (בישר) “he will announce” (יבשר) [to] others, in good lines, if they will listen and if they will refrain from what he also announces (*be-mah she-besarohu gam hu*), until they apprehend what he apprehends and they rejoice in that in which he rejoices. Because the straight region comes from one likeness, corresponding to the supernal likeness which dwells alone, and there is no god apart from Him and there is nothing more apart from Him. And He is the All and from Him is the All, and in Him is the All and He is the beginning of the All... And to Him will return the spirit of the All, with the binding of the parts, and the All is bound in all and from all and all. And in this it establishes the secret of all of the beginnings and the secrets of all prayers. And these are the uses and the great ascents which are gathered within the enlightened person with his knowing the secret of the *sefirot* and the arrangements, which are contained in the songs of ascents and in the orders of the received paths, which answer to the intellective.

Throughout this passage are motifs that refer to the *shefa*, or divine efflux. The latter partakes, as discussed, of two attributes, one divine

⁹ I have opted to translate this enigmatic expression, מחי חצי, as *meḥi ḥaṣi*, “Blow of the Arrow,” but it could also read something like “My Mind, One Half” (*moḥi ḥaṣi*) or “One Half of a Blow” (*meḥi ḥaṣi*). I believe that the expression is meant to suggest insemination, given what follows.

¹⁰ The phrase “The Source of Life for Life” has the same numerical value as that for “‘Blow of the Arrow’ is His name,” one hundred and sixty-six.

¹¹ The word “weaving” and the phrases “in the Tanin” and “my flesh” all have the same numerical value, five hundred and twelve.

and distinctly pious and Jewish, the other satanic and idolatrous. The passage touches upon a series of examples of opposing aspects of a whole that require some type of harmonization.

At the outset of this passage, Abulafia seeks to draw a rough equivalence between that which is forbidden and permitted and knots that are tied and untied. That is, the releasing of knots is appraised as a sanctioned action,¹² connected here by Abulafia to the “releasing” either of the ten commandments or of the ten *sefirot*. What is, conversely, bound or restricted is “seed.” Abulafia begins with the phrase “binds the seed,” which he clarifies later with respect to the constraining of sexual potency. Dichotomous here, within this discussion of tied and untied knots, are aspects of the intellective capacity within man, embodied in Torah or in the *sefirot*,¹³ and man’s imaginative faculty, linked with the sensual world and, thus, with sexual desire. The knot of the arm tefillin is referenced with respect to the aforementioned binding of one’s seed, and it is linked, via several *gematriyot*, to sin, blood, and crude or raw matter.¹⁴

An interesting analogy is presented here between the hand tefillin and man’s imaginative faculty. The latter, we have said, is of a material and sensual and, hence, satanic nature. Nevertheless, following in the perspective of Maimonides, the imagination is indispensable for achieving prophetic revelation. It must be subjugated and then utilized. In this respect, Abulafia’s attitude toward the tefillin of the hand is significant.¹⁵ It is a *mišvah* to wear the bound hand tefillin (and,

¹² See, for example, Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, p. 131 for this theme.

¹³ For Abulafia’s equation of Torah with the ten *sefirot* and with the Active Intellect, see Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, p. 141; Idel, *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics in Abraham Abulafia*, p. 33; Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia*, p. 141.

¹⁴ See *ibid.*, p. 149. The linkage of the raw or prime matter with evil is associated with an equivalence between the demonic Sandalfon and this matter. Idel, *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics in Abraham Abulafia*, p. 119. Abulafia also adapts the polemic from *Toledot Yeshu* discussed earlier, writing that Jesus was conceived during Mary’s menses, the blood of which is the primordial matter. Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, p. 52.

¹⁵ See Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 88, 150 n. 153, 194, 224 n. 137, to be discussed more fully below. Abulafia views the knot of the head tefillin as the counterbalance to the evil reflected in the hand tefillin. See Wolfson’s translation of a passage from *Hayyei ha-Nefesh*: “And the secret of the head and hand phylacteries is the two opposites [mercy and judgment].” *Ibid.*, pp. 149–150 n.153. Nevertheless, a different perspective on Abulafia’s part will be discussed presently.

indeed, Abulafia apparently does so during mystical practice),¹⁶ yet his mystical goal he will characterize, as this passage continues, as the untying of “knots of the world, year and soul.” These, it appears, are related to the knot of the hand tefillin. Abulafia does not intend the physical untying of the knot of the hand tefillin. But the latter’s satanic connotations bring about the impetus for some type of spiritual or psychic release. In one sense, then, Abulafia most fully consummates the *mišvah* of wearing the hand tefillin precisely in its metaphorical undoing. Abulafia’s ambivalence toward this knot well reflects his same perspective on the idolatrous imagination.

Abulafia evinces the same attitude toward raw matter, which he identifies above with this knot or with the “secret” of its strings, as he did toward the knot itself. Raw matter is an entity which Abulafia associates with the material world and with the satanic potentiality within man. It is matter devoid of form, where matter belongs, in Abulafia’s schema, to man’s imagination, while form belongs to the intellect.¹⁷ Yet, here again, that which is satanic carries with it a redeeming, attractive aspect for Abulafia. The raw or hylic matter, which is discussed in the context of man’s sins and blood, is seen as a complex of both good and evil, right and left. This is apparent from its linkage to the sefirotic pair *Hokhmah* and *Binah*, belonging to the right and left sides of the sefirotic array, respectively, and to the sun and moon, which represent these same *sefirot*. Raw matter forms a triad with either of these pairs in Abulafia’s discussion.

Abulafia’s ambivalence toward the raw matter may be displayed as well in its synonymity with bread. The “threads of the sins” of the hand tefillin’s knot are seen as “created from food of wheat,” which is “thread and blood.” In this obscure reference to bread, there appears again to be a resonance with the motif of eucharistic bread. We have seen earlier manna, likened to bread (Deut. 8:3), associated by Abulafia with materialized intellection.¹⁸ The eucharistic bread, as discussed,

¹⁶ See Scholem’s translation of a passage from *Hayyei ha-‘Olam ha-Ba’*. *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, p. 136.

¹⁷ See, for instance, Idel, *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics in Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 100–101. See above, n. 14, and below for the identification of raw matter with blood, representative of the evil nature of corporeality.

¹⁸ See above, pp. 123–126, 150–151. There, the bringing forth of bread is elicited as a metaphor for the intellectual product of letter permutation. In the current context, a eucharistic association may be strengthened in that bread is mentioned along with blood.

possesses a twofold nature, as a corporeal reification of divinity, which echoes Abulafia's sense of raw matter's twofoldness. Abulafia's ambivalent, twofold perspective toward the raw matter may as well be manifest in the emulation itself of an idolatrous motif. We should observe, finally, that Abulafia describes the goal of letter permutation, in several contexts, as the reduction of the letters to their prime matter.¹⁹ Insofar as the received divine efflux from the Active Intellect, the result of such letter operations, contains a demonic aspect, as we have seen, it is a mark of consistency in Abulafia's thought that the prime matter itself should be seen to possess both good and evil. As with the knot, then, that which is categorized as evil is seen, in the case of the raw matter, to possess a much more elusive nature upon closer inspection.

Raw matter Abulafia will go on to describe in conjunction with man's physical body, a notion that he draws into a relationship with the *'ibbur*. This latter doctrine of the "cycle," as is apparent here and elsewhere, Abulafia views as encompassing both the periodicity of celestial orbits, stemming from the term's original connotation relative to intercalation, and of the menstrual cycle, stemming from the term's other original connotation relative to pregnancy.²⁰ The term's signification relative to the celestial orbits is likely drawn into a relationship with "all the limbs" of a man's body based upon the perception, in keeping with the delineations of medieval magical texts, that man is governed by celestial bodies. This is particularly the case with respect to Abulafia's doctrine of the celestial overlord, the Teli, to be discussed shortly, within whose knots man is bound. The connection is made of the *'ibbur* with the prime matter—with respect to the celestial world—and the human body—in terms of the material world—and the *'ibbur* may be seen to partake of the same bipartite nature as the prime matter and the knots.

In terms of the human body, as noted, the concept of *'ibbur* evokes the unclean blood of the menstrual cycle.²¹ Thus, as I have suggested,

¹⁹ See *Sheva' Netivot ha-Torah*, in Jellinek, *Philosophie und Kabbala*, p. 4, discussed above, p. 91. Idel, *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics in Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 97, 140. Abulafia describes the mystic's repeated derivation of fresh significations for the letters as their returning to their primal state. *Ibid.*, p. 22. See also Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia*, p. 108.

²⁰ See Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, pp. 457–460, for the term's usage among the Gerona kabbalists.

²¹ See above, n. 14, for Abulafia's recourse to the *Toledot Yeshu* polemic with respect to menstrual blood. See also Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia*, p. 220 n. 124, where menstrual

it references in this respect the imagination. The latter is indexed in the current passage in Abulafia's allusion to man's limbs and organs, signifying man's material and sensual faculties, and as well in terms of the unclean and feminine blood. The latter we should understand as another feature of man's own constitution, and not simply that of woman's. In sum, the *'ibbur* (or its secret, to which Abulafia often intimates) alludes here to the supernal intellectual realm and to the corporeal, satanic dimension. Abulafia remains intent here on intermingling good and evil aspects, whether in the efflux which man receives or in his own being. Consequently, it is fitting that even when Abulafia discusses man's body as entwined with the raw matter, after the manner of the *'ibbur*, he alludes as well to man's mind, the seat of his intellectual faculty.

Abulafia understands the connections between the celestial/intellective and terrestrial/material realms in terms of the knots with which his current discourse began. More specifically, the knots of the hand tefillin occupy him. The binding of the human being, via these knots, to the realm of the planets, stars and constellations represents the ensnarement of man within his material nature. For this reason, the world's celestial overlord, the Teli, is at times seen by Abulafia as a wholly base captor.²² Thus, in the current passage, Abulafia proceeds to a discussion of the untying of the knots, where they are returned to their "straight configuration."

This reconfiguration Abulafia describes as enacted through numerical operations focused upon the numbers one, two and three. These numbers are to be drawn into an equivalence and "configured upon one root." Such a notion is already familiar to us from Abulafia's discussions of unifying the sefirotic array or a particular triad found therein. Our sensitivities should be aroused once again to the discussion of a unified trinity. Abulafia propounds a permutation operation in the current passage, whose purpose is to forge this seemingly

blood is seen as cleansing of the woman after the fashion of the blood of circumcision for the man. For the zoharic conception of the uncleanness of menstrual blood as the effluence from the left, see Koren, "The Woman from Whom God Wanders," pp. 159–162; Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being*, p. 60.

²² Idel cites another, related passage from *'Oṣar 'Eden Ganuz* to this effect. *The Mystical Experience*, p. 136.

sefirotic triadic unity.²³ That this is seen as the objective of mystical practice is apparent from the fact that Abulafia suggests that a release from the knots of the world, year and soul will ensue. These three cosmological categories were set forth in *Sefer Yeṣirah*.²⁴ Through the process suggested, the mystic is liberated from the fetters of “nature,” that is, the material or sensual, and he comes to cleave to the divine. Abulafia explains that it is sequestration and abnegation—that is, a subjugation of one’s satanic, imaginative, sensual faculty—by which the elect achieve this liberated state.²⁵ Here again the overcoming of the idolatrous impulse, expressed in terms of the need to render a trinity a singularity, is suggested.

The unification that is enacted through the three numbers Abulafia expresses as well in a manner familiar to kabbalistic discourse. This achievement is seen to be embodied in the Tetragrammaton, and the project is understood as the esoteric subtext of the liturgical recitation of the *Shema*.²⁶ This ritual act Abulafia views as a focus for mystical concentration. A parallel between Abulafia’s introduction of the topic of the *Shema* and the earlier portion of this discussion is articulated through the revelation that the *Shema*—and the Tetragrammaton itself—encrypts a reference to the divine and human, good and evil, blood. These are seen as blended together in the cleaving of the

²³ Note earlier that Abulafia had synthesized a triad based upon raw matter, *Hokhmah* and *Binah*. Of these latter two, *Hokhmah* is the second highest *sefirah*, while *Binah* is the third highest. It may be that Abulafia understands the raw matter in this context as *Keter*, the highest *sefirah*. This is plausible in that Abulafia at times identifies *Keter* with the Active Intellect, an association that he appears to develop in this passage vis-à-vis the raw matter.

²⁴ *Sefer Yeṣirah*, Gruenwald ed., 3:5 (para. 31).

²⁵ Idel discusses the term *hitbodedut*, used by Abulafia in the current context, with respect to the “specific meaning of ‘concentrated thought.’” That is, *hitbodedut*, for Abulafia, refers, in Idel’s opinion, to a method of concentration, beyond a simple sequestration or abstemiousness. Idel is of the opinion that it alludes to letter permutation. *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, pp. 105, 108–109.

²⁶ Wolfson discusses Abulafia’s view that the purpose of the recitation of the *Shema* is the theurgical unification of the divine realm, reflected as well in the mystic’s own intellect. *Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 150–152. Among many treatments of the kabbalists’ theurgical goal of uniting the divine realm through prayer, see, for instance, Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, pp. 100–103, 108–109, 116; Dan, “The Emergence of Mystical Prayer;” “Prayer as Text and Prayer as Mystical Experience;” Idel, *New Perspectives*, pp. 191–198; Pedaya, *Vision and Speech*, p. 173 (in Hebrew); Wolfson, “The Image of Jacob,” particularly pp. 37–38; *Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 209–215; *Language, Eros, Being*, pp. 95–96. Abulafia will conclude the current passage by informing us that the mystical unification of the All with itself is the ultimate mystical purpose of all prayer, and is not the purview solely of the *Shema*.

human with the divine. The phrase “His blood, your blood” Abulafia derives from the last letters of the words comprising the second verse of the *Shema*. These two bloods Abulafia describes as partaking, together, of the divine name. It is through such an understanding of the *Shema* that the mystic “will know to unite the one, singular, unique name, ‘YHVH is one.’” From this we can see that Abulafia views the Tetragrammaton itself to partake, in part, of the imaginative and idolatrous.

In the current passage, “life” is the consequence of the unification of the Tetragrammaton. This appears to be expressed in terms of insemination, the “blow of the arrow,” reflective of the conjoining of male and female attributes. Virility, for both the mystic and God, seems to be elicited here as fundamental to the mystic’s unification of the divine. Earlier we discussed the polemical valence of this theme for Abulafia, where we saw it as reflective of the mystic’s reconstitution of his essentially masculine nature. This model we saw as contrasted with the Jewish mystical perception of Christian monastic celibacy. We noted as well that, for Abulafia, the demonic feminine is the bedfellow of impotence or emasculation, while the man who has successfully reintegrated his feminine aspect within himself is rendered virile.

A merging of the two types of blood, good and evil, Abulafia discusses next as the “weaving” together of the front and back of the Tanin, the scriptural creature (Is. 51:9) which Abulafia takes, consistent with tradition, to be the Teli.²⁷ This weaving is accomplished by means of the letters of the alphabet, that is, through letter permutation. From these operations “flesh” is created, but this is a now divinized flesh, as may be understood through the shared consonants of the expressions “in my flesh” and “Prince in me.” Procreative implications are apparent in this discussion of the generation of flesh, and the merging of the two types of blood may thus be perceived along the same lines as the merging of male and female emissions during sexual intercourse.²⁸ Here the union occurs within the mystic at the moment of *devequt*, taking the form of a bodily transubstantiation, the likes of which we have considered already with respect to its Christian connotations. It is because this process occurs within the mystic’s own

²⁷ Sharf, *The Universe of Shabbetai Donnolo*, p. 184.

²⁸ This is particularly likely given the medieval medical identification of blood with semen. Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, p. 155.

being that the divinization is discussed as the presence of the “Prince” within the mystic; the “Prince” within is certainly Metatron, the Prince of the Countenance. Thus, *devequt* takes the form of the merging of the mystic’s own female, satanic blood with his divine and intellective blood.²⁹

Devequt is next articulated as the return, with the liberation that it engenders, of the “spirit of the All” to the “All” itself. This discussion parallels that engaged in by medieval alchemists with respect to the prime matter, as befits the current passage. The hyle is embodied in its essence in the terrestrial philosopher’s stone of medieval alchemy, and the success of alchemical transmutation resides in a return of the hyle’s lower manifestation to its supernal source.³⁰ And, indeed, it is apparent that Abulafia conceives of the All in terms of hylic matter.³¹ The connection of the All to the *sefira Yesod* by Abulafia is in this respect significant, for the word *yesod* had in Abulafia’s time become the accepted Hebrew term for “hyle” in texts translated from Arabic, as in the case of the anonymous translation of Saadia’s commentary

²⁹ This latter blood is referenced by Wolfson. *Abraham Abulafia*, p. 59 n. 167. See also *ibid.*, p. 220 n. 124, noted above.

³⁰ Patai, *The Jewish Alchemists*, p. 18. See as well, Pereira, “Heavens on Earth,” p. 137: “The stone that alchemy seeks to find might therefore be compared to the image of matter given in an anonymous twelfth century philosophical commentary on Plato’s *Timaeus*, where hyle, prime matter, is said to be the one and yet double root of everything: father and mother, form and matter of all bodies.” The discussion recalls the Aristotelian orientation adopted by Abulafia, who is very much concerned with the masculine nature of form, as against the femininity of matter. These, in turn, conform to Abulafia’s conception of ink and blood. Abulafia perceives these as well to be the two components of the divine name. *Maṣṣeḥ ha-Ra’ayon*, MS Vatican-BA ebr. 291, fols. 33a; printed edition, p. 34; *Gan Na’ul*, MS Munich-BS 58 fol. 328a; printed edition, p. 41.

³¹ In *Sefer ha-Melis* we find the Active Intellect referred to as “the material, human, hylic intellect.” MS Munich-BS 285 fol. 13b; printed edition (*Maṣṣeḥ ha-Sekhel*), p. 19. Here we see the connection specifically drawn between the Active Intellect and the hyle. Elsewhere, Abulafia will elaborate further, both on the identification of the Active Intellect with the All and of the latter with the hyle. In particular, Abulafia draws an identification between the Active Intellect and the All in his discussion of the *sefira Yesod*. See *Gan Na’ul*, MS Munich-BS 58 fol. 335a; printed edition, p. 65, where Abulafia associates *Yesod* with the Tanin and with the hyle. See also *Maṣṣeḥ ha-Ra’ayon*, MS Vatican-BA ebr. 291, fols. 31a–b, printed edition, pp. 29–30, where the All is discussed as the “point” from which matter arises. The All, Abulafia relates, stems in turn from the three letters of the Tetragrammaton. *Ibid.*, MS Vatican-BA ebr. 291, fol. 32a; printed edition, p. 31. See Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia*, p. 145, for the identification of the Active Intellect as the All. See also *idem*, “Kenotic Overflow and Temporal Transcendence,” pp. 172–174, for the Active Intellect as the All and as the *sefira Yesod*.

to *Sefer Yeṣirah*.³² The return of lower matter to the hyle or of the lower manifestation of the All to the upper one is reflected in the symbol of the uroburus, the cosmological snake that devours its own tail, a model for Abulafia's discussions of the unification of the head and tail of the *sefirot*, that is, of the first *sefirah*, *Keter* (Crown), with the last, *Malkhut*.³³

This same head and tail Abulafia discusses frequently in terms of the bipartite nature of the Teli.³⁴ From this we may understand his introduction of the Tanin in the present passage. The notion of the "weaving" together of the two aspects of the Tanin ("front and back," good and evil, divine and terrestrial blood) reflects Abulafia's frequent recourse to the motif of warp and woof, *sheti va-ʿerev*, with respect to the divine unity and to man's completed form.³⁵ The weaving together

³² H. Wolfson, "Arabic and Hebrew Terms for Matter and Element with Especial Reference to Saadia," pp. 55–57. Wolfson mentions as well the translations of Samuel ibn Tibbon.

³³ E. Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 143–144. See also idem, *Language, Eros, Being*, p. 271, where the motif is discussed in terms of its autoerotic implications.

³⁴ Idel mentions Abulafia's assigning of the Teli's bipartite nature to Metatron and Sandalfon. *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia*, p. 161 n. 169. See also Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia*, p. 144 n. 135. Baruch Togarmi, Abulafia's teacher in Spain, wrote of the twofold nature of the Teli with respect to its head and tail and the good and evil inclinations, which he classified in terms of religion (*dat*) and blood (*dam*). The words Teli, *dat* and *dam* have numerical values of four hundred and forty, four hundred and four, and four hundred and forty, respectively. *Sefer Maṣteḥot ha-Kabbalah*, pp. 230, 235, 239. See also Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia*, p. 59.

³⁵ Abulafia refers in this regard to the "perfect man" (*ha-ʿadam ha-shalem*), an expression that may reflect the influence of Ibn al-ʿArabi, who believed that his own status as "perfect man" accorded him a messianic status. Hames, "A Seal within a Seal," p. 154. See also Elmore, "The 'Millennial' Motif in Ibn al-ʿArabi's *Book of the Fabulous Gryphon*." The influence of Ibn al-ʿArabi upon Abulafia appears quite likely, and Hames details the similarities in their doctrines. Highly significant for this book is Ibn al-ʿArabi's implied identification of himself, as messiah, with Jesus. At times, this identification was expressed through encrypted allusions. Upon decipherment, it becomes apparent that Ibn al-ʿArabi refers to Jesus as the Seal of the Saints, that is, the messiah, but he also refers to himself as the Seal, and at times he specifically identifies himself with Jesus, possibly as the latter's second coming or reincarnation. Elmore, "The 'Millennial' Motif in Ibn al-ʿArabi's *Book of the Fabulous Gryphon*," pp. 3–12; Hames, "A Seal within a Seal," p. 162. Most likely, Ibn al-ʿArabi refers to Jesus as the "Imam of the Left." Ibid., p. 154. This is significant in terms of Abulafia's identification of the left with the demonic and, as well, with Jesus. This negative appraisal of Jesus is not present in Ibn al-ʿArabi's thought. Ibn al-ʿArabi relates that the Seal appeared to him in a vision, and he suggests the possibility for a type of erotic communion with Jesus. He also indicates that attaining to the level of the Seal is possible for anyone. Elmore, "The 'Millennial' Motif in Ibn al-ʿArabi's *Book of the Fabulous Gryphon*," pp. 12–16. As to the gryphon itself, Ibn al-ʿArabi refers to it as his conveyance during his experiences of attainment. He likens it to the "dragon of chaos." Ibid., pp. 17, 21. He also identifies himself as the gryphon. Hames, "A Seal within a Seal," p. 161.

of warp and woof is an erotic motif, one which Abulafia relates to the fully constituted phallic potency, which we have already had occasion to analyze in terms of the integration of the female within the male.³⁶ Abulafia's notion of the All we have come to understand as well with respect to the phallic potency, the nature accorded to the *sefira Yesod*. We have observed in this passage from *'Oṣar 'Eden Ganuz* that the unification of the good and evil elements, so fundamental to Abulafia's conception of his mystical project, is accompanied by the unification, in *devequt*, of that which exists above and that which is in man. In Abulafia's discussion of the twofold All he enunciates this relationship succinctly. There, with the liberation that comes from the unification of the two types of blood, the "spirit of the All" returns to the "All" itself.

This extended passage familiarizes us with a range of motifs that are recurrent in Abulafia's thought and writing. It is a useful springboard for an analysis of the relationship of Abulafia's mystical objectives to his need to absorb that which is Christian, not merely as an external influence, but as a feature of his sense of self. It should be observed that, even where Jesus and Christianity are not specifically mentioned by Abulafia, his project with respect to Christianity is the selfsame one as pertains to his mystical practice more generally. The mention that he does make of Christianity, as the chief exemplar of the demonic, as well as the absorption of Christian influence that his writing demonstrates, bear witness to the centrality of Christianity in Abulafia's struggle with the evil inclination. The significance of Christianity to this struggle, I maintain, manifestly prevails throughout Abulafia's copious literary production, whether issues surrounding Jesus and Christianity are explicitly indexed or not.

Ibn al-ʿArabi also referred to the gryphon as hylic matter, relating that he had successfully returned his own heart to this same state. Elmore, "The 'Millennial' Motif in Ibn al-ʿArabi's *Book of the Fabulous Gryphon*," pp. 21, 27. These conceptions of the gryphon are quite consonant with Abulafia's treatments of the Teli, which he again identifies with Jesus, a topic to be discussed in detail below. The impact of Sufism on the meditative practice and doctrine of Abulafia and his followers has been analyzed in detail by Idel. See "*Hitbodedut* as Concentration in Ecstatic Kabbalah," in *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*. See also the chapter entitled, "*Mundus Imaginalis* and *Likkutei HaRan*" in *ibid.* for the association of a Sufi-influenced text with a disciple of Abulafia. See as well Pedaya's suggestion that eastern Sufism exerted an influence on Baruch Togarmi, Abulafia's teacher during his initial studies of *Sefer Yeṣirah*. Pedaya, *Vision and Speech*, p. 195 (in Hebrew). See also above, pp. 122–123 n. 46.

³⁶ Idel understands *sheti va-ʿerev* as an erotic motif. *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia*, p. 217 n. 97. See also Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia*, p. 219.

As mentioned, the absorption of the other into the self is a theme central to the passage analyzed above. The passage is replete with themes centered around the reintegration within the mystic of his evil, feminine aspect. Perhaps most clearly, Abulafia expresses this with respect to the notion that the mystic must mingle within himself two types of blood, the intellective and pure blood and the unclean blood of *ibbur*. Abulafia even extrapolates from here to the unified divine name, to which the motif of blood is also applied. Further, the passage demonstrates that the polarities that Abulafia draws between good and evil, pious and idolatrous, spiritual and corporeal, crucial as they are to his doctrine and practice, are experienced as ephemeral at their root. Raw matter, for instance, is impure blood, but it is also the (seemingly eucharistic) twofold spiritual bread, and it also finds a central place among the upper *sefirot*. Similarly, the knot of the hand tefillin is indispensable as a *miṣvah*, but it stands for the power of the evil Teli—which itself vacillates in terms of its nature.

For Abulafia, good and evil often interpenetrate. Surely, the role of the satanic, imaginative and idolatrous is indispensable for Abulafia's mystical procedures. But we can see that even its categorization as evil is transitory. From Abulafia's perspective, though they are his building blocks to identity and attainment, flux governs polarities, and dichotomies are fugacious. We observed Abulafia's adherence to the view that evil is for the good with respect to the necessity of the mystical trial. Now we will focus more on a particular aspect of Abulafia's view concerning the elusive composition of the self. We will train our attention on the notion that the demonic is inseparable from one's own being. With this doctrine, Abulafia's thinking runs remarkably parallel with the theoretical, anthropological conclusions with which this book began. Clear delineations of self and other are understood by Abulafia as synthetic, despite the psychic turmoil that this awareness precipitates for him. Abulafia's crisis stems from the fact that, to the extent that an all-important sense of self is dependent upon a self-generated picture of the other as such, the other is itself a feature of the self.

Metatron, the Twofold Teli

A passage from *Sitrei Torah*, written several years earlier than *Oṣar Eden Ganuz*, is devoted to the subject of the hypostatic "front and rear," and engages several of the themes that we have just encountered.

These include the nature of Metatron, the tefillin and their knots and the raw matter. Abulafia begins,³⁷

The Prince of the Countenance is the thing possessing two faces at once, hidden and revealed. The revealed revolves which of them he wishes, and the hidden obstructs the revolving as well without a doubt, and the Prince is the one who has dominion and rulership and governance over the one who obstructs and over his sphere....

The reference to the Prince of the Countenance is to Metatron, whom we have considered before as Abulafia's alter ego, preeminent of the angels in Abulafia's estimation, to be identified both with the Active Intellect and with the first and last of the *sefirot*.³⁸ Just as we learned earlier that the Tanin (or the astrological Teli) is possessed of two aspects, front and back, so do we now learn that this is as well the case for Metatron; indeed, as we have already suggested, the Teli and Metatron appear to be the same entity for Abulafia.³⁹

In the current passage, one of the two aspects of Metatron, that aspect which is concealed, acts as an obstruction to revolving. The reference here is to the revolving of letters in the mystic's activity of letter permutation.⁴⁰ This conception of an obstruction to communion with the divine on the part of a portion of the Active Intellect conforms to what we observed earlier regarding the twofold *shefa'*, or divine efflux; the lower portion is the demonic, idolatrous obstruction which fills the mind of the mystic with deceptive products of the imagination.⁴¹ In the current context, that Prince, or the portion thereof that has dominion over the one who obstructs, would naturally be the higher, intellectual component of the Active Intellect. In this respect there is a mobility to the terminology that Abulafia employs, one which we will encounter

³⁷ *Sitrei Torah*, MS NY-JTSA Mic. 2367, fol. 30a; printed edition, p. 56.

³⁸ Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia*, p. 83.

³⁹ Wolfson observes Abulafia's ascription of the attributes of head and tail, alluding to the first and last *sefirot*, to Metatron. *Ibid.*, pp. 83–85. The same we have seen with respect to the Teli. The twofold conception of Metatron finds its roots in rabbinic tradition, where we encounter the notion of a twofold angelic Jacob/Israel, a theme elaborated upon by the German Pietists. See *idem*, *Along the Path*, pp. 5, 14, 20, 24, 145.

⁴⁰ Idel describes this revolving with respect to the returning of the letters to their prime matter, from which they are subsequently recombined. *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics in Abraham Abulafia*, p. 10.

⁴¹ Idel has noted Abulafia's equation of the word "daemon" with the Hebrew "*dimyon*," or "imagination." *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics in Abraham Abulafia*, p. 56. See above, p. 130 n. 60.

frequently, and one which relates to the characteristic flux to Abulafia's conception of the good and evil elements. What we find is that the Prince—Metatron—is understood as both the twofold Active Intellect and as only its intellective portion. This situation arises in part from the paradoxical fact that some portion of the "Active Intellect" runs completely contrary to that which is intellective. Abulafia had contended with this issue already in asserting that that evil portion of the efflux from the Active Intellect is evil only in appearance; it is good insofar as it exists in order to try the mystic. With respect, then, to the mystic's goal of reconstitution, it is the Active Intellect that epitomizes the integration of the mystic's non-intellective component. Abulafia continues,⁴²

And also according to our words as well [as well as those of Maimonides concerning the front and back of the divine] his [Metatron's] concern is that he is Prince of the World, and thus "Prince of the World" and "the explicit name" are numerically equivalent.⁴³ And there is no doubt on our part that one of the ways of the matters called "front and back" is that their secret is "spirit of the *'ofanim*,"⁴⁴ as is written (Ez. 1:20), "Because the spirit of the *hayyah*⁴⁵ was in the *'ofanim*;" it revolves the Torah, that is, the revolution of the twenty-two letters, and weighs them and exchanges them and permutes them in the first two hundred and thirty-one gates, in pairs of letters, as is written in *Sefer Yesirah*... And regarding this it says there, "Return the revolution front and back. There is no good higher than *'oneg* (pleasure) and there is no evil below *nega'* (plague)"⁴⁶ ... And you will take whichever of them that you choose in your revolving of the wheel of the letters, because the two powers are in your hand."

We should note first that the title of "Prince of the World" belongs to the Teli.⁴⁷ We learn that the "spirit" of the *hayyah* causes the "wheels" to "revolve." This assertion alludes to the idea that the Holy Spirit is to be identified with the efflux from the Active Intellect;⁴⁸ it is the divine potency that comes to the mystic as a result of his permutation, or revolution, of letters, and it is that through which he arrives at the

⁴² *Sitrei Torah*, MS NY-JTSA Mic. 2367, fols. 30a–b; printed edition, pp. 56–57.

⁴³ Both have numerical values of nine hundred and eighty-two.

⁴⁴ These phrases both have numerical values of three hundred and one. The *'ofanim* are the angelic "wheels" in Ezekiel's vision of the chariot.

⁴⁵ One of the angelic "living beings" (plural, *hayyot*) in Ezekiel's vision.

⁴⁶ *Sefer Yesirah*, Gruenwald ed., 2:2, 4 (paragraphs 18, 19).

⁴⁷ This stems from the latter's characterization as king of the world in *Sefer Yesirah*. Ibid., 6:1–2 (para. 59).

⁴⁸ See above, pp. 88–89.

level of prophecy.⁴⁹ In this portion of the passage Abulafia discloses the fact that “front and back” refers not only to the two components of the Active Intellect. As well, the mystic’s letter operations partake of the same nature. On the one hand, revolving the letters one way or another, expressed in the example of *ʿoneg* and *negaʿ*, is intended by Abulafia. On the other hand, as connoted by these same words, the mystic may choose to permute the letters for good or ill. The idea that the mystic may choose between “the two powers” suggests that the mystic may move in the direction of the satanic, that is, he may fall prey to the idolatrous tendencies of his imagination. Indeed, the very phrase “two powers” traditionally bears the connotation of idolatry, the by now familiar sin of assigning a multiplicity to the divinity.⁵⁰

Abulafia next refers to Maimonides’ opinion that the “front” represents the intellectual realm. Abulafia writes,⁵¹

And he [Maimonides] called the essence of matter and form that which is after it [after the “front”], to distance it from His existence, may He be blessed, and there is no doubt that regarding them it is said in the Talmud (*Berakhot* 7a) “[He showed him] the knot of the tefillin.” Because it, according to us, is the back, and the *merkabah* according to us is the front.

Here we learn more regarding Abulafia’s conception of the knots of the tefillin. He draws upon a talmudic tradition regarding the knot of the head tefillin as the backside of God that was shown to Moses. In this context, it is the knot of the head tefillin that Abulafia implicitly links with the imaginative aspect of the Active Intellect, as is apparent in his distancing of this knot, at the rear of God’s head, from His essence. The linkage of this knot with matter and form recalls the earlier discussion from *ʿOṣar ʿEden Ganuz*, where the knot of the hand tefillin was related to raw matter.⁵² In several places Abulafia relates

⁴⁹ Elsewhere in *Sitrei Torah*, the *ḥayyot* are perceived to be of an intellectual nature, while the *ʿofanim* are viewed as partaking of terrestrial generation and destruction. MS NY-JTSA Mic. 2367, fol. 52b; printed edition, p. 162. Further on, the *ʿofanim* are collectively equated with Sandalfon, who is referred to as the Prince of the *ʾAhor*, the “rear” or “backside.” Ibid., MS NY-JTSA Mic. 2367, fol. 53a; printed edition, p. 164.

⁵⁰ For background to this theme, see Segal, *Two Powers in Heaven*.

⁵¹ *Sitrei Torah*, MS NY-JTSA Mic. 2367, fols. 30b–31a; printed edition, p. 58.

⁵² The raw matter is often associated by Abulafia with matter without form, where the form is intellectual, although here they both are linked with raw matter. See above, pp. 183–184, for a closely related discussion of the nature of raw matter. See

the “working of the chariot” to the head tefillin, while the hand tefillin is related to “the working of creation.” Here, implicitly, the latter is associated with the knot at the rear of the head tefillin, while, explicitly, the *merkabah* is associated with the front of the head tefillin.⁵³ Abulafia continues,

And the *gematria* [of the expression, “the knot of the tefillin,” from *Berakhot*] is “knot of prophecies in the heart of prophecy”⁵⁴ and also “knot of the hosts of the sphere.”⁵⁵ And these [referring to the “hosts”] are those which we were commanded to put aside . . . As the Torah says (Deut. 4:19), “And lest thou lift up thine eyes to heaven, and when thou seest the sun, and the moon, and the stars, all the host of heaven, thou shouldst be misled to worship them, and serve them . . .” And regarding this you should know that it says (Ex. 20:3, Deut. 5:7), “Thou shalt have no other (*’aherim*) gods beside me (*’al panay*),” with His speaking in the singular—“Thou shalt not”—and after this speaking in the plural, in truth, regarding the nature of matter and form that are called “backwards” [*’ahoriyim*, in the plural form], which is one in nature and two by definition (*bageger*). And so it hints “others,” whose secret is “backwards,” that is, with respect to the *’ahoriyim*, you will not have additional gods added to me, that is, added to my nature. . . .

The phrase, “knot of the hosts of the sphere,” derived from a *gematria* intended to refer back to the knots of the tefillin and to prophecy, alludes to the celestial bodies assigned a status beneath their overlord, the Teli, from which, we have noted, emanate the imprisoning knots of the material world. Through this reference to the celestial hosts, Abulafia effects a transition from a discussion of the backside (*’ahor*) of the divinity to one of other (*’aherim*) gods. Abulafia reveals that he views that aspect of the Active Intellect (or Metatron) that is “behind,” in kind with the knot of the head tefillin, to be representative of the idolatrous impulse toward polytheism. This transgression, we have already seen, is exemplified most egregiously, in Abulafia’s estimation, by Christianity. That “which is one in nature and two by definition” appears to be matter and form here, such that these

also p. 94 above, where matter and form are associated with the lesser wisdom of the gentile sages.

⁵³ Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 88, 194, 224 n.137.

⁵⁴ The *gematria* for “knot of prophecies in the heart of prophecy” appears to be four short of the *gematria* for “knot of the tefillin,” which comes to one thousand five hundred.

⁵⁵ Having the numerical value of one thousand five hundred.

qualities are both unified and twofold. Matter and form are identified ultimately with the “other gods” embodied in the backside of the Active Intellect, in keeping with what we have seen of raw matter’s linkage with the knot of the hand tefillin. It should be observed that raw matter, for Abulafia, usually excludes form, which, in such cases, is seen to be intellective.⁵⁶ This inclusion of form vis-à-vis the knot of the head tefillin may precipitate Abulafia’s next thoughts, concerning the materialization of divinity.

Abulafia indicates that God must be understood as distinct from the “sphere” referenced earlier, this sphere being that of the heavenly hosts and, presumably, of the material aspect of the Teli. This sphere, Abulafia reports, is given existence and sustenance by the *shefa*⁵⁷, or efflux from God. Abulafia writes,

And there are for us regarding this two faithful testimonies, the divine, separate intellect and the material, emanated intellect, and if they are one, it is that which we received in permuting (Ex. 20:3, Deut. 5:7), “Thou shalt have no other gods beside me.” ...And the secret of the passage by *gematria* is “on earth and in heaven,” that is, you will not believe in materialized divinity at all, in all that is in heaven and in all that is on earth ...Because it is improper to believe that He is a body or a power in a body, but a separate intellect alone. And from all of this you will understand that he who is drawn after a material thing alone at all, already God has cast him behind Him and, as it were, deprived him of His supervision. But he who is drawn after an intellective thing and seeks to strengthen the cords of wisdom, he alone is before God, may He be blessed, and becomes intellective, not cast away but supervised, and not forgotten even for a moment, because God is within him to help him always, and no evil will afflict him [*yiga*⁵⁷, from *nega*⁵⁷] at all, because he is always with God and God is forever with him.

Here for Abulafia the notion of a separation between the divinity and the sphere of the celestial hosts is a crucial matter, preserving a

⁵⁶ See n. 52 above for the issue of raw matter as including or excluding form. Against the backdrop of Abulafia’s assigning of matter and form here to the knot of the head tefillin and the idolatrous *ahor*, it is noteworthy that he refers to matter and form as “one in nature.” For, if matter and form are identified with the corporeal and intellective spheres, as is frequently the case for Abulafia, his statement resonates with the claims of Christians with regard to Jesus’ status as the incarnate Logos, the very claims that he ostensibly wishes to deride as idolatrous. In the continuation of the passage, Abulafia will respond to such Christian doctrine, following the parameters of contemporary Jewish polemics.

⁵⁷ *Silrei Torah*, MS NY-JTSA Mic. 2367, fol. 31a; printed edition, pp. 59–60.

distinction between God and the corporeal realm.⁵⁸ Matter and form may constitute a unity, as we had earlier observed, despite form's status as partaking of the intellectual realm. In fact, they comprise a unity because of this very nature to form, insofar as represented here is the all-important entry of the intellectual into the material; this likely is what Abulafia means in referring to the lower "material, emanated intellect." But Abulafia attempts to assert a distinction from Christian doctrine by maintaining that the truly divine aspect of the intellectual realm, the front of the Active Intellect, remains aloof from the material. To believe otherwise is to believe that God "is a body or a power in a body," that is, to believe in an incarnate divinity.

Doubtless, Abulafia has in mind Jesus here. Abulafia asserts definitively that God does not partake of the sphere of the heavenly hosts, that belonging to the material world.⁵⁹ The consequence of believing to the contrary, that is, believing in an incarnate divinity, is the loss of God's providence, we learn. The passage derides the belief in a divine materiality. But it suggests more. That which is manifested from the backside of the divine efflux is not simply material. Rather, it partakes of that one of the "two powers" referenced earlier in the passage, that one which belongs to the nature of "evil" and "plague," the satanic power. Thus, the notion of a would-be incarnate divinity—that is, a belief in Jesus—represents not merely a wrongheaded appraisal of a purely material being, a pretender to divinity. Rather, the focus of misguided worship himself possesses a demonic status with respect to the backside of the Active Intellect.

Metatron and Sandalfon

A number of the subjects that we have just encountered—the front and rear of the divine, the twofold nature of the divine efflux, the *hayyot* and *'ofanim* of Ezekiel's chariot vision, and the knots of the tefillin—all coalesce, elsewhere in *Sitrei Torah*, around the theme of Metatron and

⁵⁸ This distinction is present in Maimonides' thought, as, for instance, in *The Guide of the Perplexed* 2:4. There the celestial spheres, guided by intelligences, are themselves referred to as corporeal entities.

⁵⁹ Abulafia at times posits God's existence, in fact, as being entirely apart from and beyond the intellectual sphere. *Sitrei Torah*, MS NY-JTSA Mic. 2367, fol. 34b; printed edition, p. 73.

Sandalfon. They do so in a manner that tightly binds the dynamic operating between these two beings with Abulafia's notions of Jesus. In fact, Abulafia's conception of Metatron and Sandalfon we may see to reside at the very core of our project of analyzing Abulafia's relationship to Jesus and Christianity.

In the passage to which I refer, Abulafia begins by drawing the four *ḥayyot* into an association with the head tefillin, via the four compartments of which the latter is composed. The hand tefillin are next seen to allude to the four *'ofanim*.⁶⁰ Abulafia links the *ḥayyot* with the intellectual aspect of the divine efflux, while the *'ofanim* he links with the opposed, corrupted aspect thereof.⁶¹ We may already see a conception parallel to the one with which we began this chapter. The head tefillin are representative of the intellect, while the hand tefillin are understood as signifying the imaginative and demonic dimension of the Active Intellect.

Abulafia continues by observing that there is only one compartment to the hand tefillin for the four scriptural passages it contains. This, he says, "...is the secret of the four *'ofanim*, because there is one likeness for the four of them. And already they are all called one *'ofan*, regarding which it is said that it is Sandalfon, who is taller than his companions by five hundred arm's lengths." Abulafia draws here upon a tradition from antiquity regarding a particular *'ofan* who is identified as Sandalfon.⁶² Abulafia will go on to wed this tradition regarding the angel Sandalfon with his assignation of this same being to the imaginative and demonic dimension of the efflux from the Active Intellect.

Abulafia next identifies Sandalfon as the *Sar ha-'Aḥor* or Prince of the Backside, in opposition to Metatron, the *Sar ha-Panim*, or Prince of the Countenance.⁶³ The expression "Prince of the Backside," Abulafia

⁶⁰ Ibid., MS NY-JTSA Mic. 2367, fol. 53a; printed edition, p. 164.

⁶¹ Ibid., MS NY-JTSA Mic. 2367, fol. 52b; printed edition, p. 162: "...because all was in the vision of prophecy without a doubt, and all in the apprehension of the human intellect alone at first that is called the intellectual of forms, called the *ḥayyot*, and after this he recognizes that man, alone among all generation and destruction, who has a form divided above in two parts, and he receives efflux from two sides, and his efflux is called the Glory of God..." The passage proceeds in parallel with Abulafia's citations from Ezekiel's chariot vision, where Abulafia refers first to the *ḥayyot*, then to the *'ofanim* and then to the enthroned male figure. Thus, the unnamed efflux opposite to that of the intellectual *ḥayyot* stems from the *'ofanim*.

⁶² See BT. *Hagigah* 13b; *Pesiḳta Rabbati*, 20.

⁶³ Abulafia observes that Sandalfon is taller than his companions by five hundred arm's lengths, and that there is another five hundred arm's lengths from the earth to the firmament, yielding one thousand, the numerical value of the phrase "Sandalfon, *Sar ha-'Aḥor*."

draws into a numerical equivalence with the phrase “spirit (*ruah*) of the head,”⁶⁴ which, he says, “concerns the tefillin of the head.” This linkage of the *’ofan* now with the head tefillin, where before the head tefillin was assigned to the *hayyot*, is not, however, problematic, in that Abulafia has already referred to Sandalfon as the “rear.” Clearly he is recalling the formulation discussed earlier, where the “rear” is understood as the knot of the head tefillin at the back of the head. We may already infer that the earlier relationship between the “other gods”—and the misguided notion of the corporealized divinity—and the “rear” of the divinity, embodied in the knot of the head tefillin, applies equally well to Sandalfon. That is, Sandalfon represents the same heretical notions against which Abulafia inveighed in a fashion that was highly evocative of a polemical response to Christian worship of Jesus.

In the present passage from *Sitrei Torah*, Abulafia next concerns himself with the nature of the relationship between Metatron and Sandalfon. The identification of Metatron with the divine name Shaddai is widely prevalent in Abulafia’s writings, and he notes here that the two names have the same numerical value.⁶⁵ As well, the name Shaddai is linked in the theosophic tradition to the *sefira Yesod*. This association renders logical the assignation of the name Shaddai to the role of Active Intellect within Abulafia’s Aristotelian framework.⁶⁶ In the current context it should be observed that, given that Sandalfon has been identified with the rear knot of the head tefillin, Metatron would be appropriately identified with the front, the actual box itself of the tefillin. The box bears the letter *shin*, the first letter of Shaddai, and is traditionally identified with that name, as we have seen.⁶⁷ Thus, the linkage of Metatron with the name Shaddai here is pointed. Implicitly, for the moment, Abulafia forges a relationship between Metatron and Sandalfon as the front and back of the head tefillin.

“And indeed the number of Metatron is ‘Shaddai,’ and the hidden letters [of the name Shaddai] are **ו ד ל ת ו**,” writes Abulafia. Here, the

⁶⁴ Both have a numerical value of seven hundred and twenty.

⁶⁵ That is, three hundred and fourteen. Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia*, p. 148.

⁶⁶ For Abulafia’s messianic self-identification with the name Shaddai and with the angel Raziel, see above, pp. 45–46. Abulafia identifies himself both as Raziel and as Metatron. From this we can see the association of the name Shaddai with the Active Intellect. For Abulafia’s identification of *Yesod* with the Active Intellect, see above, pp. 161 n. 138, 188–189.

⁶⁷ See above, p. 140.

“hidden letters” to which Abulafia refers are those letters that comprise the spelling of each individual letter of the name Shaddai, excluding the first letter of each spelling. For instance, in the transliteration of the name’s first letter, *shin* (שׁ), the hidden letters are *in* (י ן). The total numerical value of the hidden letters of the name Shaddai is five hundred. This number Abulafia has already linked with Sandalfon’s stature, which is five hundred arm’s lengths above that of his fellows. Another facet of Metatron’s relationship to Sandalfon presents itself here. Just as the divine efflux enfolds within itself a demonic aspect, so does Metatron, the personified Active Intellect, contain Sandalfon within himself. This is suggested by the observation that the name Shaddai, numerically equivalent to the name Metatron, contains, hidden within, the number five hundred, symbolic of Sandalfon.⁶⁸ Abulafia continues,

Because, as the number for Metatron testifies and says, “I was created,” and its secret is, “Understand my hint,” and it instructs in its addition regarding its nature, so too in its permutation and in its number, “He bestows the nature of the blood,” and thus he is “Prince.”

As is so often the case, the “hint” mentioned is an elusive one. However, by working through the *gematriyot*, we find that the expression, “He bestows the nature of the blood,” is numerically equivalent to the phrase, “Sandalfon, Prince of the Backside,” discussed earlier.⁶⁹ The word “Prince,” which Abulafia next adduces, has a numerical value of five hundred. A close interplay is at work between Metatron and Sandalfon beneath the surface of this passage. We have seen blood linked earlier with the demonic aspect of the tefillin, so we may expect Sandalfon to be the subtext of this reference, and this expectation is in accord with the numerical association drawn between blood and Sandalfon. Furthermore, the word “Prince” possesses the numerical value associated earlier with Sandalfon’s stature.⁷⁰ Abulafia appears, then, to suggest that the “created” aspect of Metatron, the materialized

⁶⁸ Along parallel lines, see Wolfson, “Left Contained in the Right: A Study in Zoharic Hermeneutics,” pp. 27–52.

⁶⁹ The numerical value of both is one thousand. See above, p. 198 n. 63.

⁷⁰ We may note as well that Abulafia earlier pointed to the *gematria* of the phrase “knot of the tefillin,” which comes to one thousand five hundred. This is the same numerical value as the sum of the words “He bestows the nature of the blood” (or, alternatively, “Sandalfon, Prince of the Backside”) and “Prince” in the current context.

“Prince,” is Sandalfon. The “hint” with respect to Metatron’s nature is identical to the earlier secret concerning the hidden letters of the name Shaddai.⁷¹ In both cases, Sandalfon’s presence was disclosed as a component of the Active Intellect or as part of Metatron.⁷² We may recall our earlier observation once more concerning the identification of the demonic aspect of the efflux from the Active Intellect with the blasphemous notion of a “materialized divinity,” that is, of Jesus as divine. Once more we see the “created” Sandalfon, linked with blood and the knot of the tefillin, accorded these same characteristics. Abulafia continues,

And if you will count “Sandalfon and Metatron,” you will find “knot.” Calculate “the front rear” and you will find, “two that are bound, knot of image of the body,” and it is “knot of the *neshamah*.”

The knots suggested in this passage thusfar have both been seen to allude to Sandalfon. That of the hand tefillin was linked to him explicitly. In the case of the knot of the head tefillin, the linkage to Sandalfon was made through the reference to the numerical equivalence of the phrases “*ruah* of the head,” which “concerns the tefillin of the head,” and “Prince of the Backside.” The “bound” nature now of Sandalfon with Metatron indicates a knot that is twofold in nature. The fact that the knot discussed is comprised of both front and rear, body and soul (the *neshamah* being frequently understood as the uppermost aspect thereof),⁷³ reinforces this sense.

Here again, however, the numbers tell a tale in this discussion of the binding of Metatron with Sandalfon. The sums for “Sandalfon and Metatron” and “knot” are both six hundred. The sum for “the front rear” is four hundred. The sum for “two that are bound, knot

⁷¹ In fact, Abulafia hints above that the two secrets are the same. He writes that “...the number for Metatron testifies and says, ‘I was created,’ and its secret is, ‘Understand my hint’...” The latter two phrases each have the numerical value of three hundred and fourteen, the same as that for the name Shaddai, which, we can see, is “the number for Metatron.” So the secret disclosed concerning Sandalfon and blood is also seen as encrypted within the name Shaddai, as in the case of the name’s hidden letters.

⁷² Idel notes that Abulafia elsewhere equates Sandalfon with the prime matter, a notion derived from Maimonides’ conception of the *’ofanim*, the tallest of which is deemed to be Sandalfon, as the prime matter. *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics in Abraham Abulafia*, p. 119.

⁷³ See Gikatilla, *Sha’arei ’Orah*, vol. 1, pp. 60, 89, 93–94; Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, pp. 240–241.

of image of the body” may be parsed out as follows: “two” is four hundred, “that are bound” is one thousand, “knot,” as we have seen, is six hundred, and “image of the body” is four hundred. Lastly, “knot of the *neshamah*” is four hundred plus six hundred, yielding one thousand. All of these words and phrases possess a kind of mobility. Some of them total one thousand, the number earlier linked to Sandalfon, while others total either six hundred or four hundred, yielding one thousand when they are combined in different ways. Here again, then, the secret to which Abulafia alludes concerns the nature of Sandalfon, who seems to have assumed the identity of the entire bipartite Active Intellect. This is much the same phenomenon that we described earlier with respect to Metatron and the Active Intellect. We can see here the elusiveness of a clear delineation of good and evil in Abulafia’s characterization of the mercurial Active Intellect. Abulafia proceeds further along these lines:

And from it you will understand “knot of the tefillin” and it is “knot of so-and-so (*pelonit*).” And I do not know her true name, only this, which I heard, because she has no name “besides negation (*shelilat*) of the soul.” And in this she resembles her creator, as I hinted in secret eleven of the first part,⁷⁴ but you should know that she is divided in her nature “into three sections.”

Abulafia proceeds from the observation that the letters of the word tefillin may be placed in an alternate sequence (a *temurah*) to yield the Hebrew word for “so-and-so” in the feminine form. The woman referred to here is the demoness Lilith, as is apparent from the usage of the word *shelilat*. Reinforced once more is the demonic thrust of the entire passage, as the knot of the tefillin which joins Metatron and Sandalfon is itself seen as demonic and feminine. The four phrases that Abulafia here subjects to numerical analysis each total one thousand five hundred, suggesting a link with the numbers one thousand, earlier identified with Sandalfon, and five hundred, also assigned to Sandalfon, the “Prince.” The latter portion of the passage, concerning Lilith’s resemblance to her creator, is somewhat obscure.⁷⁵

⁷⁴ *Sitrei Torah*, MS NY-JTSA Mic. 2367, fols. 35a–38a; printed edition, pp. 74–86.

⁷⁵ Her creator, given the context, may be Sandalfon here. Alternatively, it could be that Sandalfon and Lilith are being identified with one another. Sandalfon himself was the earlier secret of the phrase, “I was created.” Or, Lilith’s creator could be God. The secret from earlier in the text to which Abulafia alludes (“secret eleven of the first part”) concerns four permutations of the four letters *lamed, lamed, yod, yod* (components of the name Lilith), which there signify day and night in a sequence that changes

The figure of Lilith in the Middle Ages had become a nexus for anxiety with respect to the demonic threat. She was particularly reviled as a danger to successful childbirth and to the newborn.⁷⁶ As well, some of the chronologically earliest fears centered around her focused, from antiquity, upon her nature as a sexual threat to masculinity.⁷⁷ These two types of dangers posed by Lilith are, in fact, closely related. In order for the Jewish mystic to reconstitute his masculine identity as comprised of male and female, it was seen as imperative that sexual intercourse culminate in the birth of a child, particularly a boy.⁷⁸ For the medieval Jewish mind, Lilith stands, therefore, as a demonic and sexually threatening symbol of femininity run amuck. Earlier, we saw Abulafia discuss the manner in which the mystic is to protect himself from Lilith. In this regard, he hinted to the apotropaic properties of the name Shaddai, associated with the head tefillin.⁷⁹ Given the phallic connotations of this name,⁸⁰ Abulafia indicates here his cognizance of the nature of the danger represented by Lilith.

In the current context, Abulafia sees her, as well, as the embodiment of the demonic and feminine aspect of the Active Intellect. Given Lilith's nature, we may understand an important relation, for Abulafia, between her and Jesus. In the context of our earlier discussion of Abulafia's anti-Christian polemics, we noted that Jesus himself embodied a threat to male identity. He stripped his disciples of their masculinity and gave them feminine forms. We saw as well that the demons confronting Abulafia posed the same type of threat. We may recall also that the sin of Nadab and Abihu, in the mind of the zoharic authorship, was their bringing of the divine into an erotic union with Lilith,

according to the seasons. In the same discussion, Abulafia relates how the essential name of God, as with all names, occurs in three modes. This could recall how Lilith, above, possesses three "sections" to her nature, but see also below regarding her triadic composition. Ibid., MS NY-JTSA Mic. 2367, fol. 35a; printed edition, p. 74.

⁷⁶ See Sabar, "Childbirth and Magic," for the rabbinic background of these conceptions of Lilith. See also *Zohar* 1:19b, one of many such examples concerning Lilith. For Lilith as a threat in childbirth, see also Patai, "Lilith," p. 298.

⁷⁷ In rabbinic tradition, she was seen to have been expelled from the Garden of Eden for assuming a sexually dominant role over Adam. Sabar, "Childbirth and Magic," pp. 673–674. See also Patai, "Lilith," p. 302, for Lilith as a succubus.

⁷⁸ Wolfson discusses procreation in the *Zohar* as the engenderment of masculinity in the husband and as the consummation of the unification of the *sefirot*. "Crossing Gender Boundaries in Kabbalistic Ritual and Myth," in Ostow, ed., pp. 284–285. Part and parcel of this, as we have seen, is the masculinization of the female partner. See also *ibid.*, pp. 290–296.

⁷⁹ See above, p. 140.

⁸⁰ See above, p. 161 n. 138.

a theurgical consequence of their consorting with gentile women. The consequences of such a union are likewise to be seen as emasculating. Abulafia, in the passage under current consideration, makes no mention of Jesus. However, what should be observed is the commutative property linking Sandalfon, Lilith and Jesus. They function virtually synonymously.⁸¹

Abulafia, in the current passage, does not distinguish between a good and an evil, a divine and a demonic knot. As noted earlier, he seems in this instance to have identified the Active Intellect completely with the demonic. That demonic nature to the Active Intellect was at first personified as Sandalfon. Now, the knot that binds Metatron and Sandalfon, the knot of the “image of the body,” which is the knot of the tefillin, is wholly identified with Lilith. There is a parallel here to our earlier discussion of the Teli as the twofold Active Intellect. We noted that the Teli frequently bears only evil associations for Abulafia, despite its possessing both head and tail, front and rear. The evil nature assigned to the Teli comes from its being seen as overlord or demiurge of the lower, material plane of existence, holding the world within its omnipresent knots. At times, this view of the Teli is rather at odds with Abulafia’s discussions of the Teli as the source of prophetic illumination. Much the same dissonance is present in Abulafia’s current discussion of the Active Intellect, where all comes to be embodied within its demonic nature.⁸²

As Abulafia continues in his discussion from *Sitrei Torah*, a kind of reestablishment of Metatron occurs. Abulafia explains that the spirit of

⁸¹ See above, pp. 139–140, where Abulafia equates Lilith (as “sorceress”) with the Teli—the Active Intellect, or its evil nature.

⁸² Isaac ben Jacob ha-Cohen, a contemporary of Abulafia, appears to put forward a doctrine parallel to the one presented by Abulafia here. Isaac describes a wholly evil interaction of a triad of forces. This triad is comprised of the masculine Samael and his mate, the feminine Lilith, with the Tanin intervening between them. Dan, “Samael, Lilith, and the Concept of Evil in Early Kabbalah,” p. 38. In Abulafia’s evil triad, we find the masculine Metatron and the feminine Sandalfon, with Lilith intervening between them. We find, then, Metatron and Sandalfon, in Abulafia’s formulation, paralleling Samael and Lilith, in Isaac’s, while Lilith, whom we have recognized as embodying the nature of the Teli in Abulafia’s formulation, in that she constitutes the evil knot binding Metatron and Sandalfon together, parallels the Tanin, also known as the Teli, in Isaac’s. This may encompass Lilith’s tripartite nature. The notion that we will continue to pursue, in Abulafia’s thought, of the oscillation in the Active Intellect between full goodness and full evil is paralleled by Dan’s sense that, for his own part, Isaac conceived “...of two systems of divine emanations, similar in many details but one of good and one of evil.” *Ibid.*, pp. 39–40.

God that comes to the “rear,” in its aspect as the *’ofanim*, arrives there via the “front,” the *hayyot*.⁸³ Already in this formulation, the demonic aspect of the Active Intellect is mitigated and subordinated once more. This aforementioned divine spirit of the rear is destined to return to God, a fact which, Abulafia writes, is an expression of the secret that the Prince is placed within man in potentia. Metatron, Prince of the Countenance and of the actualization, is next described as the “fount of reward and punishment,” from which we may perceive that he contains both aspects, mercy and judgment, right and left, within himself. The mystic is finally enjoined, via the actualization whose potentiality stems from Metatron, to transcend the destruction embodied in the material nature of the *’ofanim* and to “go to the spirit of God.”

It is important to avoid construing Abulafia’s shifting perspective on the demonic nature of the Active Intellect as incoherence. Rather, this oscillation reflects Abulafia’s sense of the nature of the danger that is posed for the mystic. It is not merely that the Active Intellect contains within itself a demonic aspect, one to be avoided scrupulously by the mystic. In the radical instability of the Active Intellect that Abulafia proffers, the threat is much more treacherous. The Active Intellect in its fundamental nature alternates between a fully encompassing goodness and a fully encompassing evil. From this we may grasp the urgency of Abulafia’s many cautionary remarks regarding communion with the Active Intellect for any but the most adept and discerning. There is apparently little firm footing to be found for the mystic within the disorienting shape-shifting of the divine realm.⁸⁴

⁸³ *Sitrei Torah*, MS NY-JTSA Mic. 2367, fols. 53a-b; printed edition, p. 165.

⁸⁴ That transcendence of the Active Intellect is attainable, in Abulafia’s estimation, has been a subject of some scholarly debate, but there are certainly passages from Abulafia’s writings that imply a cleaving to God Himself, and not simply to His lower manifestation as the Active Intellect. Given Abulafia’s characterizations of the nature of the Active Intellect, it is difficult to take these statements on Abulafia’s part to be merely a shorthand for a cleaving to the Active Intellect. The latter seems far too changeable in its fundamental nature to be the ultimate objective of the mystic. Wolfson addresses one passage, from *Sefer ha-Šeruf*, in which Abulafia writes that, “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.” Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 151–152 n. 156. The passage seems to suggest that apprehension of God Himself is possible, but the assistance of the Active Intellect is a necessity. Idel observes, “Also, because the spiritual nature of this intellect seems to be, according to Abulafia, similar to God, a clear distinction between the union of the human intellect with the *intellectus agens*, or with God, is rather difficult...” Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, p. 7. See also *ibid.*, p. 10. Idel notes the inconsistent

The Messiah and Jesus, YH and VH

Accompanying motifs such as the front and rear, head and tail and Metatron and Sandalfon as modes of characterization of the bifold nature of the Active Intellect, another pairing will concern us now. Abulafia indexes the Active Intellect in his bifurcation of the Tetragrammaton, YHVH, into two component parts, YH and VH. Two significant passages elucidate this theme. In one, from *Maftelah ha-Shemot* (*The Key of Names*), written toward the end of the 1280s, Abulafia writes that Jesus is to be associated with the sixth day of the week, while the seventh day, half of the Tetragrammaton, is to be associated with the Jewish messiah.⁸⁵ The other is from *Hayyei ha-'Olam ha-Ba'*, written earlier, around the same time as *Sitrei Torah*. In it, the following linkages are established: The Jewish messiah is again linked with the seventh day, while Satan is linked with the month of Tammuz. As well, the month of Tebet is linked with the YH, the month of Nissan and the constellation Aries, while the VH is linked with Tammuz, the month of Tishrei, and the constellation Libra.⁸⁶ Since Satan is linked with

nature of Scholem's opinion on whether *devequt* constitutes *unio mystica*. Ibid., p. 3. These may be encapsulated in two statements from Scholem's *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*: "It is only in extremely rare cases that ecstasy signifies actual union with God," which leaves open such a possibility, but which is followed by the assertion that even here there is "almost invariably . . . a sense of distance." *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, pp. 122–123.

⁸⁵ *Maftelah ha-Shemot*, MS NY-JTSA Mic. 1897, fol. 80a; printed edition, p. 125.

⁸⁶ *Hayyei ha-'Olam ha-Ba'*, MS Oxford-BL 1582, fol. 71b; printed edition, p. 183. Abulafia, as Idel interprets him, links the VH with the messiah, the seventh day, the month of Tebet, and Aries. The YH is linked, according to Idel, with Satan, the month of Tammuz, and Libra. *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, p. 51. See also idem, "The Writings of Abraham Abulafia and His Teaching," pp. 413–414 (in Hebrew). However, these assignations of the YH and VH do not appear to be consistent with the text, which reads, "And from the secret of the season of the month of Tebet, which the kabbalists understand, you will understand the matter of the first half of the name (*hasi ha-shem ha-'ehad*), and from the secret of the season of the month of Tammuz you will understand the second half of the name (*hasi ha-shem ha-'aher*)." Idel reads the text as follows, "The mystery of the season of the month of Tebet . . . explains the matter of one half of the Name; the mystery of the season of the month of Tammuz explains the secret of the other half of the Name [emphasis mine]." Idel does not read the mention of Tebet and Tammuz as sequential with respect to the Tetragrammaton. That is, he will ultimately perceive in Tebet a reference to the VH and in Tammuz a reference to the YH. Since Tammuz is linked by Abulafia to Satan, Idel considers Satan to be assigned to the YH, with the Jewish messiah assigned to the VH. This is likely done by Idel in order to harmonize this passage from *Hayyei ha-'Olam ha-Ba'* with that from *Maftelah ha-Shemot*, to be discussed below. Also, Idel likely does this because Abulafia has a tendency to assign the YH to Libra (linked in *Hayyei ha-'Olam ha-Ba'* with Tammuz)

Tammuz and Tammuz is linked with the VH, we can see that Abulafia assigns the Jewish messiah to the YH and Satan to the VH. This makes added sense in that Abulafia notes that the YH is “half of the name [that] is as the whole name,” consistent with notions of Metatron, of whom the Jewish messiah is representative, as both half of the Active Intellect and as the whole of the latter in its entirety. As well, the second half of the name, the satanic VH, is referred to by Abulafia as *ha-’aḥer*, “the second,” a locution close to that applied, we have seen, to the satanic Sandalfon, the Prince of the Backside (*ha-’aḥor*).

There are, however, some complications regarding these assignments with respect to other conceptions of Abulafia. Observes Idel in a footnote, “Nissan—the month in which Jesus was killed has a numerical value in Hebrew of 121.”⁸⁷ From this observation we can see that Nissan, the VH—whose numerical value squared is one hundred and twenty-one⁸⁸—and Jesus are linked together in certain contexts. As well, the numerical value of one hundred and twenty-one is the same as that for the phrase “the constellation Aries,” which is consistent with the above linkage of Nissan with Aries. A conflict, however, lies in the fact that, in the passage from *Hayyei ha-’Olam ha-Ba’*, Nissan and Aries were linked to the YH and not the VH. There is consistency, we might say then, with respect to the linkage of Jesus, Satan or Sandalfon with the VH, but not with respect to the assignments of the months.

In another text, *Sefer ha-Melis* (*The Book of the Interpreter*), written around 1282, Abulafia engages in a related discussion of Satan, for whom we would expect a parallel categorization as that which is applied to Jesus. And indeed, a similar situation does prevail with respect to Satan. He is associated with Aries, seen above to be linked to the VH. Abulafia as well brings into this association the tail (of the Teli, which we would expect to be associated with the “tail” or back of the Tetragrammaton, the VH), the evil inclination, and Romulus, the “old king.” Abulafia

and the VH to Aries (linked in *Hayyei ha-’Olam ha-Ba’* with Tebet). Abulafia, elsewhere in his writings, observes that the numerical value of YH squared yields the value of the phrase “the constellation Libra,” while the numerical value of the VH squared yields the value of the phrase “the constellation Aries.” These assignments actually contradict those of the current passage. In the current context, Idel errs in this regard, writing that the squaring of the numerical value of the letters YH yields one hundred and twenty-one, the numerical value of the phrase “the constellation Aries.” *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, p. 52.

⁸⁷ Ibid., p. 59 n. 30.

⁸⁸ See above, n. 86.

himself, the “new king,” puts the “old king”—linked to Rome, and hence, to Christianity and Jesus—to flight in battle.⁸⁹

Elsewhere, however, we discover that Abulafia is not consistent in his assignation of the YH and VH to the true messiah and to Jesus, respectively. If we have Satan as the evil inclination, as the tail of the Teli and as Aries, and, hence, as Nissan and Jesus as well, as above, then it is logical as well to ascribe Sandalfon, as well the evil inclination and the tail, belonging to the left side, to this same VH.⁹⁰ The imagination as well belongs to this side of the Tetragrammaton.⁹¹ As a consequence, it would be logical to link the Jewish messiah and the YH with the head of the Teli, with the good inclination, with the right side and with Metatron, which also follows from the preceding. Abulafia’s self-identification as Metatron and as messiah would then partake of the YH.

Nevertheless, there is a problem in these categorizations. Hames analyzes the aforementioned assignation of Jesus to the sixth day of creation and of the true messiah to the seventh in *Maṣṣeḥ ha-Shemot*. He explicates the linkage of Jesus with the YH, and not the VH, based on the association of Jesus with the sixth day. The first letters of the Hebrew words for “Jesus the Nazarene,” *Yeshu ha-Nosri*, are YH, the same letters which begin the Hebrew words for “the sixth day,” *yom ha-shishi*. Hames goes on to observe that these are the last two words of Genesis 1:31. The next two words in Genesis, from verse 2:1, the words which begin the section of the text that concerns the Sabbath, or seventh day, begin with the letters VH. Hames observes that Abulafia makes mention of the first of these words, *Va-yekhulu* (“were completed,” concerning the heavens and the earth). From this, Hames

⁸⁹ *Sefer ha-Melis*, MS Munich-BS 285 fols. 11a, 12b; printed edition (*Maṣṣeḥ ha-Sekhel*), pp. 11, 12, 14. Idel discusses this battle with Romulus, or Jesus, as that between the body, represented by these figures, and the intellect. “The Writings of Abraham Abulafia and His Teaching,” p. 415 (in Hebrew). The battle between the two “kings” is also one between the two traditional messiahs, Messiah ben Joseph and Messiah ben David; the former stands, in Abulafia’s conception, for the body and for Jesus (Joseph being Jesus’ father), the latter stands for Abulafia himself, the true messiah from the lineage of David. Ibid., p. 414.

⁹⁰ Hames notes that in the doctrine of Ibn al-‘Arabi, likely influential upon Abulafia, it was probably Jesus who was intended with the epithet “the Imam of the Left.” Nevertheless, for Ibn al-‘Arabi, Jesus bore positive associations. Hames, “A Seal within a Seal,” p. 154. See above, p. 189 n. 35. For Baruch Togarmi’s association of Aries with Sandalfon, see *Sefer Maṣṣeḥot ha-Kabbalah*, p. 236.

⁹¹ Hames points out Jesus’ status, for Abulafia, as the imagination. “A Seal within a Seal,” p. 164.

concludes that Jesus is to be associated with the YH and the sixth day, while the entire Tetragrammaton, or the VH, is to be associated with the messiah and the seventh day.⁹² Regardless of this seeming contradiction,⁹³ what is clear is that Abulafia both parses out the two halves of the Tetragrammaton between the messiah and Jesus, and that these conform to the parsing out of the Active Intellect between Metatron and Sandalfon, respectively.

It is important to render explicit a point that has only been implied thusfar. Idel writes,⁹⁴ "...the relation between the Messiah and the body of Satan is one of ruler and subject, which, in Abulafia's opinion, expresses the relation between the Jewish Messiah and Jesus." Idel observes that in the two passages that he examines, Satan and Jesus occupy the same positions. Thus, in the lengthier passage, from *Hayyei ha-'Olam ha-Ba'*, in which Abulafia mentions only Satan and not Jesus, it is appropriate to understand that he has Jesus in mind. As Idel observes as well, the Jewish messiah and Jesus in this formulation occupy the roles of the human intellect and imagination, respectively. If we play out these notions, then, we find that Jesus stands as a component of the mystic's own psyche, the imaginative half of his nature, which must be subdued.

⁹² Hames refers the entire Tetragrammaton to the messiah in *ibid.*, p. 163, while the VH he specifically assigns to the messiah in *Like Angels on Jacob's Ladder*, p. 79. We should note that it was the YH, and not the VH, that stood for Abulafia as both half of the name and as the whole name in *Hayyei ha-'Olam ha-Ba'*.

⁹³ One answer to the apparent contradiction is that it may be that Abulafia is chiefly interested, in the passages adduced by Hames, in associating Jesus with the sixth day and the messiah with the seventh based only on *gematriyot*. That is, he may not be focused on the parsing of the YH and the VH in this context. Although he does do so in *Mafteah ha-Shemot*, in a like passage from *Mafteah ha-Hokhmot*, also adduced by Hames, Abulafia does not make mention of the words in question from Genesis 2:1, from which, Hames indicates, the VH would be derived. And there is thus also no way to know whether Abulafia had in mind the connection between the first letters of *Yeshu ha-Noṣri*, "Jesus the Nazarene," and of *yom ha-shishi*, "the sixth day," from which the YH would be derived. The *gematriyot* that seem to have more concerned Abulafia go as follows: As Hames also notes, the letters that spell *Yeshu ha-Noṣri* have the same numerical value as those for *yom ha-shishi* (six hundred and seventy-one), while those that spell *melekh ha-mashiah*, "King Messiah," have the same numerical value as those for *yom ha-shvi'i*, "the seventh day" (four hundred and fifty-three). In terms of the inconsistency under discussion, Idel also makes mention of passages from Abulafia's students, and from Abulafia himself, which link the YH with the Jewish messiah, a linkage that Idel notes to be in contradiction to the one that he presents. *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, p. 58 n. 29.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

There are erotic ramifications to these observations that bear exploration. Abulafia reports elsewhere that the prophet or mystic must harness and ride his own imagination as one would a horse.⁹⁵ This notion of riding carries sexual connotations, where the ridden entity represents the female element, the imagination, while the rider represents the male element, the intellect.⁹⁶ The erotic valence to the relationship between the intellect and the imagination—or, the Jewish messiah (Abulafia) and Jesus—cannot be ignored. It recurs in a prominent fashion as well within Abulafia's notion that the YH is to be theurgically united with the VH.

The sense of erotic implications, in Abulafia's thought, to theurgical operations bearing on the latter union has much in common with the thought of other kabbalists. The unification of the name was accorded an erotic dimension among medieval kabbalists generally, and the sublimation of sexuality into what Wolfson terms "holy eroticism" prevailed as well among kabbalists within Abulafia's doctrinal tradition.⁹⁷ A sense of homoeroticism to the relationship between the Jewish messiah and Jesus, as Abulafia delineates it, may be contextualized within a wider such tendency with respect to the Jewish mystical relationship to God.⁹⁸ This wider homoerotic dynamic carries with it a sense of autoeroticism. A unification is enacted between two aspects of the divine self, following upon the construction of a feminine other, the *Shekhinah*.⁹⁹ The same autoerotic mechanism is present in Abulafia's doctrine, where the feminine Jesus, as the imaginative element, is a feature of the mystic's own psychic landscape. This autoerotic dynamic undermines somewhat the homoerotic implications of

⁹⁵ Idel, *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 143, 188.

⁹⁶ This notion finds expression as well with respect to Samael's riding of the serpent, a motif that, we have seen, Abulafia references in the context of Eve's sin, of a sexual nature, in the Garden of Eden. See *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer*, chap. 13; Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed* 2:30.

⁹⁷ Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being*, p. 263.

⁹⁸ Ibid., pp. 324, 327, 329, 366. This pertains both to the relationships of God and the mystic to the phallicized female, part and parcel of the male divine androgyne. Homoeroticism with respect to the kabbalistic unification of the name is distinguished by Wolfson from homosexuality, in that kabbalists who sought to unify the name aspired to overcome any vestige of carnal sexuality. Ibid., p. 367. The same can be said regarding the mystic's role in the homoerotic dynamic of the union of the YH with the VH in Abulafia's thought.

⁹⁹ Ibid., pp. 271, 285, 307.

Abulafia's doctrine, given that Jesus' role in this configuration is decidedly feminine and demonic.

When we inquire into the implications of the homoerotic tendency that remains perceptible in Abulafia's thought vis-à-vis Jesus, we can see that it relates strongly to what we have seen of the dynamic operative between a demon and the wayward mystic. The mystic who has fallen victim to idolatry commits infidelity with respect to God, so that the mystic's consorting with the demonic element carries sexual overtones. In Abulafia's thought, an erotic element persists in the case of the successful mystic (or messiah), who has managed to overcome the demonic element (or Jesus), to ride it like a horse. In this case, the erotic element differs from that within the illicit relationship in that, when the intellect dominates the imagination, the carnal dimension is entirely sublimated.

Abulafia's intense interest in the motifs surrounding the theme of the unification of the name merits further investigation. In a passage from *Sitrei Torah*, Abulafia embarks upon a discussion that runs somewhat parallel to what we have seen thusfar. He focuses upon the celestial figure of the Teli.¹⁰⁰ Guided overall by the reference in *Sefer Yeširah* to the dominion of the Teli, sphere and heart, respectively, over world, year and soul,¹⁰¹ Abulafia writes that there are twelve leaders in both the soul and the year.¹⁰² The latter are the twelve constellations, which govern the months of the year. Regarding the months and their constellations, Abulafia writes, somewhat cryptically, "three, three in the nature of the explicit name, which expresses every hidden secret and every secret nature and every concealed wonder that may be apprehended." In dividing the twelve constellations or months by three, we find that we have four groups—the seasons—which now correspond to the letters of the Tetragrammaton. Adapted here is the tripartite quaternity with respect to the Tetragrammaton that we discussed earlier.¹⁰³

¹⁰⁰ *Sitrei Torah*, MS NY-JTSA Mic. 2367, fol. 23b; printed edition, pp. 32–34. A portion of this passage is translated by Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia*, p. 150 n. 153.

¹⁰¹ *Sefer Yeširah*, Gruenwald ed., 6:1–2 (para. 59).

¹⁰² *Sitrei Torah*, MS NY-JTSA Mic. 2367, fol. 23b; printed edition, p. 32.

¹⁰³ See above, pp. 49–50, 147, as well as the continuation, below, of the current passage.

In the passage from *Ḥayyei ha-‘Olam ha-Ba’* discussed above, the Jewish messiah and Satan were each assigned two months. Each of these months corresponded to one of the four seasons. These months were linked as well to the two letter pairs, YH and VH, which comprise the Tetragrammaton. Much the same structure is constructed by Abulafia in the current passage. This arrangement somewhat recalls as well Abulafia’s discussion of the letters *yod, yod, lamed* and *lamed*, mentioned earlier, which occur in four permutations corresponding to the four seasons, and which Abulafia regarded as the secret of the demon Lilith. In that context we noted how the Active Intellect seemed to have been wholly taken over by its evil element. With this in mind, we may read on in *Sitrei Torah*,¹⁰⁴

And thus there are in it [the name] two equal letters teaching that God, may He be blessed, leads in His power two seasons of the sun in one equality, in the secret of forty-nine, which revolves from five, and the two of them together are governors over all of the signs. And their secret is, “You will understand in the head and in the tail.”

The divine name is parsed on the basis of the letter *he’*, which appears in each of its halves, YH and VH, and by means of which Abulafia references these two halves. The two occurrences of the letter *he’*, we can see, lie behind Abulafia’s writing earlier “three, three in the nature of the explicit name.” Each letter *he’* has three months assigned to it, such that together the two letters comprise “two seasons.”

The parsing of the Tetragrammaton is linked as well to the motifs of the head and the tail and to two “governors over all of the signs (*ba‘alei ha-mofetim kulam*).” The introduction of the numbers forty-nine and five is obscure here, but they are used subsequently to elucidate the meaning of the head and tail. The letters that compose these numbers (ה ט ז) together comprise the word “staff.” Abulafia refers, in this connection, to the staff that turns into the serpent in chapter four of Exodus. Thus, the head and tail belong to this serpent, which, Abulafia informs us, we should recognize as the Leviathan of Isaiah 27:1, the “flying serpent” who is as well the “crooked serpent” and the Tanin. He alludes here to the Teli, the leader of the world according to the aforementioned passage from *Sefer Yeṣirah*.¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁴ *Sitrei Torah*, MS NY-JTSA Mic. 2367, fol. 23b; printed edition, p. 33.

¹⁰⁵ By the end of the passage, Abulafia makes specific mention of the Teli, sphere and heart. Ibid., MS NY-JTSA Mic. 2367, fol. 23b; printed edition, p. 34.

The parsing out of the Tetragrammaton into YH and VH may be understood, then, along the lines of the division of the Teli into head and tail. Through these, Abulafia writes, "...you will recognize the secret of the statement (Is. 9:11), 'The aged and the honored are the head; the prophets who give false instruction are the tail.'" A correspondence is present, in Abulafia's writings, between the false prophets mentioned in Isaiah and Jesus. Both, in different texts, are assigned to the tail of the Teli and the VH. Here it is apparent how frequently Abulafia has Jesus in mind, even when he is not mentioned specifically.¹⁰⁶

Abulafia writes that "you will take in your hand," the staff that changes into the serpent, "with which you will make the signs (*ha-ʾotot*); you will act upon matter and form." Certainly Abulafia intends here the mystical activity of letter permutation. The changeable nature of the staff Abulafia likely sees as expressive of both the shifting of the letters themselves and of the changing insights afforded through their permutations. The performance of signs mentioned Abulafia sees as a prophetic gift,¹⁰⁷ while the acting upon matter and form signifies the manipulation of the two components of the prophetic efflux, the imagination and the intellect, respectively. Thus, Abulafia encourages the engagement of both of these, which conform to VH and YH, tail and head. We may understand once more that Abulafia prescribes recourse, not just to the intellectual element, but as well to the demonic, embodied here by the false prophets or Jesus. Abulafia continues in *Sitrei Torah*,

And it was said (Ex. 4:3), "'Put your hand out and seize it by the tail.' And he put out his hand, and caught it, and it became a rod in his hand (בכפו)." [This should be read] "In twenty-six (בכ"ף ו"ו)," because with six in his hand (ב"ו בכ"ף) are, "In his hand are six (בכ"ף ו"ו)."

¹⁰⁶ Further indications are present, in the current instance, that Abulafia has Jesus in mind. It is significant that the staff around which the current discussion centers was used against pharaoh's sorcerers. In accord with this notion, we see Jesus, in the tradition reflected in *Toledot Yeshu*, characterized as a sorcerer. Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, p. 59 n. 37. Idel observes that Abulafia characterizes Jesus as overlord of Egypt. See *Mafteah ha-Shemot*, MS NY-JTSA Mic. 1897, fol. 71a; printed edition, p. 89, where pharaoh is equated with the Teli; both are personae that we see as associated with Jesus by Abulafia. As well, pharaoh is here linked with hot-bloodedness and the demonic (as well as the sorcerial), an association which recalls Abulafia's labeling of Jesus and Christendom as carnal. See Hames, *Like Angels on Jacob's Ladder*, pp. 78–79.

¹⁰⁷ See above, pp. 6, 107.

Abulafia's play on the end of the passage from Exodus, "in his hand," may be translated in several different ways, but two features should be maintained. The first is the notion that, in Moses' grasping of the tail, six are in his hand, that is, six months or constellations. These, we have observed, comprise half of the complete name, its demonic aspect. The second key feature is Abulafia's observation that the same last word of the passage may be seen as the spelling in full of the two Hebrew letters whose sum is twenty-six, such that this last word may be translated as "in twenty-six." Here the total numerical value of the letters of the Tetragrammaton is referenced, so that the relationship of head to tail in this passage is confirmed as corresponding to that between YH and VH.

The passage concludes with Abulafia indicating that the head tefillin bears witness to the throne, while the tefillin of the hand refers to the tablets.¹⁰⁸ Given what we have already seen with respect to the tefillin of the head and hand, we may understand once more a parallel with the opposing natures of intellect and imagination, the latter standing as interchangeable with materiality. Abulafia discusses the secret of the chariot, now seen as embodied in the head tefillin, as culminating in "the man who is upon the throne, who is called *hashmal*." Regarding this secret, Abulafia writes,

...the rod that changes to the serpent will make known to you the entirety of this secret, and its nature is explained in the secret of the known inversion. And so you will know the secret of the Teli, the secret of the sphere and the secret of the heart. And the matter of the tefillin of the hand and of the head are two worthy witnesses for the whole thing, and they reveal to you the secret of the throne and the secret of the tablets. Because indeed "throne" via [the method of] *'atbash*¹⁰⁹ is "tablets."

In the current context, it is surely appropriate to see "throne" and "tablets," respectively, as encoding the working of the chariot and the working of creation.¹¹⁰ Abulafia has only just mentioned the secret

¹⁰⁸ Wolfson notes that, elsewhere as well in *Sitrei Torah*, Abulafia identifies the working of the chariot with the head tefillin and the working of creation with the hand tefillin. *Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 88, 194.

¹⁰⁹ *'Atbash* is a method of letter exchange in which a new word is generated by replacing, in a given word, the first letter of the alphabet with the last, the second with the second to last, etcetera.

¹¹⁰ The relationship of the "throne" to the "tablets" has been discussed by Idel. *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics in Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 42–46. Idel views Abulafia's derivation, via a letter operation, of "throne" from "tablets" as revealing that the "tablets"

of the chariot and linked it with the throne and the head tefillin. As to the working of creation, Abulafia elsewhere identifies the tablets with the “stones” referenced in *Sefer Yeṣirah*.¹¹¹ These stones Abulafia understands as the building blocks for letter permutations; that is, they are the letters themselves. Thus, they are the means by which the working of creation is enacted.¹¹²

Abulafia avers, in the continuation of the passage from *Sitrei Torah*, that the working of the chariot and the working of creation, redolent of the intellect and imagination, respectively, “testify to each other,” just as the head and hand tefillin bear witness to them. The throne and the tablets—as well as the working of the chariot and the working of creation—possess a level of interchangeability here. This is well attested by the virtual synonymy that is established through the letter permutation that Abulafia evinces. Thus, the subject of discussion is not simply that of the imagination’s subservience to the intellect. Rather, the notion emerges that the two components of the divinity are in a certain way commensurate. This is consistent with Abulafia’s earlier suggestion that the mystic must engage both components of the name.

Abulafia observes above that the secret of the man on the throne, who is called “*hashmal*,” is made known through the inversions of the serpent. This we may understand as referring, on the one hand, to the process of letter permutation, as symbolized by the serpent’s changeability. As Abulafia himself demonstrates, scrutiny of the chapters in Ezekiel using the method of letter permutation brings to light the secrets of the chariot. On the other hand, Abulafia certainly also has in mind the serpent’s bipartite nature, composed as it is of head and tail, YH and VH, a composition which has so occupied him in this passage.¹¹³ This nature to the serpent sheds light upon that of the man upon the throne, in that this man himself partakes of a bipartite essence. In

possess a hidden dimension represented by the “throne.” In the current passage, the revelation of each’s secrets appears to be reciprocal.

¹¹¹ See *ibid.*, pp. 43–44; *Sefer Yeṣirah*, Gruenwald ed., 4:4 (para. 40).

¹¹² Idel observes Abulafia’s conception of the act of creation as a product of speech, executed via the letters of the alphabet. *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics in Abraham Abulafia*, p. 107.

¹¹³ Wolfson makes reference to Abulafia’s equation of the transformation of the rod into the serpent and “inversion,” and relates it to Abulafia’s collapsing of binaries such as right and left, Israel and the nations and Metatron and Samael. *Abraham Abulafia*, p. 59 n. 167.

Ezekiel 1:27, he is described first from his loins upwards, then from his loins downwards. Abulafia, elsewhere in *Sitrei Torah*, reveals his interest in this aspect of the enthroned figure, stating that it demonstrates the reception of the divine efflux in two aspects.¹¹⁴ Later, he will suggest that the *hashmal* is divided into components corresponding to the body and the soul.¹¹⁵

Wolfson's observation that, for Abulafia, the *hashmal* represents Metatron¹¹⁶ is a significant one. We may now note that, in this passage, the twofold aspect of Metatron upon the throne is revealed in the nature of the serpent, or Teli, whose tail, the VH of the Tetragrammaton, is identified with "the prophets who give false instruction," and so with Jesus. What should be recognized once more is that the latter must not be construed merely as an exemplar of satanic and idolatrous religion or even simply as an embodiment of the imagination, which is to be subordinated to the intellect. In his epitomization in the tail of the Teli and the VH of the Tetragrammaton, and through the motifs of the hand tefillin and the working of creation, Jesus is imprinted in the reciprocal relationship that operates between the Active Intellect's two halves.

Despite this apparent reciprocity, we should not lose sight of our earlier observation that Abulafia frequently refers to a battle that rages between the Active Intellect's two components and, as well, between Abulafia's own two inclinations. Though we have observed a degree of harmony between the two components of the Active Intellect, which "testify to each other," as Abulafia phrases it, in the forms of the working of the chariot and the working of creation and of the head and hand tefillin, we should not be misled. In *'Oṣar 'Eden Ganuz*, Abulafia relates that the two astrological constellations which embody the head and tail are two messengers of the name who are "always at war" with one another.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ *Sitrei Torah*, MS NY-JTSA Mic. 2367, fol. 52b; printed edition, p. 162.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, MS NY-JTSA Mic. 2367, fol. 53b; printed edition, p. 168.

¹¹⁶ Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia*, p. 198.

¹¹⁷ *'Oṣar 'Eden Ganuz*, MS Oxford-BL 1580, fols. 28a-b; printed edition, pp. 57–58. Jesus' role in this war is significant. In a sense, it is appropriate to understand Jesus as a component of the perfected Jewish messiah. In this fashion, Jesus may be understood to play a part in the redemption. This surmise, rendered apparent, in another fashion, in Abulafia's account of the eschatological battle to be waged between the two "kings," discussed in *Sefer ha-Meliṣ*, may bear signs of the further influence of Ibn al-'Arabi. *Sefer ha-Meliṣ*, MS Munich-BS 285 fols. 11a, 12b; printed edition (*Maṣref ha-Sekhel*), pp. 11,

Certainly, these two messengers are part and parcel of the YH and the VH,¹¹⁸ and they are as well the two inclinations within the human psyche. The war evoked is, then, in part the internal one, the likes of which we examined above in chapter three. Abulafia observes in this passage that our nature is part and parcel of Satan's, a fact which results in our being at war internally. Our nature Abulafia also describes as "impressed," as against the raised nature of God. The language alludes to a seal and the impression that it creates in wax, but the subtext refers to a feminine aspect—to be linked with evil—possessed by men, as opposed to God's masculine aspect. The battle here Abulafia also describes as one between Satan and God. He attests further that the Hebrew letters are the weapons of battle, while the names themselves war with one another. This conflict would appear to be one that occurs during the practice of letter permutation, perhaps with respect to names that signify the two aspects of the Active Intellect.

The contradiction between the idea that the two elements of the Active Intellect constitute a harmonious whole and that they are continually at war with one another is meaningful in terms of what it demonstrates about Abulafia's own psyche. The conflict present in Abulafia's writings does not pertain only to that between mortal enemies, orthodoxy versus the forbidden other. Rather, the true struggle appears to be between the view that such contention is at the root of man's bipartite nature and the opposite view, that there should be no struggle between self and other, both of which are crucial elements of a transcendent whole. The deeper struggle between these two views cuts to the essence of Abulafia's ambivalent relationship toward Christianity.

12, 14. Ibn al-ʿArabi had propounded the doctrine that Jesus would arrive prior to the messiah at the end of days. Hames, "A Seal within a Seal," p. 160. Hames notes the messiah's—that is, Abulafia's—mission to overcome Jesus, who represents the imagination and the material world, in order to bring about a state of conjunction with the Active Intellect. *Ibid.*, p. 164.

¹¹⁸ Abulafia will go on to characterize one as the essential name of God and the other as merely a descriptive name. This probably alludes to the status of YH as a traditional name of God in its own right, while the VH does not exist independently in this fashion.

YH and VH: "Flesh and Blood"

Our examination of the bipartite figure on the throne in Ezekiel's vision and its relationship to the Teli is a useful point of departure for a related discussion in *Imrei Shefer*.¹¹⁹ There, we find a provocative intersection with the issue of incarnationism discussed earlier. The passage that concerns us begins with Abulafia's statement that he will reveal "the secret of the division of the name into its two parts, 'ehad' *'ehad* (one one),' which are YH times YH and also VH times VH in the two forms." The word *'ehad* has a numerical value of thirteen, so multiplication by two yields twenty-six, the numerical value of the Tetragrammaton.¹²⁰ It may be that halving the Tetragrammaton in this manner, where the number one is asserted, maintains for Abulafia the notion of unity, despite the fact that a pairing is invoked. The squaring of YH and of VH yields the numerical values for the phrases "the constellation Libra" and "the constellation Aries," respectively, as we have seen before. In this, Abulafia invokes the earlier associations concerning the Tetragrammaton's two halves with the Jewish messiah and Jesus.

But Abulafia will proceed to elaborate upon this conception of the YH and VH in a different fashion. He writes,

But the whole revolution of the first will be two hundred and twenty-five, and it will be, according to its number, that its length, its width and its depth are equal. And that of the second will be one hundred and twenty-one, and it will be according to its number that its length, its width and its depth are equal.

We find that Abulafia regards the squaring of each half of the Tetragrammaton as the multiplying of that half's "length" by its "width." He suggests further that these can be multiplied by their "depth" as well. That is, each half of the name may be cubed and conceived of in three dimensional terms. He continues,

And if you wish to know the name, "pronounce" His name "thusly," because it is "His name." As well, it is His essence, in the manner of *yod gimel* with *yod gimel*; there is the name twenty-six. And it is two hundred

¹¹⁹ *Imrei Shefer*, MS Munich-BS 285 fols. 71a-b; MS Munich-BS 40 fols. 240a, 241b; printed edition, p. 77.

¹²⁰ See Idel, *Kabbalah and Eros*, pp. 79-80.

and six, whose secret is “His essence,” and the two of them are born from them, “flesh and blood.” Also, “His essence is the source,” and it is the “created will,” and it is the essence of His will.

The words “pronounce” and “thusly” numerically total one hundred and twenty-one and two hundred and twenty-five, respectively, so Abulafia maintains the thread of his prior discussion. Further, these two, added together, yield the value for the phrase “His name.”¹²¹ The letters *yod* and *gimel* have a numerical total of thirteen, so here too Abulafia proceeds along the lines delineated earlier with respect to the word *’ehad*. Spelling out the letters *yod* and *gimel*, however, yields a total of one hundred and three, which, when repeated after the fashion of the earlier “one one,” gives the numerical value for the phrase “His essence.” Thus, the two halves of the name may be manipulated to yield two conceptually equivalent expressions, “His name” and “His essence.” In this lies the precise point that Abulafia seeks to make: God’s name is His essence. In this passage, God’s essence finds embodiment in His name, and thus the divine essence is imbued with an accessibility inconceivable from the apophatic perspective of Maimonides.¹²² Abulafia will articulate his own perspective yet more clearly as we proceed.

The rendering accessible of God’s essence has important ramifications when viewed against the backdrop of a Christian cultural milieu, where Jesus stands as the divine essence manifest in the flesh. Abulafia’s phrase, “the two of them are born from them, ‘flesh and blood.’” seems to refer to the two parts of the name, which are “born” from “His name,” which is “His essence.” So we find that the divine essence, embodied in the name, gives birth to these two components.¹²³

¹²¹ See also *Imrei Shefer*, MS Munich-BS 285 fol. 64a; printed edition, p. 58.

¹²² Articulations of this kind are marked deviations from Maimonidean modes of thought, although Abulafia will at other times uphold the position that God is beyond such assertions concerning His essence. Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 172, 196–197. The opposing views of Maimonides and Abulafia concerning the question of the essential nature of the Tetragrammaton parallel their understanding of the Hebrew language itself as conventional versus divine, respectively. *Ibid.*, p. 58; Idel, “Abulafia’s Secrets of the Guide,” pp. 294, 305; *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics in Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 13, 16, 149; *Maimonide et la mystique juive*, pp. 77–78.

¹²³ Interestingly, Abulafia notes elsewhere that the seed (semen), which gives rise to individual corporeality, is spherical in form; its length, width and height are all equal. *Imrei Shefer*, MS Munich-BS 285 fol. 69b; printed edition, p. 70. Regarding these three dimensions, Abulafia observes, in the current context, that they are all equal as well for the YH and the VH when they are cubed. Although in the present

The latter, we observed, were conceived of in three dimensions, and thus as bodies in their own right.¹²⁴ If the expression of their physical birth needed further emphasis, Abulafia supplies it, stating that they become “flesh and blood,” a phrase that is numerically equivalent to that of the two phrases “His name” and “His essence.” Abulafia’s discussion to this point concludes with the restatement that these two physically embodied manifestations of the divine name—which are, we have seen, the head and tail of the Teli—stem from God’s essence: The expression “His essence is the source” is numerically equivalent to “flesh and blood.” The word “source,” in turn, is equal to the words “created” and “will,” such that the divine will that begets these two manifest entities YH and VH stems from His essence.

To this point we may recognize that Abulafia understands the bipartite Teli as the “word made flesh,” to borrow a phrase from Abulafia’s Christian neighbors.¹²⁵ For Abulafia, the essence-embodying word is, naturally, God’s name. If we continue to compare Abulafia’s formulations to those of the New Testament, his next statement is yet more striking:

And I have already told you that the secret of two hundred and six is “His essence.” If so, His essence is *Hokhmah*, and His essence is *Binah*. And thus His qualities are His essence. And also the secret of two hundred and six is “word.” If so, His name announces to us the “word” *Hokhmah* and the “word” *Binah*, as is written in a hint (Dan. 1:20), “And in every word of wisdom (*hokhmah*) and every word of understanding (*binah*).” And so too it is said (Ps. 33:6), “By the word of God the heavens were made.” The first letters and the last letters total six hundred and thirteen. And their secret is “the second matter” YH [is] “my name” (Ex. 3:15) [and] three hundred and sixty-five, VH [is] “my remembrance” (Ibid.) [and] two hundred and forty-eight.

instance these two components of the name are themselves materialized, it is quite possible that Abulafia conceives of them along the lines of the agent of materialization, the spherical seed. This is particularly apparent in that, as Abulafia proceeds in his discussion of the seed, he likens its three dimensions to God’s name rendered in a triadic form as “Ehye ’Asher ’Ehye,” as well as “YHVH YHVH YHVH,” and “*Qadosh, qadosh, qadosh* (Holy, holy, holy).” He makes the same association as well with respect to the sefirotic triad of *Hokhmah*, *Binah* and *Da’at*. Thus, all of these triads, the Tetragrammaton being most noteworthy for our current purposes, are linked directly to the notion of corporealization. Indeed, the very idea of a divine triad being linked to corporealization is, once again, evocative of Christian influence.

¹²⁴ Elsewhere, *Imrei Shefer*, MS Munich-BS 285 fol. 69b; printed edition, p. 70, Abulafia observes that every body’s corporeality is contingent upon these three dimensions.

¹²⁵ John 1:14.

Abulafia had established, earlier in this same text, that *Hokhmah* and *Binah*, the two paired *sefirot* from the right and left of the sefirotic array, stood as the YH and VH, respectively, of the divine name.¹²⁶ Thus, he is able to identify them as “His essence,” a phrase which has the same numerical value as the word “word.” Thus, God’s essence is the word, which is the name, which is born in the flesh in the form of its two parts, YH and VH. By parsing out the letters of the verse from Psalms in such a manner as to derive a reference to the six hundred and thirteen commandments, Abulafia also identifies the word, which is the name, with the Torah. On the one hand, the Torah is itself comprised entirely of God’s names, in Abulafia’s estimation, following the lead of Nahmanides. On the other, the Torah scroll is the material receptacle and embodiment of God’s commandments. The Torah was traditionally viewed in Jewish mystical circles, further, as the physical embodiment of God’s presence in the world.¹²⁷ The “secret” of the manifested name, in the form of the commandments, Abulafia informs us, is “the second matter,” presumably a reference to matter in its final manifestation, since the “first matter” would likely be the hyle. Again the emphasis on physical materialization is noteworthy. Finally, Abulafia links this “second matter” to the two components of the Tetragrammaton, as YH added to the phrase “my name” yields three hundred and sixty-five, the traditional number of negative commandments, while VH added to the phrase “my remembrance” yields two hundred and forty-eight, the number of positive commandments.

Ultimately Abulafia will play out the numerical consequences of ascribing three dimensions to the YH and the VH. The value of YH

¹²⁶ Abulafia assigns the phrase “this in this” to YH and VH and then observes that the letters for “this,” when spelled in full, have the same numerical value as both “*Hokhmah*” and “and *Binah*.” “This” multiplied by two has, as well, the same value as “sun and moon,” which Abulafia regularly assigns to *Hokhmah* and *Binah*, respectively. Referring to the word “in” in the phrase “this in this,” Abulafia observes that its single letter, when spelled in full, has the same spelling as the Hebrew word for “house.” “House,” Abulafia next observes, is numerically equivalent to the phrase “it is two,” which is as well two hundred and six multiplied by two. The number two hundred and six, of course, Abulafia had already focused on with respect to the two halves of the Tetragrammaton and the phrase “His essence,” and it is as well the same value as the word “word.” The *sefirot* *Hokhmah* and *Binah* were significant in Abulafia’s conception of the upper triad of *sefirot*. See above, pp. 85, 183.

¹²⁷ As well, Idel observes Abulafia’s equation of the Torah with the *Kavod*, God’s terrestrial manifestation. Idel, *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics in Abraham Abulafia*, p. 36. See also Wolfson, “The Mystical Significance of Torah Study,” pp. 55, 63–68, for the same perspective among the German Pietists.

cubed yields the value of the word “*hashmal*,”¹²⁸ Abulafia observes. We have already identified the *hashmal* as the manifested Active Intellect and as Metatron. Its value is also *be-shalom*, writes Abulafia, which we may take to suggest wholeness or, in the mystical sense, reconstitution of the self in the divine likeness. This latter understanding of *be-shalom* is appropriate in that Abulafia links the word not only with the YH but with those who partake of it; he adduces the passage “God will bless His people with peace” (Ps. 29:11). We have noted that Metatron may stand as both the entirety of the bipartite Active Intellect and as its positive half. In this may reside the significance, in fact, of Abulafia’s aforementioned observation that the YH spelled in full yields the numerical value of the whole Tetragrammaton, twenty-six.¹²⁹ Thus, the *hashmal* is embodied in the YH, in this instance, as the goal of mystical attainment.

From the value of VH cubed Abulafia derives the word for “garb.”¹³⁰ Garbing in this context refers, once again, to the rendering of God’s essence as perceptible or corporealized.¹³¹ Abulafia notes as well the numerical equivalence of *hashmal* with *malbush*, or “garment.” We have already seen that a conception of Jesus explicitly pervades the motif of the satanic tail of the Teli, or the VH which is Aries. Now, the birth in the flesh of the full name in each of its two parts, we see as well, owes much to Christian thought.

Nevertheless, there is as well a countercurrent present in the passage. When we note that Abulafia enlists the word *be-shalom* to refer to the mystic’s coming into the likeness of the *hashmal* or of the YH cubed, we must observe that Abulafia is here tracing the reverse course to what had initially preoccupied him. No longer is he describing the process by which the divine assumes a lower form, the corporealized name. Now he describes the means by which the mystic is afforded

¹²⁸ Actually, it yields three thousand three hundred and seventy-five, which Abulafia, in a transposition not unusual in his writings, converts into three hundred and seventy-eight by converting the number three thousand into the number three. See above, pp. 103 n. 207, 180 n. 5.

¹²⁹ See also *Imrei Shefer*, MS Munich-BS 285 fol. 64a; printed edition, p. 57.

¹³⁰ By the same method as that mentioned above, n. 128, one thousand three hundred and thirty-one becomes three hundred and thirty-two.

¹³¹ Baer notes the kabbalistic tendency to discuss God’s being as “garbed” with His names, a tendency which runs parallel with Christian notions of divine corporealization. “The Kabbalistic Doctrine in the Christological Teaching of Abner of Burgos,” p. 287. Wolfson discusses Joseph Gikatilla’s notion of God’s disrobing before the mystic as His cognomens are removed to reveal the Tetragrammaton. “Eunuchs Who Keep the Sabbath,” p. 173.

the opportunity to become transubstantiated as the divine name, to become flesh made word. Wolfson has observed the kabbalistic strain of thought in which flesh is transubstantiated as word, or as Torah, the inverse of the Christian modality in which the Logos is corporealized.¹³² With respect to kabbalah, this process is troped in terms of the inscribing of the divine name upon the body through circumcision, resulting in its transubstantiation.

Despite this significance to circumcision, it is nevertheless the task of the mystic to actualize this transubstantiation in practice; of course, only the kabbalist is capable of this achievement. Thus, in the passage that we have examined, we find the striking influence of Christian incarnationism upon Abulafia, accompanied nevertheless by an implicit Jewish mystical polemical refutation of this same doctrine.¹³³ I would suggest that present here is a further instance wherein Abulafia's conflictedness with respect to the Christian model is manifest. Something more is suggested as well. Wolfson has professed that the mystical conception of divine unity transcends the notion of the coincidence of opposites, flesh versus word. It yields what he calls an "interflesh."¹³⁴ Abulafia's having presented us with what are actually *opposed* coinciding opposites should suggest a more complicated picture, once again, than the mere overcoming of a basic dichotomy.

Jesus and Shaddai as Serpent

We have touched upon several interrelated features in Abulafia's conceptualization of Jesus. All of these relate, in some fashion, to Abulafia's perspective on sorcery and its connection with the Active Intellect. The ramifications of this theme merit further analysis. In close proximity, as it happens, to the discussion in *Imrei Shefer* regarding the YH and VH and their corporealization, we find an entryway into this topic. Abulafia commences with an analysis of the phrase "...that it was good" from the first chapter of Genesis.¹³⁵

¹³² Idem, *Language, Eros, Being*, p. 191. Nevertheless, Wolfson observes this same reverse modality to be present as well in Christian thought. Ibid., p. 255.

¹³³ Wolfson has analyzed a bahiric refutation of Christian messianic incarnationism. *Alef, Mem, Tau*, pp. 145–152.

¹³⁴ Idem, *Language, Eros, Being*, p. 193.

¹³⁵ *Imrei Shefer*, MS Munich-BS 285 fol. 71a; printed edition, p. 79.

He observes that the two Hebrew words that make up this phrase may be related, via a letter permutation (כח כי טוב becomes כח יט) to the numerical values of the solar and lunar cycles, twenty-eight and nineteen years, respectively.¹³⁶ The *sefirot Hokhmah* and *Binah*, and hence the YH and VH, are here invoked through this reference to the sun and moon, respectively. Abulafia uses the method of letter exchange called *'atbash*¹³⁷ to derive the word “למנפש,” whose numerical value, five hundred, is equivalent to what Abulafia refers to as the secret of the words “...that it was good.” This secret, we learn, is “sorcerial effluxes,” as each word of this phrase has a numerical value of five hundred. These effluxes Abulafia refers to as sealed under the hidden letters of the name Shaddai,¹³⁸ whose sum, we have seen, is indeed equal to that of each of the two words in the phrase “sorcerial effluxes.” As well, Abulafia points out, these hidden letters of the name Shaddai are numerically equivalent to the phrase “Be fruitful and multiply.”

Abulafia seeks to convey that the efflux linked to the corporealized Active Intellect or Teli contains a hidden element to be associated with sorcery. This element, Abulafia relates, represents the concealed aspect of the name Shaddai. This is in accord with what we saw earlier, when this name's hidden letters were seen to indicate the demonic Sandalfon.¹³⁹ The name Shaddai, we noted, was long conceived of in Jewish midrashic tradition as the name associated with circumcision, and thus, in esoteric circles, it was regarded as the phallic potency. Indeed, Shaddai, or the *sefira* that it represents, *Yesod*, is regarded as key to the erotic union of the mystic with the divine, a union frequently linked with the phallus' actualization in procreation. For Abulafia, as we observed in chapter three, the procreative capacity of Shaddai, as the Active Intellect, is a recurring theme, from which we understood its apotropaic effectiveness vis-à-vis the threat posed by Lilith, the “sorceress.”

It is clear, then, why Abulafia engages in the numerical association of the phrase “Be fruitful and multiply” with Shaddai. What is striking

¹³⁶ See Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 213–214 for a related passage.

¹³⁷ See above, p. 214 n. 109.

¹³⁸ See above, pp. 199–200.

¹³⁹ By contrast, see *ʿOṣar ʿEden Ganuz*, MS Oxford-BL 1580, fol. 130a; printed edition, p. 286. There, the hidden letters of the name Shaddai are said to indicate the “Prince,” Metatron. In that context, there is no overt reference to Sandalfon, although he may be implied again, as a component of the bifold Metatron, in a subsequent reference to the “spilling of seed,” which carries a sinful connotation.

is that Abulafia here discusses this capacity of Shaddai in direct connection with its “sorcerial effluxes.” In other words, that aspect of Shaddai responsible for procreation (represented by its hidden letters) is, in fact, that half of it which harbors sorcery, that which, to reiterate, had earlier been linked to Lilith, inimical to childbirth. A great ambivalence on Abulafia’s part emerges here toward the component of Shaddai that embodies both fertility and sorcery. This aspect, we may understand from our earlier discussions regarding Sandalfon and the *sefir* *Binah*, is the VH of the Tetragrammaton. It is materiality that underlies both procreation and sorcery. Procreation reflects the positive dimension of corporealization, while also suggesting the potential for erotic union latent in mystical activity. Sorcery reflects the baseness of the turning away from the divine, as in the use of the divine name for a purpose other than “for the sake of heaven.”¹⁴⁰ It is telling that this aspect of the efflux from the Active Intellect, the VH, is as well that with which Jesus is associated by Abulafia, given both his attraction to and abhorrence of this figure. Jesus, on the one hand, serves as a compelling model for Abulafia with respect to the theme of incarnationism, which parallels the “fruitfulness” in the current passage, which may be associated with corporealization. On the other hand, Jesus, for Abulafia, serves as the most venal example of the power of sorcery, which, we have seen, symbolizes death in Abulafia’s view.¹⁴¹

A related discussion of Shaddai, the phrase “Be fruitful and multiply,” and sorcery appears in *Maṣteah ha-Tokhaḥot*. Referring to the name Shaddai as harboring the secret of the phrase, “Be fruitful and multiply,” Abulafia introduces the theme of levirate marriage, suggesting that he will divulge its secret.¹⁴² He refers first to Boaz and Ruth.¹⁴³

¹⁴⁰ See above, pp. 115–116, 166.

¹⁴¹ For the linkage of Jesus with sorcery, see above, p. 213 n. 106. Abulafia picked up on the traditional accusation of sorcery leveled by Jews against Jesus. In this regard, the association by Abulafia of Jesus with Egypt, the land, in his estimation, of both carnality and sorcery, is significant. See also p. 42 n. 56 above regarding zoharic associations of Egypt with femininity. Idel notes that Abulafia conceived of the exodus from Egypt as the vanquishing of the imaginative faculty. *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics in Abraham Abulafia*, p. 69.

¹⁴² *Maṣteah ha-Tokhaḥot*, MS Oxford-BL 1605, fols. 77a–b; printed edition, p. 94. Levirate marriage refers to the marriage of one’s deceased brother’s widow, at times referred to as obligatory when the deceased brother lacked a male heir. See Deut. 25:5–6.

¹⁴³ Although the redemption in this biblical narrative is not, strictly speaking, an example of levirate marriage.

Abulafia seems to be most interested in both the notion of redemption in this story and in the progeny that results, which will lead ultimately to the messianic figure of David. With respect to levirate marriage itself, Abulafia perceives an encrypted reference to the Teli in the phrase, regarding a widow's brother-in-law (Deut. 25:10), "The house of him whose shoe was loosened." Abulafia rearranges the letters of this phrase to read "The shoe is outside (*hus*) of the house," such that another passage is recalled (Deut. 25:5), "... the wife of the dead shall not go out (*ha-husah*) to a stranger." Abulafia next reconfigures the earlier phrase "The house of him whose shoe was loosened" to read "Outside (*ba-hus*) answer the Teli."¹⁴⁴

Regarding the child of levirate marriage, the phrase (Deut. 25:6) "...[the firstborn] who she bears will be named [after the deceased brother] ..." is next the subject of Abulafia's analysis, and the theme of the Teli is prevalent in the string of *gematriyot* that ensues. "The head of the Teli is above," "the Teli is the Prince of the World," "the world is the Prince of the Teli," and "upon the name of the Teli" are some of the results of Abulafia's consideration of the child who is the fruit of levirate marriage. The brother who has died, Abulafia next demonstrates through a *gematria*, is himself the Teli, who, Abulafia suggests, is given life anew through the remarriage and birth of a child: "His brother who died, the second revives the dead. That is, the second who revives the first who died in procreating 'who the Teli preceded,' [from the phrase] (Deut. 25:6) '... [the firstborn] who she bears will be named [after the deceased brother] ...'" Positioning the essential unity of the two brothers in levirate marriage,¹⁴⁵ Abulafia then discusses Deuteronomy 25:11. This verse refers to a woman who defends her husband by seizing his assailant by the genitals, *bi-mevushav*. Abulafia views the assailant as the husband's "brother," insofar as they are both Israelites. Subsequently, this word for genitals Abulafia draws into a numerical equivalence with each word of the phrase "messiah serpent in his names."¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁴ *Maftelah ha-Tokhaḥot*, MS Oxford-BL 1605, fols. 77b–78a; printed edition, pp. 94–95.

¹⁴⁵ Abulafia first writes, "...the deceased, the brother, is himself the Teli, because he is his brother and his son and know that they are the branch and the fruit joined together with the root." Following this, Abulafia refers to Deuteronomy 25:5 and 25:11, which refer to "brothers together" and "men together, a man and his brother." *Maftelah ha-Tokhaḥot*, MS Oxford-BL 1605, fol. 78a; printed edition, p. 96.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, MS Oxford-BL 1605, fols. 78a–b; printed edition, pp. 95–96.

On the face of it, there is no obvious reason for Abulafia to be as intent as he is on linking the motif of the Teli with levirate marriage, so the passage calls for closer inspection. It is Abulafia's final assertion here that is helpful. He suggests that "serpent" is an appellation for the messiah. Although he mentions only the Teli and no serpent prior to this point, we know the two to be synonymous for Abulafia. This serpent, we see in several other treatments put forward by Abulafia, may be discussed as the tempter of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden and as the brazen serpent of Exodus.¹⁴⁷ It is to the latter conception of the serpent that we must turn to understand Abulafia's discussion.

In at least two interrelated discussions, we have seen Jesus implicitly linked by Abulafia with the procreative function of Shaddai. This provides us with a valuable clue with respect to the current context of levirate marriage, where the same phrase, "Be fruitful and multiply," is again seen to refer to Shaddai. Abulafia's identification of the messiah with the serpent is precisely what we find with respect to Jesus in the Gospel of John (3:13–15): "And no one has ascended to heaven but he who came down from heaven, the Son of Man who is in heaven. And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life." John intends that the upright brazen serpent in the desert be seen as a prefiguration of Jesus' crucifixion.¹⁴⁸

The crux of the matter is that, as in the verses from John, the motif of the serpent for Abulafia is entwined around the themes of messiahship and resurrection. The redemption of the deceased brother through the son born to the surviving brother Abulafia discusses in messianic terms. Abulafia elaborates upon the last word of Ruth 4:8, "So when the redeemer said to Boaz, 'Acquire for yourself,' he drew off his shoe." He derives the phrase "locked garden"¹⁴⁹ from the words "in the shoe of the brother-in-law." The reference to the garden here represents the notion of mystical practice as the entering into the Garden of Eden and, particularly, Abulafia's own mystical achievements. The latter entailed a messianic dimension, in Abulafia's own estimation. The messianic subtext to Abulafia's discourse is

¹⁴⁷ See *ibid.*, MS Oxford-BL 1605, fol. 25b; printed edition, p. 8; *Maḥshev ha-Sefirot*, MS Milan-BA 53, fol. 179a; printed edition, p. 85.

¹⁴⁸ See Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, p. 130.

¹⁴⁹ Song of Songs 4:12.

rendered explicit at the end of the passage, but it is already suggested in Abulafia's reference to Boaz' davidic line. So too, as in the verses from John, the motif of the serpent, for Abulafia, is accompanied by the notion of resurrection; Abulafia explicitly views the survival of the deceased brother's name in the brother's son's name as a "revival" of the deceased brother.

Though there is no specific reference to Jesus or the brazen serpent in this passage, it is difficult to justify Abulafia's desire to link levirate marriage with the Teli, and to identify the deceased brother as the Teli or serpent, without taking account of the linkage by Christians of Jesus with the brazen serpent. The confluence of messiahhood with resurrection and the serpent in Abulafia's text runs remarkably parallel with the Christian themes discussed. In view of this connection, it is worthwhile to examine Abulafia's first observation, with respect to Shaddai and the injunction to "Be fruitful and multiply." Abulafia notes that by multiplying the letter *shin* (equalling three hundred) of Shaddai by its remaining letters, *yod* and *dalet* (equalling fourteen), the total of forty-two hundred is reached. "Their sign," he writes, "is *dar*." *Dar* actually has a sum of two hundred and four, so Abulafia seems to be suggesting that the digits be shuffled in order to derive this word.

Dar is a precious stone referred to in the early theosophic work, the *Bahir*,¹⁵⁰ that aspect of the divine indwelling in the lower world, which, that text reads, contains the commandments. As such, it naturally stands for Abulafia as that component of the Active Intellect that is materialized as the Torah in the terrestrial realm. This stone is expected by the bahiric authors to ascend in the redemptive future to the place of its partner, the stone *Soheret*. *Dar* is, additionally, linked in the *Bahir* to Jacob. To this stone, *Dar*, the bahiric authors applied Psalm 118:22, "The stone that has been rejected has become the chief cornerstone."¹⁵¹ What is noteworthy about the decision on the part

¹⁵⁰ *Bahir*, § 131, 61, 133.

¹⁵¹ It should be observed that, in the *Bahir*, the two stones *Soheret* and *Dar* are linked implicitly with the two scriptural cantillation signs *zarqa'* and *segulta*. To both of these pairs are assigned Psalm 118:22 and Genesis 49:24 ("From there is the shepherd, the stone of Israel"). *Bahir*, § 61, 131, 133. Significantly, a mystical tradition centered around the *zarqa'* as the uroborus, the cosmological serpent devouring its own tail. See Wolfson, "Biblical Accentuation," II, pp. 5-6. Abulafia certainly establishes a linkage in many of his discussions between the Teli and the uroborus, so from this it may also be apparent why he was attracted to the idea of linking the Teli with the bahiric stone

of the bahiric authorship to apply this particular Psalm to *Dar* is the persistence with which the Psalm is cited in the New Testament, as against the relative disinterest with which it was treated in prior Jewish exegetical literature. In the New Testament, as well as in the writings of the early Church fathers, the psalm's stone is often taken to refer to Jesus.¹⁵²

Abulafia's decision to refer to the bahiric stone *Dar*—indeed, his somewhat tortured struggle to do so numerically—is consistent with what we have seen as far as his predilections with respect to the hidden aspect of the Active Intellect. The latter he understands both as that aspect of the divinity that is concretized in the lower world and as Jacob, whom he references here as Metatron.¹⁵³ This position runs quite parallel with the bahiric notions of *Dar* mentioned. Abulafia's attraction to the bahiric motif of *Dar*, fraught as it is with its own christological parallels, is worthy of note. It is consistent with that tendency that we noted regarding the christological parallel in Abulafia's interest in levirate marriage and its connection to the Teli. This hidden, christological dimension to the Active Intellect seems to emerge most frequently for Abulafia when the Active Intellect is troped as the Teli.

Earlier we noted how Abulafia, in a passage from *Imrei Shefer*, had put forth the idea of the word incarnate, made “flesh and blood” as the name in the form of the YH and the VH. These he had as well drawn into a close connection with the Teli. In the current passage from *Mafteah ha-Tokhahot*, one final, related observation should be made. Immediately after his mention of the stone *Dar*, Abulafia writes, “And thus ‘Shaddai speaks,’ and its secret is ‘lofty Gabriel;’¹⁵⁴ the power of Shaddai encompasses the ‘image of God;’ it comprises the level of all speaking creatures.” Abulafia here stresses the verbal component of

dar. See also Giller, *The Enlightened Will Shine*, pp. 12–13, regarding *zarqa*’ and *segulla* with respect to the sefirotic scheme in *Tiqqunei Zohar*.

¹⁵² See, for instance, Matt. 21:42, Acts 4:11, Mark 12:10–11, 1Pet. 2:4, 7.

¹⁵³ See Wolfson, “The Image of Jacob.” In *’Or ha-Sekhel (The Light of the Intellect)*, Abulafia equates Jacob with the Teli. The name Ya’aqov by a letter transposition becomes *’aqavi*, indicating the tail of the Teli, while the letters of Jacob’s other appellation, Yisra’el, may be transposed to spell *le-ro’shi*, indicating the head of the Teli. MS Vatican-BA ebr. 233, fol. 98a; printed edition, p. 94.

¹⁵⁴ Idel observes Abulafia’s equation of Gabriel with the Active Intellect in *Hayyei ha-’Olam ha-Ba’*. *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics in Abraham Abulafia*, p. 33.

Shaddai, which we can associate with both the flow of prophecy and the permutation of letters. The “word” from the earlier passage from *Imrei Shefer* should be understood in like terms. Its constituent parts, the letters, recall demiurgic notions of the Logos.¹⁵⁵

Abulafia’s discussion in *Maftelah ha-Tokhahot* of levirate marriage is certainly an intriguing one with respect to its christological overtones. Some of the same motifs found therein are recast by Abulafia elsewhere in the same treatise. We read,¹⁵⁶

And because God wished to announce to us the nature of blood, He announced first the secret of the *qorban* (sacrifice) in Leviticus. And He announced to us the secret of the altar and its nature and the secret of the sacrifice and its truth and the secret of the sacrificed and its root and the secret of that which is offered and its source. And these are four connected matters and they are the altar which is the place at which the spilling of blood of the *qorban* is always performed, because it is a place fixed and prepared for this. And the blood that is spilled upon the outer altar that is prepared for sacrifice and placed at the opening of the tent of meeting is called the blood of the *‘olah*. And it [“blood of the *‘olah*”] is [numerically equivalent to] “tent of meeting” by permutation and its name is the copper [*nehoshet*; the same word may also mean “brass”] altar. And its secret is understood from the name of the serpent which is called brazen (*nehoshet*) serpent. And the secret of “tabernacle” is “pulled;” also it is understood from “*Shekhinah*” and from “bite,” because the serpent bites. And the secret of the copper altar is “thought of the cantor” and in it are “times of repentance” “as *Binah* as repentance [or, return]” “as the rainbow” “as the root” “from repentance [is] *Binah*” “from *Binah* [is] repentance.” And thus the copper altar’s nature is the serpent and it is the place wherein is revealed how Satan will die. Because this is the aim of the intention and he who spills there his blood “kills his Satan [accuser],” and if not, “Satan kills him.”

In his consideration of this passage,¹⁵⁷ Wolfson notes that the spilling of the blood on this altar represents the defeat of “the imagination or the bodily senses,” symbolized by Satan or the serpent. Wolfson cites the passage as he makes the point that, for Abulafia, as for a number of his predecessors, ritual sacrifice receives a mystical recasting, to which

¹⁵⁵ Idel points to a related passage in *Sheva’ Netivot ha-Torah*, in which the efflux from the Active Intellect is referred to as the “Word.” Idem, “Abulafia’s Secrets of the Guide,” p. 305.

¹⁵⁶ *Maftelah ha-Tokhahot*, MS Oxford-BL 1605, fols. 54b–55a; printed edition, p. 57.

¹⁵⁷ Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia*, p. 222 n. 132.

prayer as well is subjected.¹⁵⁸ Wolfson subsequently observes that, in the passage currently under consideration, Abulafia's numerical equation of the phrase "thought of the cantor" with "the copper altar" draws prayer and sacrifice into an equivalence, so that both receive Abulafia's mystical coloration.¹⁵⁹

Abulafia identifies the outer, copper altar with the brazen serpent. The serpent, Abulafia observes elsewhere, roughly paraphrasing Exodus, both kills and revives.¹⁶⁰ The brazen serpent in the present context preserves its salutary dimension and is of service in the killing of Satan by the man who engages in the spilling of the blood of the sacrifice. Satan's death, as Wolfson observes, is here tantamount to mystical attainment. In this we may understand the references to a return to the *sefira Binah*, an ascent fraught with a messianic and redemptive significance.¹⁶¹ As well, the death of Satan is expressed in terms of the experience of the individual mystic; the mystic's sacrifice, his mystical operation, results in the death of "his Satan," or, if it fails, in his own death. In this is encapsulated again the sense of the danger that inheres in the mystical project.

When discussing Abulafia's interest in the precious stone *Dar*, we had noted that the bahiric authors describe the stone's destiny, a redemptive ascent or return to its origin. For later interpreters, as we see explicitly in the above passage from Abulafia, the place of mystical return generally is the *sefira Binah*. There is a parallelism in the linkage of the notion of return, the bahiric stone *Dar* and the Teli or serpent in the earlier passage from *Mafteah ha-Tokhaḥot*, on the one hand, and, in the current context, the notion of return to *Binah*, sacrifice located at the outer copper altar and the brazen serpent, on the other hand. We were aware, in the former passage, of the Christian themes surrounding Jesus' identification with the brazen serpent and in the *Bahir's* recourse to the christologically evocative Psalm 118:22.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid., pp. 221, 223. See also Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, p. 306; Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, pp. 53–55; Dan, "Midrash and the Dawn of Kabbalah," p. 131; "Prayer as Text and Prayer as Mystical Experience," p. 37; "The Emergence of Mystical Prayer," p. 97–101.

¹⁵⁹ Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia*, p. 222 n. 132.

¹⁶⁰ See, for instance, *Mafteah ha-Sefirot*, MS Milan-BA 53, fol. 179a; printed edition, p. 85.

¹⁶¹ See Gikatilla, *Sha'arei 'Orah*, vol. 2, pp 60–61, for *Binah* and the concept of *teshuvah* (return or repentance).

In this connection, Fossum notes that, in the Gospel of John, the same text in which the motif of the brazen serpent was linked to Jesus, the author seeks to equate Jesus with the Temple's altar stone. At John 2:19, Jesus draws a parallel between himself and the Temple. Later, at John 7:38, Jesus associates himself with salvic waters, a notion in keeping, Fossum observes,¹⁶² with the tradition of such waters as flowing from the Temple, and, more particularly, from the altar stone.¹⁶³ Finally, at John 10:35, during the reconsecration ceremony of the altar stone, Fossum observes that Jesus refers to himself as the reconsecrated one, implying his self-identification with the altar stone. Within this network of interrelated motifs we may now properly contextualize Abulafia's own interest in equating the brazen serpent with the altar stone.

I do believe that Abulafia was conscious of the interplay of these motifs. What he ultimately intends here will require some further attention. In terms of the symbolism of the serpent, apparent here is that an ambivalent portrayal is manifest once more, on Abulafia's part, concerning a motif associated with Jesus. Continuing, Abulafia writes,

And thus the blood spilled on the brazen altar is the blood of "accusers [satans] of death." And indeed the golden altar, which is the inner altar, is not fit for spilling of blood, only for incense, and thus its place is before the ark of testimonies...And know that it [incense] is made from four kinds of spices, and their sign is "table," or, it is said, "for the serpent"...

Abulafia contrasts the sacrifices of the outer altar, which are blood offerings, to be linked to the battle against Satan, and those of the inner altar, which, he will later go on to indicate, in their bloodlessness are to be seen as removed from the base sensory world. In the excerpt above, the inner altar may be placed before the ark only because its

¹⁶² Fossum, *The Image of the Invisible God*, p. 131.

¹⁶³ Ibid., pp. 117, 131. The altar stone in this regard is taken as well to be the "foundation stone" which stops up the waters of the deep. The similarity of this motif with that of the "chief cornerstone" from Psalm 118:22 should be noted.

sacrifices are bloodless. The two aspects of the mystic's constitution and the nature of his bipartite operations are here expressed. Yet, with respect to the inner altar Abulafia refers again to the serpent, this time in relation to the spiritualized, or, more fittingly, intellectual, incense. The four spices, which we may take as a counterpoint to the "four connected matters" mentioned at the outset of Abulafia's discussion of the outer altar, are seen here to yield an acrostic for the word "table," whose letters are rearranged to read, "for the serpent."

Thus, the serpent must be linked not only with the outer altar, where it figured so prominently, but with the inner one, where it still receives a mention as well. We may understand this as another expression of the bifold nature of the serpent, embodying head and tail, messiah and Jesus, God and Satan. Nevertheless, as we have indicated, the lesser aspect of the Teli, to be linked with the shedding of blood, still maintains a positive valence. This lesser aspect of the Teli is linked with Satan only insofar as he is engaged as the mystic's opponent in relation to the outer altar. The references to the two aspects of the serpent, with respect to the inner and outer altars, are *both* salutary. In this, Abulafia's nuanced perspective regarding the material aspect of the Active Intellect is once more apparent. In his tapping into Jesus' parallel identification as the altar and the brazen serpent in Christian doctrine, positive associations regarding Jesus are a noteworthy outcome of Abulafia's thought, one reflecting Abulafia's profound psychological ambivalence toward Christianity.

By extension, this ambivalence finds expression as well in Abulafia's parallel discussion of blood. We have seen that the copper altar is relegated to a position outside of the tent of meeting because blood is spilled upon it. It is profane in comparison to the inner altar and its incense; we have already discussed the base and corporeal dimension of blood in Abulafia's thought.¹⁶⁴ Despite this, Abulafia indicates the spiritual nature of blood, noting Deuteronomy 12:23, "...the blood is the soul..." It is this aspect of blood, Abulafia indicates, that makes it an essential part of offerings of atonement, following Leviticus 17:11. Referring to the latter passage and its requirement to set aside blood, while flesh may be eaten, Abulafia writes,

¹⁶⁴ See above, pp. 42–44, 50–51, 146 n. 95, 182, 188 n. 29, 189 n. 34, 200.

Behold the wonders of Torah and how it reveals our nature with respect to the matter near to the animal and with respect to the form of the matter that is near to that which is a power from the powers of demons. And one must atone in them known atonements in order that no harm to the intellectual soul will come by means of them because of their being hindrances to the power of apprehending the Holy One, blessed be He and His attributes and His actions through His names within which all was created and written and sealed. Thus, permitted is the flesh and the blood is forbidden...this announces in its words the power and nature of flesh and the power and nature of blood...

Abulafia had made mention earlier of the Yom Kippur offering to the demon Azazel. Here he clearly suggests that offerings of this type to demons, or the mystical analogs to such acts, protect the intellectual soul during mystical practice, which is focused upon both the *sefirot* (His attributes) and the divine names. The eating of flesh as against the prohibition of drinking blood is connected here, respectively, with base matter and with its form. The latter is of a demonic nature. It is a "power," in which respect it appears to be of a higher order than the utterly material flesh in which it inheres, after the fashion of blood which is of the soul, but it is demonic, after the fashion of the blood which is offered to propitiate demons.

Overall, Abulafia's complicated attitude toward blood is apparent.¹⁶⁵ It is inferior to the intellectual incense. It is nevertheless of the soul. And it is, or may be, demonic. And, interestingly, it is conceived of as part of a mystical equivalent to an idolatrous practice, the blood sacrifice to demons. This practice is essentially advocated by Abulafia, though it is proscribed in one of the very passages (Lev. 17:7) which he adduces.¹⁶⁶ In the midst, then, of Abulafia's ambivalent appraisal of the nature of blood, we find him again assigning an important place in mystical practice to that which partakes of the idolatrous.

Some final thoughts on the nature of sacrifice and its relatedness here to notions of Jesus are in order. We have observed Abulafia's interest in conceiving of the *sefirot* in anthropocentric terms,¹⁶⁷ as against the theocentric thrust of the theosophic kabbalah. Nevertheless, Abulafia preserves a perspective on the *sefirot* as components of the divine realm, as in his discussion of ritual sacrifice. Indeed, Abulafia is explicit

¹⁶⁵ For Abulafia's twofold perspective on blood, see above, pp. 186–188.

¹⁶⁶ The scriptural sacrifice to Azazel was not a blood sacrifice. Such sacrifices to demons were expressly forbidden.

¹⁶⁷ See Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 123, 145.

regarding both of these dimensions of the *sefirot* in a passage from *Maṣteah ha-Hokhmot* (*The Key of Wisdom*),¹⁶⁸ written in 1289, around the same time as both *Maṣteah ha-Tokhaḥot* and *Imrei Shefer*. In this context, Abulafia explains that redemption of the soul, as against the body's exile, is a consequence of the mystical equivalent of the *qorban*.

The case that Abulafia puts forth in this regard is that of Abraham, whose soul was redeemed and who came into possession of a covenant with God, all through the "drawing near [*leqarev*, a play on the similarity of this word to *qorban*, which share the same root consonants] of the divine potencies to the human potencies."¹⁶⁹ This covenant was consummated through the change in Abraham's nature, the integration of the feminine element within him, that came through the addition of the letter *he'* to his name. Abraham stands here as the paradigm of the successful mystic, who realizes his covenant and is made whole through his "drawing near" to the divine. Naturally, then, the patriarch Abraham stands particularly for his namesake, Abulafia himself. This understanding of Abulafia's intent may be integrated with a remark made by Wolfson:¹⁷⁰

It is undeniably true, as Idel has already noted, that Abulafia has removed the bahiric expression [regarding the "wordplay of *qorban* and *leqarev*"] from its original theosophical framework and interpreted it as a metaphor for the act of cleaving to the divine... [However,] despite the obvious shift from a theocentric to an anthropocentric perspective, there is still a significant claim being made about the nature of the divine powers.

Wolfson refers here to Abulafia's sense of a theurgical dimension to the sacrifice as accompanying its mystical one. One may be reminded here of the Christian conception of Jesus as embodying and replacing Temple sacrifice.¹⁷¹ That is, the ancient theocentric perspective on Temple sacrifice, where human participation extends only as far as

¹⁶⁸ See *ibid.*, p. 122.

¹⁶⁹ See also *ibid.*, p. 221. Here Wolfson presents a passage in which Abulafia equates thought with the sacrifice.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

¹⁷¹ Paul is most explicit in this regard. See 1 Cor. 5:7: "...Christ our Passover lamb has been sacrificed." See also Eph. 5:2. There Jesus is described as "...an offering and sacrifice whose fragrance is pleasing to God." See also Heb. 9:26, 13:11–12. In the latter example Jesus is equated directly with the sin offering made by the Temple high priest. Jesus is also cast as a model for others in this regard. See Rom. 12:1: "...I implore you by God's mercy to offer your very selves to him: a living sacrifice..."

the presentation of an offering that may ameliorate divine judgment, is supplied with a manifestly anthropocentric dimension in the figure of Jesus. In Abulafia's thinking, it is the mystic who "draws near" as the substitute for traditional ritual sacrifice.¹⁷² More specifically, it is Abulafia himself, as "Abraham," who represents the transformation that we know to understand as a divinization. In his conception of the sacrifice, then, Jesus is the appropriate model for Abulafia. In this, Wolfson's insight is prescient that the sense of the *sefirot* as components of the divine realm in the sacrificial dynamic must be preserved. The mystic himself—and, particularly, Abulafia, in his proto-christological messianic self-conception—is divinized and comes to a hypostatic participation of his own in the divine realm.¹⁷³

Moses' Rod and Eve's Serpent: Mysticism and Sorcery

I would like to return to two themes that we had temporarily put aside, these being the nature of the verbal element of the Active Intellect and the Teli's presentation in the guise of Moses' rod. In a passage from *Maṣleah ha-Sefirot* (*The Key of the Sefirot*), written as well around 1289, Abulafia refers to Numbers 20:7, which concerns Moses' procuring water from a rock. He writes, "...Because God, may He be blessed, sought to announce to Israel that in two forms it has the ability to alter specific natures, and they are with a blow with the rod and with speech with the tongue..."¹⁷⁴ The connection cited by Abulafia of the "blow with the rod" and speech relates to Abulafia's earlier discussion of Moses' rod as the Active Intellect, the Teli and the verbal potency.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷² Brody cites Azriel of Gerona's notion of the high priest's angelicization and ascension as a result of the sacrificial ritual. "Human Hands Dwell in Heavenly Heights," p. 150.

¹⁷³ Wolfson as well observes the transformation of the mystic into an angel. See, for instance, *Abraham Abulafia*, p. 148. M. Fishbane notes that Ibn Ezra conceived of himself as the Yom Kippur sacrifice. *The Kiss of God*, p. 93. Another of the modes by which this hypostatic participation in the supernal sefirotic realm is discussed by Abulafia is within the aforementioned motif of the divinized figure of Jacob. Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 128–129. See also *ibid.*, pp. 146, 150.

¹⁷⁴ *Maṣleah ha-Sefirot*, MS Milan-BA 53, fol. 179a; printed edition, p. 84.

¹⁷⁵ See above, pp. 212–215.

The ability to “alter specific natures” recalls the wonder-working that Abulafia sees as the gift of the prophet and of the mystic.¹⁷⁶

Since Abulafia has mystical practice in mind in his treatment of this passage, the two vehicles chosen for the achievement of natural signs, the rod and the tongue, carry an added significance. Abulafia appears to intend their correspondence with the physical loci of the two covenants mentioned in *Sefer Yeṣirah*. That text, referring to the covenants of the tongue and the phallus, suggests that they are the means by which the depths of the *sefirot* may be plumbed.¹⁷⁷ Of course, although the reference to the tongue in Abulafia’s treatment of the passage from Numbers is explicit, Abulafia alludes only to Moses’ “rod.” Shortly, however, we will examine another passage where this motif’s phallic connotation is revealed more explicitly.¹⁷⁸ For the time being we may recall our earlier observation of the dangerous femininity embodied by Jesus and Sandalfon, the VH or satanic component of the Active Intellect. By contrast, Moses’ action in the passage from Numbers, as a symbol for the conduct of the masculine mystic, we should expect to signify the virile phallus. This notion runs parallel to Abulafia’s linkage of Shaddai, as the Active Intellect, to the phrase “Be fruitful and multiply.” In the current context, Abulafia does not elaborate upon the significance of the rod, but that he sees it as the serpent and as the Active Intellect is apparent.

¹⁷⁶ See above, pp. 6, 107, 213. Scholem notes Abulafia’s view that the only truly efficacious magic is “spiritual and inward,” that is, in keeping with Abulafia’s kabbalah of names, and that the claims made by those who use the names with a different orientation are lies. *The Kabbalah of Sefer Temunah*, p. 181 (in Hebrew). See also idem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, p. 145, where Abulafia’s practice is termed a “magic of inwardness.” This perspective is similar to the one observed earlier with respect to the manipulation of demonic names. Idel observes Abulafia’s accordance, in *Sheva’ Netivot ha-Torah*, of the ability to “change any aspect of nature” to the highest level of prophecy. *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics in Abraham Abulafia*, p. 105. Idel notes Abulafia’s indebtedness to *Midrash Tehillim*, where wonder-working and the ability to resurrect the dead are seen as the gifts accorded the one who is capable of placing the Torah in its proper order. This is taken by Abulafia to refer to letter permutation, although, as Idel notes, Abulafia’s specific interest in adapting this notion is not in wider acts of magic but specifically in the resurrection of the dead. *Ibid.*, p. 81. See also Scholem, *The Kabbalah of Sefer Temunah*, p. 177 (in Hebrew).

¹⁷⁷ *Sefer Yeṣirah*, Gruenwald ed., 1:3, 4 (paragraphs 3, 4).

¹⁷⁸ *Maṣteah ha-Tokhaḥot*, MS Oxford-BL 1605, fol. 25b; printed edition, p. 8.

Abulafia continues by tracing the course, through Numbers, of the story of the Israelites in the desert. Referring to the loss of faith in God on the part of the Israelites, he writes,¹⁷⁹

The verbal holiness, which is the root of faith for the holy people, was not sustained then by the will of God, and Moses and Aaron were the cause of the absence of this holiness, which is the cause of faith and the cause of this absence was the transgression of disobedience... And indeed after this comes the subject of Edom (Num. 20:14), hinting to its being the cause of all deception, and after it comes immediately the matter of Aaron's being gathered to his people (Num. 20:26) and the replacement of man [Aaron] by man [Eleazar], and Eleazar filled the place of his father Aaron. And also after their destruction of the Canaanites, again they returned to their disgrace in compassing the land of Edom (Num. 21:4).

By the loss of "verbal holiness," Abulafia intends God's rendering the Active Intellect inaccessible as a result of Israel's "disobedience." This act of God, Abulafia writes, caused Israel's subsequent loss of faith. Certainly Abulafia intends an allegorical reading of his remarks, and we can see that they conform to our prior discussion of the role that faith played in Abulafia's understanding of mystical hermeneutical practice. We had observed that the mystic depends upon his own certitude with respect to the propriety of his mystical activity. He must have faith in his interpretive faculty, and, in a circular dynamic, that faculty must afford him the assurance that he is not partaking of the demonic. Doubt betrays the possible presence of heresy.¹⁸⁰ Thus, in Abulafia's mystical practice, "verbal holiness"—proper hermeneutical activity with respect to the letters of the alphabet during letter permutation—depends on faith, to which it also gives rise. We sensed in the inherent danger in this project the threat posed by Christianity.

In the current context this perception is reinforced, for Abulafia regards it as significant that the loss of faith of the Israelites is followed closely by a discussion of Edom. Abulafia writes that Edom is the "cause of all deception," and thus of Israel's loss of faith. Thus we may understand that it is Edom—that is, Christianity—that results in the "deception" that Abulafia mentions.¹⁸¹ This "deception" we discussed

¹⁷⁹ *Maftelah ha-Sefrot*, MS Milan-BA 53, fol. 179a; printed edition, pp. 84–85.

¹⁸⁰ See above, pp. 116–119.

¹⁸¹ For another example of the understanding of Edom as Christendom, see above, p. 153 n. 113.

earlier as well in terms of obstructing demons, which delude the mystic, in the absence of what is here referred to as “verbal holiness,” and lead him into heresy.

Referring to the Israelites’ speaking out against God (Num. 21:5), Abulafia writes,

And thus the very wonderful secret was clarified and explained. And they sinned verbally, inverting the sin of Moses, because Moses sinned when he did not speak and they sinned when they spoke, and the serpent with Eve sinned verbally, and thus their punishment was from the serpent’s bite.

The potency embodied in speech, linked with Moses’ aforementioned mystically efficacious “serpent,” is now contrasted with its sinister analog, evil speech, which is associated both with Eve’s serpent and with the avenging serpents of Numbers 21:6. Recalling that Eve’s sin with the serpent was of a sexual nature adds a further dimension to this analogy. Moses’ serpent represents masculine virility, while Eve’s stands as sexual transgression, the nature of which we have seen to be of an emasculating variety. We noted earlier Lilith’s appearance in Abulafia’s discussion of the demonic knots of the tefillin.¹⁸² There, she, too, represented the demonic threat posed to the mystic’s reconstituted masculinity. Insofar as Abulafia has just linked the loss of “verbal holiness,” with Edom, we may note the recurrence here of the linkage of emasculation with Christianity, as a parallel is generated between the pairing of Edom and Eve’s serpent and that of prophetic capabilities and the serpent/rod of Moses.

Abulafia continues, referring to the salvation of the Israelites by means of the brazen serpent erected by Moses,

And it comes in a received doctrine that the serpent kills or the serpent gives life; when Israel looks above and raises their eyes to there they are healed. And thus it is known that he who looks above and sees the Teli, which is the brazen serpent according to the shared noun that is decreed, and it is known that its power is nothing other than the power of sorcery, and he recognizes his Creator, he is healed.

The twofold aspect of the motif of the serpent Abulafia here addresses specifically. That he has had in mind the Teli is clarified as well. The latter, we have observed, stands as the Active Intellect, synonymous

¹⁸² See above, pp. 202–204.

with God's Glory or the *Shekhinah*. Here we may sense a significant link to earlier Ḥaside Ashkenaz mystical practice. The German Pietists had propounded a method of cleaving to the Glory in prayer by focusing their mental energies on God Himself.¹⁸³ In the current context, Abulafia addresses the healing power perceived as latent in the Teli, but he delineates a heretical threat there as well. The Teli is sorcerous in nature, and, consistent with the notion that recourse to the power of the stars represents idolatry, Abulafia insists that the human being must recognize that the healing power of the celestial Teli is conferred by God. When he does so, he is healed. If he is deluded by the appearance of the Teli and does not recognize God's hand, he falls into sorcery.

The intricate links between Jesus, sorcery, the Teli and the Active Intellect have earlier been established. Our prior observation regarding the consistency of Abulafia's doctrine with the model set forth in the Gospel of John, where Jesus represents the brazen serpent, is here also significant. On the basis of this network of interconnected themes, it is appropriate to conclude that, in the current context, Abulafia again articulates the view that the demonic and sorcerous threat imbedded in the nature of the Teli is encapsulated in the person of Jesus.¹⁸⁴

Tellingly, there is here a profound and familiar ambivalence on Abulafia's part regarding the Teli. We see that its potency, though genuine and salutary, is demonic. Thus, contending with the Teli in mystical practice is as perilous as is grappling with the imagination, whose nature, in the current context, it seems to echo. God's guiding hand behind the Teli indicates the higher, intellective component of the Active Intellect, operative behind the necessary products of the imagination. The implications in terms of Jesus are noteworthy, as

¹⁸³ Wolfson, *Through a Speculum That Shines*, pp. 246–263. See also Dan, “The Emergence of Jewish Mysticism in Medieval Germany,” pp. 72–73. Dan discusses the Special Cherub Circle, who directed their prayers, not to the enthroned cherub, but to the *Kavod* beyond. For Eleazar of Worms' instruction to bow to the *Kavod* while directing one's intentionality to the Tetragrammaton, see Abrams, “The Secret of All Secrets,” p. 71 (in Hebrew).

¹⁸⁴ On the identification of the Teli with Jesus, see *Maḥfiah ha-Shemot*, MS NY-JTSA Mic. 1897, fol. 82a; printed edition, pp. 130–131. There, Abulafia reports that Jesus “did not receive his power from the unique name. Rather, all of his power depended (*talui*) upon the image of the Teli, because he was hanged (*talui*) upon the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” See Berger, “The Messianic Self-Consciousness of Abraham Abulafia,” p. 57. See above, p. 164 n. 144.

he comes again to stand as the heretical threat which is nonetheless indispensable for the mystic.

That the head and tail of the Teli should be understood as Moses' rod and Eve's serpent is implied in another passage, from *Maṣteah ha-Tokhaḥot*, as well from the same period.¹⁸⁵ Referring to the Teli and its celestial movements, Abulafia writes,

And this is the place of the sorcery of the world, in the ingathering of the powers of the Teli in the wheel in the edifice of its moon and in [its] entrails and in the likeness of the form of the serpent in its revolving, and, in its placing of its collected tail, its body will proceed until the tail will return to the midpoint of the wheel of its body, and its head is the beginning of its wheel. And it is known that its movement is to its two sides, and thus sometimes it will stand straight in the likeness of a rod, and from this he who understands will understand the secret of Eve's serpent and the secret of the rod of Moses and the secret of the brazen serpent. And this secret is the joining of this aforementioned course according to the elements air, fire, water, earth; fire, air, earth, water. [These] eight reverse and are repeated continuously... One must join this with this [upper elements with upper, lower with lower] until this is acted upon by this and this is acted upon from this. Therefore it will be at the hands of the ministers which are the seven roving stars which are intermediaries between the constellations and the elements.

It appears that the "two sides" of the Teli are indicated by Eve's serpent and by Moses' "straight" rod. It is less clear where to assign the brazen serpent, although we have seen it described earlier as embodying the two opposing aspects that now are symbolized by Eve's and Moses' serpents. It appears that all three serpent motifs are related to the joining of the four elements in two possible sequences. This action is based upon the movement of the Teli with respect to the other constellations, which is conceptually linked to the four elements.¹⁸⁶

Once more the Teli is explicitly linked here with sorcery. Abulafia perceives that the relationship of the Teli to the other constellations and to the elements harbors a magical efficacy. In *Maṣteah ha-Sefirot*, Abulafia referred to the supernatural acts of Moses in his discussion

¹⁸⁵ *Maṣteah ha-Tokhaḥot*, MS Oxford-BL 1605, fols. 25b–26a; printed edition, p. 8, mentioned above, p. 227 n. 147.

¹⁸⁶ This may indicate the pattern that we have seen earlier, where the constellations are grouped into four sets of three each, according here to the four elements. The seven migrating stars are referenced in terms of their presumed cosmological position, below the constellations and above the world of the four elements. They appear to mediate between the upper and lower elements.

of the changing of “specific natures.” These likely bear a relationship to what is discussed in the current context. Such acts, in the former context, were seen to be effected through Moses’ rod and speech. In the current context, the “joining” of the Teli with the constellations or with the elements, performed by means of the permutation of the two sets of four elements, by which a gap is bridged between upper elements and lower, lies behind the Teli’s sorcerous potency. Abulafia does not provide additional information, but, given that there are two sequences of the four elements, we may suspect that one of these indicates a pious potency, the other a demonic. This conjecture seems supported by the discourse in which Abulafia engages immediately prior to the current one. There, Michael and Gabriel are discussed as embodying the two inclinations in man, good and evil, while they as well represent water and fire, respectively.¹⁸⁷

A perceptible fragility to the distinction between proper and improper occult practice is an underlying feature of this discussion. For, in this passage from *Mafteah ha-Tokhaḥot*, both types of practice seem to be tied to the Teli and the other heavenly bodies. The presence of two sequences of the four elements, conforming in some fashion to the two “sides” of the cosmological serpent, the Teli—one being masculine and erect, one being feminine—seems to be all that distinguishes one type of practice from another. In fact, it almost appears as if the two types are to be blended together with the combination of elements. The tendency on Abulafia’s part, suggested here in *Mafteah ha-Tokhaḥot*, toward astrological conceptions that blur the boundary between condoned mysticism and condemned magic may be viewed as part and parcel of his dilemma with respect to Christianity. The situation parallels that seen earlier, in *Mafteah ha-Sefirot*, where a salutary engagement with the Teli brought with it an undercurrent of dire peril.

A series of interrelated discussions in *Imrei Shefer* sheds further light on this theme. In one, Abulafia begins with a consideration of the phrase “two faces,” observing that God created man as an androgyne.¹⁸⁸ The letters of the words *’ish* and *’ishah*, man and woman, Adam’s two components, Abulafia parses out to read “fire of *yod*” and

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., MS Oxford-BL 1605, fols. 23b–24a; printed edition, p. 5. Uriel then represents air, and Rafael earth. See Idel, *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia*, p. 27.

¹⁸⁸ *Imrei Shefer*, MS Munich-BS 285 fol. 66b; printed edition, p. 62.

“fire of *he’*,” such that the name YH is derived. This name we have already observed to embody the messianic aspect of the Tetragrammaton, and here we find that it also embodies the androgynous aspect of Adam. Abulafia next observes that, just as the letter *he’* of the name YH (one half of the Tetragrammaton) is one half of the value of its other letter, *yod*,¹⁸⁹ so too, in the phrase “two faces” the value of the word “faces” is one half of the value of the word “two,”¹⁹⁰ and the letters *kaf* and *he’* of the word *kohen* are one half of the word’s other letter, *nun*.¹⁹¹ Thus, the priest, who in Abulafia’s understanding represents the mystic,¹⁹² is of a twofold nature, after the fashion of Adam, and he partakes of the messianic YH.

Abulafia next rearranges the letters of the words “two faces” to derive the word *nefshaniyim*, which we may translate as “soulful ones.” This, in turn, is equal to the word for “sorcerous ones” when the latter is “in the power of thirty.” Abulafia continues, “And the sages of blessed memory said (*Sanhedrin* 67b), ‘Why are they [sorcerers] called *kashafim*? Because they contradict the heavenly ministers (*pamaliya*).’ And it is that the letter *lamed* [whose numerical value is thirty] testifies to it. Because study (*limud*) is the aim of the creation of the child.”

The “two faces” of the priest/mystic, we see, partake of a spiritual or soulful and a demonic or sorcerous aspect. Abulafia provides two bases to distinguish these aspects in this passage. One is the talmudic testimony that sorcerers are disobedient to God’s angelic ministers. What Abulafia himself intends by this will bear further scrutiny. The other centers around the letter *lamed*. His contention is that when this *lamed* is added to sorcery, it is rendered soulful and pious. The *lamed* stands for study. So it is that study—certainly with regard to Torah—transforms the sorcerer into the mystic. The distinction of mystic from sorcerer, it would appear, thus lies more in the nature of the former’s understanding of the proper intentionality in occult practice than it does within some difference between the two types of practice themselves. This is consistent with our observation of the precarious distinction between the two that is implied in *Mafteah ha-Tokhaḥot*.

¹⁸⁹ The letter *he’* has a numerical value of five, while the letter *yod* has a numerical value of ten.

¹⁹⁰ One hundred and eighty and three hundred and sixty, respectively.

¹⁹¹ Twenty-five and fifty, respectively.

¹⁹² See above, p. 155.

We should recall here our earlier analysis of one of the purposes of Abulafia's hermeneutic, in which he engages in the midst of the mystical encounter. This hermeneutic is at least in part given over to the goal of dispelling doubt that one's intentionality has strayed toward the transgressive. In Abulafia's writings this purified intentionality is cast in terms of the vanquishing of one's demons.¹⁹³ The latter represent both idolatry in the form of a temptation posed by Christianity and self-doubt regarding the degree to which the mystic's intentionality is actually purified. So, in the present context, the "study" that distinguishes the mystic from the sorcerer is appropriately understood as the hermeneutic with respect to Torah which banishes the specter of Jesus and Christianity—that is, of sorcery.

The first of the two bases mentioned to distinguish between pious mysticism and sorcery was disobedience toward the heavenly ministers on the part of the sorcerer. The precise meaning of this notion, for Abulafia, is clarified in another passage from *Imrei Shefer*. There, he discusses the angelic cadre, referring to them as "princes," seemingly in connection with the ten *sefirot*. Writes Abulafia,¹⁹⁴

...And all tens, the intention in all of them, derived from the Torah, is to announce to us that He, may He be blessed, is the cause of all causes, in every respect, and from every corner.... And indeed, the one thousand bodies of the men of the host, they are one hundred tens, which are in their essence ten one hundreds. And if so, there is for all of them a high prince over them. And to each one hundred of them, there is a prince beneath. Thus, ten princes, one high, and nine beneath him. And to each fifty of them, a prince below rules one hundred, thus twenty princes, one prince and nineteen beneath him. And to each ten of them, a prince below rules fifty. Thus, one hundred princes, one prince and ninety-nine beneath him. And to each one thousand, [there is] one prince of hosts, and he is called by the name Metatron, Prince of the Countenance. And all the princes mentioned are beneath him. And the prince of the one thousand and fifty, his name is Sandalfon, Prince of the Backsides (*Sar ha-'Ahorim*).

In particular, the division of the set of ten higher princes into nine, with one above them, links the angelic host to the *sefirot*. The *sefirot*,

¹⁹³ Idel indicates that, with the motif of the "loosening of the knots," Abulafia implies as well the "removal of doubts," or the overcoming of the imagination. *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia*, p. 137.

¹⁹⁴ *Imrei Shefer*, MS Munich-BS 285 fols. 59a–b; MS Munich-BS 40 fol. 231b; printed edition, pp. 42–43.

which Abulafia knows as the separate intellects of the Aristotelian cosmology, are configured similarly; of the ten separate intellects, the Active Intellect enjoys a higher status.¹⁹⁵ The latter stands as Metatron for Abulafia, from which we may understand his status at the head of the angelic host. Likewise, Sandalfon's appearance here, as the other aspect of the Active Intellect, is understandable, although the precise configuration of the angelic host is elusive in this regard. Abulafia continues,

And this secret is "sowing of seed." And this secret is, "intercourse." And he who recognizes that the secrets of these princes' leading of all of the worlds, [is] from the mouth of the leadership of the divine attributes, he alone will grasp the matters of the divine intentions mentioned, and he alone may prophesy following the preparation...

Two secrets are elicited. The numerical value of "Metatron, Prince of the Countenance," is equal to that of "sowing of seed," while the numerical value of "Sandalfon, Prince of the Backsides," is equal to that of "intercourse." We have already seen, in the discussion of levirate marriage, that, in the course of identifying the Active Intellect with the Teli and the name Shaddai, the phrase "Be fruitful and multiply" was applied to the latter. The procreative dimension, discussed in the current context, of Metatron and Sandalfon, I would maintain, here refers to their erotic union with each other. This results from their conjunction with the mystic, from which proceeds the theurgical reconstitution of the divine name from its two halves.¹⁹⁶ The connection of these motifs with that of the head and tail of the Teli is not mentioned here but should be borne in mind as we continue.

¹⁹⁵ Abulafia's understanding of the princes should be compared to the Aristotelian model with respect to angelic intelligences. Abulafia's Aristotelian cosmology is tripartite, composed of the world of the separate intellects, which he also identifies as the world of the *sefirot*, the world of the heavenly bodies, and the sub-lunar world. See *ibid.*, MS Munich-BS 40 fols. 229a, 230b; printed edition, pp. 37–38. In the Aristotelian model, the separate intellects are the angelic intelligences guiding the movements of the heavenly bodies. See, for instance, Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed* 2:4–10; Altmann, "Maimonides' Attitude Toward Jewish Mysticism," p. 212. In this discussion of Abulafia's, then, such beings may represent the union between the sefirotic and the celestial worlds.

¹⁹⁶ Idel points to Abulafia's identification of the efflux from the Active Intellect as "seed," and he suggests that the ecstatic experience is one of impregnation. *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 191–195. See also Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia*, p. 66.

Abulafia also articulates, in the current context, that the princes, and Metatron and Sandalfon in particular, bridge the gap between the “divine attributes,” a locution for the *sefirot*, and the lower world, or “worlds” here.¹⁹⁷ The human aspirant, Abulafia professes, must grasp this relationship if he wishes to attain the level of prophecy. An understanding of the presence of the *sefirot* beyond the lower world, that of the heavenly bodies in the Aristotelian system, is what distinguishes proper mysticism, troped earlier in terms of Moses and his rod, from sorcery. In this respect, the danger seen in *Mafteah ha-Sefirot* to be posed by the serpent that is the Teli may be clarified. When the latter’s demiurgical role is not perceived as subordinate to God’s leadership, expressed through His attributes, the *sefirot*, idolatry results. The healing power of the Teli, which is the brazen serpent, is conferred only when the human being who gazes up at it recognizes that its power is sorcerous and acknowledges his Creator. The sorcerer who contradicts the heavenly ministers, as the Talmud phrased it,¹⁹⁸ is one who, for Abulafia, falls victim to the idolatrous and christological facet, in particular, of the Teli, the cosmological power which nevertheless harbors a bona fide salvific aspect.

To return to the current passage from *Imrei Shefer*, Abulafia proceeds from the statement that the secret of Metatron and Sandalfon involves procreation to a discussion of the drawing of the lot¹⁹⁹ that determines whether male or female progeny will be the result. Writes Abulafia,

Know that the secret of “lot” is “apostate,” or “exalted,” comprising the joining of “the unclean and the clean” together. And thus the secret of the name is wholly explicit, because it is that which joins the being and the body, unclean and defiled, and joined to it is the soul, which is clean and purified. And when you understand this secret, you will understand the secret of the calf and the secret of the red heifer, and why it purifies the unclean and defiles the clean.

¹⁹⁷ Confirmed here is what we had suspected regarding the angelic host’s governing role, as representatives of the *sefirot*, with respect to the heavenly bodies. See above, n. 195.

¹⁹⁸ *Imrei Shefer*, MS Munich-BS 285 fol. 66b; printed edition, p. 62.

¹⁹⁹ Abulafia refers specifically to the festival of Purim (Lots) and to Mordecai and Esther as embodying the male and female child, respectively. For a discussion of Mordecai and Esther with respect to unification with the Active Intellect, see Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia*, p. 148.

From the reference to the name as comprising the clean and unclean we may infer that Metatron and Sandalfon, whom we have seen elsewhere as embodying the name as YH and VH, respectively, are still being addressed here by Abulafia. Now they are discussed in terms of the soul and the body, respectively, which are joined in the bringing forth of progeny. The unification of Metatron and Sandalfon, soul and body, as well signifies mystical conjunction, the perfection of the mystic's being, for which the fecundity of the Active Intellect serves as a metaphor. The natures and powers of Metatron and Sandalfon are here addressed with respect to the transformations effected by the golden calf and the red heifer, representing idolatry and religious piety, respectively. From this, we may understand Abulafia's intention in his earlier statement that "study (*limud*) is the aim of the creation of the child." Procreation is a motif employed by Abulafia to suggest the unification of sorcerial and mystical potencies, while study he saw as elevating sorcery to the province of mysticism.

In his current discussion, Abulafia posits a dynamic of comparable but opposite powers. This is sustained, as he next refers to the sons of the concubines of Abraham, who Abraham sent away with gifts (Gen. 25:6).²⁰⁰ These gifts, Abulafia relates, were "names of defilement." This, we are told, "is the secret of every sorcery and every magician and enchanter and astrologer." That is, these illicit occult sciences derive from the first patriarch of the Jews, and they went to Abraham's unclean progeny. Regarding Abraham's pure offspring, Isaac, Abulafia writes,

And Abraham gave all that he had to Isaac" (Gen. 25:5). That is, just as he had nothing other than the explicit name, and it is the forty-two letter name, and from there may be understood "El Shaddai," the name for procreation, so to Isaac he transmitted this unique name. And the secret of every "prince" is "Be fruitful and multiply," and it is the secret of the name "flesh and blood"...

Naturally, the clean names were bestowed upon Isaac, and, given the earlier context of the procreative potency of Metatron and Sandalfon, the occurrence here of the name Shaddai, accompanied once more by the phrase "Be fruitful and multiply" is not unexpected. From Abulafia's

²⁰⁰ *Imrei Shefer*, MS Munich-BS 285 fol. 60b; MS Munich-BS 40 fol. 231a; printed edition, p. 45.

prior discussion of the phrase “flesh and blood,”²⁰¹ we know that he conceived of it as the corporealized YH and VH, and that its numerical value alluded to the words “His name” and “His essence.” Once more in this current passage, Abulafia returns to the motif of “every ‘prince’” in terms of the divine procreative capacity.²⁰² We had seen these princes as intimately related to the governance of the heavenly bodies. Thus, again, whereas those sons of Abraham who engage in sorcery and astrology have no cognizance of the status of these princes, it is through these princes, that is, through a recognition of God’s providence via the *sefirot*, that the name is united and corporealized. Immediately thereafter, Abulafia continues,

...And know it from the seventy-two letter name, which is the name of “your son.” And it is the secret of “the three,” “and the unity,” in the secret of “one, one, one.” [This] hints to “dew,” that in the future the Holy One, blessed be He, will revive the dead through knowledge of His name. And it is the secret of “redemption,” three times “these,” which are half of the two hundred and sixteen letter name, because it is perfect.

The secret of the name “flesh and blood,” that is, of the corporealization of the YH and VH, we now learn, is encrypted in the numerical value of the seventy-two letter name, which is equivalent to the value of the phrase “your son.” The material incarnation of the Active Intellect is this “son.”²⁰³ Entwined conspicuously about the motif of the incarnate son in this passage are notions of a trinity, of resurrection of the dead, and of redemption. Particularly in view of the fact that we may understand the incarnate son’s source in this context as the Teli, fraught, as we have seen, with christological associations of its own, one would be hard pressed to overlook the allusion to Jesus in this passage.

We have observed in this passage an essential parallelism between the clean and unclean potencies and names, the mystical and idolatrous practices oriented, respectively, toward them and Abraham’s pious and heathen sons. Abulafia now extends the notion of such an

²⁰¹ Ibid., MS Munich-BS 285 fol. 71a; printed edition, p. 77.

²⁰² Munich BS 285, 60b reads “every name” and not “every prince,” although the numerical value of the phrase “Be fruitful and multiply” is equal to that for the word “prince” (five hundred) and not to that for the word “name.”

²⁰³ Idel observes Abulafia’s equation of the intellect and imagination with the son and daughter, respectively. *Language, Torah, and Hermeneutics in Abraham Abulafia*, p. 45.

ordered parallelism to the delineation of a non-idolatrous homology to Jesus and the Trinity, one that remains within the realm of what he understands to be the esoteric dimension of normative Judaism. This Jewish mystical trinity is both a cooptation, on Abulafia's part, of core Christian doctrine and a subversion of idolatry. In the context of the current discussion, difficulties have emerged, at times, in rendering a sharp distinction between actual practice in the mystical and sorcerous spheres. At other times, Abulafia attempts to portray the two spheres as elegantly symmetrical. In the instance of divine sonship accompanied by trinitarianism, starkly apparent absorption of Christian influence is thinly masked by the logic, in Abulafia's apparent estimation, of discerning, within an acceptably Jewish framework, a palatable counterpoint to idolatrous or Christian doctrines. It is as if Abulafia wondered that, since there are clean and defiled efficacious names, there should not also be both a clean and a defiled trinity, an acceptable and an idolatrous "son" in the divine realm. In the current context, Abulafia does not mention that other, transgressive son and that other trinity. But by mentioning only the acceptably Jewish ones, we may understand where the others must fall within the schema that Abulafia puts forth. They belong, of course, in the realm of the defiled. Clearly, Abulafia's strategy represents both an attraction to and a repulsion from the modalities of the other. A central set of Christian motifs is simultaneously censured and assimilated.

Elsewhere in *Imrei Shefer*, Abulafia takes up the issue of sorcery and astrology in a somewhat different manner. He writes,²⁰⁴

Every prophet who is a prophet of God must know first the power of sorcery and its nature, and whence its existence is incumbent upon him. And because it is necessary for the prophet to know this knowledge, the prophets who instruct their sons and students in the ways of prophecy must transmit to them first the nature of their body. And thus, the way of the science of healing, because it is built completely, without a doubt, upon natural science, its ways are advantageous to man in the knowledge of God. Also, because the entire body possesses enumerated limbs, and they are thirteen ribs, cleaving to the right side in the vertebrae of the spinal cord, which are eighteen. Also [there are] thirteen ribs on the left side. And all of this is the number for a wonderful matter counted by the scribe.... The one who teaches prophecy to his students must teach him the science of number. Because, behold, the limbs are two hundred

²⁰⁴ *Imrei Shefer*, MS Munich-BS 285 fol. 56b; printed edition, p. 33.

and forty-eight, and each possesses a number, and it is the rule of the learned science. And thus it is necessary to study the science of measure and the science of understanding, to understand what the efflux teaches when he receives the actualization from it. But the divine science one must know in any case as is proper, because of the preservation from error. Also, the craft of logic is useful for this. Also every prior science, because of this depth.

Sorcery is inextricably associated with the science of the body, which is tied to natural science generally. The profane sciences, insofar as they are contingent upon the lower, material world, are sorcerous in its nature, in Abulafia's estimation. Nevertheless, they are essential building blocks in the prophet's curriculum, Abulafia tells us. This is a remarkable assertion. As he states clearly, the prophet must be proficient in sorcery. Not only is the latter necessary for the practice of medicine, but also for mystical practice. During the encounter with the Active Intellect, the mystic must employ the sciences, classed as sorcery, in order to grasp the meaning of the numerical data that he receives.

For the sake of "preservation from error," nevertheless, one must apply the "divine science" during the mystical experience, which we may understand as the science of letter permutation. That is, the mystic engages in the generation of exegetical associations derived from his understanding, based upon the profane sciences, of numerical data, which are then, it would seem, subject to the usual repertoire of letter operations. Logic as well is seen to be valuable in guarding against errors inherent in approaching the divine efflux with only natural scientific knowledge. In this we hear an echo of the advice encountered earlier, to dispense with hermeneutical conclusions that seem to be patently incorrect or heretical, and thus illogical. That aspect of the Active Intellect that partakes of the sorcerous is both potentially advantageous and perilous.

Clearly, measures and numbers undergird Abulafia's understanding of what constitutes sorcery or the natural sciences, as well as the beginnings of the mystic's self-knowledge, expressed above in terms of the limbs of the body. As he continues, Abulafia refers to the numerous measurements and numerations to be found in Scripture:²⁰⁵ "And indeed, many sciences are hinted to in the Torah, and they are

²⁰⁵ Ibid., MS Munich-BS 285 fol. 56a; printed edition, p. 34.

transmitted in the particular received knowledge, such as number and measure and many like these. And the Torah utters wonders in the science of number.” He stresses the importance of such measurements and numerations in that they possess an esoteric significance which the kabbalistic hermeneutic may bring forth. This conception of the Torah’s numerical data and the means to understand it parallels the notion that the “divine science” is mustered, along with profane science, in the service of an understanding of the numerical data borne within the efflux from the Active Intellect. The significance of the Torah’s data, Abulafia explains, resides in its carrying cosmological implications. He writes,

And these [measures and numbers] are the things based upon which the world is led, and how could the prophet be without them? And indeed there are as well other sciences that are necessary to the prophet. And he who knows the secret of the spheres and the stars and the constellations is prepared to prophesy with the general received knowledge (*‘im ha-qabbalah bi-khlal*), because the leadership comes from them to the world of man.

Abulafia professes the necessity that the mystic be proficient in astrology. Of course, the influence of the heavenly bodies upon the lower world is a conceptual *sine qua non* of both medieval magical and philosophical speculation, and Abulafia mentions nothing in the current context in regard to the auspices of the *sefirot* or to any other specifically kabbalistic conception of the stars. His statements here are very much in keeping with the scientific understanding of his age. The only suggestion of the hand of a kabbalist here is in the assertion that astrological insights are encrypted in Scripture’s discussions of measures. The conception of astrology itself and of the stars’ potency appears as generic. In this respect, then, Abulafia is consistent with his prior assertion of the mystic’s indebtedness to sorcery. For the astrology that Abulafia describes is markedly commensurate with gentile religion and natural philosophy, which he associates with sorcery. Abulafia continues,

And how could the prophet be without knowledge of God's leadership of His creations and not recognize the quality of His supervision of them, and God send him and he behave well in His eyes? [This recalls] the allegory of when a king sends a messenger to a king regarding matters that are between them, and the messenger is foolish and simple in the eyes of the king who sent him. And will not the utmost shame come to the messenger from this, when he [the other king] asks him about the conduct of his king, and he does not know how to answer? All the moreso the messenger of God, blessed be He. And not only this, but He sends him to a wise nation which will examine his message. And thus no sage doubts this, that every prophet must be a great and wonderful sage in the sciences, and all the moreso in knowledge of the name.

Abulafia turns to an acknowledgment of God's placement over the stars, a thesis that would again find a comfortable place in the works of gentile thinkers.²⁰⁶ Through his allegory of the king, Abulafia suggests that it is a shameful prophet who would bring a message to the people from God while he himself is lacking in an understanding of God's providence over the spheres and stars. Abulafia reports that Israel, among all the nations, will scrutinize prophecy for evidence of such an understanding. Abulafia suggests that prophecy is rendered acceptable to Israel based upon the prophet's demonstrable knowledge. Nevertheless, prophecy that therefore meets some normative criteria of acceptability still is understood to originate from the sorcerous domain of astrology. An understanding of the latter science is both a necessary preparation for the prophet and is the means to validate his message. Sorcery, in the case of natural numbers and measures, is to be embraced by the prophetic mystic but is to be brought to heel under the science of letter permutation.

Abulafia's recourse to the allegory of the shameful prophet to the Israelites is telling. In Abulafia's estimation, every prophetic revelation stems from what he ultimately mentions at the conclusion of the passage, "knowledge of the name." This, he stresses, is the chief criterion of legitimate prophecy. Thus, the prophet who comes to the Israelites without knowledge of the name has not properly utilized the "divine science" of letter permutation, which is founded upon the notion that

²⁰⁶ Plotinus, for instance, describes a cosmology wherein the Universal Soul is bound to the "body" of the cosmos, the stars, while it also influences man directly. *Enneads*, § 83. Plotinus bases himself, in this regard, upon Plato's *Timaeus*, where God exerts His influence through the Soul, and the stars exert their own influence as well. *Ibid.*, § 82.

Torah is composed entirely of names of God. Thus, the prophet who is lacking in knowledge of the name is to be equated with the mystic who has not subordinated sorcery to the divine science. This prophet is essentially a sorcerer, and his message stems from the demonic nature of the Active Intellect, embodied by Sandalfon and by Jesus as well, as we have seen.

For Abulafia, the quintessential shameful, false prophet to the Israelites is, of course, Jesus. Abulafia had earlier set out an example of an engagement with astrology that embraces a knowledge of the name. I refer to the schema where the YH and VH, the name itself, is parsed out in terms of the Teli, Libra and Aries. Here, the two components of the Teli encapsulate the two halves of the name and are examined by Abulafia with respect to their movements through the heavens. False prophecy, an alternate appellation for the idolatrous threat that haunts Abulafia, is contingent upon a deficient knowledge of the name. A false prophet, in the above schema, is one who engages with the VH alone, that aspect of the Tetragrammaton that is identified with Jesus. The authentic prophet integrates the VH and the YH together.

CHAPTER FIVE

WARP AND WOOF: CIRCUMCISION, CRUCIFIXION, AND DIVINE EMBODIMENT

In the previous chapter we discussed Abulafia's identification of the Teli with Jesus via recourse to the motif of the brazen serpent. Along these lines we may scrutinize the name "Teli" itself. Its relationship to the Hebrew word *talui*, which indicates hanging or suspension, may be understood in terms of the astrological figure's perceived demiurgic role. Creation itself is suspended from it and depends upon it.¹ However, the term *talui* is also used to refer to hanging as a mode of execution, and, in fact, Jews—Abulafia included—applied the term to Jesus' crucifixion.² We may wonder whether the name Teli itself—at least for Abulafia, if not for some of his predecessors as well—already evoked, through both of its meanings, notions of Jesus.

We also considered at some length in the previous chapter the significance for Abulafia of the head and tail of the Teli. These, we noted, represented both the two halves of the Tetragrammaton, the Jewish messiah and Jesus, respectively, and masculinity and femininity. We observed that, in *'Oṣar 'Eden Ganuz*, Abulafia referred to the front and back of the Tanin (the Teli) as being woven together "in the secret of 'twenty-two' letters, from which is created 'my flesh.'"³ This weaving together of the two aspects of the Teli we understood, after Idel and Wolfson, in erotic terms. The latter frames this erotic dimension as the reconstitution of the phallic potency achieved through the integration of male and female dimensions, from which we may understand Abulafia's reference to his "flesh"—that is, his phallus—in the aforementioned passage. As well, the equation, via *gematria*, of "my flesh" with "twenty-two" letters results, we saw, from the mystic's divinization

¹ The demiurgic connotation for the Teli may be gleaned from *Sefer Yeṣirah*, Grunwald ed., 6:1–2 (para. 59).

² Berger, "The Messianic Self-Consciousness of Abraham Abulafia," p. 57; Yuval, *Two Nations on Your Womb*, pp. 116–117, 230. See above, p. 240 n. 184.

³ *'Oṣar 'Eden Ganuz*, MS Oxford-BL 1580, fol. 24a; printed edition, p. 48. See above, p. 181.

subsequent to his phallic reconstitution, represented as the weaving together of the head and tail of the Teli. This is achieved via recourse to the mystical manipulation of the twenty-two Hebrew letters, which conform directly to the mystic's own body. Abulafia conveys the notion that a divinization occurs by indicating that the expressions "in my flesh" and "Prince in me" share the same consonants. That the Prince—Metatron—dwells within the mystic is representative of the latter's coming into both a divinized and a messianic status.

Sheti va-ʿErev, *Warp and Woof*

The term which Abulafia employs with regularity to indicate the woven quality to the Teli's two aspects and to the nature of the reconstituted mystic is *sheti va-ʿerev*, warp and woof. The usage of the term *sheti va-ʿerev*, with respect to the head and tail of the Teli, occurs already in the tenth century *Sefer Hakhmoni* of Shabbatai Donnolo. The latter draws upon the much earlier *Sefer Mazzalot*, which referred to the Teli, the *axis mundi*, as a "weaver's beam."⁴ Donnolo describes the planets as joined to the Teli as warp to woof, although he also suggests that the two opposed aspects of the Teli itself, its head and tail, are themselves this warp and woof.⁵

It is conceivable that Donnolo's focus is not purely astrological, that mystical elements are present in his work.⁶ Donnolo discusses the Teli as the spinal cord, joining the brain, or the righteous end of the Teli, with the genitals, or its evil end. The cosmological Teli thus parallels, in

⁴ Reads *Sefer Mazzalot*, "When the Holy One, blessed be He, created the two luminaries, the sun and moon, and the five stars and the twelve constellations, he created the Teli to be a beam (מנור) for the luminaries, and a beam for the five stars, and for the twelve constellations, like a weaver's beam (כמנור אורגים), and He extended it in this firmament from one end to the other, like an axis (בריה), like the 'crooked serpent' (Is. 27:1), and made for it a head and a tail, as is written in Job (26:13), 'By his wind the heavens were made; his hand slew the bent (בריה) serpent.'" Sharf, *The Universe of Shabbetai Donnolo*, p. 184.

⁵ Donnolo writes, "...and all the stars and luminaries and constellations are connected to it [the Teli], as the threads of warp and woof are connected in a weaver's beam (כמו שאדוקין חוטי שתי הערב במנור אורגים)..." Ibid., p. 181. See also *ibid.*, pp. 33–38, 43–45, 55, 58, 66.

⁶ Wolfson observes in Donnolo's thought an interest in a theosophic gnosis pertaining to the *sefirot*, in their connectedness with God, which transcends astrology. *Through a Speculum That Shines*, p. 138; "The Theosophy of Shabbetai Donnolo," pp. 286, 290, 294, 297.

anatomical terms, man as the microcosmos. Donnolo may be suggesting here man's need to reconcile or unite his intellective aspects with his base and lustful ones.⁷ Given that Donnolo places these notions within the context of a treatment of *Sefer Yeṣirah*, he must have seen this function to and configuration of the Teli in terms of the mystic's following of Abraham's model. The latter achieved an erotic union with the divine by the conclusion of *Sefer Yeṣirah*. There, *imitatio dei* apparently resulted in the achievement of a balancing of opposites or of the *sefirot*, with the covenant centered in their midst.⁸ The nature of the Teli as comprised of an integrated warp and woof could then, for Donnolo, already have suggested the paradigm of the mystic's reconstitution of his own microcosmic nature.⁹

Though, in the passage cited above from 'Oṣar 'Eden Ganuz, Abulafia evokes the woven quality to the components of the Teli without recourse to the term *sheti va-'erev*, we do find a related and complex treatment of the term in one commentary to *Sefer Yeṣirah* ascribed to Abulafia. There, Abulafia first reasons that, just as we, in God's image, are comprised of two causes, these being our fathers and our mothers, so too the unique and explicit name, the Tetragrammaton, which imparts instruction concerning God, the first cause, is as well of a bipartite nature.¹⁰ At times, God or His name acts toward us as a father to a son, and at others as a mother to a son.¹¹ Abulafia's discussion should recall for us that the Tetragrammaton is comprised of the two components YH and VH, embodying masculinity and femininity, respectively.¹²

⁷ A traditional linkage of the Teli's tail with Sagittarius and thus with sexuality—evoked in the notion of the firing of arrows, a theme we touched upon in the last chapter—may inform Donnolo's conception. See above, pp. 181, 187.

⁸ *Sefer Yeṣirah*, Gruenwald ed., 1:3, 6:4 (paragraphs 3, 61).

⁹ Nevertheless, see Wolfson, *Through a Speculum That Shines*, pp. 127–144. Here Donnolo's commitment to a notion of a *demut*, an invisible likeness ascribed to God, is examined. God possesses such a *demut*, in Donnolo's opinion, whose anthropomorphic status, as well as its visibility, is in an important way challenged. Thus, despite the likeness between the human body and God's configuration with respect to the *sefirot*, knowledge of the *sefirot*, and hence of God, is described by Donnolo as inaccessible. Ibid., pp. 142–144. See also idem, "The Theosophy of Shabbetai Donnolo," pp. 290, 293, 298–299.

¹⁰ Weinstock, *Perush Sefer Yetzirah 'Almoni mi-Yesodo shel Rabbi 'Avraham 'Abul'afiya*, pp. 21–22.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 23.

¹² Weinstock as well observes the bipartite nature of the Tetragrammaton. Ibid., p. 22.

Abulafia continues by indicating that that component signified by the word *ʾav*, father, is “the beginning of all that comes after it.”¹³ The secret of the word *ʾav*, Abulafia relates, is “one, two, which are three,” a reference to the letters *ʾalef* and *bet* which comprise the word and whose numerical sum is three.¹⁴ Regarding the maternal component of the name, Abulafia parses the word for mother, *ʾaim*, in a similar fashion. “Its secret is forty-one,” Abulafia writes, “and the secret of ‘mother’ is one fourth of the point whose secret is called ‘the small one.’” Abulafia derives the term “one fourth” from the observation that the letters of the words “forty-one” are the same as those of “mother [is] one fourth.” Just as Abulafia was interested in deriving the number three from the word for father, so too is he interested, with respect to the word for mother, in deriving the number four. We will have more to say concerning why the numbers three and four are of significance for Abulafia, but for the moment we may recall our earlier observation that the numbers three and four signify the Tetragrammaton for Abulafia. The name consists of three letters, YHV, occurring a total of four times to compose the full name, YHVH. The number three signifies, for Abulafia, the first part of the name, the number four the last part.

Abulafia suggests that the word “mother,” via *gematria*, is one fourth of the word “point.” The appellation “mother” Weinstock appropriately perceives to represent the *sefira Binah*.¹⁵ Abulafia indicates that the word “point,” in turn, is equivalent to the word “the small one.” The “small one,” we learn, stands for the smallest of the letters in graphic terms, the letter *yod*, whose numerical value is ten. Writes Abulafia, “It is incumbent upon us in this respect to call the beginning of the name of God with the smallest of the letters, [which is as well] the largest of all of them [of all of the first ten numbers] in its numerical value...” Abulafia has here drawn the discussion of the mother and father into a connection with the Tetragrammaton. The “mother,” *Binah*, is one fourth of the letter *yod*, itself one fourth of the name, and this relationship between the mother and the *yod* provides a springboard to the revelation of the twofold nature of the letter *yod*, as both

¹³ Weinstock observes that the father and the mother refer to the two *sefirot Hokhmah* and *Binah*, which are also signified here in the allusion to *sefirot* as “points,” *nequdot*. *Ibid.*, p. 23.

¹⁴ See above, pp. 85–87, 146–147, for two markedly similar treatments of the word *ʾav*.

¹⁵ See above, n. 13.

the most diminutive (in its female aspect) and greatest (in its male aspect) of the letters and numbers.¹⁶ The earlier theme of the bipartite and androgynous nature of the name is thus rephrased in terms of its first letter alone.

Next, the same bipartite nature is seen to inhere in man as well. The latter, Abulafia explains, is the microcosmos (*'olam qatan*), "...and it [the *'olam qatan*] is the secret of the world to come, which depends upon (*talui*) a point." The reference here to the world to come is, once more, to the female *Binah*, which was traditionally understood by this appellation.¹⁷ A resonance with traditions concerning the Teli is present here, suggested in Abulafia's choice of the word *talui*, and both motifs, *Binah* and the Teli, harbor demiurgic overtones.¹⁸ In this, we may suggest that the linkage of the Teli with the female aspect of the name and thus with Jesus, as in our earlier discussions, is invoked.

At the same time, Abulafia continues, we are as well the macrocosmos (*'olam gadol*) "...in our grasping the truth of the point which is renewed in truth, whose name is *yod*, whose number is ten and whose form is half of a circle; and their secret is the tenth splendor." We are to be linked with the greater aspect of the letter *yod* as well, in the latter's status as the consummation of the *sefirot* (here, the ten "splendors"), a notion which ensues from the letter's numerical value. A linkage to the *sefira Hokhmah*—the male counterpart to *Binah* in the sefirotic array—is apparent due to the traditional association of this *sefira* with the letter *yod* of the Tetragrammaton, with *Keter*, the first *sefira*, standing as the uppermost scintilla thereon.¹⁹

To this point, one aspect that emerges from Abulafia's discussion is the notion that man comes to embody the structure of the divine with his attainment to the two relevant *sefira*. Attaining to the microcosmic

¹⁶ See Wolfson, "Kenotic Overflow and Temporal Transcendence," pp. 174–175. As well, the Teli, as the Active Intellect, is appropriately thought of as both the first and tenth, first and last, of the *sefirot*. For the Active Intellect as both first and last, see *Oṣar 'Eden Ganuz*, MS Oxford-BL 1580, fols. 86b–87a; printed edition, pp. 177; MS Oxford-BL 1580, fol. 154b; printed edition, p. 348.

¹⁷ For this association of *Binah* and the world to come, see Gikatilla, *Sha'arei 'Orah*, vol. 2, pp. 58, 66.

¹⁸ For *Binah* as creator of souls and sustainer of the lower world, see *ibid.*, pp. 56, 58, 60. For *Binah* as creator and king of the world, see *Ma'arekhet ha-'Elohut*, 54a–b; Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, p. 219.

¹⁹ On the correspondence between the *sefirot* and the Tetragrammaton in Abulafia's thought, see also Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 113 n. 54, 132 n. 101, 157. For this conception in Joseph Gikatilla's thought, see *Sha'arei 'Orah*, vol. 1, p. 238; vol. 2, pp. 105–106.

Binah is linked with the arrival at the world to come, while the macrocosm is reached through a grasping of the nature of *Hokhmah*. The resultant structure that man assumes, in his coming into the status of flesh made word, as we had called it earlier, following Wolfson, is androgynous. That structure Abulafia relates to the components of head and tail, as the letter *yod* is at the “tail” of the Hebrew letters corresponding to the single digit numbers in the decimal system, while it is at the head of those that correspond to the two digit numbers.²⁰ In this we see a hint to the Teli, composed of head and tail, which, we had been told, “depends upon (*talui*) a point,” that point being the letter *yod*.

From here, Abulafia extrapolates to several other sets of letters. He describes a meditational practice which “...draws the thought to the *Ein-Sof* (Limitlessness), because He, may He be blessed, is the beginning of all existence and its end.”²¹ What is grasped from such a practice, Abulafia relates, comes in three forms, the form of images, of names associated with that which is imaged and likewise of associated numbers. The latter two forms, names and numbers, are as well to be understood in terms of letters and numbers, as is apparent from Abulafia’s subsequent discussion. “...The beginning of the apprehension is the reception of the transmission of the letters, with their names and with numbers,” he writes. In this, Abulafia explains, resides the secret of the thirty-two paths of wisdom discussed at the beginning of *Sefer Yesirah*, which are composed of the ten *sefirot*, conceived of as the numbers one through ten, and the twenty-two Hebrew letters. Regarding the thirty-two paths, Abulafia writes, “And all of them are in the likeness of warp and woof (*sheti va-‘erev*).” Abulafia notes the numerical equivalence of the words “with thirty and two” and “likeness of *sheti va-‘erev*.”²²

Ultimately, we learn that the secret of the thirty-two paths, by a similar numerical equivalence, is “the fourfold and threefold likeness.” The numbers three and four, which had appeared earlier in Abulafia’s discussion of the father and mother, now recur with respect to the phrase *sheti va-‘erev*, from which we may see the ultimate interrelatedness

²⁰ Weinstock, *Perush Sefer Yetzirah ‘Almoni mi-Yesodo shel Rabbi ‘Avraham ‘Abul’afya’*, p. 28.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 27. See also above, n. 16.

²² See Weinstock’s note, *Perush Sefer Yetzirah ‘Almoni mi-Yesodo shel Rabbi ‘Avraham ‘Abul’afya’*, p. 28.

of this entire discussion. The thirty-two paths are composed of warp and woof, male and female, in much the same manner in which the Teli was “woven” of two components in the earlier passage from *’Oṣar Eden Ganuz*. The letters and numbers of the thirty-two paths, keys to the meditative process that bring the mystic to the *’Ein-Sof*, are consonant with God’s bipartite nature as father and mother and as first and last, with the *sefirot Hokhmah* and *Binah*, with the bipartite nature of the letter *yod* of the Tetragrammaton, with the Tetragrammaton itself as YH and VH, and with the mystic’s own perfected androgynous status as both macrocosm and microcosm. All of these dichotomous pairings are *sheti va-’erev*.

From the words “fourfold” and “and threefold,” Abulafia derives another bifold pairing, that of the words “moist” and “dry.”²³ Subsequently, he writes,

And anyone who is ashamed²⁴ to speak of the truth of these wise matters, which it is proper to announce (*ledabber be-’elu ha-ḥokhmot be-’emitatam ha-re’uyah lehodiyah*), only errs. Because it is proper to announce that warp and woof (*sheti va-’erev*), which is without a doubt the covenant of Esau,²⁵ is the Prince of Abomination²⁶ who rules from the Torah at the gate of chaos.²⁷ And they [*sheti va-’erev*, warp and woof] are twelve tens,²⁸ and

²³ The respective numerical values of “fourfold” and “and threefold” are three hundred and twelve and six hundred and seventy-six. These words, therefore, Abulafia explains, derive from the “names of twelve and twenty-six.” Twenty-six multiplied by twelve yields three hundred and twelve, while twenty-six squared yields six hundred and seventy-six. See Weinstock’s notes ad loc. These two divine names yield the word “moist,” *lahi*. The word “dry,” *yavash*, which “comes from moistness,” according to Abulafia, has a numerical value of three hundred and twelve. Thus, when the two divine names that compose the word “moist” are multiplied together, they yield the word “dry.” Abulafia appears to have the inscription of the divine names during mystical practice in mind here. He refers to “the likeness of the writing that is at first moist and ran and after this became dry.”

²⁴ The text should read *mitbayyash*, as Weinstock notes, a word with the same root letters as those for the word for “dry.”

²⁵ *Brit* has a numerical value of six hundred and twelve, “Esau” of three hundred and seventy-six. Note the transposition of numbers, or the intertwining, more appropriately, from the numbers with which we began, three hundred and twelve and six hundred and seventy-six. See above, n. 23.

²⁶ *Sar ha-To’evah*, with a numerical value of nine hundred and eighty-eight, the same as that for “*brit* Esau.”

²⁷ *Be-sha’ar ha-tohu*, comprising the same letters as *Sar ha-To’evah*. See Weinstock ad loc.

²⁸ “Twelve tens” has a numerical value of nine hundred and eighty-eight.

their sum is “Orion”.²⁹ And this in its secret aspect is gate and house,³⁰ because within it is the gathering of the fruits of the bodies.³¹ And he is the head of corners,³² and he is the Prince in elements,³³ because the flesh instructs concerning the secrets of nakedness.³⁴ And its matter is that he is the foundation of the flesh, front and back,³⁵ and contains visions of fire, and he is woven in time, amassed in completion. Indeed the curls of his head contain two angels, right and left. And thus the unique name is the beginning of the revolving. And when you explain “In the beginning,” whose matter is “in wisdom,” immediately you will find the Prince of Opening, whose opening is open, and you will be able to say, “I found an open gate;”³⁶ in your understanding [this is] the virgin who is the beginning of his house. And know that the prince who opens is the prince who closes in this way.

The recurring theme of the bipartite nature of the divine name, of the efflux from the Active Intellect and of the reconstituted mystic himself, encapsulated in the phrase *sheti va-‘erev*, is first referred to by Abulafia as the “covenant of Esau.” Insofar as one component of the bipartite divine structure we may already associate with Jesus, this being the VH or demonic and imaginative dimension of the Active Intellect, we may understand initially why at least a portion of the divine warp and woof would be linked to him. That Esau in the phrase “covenant of Esau” stands for Jesus and Christianity should be apparent both from the immediate context of the passage at hand and from elsewhere in Abulafia’s writings.³⁷ Abulafia in the current passage refers to Esau as the “Prince of Abomination” and as the “foundation of the flesh.” Abulafia’s explicit linkage of Jesus with idolatry has already been established, as has the parallel linkage of Jesus with the imagination, and thus with the corporeal, a polemical turn on the Christian theme of the corporealized divinity. It is in this association that the significance

²⁹ *Kesil* has a numerical value of one hundred and twenty, that is, twelve multiplied ten times.

³⁰ *Sha‘ar ve-bayit*, with a numerical value of nine hundred and eighty-eight.

³¹ *Kābus peri ha-gufot* has a numerical value of nine hundred and eighty-eight.

³² *Ro‘sh pei‘ot* has a numerical value of nine hundred and eighty-eight.

³³ *Sar be-yesodot* has a numerical value of nine hundred and eighty-eight.

³⁴ *Ha-basar moreh ha-sodot she-be-‘arayot*. The phrase “of nakedness” (or “that are in nakedness”), *she-be-‘arayot*, has a numerical value of nine hundred and eighty-eight, while “the flesh” and “the secret,” *ha-basar* and *ha-sodot*, together have a numerical value of nine hundred and eighty-eight. See Weinstock ad loc.

³⁵ *Yesod ha-basar, panim ve-‘ahor* has a numerical value of nine hundred and eighty-eight. See Weinstock’s note, ad loc., for the remaining *gematriyot*.

³⁶ BT. *Ketubot* 9b.

³⁷ See above, pp. 38–39, 41–45, 47–48.

of the phrase “foundation of the flesh” inheres. Another polemical dimension to the current passage is apparent in the reference to Jesus as the “Prince of Opening.” Abulafia maintains here that “the virgin,” Mary, is indicated in the talmudic phrase “I found an open gate.” In its rabbinic context, the “open gate” is that of a bride who has been found to have been violated.³⁸ Thus, Abulafia draws again upon the Jewish tradition that impugns Mary’s purported chastity. Of course, such an attack upon Mary further draws Jesus into the sphere of base corporeality.³⁹

How it is that both elements, warp and woof, of the *sheti va-‘erev* construct may be linked with Jesus and the covenant of Esau requires further investigation. Earlier we noted that this entire bipartite construct, and not just that component analogous to the VH, had been troped as the demiurgic Teli. Despite its being an evil overlord of the world, the Teli nevertheless is composed of a head and a tail. It was for this reason that the Teli was described in terms of “weaving” by Abulafia. We have noted as well that the Teli bore christological associations for Abulafia, as, for instance, when it was represented by Abulafia as the brazen serpent. Since the Teli is represented by Abulafia in terms of warp and woof, we can understand how a “covenant of Esau” or Jesus, himself, for whom the Teli appears as a symbol, can be represented similarly.

In light of this, we may begin to approach a second question raised by the current passage. We still must consider the nature of Esau’s “covenant.” Its essence, in Abulafia’s estimation, may first be gleaned from the idea that Jesus was “hanged” (*talui*) from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which signifies corporeality. Similarly was the Teli placed, in its metaphorical status as the brazen serpent, upon a pole.⁴⁰ Both of these motifs may be understood in terms of the crucifixion. And so indeed is the case for the very phrase *sheti va-‘erev*, which to this point we have translated only as “warp and woof.” When Abulafia

³⁸ See Jastrow, פתח, p. 1252.

³⁹ See Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia*, p. 122 n. 78 for a discussion of openness, representing masculinity, and closedness, indicating femininity, in Abulafia’s thought. Certainly the last sentence of the current passage, “And know that the prince who opens is the prince who closes in this way,” plays into these conceptions. Regarding kabbalistic polemics concerning Mary’s virginity, see idem, *Alef, Mem, Tau*, pp. 145–149 (where the theme of openness and closedness is also discussed); “Eunuchs Who Keep the Sabbath,” p. 152. See also Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, p. 60.

⁴⁰ Num. 21:8.

states that Esau's covenant is *sheti va-erev*, we must understand him to mean that this covenant is "cruciform" in its essence. That Abulafia intends the notion "cruciform" with the phrase *sheti va-erev* may be surmised from the placement of the phrase within the context of the motifs already mentioned. As well, an investigation of a few of the phrase's other appearances in relevant medieval texts is instructive. We will take a brief look at some of these instances. We will also have occasion shortly to make reference to Abulafia's *Sefer ha-Brit* (*The Book of the Covenant*), where he parses out the YH and the VH, the two *sheti va-erev* components of the Tetragrammaton, in terms of the two axes of a geometrical cross.

The Book of the Pious of the German Pietists provides a useful glimpse into the implications for medieval Jews—and, more specifically, for at least some circles of Jewish mystics—of the phrase "*sheti va-erev*." The phrase occurs several times in this text with reference to the Christian sign of the cross. It is not surprising that in each of these appearances of the phrase the authors manifest an anxiety with regard to the perceived idolatrous dimension of the cross. In the first of these we find the following:⁴¹ "If on a bowl or a cup or vessel the gentiles made a cross (*sheti va-erev*), for as long as the cross is upon it do not use it until it is scratched off, and needless to say if there are faces on it." Elsewhere⁴² we find: "If a man is in a synagogue and he sees out the window a church or a cross (*sheti va-erev*), he should place something in the window so that he won't see it." Two other occurrences of the phrase in *The Book of the Pious* address the cross' appearance on Christian coins. The first of these⁴³ reads: "A man should not carry even pocket money with a cross (*sheti va-erev*) on it, nor cloth that is used for idolatry like coarse silk and the like." Lastly, we find:⁴⁴ "The sages say that a man may bundle coins at the end of a cloth in which tefillin are bound, but this cloth [must be such that] they [the coins] are not together with the tefillin. But if on the coins there is a cross (*sheti va-erev*), he will not bind them to the cloth of tefillin [at all]."

It is clear that, in *The Book of the Pious*, the cross, *sheti va-erev*, is a symbol of idolatry. It possesses a contagious property, such that drinking from a vessel that is inscribed *sheti va-erev*, or having such an

⁴¹ *Sefer Hasidim*, § 277. The passage is repeated at § 901.

⁴² *Ibid.*, § 437.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, § 773.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, § 900.

inscription on coins in one's possession, or placing such a coin near one's tefillin, or seeing such a symbol while in prayer brings a kind of contamination. For his own part, Abulafia uses the phrase *sheti va-'erev* in the context of a polemical discussion concerning Christianity, one which leaves little doubt that by this phrase he intends the meaning "cruciform," as with the authors of *The Book of the Pious*.⁴⁵ This, then, is the nature of Esau's covenant for Abulafia. It is crosswise or cruciform. As with *The Book of the Pious*, Abulafia likewise associates the phrase, in the passage from his commentary to *Sefer Yesirah*, with the uncleanness of idolatry and the demonic. We will elucidate the implications, in Abulafia's estimation, of this "covenant of Esau" through the examination of several related passages. First, some final observations are in order concerning the current passage from Abulafia's commentary to *Sefer Yesirah*.

As mentioned, in the preceding chapter we observed discussions of the twofold nature of the Teli in which both components, seen to belong to the idolatrous demiurge, were considered by Abulafia to be evil. This, we noted, runs counter to Abulafia's other, more prevalent thesis that the Active Intellect contains both good and evil components. In the current instance we find a model related to the former one; the evil demiurge is assigned two components, this being the meaning of his *sheti va-'erev* configuration. Surprisingly, however, Esau, the "Prince of Abomination," linked in the passage with the body, flesh, nakedness, and the elements, is described as comprised of "two angels, right and left." These, certainly, are good and evil. That this cruciform demiurge is Jesus we have already established. Calling him "the head of corners," an allusion to Psalm 118:22,⁴⁶ only reinforces this identification. As discussed in the last chapter, this theme had been applied by Christians to Jesus beginning with the Gospels. So we are left with the surmise that Jesus, idolatrous and demonic as he may be, comprises within himself a counterbalancing positive element as well.

⁴⁵ Horowitz presents other examples in medieval Jewish texts where the term *sheti va-'erev* indicates the Christian cross. In some of these, the term possesses a non-polemical tone, as against references to the "evil" or "unfit sign." "The Cross that Pierces and European Jews in the Middle Ages," p. 118 (in Hebrew). See also *ibid.*, p. 199 n. 2 for further sources.

⁴⁶ "The stone that has been rejected has become the head of the corner," or the "chief cornerstone."

Despite his obviously polemical tone, then, Abulafia presents a notion commensurate with one we had seen applied to the role of the imagination. The latter, though evil in its essence, is nevertheless the mechanism through which one attains to a conjunction with the Active Intellect. In the current instance, the nature of the evil represented by Jesus is qualified. It contains a “front” to accompany its “back,” or an angel from the right side, as against that from the left. Abulafia’s view of Jesus, then, is not entirely different from the Christian one in a certain sense. Christians regard Jesus’ corporeal manifestation as proferring the means to union with the divine, a notion which is consistent with Abulafia’s view of the *sheti va-’erev Teli*.⁴⁷

Jacob and Esau, Moses and Amaleq

In Abulafia’s epistle, *Ve-Ẓo’t li-Yehudah*, some notions related to the idea of a “covenant of Esau” are present. They appear in a passage that begins with a warning concerning the *sefirot*.⁴⁸ The beginning of the passage is unclear, but suggests that there are two names, one that saves from danger associated with the *sefirot*, and one that does not.⁴⁹ The passage implies a linkage between the names or the *sefirot* and hands, from which we may understand that the right and left sides of the sefirotic array may be under discussion. The passage goes on to consider the hands of Esau. These, Abulafia writes,

...return to be blessed and to bless in action, what with their being quarrelsome, spilling blood by the hands of Amaleq.⁵⁰ “And the hands of Moses were heavy...and it was that his hands were steady until the sun went down” (Ex. 17:12), and the secret depends upon its saying, “when Moses raised his hands [Israel prevailed, and when he rested his hands] Amaleq prevailed” (Ex. 17:11). And regarding this, in our saying “voice,” [this is] the voice of Jacob in the uttering of the name as it is written, in the sanctuary, with “the hands” being the hands of Esau in

⁴⁷ See Wolfson’s reference to Abulafia’s conception of the imagination, though satanic, as the “angelic intermediary.” “Kenotic Overflow and Temporal Transcendence,” p. 146.

⁴⁸ *Ve-Ẓo’t li-Yehudah*, in Jellinek, *Auswahl kabbalistischer*, p. 23.

⁴⁹ *Šarikh lehazhir min ha-middot ha-mithayyot min ha-sefirot, ha-yesh shem mašil mi-hem, ve-et ha-shem ha-’omer, ve-’ein mi-yadei mašil...*

⁵⁰ ... *im hayyotam ba’alei ha-riv, shofkhei damim, be-yadei Amaleq.*

the supernal ones. And we place a single covenant, the arbiter between them, and it is the covenant of the tongue. And so too with the lower ones with the covenant of circumcision. And we join the utterance that instructs students with the actions, and the power that instructs sons with the movement, such that hand and foot hint to two matters in the power of the twenty-two letters that reveal the secret of the *sefirot* in truth, not incidentally. Immediately we take together the gathering of powers, and we raise “the banner of Jerusalem” in the name of God, and the exiled are assembled, and the banished of Israel God gathers for the sake of His name, as it is written “Not for your sake do I do this, [house of Israel,] but for the sake of My [holy] name...” (Ez. 36:22). And here the full secret hints to the absence of the *Shekhinah* from our city and from amongst us and its existence that contains ten *sefirot* together...

The passage follows a schema laid out in *Sefer Yeṣirah*, wherein the covenant of the tongue is centered between the ten fingers of the two hands, while the covenant of the phallus is fixed between the ten toes of the feet.⁵¹ Remarkable in the passage from Abulafia is that the two hands belong to Esau. In kind with *Sefer Yeṣirah*, we find that the covenant of the tongue is between them. Along the lines of Abulafia’s commentary to *Sefer Yeṣirah* analyzed above, we might expect this covenant between Esau’s two hands to be the “covenant of Esau,” although that phrase is not used here. The covenant of the tongue is described in the current passage as the supernal covenant, while that of circumcision is the lower one. Abulafia operates through a linkage of chapter twenty-seven of Genesis with *Sefer Yeṣirah*’s notion of the covenant of the tongue between the two hands. In particular, it is Genesis 27:22 that interests Abulafia: “The voice is Jacob’s voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau.” The outcome of Abulafia’s exegetical strategy is the association of Esau, or his hands, with the upper covenant.

Nevertheless, Abulafia seeks to establish clearly that Esau’s hands are profane and inimical to Judaism.⁵² Thus the connection is effected between Esau’s hands and Amaleq’s, Amaleq being the enemy of Moses. Moses’ hands, in fact, were typically associated by kabbalists with *Sefer Yeṣirah*’s discussion of the two hands flanking the covenant of the tongue. This association is made with respect to the role of Moses’

⁵¹ *Sefer Yeṣirah*, Gruenwald ed., 6:4 (para. 61). See above, p. 237, regarding these covenants in *Sefer Yeṣirah*.

⁵² Wolfson notes that, in some medieval Jewish polemical literature, the reference in Genesis 27:22 to Esau’s hands and Jacob’s voice is employed as a springboard for the discussion of Christendom’s violent nature. *Venturing Beyond*, p. 133.

hands in the battle with Amaleq (Ex. 17:11). Abulafia does employ that theme of Moses' raising of his hands in his battle against Amaleq, but not, however, for this more conventional purpose, following the discussion in the *Bahir*, of linking Moses' hands with those discussed by *Sefer Yesirah*.⁵³

Rather, Abulafia references Moses' battle with Amaleq in order to suggest a comparison between the covenantal power latent in Moses' hands and that murderous power exerted by Esau's, which are "quarrelsome, spilling blood by the hands of Amaleq." That murderous power, we may understand, is to be associated with Christianity, in line with our prior discussions of Esau, with whom Amaleq was associated.⁵⁴ Thus, while Moses' hands play a crucial role in the proper configuring of the *sefirot* and of the upper covenant in traditional kabbalistic discourse, in the current passage we see them contrasted with the malevolency of Esau's (Christendom's) hands. The power exerted by Esau's hands is the profane counterpart to that exerted by Moses'.

The voice between the hands of Esau in Abulafia's discussion is, following after Genesis 27:22, nevertheless the voice of Jacob. It enunciates God's name, Abulafia tells us, and imparts secrets concerning the letters, the two covenants and the *sefirot*, from which will result the redemptive ingathering of the Jews from exile among the nations. This, so the end of the passage suggests, is to be accompanied by the restoration of the *Shekhinah* to its place in Jerusalem and, thus, by the rectification of the *sefirot*, as suggested as well in the conclusion of the passage. The voice associated with the covenant of the tongue, fixed between Esau's two hands, may thus be understood to thwart Christendom in its subjugation of the Jews.

The covenant belongs to Jacob, representative of the central *sefira* *Tiferet*,⁵⁵ and it enacts the mystico-theurgical redemption that encapsulates as well Esau's, or Christendom's, ultimate defeat. As mentioned, no "covenant of Esau" is specifically elicited in this passage; only his hands, flanking the covenant of the tongue, are mentioned.⁵⁶

⁵³ *Bahir*, § 135, 137; *Zohar* 2:57a, 66a–67a.

⁵⁴ Amaleq was conflated with Esau as synonymous with Christendom on the basis of Genesis 36:12, which identifies Amaleq as Esau's grandson. See Nahmanides' commentary on Ex. 17:9, 16.

⁵⁵ See above, p. 41, regarding *Tiferet* and Jacob.

⁵⁶ We will see presently a parallel passage from *Oẓar Eden Ganuz* which does make mention of Esau—or at least of the phrase *ברית עשו*—in apparent connection again with the covenant of the tongue.

However, the connection between this passage concerning Esau's two hands and that from Abulafia's commentary to *Sefer Yeṣirah*, which concerned Esau's covenant, is clear enough, given that Esau's hands are here drawn directly into the discussion of the covenant of the tongue. The ultimate purpose of this current passage appears to be to contrast the redemptive aspect of Moses' or Jacob's covenantal relationship with God,⁵⁷ exercised through Jewish mystical practice, with the evil potency ascribed to Esau. Jacob's covenant, we see, is redemptive, while Esau's covenant, implicitly, is in vain.

Three other passages, each from *'Oṣar 'Eden Ganuz*, may now be considered in turn. Each makes mention of the bipartite warp and woof configuration. One issue that must concern us in each of these passages is the fact that the phrase **ברית עשו**, an anagram (*temurah*) of the phrase *sheti va-'erev*, can have two meanings. It may at times be read as "covenant of Esau," as was the case above in Abulafia's commentary to *Sefer Yeṣirah*, or, as has been observed by Wolfson, it can be read as "they made a covenant."⁵⁸ In all cases, context will dictate whether the former or latter reading should be chosen.

The first passage to be considered from *'Oṣar 'Eden Ganuz* has something of the quality of automatic writing, of a stream of consciousness operating through a series of *gematriyot*. This makes it difficult to render a literal translation, but it will be useful to paraphrase the passage. The section that concerns us begins with a discussion of the phrase *sheti va-'erev*.⁵⁹ Its numerical value is added to the number eleven by Abulafia, this in connection with a prior allusion to the latter number as one half of the twenty-two letter Hebrew alphabet. The value for *sheti va-'erev* plus eleven, Abulafia relates, "is a great secret: 'the conversion of male and female'; 'He created male and female, granule (גרנול).'" The numerical total of the phrase *sheti va-'erev* added to eleven yields nine hundred and ninety-nine, the same value as these subsequent two phrases, both of which concern the male and female.

We see that Abulafia intends to convey that the warp and woof referenced in the phrase *sheti va-'erev* represent the opposed poles of

⁵⁷ Jacob is himself described as *sheti va-'erev* in *'Or ha-Sekhel*, MS Vatican-BA ebr. 233, fol. 98a; printed edition, 94.

⁵⁸ Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being*, p. 140.

⁵⁹ *'Oṣar 'Eden Ganuz*, MS Oxford-BL 1580, fols. 33b–34a; printed edition, pp. 69–70.

masculinity and femininity. This is subsequently elaborated upon with respect to heaven and earth, the two inclinations in man, two unspecified but opposed *sefirot*, two opposite thoughts within the angel Michael, and the opposed words pleasure (*oneg*) and plague (*nega'*).⁶⁰ The numerical value of the phrase “flax and wool,” referring, by implication, to the warp and woof of a *shatnez* garment,⁶¹ is then drawn into a connection to the phrases “face of two inclinations” and “unique and explicit, permuted.” The latter phrase alludes to the Tetragrammaton, and, given the context, more specifically to its two parts, the YH and VH. *Sheti va-’erev*, then, encapsulates here most of what we have seen of the essential nature of the bipartite Active Intellect and the Teli.

We learn next something of what this duality implies with respect to the covenant of circumcision. The phrase *sheti va-’erev* is now considered according to its anagram, ברית עשו. The covenant elicited is described as a “complete covenant,” the latter phrase having the same numerical value as that for both *sheti va-’erev* and ברית עשו. As well, the phrase “circumcision of the flesh” is drawn into a like equivalence. This circumcision of the flesh, Abulafia tells us explicitly, “is *sheti va-’erev*,” such that it partakes of the opposed aspects discussed above. From the beginning words of Psalm 33:21, “For in Him...”⁶² Abulafia subsequently derives the numerical value three hundred and fifty-two.⁶³ This number, Abulafia observes, is also, inter alia, the result of the *gematriyot* of the words “in the intellect” and “[the] accuser.”

The passage suggests that the covenant of circumcision brings man into a bipartite configuration, one echoing that of the Active Intellect and of the Teli. In this, there is a parallel to the discussion from Abulafia’s commentary to *Sefer Yesirah*, where the phrase ברית עשו appeared in much the same context, which began with a discussion of the twofold nature of the Teli. One important difference between the two passages is that there was little ambiguity in the commentary

⁶⁰ See *Sefer Yesirah*, Gruenwald ed., 2:4 (para. 18). See above, pp. 193–194. We should note a related passage from Baruch Togarmi’s commentary to *Sefer Yesirah*, where he characterizes both the covenant of the tongue and of circumcision as bifold, each being composed of the good and evil inclinations. Among the subsequent dichotomies associated with these inclinations are Adam and Eve and Jew and gentile. *Sefer Maftehot ha-Kabbalah*, p. 234.

⁶¹ *Shatnez* refers to the prohibition, stemming from Leviticus 19:19 and Deuteronomy 22:11, against wearing a garment composed of both linen and wool.

⁶² “For in Him our heart shall rejoice, because we have trusted in His holy name.”

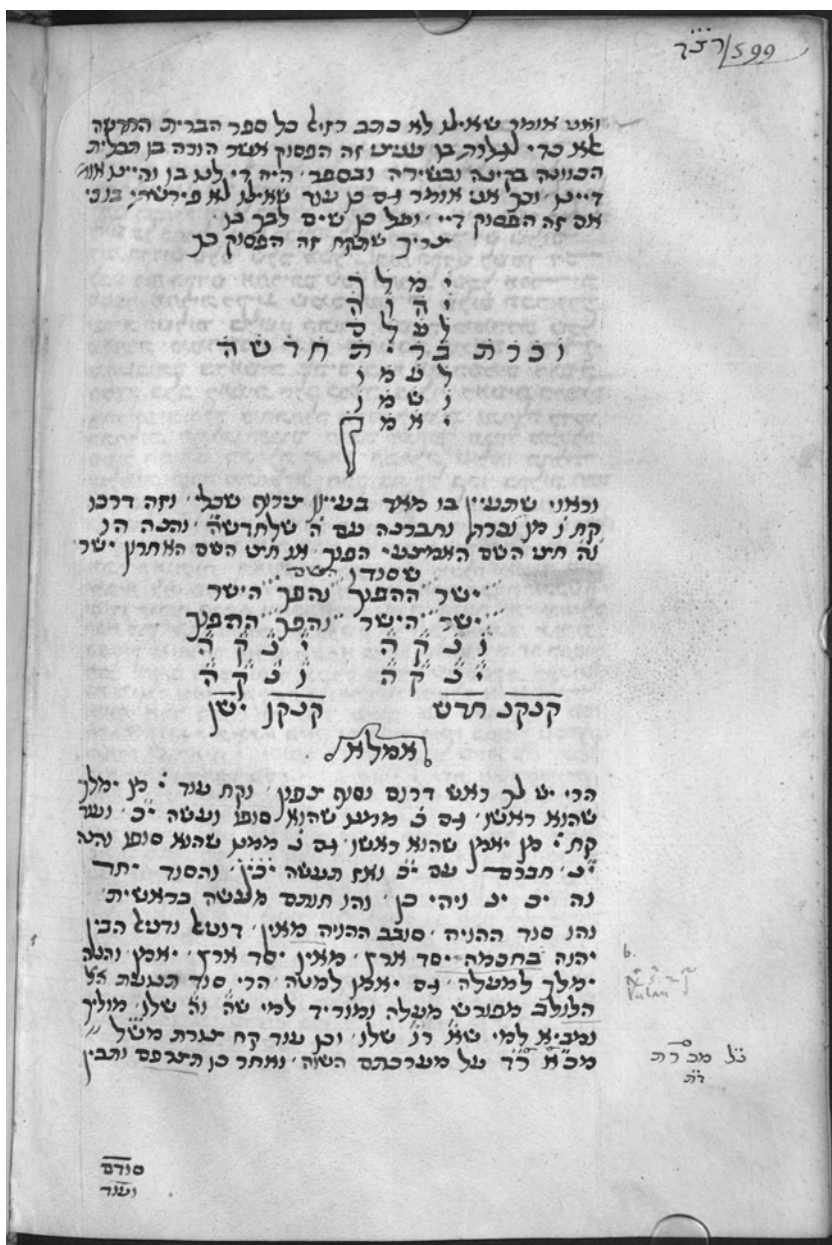
⁶³ From the words כי בו Abulafia derives the equation sixteen times twenty-two, yielding three hundred and fifty-two, based on permuting the letters as such: יו כב.

to *Sefer Yesirah* regarding the fact that עשו referred to Esau, and that it did not, in that context, mean “they made.” The fact that that passage mentioned עשו in connection with the Prince of Abomination, with the corporeal Prince and with the “head of corners” bears this out. In the current context, that same clarity is absent. It is perhaps easier to understand that the phrase “they made” is here intended, rather than “Esau,” because the thrust of the passage simply concerns the relationship between circumcision and the motif *sheti va-‘erev*; there is not very much present by which to understand a reference to Esau.

There is, in fact, but one juncture at which there is a connection between this discussion and those which overtly reference Esau. This is in Abulafia’s mention of the “accuser” towards the end of the passage, which is drawn into a numerical equivalence with the phrase “mixed in my power.” Abulafia here refers to the demonic, idolatrous component of the efflux from the Active Intellect, a notion confirmed by its appearance alongside the phrase “in the intellect,” possessing the same numerical value. The demonic component of the Active Intellect, of course, we have already seen linked to Jesus and Christianity, so that an allusion to Esau here is conceivable. But this possibility, to be sure, is only opened up by the fact that *sheti va-‘erev* is discussed much more overtly elsewhere with respect to a covenant of Esau.

In general, if the covenant, in its being *sheti va-‘erev*, is comprised of both components of the Active Intellect, as it clearly is in Abulafia’s estimation, then referring to it as the “covenant of Esau” poses an obvious problem, one which we have begun to explore. The Christian cross is easily understandable as bifold in graphic terms, but a “covenant of Esau” can symbolize at most only the bodily portion of a covenant, perhaps only its physical nature. Abulafia’s conception, therefore, represents a peculiar inversion of expectations. To associate Christianity with physical circumcision, devoid of spiritual content, flies in the face of the obvious fact that Christians do not partake of bodily circumcision. Indeed, Christianity forswore circumcision precisely because of the avowed perception that it lacked spiritual content; it was the latter that was sought in Christianity’s dispensing with the physical act.⁶⁴ In this we see the beginnings of a polemical turn on Abulafia’s part, one whose outlines we will continue to delineate. He suggests that Christianity, contrary to appearances, embodies a base,

⁶⁴ See, for instance, Rom. 2:28, 1Cor. 7:19, Gal. 5:2, 6.

Figure 1. *Sefer ha-Brit*, MS Munich-BS 285, fol. 36b.

physical covenantal modality in its dedication to a corporealized divinity. The physical covenant of which Christians partake is denuded of its all-important spiritual content.⁶⁵ In the current passage, Abulafia refers to circumcision, in its state of completeness, as being *sheti va-'erev*.⁶⁶ This conception of the covenant as complete refers, on the one hand, to the two-part procedure, *sheti va-'erev*, that Abulafia observes in the halakhic act of circumcision.⁶⁷ But it also refers, on the other hand, to circumcision's possession of two components, a spiritual and a material dimension. This conception will be enlarged upon shortly.

As I have suggested, if we perceive in the phrase **ברית עשו**, in the current context, another reference to Esau, then we are faced with the problem that Abulafia would be describing Esau's covenant as complete, a notion inconsistent with the statement that Christianity is devoid of the spiritual dimension of the covenant. To reiterate, this is a problem that we have encountered before. For we have already observed that the Teli, in its evil capacity, and Sandalfon, the demonic component of the Active Intellect, are described by Abulafia in a fashion that suggests that each may comprise the whole of the divine Active Intellect. We have noted that the bipartite entity that is *sheti va-'erev* appears to oscillate, in Abulafia's conceptualization or experience, between the wholly good and the wholly evil.

The Spiritual Covenant

It appears to me that a conception that the Christian covenant is complete in mundane terms, embodied in the physical cross, but incomplete spiritually is suggested in manuscript Munich-BS 285 of Abulafia's *Sefer ha-Brit*.⁶⁸ There, part of the manuscript text is itself arranged in the geometric form of a cross (see figure 1). The phrase "and cut a new covenant" (*ve-karat brit hadasha*) makes up the cross' lateral axis. In his accompanying text, which elaborates upon the meaning of this cross, Abulafia observes that the first and last letters of this phrase are

⁶⁵ See above, pp. 47–48, to be discussed further below.

⁶⁶ **ברית עשו**, *brit shalom*, and *sheti va-'erev* have the same numerical value.

⁶⁷ For kabbalistic interest in this aspect of circumcision, see Wolfson, "Woman-The Feminine as Other," pp. 186–187.

⁶⁸ *Sefer ha-Brit*, MS Munich-BS 285, fol. 36b; printed edition (*Maṣref ha-Sekhel*), pp. 54–55.

VH, the second half of the Tetragrammaton. Following this, Abulafia records a set of letter transpositions of the complete Tetragrammaton. We may surmise that Abulafia must conceive of the other, vertical axis of this cross as the first half of the Tetragrammaton, YH. This configuration would then accord graphically with what we have seen textually, a *sheti va-‘erev* Tetragrammaton. That Abulafia does associate the vertical axis of this cross with the YH of the Tetragrammaton is apparent from the accompanying text. There, Abulafia takes the four letters that begin and end the first and last lines of the cross’ vertical axis (*yod*, *kaf*, *yod* and *nun*) and combines them with the letters *vav* and *he’*, taken from the cross’ horizontal axis, deriving thereby the words “and it was so” (Gen. 1:7, 9, 11, 15, 24, 30). This phrase, Abulafia reports, is “the secret of existence” (*sod ha-havayah*).⁶⁹ The word *havayah* contains the same letters as the complete Tetragrammaton, so we can see that the two axes are intended to comprise the Tetragrammaton. Given that the horizontal axis is the VH, we can be certain that the vertical axis stands as the YH.

The VH of the Tetragrammaton, we have seen, corresponds for Abulafia with Christendom, and a critique of the Christian covenant is implicit, in this case, in the text that comprises the cross’ horizontal axis, the one corresponding to the VH. With the words, “and cut a new covenant,” Abulafia elicits the inadequacy of the Christian covenant. There is an eschatological dimension to the “new covenant” to which Abulafia alludes. Taking together the complete text that comprises the cross, we find, “And YHVH will reign forever, and He will cut a new covenant for His people, and His name will be fulfilled.” Abulafia, it can be said, appropriates the graphic, Christian cross as a representation of this new covenant, which, doubtless, is itself *sheti va-‘erev*. The eschatological covenant envisioned by Abulafia transfigures the mundane cross, fulfilling the messianic project of unifying the divine name in the completed, *sheti va-‘erev* form, the same form that is possessed by the new covenant itself.

Abulafia engages here in a further appropriation of a Christian motif, or a reappropriation of a Jewish one. The New Testament is replete with references to the covenant of Jesus as the “new covenant.”⁷⁰ The source for this notion was Jeremiah 31:30, “Behold, days are coming,

⁶⁹ Each of these phrases has a numerical value of one hundred and one.

⁷⁰ Matt. 26:28; Mark 14:24; Luke 22:20; 1Cor. 11:25; Heb. 8:8, 13; 9:15.

says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah..." Abulafia's affixing of a reference to a "new covenant" on a cross is almost disorienting, so closely does this construct mimic Christian symbology. It is clear that Abulafia seeks to assume for Judaism proprietorship of the cross as a representation of a complete, messianic covenant, one which lies beyond the purview of Christendom. But one cannot escape the sense, which we have experienced many times already to this point, that Abulafia's covetousness of Christian symbols is rooted in a powerful attraction thereto.⁷¹

The continuation of the passage from Jeremiah mentioned above, though not specifically cited by Abulafia, refers to the new covenant in connection with the inscription of Torah in the hearts of the people (Jer. 31:32). This phrasing is certainly evocative of Abulafia's contention that the new, complete and *sheti va-'erev* covenant is the spiritual one. The second passage from *'Oṣar Eden Ganuz* to be considered has more to say on the subject of the spiritual nature of the complete covenant. It reads as follows:⁷²

It is fitting to cut among ourselves the "covenant of circumcision," whose secret is the "four *ḥayyot*," because from them is our identity,⁷³ and the covenant is cut in the form *sheti va-'erev*. And it is fitting to cut this corporeal covenant and to cleave to that which is spiritual in it, which is the knowledge of the name, because it is not possible for the name to be revealed until its paths are taken *sheti va-'erev*, which is *ברית עשו*. That is to say, if man does not understand the actions of God, he does not understand Him, and that which he understands of Him is through the covenant of the holy language. And that which testifies to His sabbatical actions and to its signs, which are the repose and the gathering and the cleaving and the cessation (*shevitat*) of the action of dispersal, it is the second sign, and the Sabbath is the sign of repentance [or, return, *teshuvah*], and the sitting (*yeshivah*) is the sign of study, and the motion, its sign is weariness and fatigue (*yegiy'ah ve-'ayefot*), and there is no end save in repose. And "the day of repose" hints to eternal and sworn (*mushba'at*) repose. And regarding this comes the mentioning of "in the rainbow" to mention the covenant of world, year and soul, for which

⁷¹ Horowitz cites examples of a medieval Jewish dynamic of simultaneous attraction to and abhorrence of the Christian cross. "The Cross That Pierces and European Jews in the Middle Ages," pp. 120–122 (in Hebrew).

⁷² *'Oṣar Eden Ganuz*, MS Oxford-BL 1580, fol. 130a; printed edition, p. 286.

⁷³ This is so with respect to man's four bodily humors, as Abulafia had mentioned previously.

it [the rainbow] was a sign. And so too the tefillin were for a sign and a remembrance and the intention behind every sign and wonder that comes in any place is as a remembrance, so that we will not forget what we have forgotten.

The conception that the “paths” of the divine name are *sheti va-’erev* is understandable if we surmise that the Tetragrammaton is the name referenced. We know the Tetragrammaton to have been considered *sheti va-’erev* by Abulafia based upon its perceived bipartite composition. Knowledge of the name is here itself the consummation of the covenant of circumcision, Abulafia explains; the spiritual content of this act consists of this knowledge, and the act represents a coming into possession of the name.⁷⁴ For the covenant of circumcision, just as is the name, is *sheti va-’erev*. This parallelism between circumcision and knowledge of the name goes far in explaining the appearance of the phrase *ברית עשו* alongside the phrase *sheti va-’erev*; they are composed of the same letters, and the former phrase, in its covenantal evocation, elucidates the esoteric meaning of the latter. All of this is sufficient to understand the former phrase, in this instance then, as “they made a covenant,” and not as “the covenant of Esau.”

Nevertheless, further inspection yields an additional possibility. In discussing the prior passage from *’Oṣar Eden Ganuz*, we had noted that Abulafia references the completeness of the covenant that is cut *sheti va-’erev*, and we had suggested that the spiritual and physical components of the covenant together embodied that completeness. This is commensurate with the analogy drawn in the current instance between the bipartite name and the bipartite covenant, for the two components of the name we saw in the preceding chapter to be spiritual and corporeal. It is in the passage under current consideration that Abulafia makes specific reference to the requirement that the covenant possess a spiritual component in order to be complete. One must, he says, “cleave to that which is spiritual” within the “corporeal covenant.” And that which is spiritual therein, fittingly, is intellective in nature; that is, it partakes of the intellective dimension of the efflux from the Active Intellect, as opposed to that which is corporeal, and hence, as we have seen, imaginative, demonic, and to be associated with Jesus and Christianity. We may understand that Abulafia intends this

⁷⁴ See Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia*, p. 89, for a discussion of the connection, for Abulafia, between circumcision and the Tetragrammaton.

intellective efflux when he refers to the spiritual dimension of the covenant because he identifies it explicitly with “knowledge of the name.”

There is already a hint of a polemical subtext operative in Abulafia’s allusion to the spiritual dimension of the covenant, and this intention will become more explicit as we proceed. For the moment we may observe that Abulafia goes on to proffer the possibility of the complete covenant, that is, one that comprises not merely the corporeal but the spiritual dimension as well, to the Jews alone. He sets about defining what is entailed in the knowledge of the name, that knowledge standing as the spiritual component of the covenant. First, Abulafia relates that an understanding of God’s actions is essential to this knowledge of the name.⁷⁵ Abulafia subsequently specifies what he intends in this reference to the understanding of God’s actions.

He refers in particular to actions with respect to the Sabbath. These include cessation from labor and, by extension, the study of Torah, the latter being signified as well in the injunction to rest (*yeshivah* in the current passage, which implies for Abulafia both sitting and studying). The means to understand God’s sabbatical actions are found within “the holy language,” as Abulafia puts it. We may understand Abulafia’s allusion to Hebrew based upon the importance of letter permutations, executed in that language, for an understanding of the esoteric significations of Scripture or of a divine name. All of these elements to the knowledge of the name—honoring of the Sabbath, Torah study and skill in heremeneutical operations based upon the Hebrew language—act to confine access to the spiritual dimension of the covenant to the Jews. Abulafia as well goes on to refer to the *mišvah* of tefillin as a sign requisite for the remembrance of the covenant.

There is more to be said here regarding the significance of God’s sabbatical actions. Abulafia writes that the Sabbath signifies “gathering,” “cessation of the action of dispersal,” and eschatological “return.”⁷⁶

⁷⁵ See, for example, *Shomer Mišvah*, MS Paris-BN héb. 853, fols. 62b, 63b, 65b, 67b, 71b–72a; printed edition, pp. 29, 31, 33, 37, 42, where Abulafia references Maimonides’ conceptions in this regard. See Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 161–164. Recalled here is the Maimonidean contention that God may be understood only through His actions and not in His essence, and that His names are representative of His attributes and not of His essence. For both Maimonides and Abulafia, a linkage is apparent between God’s names and His actions.

⁷⁶ For the association of this eschatological return with the *sefirah Binah*, see above, pp. 230–232. For the significance of the Sabbath with respect to heightened enlightenment from the Active Intellect, see Ginsburg, *The Sabbath in the Classical Kabbalah*, p. 154 n. 104.

Sabbath refers, then, to the messianic ingathering of the Jews, a theme we have encountered before. A confinement to the Jews of the spiritual covenantal signification is again apparent. And striking here is the parallel to the passage we had earlier examined from *Ve-Ẓo't li-Yehudah*, where Esau had been overtly referenced. There, the covenant between the latter's two hands was that of the tongue with respect to the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet. We saw in that instance that the ingathering of the Jews and the return of the *Shekhinah* to Jerusalem were discussed specifically as a consequence of this covenant and of the Hebrew alphabet.⁷⁷ The power of the twenty-two letters, there associated by Abulafia again with both the covenant and with study, led to a unification of the *sefirot*. This, Abulafia explained, is to happen in God's name and for the sake of His name.

Thus, in these two passages a noteworthy similarity is apparent, as a link is effected between letter permutation, the knowledge of God's name, the covenant and the ingathering of exiles. Only in the passage from *'Oṣar 'Eden Ganuz* are we given to understand more particularly that the spiritualized component of the complete covenant, that component which is confined to the Jews, is under special consideration. In the passage from *Ve-Ẓo't li-Yehudah*, we recall, the covenant of the tongue, associated with the alphabet and thus with the eschatological ingathering described, was placed between the hands of Esau. Noteworthy in this regard is the fact that, in the passage from *'Oṣar 'Eden Ganuz*, the knowledge of God's name which concerns Abulafia is achieved through the "covenant of the holy language," that is, through the same covenant of the tongue described in *Ve-Ẓo't li-Yehudah*.⁷⁸ Based on this series of parallels, we have compelling reason to consider an additional valence to the phrase, in the current passage from *'Oṣar 'Eden Ganuz*, ברית עשו. For the covenant of the holy tongue here described may be construed to partake of one final parallel with the passage from *Ve-Ẓo't li-Yehudah*, in that עשו, in the current context, may well once more refer to Esau, whose hands, in the earlier passage, flanked this covenant.

Here, we return again to the problem of a covenant, in some way linked with Esau, which is nevertheless termed complete and bipartite

⁷⁷ See above, pp. 266–269.

⁷⁸ Wolfson associates Abulafia's discussions of the covenant of the tongue with letter permutation and with the separation of the soul from the body. "Kenotic Overflow and Temporal Transcendence," p. 167.

in the current passage. We are left to accept this assertion, though it is rendered problematic by the entire thrust of the passage, which suggests that the Jews alone, as opposed to Esau (Christianity), possess the complete bipartite covenant. Alternatively, we may venture a different reading of the passage, one in which the **ברית עשו** refers to the misunderstanding of God and of His actions that is discussed immediately after the phrase appears, as well as to the concealment of the name that is discussed before. Abulafia provides no additional hints in this regard.

Alternatively, it is appropriate to return momentarily to the first passage that we examined in which the phrase **ברית עשו** appeared, the one found in the commentary to *Sefer Yesirah*. That passage read in part, "...warp and woof (*sheti va-'erev*), which is without a doubt the covenant of Esau (**ברית עשו**), is the Prince of Abomination..." There the paradox against which we may feel inclined to struggle is rendered in a stark fashion; idolatry and Christianity are overtly discussed as bipartite, that is, *sheti va-'erev*, which is to say, cruciform. It may simply be that Esau's covenant is complete, in superficial terms, in that it is *sheti va-'erev*. As such, the bifold geometric figure of the cross is to be understood as indicated. That being said, Esau's covenant is nevertheless to be considered incomplete in terms of the spiritual criteria discussed in the current passage. Abulafia is, indeed, consistent on this point. There is more still to say on the subject of Esau's covenant, and we will return to consider further aspects of this second passage from *'Oṣar 'Eden Ganuz*.

The Four Ḥayyot and the Apotropaic Blood of Circumcision

The last of the three passages from *'Oṣar 'Eden Ganuz* which concern the phrase **ברית עשו** reads as follows:⁷⁹

Were it not for the covenant of circumcision, the covenant of the tongue could not be sustained, and were it not for the covenant of the tongue, the covenant of circumcision could not be sustained. And behold "ten *sefirot belimah*," their secret is "ten is the end of the covenant of circumcision." And behold "they made [a] book [concerning] the covenant of circumcision," whose secret, we find, is the four *ḥayyot* which contain

⁷⁹ *'Oṣar 'Eden Ganuz*, MS Oxford-BL 1580, fols. 4b–5a; printed edition, p. 9.

heaven and earth. And every tetrad is ten after the fashion of one, two, three, four joined together and counted, and therefore it was that “[the] reward of circumcision, [is that] they made a covenant (ברית עשו),” which is *sheti va-’erev*, to announce this, that in this way do we make this covenant: We cut into the flesh of desire to honor God, and we reveal the crown and cut the excess flesh, warp and woof. And we possess the complete covenant, and in the circumcision we cut the warp of the weave and with the uncovering we cut the woof of the weave. And the blood is for us a sign that is on the two doorposts and on the lintel. And God saw the blood and passed “...over the door, and did not allow the destroyer to come into...” our houses to smite us (Ex. 12:23). And God passed to smite the Egyptians, and the rest is understood from this. And from the expression “to smite” (*lingof*) the secret is understood that the destroyer smites the bodies (*ha-gufim*). And he who is within his house is saved from the destroyer when the wrath passes over. And the member that is a tool of procreation is not destroyed because of circumcision; rather, it is restored according to that which is intended for it, as will be said in its place, God willing.

In this translation I have rendered the phrase ברית עשו as “they made a covenant,” and there seems little basis on which to complicate the matter in this instance. The fact that the phrase, for Abulafia, proclaims the manner in which “...we make this covenant [emphasis mine]...” certainly suggests that it is the perfected covenant of the Jews that is under discussion. There are, however, other resonances in the passage that merit our attention. In the preceding, second passage from *Oṣar Eden Ganuz*, Abulafia drew the four *ḥayyot* of Ezekiel’s chariot vision explicitly into his discussion of circumcision. He pointed to the numerical equivalence between the phrases “four *ḥayyot*” and “covenant of circumcision.” In the current passage, Abulafia does much the same thing. He suggests that the four *ḥayyot* are connected with the number ten by way of the pythagorean tetractys, that is, by observing that the sum of the numbers one through four is ten. This observation of Abulafia’s is relevant because the passage begins by asserting the relationship between circumcision and the ten *sefirot*; circumcision represents the completion of the *sefirot*. Thus, to assert the connection between the *ḥayyot* and the *sefirot* is to establish the same relationship between the *ḥayyot* and circumcision, something that Abulafia is intent on doing.

Abulafia’s interest in establishing the latter relationship, that between the four *ḥayyot* and circumcision, relates to the fact that the latter is *sheti va-’erev*. A clue to this is apparent as the passage continues. “And the blood is for us a sign that is on the two doorposts and on the

lintel," it reads. Blood here simultaneously refers to the blood of the Exodus story, placed by the Israelites on their homes in order to protect themselves, and to the blood of circumcision.⁸⁰ Abulafia modifies Exodus 12:23 slightly, so that the reference to the two doorposts (*shtei ha-mezuzot*) now appears before that to the lintel. Abulafia is concerned with the motif *sheti va-'erev*, and he evidently seeks a correspondence between this motif and the *shtei* doorposts and single lintel. It is not difficult to conceive of the doorposts and lintel, being that they are at right angles to one another, as conforming to a structure of warp and woof. Abulafia has in mind a geometrical correspondence between the doorposts and lintel and the motif of *sheti va-'erev*.

In this, we may understand a further significance to the recurrent appearance of the four *hayyot* in the context of these discussions. When we conceive of *sheti va-'erev* in terms of two lines intersecting at right angles we may as well be mindful of the four endpoints of these lines. And indeed, the continuation of the current discussion lends further support to this contention. Immediately following the discussion of the blood on the doorposts and lintel with respect to circumcision, Abulafia goes on to make mention of the structure of man's body with regard to the ten *sefirot*. These themselves are *sheti va-'erev*, he relates, and they parallel

...the four winds that are in the world, and they are on one side East/West, two [that are] a line revealed above, after the fashion of the sun in the day, and a line hidden below, after the fashion of the moon at night. And the side [which is] South and North, the two are a line revealed above, after the fashion of the moon [sun?] in the day and a line concealed below after the fashion of the moon at night. And this is reversed according to the movements in summer and winter...⁸¹

Just as the covenant of circumcision—which is *sheti va-'erev*, composed of warp and woof—represents the summation of the *sefirot*, so too does man's entire body, the microcosm, conform to the sefirotic macrocosm. The latter Abulafia refers to specifically in terms of two perpendicular lines, that is, to a *sheti va-'erev* or cruciform structure. One

⁸⁰ We may be reminded here of the talismanic apotropaic function of circumcision discussed earlier. In either of blood's associations in the current context, protection from demons is an outcome. Although this is not Abulafia's immediate concern here with respect to circumcision, it is certainly implicit here. For the covenantal nature of the blood on the doorposts, see Biale, *Blood and Belief*, p. 42.

⁸¹ *'Oṣar 'Eden Ganuz*, MS Oxford-BL 1580, fol. 5a; printed edition, p. 10.

line runs East/West, the other South/North. These correspond to the “four winds” of the world. These in turn we may now see to parallel quite well the four *hayyot* that were linked earlier to the warp and woof of circumcision.⁸² Thus, we may understand that these *hayyot* represent for Abulafia the four endpoints of the two intersecting lines that comprise the *sheti va-’erev* structure of circumcision.⁸³

To conceive of this configuration in visual terms is to come to a surprising discovery. Christian tradition had had it since late antiquity that the four evangelists Matthew, Mark, Luke and John were to be represented by the four faces possessed by each of the *hayyot* of Ezekiel’s vision in the desert. These were the faces of a man, lion, an ox and an eagle, respectively.⁸⁴ The profusion of Christian examples, from antiquity and the Middle Ages, of visual representations of the four evangelists, represented as the four creatures whose faces

⁸² Thus we find in *Sitrei Torah* the notion that man’s own form follows the pattern of the four *hayyot*. MS NY-JTSA Mic. 2367, fol. 33b; printed edition, p. 68.

⁸³ Elsewhere, in *Maftelah ha-Tokhahot*, Abulafia again brings together the motifs of circumcision and of the four *hayyot* in a manner that suggests the configuration *sheti va-’erev*. He writes, “...And this is what I revealed to you concerning the ten *sefirot*, five of them are heavenly and supernal and five of them are terrestrial and beneath, as I described to you. And thus ‘the limb of procreation’ is ‘the limb of the covenant of circumcision of the uncircumcised,’ prince without the covenant, prince of the four *hayyot* whose secret is ב"ב. That is, that they are joined two [and] two and revert to one body, like the working of creation and as well the working of the chariot.” *Maftelah ha-Tokhahot*, MS Oxford-BL 1605, fol. 88b; printed edition, p. 116. The phrase *sheti va-’erev* is never mentioned here, but, in view of what we have seen regarding Abulafia’s other discussions of the *hayyot* in connection with circumcision, it should be apparent that the pairing of the *hayyot* in two sets, again in connection with circumcision, here too suggests the *sheti va-’erev* configuration. The reversion of the *hayyot* to one body would then imply the completion of the covenant, as before. In view of what we have seen of the synonymy of the “covenant of Esau” with the *sheti va-’erev* configuration, Abulafia’s reference here to “the limb of the covenant of circumcision of the uncircumcised” and the “prince without the covenant” is, of course, provocative. He may be referencing Esau here, or the Christian *sheti va-’erev*, which represents the completed geometric configuration of circumcision, but which lacks the consummation of bona fide circumcision itself. Mention should be made of a curious early fourteenth century theme observed by S. Cohen. Inquisitor Bernard Gui reported that Christian converts to Judaism received, at Jewish hands, an incomplete covenant, one in which only half of their foreskin was removed. Cohen advances some well-reasoned possible explanations for this unusual claim. There is a plausible underlying conception, perhaps held by Gui or his source, that Jews regarded the covenants of these converts to be incomplete, and so physically represented them as such. S. Cohen, “Between Judaism and Christianity.”

⁸⁴ Ez. 1:10. See also Rev. 4:7. The correspondences listed follow Jerome’s systematization. For a brief synopsis of the different opinions of the Church Fathers on this subject, see Peabody, McNichol, Cope, *One Gospel from Two*, p. 73.

are those of the scriptural *hayyot*, is impressive. The evangelists are time and again portrayed after the fashion of the *hayyot*, surmounting the endpoints of the cross or surrounding a mandorla with Jesus in the center, themselves, in the latter examples, signifying the cross in the latter's absence.⁸⁵ Even a cursory survey of Snyder's *Medieval Art*, for instance, yields numerous such examples.⁸⁶

In Abulafia's conception of the *sheti va-'erev* covenant as punctuated at each of its four endpoints by one of the four *hayyot*, we face a striking imagistic parallel with the widely popular Christian representation of the cross surrounded by the symbols of the four evangelists. It is difficult to hold to an explanation of this parallelism that does not acknowledge the likelihood that Abulafia was influenced by the Christian imagery that he saw around him.⁸⁷ And, indeed, there is some noteworthy corroborating evidence that just such a motif had entered Jewish consciousness in Abulafia's environs and in reasonable chronological proximity.

I refer to an image thought to have been created in the workshop of the Master of San Marco in Barcelona in 1348, although some ascribe it to Ferrer Bassa, who worked outside of the workshop but was influenced by the Master. The workshop was responsible for producing both Jewish and Christian texts, including Latin Psalters and

⁸⁵ The configuration that I describe here in the Christian imagery, of a divine and luminous body surrounded by symbolic representations of the *hayyot*, well recalls the structure of Ezekiel's chariot vision, the mandorla being analogous to the scriptural *hashmal*. Idel and Wolfson both discuss a parallelism between Christian notions of the luminous mandorla and contemporary Jewish mystical conceptions. Idel, "Some Remarks on Ritual and Mysticism in Geronese Kabbalah," pp. 120–121; Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being*, p. 256.

⁸⁶ To take just a few of these examples from Snyder, *Medieval Art*, we find the *Maiestas Domini* in the Vivian Bible (p. 221), the cover for the Pericopes of Henry II (p. 226), the front of the Altar of Saint Ambrose in Milan (p. 227), the Enthroned Christ in the Codex Aureus of Speyer Cathedral (p. 243), the *Maiestas Domini* in the Saint Sever Beatus of Liebana (p. 252), the *Maiestas Domini* relief in Saint Sernin, Toulouse (p. 266), and the *Maiestas Domini* tympanum of the west façade of Chartres Cathedral (p. 364). The book jacket to Snyder's *Medieval Art* shows the motif richly presented on the cover of the Lindau Gospels. We may add to this brief list such important works as the Book of Kells, the Archepiscopal Chapel ceiling in Ravenna, and the façade of the Basilica of San Francesco, Assisi.

⁸⁷ Of the locations of the works listed in the previous note, we know of Abulafia's presence in Ravenna. We do not know whether he would ever have had occasion to see the Archepiscopal Chapel ceiling. We may observe, however, that the motif in question is sufficiently common that Abulafia could have come across it at any time during his extensive travels, or that it may have been described to him by a Christian associate.

Hebrew manuscripts, the latter including Maimonides' *The Guide of the Perplexed*.⁸⁸ The style of the particular manuscript illumination that concerns us conforms to that found in Psalters produced in the same workshop, showing the influence of contemporary Italian production.⁸⁹ On the whole, the workshop of the Master of San Marco can be considered quite cosmopolitan in nature. Located in Barcelona, the nexus of diverse cultural currents, it produced works of a very high quality, and it partook of an international style.

The manuscript illumination of interest appears on the first folio of book three of a well known Hebrew edition of Maimonides' *The Guide of the Perplexed* (see frontispiece).⁹⁰ Book three of *The Guide* is dedicated to the investigation of what Maimonides classifies as the working of the chariot. Maimonides' concern there is with Ezekiel's vision of the chariot as it pertains, in his estimation, to issues of metaphysics. In his effort to "...interpret that which was said by Ezekiel the prophet..."⁹¹ Maimonides begins by examining the meaning of the physiognomy of the *hayyot*.⁹² Immediately apparent here is the appropriateness of decorating the introductory page of book three of *The Guide* with a representation of Ezekiel's chariot vision, and particularly upon focusing upon the *hayyot*, and that is precisely what we find in the manuscript. It is remarkable to observe, however, that the pictorial mode chosen for this task is wholly filtered through the prism of the Christian iconography of the four evangelists, derived, in turn, from Ezekiel 1:10.

Given the nature of the workshop of the Master of San Marco, we can easily imagine an interchange of ideas between Jews and Christians in the effort to arrive at a felicitous depiction of Ezekiel's chariot, one which could capture in a schematic form what would have been an

⁸⁸ Sed-Rajna, "Hebrew Illuminated Manuscripts from the Iberian Peninsula," pp. 139–140. See also idem, "Hebrew Manuscripts of Fourteenth Century Catalonia and the Workshop of the Master of St. Mark;" Kogman-Appel, "Hebrew Manuscript Painting in Late Medieval Spain," pp. 267–268. For Ferrer Bassa, see Alcoy i Pedros, "The Artists of the Marginal Decorations of the 'Copenhagen Maimonides,'" pp. 130, 131, 137; Meiss, "Italian Style in Catalonia and a Fourteenth-Century Catalan Workshop," pp. 50–60, 85.

⁸⁹ Opinions range on whether the influence reflected is of Siennese, Bolognese or Florentine origin. See previous note.

⁹⁰ "The Copenhagen Maimonides." Cod. Heb. 37, folio 202a, The Royal Library, Copenhagen.

⁹¹ Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, Book 3, Introduction.

⁹² Ibid., 3:1.

overwhelming challenge to render in detail. The entire central throne and figure is ultimately omitted from the depiction, as are the *'ofanim*, and the *hayyot* are simplified, so that each creature represents only one of the four faces. The image that was hit upon was indubitably informed by Christian input, as it is a precise rendering of the evangelist Tetramorph. In terms of the portrayal selected, of additional note is the arrangement of the four creatures in the image. Moving clockwise from the top left, they represent a man, an eagle, an ox and a lion. There is no conformity here to Ezekiel 1:10, which remarks first upon the face of a man; then upon that of a lion, to the right; then upon that of an ox, to the left; then upon that of an eagle. When we consider, however, the sequence of the four Gospels as they appear in the New Testament, we find a perfect conformity with the image introducing book three of *The Guide*, moving in a counterclockwise direction. Matthew stands for the face of the man, Mark for the lion, Luke for the ox and John for the eagle. Not surprisingly, variations on this sequence appear regularly in Christian iconography.⁹³ Most likely, as noted above, the image in the Hebrew manuscript of *The Guide* was executed by a Christian. Alternatively, it could have been copied by a Jew from a Christian model, the mode chosen could have been described by a Christian to a Jew or perhaps it was already known to a Jewish illuminator.⁹⁴

Regardless, it appears likely that there was some awareness among Jews of the motif of the Christian Tetramorph and that there was a visible receptiveness to adapting it to Jewish uses. This known instance of such an adaptation, in the manuscript of *The Guide of the Perplexed* of the workshop of the Master of San Marco in Barcelona, occurred within a generation of Abulafia and in one of his hometowns—in fact, the locale which influenced him more than any other in his life. Abulafia's appropriation of a cruciform schema for the *hayyot* as a result of the influence of Christian imagery appears far more understandable when we extrapolate from the evidence presented here concerning his cultural milieu. Where Abulafia parts ways with the workshop of the Master of San Marco is in his effort to

⁹³ See Snyder, *Medieval Art*, pp. 220, 224, 250 (beginning from the top right instead of the top left), 252, 266 (beginning from the top right and moving clockwise instead of counterclockwise), 364.

⁹⁴ See above, p. 31 n. 16, for Green's remarks concerning the visibility to Jews of this time of Christian symbols.

harness and co-opt the actual meaning of the Christian symbol that he appropriates. In the manuscript illumination from *The Guide*, by contrast, the Christian origin of the imagery had no bearing on its intended function.

To return to Abulafia's writings, a related passage, from elsewhere in *Oṣar Eden Ganuz*, affirms the notion that Abulafia approaches the theme of *sheti va-erev* in the graphic terms that we have described, and that he has a particular interest in the endpoints of the lines that intersect crosswise in this configuration. These endpoints we have seen to be linked with the four *hayyot*. The passage, as well, carries with it suggestions concerning the incompleteness of the covenant of Esau. Writes Abulafia,⁹⁵

Sheti va-erev is "two and four" (*shtayim ve-arba'*) because they are lines and planes, because the line is two points and the plane is two lines, which are four points, and the body is two planes, which are eight points. And for all of their points, the secret concerning the first ones is one, two, four, eight, (ד ב א ח) and their hint is "in one" (באחד).

Certainly, a geometric concern with regard to the theme of *sheti va-erev* is in evidence in the passage.⁹⁶ There is more than one possible reading concerning Abulafia's parsing of the *sheti va-erev* configuration into lines, planes and their attendant endpoints, but it appears that Abulafia intends that the configuration be understood as a plane, which, as he conceives it, consists of two lines.⁹⁷ We can understand how two intersecting lines can be seen to indicate a plane, as together they spatially delineate length and width with respect to each other. Abulafia continues by noting that a plane so configured, as two lines, possesses four endpoints.

Abulafia continues, relating that a three dimensional body is composed of two planes or eight points. An interest in the corporealization

⁹⁵ *Oṣar Eden Ganuz*, MS Oxford-BL 1580, fol. 13a; printed edition, p. 26.

⁹⁶ A closely related passage appears in *Ish Adam (The Man, Adam)*. The secret of עשו, we are told, is "...*sheti*, which are the two inclinations, *va-erev*, which are four, thus six, containing fire, air and water, to the six extremities." Here, the geometry of the six spatial directions is applied to the created world through the use of a *gematria*; the numerical value for the word "six" is the same as that for the words "fire, air and water" (*esh, ruah, mayim*), six hundred and five. All is related as well to the phrase *sheti va-erev*. *Ish Adam*, MS Munich-BS 285 fol. 19a; printed edition (*Masref ha-Sekhel*), p. 46.

⁹⁷ See the related discussion in *Mafleah ha-Ra'ayon*, MS Vatican-BA ebr. 291, fol. 31a; printed edition, p. 29. There the two "extensions," length and breadth, where length is established as linear, combine to generate a plane.

of the divine name underlies this conception. For Abulafia next observes, in the passage's continuation, that the numerical total of **באהד**, "in one," is fifteen, the same as that for the divine name YH. The phrase "in one" he had derived from the accumulation of points leading up to the composition of a three dimensional body.⁹⁸ Thus, Abulafia alludes to the manifestation of the name as a materialized, three dimensional entity; the YH is that body that is consolidated out of the points that together signify the phrase "in one." This assertion of the three dimensional nature of the Tetragrammaton's two parts, of the corporealization of the word, we have seen Abulafia make before.⁹⁹ In that earlier context, we noted that the reverse process in the Jewish mystical tradition, that of the transubstantiation of the flesh into word, is associated with the inscription of the divine name on the body during circumcision. Although circumcision is not specifically mentioned in the current passage, we can discern its suggestion in the phrase *sheti va-erev*. Thus, we can understand the current passage to invoke the corporealization of the unified Logos, the Tetragrammaton, in the person of the mystic. The word is corporealized into three dimensions while the flesh, with circumcision, is also made word, yielding once more Wolfson's notion of an "interflesh."

As we have noted, all of the points enumerated in the current passage together yield the name YH and allude to God's unity. This is consistent with what we have observed with regard to Abulafia's conception of the completed circumcision. Its *sheti va-erev* structure represents the unity of the *sefirot*, and, implicitly in the earlier passage, of man's body as well.¹⁰⁰ We may surmise then that Abulafia conceives of the name YH as reflecting the completed covenant. Along these lines, we have already observed that the YH can stand in the stead of the entire Tetragrammaton. Since the completed covenant is consummated by means of its spiritual half, and since we have seen that the YH of the Tetragrammaton represents the positive, male and intellectual component of the Active Intellect, we may understand that the YH in the current passage stands, then, for the completion of the *sheti va-erev* configuration.

⁹⁸ One point added to two points for a line added to four points for a plane added to eight points for a body equals fifteen.

⁹⁹ See above, pp. 218–223.

¹⁰⁰ See above, pp. 222–223.

The VH of the Tetragrammaton, then, is enfolded within the unified YH. The YH is spiritual in nature, the VH corporeal. We find the following in *Sitrei Torah*:¹⁰¹ "...And indeed, the YH that is inscribed testifies to Him about whom it is said that He is neither a body nor a potency in a body, and this is what I say to you, its one half judges its [other] half." The YH here is entirely spiritual, and it "judges" the Tetragrammaton's corporeal other half. The latter indicates, for Abulafia, the material component alone of the completed covenant, the physical *sheti va-'erev* in isolation from its spiritual dimension. Put another way, it is the defective, corporeal Christian covenant of Esau. That is to say, it is the Christian cross.

At this point, some further remarks are in order regarding the earlier passage, from *'Oṣar Eden Ganuz*, that considers the *sheti va-'erev* nature of the doorposts and lintel of Exodus 12:23.¹⁰² Abulafia makes specific reference there, we recall, to the nature of the fate met with by the Egyptians. They are struck down bodily: "...And from the expression 'to smite' (*lingof*) the secret is understood that the destroyer smites the bodies (*ha-gufim*)." A polemical motif that appears elsewhere in Abulafia's work is operative here. We have noted that Egypt symbolizes for Abulafia the gentile world generally, and Jesus and Christianity specifically. Abulafia's maintaining that Christendom is smitten bodily while the Jews, by dint of circumcision, are saved from this fate is consistent with his association of Christianity with corporeality. In this, the Christian suffers a punishment that is in accord with his nature.

There are resonances to this observation that bear exploration. It is appropriate to consider the Christian motif of crucifixion, especially since Abulafia in this passage has already invoked the *sheti va-'erev* configuration. In considering the Christian crucifix itself, we see that it symbolizes the fate suffered by Jesus, his bodily crucifixion. For Abulafia, according to the line that he pursues here, the fate suffered by Jesus on the cross would stand as a judgment rendered upon him for his own epitomization of idolatry. To be sure, Abulafia makes no specific mention of this notion concerning Jesus' crucifixion in the current context, but Abulafia clearly conveys elsewhere that Jesus' crucifixion was directly commensurate with his corporeal essence.¹⁰³

¹⁰¹ *Sitrei Torah*, MS NY-JTSA Mic. 2367, fol. 35b; printed edition, p. 77.

¹⁰² See above, pp. 279–281.

¹⁰³ See above, p. 240 n. 184. Jesus was "hanged" (*talui*) from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, signifying his material nature. Abulafia indicates that Jesus

We observed earlier that Abulafia perceived, in the temptations posed by idolatry, a bodily threat. This took the form, in particular, of punishment by castration. In the current context, we must consider the nature of the bodily punishment undergone by the Egyptians. This punishment is presented in contradistinction to the preservation afforded the Jew by dint of his phallic apotropaic talisman, his circumcision, the blood of which adorns his *sheti va-‘erev* doorposts and lintel. Consonant with Abulafia’s view that to be a Christian male is to have been feminized, it is not difficult to imagine that the punishment to the Christians, the “smiting of the bodies” referenced by Abulafia, would take the form of castration.

In this we may understand the ramifications of the continuation of Abulafia’s discussion. Abulafia specifically suggests that the Jew is spared the fate of castration. To the contrary, through his circumcision the phallus of the Jew is augmented: “...And the member that is a tool of procreation is not destroyed because of circumcision; rather, it is restored (*nitqan*) according to that which is intended for it...” In its restoration through circumcision, the phallus of the Jew assumes a status beyond that which it possessed before. Again, the unification of the *sefirot* is implied here, and the reference to restoration evokes the notion of communion with the *sefira Binah*.¹⁰⁴

In the same context, Abulafia writes that “...he who is within his house is saved from the destroyer when the wrath passes over.” Given this idea’s appearance alongside the allusion to the castration of the non-Jews and the protective circumcision of the Jews, it is appropriate to surmise that a like significance is present in the safety accorded the Jew in his house. As has been analyzed in depth by Wolfson, Abulafia’s contemporaries deemed marital relations as crucial to the theurgical unification of the *sefirot*, as against the demonic threat that would otherwise impinge upon the mystic.¹⁰⁵ The notion of safety’s being afforded to the Jew by his being in his house must be understood in such terms. That is, the phallus that is safe from castration, ensconced

“hanged himself on the material tree,” reinforcing the point that his own nature sealed his fate. *Mafteah ha-Shemot*, MS NY-JTSA Mic. 1897, fol. 82a; printed edition, pp. 130–131. See also above, pp. 164 n. 144, 175 n. 171. On the link between the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and shameful sexuality, see Idel, *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia*, p. 204.

¹⁰⁴ See, for this notion of *Binah*, Gikatilla, *Sha‘arei ‘Orah*, vol. 2, p. 46. For Abulafia’s conception of *Binah* in this regard, see above, pp. 230–232.

¹⁰⁵ See above, pp. 152–153.

in its “house,” is protected and completed and accomplishes the unification of the *sefirot*. This “house” is the wife, the terrestrial embodiment of the *Shekhinah*, who in sexual intercourse herself serves to complete the phallic configuration. Thus, the reference to the house and the safety that it affords serves for Abulafia as another means by which to make the point that the completed phallus, which is *sheti va-‘erev*, represents a communion with the *sefirot* and a spiritualized covenant that is denied to idolators (Christians), who have lost their male status through their corporeal preoccupation.

Wolfson, we have noted, observes the polemical dimension inherent in the erotic quality to the theurgy posited by medieval kabbalists. Since this theurgy entails sexual intercourse with one’s wife, the monastic ideal of celibacy is tantamount to the inflicting upon the Christian of the bodily harm described by Abulafia in the current passage. It is for this same reason that the *Zohar* enjoins against sleeping alone.¹⁰⁶ To sleep alone is to open one’s self to the demonic threat, identified there chiefly with Lilith, analogous to the one described here by Abulafia. In the *Zohar*, the threat of idolatrous fornication with demons ensues. For Abulafia, the threat of emasculation implicitly results from this infraction, the failure to consummate the erotic unification of the *sefirot*. In the *Zohar*, one is offered the choice of cohabitation with the *Shekhinah*, achieved through one’s wife, or idolatrous cohabitation with demons. For Abulafia, the choice is of theurgical unification through one’s wife, represented by the completion of the phallus as *sheti va-‘erev*, or dismemberment along the lines of the Christian example.

In this respect, Abulafia’s statement in the current context, “We cut into the flesh of desire to honor God,” appears to suggest an additional polemical gesture. Circumcision was deemed by Maimonides, to the extent that it tempered a man’s lustful feelings, as a protective device against idolatrous behavior.¹⁰⁷ Thus, the circumcised Jew is protected from the temptations that plunge the non-Jew into sexual lasciviousness and heretical conduct. The cutting into “the flesh of desire” that results in the Jew’s honoring God is, then, a cutting into his desire itself. Thus, God is honored in the proper sexual conduct that results,

¹⁰⁶ See, for instance, *Zohar* 1:19b.

¹⁰⁷ Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 90, 219–220; Biale, *Eros and the Jews*, p. 91. Biale suggests that conceiving of circumcision in this fashion, as a means to rein in sexual desire, comes “...suspiciously close to effecting something like castration.” See also above, p. 165 n. 147.

conduct which effects the preservation of the covenant of the phallus. The non-Jew, denied this protection, defiles and emasculates himself.

We have observed, concerning the theme *sheti va-‘erev* and the covenant of Esau, that the latter may be considered in two ways. On the one hand, it is cruciform, and as such it partakes of the completeness with which Abulafia associates that configuration, as is particularly apparent when he discusses the nature of circumcision. On the other hand, the covenant of Esau is nevertheless incomplete, being purely physical in nature, lacking the spiritual component of the covenant of the Jews. In one sense at least, then, both of the covenants under consideration, that of Esau and that of the Jews, may be considered *sheti va-‘erev*. Concerning that of the Jews, Abulafia is unambiguous. Concerning that of Esau, though his covenant is incomplete, nevertheless that covenant is as well *sheti va-‘erev*, just as the crucifix is *sheti va-‘erev*. This understanding will help to elucidate a pertinent passage from *Mafteah ha-Tokhaḥot*.

Abulafia begins there by linking the demonic both with man’s animalistic component and with the blood of animals, which is not to be consumed.¹⁰⁸ The flesh is appropriate for consumption, while the blood should be spilled upon the sacrificial altar. This concern with the sacrificial altar leads Abulafia into a discussion of Abraham’s binding of Isaac. That episode, Abulafia suggests, distinguishes the Jews from the idolators, who boast of their gods and sacrifice to them even their children.¹⁰⁹ Abulafia turns his attention next to Jacob, the third of the three patriarchs. He clearly indexes the three *sefirot* corresponding to these three figures as he writes, “Three that are one (*‘eḥad*): *’emet* (truth), *ḥesed* (mercy), *din* (judgment).”¹¹⁰ In this Abulafia appears to invoke a trinity in contradistinction to the one proffered by the idolatrous Christians. This is particularly apparent in his adoption of the Christian idiom, “three that are one.”¹¹¹ Abulafia continues,¹¹²

¹⁰⁸ *Mafteah ha-Tokhaḥot*, MS Oxford-BL 1605, fols. 55b–56a; printed edition, pp. 58–59.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, MS Oxford-BL 1605, fol. 56b; printed edition, p. 60. Abulafia contends that the idolators, “...boast of their gods and sacrifice even their children for their sake,” through a misunderstanding of the near-sacrifice of Isaac. This opinion is juxtaposed shortly thereafter with a discussion of Esau, such that we can sense a possible allusion to the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross, considering the Christian interpretation of the sacrifice of Isaac as presaging the crucifixion.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, MS Oxford-BL 1605, fol. 57a; printed edition, p. 61.

¹¹¹ Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 131–133 n. 101.

¹¹² *Mafteah ha-Tokhaḥot*, MS Oxford-BL 1605, fols. 57a–b; printed edition, pp. 61–62.

...The attribute *’emet* is found with the power of growth. And the explanation of this is that, with the growth of much study, the truth is revealed, and not, by any means, without much study. And thus study is mentioned explicitly with respect to the attribute and concern of Jacob, and with respect to Esau his brother hunting is mentioned, because it [hunting] is corporeal growth in two respects. As it says, “...and Esau was a cunning hunter, a man of the field” (Gen. 25:27). Thus there are two respects, “a cunning hunter” is one, in hunting animals, “a man of the field” is the second, concerning trees and grasses that are born in the field. “And Jacob was a humble man, dwelling in tents” (ibid.), is also two respects, the revealed one is “a humble man”, the concealed one is “dwelling in tents.” “Man of *belimah*,” “man of vanities,” studying Torah, all of which is full of vanities. “From the breath [*hevel*, sharing the same consonants as the word “vanity”] of school children.”¹¹³ And also, “Vanity of vanities, says Qohelet, vanity of vanities; all is vanity” (Ecc. 1:2).

Abulafia goes on from here to indicate that Esau spilled both animal and human blood, drawing a contrast with Jacob’s conduct. Similarly, Esau was hairy while Jacob was bald. Abulafia concludes by indicating that by becoming acclimated to study one may transform one’s animalistic tendencies.

In this passage, a reading consistent with the kabbalistic commonplace of a discussion of the *sefira Tif’eret* (symbolized by Jacob and by *’emet*), in its role as arbiter between the *sefirot Hesed* and *Gevurah* (alternatively referred to as *Din*) would be entirely plausible, but for one significant addition. That significant addition concerns Esau. When Jacob is described as partaking of two attributes, one encrypted in the phrase “a humble man,” the other in “dwelling in tents,” it is his internalization of the attributes of Abraham and Isaac, that is, the *sefirot Hesed* and *Gevurah*, that is intended. What then is intended when Abulafia relates that Esau as well partakes of two attributes, one encrypted in the phrase “a cunning hunter,” the other in the phrase “a man of the field”?

In answering this we may be able to come to a further understanding of how it was that Jacob and Esau’s covenants were paired in the earlier passage concerning the covenant of the tongue, where the *sefira Tif’eret* served as nexus for both.¹¹⁴ The current passage offers much the same paradigm in this regard. Jacob’s twofold nature finds its expression in *Tif’eret*, and so, apparently, does that of Esau. That

¹¹³ BT. *Shabbat* 119b.

¹¹⁴ See above, pp. 266–269.

Abulafia has in mind here a twofold twofoldness to the composition of the Active Intellect is apparent.

Once more, the *sheti va-‘erev* nature of the Active Intellect is not to be conceived merely in terms of the harmonization of good and evil, spiritual and material, components. Rather the Active Intellect as a whole oscillates entirely between its good and its evil, its angelic and its demonic, its pietistic and its idolatrous, and hence its Jewish and its Christian manifestations. In either of these manifestations it is inherently cruciform. This conception provides a useful context for the idea that Jacob’s nature is as “three that are one.” This transparent absorption of Christian influence may reflect a logical surmise on Abulafia’s part. If there is a debased and idolatrous triadic essence to Christianity, then, given the nature of the Active Intellect, the threefold construct of *Hesed*, *Gevurah* and *Tif’eret* must be considered in equal and opposite terms. These two triads must be conceived of as opposing expressions of the same entities.

Approached in this light, further details of the passage at hand emerge in greater clarity. For instance, both Jacob and Esau are linked by Abulafia to the concept of “growth.” In this we may recognize their close parallelism. Jacob is linked to the “growth of much study,” that is, with that which is spiritual and pietistic in nature, while Esau is linked with “corporeal growth.” Thus, each reflects one component of the *sheti va-‘erev* Active Intellect, though Abulafia, as we have said, elucidates the *sheti va-‘erev* nature of each in turn. The conception of Jacob as bald, Esau as hairy articulates once more the notion that Esau is to be linked with that which is animalistic, while Jacob represents man’s nobility.¹¹⁵ And for the same reason Esau is again linked with bloodshed here, seeming to effect a linkage as well with the passage’s initial topic, the savage conduct of idolators in their sacrifices.¹¹⁶ That which is represented in Esau’s bifold constitution is thus to be shunned, from which we may understand that the wholly Christian, yet nonetheless bifold, dimension of the Active Intellect is abhorrent. We are exhorted by Abulafia to turn to study, that is, to the righteous dimension of the

¹¹⁵ The association of hairiness with the demonic and baldness with purity is found as well in the *Zohar*. See *Zohar* 3:48b–49a.

¹¹⁶ Another polemic is apparently rendered here. Esau, that is, Christendom, is considered to be barbaric in its recourse to sacrifice, the sacrifice of Jesus being central to Christian dogma.

Active Intellect, by which, apparently, we may curtail the latter's oscillations towards its idolatrous constitution. Regarding these oscillations, and particularly the fact that the divine Active Intellect may become associated wholly and completely with evil, Wolfson makes some trenchant observations. He discerns a false dichotomy in our conception of the two attributes, good and evil. For Abulafia, Wolfson observes, "the difference between the good and evil inclinations is minimal" insofar as Abulafia maintains that the periods within which each dominates are infinitesimally small.¹¹⁷ In this manner, the opposition between the two extremes is ultimately overcome and effaced.

Partial and Complete Covenants

On the subject of the theme *sheti va-'erev* and its implications for a covenant of Esau, there is a final passage to consider, this from the early text *Sefer Melammed*, written in 1276.¹¹⁸ Abulafia begins here by noting areas of agreement and disagreement between Jews and the other nations concerning such matters as the calculation of the age of the world and the nature of Adam and Eve's creation.¹¹⁹ He refers to Genesis as offering prooftexts concerning such issues, but he goes on to note that, despite such recourse to Scripture, there are only "wonderful observations" to be made, and that

...we have no [divine] proofs for any of them...there is no knowledge except in the intellect or in the senses, about which the intellect testifies, and regarding which it will bring many doubts in the heart. And also, because no prophet shows us sensory or intellectual signs today, so that we will know the truth of that which we receive from our fathers and from the sages of blessed memory, that is, from their excellent books.

¹¹⁷ Wolfson, "Kenotic Overflow and Temporal Transcendence," pp. 151–152. See above, p. 123, for a similar discussion on Abulafia's part.

¹¹⁸ We touched earlier upon a portion of the passage. See above, pp. 47–48.

¹¹⁹ *Sefer ha-Melammed*, MS Paris-BN héb. 680, fol. 303b; printed edition, p. 36.

An epistemologically tenuous situation prevails in Abulafia's day, he explains, because of the absence of divine revelation, the likes of which was described in Scripture and which could verify Scripture's testimony. Man has recourse only to his reason and to his senses, and the latter, being of dubious worth, must be subjected to reason for analysis. Contemporary Jews, Abulafia observes, have the advantage of being able to turn to the illumination of received traditions, although the latter must be accepted on the basis of faith, in the absence of the verification of divine revelation. The eminence of these traditions apparently obviates the necessity for divine revelation, although the latter would nonetheless elevate the Jews' level of enlightenment.

Next appears the crux, for our purposes, of Abulafia's discussion:¹²⁰

And thus it remains to received doctrine concerning what has come to pass—indeed, concerning what is today as well, in respect to how it responds to what has come to pass. Such as our being sons of Jacob our father, peace be upon him, and the uncircumcised being sons of Esau, he who was circumcised in the phallus and uncircumcised of heart, and the Ishmaelites, sons of Ishmael, who also are circumcised in the phallus and somewhat of heart, with respect to their belief in the unity; there is no one who can deny that the matter is so, as the Torah relates it. Because thus we have it regarding this, and the intellect does not contradict a word of it. And if so, we have no way to deny it.

Abulafia explains first that Jewish notions of the relationships to God of the three abrahamic faiths are based, in the absence of contemporary divine revelation, upon the illumination of received doctrine. Despite their being credible, being, as well, not inconsistent with reason, Abulafia appears to concede that these views lack the imprimatur of prophetic verification, consistent with the epistemological state of affairs delineated above. Although this somewhat uneasy stance conforms to the theme of the passage just delineated, that the Jews are lacking miraculous revelation, it is a somewhat surprising position. For it is to the level of prophecy, Abulafia maintains consistently, that the kabbalist attains in his cleaving to the Active Intellect. All the more surprising are Abulafia's apparent doubts, considering that he maintains here that the Jews enjoy a completed covenant. The latter, we have come to understand, initiates a perfected state of union with the Active Intellect.

¹²⁰ Ibid., MS Paris-BN héb. 680, fol. 304a; printed edition, pp. 37–38.

These apparent doubts on Abulafia's part bear a relationship with his attestations that temptations toward idolatry caused him great tribulations. For susceptibility to such temptations, Abulafia indicated, stems from instability within the edifice of belief so crucial to the mystical project. And there is a further relationship here to the conception that the divine efflux may spontaneously transform into that which is wholly evil. The mystic's grip on the true revelation that flows from this efflux can only be insecure. Such conceptual threads run throughout Abulafia's thought, we have seen, and it appears that at the time of his writing of this current passage from *Sefer Melammed*, Abulafia lacked some measure of confidence in the status of mystical revelation as prophetic proof.

As I have suggested, these epistemological questions, tellingly, undermine Abulafia's accompanying assertions concerning Judaism and the other nations in this passage. Abulafia, in his reference to Esau's physical circumcision, again alludes to a covenant of Esau. The circumcision of the heart, Abulafia reports, is lacking from Esau's circumcision, such that the spiritual element of the covenant, discussed earlier, is absent. Esau's covenant is incomplete,¹²¹ which is to say, in a transcendent sense it is not *sheli va-'erev*. Esau's physical circumcision may have been so, but this does not comprise the entirety of the complete covenant. As the crucifixion symbolizes, we have seen, the thrall of the material, in Abulafia's estimation, the cruciform configuration that represents Christianity refers only to its physical dimension.

This is an extraordinary thesis on Abulafia's part, for he implicitly declares that the complete covenant, that is, the True Cross, belongs not to Christians but to Jews. This contention is all the more intriguing when one considers the far-flung cult of relics prevailing in medieval Christian Europe. In the midst of Christian society given over to devotional fervor concerning these physical embodiments of divine potency, none of whose renown exceeded that for fragments of the

¹²¹ See *Mafteah ha-Tokhahot*, MS Oxford-BL 1605, fol. 84a; printed edition, p. 106, regarding the circumcision of the heart's status as "the basis of the whole covenant." See also *Or ha-Sekhel*: "...the revealed circumcision is the cause of the circumcision of the heart, and the circumcision of the heart is the cause of the life of the world to come for the heart and for the soul of those who love God." MS Vatican-BA ebr. 233, fol. 48b; printed edition, p. 45.

True Cross, Abulafia proclaims the latter's true locus to be on the person of the male Jew.¹²²

In this regard, it is possible to perceive an added dimension to the psycho-sexual dynamic in which Abulafia, we have seen, is immersed. Abulafia's attraction to Christianity bears the imprint of erotic fascination. His anti-Christian vituperations bear an intimate relationship to his attraction to Christianity. As well, we see, Abulafia at times harbored doubts concerning his own critique of Christianity. In his cooptation of the motif of the Christian *sheti va-'erev*, we might fairly say that Abulafia secretly covets what the Christians possess. This jealousy, of course, is centered for him around notions of the phallus, which he identifies with the *sheti va-'erev*. Where, then, Abulafia doubts the purported idolatrousness and, hence, femininity of Christendom, we may sense that he may well harbor a hidden envy for Christian masculinity.

Abulafia's view concerning Islam here is interesting as well. The Ishmaelite covenant is less complete than that of the Jews; Muslims are only to some certain extent circumcised of heart. But it is superior to that of the Christians, who possess no element whatsoever of this circumcision of the heart. Hence, it is apparent that the Islamic covenant is perceived as to some extent *sheti va-'erev* in the transcendent sense. Abulafia's contention about Islam as well elucidates the nature of his critique of Christianity. Islam has redeeming merit to the extent that

¹²² Snoek, *Medieval Piety from Relics to the Eucharist*, provides many examples of the supernatural powers accorded relics, with pieces of the True Cross outstripping all others in this regard. He presents the thesis that by the thirteenth century, a "transposition" had been set in motion, where the material culture of reverence centering around relics began a slow shift toward the distinctly material veneration of the eucharistic object, in tandem with the shifting of emphasis away from the eucharist as ceremony and toward the eucharist as physical embodiment of the divine. We may sense, then, that in Abulafia's day the eucharist as a physical relic of Jesus himself possessed a status related to that for relics of his True Cross. Given Abulafia's interest in the divine name as Logos, the locus for the materialization of divine intellection in its correlation with the mystic's body, and given as well Abulafia's sense of the cruciform nature of the divine name, impressed upon the body in circumcision, we can see that Abulafia's conception of the significance of circumcision echoes Christian modalities both with respect to the physical eucharist as the materialized Logos and with respect to the indwelling of divine potency in relics of the physical True Cross. Hames makes a related observation, that Bonaventure describes Francis of Assisi as having the crucified Christ imprinted as a seal upon his body. "A Seal within a Seal," p. 161 n. 31.

it embraces belief in God's unity.¹²³ Christianity, therefore, does not embrace the unity in the least.¹²⁴ Just as the theurgical unification of the *sefirot*, as we have seen, is to be associated with the completed *sheti va-erev* configuration, so then does Christian polytheism, reflected in its trinitarianism, in Abulafia's opinion, suggest a disunity to the divine.

Blood, Semen, and Sexual Desire: Moses and "The Egyptian"

The surmise that Abulafia could be contending with what, in Freudian terms, suggests penis envy may be associated with the observation that Abulafia was grappling with a powerful castration anxiety. At times, we can discern the suggestions in Abulafia's thought that he may have felt himself to have been emasculated by his doubts, which were manifest in the form of maimings at the hands of bloodthirsty demons. If he felt, at points, his own virility to have been removed

¹²³ That Abulafia's appraisal of Islam here seems to reflect a wider Jewish view is apparent from a statement by Joseph b. Shalom Ashkenazi, who reported that some Jews recited the *Shema*, the liturgical profession of God's unity, while worshipping with Muslims, "...testifying to their unitary faith." Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*, p. 189. See the related discussion above, pp. 34, 46–48. In the *Zohar*, we find the attribution of at least a human status to Muslims, based upon their possession of what is at least a partial circumcision, while Christians are relegated to the status of beasts. Nevertheless, the zoharic authorship will at times reverse this judgment, declaring that exile among the demonic Muslims is worse than among the (also demonic) Christians. Wolfson, *Venturing Beyond*, pp. 51, 58. The status of human or "man" (*'adam*), that is, the divine likeness, is achieved only by the Jews, because only the Jews are circumcised. For the rabbinic background to this notion, see Gottstein, "The Body as Image of God in Rabbinic Literature." See also the comment on the preceding in Aaron, "Shedding Light on God's Body in Rabbinic Midrashim: Reflections on the Theory of a Luminous Adam." The notion of this perfected human form in the divine likeness has other antecedents. The divine luminous body in Jewish-Christian thought is discussed in Fossum, "Jewish-Christian Christology and Jewish Mysticism." Fossum relates the "Son" in this context, referred to as the "Great Power," to the *Kavod* in the hekhalotic tradition, which is similarly identified. See p. 273. As well, the "Hidden Power," identified with Jesus, is also present in the *Shi'ur Qomah* tradition. Ibid., p. 274.

¹²⁴ In *Sefer ha-Edut* (*The Book of Testimony*), in the context of a discussion of the permutation of the letters of the Tetragrammaton forwards and backwards, Abulafia reports that "the nations" write backwards, while Jews and Muslims write forwards. The linkage of Islam with Judaism, as against Christianity, is again apparent here. Since Abulafia addresses once again the head and tail of the Teli in this context, we may also surmise that Abulafia associates Judaism and Islam with the Teli's *sheti va-erev* configuration, or with the all-encompassing YH of the Tetragrammaton. *Sefer ha-Edut*, MS Munich-BS 285 fol. 43a; printed edition (*Maṣref ha-Sekhel*), p. 77.

from him through his attraction to idolatrous, castrating Christianity, it was as well the masculinity of Christianity—a masculinity which he vehemently denied—that he claimed for himself. Simultaneously, then, in Abulafia's cooptation of the Christian phallic symbol for himself, he transfigures a symbol of illicit eroticism, transmuting and clothing it in sacrality, while he restores his preferred assignations of masculinity and femininity.

Relative to this internal battle over vying conceptions of phallic potency, another theme employed by Abulafia, that of the trees of the Garden of Eden, is revealing. From what we have seen, both trees, for Abulafia, assume a phallic valence, just as each, in a different respect, is cruciform. The tree of knowledge of good and evil is cruciform in that it is the tree upon which Jesus, for Abulafia, was crucified. It represents the material fixation that lies at the root of Christianity, the reason for which Jesus received his harsh but symbolically appropriate judgment. Abulafia's subconscious envy of Jesus, exemplified in his assignation to his own phallus of the crucifix motif, accords with a conception of the material tree, that of the knowledge of good and evil, as phallic. By contrast, the tree of life, antithetical to the death with which the other is identified, stands as the spiritualized phallic potency.¹²⁵ The following passage from *Sitrei Torah* informs this line of reasoning:¹²⁶

And the secret [of the two trees] is "the mouth is male and the membrum is female. And¹²⁷ the two trees are supernal and lowly."¹²⁸ And the secret of "garden" is "body, soul,"¹²⁹ in the two of which is "divine wisdom."¹³⁰ And the locution "garden" is as a place that receives all kinds of growth, and so too "the mind"¹³¹ is a place that receives all manner of image (*siyur*), but testimonies come from it and tell us its [the image's] powers,

¹²⁵ Scholem refers to the idea that the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is understood in kabbalistic discourse as the "tree of death," as against the tree of life. The former is to be associated with the *Shekhinah's* exile, perpetrated by demons, while the latter represents sefirotic unity. *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*, p. 107.

¹²⁶ *Sitrei Torah*, MS NY-JTSA Mic. 2367, fol. 47b; printed edition, p. 130.

¹²⁷ The numerical value of the expression (in quotes) is five hundred and seventy-six to this point, equal to the numerical value of the words "two trees."

¹²⁸ The numerical value of the words "supernal" and "lowly" is again five hundred and seventy-six.

¹²⁹ The "secret" is based upon the consideration of the word "garden" as an acrostic for the words "body, soul."

¹³⁰ This latter phrase has the same numerical value as "body, soul," five hundred and nineteen.

¹³¹ "Garden" and "the mind" have the same numerical value, fifty-three.

and they are the two trees, and every “tree” is “an image” (*selem*)¹³² and every “efflux” is “a likeness”¹³³ ... And in truth one tree adds wisdom and the other adds lust. “And the tree of life adds wisdom (*hokhmah*),”¹³⁴ “and the tree of knowledge adds sciences (*hokhmot*).”¹³⁵ “And the tree of life is a lot (*goral*),”¹³⁶ “and the tree of knowledge is lots (*goralot*).”¹³⁷ One lot is for God, and one is for Azazel; the first one is for good and the middle is for chance (*ʿefsharut*) and the last one is for evil. “And the tree of life adds an embryo (*golem*),”¹³⁸ and the tree of knowledge adds barrenness (*galmud*).¹³⁹

When, at the beginning of the passage, Abulafia speaks of the mouth and the phallus with respect to the Garden’s two trees, he alludes to the covenants of the tongue and phallus from *Sefer Yeṣirah*. We recall that Abulafia located the covenant of the tongue, which he had linked to Jacob, between the hands of Esau. The covenant of the tongue was there understood to be a covenant of a higher order than that of the phallus.¹⁴⁰ In the current context, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is associated with the profane, and Abulafia links this tree and its nature with the circumcision of the phallus. Conversely, the tree of life, in tandem with the covenant of the tongue, is seen as spiritual in nature. These distinctions conform as well to the passage’s division of the Garden into two components, one identified with the “body” and the other with the “soul,” respectively. In both of these is

¹³² “Tree” and “image” have the same numerical value, one hundred and sixty.

¹³³ “Efflux” and “likeness” have the same numerical value, four hundred and fifty.

¹³⁴ The phrase “and the tree of life” has the same numerical value as “adds wisdom,” two hundred and thirty-nine.

¹³⁵ The phrase “and the tree of knowledge” has the same numerical value as “adds sciences,” six hundred and forty-five.

¹³⁶ The phrase “and the tree of life” has the same numerical value as “lot,” two hundred and thirty-nine.

¹³⁷ The phrase “and the tree of knowledge” has the same numerical value as “lots,” six hundred and forty-five.

¹³⁸ The phrase “and the tree of life” has the same numerical value as “adds an embryo,” two hundred and thirty-nine.

¹³⁹ A peculiarity ensues here. Were we to find גלמות here instead of גלמוד (as occurs in JTS MS 2367), then we would find a numerical equivalence between the phrase “and the tree of knowledge” and “adds גלמות,” both yielding six hundred and forty-five. גלמות, however is not easily understood, the plural for *golem* being masculine in form. “*Galmud*” makes contextual sense but disrupts the numerical equivalence of the two phrases in question.

¹⁴⁰ See above, p. 267. Elsewhere, we noted Abulafia’s reference to a “covenant of the holy language,” one that appeared to coincide in all respects with the covenant of the tongue. See above, p. 275. See also Wolfson, “Kenotic Overflow and Temporal Transcendence,” p. 167.

“divine wisdom” to be found. That is to say, each is a component of the efflux from the Active Intellect, the former being imaginative, the latter intellective. That the lower tree—that linked to the body, the imagination and the inferior circumcision—would stand here as the tree upon which Jesus was crucified, that of the knowledge of good and evil, is clear.

Each of these trees, or components of the Garden and the Active Intellect, Abulafia treats, in the current passage, as a “likeness,” while that which is received from them is an “image” found in the mind of the mystic subsequent to his reception of the divine efflux. It is noteworthy, given our concern with the notion that both of these trees represent crosses for Abulafia, that the word for “image” here, *selem*, has a common second meaning, “cross.” Abulafia appears to have this double meaning in mind here. The fact that both trees, crosses or components of the Active Intellect are responsible for the generation of a “likeness” in the mind of the mystic demonstrates what we had discussed at length earlier, the impossibility of circumventing the human mind’s idolatrous, imaginative faculty.

As part and parcel of this faculty, the inferior circumcision, that of the membrum, is categorized as female at the outset of the passage. Abulafia also links the lower tree with “lust” (*ta’avah*), illustrating the polemical argument that the idolatrous lusts of the Christian man render him female.¹⁴¹ This idea is reflected in the passage’s closing point. There, it is suggested that the tree of life gives rise to progeny, the sign, we have noted, of fully actualized masculinity, while the tree of knowledge proffers only barrenness or sterility. Abulafia again derides that hallmark of Christianity, referred to here as the lower and inferior circumcision, that of the phallus, as emasculating or feminizing. Nevertheless he co-opts its *sheti va-’erev* configuration as phallic. His own ambivalence is again at play.

In a related passage, from *Mafteah ha-Ra’ayon*, Abulafia writes,¹⁴²

...The intention of creation was completed only after the giving of Torah. And he who was created was not completed until he circumcised himself and removed from himself his foreskin. And two contained covenants were brought, and they are the covenant of circumcision, to complete within it the creation of the attribute of the body, and the

¹⁴¹ On the link between the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and shameful sexuality, see Idel, *Mystical Experience*, p. 204.

¹⁴² *Mafteah ha-Ra’ayon*, MS Vatican-BA ebr. 291; fol. 25b, printed edition, p. 14.

covenant of the tongue, to complete within it the creation of the attribute of the soul. And the covenant of circumcision came to completion at the hands of Abraham our father, and the covenant of the tongue at the hands of Moses our rabbi. And thus the two of them are called by the names of teachers; we say that this one is our father and this our rabbi. And this is the secret of divine kabbalah, and understand this.

The thrust of the passage concerns the essential completion and perfection of the human being, and, along these lines, Abulafia will go on to discuss the perfected man's microcosmic nature.¹⁴³ This perfection is attained through the consummation of the two covenants already discussed, that of the tongue, linked, as before, to the soul, and that of the phallus, linked to the body. Abulafia associates each of these covenants with a Jewish patriarch, such that the Jew alone embodies the complete covenant, *sheti va-ʿerev*.¹⁴⁴

Abulafia will go on to suggest a slightly different notion of the circumcision of the heart than that which we considered earlier.¹⁴⁵ Here, he explains that the circumcision of the heart, seat of life and Torah, is the "arbiter" discussed in *Sefer Yeṣirah*, corresponding to the air that moderates between fire, symbol for the covenant of the tongue, and water, from which the belly was created and with which the covenant of circumcision is to be linked.¹⁴⁶ Thus the circumcision of the heart represents the spiritual completion of the covenant, while that of the tongue is that part, the higher, linked to the soul, as before, as against the bodily circumcision of the phallus.

From this we may understand an assertion from our prior reading from *Sitrei Torah* that might have been opaque to us before: "...One lot is for God, and one is for Azazel; the first one is for good and the middle is for chance (*ʿefsharut*) and the last one is for evil." The passage referred to the two trees in the Garden of Eden and to the two covenants to which they are linked. In this excerpt, lots are designated for these two elements as well, but a kind of arbiter, a third lot, partaking of either one of the others, is introduced between the good and evil natures of the two trees and two covenants. Abulafia, more than

¹⁴³ Ibid., MS Vatican-BA ebr. 291, fol. 26a; printed edition, p. 16.

¹⁴⁴ Wolfson notes Abulafia's association of the covenant of the tongue with Moses and that of the phallus with Abraham. He observes as well that the circumcision of the heart mediates between those of the tongue and phallus. Wolfson, *Venturing Beyond*, pp. 67–69; *Language, Eros, Being*, p. 139.

¹⁴⁵ *Maṣleḥ ha-Raʿayon*, MS Vatican-BA ebr. 291, fols. 25b–26a; printed edition, p. 15.

¹⁴⁶ *Sefer Yeṣirah*, Gruenwald ed., 3:3–4, 6:1 (para. 25–26, 28–30, 35). See above, pp. 156–157.

likely, conceived of this arbiter as the circumcision of the heart. It is clear from *Maḥṣeḥ ha-Ra'ayon* that the bifold nature of the complete covenant, or its cruciform status, finds its center around the circumcision of the heart.

In this regard, there is a significance to the assigning of Moses to the spiritual component of the covenant, that of the tongue. This becomes apparent when one considers several related passages concerning Moses. In these, the polemical dimension of Moses' spiritual circumcision is apparent. One such passage is to be found in *Sitrei Torah*. There, Moses is contrasted with "the Egyptian." What each represents may be understood contextually. The most significant section, for our purposes, reads as follows:¹⁴⁷

...you know that your first matter is proximate to the efflux of your father and mother, and its name is "effusion of semen" (*shikhvat zera'*) or "drop of semen," and it is "fetid drop" (*tippah seruḥah*), whose "end is repentance" (*ḥaratah*). And it is "earthly" (*'aphariyot*) and contains "ten sefirot," and the secret is "time and fruit" and its concern is "the uncovering of the circumcision" that contains the "counting of the Torah." [This is the] six hundred and thirteen *misvot* of the Torah, and it is "circumcision of the nakedness," and behold still "they did not reveal [their] nakedness." But "effusion of semen" is "טצק" [having a numerical value of nine hundred and ninety-nine]. And he is born "incidentally" or [from] pollution (*qeri*), and it is the name that comes "from the inclination" and it is "the Egyptian" whom "Moses" struck; and he is "'El Shaddai." And his secret in full is, '*alef, lamed, shin, dalet, yod*; count it and you will recognize it [the numerical value of nine hundred and ninety-nine]. And if he merits "the name," he is "Moses," he who "draws [its] form" (*mesayer riqmah*); he is very dear.

Moses and the Egyptian whom he smites are placed in opposition to one another, although some similarity—or even mutual identification—is delineated as well, as is suggested by the fact that the numerical values for "Moses" and "the Egyptian" are the same.¹⁴⁸ The Egyptian is born out of "pollution," or out of the happenstance or incidental nature (*miqreh*) of the lower, impure world, as against the essential nature of the supernal world. This characterization of "the Egyptian" follows upon a discussion of sexual intercourse and of the pollutedness that, for Abulafia, is its hallmark; the character of semen is as the "fetid drop," wholly terrestrial (*'aphariyot*, in the passage) and described in

¹⁴⁷ *Sitrei Torah*, MS NY-JTSA Mic. 2367, fol. 57a; printed edition, pp. 185–186.

¹⁴⁸ Both equal three hundred and forty-five.

terms of the dishonoring or the rendering unchaste of the circumcision (*‘ervat ha-milah*, in the passage).

It is not surprising to find an Egyptian rendered in such terms, given what we have already seen regarding the identification that Abulafia makes between Egypt and Christendom. Indeed, Abulafia refers to Jesus himself, the “bastard son of the menstruant,” as “the secret of the first matter,” in *Mafteah ha-Shemot*, at the same time identifying him with pharaoh.¹⁴⁹ So we may suspect that if Moses represents the Jewish people, and “the Egyptian” stands for Christendom, then it is likely that Jesus himself is implied. In this sense we may understand Abulafia’s intention with respect to the dishonoring of the circumcision, for Jesus, we have already come to see, failed to fulfill the covenant through its spiritual consummation. And likewise is Christianity, with respect to its idolatrous practices and beliefs, to be associated with sexual transgression, tantamount to the desecration of the self. Abulafia’s discussion of “the Egyptian” illustrates Abulafia’s own anxiety with respect to the evil entity, whom he draws into an implicit equation with Moses himself, and toward whom he manifests a fascination.

Entwined within Abulafia’s discussion of the corruption latent within sexual procreation is precisely the opposite quality as well. Abulafia refers in this regard to the “circumcision of the nakedness,” an inversion of the words for the dishonor implicit in the “uncovering of the circumcision” just discussed.¹⁵⁰ Though the two phrases are composed of the same Hebrew letters, the former suggests the sanctification of the male organ and, thus, of the sexual act. This sanctifying circumcision is drawn into a numerical association with the Torah and *misvot*, as was its opposite expression.¹⁵¹ The latter, the “uncovering of the circumcision” is as well linked numerically by Abulafia to the phrase “ten *sefirot*.” This latter phrase, we then find, contains nearly the same letters as—and has the same numerical value as—the word for “earthly” (*‘aphariyot*).¹⁵² From all of this it is apparent that Abulafia seeks to demonstrate that two moral valences are present within the

¹⁴⁹ *Mafteah ha-Shemot*, MS NY-JTSA Mic. 1897, fol. 81b; printed edition, p. 130.

¹⁵⁰ *Milat ha-‘ervah* versus *‘ervat ha-milah*.

¹⁵¹ Both phrases are numerically equivalent to the phrase “counting of the Torah” (having a numerical value of seven hundred and sixty-six), which, Abulafia implies, refers to the number of *misvot*.

¹⁵² עפריות י" versus ספירות.

act of procreation, one heavenly and consecrated, one terrestrial and debased.¹⁵³

Just, then, as these two components are entwined within the Active Intellect, so too are the natures of Moses and Jesus. Both are to be associated with the procreative act, Jesus with its corrupted performance and Moses with its consecrated expression. Moses' identification with procreation is amplified by Abulafia when he notes that Moses, through a numerical equivalence, is to be identified with "'El Shaddai."¹⁵⁴ The significance of this point inheres, as we have seen, in the fact that 'El Shaddai is the name linked to the *sefira Yesod*, the phallic potency within the sefirotic array. Moses stands here for the supernal procreative faculty, as against Jesus' purely physical endowment. That Abulafia intends this procreative aspect to the name 'El Shaddai becomes clear when he observes that the numerical value of the letters of this name, when each is spelled out in full, is equal to the numerical value of the prior phrase "effusion of semen" (nine hundred and ninety-nine).

In the continuation of the *Sitrei Torah* passage, Abulafia declares that he who merits "the name" is "Moses."¹⁵⁵ Undoubtedly, meriting the name is synonymous with the cleaving to the Active Intellect, which, as with the *sefira Yesod*, is as well referred to by Abulafia as Shaddai.¹⁵⁶ Just as, elsewhere, the mystic who accomplishes this is transformed into the angel Metatron, so here we see him transformed into the hypostatic Moses.¹⁵⁷ We saw earlier that this divinized state is the result of the perfection of the covenant of circumcision, completed in the form *sheti va-'erev*, so we may well understand the association here between the Active Intellect and the phallic potency. When Abulafia

¹⁵³ This formulation follows from Abulafia's immediately preceding discussion, not quoted here. There, he discussed the divine and terrestrial natures, what he refers to as the intellective and the material, with respect to the ox and the ass. The ox, a clean animal, is linked to the *merkabah* by the fact that an ox's face is one of those possessed by the *hayyot*, while the word for ass, an unclean animal, possesses the same consonants as the word "matter." The corrupted nature of the ass is somewhat qualified, just as is that of the material or imaginative component of the efflux from the Active Intellect, by the fact that the messiah will ride upon, that is, subjugate and harness, an ass (Zech. 9:9). Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being*, p. 242. Idel, *Mystical Experience*, pp. 143, 188.

¹⁵⁴ "Moses" and "'El Shaddai" both have a numerical value of three hundred and forty-five.

¹⁵⁵ "The name" is an anagram of "Moses."

¹⁵⁶ Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 131 n. 100, 148, 204, 205.

¹⁵⁷ For the interconnectedness of Moses, Metatron and the Active Intellect in the thought of Jacob ha-Cohen, see Pedaya, *Vision and Speech*, p. 96 (in Hebrew).

writes that the one who achieves this stature “draws [its] form” (*mešayer riqmah*), he may refer to what we have already seen, that the form to be associated with the Active Intellect is cruciform, *sheti va-‘erev*. In kind with this observation, we noted earlier that the reception of the Active Intellect’s *selem*—“image” or “cross”—takes the form within the recipient of the *demut* or “likeness.” Achieving the status of Moses, then, may represent the attainment to the cross, as *sheti va-‘erev* or *selem*.¹⁵⁸

It is as well the demiurgic nature of the Active Intellect that is underscored through its being associated with the phallus.¹⁵⁹ Abulafia will, as the passage from *Sitrei Torah* continues, refer to the four tablets received by Moses (Ex. 31:18, 34:4). These he connects both with the name ’El Shaddai and with the four colors red, white, black and green.¹⁶⁰ In turn, these are associated with the creation of the four bodily humors, with day and night and with creation’s extraction from nothing (*yesh mei-‘ayin*). Here, then, we find Moses as phallic potency and demiurge, in a parallel with Christian characterizations of Jesus as this same figure.¹⁶¹ Moses’ parallel but superior status with respect to

¹⁵⁸ Abulafia’s perspective that the *sheti va-‘erev* circumcision gives rise to a cleaving with the Active Intellect, resulting in the realization of a divine status, finds a further noteworthy Christological parallel. In a vision of hers, Catherine of Siena wore Jesus’ foreskin as a wedding ring, one which she associated with the eucharist. Bynum, “The Body of Christ in the Later Middle Ages,” p. 408. Through circumcision—Jesus’, vicariously—Catherine comes into her erotic intimacy with the divine. At the same time here, we may also detect a suggestion that Jesus’ own divine identity is expressed in his circumcision. His divine embodiment is encapsulated in his foreskin, as an analog to the eucharistic wafer.

¹⁵⁹ The Active Intellect’s status as demiurge and phallic potency is emphasized in a passage from *Gan Na’ul*: “And after this [discussion of the lowest *sefira*, *Malkhut*] contemplate the second [*sefira*], which is the ninth *sefira*, and it is the root of the tenth, which is the last branch of all the *sefirot*, and its name is *Yesod*. And it is hinted at in the covenant of circumcision, and from the power of this ninth *sefira* the tenth produces fruit.” MS Munich-BS 58 fol. 319a; printed edition, pp. 11–12. See also *Mafteah ha-Ra’ayon*, MS Vatican-BA ebr. 291, fol. 41a; printed edition, p. 58 for the identification of *Yesod* with circumcision. For *Yesod* as Shaddai, the Active Intellect and the phallic potency, see above, pp. 199, 161 n. 138, 188–190, 224, 305–306. See also Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, p. 228, Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 130–131; “Circumcision and the Divine Name,” pp. 85, 98; *Circle in the Square*, pp. 42–47; *Language, Eros, Being*, p. 133; Idel, *Language, Torah, Hermeneutics*, p. 7.

¹⁶⁰ The first letters of each of these colors, when combined with the letter *dalet*, signifying the number four, spell the name ’El Shaddai.

¹⁶¹ See John 1:3, 10; Col. 1:15–15; Heb. 1:2, 10. See Deutsch, *Guardians of the Gate*, p. 156. For the Jewish roots of demiurgical motifs that may subsequently have informed conceptions of Jesus, see Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism*, pp. 2, 12, 34, 42, 45, 49, 51, 66; Fossum, *The Image of the Invisible God*; Stroumsa, “Form(s) of God,” pp. 277, 279, 281; Wolfson, *Along the Path*, pp. 75–84; Liebes, *Studies in the Zohar*, pp. 156,

his near-namesake, “the Egyptian,” is thus apparent in this passage, as, once more, is Abulafia’s self-identification with Jesus, the figure whose expression within himself Abulafia seeks to control.

Yesod, the Šaddiq, or Righteous One, as Alpha and Omega

A related passage, from *Maṭteah ha-Ra’ayon*,¹⁶² bears scrutiny. It refers to the man who has attained to the perfected state of conjunction with the Active Intellect. Such a man becomes “first and last,” following the model of the letter *’alef*. The *’alef* is the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, but it is also referred to as the last by Abulafia when he considers it to represent *’elef*, consisting of the same consonants as *’alef* but indicating the number one thousand. When such a man comes into a likeness with the letter *’alef*, he resembles, for Abulafia, the enthroned prince, Metatron, as well as both Adam and God Himself. This man is called “one,” and he becomes the one pillar in the world on which the All depends.¹⁶³ His name is *šaddiq*, the righteous one. The passage goes on to associate the letter *’alef* with a tripartite configuration, stemming from the letter’s graphic form but suggested as well in that it embodies within itself the three numbers one, ten and one hundred.¹⁶⁴ Similarly is man’s being tripartite, composed of body, soul and intellect, while the male body is also tripartite, composed of head, stomach and lower body (*geviyah*).

In view of the statement that such a man is both “first and last,” one theme from the passage just discussed from *Sitrei Torah* may now be elucidated. This was Abulafia’s highlighting of the fact that the phrase “effusion of semen” had a numerical value of nine hundred and ninety-nine. Abulafia transcribed the number in terms of the letters for the three numbers nine, ninety and nine hundred, but without explanation. We may see now that if the man who has perfected his circumcision and exercised his procreative faculty is reflected in the letter *’alef* and the numbers one, ten and one hundred, as in *Maṭteah*

240–241, regarding the evidence of *Midrash ’Otiyyot de-R. ’Aqiva*. See above, p. 125 n. 51.

¹⁶² *Maṭteah ha-Ra’ayon*, MS Vatican-BA ebr. 291, fols. 37a–b; printed edition, p. 47.

¹⁶³ See BT, *Ḥagigah* 12b, *Toma* 38b; *Bahir*, § 102; *Battei Midrashot* 2:3, 4.

¹⁶⁴ In the theosophic kabbalistic tradition, as well as elsewhere in the work of Abulafia and his disciples, the letter *’alef* is discussed in terms of its tripartite nature. Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being*, p. 544 n. 450.

ha-Ra'ayon, these being numbers associated with his being “first,” so then is he “last” in his embodying the terminal number nine and the triad of nine, ninety and nine hundred, as in *Sitrei Torah*.¹⁶⁵ We may recall that the number nine hundred and ninety-nine was again highlighted there by Abulafia when he observed that the letters for the name 'El Shaddai, when they are spelled out in full, yielded this sum. So it is that the number nine hundred and ninety-nine is linked by Abulafia with the demiurgic *sefira Yesod*.

That Abulafia intends a demiurgic understanding of the perfected man whom he references in the passage from *Maftelah ha-Ra'ayon* is rendered apparent in several ways. First, this man is seen to sustain the world after the fashion of a supporting pillar, a notion drawn from the Talmud regarding the righteous of every generation.¹⁶⁶ Second, the word that Abulafia chooses to denote the world's dependence on the righteous man is *talui*. This choice is most certainly intended by Abulafia to allude to the function of the demiurgic Teli, from which the world devolves and is suspended or “hangs.”¹⁶⁷ This connotation to the name itself for the Teli we have already considered. Elsewhere, Abulafia will link the Teli with his discussions of the *sefira Yesod*.¹⁶⁸ That Abulafia refers to the world here as the All recalls gnostic notions of the demiurge as the progenitor of or from the pleroma, notions that

¹⁶⁵ In the passage from *Maftelah ha-Ra'ayon*, there is some degree of ambiguity in terms of how the “last” is to be understood with respect to the *'alef*. It was apparent that the *'alef* is “last” when it represents, for Abulafia, the number one thousand, but as Abulafia continues, the *'alef* is not again associated with the “last” number, one thousand, but only with the numbers one, ten and one hundred. It is from this and from the appearance of nine, ninety and nine hundred in the same connection in *Sitrei Torah* that I infer that *'alef* is essentially “first,” because of its placement with respect to the single digit numbers, while the number nine, or the letter *ṭet*, is last for a similar reason.

¹⁶⁶ See above, n. 163.

¹⁶⁷ Insofar as the *saddiq* may be thought of as the *axis mundi*, we may understand as well his association with the Teli. See, for instance, Green regarding R. Simeon bar Yohai of the *Zohar* as both the *saddiq* and as the *axis mundi*. Green, “The *Saddiq* as *Axis Mundi* in Later Judaism,” p. 336. We should note a related discussion on the part of Abulafia's teacher, Baruch Togarmi. Addressing *Sefer Yesirah*'s reference to the *sefirot* as *belimah*, he writes, “The moon [*levanah*, having the same numerical value as *belimah*, eighty-seven] is the beginning of the lower ones in one respect and the end of the upper ones as well. And thus the *Yesod* depends (*talui*) upon the mouth in one respect and in one respect upon the *milah*.” Togarmi here integrates a notion of the twofold aspect of the demiurge, accompanied by the latter's association with the two covenants, and an identification of this demiurge both with the *sefira Yesod* and, by implication, with the Teli. *Sefer Maftelah ha-Kabbalah*, p. 232.

¹⁶⁸ See, for instance, *Gan Na'ul*, MS Munich-BS 58 fol. 335a; printed edition, p. 65.

Abulafia has doubtless garnered from the *Bahir*.¹⁶⁹ The last means by which Abulafia attributes a demiurgic nature to the perfected man, in *Maṣleah ha-Ra'ayon*, is his referring to him as the *ṣaddiq*. For the *sefira Yesod* is understood as the *ṣaddiq* time and again by kabbalists, and we have already come to understand this *sefira*'s demiurgic signification, particularly with respect to the symbolism of circumcision and the fecundity with which it is linked.¹⁷⁰

We perceived an allusion to Jesus operative in the discussion of "the Egyptian" in the passage from *Sitrei Torah*, and we noted the close identification of this defiled figure with the one who is as well his opposite, Moses. Something similar is operative in the current case, in that the righteous man is identified as "first and last," a phrase, derived from Isaiah 44:6. Abulafia's recourse to this phrase in his discussion, in particular, of first and last letters is highly suggestive of the Book of Revelation's discussion of Jesus as the letters alpha and omega.¹⁷¹ That the alpha and the omega are the first and last Greek letters clarifies further Abulafia's interest in the Hebrew letter 'alef in the current context, as well as his interest in the numerical sets one, ten and one hundred and nine, ninety and nine hundred, when we consider both the passages from *Sitrei Torah* and *Maṣleah ha-Ra'ayon*.¹⁷²

We should, of course, observe that the christologically suggestive evocation of the letter 'alef is accompanied by the assertion that the letter is tripartite—or trinitarian—just as is the man who embodies this letter. As well, Abulafia clearly suggests that such a man is divinized. He bears the likeness of both Metatron and of God. As to the nature of this likeness, we noted earlier how the *sheti va-erev* configuration with

¹⁶⁹ Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, pp. 71, 87–89; Wolfson, *Along the Path*, pp. 72–73; Abraham Abulafia, pp. 130–131.

¹⁷⁰ Nahmanides referred to *Yesod* as the All. Idem, "By Way of Truth," pp. 166–167. He referred as well to the *Shekhinah* as the All, embodying as it does all of the higher *sefirot* within it. We should note that this unification with the higher potencies is achieved through the conjoining of *Yesod* with the *Shekhinah*, realized, as mentioned earlier, in circumcision. See *ibid.*, p. 145.

¹⁷¹ Rev. 1:8, 17; 21:6; 22:13, and see next note.

¹⁷² Wolfson discusses the influence of emergent Christian doctrine regarding Jesus as the alpha and the omega on the formulation in *Shir ha-Shirim Rabbah* concerning God and the letters 'alef, mem and tav. *Alef, Mem, Tau*, pp. 164–165. Marcus notes the "highly suggestive" similarity between the Christian eating of the eucharistic wafer, representing God, "the alpha and the omega," and the medieval Jewish practice of having children eat cakes inscribed with the alphabet. Jewish absorption of this Christian motif is suggested. "Jews and Christians Imagining the Other in Medieval Europe," p. 221; *Rituals of Childhood*.

respect to the perfected circumcision may be accompanied by a third element, the circumcision of the heart, reflecting the fully spiritualized circumcision. In this sense, then, the *sheti va-‘erev* configuration of the circumcision is itself not simply bipartite but tripartite as well, just as is the righteous man, with all of the phallic connotations to be linked with him in terms of the signification of the demiurgic *sefira Yesod*.

We have discussed at length how the covenant of Esau is not infrequently understood as complete and as *sheti va-‘erev*, although its lower and corporeal status nevertheless persists. The current passage from *Maftelah ha-Ra‘ayon* may as well help us to understand this conception. The perfected man is described as possessed of the completed triad that is body, soul and intellect, this then embodying the fully spiritualized covenant, while the body itself is described in triadic terms in its own right. It is this latter triad—or trinity—that corresponds to the completed corporeal covenant of Esau, embodied in the crucifix.

It is significant to note, in closing our examination of the passage from *Maftelah ha-Ra‘ayon*, Wolfson’s exploration of the sources for the bahiric authors’ discussion of the demiurge. He observed that Jewish-Christian doctrine from antiquity seems to have referenced Jesus as the *ṣaddiq*.¹⁷³ Given our observations concerning Christian evocations in the passage from *Maftelah ha-Ra‘ayon*, and taking it together with the prior passage from *Sitrei Torah*, which identified the phallic, demiurgic Moses with the evil “Egyptian,” it is difficult to avoid the surmise that Abulafia was attuned to the association of Jesus with the figure of the demiurgic *ṣaddiq*.

Earlier, we noted that Abulafia characterized the tree of life in terms of virility and fecundity, while the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, linked to Jesus’ cruciform nature, was understood in terms of sterility and impotence. In this regard, there is complexity to what we have seen of Jesus’ association with the *sefira Yesod*, inasmuch as his linkage with the tree of the knowledge of good and evil is essentially contradictory to the procreative nature of the phallic, demiurgic *sefira*. Abulafia’s putting forward of the theme of Jesus’ “fetid drop” navigates this difficulty, as Jesus’ virility is rendered unclean and, hence, feminized, as we have seen. Abulafia’s efforts to contend with Jesus’ phallic status and relationship to *Yesod* have considerable bearing on a

¹⁷³ For Jesus as the *ṣaddiq* in *’Otiyyot de-Rabbi ’Aqiva* and in the *Zohar*, see Liebes, *Studies in the Zohar*, pp. 154–158; Wolfson, *Alef, Mem, Tau*, p. 146.

protracted discussion in *Gan Na'ul*, written in 1289. In reflecting upon Jesus' relationship to the Jewish messiah, in this context, elaboration upon the significance of the blood of circumcision runs to the core of Abulafia's concerns.

Abulafia's extended treatment of these subjects in *Gan Na'ul* is a display of hermeneutical agility. Abulafia himself here refers to his approach as one of "skipping" or "jumping," as he seemingly spontaneously follows the course of his own permutational process, though within prescribed limits. The general pretext of his discussion concerns the Israelites' contention with pharaoh. An appropriate point at which to begin is with Abulafia's delineation of a type of magic square constructed from the names of the third, sixth and ninth of the ten plagues; these are vermin, boils and darkness respectively. Abulafia writes,¹⁷⁴

Behold, already you see that these [three plagues are] mentioned through the signs three, six, nine, which are the third, sixth and ninth. Because they are without a doubt three three three, and the tenth, which is one, is separate and alone, and upon this the entire secret of *Sefer Yeṣirah* depends.

It is apparent that Abulafia here contemplates a relationship between the plagues and the *sefirot*, the latter in their configuration of three hierarchical triads, with the lone *sefira Malkhut* beneath.¹⁷⁵ Thus, the ninth plague, darkness, corresponds to the ninth *sefira*, *Yesod*. Abulafia next notes the presence of the word "plague" (*nega'*) in Exodus 11:1,¹⁷⁶ drawing a connection between its appearance there and its appearance in *Sefer Yeṣirah*. There, the word pair of *'oneg* (pleasure) and *nega'* was enigmatically evoked.¹⁷⁷ Here it seems that Abulafia intends *nega'* to indicate the tenth *sefira*.¹⁷⁸ This is apparent from his subsequent reference to pharaoh's sending of the Israelites from Egypt, in the same

¹⁷⁴ *Gan Na'ul*, MS Munich-BS 58 fol. 329a; printed edition, p. 45.

¹⁷⁵ Abulafia states that he understands the scriptural treatment of the ten plagues to encrypt clues concerning the ten *sefirot*. Ibid., MS Munich-BS 58 fol. 329a; printed edition, p. 45.

¹⁷⁶ *Ve-hu' she-qara' ha-shem nega', she-ne'emar...*

¹⁷⁷ *Sefer Yeṣirah*, Gruenwald ed., 2:4 (para. 18). See above, pp. 193–194, 270.

¹⁷⁸ It is also possible that Abulafia understands the positive and negative connotations of *'oneg* and *nega'* to refer to aspects of each *sefira*. Those negative aspects are then to be understood as having the character of a "plague." This notion is particularly relevant to a consideration of the ninth *sefira*. For *Yesod* is identified by Abulafia with the Active Intellect, whose bipartite nature has been essential to our analysis of Abulafia's construal of an idolatrous element within the divine efflux received by the mystic.

verse from Exodus, as hinting to “the first exile.” The idea that the tenth *sefira*, also represented in terms of the *Shekhinah*, may be perceived to be in an exilic state, or a state of separation from the supernal *sefirot*, is one to be found frequently in kabbalistic discourse.¹⁷⁹ This state of separation is one in which the *Shekhinah* is bereft of the life-giving efflux from the phallic and demiurgic *sefira Yesod*.

The “first exile,” for Abulafia, is indicated in Exodus 11:1 in that part of the verse which reads, “Yet I will bring one plague more upon pharaoh and upon Egypt; afterwards he will let you go from here.” A “last exile” is suggested, for Abulafia, in the last part of the verse, the part that reads “...he shall send you altogether...” (*ke-shalho kalah*). The word “altogether” (*kalah*), by a letter transposition, Abulafia reads as *ha-kol*, “the All.” He writes, “The sign at the end [is] for the last exile, because it is at the end of ‘the All,’¹⁸⁰ hinted at in his [pharaoh’s] sending.” We have observed the close connection between the notion of the All and *Yesod*, so we may discern here the idea that this last exile refers to the separation of *Malkhut* from the other nine *sefirot*, as discussed.

The letters for “he shall send you” (*ke-shalho*), from the last part of the verse, Abulafia next transposes to derive “and the darkness” (*ve-la-hoshekh*). He writes, “‘And the darkness he called night’ (Gen. 1:5) is the name of Satan. Also night is his name, because he is the angel who rules over pregnancy, who restrains the white seed.” Abulafia makes use here of a numerical equivalence between “and the darkness,” “Satan” and “white seed.”¹⁸¹ The darkness or night that is linked with the exile of the *Shekhinah* and the cessation of the flow of the divine efflux is satanic in nature.¹⁸² And Abulafia is clear toward the end of this passage that this disruption in the sustaining flow of the phallic efflux is to be understood either as barrenness or as impotence, a restraining of semen, “the white seed.”

The “end of the All,” or the impotence of the phallic *Yesod*, is essentially satanic in nature. We have already observed that Jesus is described by Abulafia in terms of the material and corrupt aspect of semen, the

¹⁷⁹ See above, p. 268; Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*, pp. 107–109.

¹⁸⁰ Or, “in the end.”

¹⁸¹ Each has a numerical value of three hundred and sixty-four, although, with respect to “white seed,” this only holds when one removes the prefix letter *he’* from the word *ha-levanah*.

¹⁸² Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*, p. 107.

“earthly” “fetid drop.” In this respect, he is not to be understood as physically impotent, but only spiritually so (as against Moses and the quality of semen with which he is associated). We may recall as well the earlier reference in *Sitrei Torah* to the barrenness to be linked to the tree upon which Jesus hung, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. In this, we find a noteworthy parallel to the current discussion of a satanic *Yesod*, particularly insofar as the tree, as crucifix, bears for Abulafia the phallic associations already discussed. That the satanic element in the current case is not simply itself impotent but actually propagates impotence, a characteristic that we have seen linked to Jesus with respect to his followers, highlights Abulafia’s anxiety.

We should understand that, for Abulafia, the notions of impotence and of the base and corrupted state of the “fetid drop” that is linked to the demonic are equivalent. Both are to be contrasted with the virility of the *saddiq* or of Moses, and both are linked inextricably with death. So, just as we found Jesus tied to the theme of impotence in terms of the feminizing nature of his idolatry, so too do we elsewhere find the following:¹⁸³ “And behold the tree of knowledge preserves the drop and upon it is engraved the particular name and it is the name of idolatry, because he is prince of the bodies, prince of every body, prince of the body of man.”¹⁸⁴ The close identification of Jesus with the tree of knowledge of good and evil has already been established. Here we see that the tree is linked with “the drop,” subsequently identified once more as the “fetid drop,” whose “secret is sexual intercourse from the left.”¹⁸⁵ That the “prince” to be linked with such demonic sexual intercourse is Jesus is more than likely, given the identification of this prince with the tree upon which Jesus was crucified.¹⁸⁶

In *Gan Na’ul*, Abulafia draws the connecting link between what he perceives to be a discussion in Exodus of sefirotic exile and Satan based upon the word “darkness.” He then elaborates further on this darkness as it relates to *Yesod*, returning to the theme of the ninth plague. Abulafia, we have seen, ascribes to Satan this darkness and the

¹⁸³ *Shomer Miṣvah*, MS Paris-BN héb. 853, fol. 41a; printed edition, p. 4.

¹⁸⁴ The phrases “tree of knowledge,” “preserves the drop,” “the particular name,” “the name of idolatry,” “prince of the bodies,” “prince of every body” and “prince of the body of man” all have the same numerical value, six hundred and thirty-nine.

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.* The words “fetid drop,” “sexual intercourse” and “from the left” all have the same numerical value, three hundred and seventy-three.

¹⁸⁶ We have seen the demonic Sandalfon referred to as the “prince,” so it is possible that Abulafia alludes to Jesus via a reference to Sandalfon. See above, pp. 200–201.

impotence that it inflicts, and he goes on to do something similar in discussing Exodus 10:22 with respect to the phrase “thick darkness.” The other plagues Abulafia describes as partaking of light. The ninth alone, Abulafia relates, lacks a bona fide existence insofar as it partakes of pure darkness. Abulafia draws for a proof-text upon the statement (Ex. 10:23) that the Israelites “had light in their dwellings” when the Egyptians did not. A correspondence between the letters in the words “light in their dwellings,” from the verse, and the words “light in their names” suggests, in Abulafia’s estimation, that the other plagues partake of luminosity. Abulafia appears here to proceed on the basis of Scripture’s presumed encryption of the *sefirot* as the plagues. Divine names, and thus the *sefirot*, then, are perceived as being alluded to here.¹⁸⁷ If this is the case, then linking the darkness of the ninth plague to unreality may be understood with respect to the nature of the ninth *sefira*—that is, that of the Active Intellect. The latter’s demonic component is, as we have seen, imaginative in its essence. Though the danger it poses is real, it is nonetheless founded on chimerical deception, comprised as it is of quasi-existent evil phantasms.¹⁸⁸

Along similar lines, Abulafia examines the words “three days,” the duration of the darkness mentioned in Exodus 10:22. These three days are

...day and night, whose secret is Samael, hinting to the three days of thick darkness during which no luminous heavenly body had yet been created.¹⁸⁹ Because on the fourth [day] they were created from the attribute of curses (*me-’eirot*); “The word (*’imrat*) of the Lord is tried, He is a shield to those who trust in Him” (Ps. 18:31).¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁷ That Abulafia is considering divine names in particular becomes apparent when he next draws an equivalence to the phrase, “light of forty-two names,” evoking the forty-two letter divine name.

¹⁸⁸ The conception of darkness as lacking a bona fide existence could relate as well to Abulafia’s contention that evil is ultimately always for the good, a theme which we have seen him apply to the demonic component of the Active Intellect with respect to the importance of the trial of the mystic.

¹⁸⁹ *Gan Na’ul*, MS Munich-BS 58 fol. 330b; printed edition, pp. 46–47. Abulafia refers to the Genesis creation story, where, although God’s first act is the creation of light, the heavenly bodies are not created until the fourth day.

¹⁹⁰ See a closely related passage, *Zohar* 1:19b. This parallel makes it apparent that **ממדת מארת** should be rendered as “from the attribute of curses” and not as **ממדת מאורות**, “from the attribute of lights.” Given the context, Abulafia clearly intends an implicit connection between the words *me’ir* (luminous) and *me-’eirot* (curses). In the current passage, the words “three days” have a numerical value of one thousand one hundred and thirty, while the words “day and night” have a value of one hundred

The creation of the heavenly bodies “from the attribute of curses” may be explained by the fact that the thick darkness has been linked here to the demon Samael. This evil precedes the radiance of the luminous bodies, and it carries a decidedly demiurgic connotation here.¹⁹¹ The link of divine names to the *sefirot*, to which we had earlier turned, seems to be implicit again here. For the phrase “word of the Lord” (אמרת יהוה) from Psalms may be read as “the word ‘YHVH,’” such that the Tetragrammaton itself is to be read as a shield that protects, presumably from the threat of Samael. Here, then, the divine names are again linked with light, the letters of the word “curses” being transposed to those of “word” (the word being “YHVH”) with the creation of the heavenly bodies, which stand here for the *sefirot*. The demiurgic aspect of the ninth plague or *sefira* befits *Yesod*’s nature, and its evil quality is consistent with our earlier discussion of the essence of the Teli in its identification as *Yesod*.¹⁹²

That Abulafia has Jesus in mind in the course of this discussion is subsequently rendered explicit. Regarding the verse that precedes the Exodus mention of the “thick darkness,” Abulafia writes as follows concerning God’s instructions to Moses:¹⁹³

And it is said there, “...Stretch out your hand toward heaven” (Ex. 10:21) “the dead” “Stretch out your hand” “writ of judgment” “Satan descends” “toward heaven” “spirit of Satan” “who kills” “...that there may be darkness over the land of Egypt, darkness which may be felt”

and thirty-seven, and “Samael” has a value of one hundred and thirty-one. Perhaps Abulafia intends the omission of the prefix “and” in the phrase “day and night,” so that its numerical value would be equivalent to that for “Samael,” which, in turn, is comprised of the same digits as those of the numerical value of the words “three days.” The numerical value of the phrase “from the attribute of curses” is one thousand one hundred and twenty-five, five less than that for “three days.”

¹⁹¹ By a letter transposition Abulafia had also linked “thick darkness” to the words “potency of anger,” suggesting a link between the darkness and harsh judgment. The *Zohar* explains the same essential wordplay in terms of the cursed, or impaired, state of the moon. See previous note.

¹⁹² That Abulafia intends for *Yesod* in particular to be understood as progenitor of the other *sefirot*, it must be observed, is somewhat awkward, given its position as the ninth of the ten *sefirot*. Abulafia seems here, as elsewhere, to blur together several facets of his understanding of the Active Intellect. It is demiurgic with respect to the lower world, it is the phallic potency (represented in sefirotic terms by the ninth *sefira*, *Yesod*), and it is both the first and last of the *sefirot*, *Keter* and *Malkhut*. It is in this manner that the Active Intellect may at once be seen by Abulafia as both the progenitor of the other *sefirot* (consistent with our understanding of *Keter*) and as the ninth, phallic and demiurgic *sefira* (as *Yesod*).

¹⁹³ *Gan Na’ul*, MS Munich-BS 58 fol. 330b; printed edition, p. 47.

(ibid.), whose “power is solar,” whose “name [and] power are equivalent,” “may his name and memory be blotted out,” and his name is like the name “land of Egypt” and let there be darkness upon “Jesus of Nazareth.”

In the first portion of this passage, Abulafia seeks to discern the satanic element in the verse from Exodus, an effort that is carried forward through the use of *gematriyot*.¹⁹⁴ This satanic element is ultimately equated by Abulafia with Jesus, who, not surprisingly, is drawn into a connection with the darkness that has been Abulafia’s running theme.¹⁹⁵ We may recall that earlier in this excerpt from *Gan Na’ul* the nocturnal element was linked with Satan and with the threat of impotence.¹⁹⁶ Here we see Abulafia’s intention rendered more clearly; it is Jesus that he has specifically in mind.

We have already observed that Abulafia has couched this discussion within a consideration of the ninth *sefir*a. We see, then, that Jesus once more represents *Yesod* in its state of phallic dysfunction, signified as darkness, the demonic. This may be the thrust of Abulafia’s derivation of the phrase “his power is solar” from the scriptural words “darkness which may be felt.” Jesus is endowed with that potency ascribed earlier to Satan, that which brings darkness. Jesus, thus, is possessed of the capacity to occlude the sun.¹⁹⁷ The same evil power is both the

¹⁹⁴ “Toward heaven” is numerically equivalent to the phrases “the dead” and “who kills” (having a numerical value of four hundred and ninety-five). Abulafia appears to imply a correspondence between “stretch out your hand” and “writ of judgment,” although they are not numerically equivalent (their values are five hundred and ninety-three and five hundred and seventy-eight respectively). Nevertheless, there is a numerical correspondence between “writ of judgment,” “Satan descends,” and “spirit of Satan.”

¹⁹⁵ The phrase “name [and] power are equivalent” Abulafia derives (along with the phrase “power is solar”) from a letter transposition based upon the words from Exodus, “...darkness which may be felt.” Abulafia next discerns the presence of an acrostic in the word “equivalent” within the phrase “name [and] power are equivalent.” The word is seen to be constructed from the first letters of the phrase “may his name and memory be blotted out.” The same word “equivalent” is as well constructed in its entirety from the same three letters that spell the name Yeshu, such that the name itself is read as an acrostic for the phrase “may his name and memory be blotted out.” Lastly, the name Jesus of Nazareth is observed by Abulafia to have the same numerical value as does the phrase “land of Egypt” (six hundred and seventy-one).

¹⁹⁶ We should note that in the aforesaid passage from the *Zohar* nocturnal sexual threats appear as well, personified there in terms of Lilith and her demonic progeny. See above, n. 190.

¹⁹⁷ Abulafia’s allusion to the solar power of Jesus may also refer to the solar Christian calendar, as against the Jewish (and Muslim) lunar one. Hames, *Like Angels on Jacob’s Ladder*, p. 74.

destroyer and the destroyed here, as Abulafia suggests that the ninth *sefira* darkens Egypt and Jesus as well, or at least Abulafia would have it so (“may there be darkness upon Jesus of Nazareth,” he writes).

There is a clear parallel to be drawn between Abulafia’s self-identification with the angelic Metatron, the Active Intellect, and his suggestion that there is a twofold nature to Jesus, a terrestrial figure who possesses a hypostatic identity as the Active Intellect’s demonic potency. It is noteworthy that in the latter, demonic pairing, the hypostatic element brings death to its own terrestrial manifestation. A polemical approach to Christian incarnationism is implicit here. The idolatrous and demonic conception of Jesus’ divine incarnation bespeaks his own death by crucifixion. The death that is propagated in the world by idolatry is refracted back upon this idolatry’s object, the passage suggests.

Abulafia’s evocation of death in the passage suggests Satan’s opposition to *Yesod* in its proper role as the giver of life. Jesus, for Abulafia, epitomizes death in this regard. In this fashion, the Christian notion of Jesus’ corporealization, of the God rendered animate, is turned on its head. In Abulafia’s estimation, the idolatrous notion of the corporealized god is the gateway to death. But a cooptation is once more at work as well. The role ascribed by Christians to Jesus accrues, for Abulafia, to Moses. The latter comes to signify both life, as a kind of divine progenitor, and divine corporealization, since he is to be linked with the phallic potency. This potency we know to be consummated in circumcision, so that the divine phallus, as represented by Moses, is replicated, in cruciform fashion, in the circumcised Jewish male.

The Righteous and Fetid “Drop:” Abulafia, Jesus and the Prima Materia

In the continuation of Abulafia’s discussion in *Gan Na’ul*, either a cooptation of Christian motifs or the articulation of some remarkably parallel themes is apparent. The passage recalls the Christian perception of the sacred nature of Jesus’ blood, which originates in the Gospels’ contention that Jesus’ blood possessed a sanctifying nature.¹⁹⁸ The point of

¹⁹⁸ See for instance Matt. 26:28: “...for this is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.” Note Jesus’ characterization of his own blood as covenantal. Abulafia’s interest in a positive valence to blood is focused

contact between this theme and that discussed earlier, concerning the blood placed on the posts and lintels of the doors of Israelite homes during the Exodus story, bears mentioning. Jesus is identified as the paschal sacrifice in the New Testament.¹⁹⁹ As the lamb, his is the blood on the doors of the Israelite homes. For Abulafia, the structure of the posts and lintels of those doors signified circumcision. Implicitly, in that earlier case, the blood of circumcision was imbued with the same aura of sacrality, by Abulafia, that Christians ascribed to Jesus' blood.²⁰⁰ The fact that Abulafia, as noted, viewed these posts and lintels as *sheli va-erev* surely amplifies the parallelism, in that example, between his and the Christian perception of the blood on the doors of the Israelite homes.

As I have suggested, some of these same issues reemerge in the context of Abulafia's discourse in *Gan Na'ul*. He writes,²⁰¹

And this is the secret of the redemption, and because the ten *sefirot* are explicated from the Torah from the secrets of the ten plagues, because each *sefirot* acts to alter nature in the world, year and soul, I must speak of them in chapter headings; and study them well from the Torah. And the first concern is that God said to Moses, "See, I have made you a god to pharaoh" (Ex. 7:1). "YH in full for the dust of God." Because Moses is the name called 'El Shaddai who guards the four tablets of the first, central, comprising drop, which is understood as the fount called the roots of the tree. And the tablets are four, and these are the four colors red, black, white, green, and the secret of their endings is "horns." It is written, "hoofs" (Ps. 69:32); "books," as I hinted above.²⁰²

as well, we have seen, upon that blood which is covenantal. For the covenantal nature of Jesus' blood, see Biale, *Blood and Belief*, p. 61.

¹⁹⁹ See Mark 14:16, 24; Heb. 12:24; 1Cor. 5:7, 8; John 1:29; 1Peter 1:18–19; Rev. 5:6, 13.

²⁰⁰ Wolfson observes the positive valence to the blood of circumcision and the blood of the paschal sacrifice in *Hayyei ha-'Olam ha-Ba'*. Abraham Abulafia, p. 59 n.167. See also *ibid.*, pp. 90, 219–220, for the positive valence to the blood of circumcision. In the latter case, it is the removal of blood during circumcision that is construed as positive. Biale observes the close relationship in rabbinic tradition between the blood of the paschal sacrifice and the blood of circumcision. *Blood and Belief*, pp. 69–71. He also concludes that the medieval *mohel's* practice of sucking the blood of circumcision represents the "mirror image of the Eucharist." *Ibid.*, p. 99. Bynum observes that Christians as well focused on the blood of circumcision with respect to Jesus. She notes that the many painted portrayals of blood coursing from Jesus' wounds down into his groin effect the connection between the salvic blood of his sacrificial death and the blood of his circumcision. Similar such themes, she observes, occur in many medieval sermons. Bynum, "The Body of Christ in the Later Middle Ages," pp. 408, 413.

²⁰¹ *Gan Na'ul*, MS Munich-BS 58 fols. 330a–b; printed edition, p. 47.

²⁰² See *ibid.*, MS Munich-BS 58 fol. 326a; printed edition, p. 34.

The exile that Abulafia, earlier in *Gan Na'ul*, had first linked to Satan—and, ultimately, by association, to Jesus—is now contrasted with the redemption that is linked with Moses. We find again Moses contrasted with Jesus. We are also given to understand once more that it is the *sefirot* that constitute this discussion's subtext. Thus it is apparent that, when Abulafia again establishes the connection between the names Moses and 'El Shaddai, it is *Yesod* that is his focus. Abulafia maintains that secrets regarding the *sefirot* are to be discerned in the scriptural verses concerning the Exodus story, and his example here is focused chiefly upon the words "a god to pharaoh" from Exodus 7:1. The phrase that he derives from the letters of these words, via letter transposition, "YH in full for the dust of God," is enigmatic to say the least, but his allusion to a prior discussion will be helpful.

Abulafia derives the word "horns" from the final letters of the words for the four colors mentioned. "Horns" he relates to the word "hoofed." They share the same numerical value (three hundred and ninety) and they appear together in Psalm 69:32.²⁰³ In that prior discussion referenced by Abulafia, he had observed that "horns" in the psalm appears in the singular form (*maqrin*); regarding these two horns, then, "the two of them are one equal number."²⁰⁴ The significance of this singular nature to the horns lies, Abulafia explains, in that numerical equivalence of "horns" to "hoofs" (*mafris*). By letter transpositions, the latter yields both "ten is the number" and "books," but, most importantly, it shares the same numerical value as the phrase "male and female." The appearance of "hoofs" in the singular in the psalm, then, alludes to androgyny, a word itself that, Abulafia will subsequently observe, is numerically equivalent to the words "male and female."

In the later passage from *Gan Na'ul*, Abulafia eventually begins to elaborate upon the composition of the Tetragrammaton.²⁰⁵ This turn elucidates Abulafia's earlier derivation of the phrase "YH in full for the dust of God." A connection of Moses and the name YH is drawn here, while "YH in full," that is, the full spelling of the letters *yod he'*, yields a numerical total of twenty-six, the same as that for the Tetragrammaton. Abulafia is preoccupied with the relationships between Moses, YH and the full Tetragrammaton. Subsequently, the connection

²⁰³ "And it shall please the Lord better than an ox or a bullock that has horns and hoofs."

²⁰⁴ *Gan Na'ul*, MS Munich-BS 58 fol. 326a; printed edition, p. 34.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, MS Munich-BS 58 fol. 330b; printed edition, p. 47.

between YH and the Tetragrammaton serves as springboard for Abulafia's discussion of the four tablets in the current passage, since the Tetragrammaton is as well fourfold. Importantly, in the earlier passage from *Gan Na'ul* referenced by Abulafia, where the androgynous nature of the word "hoofs" is discussed, Abulafia observes that the numerical value for YH (fifteen) multiplied by twenty-six (the numerical value of YH in full and of the Tetragrammaton) yields three hundred and ninety, the same value as that for "male and female." From all of this it is apparent that, in Abulafia's derivation of the name YH and, ultimately, of the word "horns," and in the discourse concerning Moses, the subject of androgyny is his overriding interest.

Concerning Moses, we find in the current passage a familiar motif. Moses is associated—once more in connection with his identity as the phallic potency—with the "drop" of the *ṣaddiq*, a righteous semen, as against the "fetid drop" of Jesus. Both are to be understood as the *prima materia*, the essence of the created world, for which the demiurge is responsible. The "drop" is here characterized as "first," "central" and "comprising," and also as "the fount" and "the roots of the tree." It is, then, the *prima materia*, and it, as we have seen in connection with *Yesod*, is also the All.²⁰⁶

In this regard, Abulafia's discussion of androgyny in *Gan Na'ul* reveals another significant feature. Among the phrases that, Abulafia observes, are equivalent to the numerical value for "male and female"²⁰⁷ is the phrase "source of the blood." This phrase Abulafia mentions twice, and he includes as well the phrase "name and blood." The significance of blood is not here clarified, although its vivifying role, and thus its connection to Abulafia's discussion of semen, is readily apparent. In fact, blood and semen are essentially equivalent for Abulafia, whether they partake of good or evil.²⁰⁸ Both are identified with the *prima materia*.

²⁰⁶ See above, p. 306, for a parallel association of Moses, the four tablets, the four colors, the four bodily humors, and the act of creation. A similar demiurgic conception is operative there to what we find in the current context when we consider *Yesod* as its subtext.

²⁰⁷ *Gan Na'ul*, MS Munich-BS 58 fol. 326a; printed edition, p. 35. These include "Shekhinah," "the All [is] Mt. Sinai" (suggestive once more of Moses' identity with respect to the *sefirah Yesod*), "every name," "the name of the man," "name of the father and mother," "a boy will be born" and "source of birth."

²⁰⁸ For this equivalence, see, for instance, *ibid.*, MS Munich-BS 58 fol. 331a; printed edition, pp. 49, 51–52. See also *Sheva' Netivot ha-Torah*, in Jellinek, *Philosophie und Kabbala*, p. 17, where semen is referred to as "the other blood, that is male and white in color," likened to ink and to the *prima materia*, while red blood is deemed

Present here, then, is a correspondence between Christian notions of Jesus' divine blood²⁰⁹ and Abulafia's conception of the *sefira Yesod*, or of the righteous one who is conjoined to the Active Intellect. A sacrality to blood, for Abulafia, is bound to notions of the demiurge. By implication, blood in its demonic manifestation is similarly to be linked with the demiurgic *sefira*, but in association with its evil component.

The subject of androgyny, within which Abulafia's interest in blood manifests, is one that bears further examination here. By implication, androgyny is a significant underlying issue in Abulafia's speculations upon Moses and the sefirotic discussion that, he contends, is encrypted in the Exodus story. We may readily surmise something of what this androgyny indicates for Abulafia, since the Active Intellect, we have seen, is comprised of male and female aspects. The latter is identified with Jesus, the former with the Jewish messiah, who as well stands as the integration of both. Such a formulation is very likely recalled in the present discussion of androgyny.

Abulafia draws upon Genesis 49:11 in this regard: "Binding his foal to the vine, and his ass' colt to the choice vine; he washes his garments in wine, and his clothes in the blood of grapes."²¹⁰ The words "in wine" and "in the blood" from this verse Abulafia considers with respect to the phrase "name and blood." The latter phrase we had noted earlier to be equated with the phrase "male and female." Here Abulafia suggests that, since the numerical value for "in wine" is seventy-two, suggestive of the seventy-two letter name of God, it may substitute for the word "name" in that phrase "name and blood." In this manner, Abulafia posits a subtext concerning androgyny in the verse from Genesis, as well as a relationship to blood.

Continuing, Abulafia next derives the word "Eden" from the verse. Its numerical value (one hundred and twenty-four) is equal to that for the words "in wine" and "in blood" taken together. A linkage of Eden with blood and with androgyny is established. Subsequently Abulafia combines the values for the words "vine" (*gafen*) and "choice vine" (*shereiqah*) from the same verse, indicating that they together comprise

to be female. The two of them together are said to comprise the name 'El Shaddai. Nirenberg explains that semen was regarded in medieval medical theory as heated blood. *Communities of Violence*, p. 155.

²⁰⁹ See also in this regard, Neu Watkins, "Two Women Visionaries and Death," pp. 180–183.

²¹⁰ *Gan Na'ul*, MS Munich-BS 58 fol. 326a; printed edition, p. 34.

the same value as that for the word “garden” taken together with the words “Prince of the Countenance” (seven hundred and thirty-eight). A relationship is established between the Garden of Eden, blood, androgyny and Metatron. We find, then, that the mystic’s identification as Metatron, seen as the former’s achieving a state of androgyny, is tied here to a hypostatic conception of blood. A parallel to the Christian fixation upon the divine blood of Jesus is apparent. Equally striking here is the fact that Abulafia begins his exegesis of the Genesis verse by pairing together wine with blood, the substances equated to one another by Jesus, with respect to his own divine blood, at the Last Supper. As well, the equation of wine, blood and divine name carries further connotations concerning the incarnation of the Logos.

Abulafia’s interest in Eden with respect to androgyny is significant in that it suggests the theosophic understanding of the *sefira Tif’eret*. The latter was seen by theosophic kabbalists to be comprised of male and female components, and it was also identified with the Garden of Eden.²¹¹ And, subsequent to his mention of the Prince of the Countenance, Abulafia does begin to discuss *Tif’eret*. He observes that the numerical values for the names Jacob and Isaac total three hundred and ninety, the same as for the words “male and female.” Indeed, the secret of the latter phrase, he explains, consists in this fact.

The phrase, Abulafia relates, contains fifteen names. We may recall that the value of the name YH when its letters are spelled in full, twenty-six, when multiplied by its simple numerical value, fifteen, as well yields three hundred and ninety, so Abulafia clearly alludes to the name YH again here. But Abulafia intends more than this. The number fifteen Abulafia writes as comprised of the letters *zayin* and *het*, having the numerical values of seven and eight, respectively. The *zayin*, writes Abulafia, stands for the word *zekhut* or merit, to be associated with Jacob, while the *het* stands for the word *hovah* or guilt, to be associated with Isaac. These two patriarchs stand as well for the two *sefirot Tif’eret* and *Paḥad* (Fear, an alternate appellation for *Gevurah*), respectively.

Abulafia observes that *Tif’eret* denotes the attribute *’emet* or truth, a point that will concern us shortly. Among other notes regarding *Tif’eret*, a string of *gematriyot* ultimately identify *Tif’eret*, in succession, with the phrases “crown of Jacob,” “Holy Spirit in the Garden of

²¹¹ See for instance, Gikatilla, *Sha’arei ’Orah*, vol. 1, pp. 179, 182, 197–198, 263–264.

Eden” and “man and woman [are] witnesses in the garden.”²¹² A clear identification of *Tiferet* both with the Garden of Eden and with androgyny is conveyed. Both androgyny and *Tiferet* are typically associated with *Sefer Yesirah*’s theme of the balancing of merit and guilt.²¹³ In this instance Abulafia links *Tiferet* with androgyny, but only with merit, and not with merit and guilt together. In this we see reflected the issue that we have encountered frequently in Abulafia’s thought, one that, we might say, encapsulates his ambivalence regarding the demonic element. For the man who has entered into communion with the Active Intellect—or, in theosophic terms, the man who attains not merely to *Yesod* but to *Tiferet*—is wholly good, but may be understood in this light because he has reconciled good and evil within himself.²¹⁴

The attainment to the *sefira Tiferet* may be understood within the context of Abulafia’s discussion of Moses, the demiurgic *sefira Yesod* and the *prima materia*, either semen or blood. For, with respect to the theosophic paradigm of the hypostatization of the righteous in the *sefira Tiferet*, *Yesod* figures prominently. It remains the divine phallic potency within this conceptual framework; *Yesod* is wielded by the male entity *Tiferet* in the course of erotic union with the divine female element, the *Shekhinah* or the *sefira Malkhut*.²¹⁵ Thus, Abulafia’s discussion has not strayed far from our main concern, as it pertains to *Yesod*, and his discussion of *Tiferet* will serve to directly inform our reading of what

²¹² Abulafia observes that the number of letters in the ten commandments, six hundred and twenty, is equivalent to the numerical value of the word “crown.” Additionally, there are one hundred and seventy-two words in the ten commandments. If one adds the number ten, for the number of commandments themselves, to these other two sums, the resulting sum is eight hundred and two, the same as that for the words “crown of Jacob” and for “Holy Spirit in the Garden of Eden” (if one discounts the letter *vav* from either the word for “holy” or “spirit”) and “man and woman [are] witnesses in the garden.”

²¹³ *Sefer Yesirah*, Gruenwald ed., 2:1 (para. 23). See n. 211 above.

²¹⁴ Comparing the current passage to the earlier one where Esau—representing, as we saw, Christendom—stood for the two hands that surrounded Jacob, signifying the covenant of the tongue, we see that an alternate model is presented here. Though, in that earlier case as well, Jacob, or *Tiferet*, represented the harmonization of the polarities embodied by the *sefirot* of the left and right, in the current case Jacob stands, not for the center, but for the right side as encompassing the left, while Isaac, and not Esau, stands for the left. See above, pp. 266–269. See E. Fishbane, *As Light before Dawn*, pp. 72–73, where Isaac of Acre, drawing upon the influence of Nahmanides, articulates the conception that *Tiferet* partakes of the right side, given that it receives its efflux from *Hesed*.

²¹⁵ See Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, pp. 27–28; *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*, pp. 104, 143; Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, pp. 65, 134, 227; Wolfson, *Through a Speculum That Shines*, pp. 335–344, 387–392.

we find shortly thereafter concerning notions of messiahship and the *prima materia*.

For Abulafia will next turn these themes toward a discussion of his own self-conception. His starting point is a series of letter operations.²¹⁶ The letters for “He created them” (*bara’am*)—likely recalling Genesis 5:2, “male and female He created them,” particularly given the preceding discussion of androgyny—he transposes to derive the name Avram, a first reference to himself in this passage. By this alone Abulafia makes an implicit claim concerning his own status as having achieved the state of conjunction just delineated. By a numeric equivalence, Abulafia next derives the phrase, “I will bless his hand (*yado*).”²¹⁷ Regarding this phrase, he writes,

...that is, the ink (*diyo*) of the time of exile, the number of whose years will be א"רנב, one thousand two hundred and twenty-two years, and it will be completed in the fiftieth year. And the Christians will complete it [as] the year 1290.

The words, “his hand,” Abulafia transforms into the word “ink,” which conforms to what we will see concerning the theme of the inscription in writing of prophetic pronouncements. Here, Abulafia simply says that the ink pertains to the period of Jewish exile.²¹⁸ The letters for “I will bless” he considers as numbers (taking the letter *’alef* for *’elef*, or one thousand), yielding what he contends will be the number of years until the end of the exile. It is apparent that the year 68CE is his starting point for the exile, because he considers its end to be the year 1290 of the Christian calendar, and he declares that it will last one thousand two hundred and twenty-two years. The note regarding the “fiftieth year,” the year 1290, refers to what will be his own age at that time.²¹⁹ Earlier, Abulafia had referred to the fiftieth year with respect to the redemptive jubilee year, as discussed in Leviticus 25:10.

²¹⁶ *Gan Na’ul*, MS Munich-BS 58 fol. 327a; printed edition, p. 37.

²¹⁷ The phrase and the name Avram both have a numerical value of two hundred and forty-three.

²¹⁸ Another valence to the significance of this ink is relevant. Abulafia will frequently pair the words blood and ink (*dam ve-diyo*), blood representing base corporeality in such a context, ink standing for intellection. See, for instance, just a few pages later, *ibid.*, MS Munich-BS 58 fol. 328a; printed edition, p. 41. An intellective conception of ink vis-à-vis the conclusion of exile, and of Abulafia’s prophecy itself, is likely intended here. For blood and ink, see Idel, *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 97–98; *Absorbing Perfections*, pp. 342–343, 443–444.

²¹⁹ See Berger, “The Messianic Self-Consciousness of Abraham Abulafia,” p. 58.

As with his earlier allusion to the significance of his own first name, now, with reference to the redemptive import of his own age, Abulafia again writes himself into prophecy regarding collective Jewish redemption. He continues,

And this is what is hinted at in the saying (Dan. 10:21), “the inscription in true (*’emet*) writing.” Because within its words it says that Daniel (Ibid., 7:1) “...had a dream vision and visions of his head (*rei’sheih*) as he lay upon his bed; then he wrote the dream and told the sum of the matter [or, the “beginning of words,” *rei’sh milin*].” And they, [the letters] *’emet*, are the beginnings of words (*ra’shei teivot*), yielding one thousand (Ⓚ) two hundred (Ⓜ) ninety (Ⓣ), “he told the sum of the matter” [or, “the beginnings of words,” *rei’sh milin*]; “from the land of Israel”...

At this point Abulafia discusses the prophecies inscribed in writing by Daniel, so that his earlier reference to ink forges an analogy between his own prophecy and Daniel’s. The words *rei’sh milin* from Daniel 7:1 Abulafia takes to mean *ra’shei teivot*, the “beginnings of words.” He perceives that Daniel wrote his prophecy in the form, then, of an acrostic, and so he turns to the word *’emet* from verse 10:21 and pronounces it to be composed of the first letters of the words for one thousand, two hundred and ninety. Thus, the word encrypts his own declaration regarding the end of the Jewish exile. That he chooses the word *’emet*, truth, as his focus is significant. We observed earlier that the *sefira Tif’eret*, the androgynous potency, is known by this cognomen, “truth.” Since, in this current passage, Abulafia has already referred to both androgyny and to the word truth, we may understand that he considers his own attainment to the *sefira Tif’eret* to be the basis for the coming jubilee, or messianic redemption. The finishing stroke to the picture that we find, in *Gan Na’ul*, of Abulafia’s cooptation for Judaism of Christian motifs concerning the messiah—including the import of the latter’s salvific blood for humanity, this blood’s equivalence to wine, and as well to the demiurgic life-giving *prima materia*—is presented in Abulafia’s offering of himself as the true messiah, antithetical to Jesus.

Still, Abulafia extends the current discussion yet further with respect to the last of the themes just mentioned, that of the *prima materia*. Abulafia had noted that the numerical value for the words “he told the beginnings of words” is equivalent to the words “from the land of Israel.” He now proceeds to explain that the land of Israel is named “the inheritance of the nations” (perhaps a reference to Psalm 111:6), and he notes a numerical equivalence between this latter phrase and

the phrase “the virgin drop” (with a value of five hundred and forty-seven). This drop, he writes, “is called ‘living creature,’” the numerical value for the sum of the words “drop” and “living creature” together being equivalent to that for the words “the inheritance of nations.” The words “living creature” Abulafia relates to the verse (Gen. 1:24), “Let the land (*ha-’ares*) bring forth living creatures after their kind,” And the word “land” in the same verse he uses to return once more to the phrase “land of Israel.” The numerical values for the letters of the word “land”—one (or one thousand, in this case), two hundred and ninety—constitute once again for Abulafia a clue to the time of redemption, the year 1290.

The “drop” to be associated with the land of Israel and with the propagation of life most certainly stands for the righteous semen discussed earlier in connection with Moses, the *ṣaddiq* and the *sefir* *Yesod*. Here, since an evocation of *Tiferet* and its androgynous and messianic nature is apparent, the reference to “Israel,” the other name given in Scripture to Jacob, alludes to the latter’s aforementioned symbolic masculine role among the *sefirot*. As mentioned, *Tiferet* is the masculine entity in possession of the phallic potency *Yesod*. Thus, it is appropriate for the life-giving drop to figure in this discourse, as it suits the demiurgic and phallic nature of the messiah—Abulafia himself, as we have seen.

Abulafia had referred to this drop as the “living creature,” likely with respect to its vivifying essence. The notion of the “living creature” serves as a point of departure for a discussion of a number of bipartite and dichotomous entities. Abulafia first considers the contrast between land and sea creatures. Thereafter he elaborates upon the oppositions between the elements earth and water, the planets Saturn and Jupiter, the constellations Virgo and Pisces, and, ultimately, the two components of the Teli. Themes related to the Teli’s demiurgic identity as the Active Intellect constitute the backdrop for the thoughts which conclude this portion of Abulafia’s discussion:²²⁰

And know that the secret of the “inheritance of the nations” [is] “Gabriel, fire” and his appearance is “the appearance of fire,” “and Israel,” “will be sealed in his power” in the saying (Deut. 33:2), “From His right hand went a fiery law for them.” And it is the “particular matter” (*homer perati*), and thus “his hand will wipe out the drop.” Because when Israel

²²⁰ *Gan Na’ul*, MS Munich-BS 58 fol. 328b; printed edition, p. 39.

performs the will of God, and seeks to know His great name, immediately the left is made right. And the drop, from which humankind is inscribed in the attribute of harsh judgment and in the palm of guilt, is erased, and it is written in the reverse and opposite place, and it is the drop sealed in the attribute of strong mercy and [it is] engraved in the palm of merit.

Abulafia returns to the phrase “inheritance of nations.” By *gematriyot*,²²¹ he derives references to Gabriel (recalling his earlier interest in the prophecies contained in the Book of Daniel), to fire and to Israel and its connectedness to God. The allusion to fire and Israel sets the stage for his recourse to Deuteronomy 33:2, such that Israel, through the “fiery law,” is to be associated with God’s right hand. The notion of Israel’s link with the right hand reflects Abulafia’s prior elaboration upon Jacob and Isaac. Jacob there was related to merit, from the right, as against guilt, from the left, which was ascribed to Isaac. As well, in keeping with its status among the theosophic kabbalists as a *sefira* that harmonizes within itself both the left and the right, *Tif’eret* had been linked by Abulafia with androgyny. This is the nature of its ultimate righteousness, as well as of the fecundity of its “drop.” Its status on the right is inclusive of the left.

Earlier we had discerned Abulafia’s association of Jesus and his corporeality with the “fetid drop,” as against the righteous “drop” of the Jewish messiah, Abulafia himself. We had observed that these conceptions dovetailed with those of evil and righteous blood, respectively, as Abulafia countered Christian notions of the sacrality of Jesus’ blood with his own complicated view of the *prima materia*. The same notion of the two types of semen suggested there is rendered in the current passage, but here it is accompanied by an added allusion to Jesus. Abulafia specifies that there is a “drop” to be associated with the side of guilt. The right hand, the one of which Israel partakes, “wipes out” (*timḥeh*) this evil drop. The verb “wipe out,” or “blot out,” is the same one that Abulafia used earlier when he expressed the desire that Jesus’ name and memory be blotted out. It is the verb used in Deuteronomy 25:19, where God demands the blotting out of the memory of Amaleq—himself a symbol, for medieval Jews, we have noted, of

²²¹ The phrases “inheritance of nations,” “Gabriel, fire,” “the appearance of fire” and “and Israel,” and later, “particular matter” and “will wipe out the drop,” all have a numerical value of five hundred and forty-seven. The phrase “will be sealed in his power” has a value of five hundred and forty-six.

Christendom. The connection, in the current context, of the corrupted semen with Jesus is apparent.

Abulafia refers to the “particular matter” (*homer peraṭi*) with respect to this base semen. We must recognize that Abulafia ascribes to the particular or to the individuated (*peraṭ*) a low, terrestrial status, as against that which exists in a collective fashion (*kelal*) as a general category, as that which may be understood in terms of a platonic form.²²² In the current context the matter that is part and parcel of the corrupted semen is “particular.” In a similar fashion did we note that, elsewhere, the “name of idolatry” for the “prince of the bodies” from the tree of knowledge—references to Jesus, almost certainly—is as well “particular.”²²³ It is once more apparent that, in the current context, the corrupted semen of the left, the side of guilt, is to be linked with Jesus. On the other side, we find the life-giving semen of mercy.

In his reference to the transformation of the left into the right and to the inscribing of the unclean drop “in the reverse and opposite place,” Abulafia hints not only to the process taking place within the *sefira Tiferet*, but also to his meditative letter permutational methods, by which the revolving of letters can transform, to take a familiar example, ‘*oneg* (pleasure) into *nega*’ (plague), or vice versa. Abulafia goes on to speak further of this process, in which a reversal or inversion (*hafekhah ve-ḥalufah*) takes place. In this we can see that Abulafia intends that, by these processes, Jesus’ “fetid drop” is to be transformed, within the mystic, into the righteous one.

Abulafia goes on to write, “And from what I wrote in the revolution of many matters (*be-gilgulei inyanim*), jumping (*medolagim*) and skipping (*meqofsim*) from this to this, and hinting, you will understand my intention...” Abulafia refers to the methodology behind his writing of this section itself of *Gan Na’ul*, where the successive hermeneutical outcomes of letter permutation are manipulated in a process referred to as “skipping” or “jumping.”²²⁴ In thereafter discussing the varying levels of mystical attainment, Abulafia refers to the process by which the intellect is actualized:²²⁵

²²² See above, pp. 110, 111 n. 16.

²²³ See above, p. 313. *Shomer Mitzvah*, MS Paris-BN héb. 853, fol. 41a; printed edition, p. 4. *Shem peraṭi* is the phrase used there by Abulafia.

²²⁴ Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, pp. 135–136.

²²⁵ *Gan Na’ul*, MS Munich-BS 58 fols. 328a–b; printed edition, pp. 40–41.

One must revolve (*sarikh legalgal*) all of the Torah, because it is [comprised of] the names of the Holy One, blessed be He. And one must innovate [from] every letter and every word new wonders from moment to moment. And one must contemplate one word and connect it with another, and then put aside (*lehaniyah*) the second and seek a third to connect with it. And again with another, sometimes with half of them, sometimes with their beginnings, sometimes with their ends. And sometimes with their numbers and sometimes with their permutations (*be-temuroteihem*), until it is necessary that he go out from all of his first thoughts and innovate other new revealed ones from them, ever one after another. And with all of this that he does, for as long as the holy name is sealed within his heart, he will not feel, until he moves from his source and his place, and his blood will not flee from him from the attribute of fear with the attribute of joy still [upon him], and no thing from all of the prophetic apprehension will arise in his hand [otherwise]. But it is known that when the name, whose secret is “blood and ink,” begins to move within him, and he senses it, like one who recognizes a place from a stone that is within it, then he will know that knowledge of the name acts within him. And it begins to bring him from potentia to actualization.

Abulafia provides here a detailed description of the means by which the transformation under discussion is to be effected. The name whose secret is “blood and ink” is presumably the seventy-two letter name,²²⁶ but Abulafia, as before, likely intends to allude, with the pairing of blood and ink, to the corporeal and the intellective faculties, respectively, within the mystic. Abulafia contrasts as well the “fleeing of the blood” from the “attribute of fear”—that is, from the *sefira* of the left side, *Paḥad*, earlier linked with Isaac and the impure “drop”—with the prophetic experience linked with the “attribute of joy.” In this, then, blood is contrasted once more with intellection. Abulafia continues,

And from here and thereafter he will be judged in each of the attributes. And he must stand strong in their battle, because they are supernal messengers, examining and trying his power. As it is said (Deut. 13:4), “For the Lord your God tries (*menaseh*) you.” And he will beware that he will not think idolatrously at all, lest he perish from this world and the world to come. And he should pray and entreat continually to God the glorified one to save him from the examination of the attributes...

²²⁶ The numerical value of the phrase “blood and ink” is seventy. As Abulafia will do on occasion, adding the number one for each word of the given phrase yields seventy-two.

A transition has taken place in *Gan Na'ul* from an investigation of the relationship between Jesus' fetid drop and the righteous messianic semen, Abulafia's own, to one of the methods by which the eschatological transformation from one to the other may be achieved, to one, now, of the accompanying internal battle that the mystic, Abulafia himself, must wage in this process. To contend with that psychic component linked with Jesus, *Paḥad* and impure blood and semen is to seek to prevail, we learn, in the trial of idolatry. Given what we have seen of the erotic valence of this battle, we can recognize the pertinence of the prior discussion of the two kinds of "drops," as the strife within the psyche of the mystic may be expressed as that between the impure and pure semen. The evil corporeality of Jesus, reflected in the notions of impure blood and impure semen, represents the risk that the mystic (Abulafia himself, assuredly) may be corrupted from within.

That section of *Gan Na'ul* that has been of interest here concludes, not surprisingly, with specific allusions concerning Jesus, blood and the demiurgic potency. Considering Exodus 7:12, "And every man [of the Egyptian sorcerers] cast down his rod, and they turned to snakes, but Aaron's rod swallowed up their rods," Abulafia observes a numerical correspondence between the phrase "every man his rod" and the phrase "Jesus the unclean,"²²⁷ reestablishing familiar associations between Jesus and sorcery and the phallic potency. As to the sorcerers themselves with which Jesus is identified, Abulafia indicates that they too "act from an unclean spirit." He presents a string of phrases numerically equivalent to the phrase "magicians of Egypt" (*ḥartumei mišrayim*), among which are included "killers of the sons of man" and "princes of day and night."

Regarding the latter phrase, Abulafia explains that the words (Ex. 7:11) "sorcerers of Egypt with their secret arts (*be-laḥateihem*)" should be understood in terms of the flaming sword (*laḥaṭ ha-ḥerev*) of Genesis 3:24. This sword Abulafia refers to regularly, in its revolving action, as a symbol for the procedure of letter permutation.²²⁸ The phrase "prince of day and night," Abulafia explains "...hints to the flaming sword that revolves from day [to] night, from night [to] day, from light to darkness, from darkness to light." The Egyptian sorcerers are seen

²²⁷ Both yield a numerical total of three hundred and seventy-one.

²²⁸ Wolfson discusses this motif as representative of the mystic's transformation of the attribute of judgment into that of mercy, these attributes representing Metatron's two faces. Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 172–173 n. 213. See above, p. 173.

here to engage, in their “secret arts,” in the identical but oppositely directed activity of the pious, mystical one. Thus, we may read the activity of the Egyptian sorcerers as a coming into communion with the demonic aspect of the Active Intellect. In this, the connection between the sorcerers and the idolatrous messiah, Jesus, is reinforced.

In the numerical value of the words “with their secret arts,” from the aforementioned Exodus passage, Abulafia observes an equation with the words “with their blood,” as well as with the phrase from the beginning of Genesis “And it was so.” The former connection, of the sorcerers with the theme of blood, we will examine shortly. As to the latter, in his reference to Genesis, Abulafia more than likely has in mind an earlier observation. The pair of phrases from Exodus 7:9–10, “it will turn into a snake” (*yehi le-tanin*) and “and it turned into a snake” (*va-yehi le-tanin*), in Abulafia’s words, “hint to the secret of ‘...let there be light. And there was light (Gen. 1:3).’” In the cases of the activities of both the sorcerers and of Aaron (who is referenced in Ex. 7:9–10), a link is established with the acts of creation described in Genesis. Further, the phrase “And it was so” Abulafia refers to as the “seal of creation (*yeṣirah*).” It is likely, then, that Abulafia understands the activities of the sorcerers and of Aaron as in kind with those suggested in *Sefer Yeṣirah*, particularly insofar as these pertain to letter permutation.

The transformation of the rod into the serpent and back again, Abulafia writes, is accomplished by Moses and Aaron, “that is,” writes Abulafia, “by the first man.” The phrases “Moses and Aaron” and “the first man” are numerically equivalent.²²⁹ Abulafia understands this “first man” as the perfected androgyne discussed earlier in the text, comprised, as Adam was, of “male and female.” In the continuation of the passage, Abulafia remarks that the final letter *nun* of the word Satan is “the *nun* of the name Aaron.”²³⁰ Similarly, Abulafia writes that this final *nun* is “Placed as a seal in the breastplate [*hoshen*, ending with a final letter *nun*] of judgment [worn by Aaron], and it is inverted in the word serpent (*naḥash*).” We know that Abulafia conceives of Moses in terms of the *ṣaddiq* and of the name YH, but he is paired here with Aaron, who, in this context, is linked with the demonic aspect of the Active Intellect through the evocation of Satan and of the serpent. In this way, Moses and Aaron represent Adam, the

²²⁹ Both equal six hundred and seven.

²³⁰ *Gan Na’ul*, MS Munich-BS 58 fol. 331b; printed edition, p. 50.

first man, comprised of male and female. So too do they represent the man who has perfected himself in Adam's likeness and conjoined with the Active Intellect. The contrast is a pointed one with the sorcerers, whose actions are to be associated with Christianity. Indeed, Abulafia likely has Christian practice itself in mind. The results achieved by the sorcerers are inferior and illusory in their idolatrous quality. This is Abulafia's intent in writing "...but they [the sorcerers themselves] are without a separate existence in [their] action."

As mentioned, the sorcerers are discussed not only in terms of their "secret arts," but also in terms of "their blood." The phrases "with their secret arts" and "with their blood," we recall, were observed to be numerically equivalent. Regarding this, Abulafia writes, "'But Aaron's rod swallowed up their rods.' (Ex. 7:12) 'Their rods,' that is written, is 'blood of the Teli,' 'blood of the dead,' 'blood of sorcery'..." The equation of "their rods" with "blood of the Teli"²³¹ is an important one, given the equation of the sorcerers with Jesus. Implied is the association of Jesus with the Teli, although here, consistent with the running theme of *Gan Na'ul*, Abulafia refers specifically to the blood of the Teli. Righteous blood, we know, is to be linked with Moses, who was placed in a demiurgic context with respect to the *sefra Yesod*. Conversely do we now have Jesus, whose blood also partakes of a demiurgic essence, as we see again in the reference to the Teli, but whose nature is deadly, as is reinforced with the observation of a numerical equivalence between the phrases "blood of the Teli," "blood of the dead" and "blood of sorcery." Abulafia further amplifies upon the subject of blood.²³²

"...And all the water that was in the Nile was turned to blood." (Ex. 7:20) And the turning of "the water...to blood" [is] "from the blood of circumcision." And it is the first letter [or "sign," *ʾol*] decreed from the secret of man, "circumcision," and it is the first letter [or "sign," *ʾol*] decreed from the secret of "the foundation."

The sacred power of the blood of circumcision, as against the sorcerial blood of the Teli and Jesus, is here overtly discussed. The blood of circumcision is the cause of the Nile's turning to blood, just as it had

²³¹ Both phrases, along with "blood of the dead" and "blood of sorcery," have a numerical value of four hundred and forty-five.

²³² Ibid., MS Munich-BS 58 fol. 331a; printed edition, p. 51.

been implicitly identified elsewhere with the protective blood of the paschal lamb on the doors of Jewish homes. As to the meaning of the remainder of the passage, although surely the “sign” of circumcision is intended, I favor reading the word *’ot* as “letter” as well as “sign.” The mention, then, of the “first letter,” as it pertains to the “secret of man,” recalls the passage from *Maṣieaḥ ha-Ra’ayon* examined earlier.²³³ There, the letter *’alef*, the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, stood for the man who was both “first and last,” who resembles Metatron, Adam and God, and who is called *ṣaddiq*, alluding to the *sefira Yesod*. The current passage refers to the “secret of man” as the “secret of the foundation,” that is, of *Yesod*.²³⁴ The connection of this “secret of man” with the blood of circumcision is reinforced in that, if the first letter, *’alef*, is separated from the remainder of the word for “man,” *’adam*, the word for “blood,” *dam*, remains.²³⁵

The passage alludes clearly to the sacrality and power of the blood of circumcision in the coming into perfection of man in the model of the *ṣaddiq* and of *Yesod*. The righteous, demiurgical and messianic blood of circumcision held, for Abulafia, a central symbolic role in his reading of the Exodus story, functioning in direct opposition to the unclean blood of the demiurgical Teli, to be equated with the blood shed by Jesus at his crucifixion. Indeed, the good and evil types of blood both relate directly to the cruciform configuration, *sheti va-’erev*, discussed earlier, and both types of blood bear directly on the procreative potency of the demiurge with respect to its two types of semen.

²³³ See above, pp. 307–310.

²³⁴ The words “circumcision” and “the foundation” (*ha-yesod*) both have the same numerical value, eighty-five.

²³⁵ The correctness of this approach to the passage seems to be confirmed by another, this from *’Or ha-Sekhel*: “And the blood is the first thing created in man, and thus ‘man’ (*’adam*) and ‘blood’ (*dam*) are related in their concern. Also ‘imagination’ (*dimyon*) includes them, also ‘earth’ (*’adamah*), also ‘likeness’ (*demut*) and ‘silence’ (*dema-mah*).” MS Vatican-BA ebr. 233, fol. 42a; printed edition, p. 38. As to the meaning of the apparent “secret” linked, in the passage from *Gan Na’ul*, to the first letter of “the foundation,” Abulafia may refer to the letter *yod* of the word *yesod*. Wolfson has elucidated the kabbalistic signification of the letter *yod* in terms of the corona of the phallus and the covenant of circumcision. Since Abulafia establishes here a connection between the words “circumcision” and *yesod*, this could easily be his intent with respect to the letter *yod*. Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being*, pp. 73, 137, 186, 267, 365, 379; *Through a Speculum That Shines*, pp. 336–345, 357–377, 384–392; *Circle in the Square*, pp. 29–48. Wolfson makes another observation that is noteworthy in the current context, referring to a doctrine by which the letter *yod* is conceived of as both a graphic and a hypostatic component of the letter *’alef*. Idem, *Language, Eros, Being*, pp. 282–283.

It is apparent that Abulafia has taken to heart Christian beliefs concerning the blood of the messiah, using them as a point of departure for elaboration upon the demiurgical blood of the Jewish *sheti va-‘erev* circumcision.

The “Damned Body” and Divine Corporealization

Abulafia’s doctrines concerning the bodily fluids blood and semen, focused upon conceptions of the demiurge, the lynchpin between the divine and the material worlds, hinge upon associations of the divine with corporeality.²³⁶ In his day, Abulafia’s Christian contemporaries were heightening their focus on the visceral facts of Jesus’ incarnation, and Abulafia may well have been swayed in this direction in the formulation and articulation of his own doctrine concerning the corporeal dimension of the divine.²³⁷ Abulafia frequently abjures any notion of God’s confinement within a body, but he nevertheless reserves an important place in his conception of the divine realm for some form of material incarnation. In particular, it is God’s name, in its demiurgical capacity, that very often bears the hallmarks of bodily manifestation, as we have already noted at points.

Wolfson has examined in detail the notion of the visionary manifestation of the divine name, often conceived of as the revelation of the

²³⁶ Concerning the place of this conception of divine corporealization in kabbalah, see the notes that follow below.

²³⁷ Rubin observes that European medieval culture had placed a heightened focus upon what she terms “the fragmented body.” Emphasis on the visceral reality of the pain and suffering of Jesus’ body were of a piece with wider cultural phenomena. In visual terms, this found expression in representations of Jesus’ tortured body “...as a series of wounds or wounded body parts surrounded by wounding instruments; hand, foot, side, sweaty brow. This was the way through which Christ’s suffering body was apprehended, in the breaking up, in the *corps morcelé*.” Rubin, “The Person in the Form,” p. 113. The evocative power of blood played a particularly prominent role, in this regard, in cultural consciousness. Rubin notes that an increased emphasis on the facts of Jesus’ corporeal reality led to internal conflict for some Christians. The contrast between this mode of apprehending Jesus, so commensurate with the individual’s rising perceptions of his or her own physical vulnerability, and the notion of Jesus’ essential status as impeccably immaterial sometimes became irreconcilable. *Ibid.*, pp. 111–113. In this there is an echo of the type of difficulty that Abulafia sought to navigate in reconciling motifs of divine corporealization with those of God’s utter transcendence. As well, the motif of the *corps morcelé* well recalls Abulafia’s anxieties regarding the demonic threat to his own body should he fail to successfully surmount this challenge to faith.

divine body, during the Jewish mystical experience.²³⁸ Perhaps most often this manifestation is understood to occur after the fashion of prophecy, wherein the prophet is granted a sensory experience of that which ordinarily transcends the senses, for his benefit alone. God, or the divine entity that manifests itself, such as the *Kavod* or the *Shekhinah*, does not truly exist in the form beheld by the prophet, but it appears as such in order that it might be rendered accessible to human apprehension.²³⁹ Such a conception often carries the imprint of Maimonides' adaptation to Scripture of Aristotelian thought concerning the Active Intellect.²⁴⁰ Not always is it the case, however, that the mystics in question scrupulously distinguish the manifestation of the divine entity in bodily form from its transcendent essence.²⁴¹ And not always is it the case that the divine name, for example, is clearly disassociated in its true nature from the corporeal. In Abulafia's writings we find such an ambiguity regarding the essential immateriality to the divine name. And, in fact, we find assertions that appear to fly in the face of presumptions of immateriality. We will examine some of these, particularly those that are especially reflective of Christian influence.

We have already noted Abulafia's insistence upon the link to the material of the lower portion of the Tetragrammaton, the VH. Such a link, we have seen, was accompanied by associations with Jesus and with the idolatrous conception of an incarnate deity. In this sense,

²³⁸ Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being*, pp. 219, 257; "God, the Demiurge and the Intellect," pp. 88, 108; *Along the Path*, pp. 29, 44; *Through a Speculum That Shines*, pp. 192, 198, 202, 263. Intimately connected to this notion is another, that the divine name is identical with the Torah, which in turn is conceived of as the divine corpus or, at times, as the divine hypostatic feminine element. Idem, *Language, Eros, Being*, pp. 205, 223, 250, 256; "The Mystical Significance of Torah Study," pp. 53–54, 57–63, 61–66, 73–77; "Metatron and Shi'ur Qomah," p. 74; *Through a Speculum That Shines*, pp. 248, 263; *Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 63, 167, 212; Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*, pp. 37, 39–50, 58; Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, pp. 227–230; *Language, Torah, Hermeneutics*, pp. 33, 36. Twersky observes that R. Abraham ben David of Posquière's objected to Maimonides' strident contention that those who spoke of God in anthropomorphic terms should be deemed heretics. Rabad noted that there were outstanding sages who had done just that, and suggested the need for a more nuanced stance on the question. Twersky, "Rabbi Abraham ben David of Posquière's," pp. 188–192.

²³⁹ Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, pp. 110–116.

²⁴⁰ Altmann, "Maimonides' Attitude Toward Jewish Mysticism," p. 204; M. Fishbane, *The Kiss of God*, pp. 27, 29; Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, p. 139; Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 44–47; Idel, "Abulafia's Secrets of the Guide," p. 295; *Language, Torah, Hermeneutics*, p. 45; Klein-Braslavy, *King Solomon and the Philosophical Esotericism*, pp. 119–121.

²⁴¹ See, for instance, Scholem's discussion of the *Shi'ur Qomah* precedent. *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, pp. 63–67.

Abulafia manifests a negative attitude toward that corporeal dimension of the divine realm. One passage from *Sitrei Torah* delineates this attitude toward corporeality generally, touching upon both the question of the VH of the Tetragrammaton and upon corporeality in the material world, and alluding at the same time to Christianity. Abulafia begins his discussion along the lines of Maimonides, referring to the notion of the “death by the kiss.”²⁴² Writes Abulafia,²⁴³

All who weaken the powers of the body and extinguish the fire of lust, his intellect will be strengthened and his light will be magnified and his apprehension will be meritorious and he will rejoice in that which he apprehends, so that when the man comes to the completion of his days and approaches death, he will add to this apprehension a powerful addition and he will magnify the joy in this apprehension and the desire to be apprehended (*ve-ha-ḥesheq le-musag*), so that the soul will be separated then from the body at this time of pleasure.

From the outset, the human body is understood as the corrupt receptacle for the intellect. The former occludes intellectual clarity through carnal desire and prevents the human being from partaking of the divine. The divide between the corporeal and sensual and the immaterial and divine could not be rendered more starkly. The link that we had observed previously between sexual desire and idolatry is implicit here, as true communion with the divine, discussed here with regard to the ascent of the soul of the righteous man after his death, is possible only through the forswearing of those impulses which lead men away from pious, intellective worship.

Abulafia proceeds from here to explain how the conception of the soul thus outlined constitutes the basis for a proper understanding of the afterlife. He who errs in this understanding, believing in a bodily afterlife, and “...sins with regard to the revival of the dead, is he who dies, and he has no portion in the world to come.”²⁴⁴ To believe in bodily resurrection is, itself, to fall prey to the seductions of corporeal delusion. One who does this sins, as Abulafia states it here, and falls short with respect to an intellective apprehension of the divine. Such

²⁴² M. Fishbane, *The Kiss of God*, pp. 24–29. Idel, *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 180–184. The kabbalist Ezra of Gerona makes reference to the cleaving of the soul with the Active Intellect through the kiss. Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, pp. 377–378. For Ezra’s influence on Abulafia, see *ibid.*, p. 371; Pedaya, *Vision and Speech*, pp. 195–197 (in Hebrew).

²⁴³ *Sitrei Torah*, MS NY-JTSA Mic. 2367, fol. 31b; printed edition, p. 61.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, MS NY-JTSA Mic. 2367, fol. 31b; printed edition, p. 62.

a one, consequently, is cut off from the divine; he is, as Abulafia puts it, a “lover of the imaginative,” as against that which is intellective. He “aggrandizes love of sensual, imaginative and bodily matters over love of intellective, divine matters separate from any body, according to the belief of every enlightened one, [every] master of the Torah of God...” Hence, the soul of the man who transgresses in this fashion remains forever mired in the body. Abulafia continues,²⁴⁵

I and those like me, from among those who are drawn after the prophets and after the sages who received [the doctrine] from Moses, our rabbi, peace be upon him, and from God, may He be blessed, [know] that it is not proper to believe in anything other than intellective truths received from God, may He be blessed, and from His prophets. And this is because, God forbid that I should believe that the goal of the intention for the existence of man from God is for him to live forever with this lowly, woeful, foul, cursed, damned body, which God damned and cursed with the curse of the earth in its saying (Gen. 3:17), “cursed is the ground for your sake.” For how can it be that He curse the tree and its fruits not be damned, since its fruits are parts of the tree, and it testifies that all of us die because of our being parts of Adam, who was cursed with death.

Abulafia’s opinion of the deplorable nature of man’s corporeal existence is articulated here in the strongest of terms. Abulafia speaks of the cursed nature of the body, and he describes humanity as damned fruits of the damned tree, that tree being Adam, but he probably alludes as well to the cursed nature of the literal tree, that of the knowledge of good and evil, from which Adam ate. Adam and his progeny are cursed thereby with death, and we should not fail to observe that this is the tree, according to Abulafia, upon which Jesus suffered his own corporeal death. The link between idolatry and Christianity and the bodily is implicitly reinforced through this tree’s connection to both Jesus, the corporealized divinity, and to man’s impure body. As well, the contrast between the eternal life of the intellective soul and the death that is linked with the prevailing of the corporeal and imaginative over the intellective is notable. Just as, above, the sin of imaginatively misconstruing the nature of man’s intellective afterlife results in death, so too does an idolatrous association with the god who dies mean death to the misguided.

²⁴⁵ Ibid., MS NY-JTSA Mic. 2367, fol. 32a; printed edition, p. 63.

Abulafia goes on to discuss the objections raised to the doctrine of the purely intellective afterlife of the soul on the part of those who point to Enoch and Elijah.²⁴⁶ These objections stem from the fact that "...even the nations believe that the two of them will descend from the heavens in the time of redemption." The nations, as well as some Jews, believe that these two figures demonstrate the corporeal nature of resurrection, since it is accepted that the two will return bodily to earth with the redemption. Certainly Abulafia is aware that the same doctrine held currency among Christians concerning Jesus, who, in kind with these two figures, as well was perceived to have ascended bodily to heaven. It is unlikely that Abulafia would have brought up for consideration the point regarding Enoch and Elijah, in the same context in which he alludes to the tree that he elsewhere explicitly associates with Jesus, if he had not been thinking of the latter in the current context as well. The added fact that he refers specifically to the beliefs of the "nations" on these issues reinforces this probability.

The objections based on Enoch and Elijah are accorded some level of legitimacy by Abulafia. He acknowledges some level of mystification on the question:²⁴⁷

And perhaps this was a great matter, and it is very strange, that there were among this humankind men much more honored than these two according to the testimony of all the books, and yet it is not said of them that they [have] life in the form of the lives of these two according to what the masses believe as it concerns them.

The fact that greater men than Enoch and Elijah are not characterized as designated to return bodily to earth inclines Abulafia to hold either that it cannot, therefore, be true regarding Enoch and Elijah or that such a destiny is reserved only for these two and not for a group of the elect.²⁴⁸ Abulafia is not exactly clear on this, although it is

²⁴⁶ Lachs notes R. Abbahu's response to a heretic's challenge concerning the hypostatization of Enoch and Elijah in *Genesis Rabbah*. R. Abbahu, Lachs perceives, is sensitive to the implicit connection between Enoch, who at least by the time of *3Enoch* was seen to have been transformed into the divine Metatron, and Jesus, and so he refutes the claim that Enoch was hypostatized. Lachs, "Rabbi Abbahu and the *Minim*," pp. 202–203.

²⁴⁷ *Sitrei Torah*, MS NY-JTSA Mic. 2367, fol. 32a; printed edition, pp. 63–64.

²⁴⁸ The discussion bears some resemblance to a passage found in the polemical work *Sefer Nestor ha-Komer*, which points to Biblical figures more worthy of divinity than Jesus. See Lasker, "Jewish-Christian Polemics at the Turning Point," p. 167; Rembaum, "The Influence of *Sefer Nestor Hakomer* on Medieval Jewish Polemics," pp. 176, 181.

apparent that he does not understand why these two are accorded this destiny. In any case, his belief in the intellective nature of the afterlife of the soul is demonstrated here in the face of the challenge posed by the nations and by some Jews. He may lend a certain credence to the notion of bodily resurrection in the cases of Enoch and Elijah, but he in no way grants this to another, and, even still, he is undeterred in his contention that that which is corporeal is a thing of the imagination and not of the divine realm. Those who make claims to the contrary concerning the afterlife "...bring proofs that are not intellective but imaginative, and not received in truth as those who raise objections think. And thus we must believe that we sleep in the dust, and (Ps. 103:14), 'He remembers that we are dust'..."

Abulafia refers to our flawed perception concerning corporeality as "...the screen that separates between us and God, may He be blessed." The dedication to corporeality, again, forestalls contact with the divine. Nevertheless, the impulse to project the material into the divine realm appears, to Abulafia, to be a universal one, despite the fact that it represents a failure of the intellect, one which precipitates a state of detachment from God and, ultimately, both a material and a spiritual death.²⁴⁹

But we seek to establish this materiality which God, may He be blessed, did not wish to establish eternally in its particularity, but in its generality, and we wish to create people that God did not create, and certainly we wish to establish their existence in our imaginative thought alone, and He will not do so in our place.

Still, a notion of corporeality in the divine, in Abulafia's own wider doctrine, is readily apparent when one considers the aforementioned notion of the VH of the Tetragrammaton. This is perhaps the materiality seen by Abulafia to have been established eternally only in its "generality" and not in its "particularity." Although it is an avowedly demonized corporeality that is presented, Abulafia's conception of the evil component of the Tetragrammaton does evince a bodily dimension within the divine world, one present in God's very name itself. And the association, for Abulafia, of this aspect of the divine with Christianity, the faith most egregiously responsible for the error concerning divine corporealization, is by now clear.

²⁴⁹ *Sitrei Torah*, MS NY-JTSA Mic. 2367, fol. 32b; printed edition, p. 64.

The Materialization of the Divine Name

As is so often the case with Abulafia, that Christian notion against which he rails in one place is in another embraced and recast. We find that Abulafia will at times link the divine name, unaccompanied by any polemical assertions, with the corporeal. In this regard, we examined earlier a discussion from *Imrei Shefer* in which Abulafia conceived of each half of the Tetragrammaton as a three dimensional body. Through letter operations, a relationship to the phrases “flesh and blood” and “His essence” was also established.²⁵⁰ We observed that the contention that God’s essence becomes manifest through the name runs counter to Maimonides’ position, a theme to which we will return shortly. We saw as well the identification of God’s “word,” His name, with the Torah, so that the Torah stands as the embodiment of the divine word, the “word made flesh.” Along roughly similar lines, Abulafia engages in two complex discussions, one in *Maṣleah ha-Ra’ayon* and the other in *Shomer Miṣvah*. In these, the subject of divine corporalization takes on greater complexity, and conflicting statements on Abulafia’s part betray his inner strife with respect to the influence of Christian incarnation doctrine.

In *Maṣleah ha-Ra’ayon*, Abulafia considers *Sefer Yeṣirah*’s enumeration of the permutations of the letters *yod*, *he*’ and *vav* of the Tetragrammaton. In *Sefer Yeṣirah*, God is described as having used these letters to “seal” the six spatial directions. It is implicit there that these six directions also correspond to six *sefirot*.²⁵¹ Abulafia is intent upon associating bodily dimensionality, and not just spatiality, with this portion of *Sefer Yeṣirah*. He understands that “the world is a created body,”²⁵² and so he sees the text’s elaboration upon the creation of the physical world as informing one concerning the creation of physical bodies.

Abulafia’s discussion of the letters of the Tetragrammaton clearly suggests his opinion that they themselves together possess the attributes of a physical body. It is not merely that they give rise to such bodies, but that such bodies arise through their correspondence with

²⁵⁰ See above, pp. 218–220.

²⁵¹ *Sefer Yeṣirah*, Gruenwald ed., 1:9–14 (paragraphs 10–16). The text delineates a fourfold process of emanation—breath, breath from breath, fire from breath, water from fire—which seems to correspond to four *sefirot*, given that six spatial directions are next considered.

²⁵² *Maṣleah ha-Ra’ayon*, MS Vatican-BA cbr. 291, fol. 32b; printed edition, p. 33.

the essence of these letters. Given the close identification of God's name with His being, Abulafia, in the course of this discussion, is forced to confront directly the challenge to God's incorporeality that his own treatment of *Sefer Yesirah* appears to represent. Writes Abulafia,²⁵³

Know my son that every body has three extensions, and they are length, breadth and depth. And the forms of the three letters of the name are like these, that is, line, plane and body, because they are length, breadth and depth. And every body has depth in its form in a point, because the point is that which instructs concerning the root of the depth of the body, and it is the All (*ha-Kol*). And so the *yod* in its essence is like a point and it is the body and it is the vessel upon which all of the depth depends (*talui*). And the form of the *he'* is broad, and it instructs concerning the plane that is in the body, which is the breadth. And the form of the *vav* is long and it instructs concerning the line, which is the length. And from these three forms all the world is built, [it is] built and sealed with them... You will know from this that the six seals [are for the] six sides, and the bodies are the three elements air, water and fire.

Abulafia asserts that bodily existence, as well as the physical presence of the world as a whole, possesses a nature which corresponds to the constituents of the Tetragrammaton, the three letters *yod*, *he'* and *vav*. These may be considered in terms of the three spatial dimensions, length, width and height, as well as with respect to the geometric building blocks of tridimensionality, the point, line and plane. The three geometric dimensions are indispensable to bodily existence, and they inhere in the nature of the three letters themselves and in their permutations. Consistent with the idea that physical existence is created from these letters, the demiurgic quality to the letter *yod*, which we have encountered before, is indicated here.²⁵⁴ Abulafia is clear that the three letters give rise to the created world and to its physical bodies by dint of the fact that the nature of these letters themselves is imbued with the attributes of physicality: The *yod* "...in its essence is like a point and it is the body," while the *he'* and the *vav* inherently possess the attributes of breadth and of length, respectively.

Abulafia next discusses the three elements air, water and fire. These too are seen as the building blocks of creation, in kind with the letters *yod*, *he'* and *vav*. "From them [these three elements] was created the

²⁵³ Ibid., MS Vatican-BA ebr. 291, fols. 31a-b; printed edition, pp. 29-30.

²⁵⁴ See above, pp. 258-259.

All (*ha-Kol*),” writes Abulafia.²⁵⁵ These three elements are next brought into a conformity with the three components of the world, the intellectual component, represented as the Holy Spirit, corresponding to air, the heavenly component, discussed in terms of fire (Abulafia drawing here upon scriptural descriptions of angelic beings as fiery), and the “lower ones,” discussed in terms of water. Referring again to *Sefer Yeşirah*, Abulafia suggests that the six permutations of the letters *yod*, *he*’ and *vav* stem from the upper four emanations, which correspond to the three elements discussed, yielding a total of ten constituents of creation.²⁵⁶

Abulafia is fully aware of the apparent implications of his discussion, that the letters of the Tetragrammaton together comprise the physicality of a body. He subsequently seeks to assert a distinction between the properties of corporeality possessed by these letters and corporeality itself. In this regard he refers to the difference between the form of letters and the actual inscription, using physical ink, of the same letters. He steps back from the implications of his prior discussion to suggest that the letters of the Tetragrammaton, in this respect, are the still immaterial forms of letters. He writes,²⁵⁷

... Although it is known to every enlightened one that these three extensions [length, breadth and depth, with which the “world is sealed”] are not a body except incidentally from the incidence of quantity, and there is to them also a portion from the incidence of quality. But the body is that which is composed from matter and form, and the matter is in ink. And it is known that they require a place and time, and the place is the boundary within which the body moves or rests. And there is a place for the place, until the arrival at the first place, which has no place, only position (*ma’amid*). And this position is called *belimah*, place, with a shared name (*shem meshutaf*). Because that which is not a body nor a potency in a body has no place, and has no boundary, and does not fall under time. Because time is composed of parts, and they do not occur in time, and they are moments and hours and times and days and nights and weeks and months. And the movement moves in a place, and time instructs regarding what happens from the movements of the moving body...

Abulafia writes that the three constituents of corporeality do not themselves inherently comprise a body. They do so only incidentally,

²⁵⁵ *Maftelah ha-Ra’ayon*, MS Vatican-BA cbr. 291, fol. 32a; printed edition, p. 31.

²⁵⁶ There are two types of “breath,” or air, mentioned in *Sefer Yeşirah*. Gruenwald ed., 1:9–10 (paragraphs 10–12). See above, n. 251.

²⁵⁷ *Maftelah ha-Ra’ayon*, MS Vatican-BA cbr. 291, fol. 33a; printed edition, p. 34.

through the attributes of quality and quantity. Abulafia suggests that the three dimensions are preconditions to corporeality, but that they act to constitute actual physicality only when accompanied by the elements of quality and quantity. It is clear that Abulafia seeks to contend that there is a difference between these three attributes and fully fledged physicality. He then adds to this discussion the elements of matter and form. The latter, as we mentioned, seems to be implicit in the preexistent letters themselves. Form, as in the example of the written letter, is that which exists prior to physical presencing, and is that which is infused into matter in order to lend to it actual physical existence. And indeed, Abulafia has elaborated at some length upon the forms of the preexistent letters as the basis for all subsequent physical manifestation. The precise nature of matter, prior to its being infused with form, if not a feature itself of the three letters of the Tetragrammaton, is not clarified, but here Abulafia attempts to distance matter from the preexistent letters that signify form.

Abulafia next suggests that the applicability of temporality and spatiality is, as well, a hallmark of the bona fide corporeality which the Tetragrammaton's letters transcend. Abulafia contends that that which is the source for subsequent place—and presumably he refers here to the letters of the Tetragrammaton—resides itself in a place, which in some sense is only a “position,” called *belimah*. The latter term is used in *Sefer Yeṣirah*, seemingly, to describe the incorporeality of the *sefirot*,²⁵⁸ but Abulafia here suggests the presence of a correspondence between the words “place” and *belimah*.²⁵⁹ Thus, the letters of the Tetragrammaton stand in a place that lacks the features to be associated with corporeality, namely, as we have seen, tridimensionality, in that this place is *belimah*.²⁶⁰ Yet tridimensionality, as Abulafia suggests, is inherent to any notion of place.

²⁵⁸ *Sefer Yeṣirah*, Gruenwald ed., 1:2–6, 8–9, 14; 2:1 (paragraphs 2–5, 7, 8–11, 16).

²⁵⁹ *Belimah* has a numerical value of eighty-seven. *Maqom*, “place,” has a numerical value of one hundred and eighty-six. If, with respect to the latter value, one transposes the digit for the number one hundred, converting it into the number one, the numerical values for *belimah* and “place” are rendered equal.

²⁶⁰ Wolfson discusses Abulafia's drawing of an equivalence between *be-milah* (“with circumcision”) and *belimah*, such that knowledge of the name is attained through the covenant. Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia*, p. 89. In the context of the current passage, the connection with circumcision would once again evoke notions of the immateriality of the higher covenant, as against the purely corporeal one. We should note the insistence of Baruch Togarmi, who instructed Abulafia concerning *Sefer Yeṣirah* in Spain,

Thus, the letters of the Tetragrammaton are seen here to reside in a hazily defined place that is no place. As mentioned, Abulafia refers to the location of these letters, as well, as not a “place” but only a “position.” They fall outside of the notion of place, whose attributes, nevertheless, are indelibly imprinted in their natures. This is because “...that which is not a body nor a potency in a body has no place, and has no boundary...” Abulafia regularly employs this description of the letters, as entities which are neither bodies nor potencies in bodies, with respect to both purely intellectual entities and, particularly, to God Himself.²⁶¹ In this we may perceive a further complexity, for the divine name, which is only with difficulty distinguished from the corporeal, is here as well rendered nearly indistinguishable from God’s actual essence, a status which we will examine further.²⁶²

Abulafia subsequently describes how true corporeality inheres not only in the attribute of place, but in temporality and motion as well, suggesting that the letters of the divine name are hypostatic constituents of the intellectual realm. Nevertheless, it is important to note that Abulafia has already made different claims for the essential nature possessed by the letters of the Tetragrammaton and for their resultant relationship to place and to corporeality, given the fact that they compose the dimensions of the world, which is “a created body.” And indeed, later in *Maftelah ha-Ra’ayon* Abulafia will appear to return to this perception of the three letters that seal the six spatial directions. He writes,²⁶³

It is His nature, may He be blessed, that He wishes and desires to seal in it [the name] six sides, and He is the seventh, because He sets up the six, and the six have movement and tendency, and the seventh does not have in its essence either movement or tendency because it is in all of them and all of them are in it.

that the divine essence is in no way to be associated with the *sefirot*: “God, may He be blessed, is not Himself counted among the *sefirot* and is not at their level; rather He is above all of them.” *Sefer Maftelah ha-Kabbalah*, p. 231.

²⁶¹ Among many examples, see *Hayyei ha-Olam ha-Ba’*, MS Oxford-BL 1582, fols. 4b–5a; printed edition, p. 49, regarding God, the “souls of the pious of the nations” and the “souls of the righteous of Israel.” The locution derives from Maimonides, as in his discussion of the Active Intellect in *The Guide of the Perplexed* 2:18.

²⁶² We may observe, however, that the three elements fire, water and air, related above by Abulafia to the three letters comprising the Tetragrammaton, are elsewhere identified by him as “resembling” the Teli. *Maftelah ha-Sefirot*, MS Milan-BA 53, fol. 181b; printed edition, p. 93. By implication, then, the Tetragrammaton and the Teli may be seen once again to share the same identity, so that the former has a kind of an independent demiurgical existence, one with, yet apart from, God.

²⁶³ *Maftelah ha-Ra’ayon*, MS Vatican-BA cbr. 291, fol. 42b; printed edition, p. 62.

The letters of God's name are infused with His essence (and vice versa) and serve the same demiurgic function as before. Here, however, the letters of the name are imbued with motion, which Abulafia had observed earlier to be a distinguishing feature of that which possesses corporeality. Only God Himself is here seen to be immobile. Ultimately, we may discern that Abulafia is aware of the difficulties raised by his efforts to associate the divine name with the realization of corporeality. He asserts that corporeality is in no way to be linked with the letters of the Tetragrammaton, while his discussion leads to some more ambiguous conclusions.

Again in *Maṣteah ha-Ra'ayon*, Abulafia considers the difference between the utterance and the inscription of letters. In the case of speech, where no physical embodiment of the letters occurs, the latter are understood to be purely intellective.²⁶⁴ This is particularly the case if they are not even heard. Extrapolating from here, Abulafia writes,²⁶⁵

And so, images of what is neither a body nor a potency in a body possess an image neither in relief nor in inscription nor inbetween, but it is an image in truth that God, may He be blessed, draws. And He, may His name be blessed forever, will call it an image or a form, although He, may He be blessed, does not act. But you may say regarding Him that He draws Himself, because if He did not draw Himself He would not have recognized Himself, and the image is the essence of His truth and His being; and His essence is drawn by Him just as He, may He be blessed, is in His being. And this is like our saying that He is the intellect, the intellectual and that which is apprehended by the intellect; or it is said as well among us that He is the knowledge and the known and the knower...

In the coincidence of opposites described here, that which is a product of pure intellection is seen to be indistinguishable from God, even if it is realized in the form of an intellective image. Recalling the backdrop to this discussion, it is apparent that Abulafia alludes to the nature of the letters here. We may surmise that the letters are the intellective images referred to, and that they are bound to God's essence. At least this is the case with the letters in their intellective status. With the inscription of letters, we may surmise, the dimensionality inherent in their intellective status is realized. This possibility ensues, to return to

²⁶⁴ Wolfson observes Abulafia's tendency to privilege the phonetic utilization of letters over the graphic. *Abraham Abulafia*, p. 67.

²⁶⁵ *Maṣteah ha-Ra'ayon*, MS Vatican-BA ebr. 291, fol. 43b; printed edition, p. 64.

our starting point in *Maftelah ha-Ra'ayon*, with the opening up of the potential of the intellective letters in their actualizing delineation of spatiality.

In the considerably later text, *Shomer Mišvah* of 1287, Abulafia makes reference once again to the issue of the sealing of the six directions of three dimensional space with the three letters of the Tetragrammaton. "Behold," he writes,²⁶⁶ "the whole world is sealed in them [in God's names] in the power of YHV, whose foundation, according to its square, totals 'truth' (*'emet*). 'And YHVH is the true God (*'Elohim 'emet*) (Jer. 10:10).'" Abulafia notes that the numerical value of the letters YHV squared (four hundred and forty-one) is equal to the numerical value of the word "truth," and this serves as the basis for his understanding of the verse from Jeremiah, where he perceives an equivalency between the Tetragrammaton and the word "truth." But Abulafia actually seeks to forge a connection between the materialization of the world through God's name and the priestly blessing. For he refers earlier to the "secret of the raising of the palms" of the priests, five fingers opposite five, conforming to the proper configuration of the *sefirot* according to *Sefer Yeširah*. He notes that

...five times five yields twenty-five, five times twenty-five yields *kohanim*. And behold, five instructs regarding the simple length of a line, and twenty-five instructs concerning the equal length and breadth. And thus it is said (Num. 6:23), "In this way you shall bless" (*koh tevarekhu*) "twenty-five blessings," twenty-five letters whose secret is יהי ("Let there be"), within which light was created...

The same mathematical operation, squaring, that he performed on the letters of the Tetragrammaton, Abulafia performs here on the number five, symbolic of the five fingers of each of the priest's hands. He alludes to length and breadth, with regard to the square of five, but omits a reference to height, which we might have expected as a result of his then cubing the number five, an operation which results in the numerical value of the word *kohanim* (one hundred and twenty-five). It is apparent that Abulafia is considering the dimensions that he describes, as well as the significance of the blessing itself, in cosmogonic terms. For the square of the number five, he notes, is equal to the numerical value of "Let there be," the utterance by which light was created. It is this significance to the squaring of the number five that

²⁶⁶ *Shomer Mišvah*, MS Paris-BN héb. 853, fol. 53b; printed edition, p. 19.

leads Abulafia to perform the same operation upon the three letters of the Tetragrammaton which we first examined. This, he notes, also bears a cosmogonic signification, the sealing of the world. Here, the physical dimensionality epitomized by the letters of the divine name is suggested, as before, and to this is implicitly ascribed the creation of the material world.

The Intermediacy of the Divine Name

A slightly earlier discussion from the same text delineates more specifically the conceptual basis for the connections between the creation of the physical world, the priestly blessing and the divine name. Abulafia writes,²⁶⁷

...And thus I say that this name instructs concerning the differences that are between us and God, and instructs concerning that which connects us with God. And the differences are powers, all of which possess matter, upper and lower, and those things which connect are spirits and do not possess materiality at all. And [this is] because of God's being utterly immaterial and our possessing lower matter. And He, may He be blessed, bestows upon us His light and His goodness and blesses us with His blessing, and commands us to bless His name in order that we might be blessed by it. And because the blessing comes to us via intermediaries—some of them being bodies and some of them being powers in bodies and some of them being spirits without bodies—He commands us that they [the *kohanim*] bless us, [with a blessing] containing all. And understand from this matter that we say what our sages of blessed memory said: "Every *kohen* who does not bless is not blessed, and every *kohen* who blesses is blessed," as it is said (Gen. 12:3), "And I will bless them who bless you."

Abulafia refers at the outset of this passage to the divine name **אנקתם פסתם פספסים דיונסים**, a twenty-two letter name synthesized from the first five words of the priestly blessing, Numbers 6:24–26.²⁶⁸ Abulafia is particularly concerned with those entities, angelic and demonic, that establish or disrupt, respectively, man's relationship with God, and he states that this twenty-two letter name is edifying on the subject. Those disruptive "powers" or "differences" are material in either a

²⁶⁷ Ibid., MS Paris-BN héb. 853, fol. 52a; printed edition, p. 17.

²⁶⁸ The intricate method by which letter operations are used to construct this name based on these verses is detailed in Cordovero, *Pardes Rimmonim*, ch. 21, sect. 14.

heavenly or a terrestrial manner, while those that behave as intermediaries between man and God are utterly immaterial, after the fashion of God Himself. Involved in this dynamic is the divine name, which is also an intermediary, in that our blessings should be directed toward it. From it, we, in turn, are blessed. God "...commands us to bless His name in order that we might be blessed by it," Abulafia writes.

This returned blessing is brought to us by one of the intermediate beings. Such beings, we are told, may be to some extent or other corporeal, or they may be incorporeal. Given Abulafia's earlier statement that those that are corporeal disrupt the flow of blessings, we may assume here again that only the incorporeal entities transmit blessings, although the ambiguity in Abulafia's writing is apparent: "...the blessing comes to us via intermediaries—some of them being bodies and some of them being powers in bodies and some of them being spirits without bodies..." The *kohanim* are responsible for initiating the blessing that ultimately results in the blessing that the Israelites receive in return, although the latter blessing, Abulafia has explained, comes through the divine name. Although it is apparent that he is intent upon the role of the divine name as intercessor, Abulafia does not see the divine name as corporeal. He explains that incorporeality, being the mark of similitude with God, is necessary for intermediacy.

Taking together the two passages from *Shomer Mišvah*, Abulafia asserts the role of the priestly divine name as both demiurge and intercessor. The former significance resides in the cosmogonic potency of the priest's raising of his hands as he recites the name embedded in the priestly blessing. The latter significance rests in what we have just seen concerning the directedness of the priest's same blessing toward the name. An evocation of a synonymy between the demiurgic nature of this name and that of the Active Intellect is present here, given, as we have seen, that Abulafia draws an equation between the *kohen* and the mystic. The intermediacy of the divine name, for Abulafia, is at the core of his notion of prophecy, which is itself, he contends, nothing other than the fully realized knowledge of the name.²⁶⁹ As he writes in *Shomer Mišvah*,²⁷⁰

²⁶⁹ Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 54, 73, 77, 89, 93, 107, 164, 166, 175, 186, 191, 196, 211, 216, 221; Idel, *Language, Torah, Hermeneutics*, pp. 101, 105–106; *The Mystical Experience*, pp. 33–34, 40, 116, 136; "Defining Kabbalah," pp. 101–104; *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, p. 51.

²⁷⁰ *Shomer Mišvah*, MS Paris-BN héb. 853, fol. 67a; printed edition, p. 35.

...his [man's] body was created only because of his soul. And this is because his soul was created only for knowledge of the Creator through His name, may His name be blessed. And the knot that binds these five [sections, concerning knowledge of the name] that we discussed is the matter of the connection between man and God with respect to knowledge of the name, because there is for man no higher height. And it, for every perfect sage, in truth, brings [a man] to the hands of prophecy.

Abulafia is clear, in this passage, regarding the intermediacy of the name in his conception of the mystic's relationship to God. His initial mention of the body is not superfluous. It relates to another, very relevant discussion from slightly earlier in *Shomer Mišvah*. There, Abulafia writes,²⁷¹

He who comes to receive knowledge of God should not set his thoughts on His attributes, but he must set and establish His attributes according to his intellect.²⁷² Because it is proper to draw the attributes after the intellect and not the intellect after the attributes, because the attributes are like matter and the intellect is like form, and it is fitting and proper that he draws the matter after the form and not the form after the matter.

Abulafia follows Maimonides in the latter's insistence that the divine names describe only God's attributes, which may be recognized only through His actions, and not His essence. For Abulafia, however, the Tetragrammaton is an exception. It is the lone divine name that refers directly to God's essence, and is, therefore, the means to apprehension thereof.²⁷³ Abulafia states this case somewhat earlier in *Shomer Mišvah*,²⁷⁴ and this position informs an examination of the passage above concerning the attributes and the intellect. Man, Abulafia contends, must not attempt to acquire knowledge of God by seeking to perceive His attributes, as this would represent, not an intellective, but an imaginative approach to the divine, surely a serious transgression. These attributes correspond to matter, as against intellection, Abulafia relates. In this, we can detect the idolatrous threat latent in seeking to approach the divine by such means. Abulafia pronounced a related injunction against focusing one's attention on the lesser manifestations of the divine with respect to the Teli, cast in this earlier context as the brazen serpent. There, recognizing God beyond the Teli was essential in

²⁷¹ Ibid., MS Paris-BN héb. 853, fol. 65b; printed edition, p. 33.

²⁷² See BT. *Kiddushin* 71a.

²⁷³ See above, pp. 133–134, 218–220.

²⁷⁴ *Shomer Mišvah*, MS Paris-BN héb. 853, fol. 62b; printed edition, pp. 29–30.

order that one might be healed and not harmed by the serpent.²⁷⁵ In the current context, Abulafia goes on to remark,²⁷⁶

And be warned that following the knowing [of the name] and the preserving in purity [of the knowledge] are matters that instruct that man should guard himself, after he knows God by name, for the sake of his life, without thinking after His attributes in any manner.

The distinction is reinforced between seeking after God, Himself, as reflected in His divine name, the Tetragrammaton, and seeking after His attributes. We should note that knowledge of the attributes does, in fact, ensue if one follows the appropriate path. This is what is meant by the earlier instruction “to draw the attributes after the intellect and not the intellect after the attributes.” But the risk of falling prey to the material nature of the attributes does not subside even after one achieves the superior knowledge of the name.

We have observed Abulafia’s active interest in many names for God aside from the Tetragrammaton, and it does appear that these names correspond to God’s attributes, as we have already noted. What we may understand from the current passage is that, in a certain respect, these divine names possess a material nature, in Abulafia’s judgment. An imaginative engagement with the names in the quest to fathom the divine leads one into a fixation upon their materiality and, apparently, throws one’s very life into jeopardy, most certainly at the hands of the demons who prey upon idolators. We may now better understand the passage brought earlier from *Shomer Miṣvah*, which discussed the body and soul of man. There, it was the soul’s dedication to knowledge of the name that brought man to prophecy. This was contingent upon the subordination of the body to the soul, which is analogous to the repression of the temptation to seek after God’s attributes.²⁷⁷

²⁷⁵ See above, pp. 239–241.

²⁷⁶ *Shomer Miṣvah*, MS Paris-BN héb. 853, fol. 66a; printed edition, p. 34.

²⁷⁷ See Wolfson’s discussion concerning those who engage in the non-intellective approach to the divine names. *Abraham Abulafia*, p. 99. Some ambivalence on this point in Abulafia’s thought is noteworthy and, perhaps, indicative of a struggle regarding the question of the propriety of seeking after the *middot*, which, as we see, bear corporeal associations for Abulafia. For, later in *Shomer Miṣvah*, Abulafia will describe the knowledge of the attributes as the “root of all wisdom.” It is achieved through the performance of the *miṣvot*, which, in turn, are dependent upon man’s bodily limbs. *Shomer Miṣvah*, MS Paris-BN héb. 853, fol. 67b; printed edition, p. 37. The connection of the attributes with corporeality is thus again established, this time through man’s own limbs, though it is given a positive interpretation by dint of the restraining effect of the performance of the *miṣvot*.

One points to it [the name] with his fingers, and this matter is [like the verse] “This is my God and I will glorify Him” (Ex. 15:2) concerning which they said that it indicates that they pointed to Him with a finger. This is the matter of the knowledge of the name...

What is first suggested here, in addition to the visual dimension to the apprehension of God,²⁸⁰ is the blurring together of God’s name and of His essence. By knowing or pointing to the name, one recognizes or points to God’s being. God is perceived to be incarnated in the visualized name, to have infused it with His being. The resonance with Christian doctrine is striking when one considers the equation that is drawn between God’s name, or corporeal manifestation, and the unleavened bread of Passover. This is precisely the equation made by Jesus when he indicated this same bread at the Last Supper, a Passover *seder*, and proclaimed, “This is my body...”²⁸¹

Regarding the related notion of the kabbalistic equation of the Torah with the name and with the divine body, Wolfson, in another context, writes,²⁸²

Assuredly, one must be on guard against making definitive claims regarding the origin of kabbalistic motifs, given the sophisticated exegetical prowess of kabbalists and the intricate ways they develop secret traditions

²⁸⁰ Wolfson refers to both rabbinic precedents for this pointing to God with one’s finger and to other instances in Abulafia’s work where the visual apprehension of God’s name is suggested. *Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 166 n. 193, p. 167 n. 197. See also above, p. 135. We may add to these insights the observation that Abulafia distinguishes between a proper and an improper mode of visually apprehending the Tetragrammaton. He writes, “And behold I was shown YH YHVH VH YHVH VH YHVH YH.... And God spoke to me at the time of my seeing His explicit and unique name in the blood of my heart to distinguish between blood and ink and between ink and blood.” Apparent here is the notion that prophetic seeing must entail the capacity to distinguish between the YH and the VH of the name, an idea in keeping with what we have seen of Abulafia’s interest in apprehending the intellectual image, as against the imaginary. The YH and the VH correspond respectively, as we have seen, to ink/righteous semen/the masculine and blood/fetid drop/the feminine. These correspond as well, Abulafia suggests, to the “image” and the “likeness” of God that he beheld. Abulafia indicates that a battle ensues in the heart of the would-be prophet between ink and blood, and, for the successful prophet, ink prevails, resulting, we may understand, in the subordination of the VH to the YH. Jellinek, “Sefer ha-Ôt,” p. 81.

²⁸¹ Matt. 26:26, Mark 14:22, Luke 22:19, 1Cor. 22:19. See above, pp. 125–126 n. 52, for relevant observations concerning remarkable parallels between Jewish Passover motifs and Christian conceptions of the eucharist. See also above, pp. 125–126, 150–151, 183–184, 297 n. 122, 306 n. 158 regarding the eucharist. See also Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being*, p. 543 n. 433, regarding other Jewish and kabbalistic motifs indebted to Christian notions of the eucharist.

²⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 256.

either hinted at in older texts or transmitted orally...nevertheless, it behooves one to note the obvious affinity of the mythic understanding...with Christological beliefs.

Wolfson's cautionary remarks are well placed.²⁸³ However, as with so many instances that we have seen, in the case of Abulafia's discussion of God's body/name and the unleavened bread of Passover, we do have an "obvious affinity" with Christian doctrine. The origin of the kabbalistic motif put forth by Abulafia is to be found in the New Testament, likely channeled, along with the other themes and motifs examined here, through his Christian contemporaries.

Conclusion

Abulafia slips from our view in the early 1290s, some time after his messianic expectations failed to bear fruit in the anticipated year of 1290. We can only guess what fate befell him. Hames suggests that Abulafia's disappearance might have had something to do with acute disappointment that the messianic age had not dawned as he had expected.²⁸⁴ As discussed earlier, the 1290s saw dramatic deterioration in the tenor of Jewish-Christian relations in Italy and Sicily. Perhaps Abulafia met with material hardship, or worse, at this time, or perhaps such an unfavorable inter-religious climate accentuated Abulafia's discouragement, since his messianic mission had been oriented toward propelling the ingathering of the nations into Judaism. Certainly, what turned out to be the non-event of 1290, and, indeed, the subsequent regression in the Jews' social condition, must have been as great a disappointment as had been Abulafia's ill-fated effort to convert the Pope to his messianic message.

Abulafia might have been greatly heartened to see that his work ultimately did impact the papacy greatly. This would occur under the auspices of Egidio da Viterbo, Pope Julius II's chief theological advisor and the foremost Christian kabbalist of the Renaissance, although

²⁸³ Idel as well cautions against mistaking immanently Jewish esoteric traditions for those formed under Christian influence. *Messianic Mystics*, pp. 86–89. As well, the influence of rabbinic mythical conceptions, Idel observes, should not be overlooked in a hasty effort to detect inter-religious influences upon kabbalah. "Rabbinism versus Kabbalism," p. 291.

²⁸⁴ Hames, *Like Angels on Jacob's Ladder*, p. 53.

Abulafia's efforts would not bear fruit in this manner for another two centuries after his death.²⁸⁵ A kindred spirit of Abulafia's in many ways, Egidio's hopes for a messianic age were stoked by the fervent belief that his own incorporation into Christianity of kabbalistic doctrines—including those of Abulafia himself²⁸⁶—was of momentous significance.²⁸⁷ Interestingly, given Hames' hypothesis that Abulafia sought the favor of Joachimists and adjusted his teachings accordingly, it is important to note that Egidio himself was an ardent Joachimist, and that he found little difficulty in effecting a synthesis of kabbalistic and Joachimist doctrines.²⁸⁸

Egidio found expression for his kabbalistic, syncretic project in different ways, not least of which was in the conceptualization of the Sistine Chapel Ceiling program. The latter project he perceived in messianic terms similar to Abulafia's.²⁸⁹ Evidence for such a messianic view of syncretism on Egidio's part is apparent in his oration of 1507.²⁹⁰ Abulafia's kabbalistic recourse to Christian modalities, which

²⁸⁵ For Egidio's unrivalled stature in the court of Pope Julius II, see O'Malley, *Giles of Viterbo on Church and Reform*, pp. 6, 9, 91. Hames mentions Egidio's part in arranging an audience for two would-be Jewish messiahs, David ha-Reubeni and Solomon Molcho, with the Pope. *Like Angels on Jacob's Ladder*, p. 89. Egidio would very likely have drawn a connection between these figures and Abulafia.

²⁸⁶ The positing of an equivalence between Metatron and Jesus, drawn from Abulafia, for instance, would become a recurring feature of Christian kabbalah. Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, p. 54. See also idem, "Egidio da Viterbo e gli scritti di Avraham Abulafia," pp. 48–50. The motif finds its way into Egidio's *Sechina*. Abrams, "The Boundaries of Divine Ontology," pp. 317–318 n. 98.

²⁸⁷ O'Malley, *Giles of Viterbo on Church and Reform*, p. 74; Secret, *Les kabbalistes chrétiens de la Renaissance*, pp. 117–119.

²⁸⁸ For Abulafia's active engagement with Joachimists, see Hames, *Like Angels on Jacob's Ladder*, pp. 26, 28, 43–44, 89–96. On Egidio's interest in synthesizing Joachimism with kabbalah, see O'Malley, "Giles of Viterbo: A Reformer's Thought on Renaissance Rome," pp. 6–7. On Egidio's intense interest in Joachimism, see Bull, "The Iconography of the Sistine Chapel Ceiling," pp. 602, 604–605. Some have articulated the possibility that Joachim may have himself been influenced by Jewish thought, to include even kabbalah. Such a circumstance would make it apparent how first Abulafia and then Egidio would find so powerful an affinity between the two doctrines. Hames, *Like Angels on Jacob's Ladder*, pp. 110–111 n. 10, 105–106. See also above, pp. 52–53 n. 84.

²⁸⁹ Sagerman, "A Kabbalistic Reading of the Sistine Chapel Ceiling," pp. 91, 99, 175–177.

²⁹⁰ The *Libellus de Aurea Aetate* of 1508, edited in 1969 by O'Malley, was written by Egidio at Julius II's request, and was based on an oration delivered by Egidio in St. Peter's Cathedral in 1507. O'Malley, "Fulfillment of the Christian Golden Age under Pope Julius II: Text of a Discourse of Giles of Viterbo, 1507," p. 267. O'Malley notes the intensive engagement with numerology on Egidio's part in the *Libellus*. *Ibid.*, pp. 269 n. 13, 273. Egidio derived these numerologies from kabbalistic sources, including

had already caught the attention of Egidio's predecessor, Pico della Mirandola, fed Egidio's belief that kabbalah held the key to the messianic advent.²⁹¹

For all of this, it is the synchronic dimension of Abulafia's messianic thought that endures beyond his own and Egidio's thwarted expectations. This dimension we encounter at the hermeneutical level, in the practice of confronting Abulafia's complex doctrines with an eye toward their disentanglement. The puzzling out of the intricacies of Abulafia's thought brings with it the discovery that the goal of eradicating dichotomies ran to the very core, not only of his messianic doctrine, but of his very consciousness. Such a goal, which Abulafia saw in terms of the reconstitution of self, we may understand as the experiential recognition that the category of other is inseparable from that of self, and that the process of self-definition through the other takes place on the stage of each individual psyche. The messianic ingathering of the faiths into Judaism that Abulafia sought on the world stage he sought as well to enact within his own being.

If we have seen the category of other as indispensable to the category of self, we may also see that Abulafia sought not merely to found his identity on the holding of self and other in a kind of balanced suspense. Abulafia did not simply accept the detestable idolatrous element as a necessary part of himself. Rather, we may understand Abulafia as having been directed toward destabilizing the process by which self is constructed out of dichotomy. We may say that he sought to reestablish his identity on the basis of a synthesis and not on that of a permanent, uneasy relationship of antitheses. Although at times, we have seen, Abulafia spoke of vanquishing the imaginative element, we see as well that he did not utterly reject the attraction to the religious other that that element engendered. This attraction did not represent simply an inner weakness to be overcome. It pointed as well to the

from Joseph Gikatilla, Abulafia's protégé. Sagerman, "The Syncretic Esotericism of Egidio da Viterbo," pp. 54–57. Egidio's syncretic impulse in the *Libellus* encompasses Roman Classicism, Hermeticism, and kabbalah. See, for instance, *Libellus* 25v. This integration under Christianity signified for Egidio the arrival of the messianic Golden Age, a parallel to Abulafia's messianic and universalist expectations for Judaism.

²⁹¹ Pico's fondness for Abulafia is known. Aside from his engagement with Abulafia's letter permutational methods, Pico's derivations, for instance, of the Christian Trinity and of Jesus' name from the Tetragrammaton, discussed in his *Nine Hundred Theses*, may have been indebted either to the *Zohar* or to Abulafia. See Scholem, "Zur Geschichte der Anfänge der christlichen Kabbala;" Wirszubski, "Pico della Mirandola's Encounter with Jewish Mysticism."

possibility that the other had a place to occupy in the construction of an undifferentiated internal whole, a process that removed “obstructions” and cleared the way for union with the divine.

For the constitution of this whole, we may look to Abulafia’s unabating declarations of the absolute unity of the godhead, expressed in terms of the holistic nature of the Tetragrammaton. From this we may recognize that the place of the VH in the YHVH was not construed by Abulafia to be one held by a coexistent, evil element. To perceive the divine in this fashion, to hold its two components together in suspense, would be, essentially, to posit a multiplicity in the divine, a notion against which Abulafia inveighs, taking both Christians and his fellow kabbalists to task on this count. To perceive the idolatrous VH as a counterposed element within the Tetragrammaton was, then, to commit that very heresy of idolatry which it epitomized. For Abulafia, that element—which signified Christendom above all else—was somehow to be embraced, in no way any longer as other, but as self. From this we may come to understand that Abulafia, at a deep level, confronted his Christian milieu with the sense that to experience heresy strictly as such was the quintessential heresy.

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