

## Chapter 1

In thirty-two:<sup>1</sup> The letter *bet* is an allusion to<sup>2</sup>  
*Hokhmah* and *Haskef* and it alludes to all that the

<sup>1</sup> *Sefer Yezirah*, (henceforth *SY*) in "A Preliminary Critical Edition of *Sefer Yezirah*, ed. I. Gruenwald, *Israel and Oriental Studies*, vol. 1 (Tel Aviv, 1971), 1:1 (sec. 1) 140. References to *SY* from this work follow Gruenwald notational conventions. Bold type signifies direct quotations from *SY*. The order and general text of R. Isaac's quotations from *SY* follow what Gruenwald calls the "short recension." This is especially clear in his treatment of *SY* 1:5-8. Compare secs. 7, 8, 6, 5 of the long recension, respectively. See, too, G. Scholem's note, *Haq-Qabbalah be-Provence*, 16, n. 33, demonstrating that R. Isaac followed what Gruenwald came to call the short recension.

Of the short recensions brought by Gruenwald, the following match R. Isaac's citations frequently, but not in all respects: Parma De Rossi 1390, foll. 36b-38b; Leiden Warn. 24 (5) Cod. Or. 4762, foll. 140b-42a; British Museum 600 (1), foll. 2a-3b; British Museum, Gaster 415, foll. 29a-32a; Moscow Ginzburg collection 133, foll. 198a-99a. It should be noted that Gruenwald examined over one hundred manuscripts for his critical edition of *SY*, but selected only nineteen for publication in his apparatus, based on criteria he explains, 134-35. It is not surprising that the text R. Isaac followed is not precisely one of these. The pivotal text variants in R. Isaac's Commentary are found in lines 17, 40, 75, 136, 151-52, 163-64, 261 and 343. See the notes to those passages, below.

<sup>2</sup> Note the abbreviated construct, without use of *-l*. See M. Goshen-Gottstein, *Tahbirah u-Milonah sel hal-Lashon ha-<sup>c</sup>Ivrit*, (Jerusalem, 1951) 29-30, secs. 81.1,2, who considers this form a non-indigenous development through Arabic influence, citing a similar Maimonidean usage, *Yesodei hat-Torah*, 4:11. See, too, Gen. 12:1, one of the source-texts for this passage of the *Commentary*, cited below: **הַמִּקְהֵל יוֹדְעִין רְמוּזוֹ וְהַגִּיּוֹנוֹ**. R. Isaac may have had this passage in mind both explicitly and subliminally.

<sup>3</sup> The *sefirah* Wisdom and semi-sefirotic hypostasis Intellection. See discussion, *supra*, ch. 8.3. Henceforth, the term *supra* signifies references to

apprehension of thought<sup>4</sup> apprehends<sup>5</sup> unto 'Eln Sof,<sup>6</sup> and all the more so what is included within itself.<sup>7</sup> From those

volume one of this work, the historical analysis. The terms "above" or "below" signify references to the present volume.

<sup>4</sup> The reference is to human thought. R. Isaac's commentary has a decidedly psychological orientation. He regards the *sefirot* and letters not only as categories of divine activity, but as categories of human cognition. To be precise, they are those categories of divine activity which human thought is capable of discerning. See below, lines 47-60.

<sup>5</sup> The term *השגה*, apprehension, is a philosophic standard, a favorite of Maimonides and the Tibbonites, e. g., *Yesodei hat-Torah*, 1:10; *Moreh Nevukhim* 1:4, 5, *et al.* The redundancy of this expression, *שהשגת המהשגה*, using a genitive construct with a predicate echoing the construct itself, is a peculiar signature of R. Isaac's style.

<sup>6</sup> The Infinite, God's ownmost essence. See G. Scholem, *Origins*, 265-72, *Ha-Kabbalah be-Provence*, 154-62, on the development of this term. R. Isaac's usage is transitional, shifting between the adverbial and the developing nominal form.

<sup>7</sup> R. Isaac is interpreting the letter *bet*, prefixing the "thirty-two paths of wondrous wisdom," with which *SY* begins according to a number of long and short recensions. See I. Gruenwald, "A Preliminary Critical Edition of *Sefer Yezirah*, 140. According to R. Isaac, the graphic form as well as the semantic sense of the letter both signify "encompassing in," yet "opening out." For other traditional examples of such graphic interpretation, compare "Midrash 'Otiot de-Rabbi Akiva ha-Shalem," recension B, in *Batei Midrasot*, ed. Wertheimer, vol. 2, 404: "...for *bet* resembles a house whose doors are open to all." See, too, *Sefer hab-Bahir*, secs. 14, 15, which emphasize the letter's enclosure on three sides. In the case at hand, R. Isaac adds a semantic dimension to the graphic: *bet* is open, and also includes that which is "in" it. See, too, R. Abraham Bar Hiyya, *Negillat ham-Negaleh*, 6: והוי יודע כי אות ה"ב נוספת על השמות ועל המלות על ענינים רבים והענינים ההם נחלקים לשני כללים גדולים... והשני להכניס דבר בדבר כדי להשלימו ולקיימו או להקיפו מכל צדדיו That *Hokhmah* and *Haskel* and all that thought

wonders which cause wonder<sup>8</sup> [come] the pathways [which] are

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grasps are represented by the letter *bet*, signifying "encompassing in," alludes to the epistemological notion of R. Moses Ibn Ezra, drawn from R. Solomon Ibn Gabirol, that the mind "encompasses" its object. See M. Ibn Ezra, *'Arugat hab-Bosem*, 123: המדע הוא להיות שכל היודע שולט ומקיף על כל הידוע ואי אפשר לשכל להקיף ולשלוט היודע שולט ומקיף על כל הידוע ואי אפשר לשכל להקיף ולשלוט (!) מה שאין לו תכלית (knowledge means that the knowing intellect masters and encompasses all that is known, and it is impossible for the intellect to encompass and master that which has no limit). This is a paraphrase of Ibn Gabirol, *Meḳor Ḥayyim*, trans. Blaustein, 5 (1:5). R. Isaac also alludes to this conception in his doctrine of the double *yod* that encompasses all things, lines 41-42 below. R. Isaac's point is that the proper function of *Hokhmah*, as wisdom, represented by the letter *bet*, is to circumscribe its object. It also, together with *Haskel*, has the further ability to reach upwards, towards the infinite. Compare lines 130-32, below.

<sup>8</sup> R. Isaac defines the unusual term מליאות in *SY* 1:1 (sec. 1) as conveying a more active and intensive quality than נמלאות : they are wonder-inducing: הממליאות .

This phrase itself is syntactically difficult. It is possible it belongs to the previous sentence, that these wonders, the *sefirot* and letters in their most recondite aspect, are also included among the allusions included in the letter *bet*, and considered within the purview of thought that extends towards the Infinite. The phrase "all the more so what is included within itself" would then be parenthetical, the "wonders" referring directly back to the *bet*, not to the argument *a fortiori*. Scholem, however, punctuates this clause as initiating the following sentence. In this, he follows R. Isaac of Acre's paraphrase of R. Isaac the Blind's *Commentary*, *Kiryat Sefer*, 31 (1956) 381: ומאותן (And from those secrets hidden in *Hokhmah* come forth pathways). This is essentially the reading used in this translation: from the wonders come forth pathways.

A slightly different reading is found in other MSS, such as Montefiore 313, fol. 1a, and Leiden 24/25 (Cod. Or. 4762), fol. 1a, which drop the first mention of "pathways" altogether, and turn the "wonders which cause wonder" into the clear subject of the sentence: "Regarding those wonders which cause wonder, they are like strands of flame, which are the bodies of the flames, that are pathways to the embers." For the

like strands of flame that are pathways to embers:<sup>9</sup> by the flames a person sees the ember as in the manner of a ball of thread, for by the strand a person walks to the place of the ball.<sup>10</sup> So, too, with a tree, by the many leaves and twigs and branches and boughs and trunks a person finds the veins of the stock and the subtle existence of the root, which is not visible because of its great subtlety<sup>11</sup> and innerness.<sup>12</sup>

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propriety of *וּמֵאוֹתָן* as an introductory prepositional phrase, see M. Goshen-Gottstein, *Tahbirah*, 96 (sec. 207.6.b), who considered such a usage to be influenced by Arabic syntax.

<sup>9</sup> The flame-and-ember image comes from *SY*, 1:7 (sec. 6).

<sup>10</sup> *Midrash Genesis Rabbah*, 12:1, applies this Ariadne-and-Theseus image from Greek mythology to approaching the difficulty of understanding the order of the cosmos: שָׁכַל לַפְּלִמִּין גְּדוּלָּה שֶׁהָיוּ לָהּ פִּתְחוֹן הָרְבֵּה. שָׁכַל מִי שֶׁהָיָה נִכְנָס לְתוֹכָהּ הָיָה מוֹעֵה. מָה עָשָׂה פֶּקַח אֶחָד. נִמְלַךְ פֶּקַח שֶׁל גָּמִי וְקִשְׁרָה כְּנֹגֵד הַפֶּתַח וְנִכְנָס דֶּרֶךְ הַפֶּקַח וַיֵּצֵא דֶּרֶךְ הַפֶּקַח. (It is compared to a large palace with many doors: whoever would enter it became lost. What did one clever fellow do? He took a ball of string and tying one end to the entrance, entered by way of the ball of string and left by way of the ball of string. Then everyone began to enter and leave by way of the ball of string.)

<sup>11</sup> While *דק* in the sense of fine and refined is a good biblical term (Ex. 16:14; Is. 29:5), it is also used in Hebrew philosophical literature to convey refined spiritual existence. See Saadiah b. Joseph, *Sefer ha-ʿEmunot we-ha-Deʿot*, trans. J. Ibn Tibbon, ed. J. Fischel, (New York, 1947 reprint of Leipzig, 1859) 120: כִּי כִּאֲשֶׁר הִתְאַמֵּת כִּי הִנֵּפֶשׁ בְּרוּאָה... וְשֶׁעֲצָמָה עֲצָם נָקִי 120: כְּנִקְיוֹת הַגְּלִגְלִים... אֲבָל עֲצָמָה יוֹתֵר דָּק מִן הַגְּלִגְלִים.

<sup>12</sup> Compare G. B. Ladner, "Medieval and Modern Understanding of Symbolism: A Comparison," *Speculum*, 54, no. 2 (April 1979) 223-256, regarding the prevalent twelfth-century use of tree imagery. See Scholem, *Origins*, 345, 447 n. 194-5 (the Tree of Porphyry). See, also, *Sefer hab-Bahir*, secs. 118, 119/85, for the

Every word which has a *bet* at its beginning indicates both itself and what is within it.<sup>13</sup> So, too, *bet* of in thirty-two, in which He engraved, meaning: that which thought does not apprehend.<sup>14</sup> He engraved two letters,<sup>15</sup> which are

association of tree imagery with the *Sefirot*. With these images of ball of thread and ramified tree, R. Isaac sets out his central epistemological vision: the possibility of a reliable continuity of inference from the concrete world of multiplicity to the progressively unified abstract world of the *Sefirot*, from the finite to the infinite. See *supra*, ch. 7.1.

For the term *פנימיות* in the sense of spiritual innerness, see Maimonides, *Moreh Nevukhim*, trans. J. Alharizi, intro., 16, in his rendering of the golden apple with silver filigree image. The golden apple is called *הפנימי*, and by extension: *וכן הם משלי הנביאים* and *ע"ה חצוניהם חכמה מועילה בדברים רבים האחד מהם תקון צורכי חבורות בני אדם... ופנימיותיהם חכמה בידיעת האמת על* (Thus are the parables of the prophets: their external sense is wisdom beneficial in many ways, one of which is the rectification of the needs of human society...while their innerness is wisdom concerning the knowledge of truth according to its proper disposition). The term *פנימיות* and its permutations was also used extensively by Solomon Ibn Gabirol, e.g., *Keter Malkhut*, 52, sec. 25, line 4: *חצוניהם ופנימיות*. I. Twersky notes that Ibn Tibbon and Alharizi employed the term *penimi*, denoting "hidden" or "internal," to describe the "internal senses," and that R. Abraham b. Nathan ha-Yarhi of Lunel, one of R. Abraham b. David's students, was the first to use the term *penimi* to characterize the genre of esoteric literature as a whole. See I. Twersky, *Rabad*, 243, n. 16.

<sup>13</sup> See note 7, above.

<sup>14</sup> "That which thought does not comprehend" is not a description of the activity "engraved" or its object, but an identification of its implied subject. Compare R. Asher b. David, *Sefer ha-Yidhud, Kabbalat R. Asher b. David*, 58: *ל' חקק לשון נסתר ולא אמר מי החוקק, ר"ל: חקק הנעלם* (it says "engraved" in third person, but does not say who is the engraver; which is to say, the Hidden One engraved). See R. Azriel, *PSY, Kitzur Ramban*, 453: *חקק והמציא... חקק והמציא* (Engraved, etc.: the power of the Cause of causes, *Eln Sof*...engraved and brought forth a causal

thirty-two,<sup>16</sup> which are divided into three divisions.<sup>17</sup>

power).

<sup>15</sup> יו"ד ה"א . R. Isaac is reading the first line of *SY* 1:1 such that this divine Name is the object, not the subject, of "engraved." See Azriel of Gerona, *PSY*, 453: חקק והמציא כה טבה שנקראה יו"ד ה"א ; This reading is corroborated by Nahmanides, *PSY*, 403, lines 5-7, and Isaac of Acre, *PSY*, *KS* 31 (1956) 381, line 28. Nahmanides notes that these two letters designate the *sefirot Hokhmah* and *Binah*, and that according to this interpretation, the *sefirah Keter* is skipped. He explains that the engraving of which *SY* speaks is already too coarse a creative process relative to *Keter*, and that *Keter* itself is alluded to in the bringing forth of the thirty-two pathways, *in* which the two letters are engraved. This is consonant with R. Isaac the Blind's system.

On the cosmogonic function of the first two letters of the Tetragrammaton, compare Jerusalem Talmud, *Ḥagigah*, 2:1: ר' אבהו בשם ר' יוחנן בשתי אותיות : נבראו שתי עולמות העולם הזה והעולם הבא א' בה"א וא' ביו"ד (R. Abahu in the name of R. Yoḥanan: with two letters two worlds were created: this world and the next world, one with *heh* and one with *yod*).

<sup>16</sup> R. Azriel of Gerona, *PSY*, *Kiṭvei Ramban*, vol. 2, 453, offers a *gematria* to bridge the relationship between the two letters and the thirty-two paths: according to the verse Is. 26:4, God formed the world בִּי-ה, two plus the letters יו"ד ה"א added forwards and backwards, for a total of thirty-two. This particular verse was a favorite of the Heikhalot mystics: see *Seder Rabbah de-Berešit*, *Batei Midrašot*, vol. 1, 19. R. Isaac of Acre, *PSY*, 382, lines 3-4, offers a variant *gematria* to arrive at the sum thirty-two out of the two-letter divine Name: יו"ד ה"א equals fifteen, permuted twice equals thirty, plus the Name itself taken twice, read forwards and backwards, equals thirty-two. R. Isaac the Blind, however, may not have had such a formalistic approach in mind. Rather, the thirty-two units of creative signs, ten *sefirot* and twenty-two letters, are understood as unfolding by emanation out of the two-letter divine Name. Nahmanides is also satisfied to explain the relationship between the two letters of the divine Name and the thirty-two paths in this way, without resorting to extrinsic arithmetical methods (*PSY* 403, lines 5-6).

<sup>17</sup> These are the three *sefarim* discussed in the

In three *sefarim*: these are three Names<sup>18</sup> which are in three letters<sup>19</sup> which receive from and are received by them.<sup>20</sup> The beginning<sup>21</sup> of those essences<sup>22</sup> that are given

passage immediately following. The MS Harvard Heb. 58/11 reads "He engraved in the letters, which are twenty-two, which are divided into three divisions." The point would then be that the process of engraving applies to the letters specifically, which are divided into three letter categories of *Sefer Yeẓirah*: matrices, doubled and simple letters. This is clearly a later attempt at reworking this obscure passage into a more readily coherent form by a scribe unacquainted with the kabbalistic interpretation under discussion.

<sup>18</sup> According to R. Asher b. David, the three Names are those three listed in the first section of *Sefer Yeẓirah*, 1:1 (*Kabbalat R. Asher b. David*, 16, lines 32-35; 58). These are יה"ה, יהו"ה, צבאו"ה. Scholem notes that R. Isaac the Blind and R. Ezra of Gerona did not use those recensions of *Sefer Yeẓirah* that include a longer string of divine epithets (Nahmanides, *PSY*, 404, n. 1). Among the short recensions R. Isaac follows most closely, Moscow Ginzburg collection 133, foll. 198a-99a has just these three Names. Nahmanides also seems to endorse this interpretation of the three *sefarim*, associated with *Hokhmah*, *Binah*, and the lower seven *sefirot*, respectively (*PSY*, 405, lines 1-5; and compare 403, lines 5-12, 404, lines 1-2).

R. Isaac of Acre identifies the three corresponding Names with an overlapping sequence of letters: א-ה-י-ה-ו-ה. He correlates this sequence with the upper three *sefirot*, each successive pair of letters standing as a "Name" corresponding to *Keter*, *Hokhmah*, *Binah*, respectively (*PSY*, 382, lines 13-19).

<sup>19</sup> These are the three constituent letters of the Tetragrammaton, יהוה. See Azriel of Gerona, *PSY*, 1:1: בטפח וטפח וטפח של אלהיות של שם יהוה. See also Nahmanides, *PSY*, 403, lines 7-11 and 405, lines 1-3; Isaac of Acre, *PSY*, 382, lines 17-19.

<sup>20</sup> R. Isaac's usage of the reflexive מתקבל is varied throughout the *Commentary*. In some instances it is reflexively self-referential, in others it has a passive voice, both of which are frequent talmudic usages. See E. Ben Yehudah, *Millon ha-Lashon ha-Ivrit*, vi, (New York, 1930) 5692a,b for examples. Instances of

to think about are the wonders within *Hokhmah*,<sup>23</sup> for the

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passive usage are: lines 37, 109, 133. Instances of reflexive usage are: lines 34, 95, 103, 132. In line 280, R. Isaac uses *והמתקבלים* in a passive, reciprocal sense, with the reciprocity made explicit through prepositions. Here, paired and contrasted with the *pi'el*, *והמתקבלות* is passive and reciprocal. *פהם* modifies *והמתקבלות*.

In R. Isaac's system, *מקבל* is the receiving of efflux by a lower ontological level from a higher level. By contrast, *מתקבל* is usually reception of or from the lower by the higher, or the preparation for such reception. The idea here is that the three constitutive letters of the divine Name represent the ontological sequence and mutual relationship of the *sefirot* themselves, which are signified by the three *sefarim* and their representative divine Names.

Generally speaking, in R. Isaac's system, the *sefirot* are conceived as *in* the letters. R. Isaac explains this concept of inclusion below, lines 264-65, saying "Each of the ten *sefirot* are in each and every letter." This corresponds to Nahmanides explanation that "even though we have said that the ten *sefirot* are included in the letters, they are not the letters themselves, but their innerness (*PSY* 401, lines 2-3)." In the present case, the three letters of the Tetragrammaton have a unique relationship to the *sefirot* they represent. According to R. Asher b. David, who appears to be expounding R. Isaac's position, these three letters reflect the three *sefarim* in their entirety, that is, the full set of *sefirot*, but as they appear engraved in the *sefirah Hokhmah* (*Kabbalat R. Asher b. David*, 14, lines 27-28).

<sup>21</sup> The term "beginning" as R. Isaac uses it, while based on the passage in *Sefer Yezirah*, 1:7 (sec. 6) "their beginning is fixed in their end," is employed here specifically along lines developed by R. Judah b. Barzilai in his theory of prophecy, described in his *PSY*, 31. According to R. Judah, God "created light and great fire for glory, that is called holy spirit and is also called *Sekhinah*, as the dwelling of His glory. Neither angel nor seraph nor prophet can gaze at all at the beginning of that great light... But from the end of that light the Creator, when He wishes, shows lights and sparks to His angels, seraphs and prophets. Sometimes from the end of the light there goes forth sparks and lights to his angels, seraphs and prophets; sometimes from the end of that light there is shown to them certain forms and visions and dreams or a visual



pathways are wonders within it.<sup>24</sup> About this it is said "God

image to whomever God wishes." In R. Judah's scheme, the inception of this light is too overwhelmingly powerful for any creature to behold. R. Isaac the Blind, in his emanation doctrine, plays off this notion of the incomprehensibility of the beginning of the emanative process, and its gradual attenuation, such that the "beginning," or first opportunity to grasp any aspect of this process is at the level of the "wonders within *Hokhmah*," as he goes on to explain. "The beginning of those essences that are given to think about..." implies the process begins earlier, but cannot be perceived. For conceptions of the prophetic process similar to R. Judah b. Barzilai's, see Judah Halevi, *Kuzari*, 4:3; R. Abraham Ibn Ezra, *Perusei hat-Torah*, short recension, 33:18, ed. A. Weiser, vol. 2, 342-43.

<sup>22</sup> For the term *הויות* used in the plural, see Solomon Ibn Gabirol, *Tikkun Middot han-Nefesh*, trans. J. Ibn Tibbon, (Jerusalem, 1883) 3: כל הגופות וההויות.

Scholem suggests that *הויות* derives from the Latin *essentiae*. The term was also in contemporaneous use among the *Hasidei Ashkenaz*, though Scholem detects a difference of nuance: for the *Hasidei Ashkenaz* it denotes presences or immanences; for R. Isaac, something closer to central, inner qualities of being. See J. Dan, *Torat has-Sod*, 94-103; M. Idel, *Has-Sefirot she-me-'al has-Sefirot*, 268, n. 153.

Scholem correlates R. Isaac's conception with that of the Gerona kabbalists, who held that "the essences were, but the emanation came into being (*Sefer Bialik*, 158; *Kiryat Sefer*, 9 (1932) 126)." See R. Meir b. Solomon Abusahulah, *Bey'ur le-Ferus ha-Ramban 'al hat-Torah*, Gen. 1:3, ed. J. Shapiro, (Warsaw, 1875, reprinted Jerusalem, 1973) 3: שההויות היו והאצילות שחודש. According to Scholem, these "essences" are the inner root of the *sefirot* and letters, the very highest ontological degree of differentiation, yet he notes that on occasion, R. Isaac seems to use "essences" interchangeably with both *sefirot* and letters (*Hak-Kabbalah be-Provence*, 145-6; *Origins*, 279-281; "Te'udah Hadashah," *Kiryat Sefer*, 158, n. 6.) By contrast, R. Isaac of Acre defined these essences as the *sefirot* as manifest clothed in letters, an ontological level one step below the *sefirot* themselves (Isaac of Acre, *PSY*, 384). See Idel, "Ha-Sefirot she-me-'al ha-Sefirot," 241-2, n. 12, who also flags this discrepancy.

Ultimately, all these interpretations attempt to pin down the term as referring to a specific set of

understands its byway (Job 28:23)," understands the byways and pathways that are within it. By virtue of the permanent

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entities on a specific ontological level. It seems, however, that R. Isaac the Blind uses this term as a generic designation for entities of ontological permanence, on whatever sefirotic level they may appear. It can refer to *sefirot*, to letters, to the pathways and to the inner principles from which all these originate. See lines 10-12, 15, 19, 23, 36-37, 64-66, 75-76, 79, 136, 218-20, 224-25, 233, 236, 267, 270-71, 289, 319. In the sentence under consideration, it is only those essences within the *sefirah Hokhmah* which are given over to contemplation, implying there are other essences which are not. This implication is explicit in lines 64-66, 79.

R. Isaac's definition of essences as entities of permanent being comes close to the regnant twelfth-century Latin use of the term *essentiae*, as Scholem suspected. See R. LeMay, *Abu Ma'ashar and Latin Aristotelianism in the Twelfth Century*, (Beirut, 1962) 198-217, for a discussion of the definition of *essentiae* as formulated by Hermann of Carinthia, in his *De Essentis*, written in 1147, through the influence of Al-Kindi and Abu Ma'ashar on the one hand, and Boethius on the other, as "those entities...which have a simple and unchanging nature and are therefore unable to receive any alteration" (Ibid, 199; Hermann de Carinthia, *De Essentiis*, ed. P. Manuel Alonso, (Santander, 1946), 25). According to LeMay, while there was no limit to the varieties of such *essentiae*, Hermann focussed his discussion on certain permanent *genera* whose role was to bring into existence entities of intermittent being (Ibid.). It is this definition of *essentiae* that is at the root of the maxim of R. Ezra and the Gerona kabbalists: "the essences were, but the emanation came into being." See *supra*, ch. 8.1.

<sup>23</sup> This restates the argument of line 1, that the thirty-two paths are contained in the *sefirah Hokhmah*, adding that these constitute the primary categories of comprehension that are first perceived as differentiated.

<sup>24</sup> This seemingly redundant identification may have been prompted by an understanding similar to Nahmanides' definition of פליאות as "separate and distinct effects," based on Targum Onkelos, Dt. 17:8 (Nahmanides, *PSY*, 402).

See, too, R. Azriel of Gerona, *PSY*, in *Kitvei*

essences<sup>25</sup> engraved in him there is within him power to contemplate<sup>26</sup> the subtle permanent essences which have no limit.<sup>27</sup> The pathways are sources<sup>28</sup> of the byways: for a

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*Ramban*, vol. 2, 457: ומה שנקרא בכח ראשון נתיבות נקרא (That which is called "pathways" in the first power is called *sefirot* in the second power, and in the third power "letters"). This means that at the highest sefirotic level, *Keter*, the principles are called pathways; at the second ontological level, *Hokhmah*, these principles are called *sefirot*, and at the third ontological level, *Binah*, they are called letters.

<sup>25</sup> The term קבוצות is found in *SY*, 1:13 (sec. 15), 2:3 (sec. 17), in the sense of "fixed" or "set." In this phrase, however, ההויות הקבוצות, "the permanent essences," appearing here and at the end of this sentence, the term "permanent" is intended to provide a definition, *qua* modifying synonym, of the nature of these essences themselves, as permanent entities. See above, note 22. Compare line 207, below.

<sup>26</sup> R. Isaac of Acre discusses the referent of the pronouns "him" in this sentence. He asserts that R. Isaac the Blind understood them to denote the kabbalistic adept, which he interpreted midrashically as the אלהים of the verse Job 28:23. Scholem questions how R. Isaac of Acre arrived at this reading (Isaac of Acre, *PSY*, 382, n. 12). R. Isaac of Acre himself, however, criticizes this interpretation and suggests that it is God who "understands its byway." Projecting his own opinion upon R. Isaac the Blind's words, he claims it is the *sefirah Binah* in which the fixed essences are engraved and that has within it the power to comprehend *Hokhmah* (*PSY*, 382, lines 22-29).

It seems, however, that the correct reading lies between these two poles. While the referent of "him" in both instances in the sentence is clearly God in the aspect of the *sefirah Binah*, consonant with the kabbalistic reading of Job 28:23, as R. Isaac of Acre suggests, the "power to comprehend" is a power conferred upon, or accessible to, the adept, who can participate in the activity of this *sefirah*. Thus, it is the term להתבונן, to comprehend or contemplate, that refers to the action of the human adept. To paraphrase: "By virtue of the permanent essences engraved in the *sefirah Binah*, there is power that enables man to contemplate the subtle, permanent essences that have no

pathway is the "source of a byway (Ez. 21:26)." The pathway is a generality and a principle, for the byways disperse and separate and spread out from there.<sup>29</sup> The pathways of the wonders are like veins within the stock of a tree, and *Hokhmah* is the root. They are inner and subtle essences, which no creature can contemplate except that which suckles from it,<sup>30</sup> a mode of contemplation by way of suckling, not

limit."

<sup>27</sup> This is a restatement of R. Isaac's basic epistemological argument, that the infinite can be grasped in stages and levels from the finite. See above, note 12, and *supra*, ch. 7.1.

<sup>28</sup> This is also an allusion to the term *מאמות*, matrices, as used by *SY* itself, chs. 2 and 3.

<sup>29</sup> R. Isaac the Blind interprets the term *נתיב* of *SY* 1:1 as the general principle, the main road, from which specifics radiate like byways. While this runs counter to usual Hebrew usage, it receives some support from Yonah Ibn Jannah, *Sefer HaS-Gorashim*, trans. Yehudah Ibn Tibbon, ed. W. Bacher, (Berlin, 1896), p. 327, entry *נתיב* : "One speaks of a pathway (*נתיב*) with regard to a byway (*דרך*) in the general sense, when you regard and speak of that which is customary, which is the clear path." Compare, too, Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, *Sehitah*, 14:16, who uses the term *נתיבות* in this general sense.

This definition of the term *נתיב* as general path is necessary in the conceptual context of R. Isaac's system, where the more ontologically superior principles are also the most general. Nahmanides, by contrast, preserves the usual Hebrew meaning of the term as "narrow trail," focussing on its obscure quality, consonant with the concept that the more ontologically superior principles are also the more recondite and difficult to perceive (*PSY*, 402, lines 2-7). This is one instance of Nahmanides' divergence and independence from R. Isaac the Blind's thought. See R. Isaac of Acre, *PSY*, 383, 3-5, who also noted this disparity.

<sup>30</sup> See Scholem, *Provence*, 221, who states "Of

by way of knowing.<sup>31</sup>

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course, it is most probable that the entire commentary of R. Isaac the Blind does not refer at all to the creature in the sense of the contemplative man, but to the *sefirot* themselves...Therefore there is within them, in these *sefirot*, a contemplation, that their suckling is from their root, and not for the kabbalists below." With all due respect, R. Isaac refers here very plainly to contemplation by the creature, and though he is often ambiguous as to the subject of the mental processes he describes, here the intent is unmistakable. The ambiguity may be partly intentional: R. Isaac's mystical psychology is predicated on a continuum and parallelism between the divine and human mind.

<sup>31</sup> R. Isaac's epistemology distinguishes between conceptual knowledge and an intuitive, continuous contemplative awareness which draws upon the already abiding relationship between the knower and the known. He contrasts these two modes through a play upon the double-entendre in the biblical usage of the term "knowing," in both the carnal and conceptual sense. "Knowing," between man and woman, connotes a less intimate relationship than "suckling" which refers to the totally engaged and dependent relation of a nursing child to its mother, which R. Isaac recruits to metaphorically evoke a more intimate, direct, continuous and intuitive form of awareness. See I. Tishbi, *Peruṣ ha-ʿAggadot le-R. Azriel*, 82, n. 5, 7. The image of drawing liquid standing for intuitive knowledge is used in the *Bahir*, secs. 87, as *שואב*, drawing water; and in *Peruṣ Šir Haš-Širim le-R. Ezra*, 504, where *המשכה*, "drawing" is associated with the concept of emanation. "Suckling" is the epistemological counterpart of the ontological process and relationship of emanation. See Scholem, *Provence*, 220-22.

C. W. Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages*, (Berkeley, 1982), notes that the image of suckling became extremely popular in the twelfth century among French Christian thinkers. For them, the paradigm of the nursing child was used variously to express the relation of the soul to God, the individual to the Church or to ecclesiastical authority, and of the world as child to God as mother (113-34). Bynum considers this an aspect of the feminization of Christian spirituality and symbolism and a sign of the higher social status of women in the twelfth century in general. (135-39) She

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also suggests an anti-Catharist polemical component in the image of suckling in particular. Suckling conveys a positive sense of the body, the inherent goodness of Creation, and the continuity of the soul with Heaven, all concepts running counter to Catharist dualism and acosmism (134). It may well be that the image of suckling served similar purposes for R. Isaac, and was in part a reflection of its broad popularity in the general culture at-large. See, too, C. W. Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: the Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*, (Berkeley, 1987) 269-73.

*Sefer* includes *ha-sefar* and *sefar* includes *ha-sippur*.<sup>32</sup>

Three matrices<sup>33</sup> are sealed<sup>34</sup> with [the letter] *yod*, and

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<sup>32</sup> The reading of the three ספרים of *SY* 1:1 as *ספר וספור וסיפור*, that is, writing, counting and speaking, is already explicit in R. Saadiah Gaon's commentary, *Sefer Yezirah*, trans. J. Kafah, 35. How these three are associated with the *sefirot* is not stated outright in R. Isaac the Blind's *Commentary*. Nahmanides associates writing with *Hokhmah*, counting with *Binah*, and speaking with the lower *sefirot* (*PSY*, 405, lines 1-3). R. Isaac of Acre repeats this lineup, but also offers a more interior series: writing is *Keter*, counting is *Hokhmah*, speaking is *Binah* (*PSY*, 382, lines 17-19; 383, lines 9-11).

The statement that each term includes the following term refers to the notion that in the process of emanation, the higher includes the lower, which issues forth from it and is thus included in it. See below, line 268: "All that would in the future be hewn from them was in them, just as within a man are all his offspring." Compare Isaac of Acre, *PSY*, 383: ואני אומר כי כל הקודם באצילות הוא הכולל מה שאחריו ודי למבין (I say that all that comes first in emanation includes that which comes after it, and this is sufficient for the adept).

<sup>33</sup> *SY*, 1:2 (sec. 2). See I. Gruenwald, "A Preliminary Critical Edition of *Sefer Yezirah*," 140 n. 1, who observes that this reading, which mentions the three matrices in *SY* 1:2, appears only in the short recension versions and one of the long recensions (Firenze Mediceo-Laurentiana Pluteo II, codex V (8), fol. 227a).

R. Isaac's comment here is based on his reading of *SY* 1:13 (sec. 15), which is interpolated at this point. Compare *SY*, 2:1 (sec. 23), where the three matrices are identified with the letters אהה. R. Isaac associates them with the three *sefirot* *Binah*, *Hesed*, *Pahad*, (line 152) and describes them as "things that emanate and are emanated and received each from each other (line 280)." See, too, R. Azriel *PSY*, 456. R. Isaac of Acre, while purporting to expound R. Isaac the Blind's *Commentary*, associates these letters with the *sefirot* *Binah*, *Tiferet* and the pair *Yesod-Malkhut* (*PSY*, 383, lines 14-15).

<sup>34</sup> "Sealing" is a metaphysical concept employed in

those that are sealed are sealed in the zenith with *yod*.<sup>35</sup>

the cosmogony of the *Heikhalot* and related literature, as well as in *Sefer Yeẓirah* itself (1:13, sec. 15; 3:2, sec. 24; 3:5, sec. 31). See, e. g., *Seder Rabbah de-Berešit*, ed. Wertheimer, vol. 1, 21, notes 10, 11; 23-24, and *Ṭiṭot de-R. Akiva*, ed. Wertheimer, vol. 2, 363-6, where sealing by letters of the divine Name functions to secure and protect the created world from dissolution through contact with heavenly fire aroused through the letter contemplations of the mystic.

Compare *Berayta de-Ma'aseh Berešit*, ed. N. Séd, *REJ*, 124 (1965) 28, 46, where it seems that only the mystic himself is endangered by the fire engendered in his meditations. See, too, *Sefer ha-Bahir*, secs. 107, 110.

R. Isaac the Blind in this passage is working off *SY*, 1:13 (sec. 15), see note 34, below. R. Asher b. David, *Sefer ha-Yiḥud*, *Ḳabbalat R. Asher b. David*, 57, explains this concept of sealing with the great Name as a setting of limits of a created being and sustaining that being in its form: **ג' אותיות אלו של שמו הגדול** **בונות שש קצוות שנחתם כל צד בהם ומתקיים כל צד במשך הברכה שבהם ועל זה אמ' אחתם כמי שמביא חותמו של מלך בידו ואין כל בריה יכולה ליגע בו כך כל קצב וקצב צומד ומתקיים בכח** (These three letters of His great Name build six extremities. For each side is sealed with them, and each side is sustained with the efflux of blessing in them. Regarding this it is said "I shall seal," like a person who carries the seal of the king in his hand, such that no one can harm him. So, too, each extremity stands and it sustained by the power of the blessing that is in these three letters). Here, as in the *Heikhalot* texts, sealing serves a preservative function.

Developing this idea systematically, R. Isaac of Acre explains the concept of sealing as analogous to the clothing of a higher level of emanation in the garment of a lower level (*PSY*, 383, lines 23-25). Sealing in this sense represents the final step in the creation of an entity or essence, granting limit, permanence and endurance. In the present case, as R. Isaac uses the concept with respect to the *sefirot*, sealing functions to stabilize a divine hypostasis at a permanent level in the process of descending emanation.

<sup>35</sup> This comment, precipitated by the introduction of the term "matrices" in the context of the imbedding of the emanated effect in the emanating cause, is based upon R. Isaac's reading of *SY* 1:13 (15), following the short recension versions found in Leiden Warn. 24 (5)



When they are sealed with *yod* they are placed in His great Name and compose a single structure, they within the Name and the Name within them, faces within faces,<sup>36</sup> essences

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Cod. Or. 4762 and Moscow Ginzburg collection 133, foll. 198a-199a. See I. Gruenwald, "A Preliminary Critical Edition of *Sefer Yeẓirah*," 146. The text reads: -- חמשה חתם ריבוי שלש אמות (Five -- the zenith sealed three matrices with [the letter] *yod*). But see below, notes to line 343, where it becomes clear that R. Isaac had before him a text corresponding specifically to Leiden Warn. 24 (5) Cod. Or. 4762. R. Isaac's comment at hand is rephrased more explicitly in lines 151-52 below, in his actual exposition of *SY* 1:13 (15). There, R. Isaac explains this passage from *Sefer Yeẓirah* as follows: "Zenith is like "holy," and zenith beyond zenith. Zenith sealed in *yod*, which is in *Hokhmah*. In it were sealed three matrices, which are *Binah*, *Ḥesed*, *Paḥad*." In other words: the *sefirah Keter*, the Zenith, delimited and sustained the three *sefirot Binah*, *Ḥesed*, *Paḥad* in the *sefirah Hokhmah* represented by the letter *yod* of the divine Name.

<sup>36</sup> Compare line 152 below, on *SY* 1:13 (15): וקבען בשמו הגדול (and He set them in His great Name). R. Isaac explains that the letters and *sefirot* first introduced in *SY* 1:2 (2) are not isolated and independent entities. In his thoroughly hierarchic system, letters represent a lower degree of being imbedded in the *sefirot*, which are organized according to the divine Names. The letters, *sefirot* and divine Names form one unified structure of multiple aspects, which he calls "faces within faces, essences from within essences. The structure is sustained by the action of "sealing," which effects the delimiting and nesting of one hierarchic set within another. In general terms, the entire program of R. Isaac's *Commentary* is precisely to combine the *sefirah* and letter system of *Sefer Yeẓirah* with the talmudic, midrashic and Heikhalot lore of divine Names.

The concept of "faces" as used here and expounded at greater length in lines 153-56, q. v., is derived from R. Saadiah Gaon, *PSY*, 72: לפי שהם עשויים פנים לכל (because [the bolts of angelic lightning] are constituted as faces in all directions.) R. Saadiah Gaon goes on to explain that in the world of angels, one encounters only the faces of angelic entities, never the backs. The context of the discussion is a comparison of the recurring pattern of numbers in base

from within essences.<sup>37</sup> The *sefirot* are a foundation, and

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ten to the nature of angelic entities. This was quoted and developed by R. Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 163: והם נהם בפנים מכל עבריהם וצדיהם ([the numbers and the letters] are represented in faces from all directions and sides). R. Judah makes the similarity between angelic qualities and the numbers and letters of *Sefer Yezirah* more explicit, but does not entirely spell out the application to the numbers and letters of the concept of faces-only. R. Isaac develops and extends this concept of faces to the *sefirot*, saying "He made faces above, for a person finds them on all sides, for there is nothing above but faces, for *Hokhmah* surrounds from all sides (lines 153-54)." This is to say that the upper world is a realm composed entirely of multiple faces or aspects of the same set of principles, emanating and unfolding from multiple perspectives. See Scholem *Origins*, 282.

<sup>37</sup> R. Isaac uses this phrase pattern "*x* within *y*" frequently enough that it is one of the signatures of his style. See lines 105, 186, 190, 236-37, 247, 250-51, 344. As such, it is recognizable in citations by his students, such as R. Ezra, "Peruṣ le-ṣir ha-ṣirim," introduction, in *Kitvei Ramban*, ed. H. D. Chavel, vol. 2, 478: וקבל במעמד הקודש ההוא ידיעת ה' שיש בו ג' שמות מי"ב אותיות שהם פנים בתוך פנים והויות [כצ"ל] ([Moses], at that holy convocation, received knowledge of God as comprised in three divine Names composed of twelve letters, which are faces within faces and essences within essences). This phrase pattern can be traced back directly to the grandiloquent style of *Heikhalot* literature. Compare, e. g., *Seder Rabbah de-Beresit*, *Batei Midraṣot*, vol. I, 57: זה לפנים מזה וזה לפנים מזה (This within that and this within that), and 60: עשרים פנים בתוך ארבע פנים...יש לה פנים בתוך ז' פנים ויש לה כנפים בתוך כנפים (Twenty faces within four faces...it has faces within seven faces and it has wings within wings) This demonstrates not only that R. Isaac has internalized an aspect of *Heikhalot* rhetorical style, but precisely that aspect and its underlying conception which corresponds to his central epistemological and ontological theory: the successive layers of being, one nested within the other, mutually influential and inferential. It would seem that R. Isaac recognized the similarity between the *Heikhalot* descriptions of multiple levels of heaven, and the Neoplatonic concept of a layered existence. The confluence of both conceptions, synthesized in his thought, represents the

they are an innerness.<sup>38</sup> The foundation of the structure<sup>39</sup> made by them are the letters,<sup>40</sup> like stones from the mountain.<sup>41</sup> In a mountain there are numerous veins like

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foundation of his entire theology.

At the risk of overinterpretation, the phrase "faces within faces, essences from within essences" may be understood: faces within faces, when viewed from the perspective of the adept contemplating upwards; essences from within essences from the perspective of the unfolding of creation downwards. In R. Isaac's Neo-Platonic epistemology, that which is more inner and spiritual is the basis for the more outer and material.

<sup>38</sup> In *SY* 1:2 (2), the letters are called a foundation. Here it is stated that the *sefirot* are also a foundation in the general sense, one that is more fundamental because, in R. Isaac's Neoplatonic conception of the hierarchic continuum of emanation, they are spiritually and ontologically more interior than the letters. R. Isaac of Acre explains that R. Issac the Blind was prompted to make this comment because, while the letters are called a foundation, "this is not to say that the letters are a foundation for the ten *sefirot*, for this cannot be, for the *sefirot* are a cause and the letters are effects, and how can an effect be the foundation of a cause? Rather, according to that which was in the future to issue from them they are called a foundation (R. Isaac of Acre, *PSY*, 384, lines 12-14)." Compare R. Isaac the Blind, *PSY*, lines 26-27.

<sup>39</sup> See *supra*, ch. 8.3, on the term "*binyan*." See, too, Solomon Ibn Gabirol, *Keter Malkhut*, 2:1, ed. D. Yarden, 39: **אתה אחד ראש כל מנין, ויסוד כל בנין** (You are one, the first of all number, the foundation of all structure).

<sup>40</sup> *SY* 1:2 (2).

<sup>41</sup> The letters are a foundation in the sense that stones comprise the foundation of a building. The stones themselves, however, are quarried from an even more fundamental source, the mountain to which the *sefirot* are likened. This comparison of letters to the foundation stones of a building comes from R. Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 69: **אדם בונה בית ומתקן אבנים להיותן יסודות** (a man builds a house and arranges stones to be foundations). See, too, Abraham Bar Hiyya, *Hegyon han-*

tunnels in the earth, which is composed of tunnels upon tunnels,<sup>42</sup> and therefore "the pit cannot be filled from its hollow,"<sup>43</sup> for in the filling of the hollow places, the once full places remain lacking dirt,<sup>44</sup> for deficiencies, by

*Nefesh*, 37.

<sup>42</sup> R. Isaac's use of the term חוליה for מחלה is based on his interpretation of Berakhot 3b, 59a; see following note. For the general idea of cavities in the earth, compare *Ketubot* 111a, concerning how the dead roll their way to the Land of Israel through the underground tunnels: מחילות נעשות להם בקרקע (tunnels are made for them in the ground). R. Isaac here seems to have in mind a permanent geological feature of mountains and of the earth in general. See *supra*, ch. 7.2, concerning the image of subterranean passages to represent the recondite nature of truth as used by William of Conches in his unpublished commentary on Macrobius, cited in P. Dronke, *Fabula*, 48-49.

<sup>43</sup> Berakhot 3b, 59a.

<sup>44</sup> Most medieval commentators interpreted the term חוליה to refer not to the hollow of a pit, but to the earth dug from the pit: Rashi, Berakhot 3b, R. Isaac of Dampierre, Tosaphot Berakhot 3a, R. Nissim Gaon, Berakhot 4a, R. Hananel, Sanh. 16a, *Sefer he-Arukh*, entry חלי. It is this earth which the proverb says cannot refill the pit from which it was taken. Tosaphot Sanh. 16a also mentions another interpretation: the dirt taken from a pit and used to rim the pit as an entrenchment.

Ben Yehudah, *Millon*, II, p. 1465-6, note 2, cites Shab. 99 and Eruv. 83, where חוליה evidently refers to a perforated stone used to rim a well. He cites Arabic parallels, and associates this usage with חוליה as denoting the hollow spinal vertebrae. This is the definition R. Isaac seems to have in mind: a hollow space, from the Hebrew root חלל, which he takes as synonymous with מחלה, used above, line 14, and below, line 24. R. Isaac therefore explains the proverb differently: The pit cannot be filled from its hollow, or on account of its hollow. The explanation he gives, however, that in filling the hollow places the full places become hollow, is similar to that of Rashi and R. Isaac of Dampierre, Berakhot 3b.

their nature, cannot be filled.<sup>45</sup> Thus the essences are subtle, until a person reveals them and makes impressions in them and engraves engravings and hews hewings: then the cavity appears from whatever place it starts.<sup>46</sup>

*Belimah*<sup>47</sup> they are all suspended.<sup>48</sup> The *lamed* is a letter in *Hokhmah*.<sup>49</sup> *Yod* is in all.<sup>50</sup> The *mem* and the *heh*

<sup>45</sup> The idea is that deficiency is to be understood as an abstract essence whose existence persists irrespective of the place it is shifted to.

<sup>46</sup> R. Isaac reads the talmudic dictum as a mining image. The persistence of a deficiency or hollow space as dirt is shifted from one location to another, serves as an image for the process of tracking and uncovering a subtle, abstract essence by following its traces in the phenomenal world to their source.

<sup>47</sup> *SY* 1:2 (2). בלימה is usually translated "insubstantial." R. Isaac here will expound the word according to the *notarikon* method, as an acrostic in which each letter stands for a *sefirah*, and the whole word expresses the process of emanation.

<sup>48</sup> Job 26:7: תולה ארץ על בלימה (He suspended the earth on nothing). This is to say that the *sefirot* are all suspended in a manner signified in the word בלימה. The letter *bet* is to be read here as a preposition, as well as a reference to the *sefirah Hokhmah*, "in" which all are comprised, as in lines 1-2, above. This sentence can be paraphrased: "In *lamed-yod-mem-heh* they are all suspended."

<sup>49</sup> According to this reading, the letter *lamed* signifies the *sefirah Binah*, which is in the *sefirah Hokhmah*, represented by the letter *bet*, according to line 1, above. *Lamed* is clearly associated with *Binah* in later kabbalistic works. Among R. Isaac's students, see Jacob b. Sheshet, *Nesiv Devarim Nekhotim*, ed. G. Vajda, (Jerusalem, 1969) 95 (ch. 5, line 76-77): הלם"ד... נקראת בלשון רבותינו מגדל הסורה באויר על כן אני אומר כי היא תורה על שוב הנבראים כלם אל היסוד הראשון (The *lamed*... is called in rabbinic terms "the castle floating in the air [Hag. 15b]. Therefore I say that it indicates the return of all creatures to the first principle). The return of Creation to its source is the

become spirit from which comes the governance of their offspring.<sup>51</sup> Foundation: it does not say they are a foundation except with respect to what is to come from them in the future, and the cause is the beginning of the foundation.<sup>52</sup> So too, the mountain is the beginning of all the structures that come from it, for it is the beginning of the impressions.<sup>53</sup> After the impressions He engraved the

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special function of the *sefirah Binah*. See *supra*, ch. 8.4.1. See, too, *Sefer hat-Temunah*, (reprint of Lemberg, 1892) 17b; *Zohar*, II, 159a; Moses Cordovero, *Pardes Rimmonim*, ch. 27.15. What suggested this association to R. Isaac the Blind is not entirely clear. Possibly, the number value thirty for *lamed*, representing the third set of ten principles contained in *Binah*, contributed to the association. See M. Idel, "Has-Sefirot *Se-me-'al* has-Sefirot," 245-46, regarding traditions ascribed by Ibn Shu'ib to R. Isaac the Blind, concerning the orthographic representation of the divine Name with three letters *yod* associated with three sets of ten principles: עשר ספירות, עשר מאמרות, עשר דברות .

<sup>50</sup> This is to say, it represents all ten *sefirot*, according to the numerical value of the letter. R. Isaac identifies the letter *yod* with the *sefirah Hokhmah*, lines 41-42 below.

<sup>51</sup> According to R. Isaac of Acre, the letters *mem*, *heh* represent the Tetragrammaton as a whole (*PSY*, 384, lines 29-30), that is, the entire sefirotic structure which emanates from *Hokhmah* and *Binah*. The word בלימה is read as a *notarikon* representing the unfolding of the entire sefirotic process.

MSS Harvard Heb. 58/11 and Cambridge Or. 2116,8/9, read: "*Belimah*: all whatness is included in *Hokhmah*, which is the letter *yod*, and *yod* is in all, and the *mem* and *heh* become a power from which issues the governance of their offspring."

<sup>52</sup> See line 19 and note, above. The "cause" refers to the *sefirot*, which are the beginning of the foundation, here, the letters.

<sup>53</sup> See line 20, above.

engravings from which are the hewings from which is the structure.<sup>54</sup>

Letters and signs are different, for signs sometimes have no image,<sup>55</sup> but only an appearance,<sup>56</sup> such as the appearance of white and of red and so forth. For a sign is the appearance of a change in something,<sup>57</sup> which has changed from its color and from its condition of being, as was said, "lie on your left side (Ez. 4:4)," and it is written, "it is

<sup>54</sup> R. Isaac here employs a series of terms taken from *Sefer Yeẓirah*, and treats them as precise technical terms representing successive levels of divine creative action through the image of successive depths of "carving." According to R. Isaac, "engrave," from *SY* itself, denotes the second most refined degree, while *רשם*, inscribe or impress, a term he himself adds, is the first degree, these being the first steps towards the sculpting of a complete material entity, as yet too subtle for the apprehension of human thought. "Inscribe" is used in sense of lightly marking before writing, as in Gen. R. 81 with reference to Dan. 10:21.

<sup>55</sup> For *דמיון* as image or shape, compare Maimonides, *Moreh Nevukhim*, 1:1,3.

<sup>56</sup> The term *מראה* as mere appearance or accident, in contradistinction to essence, is used by Judah Halevi, *Kuzari*, 4:3, trans. J. Ibn Tibbon: *כי החושים אינם משיגים מן המוחשים כי אם מקריהם, לא עצמיהם, ואינם משיגים מן המלך על הדמיון וולתי המראים והתבניות והשעורים* (For the senses do not grasp of the sensible anything but their accidents, not their essences. They do not grasp, for example, of a king anything but the appearances and forms and dimensions).

<sup>57</sup> Targum Ps.-Jonathan, Jer. 10:2: *ומאתון דמשתנין בשמיא לא התברון* (and of the signs which change in the Heavens do not be afraid). The idea is that a sign is something which has become distinctive by being out of the ordinary. This definition has a precedent in rabbinic legal thought, in the laws concerning lost objects, where anomalous change functions as a sign of ownership. See *Bava Neẓi'a*, 21a.

a sign to the house of Israel (Ez. 4:3)": a sign, without change of form or nature, for there is no form separate and changing from another, rather one thing that is turned into several matters. So, too, voice and appearance are signs. But letters are things which come from their cause, from the term *ba'ot*, for a letter is something which derives and is shaped and receives from the place from which it was hewn.<sup>58</sup>

The number ten.<sup>59</sup> What was mentioned in the two aforementioned sections<sup>60</sup> were the pathways and letters from which essence is apprehended.<sup>61</sup> Therefore it delayed until here to say the number ten, whose meaning is the apprehendable essences,<sup>62</sup> that are received in their

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<sup>58</sup> This passage is based upon Judah Halevi, *Kuzari*, 4:25, regarding the distinction between signs as used in human thought, speech and writing, and divine language. See *supra*, ch. 7.5, for an analysis of lines 29-35.

<sup>59</sup> *SY* 1:3 (sec. 3), 141.

<sup>60</sup> *Sefer Yezirah* 1:1 (1), 1:2 (2).

<sup>61</sup> The pathways and letters, which constitute the divine Names, enable the apprehension of the essences, or *sefirot*.

<sup>62</sup> *Sefer Yezirah* first introduced the modes of cognition by which the essential categories, the ten *sefirot*, may be grasped. Now it proceeds to focus discussion on those categories. R. Isaac's definition of *sefirot* as apprehendable essences combines ontological and cognitive dimensions. The *sefirot* are subsistent and permanent, that is, essences, whose number is determined by what the mind can properly grasp of them. See lines 47-60 for his key discussion of the cognitive conditions for recognizing and enumerating the *sefirot*.



elevation,<sup>63</sup> in the "lifting of their hands" upwards.<sup>64</sup> Five are *Nezah, Hod, Tiferet, Hesed, Hokhmah*, behold five.

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<sup>63</sup> For R. Isaac, the process of reception and elevation is the means for the cognition of metaphysical principles. R. Isaac developed this theory as a Neoplatonic interpretation of a conception of R. Saadiah Gaon as presented by R. Judah b. Barzilai. According to R. Isaac, spiritual forms descend to be received by the human mind, after which they ascend to their origin, an ascent which the mind traces intellectually in order to grasp the true nature of the forms it has apprehended. The mind's tracing of the ascent represents the process of abstraction of the originally received intimation of the forms. This theory, rooted in Middle Platonic epistemology, also bears strong resemblance to the twelfth-century French theory of symbolic signification, comprising a *collatio* and *elevatio*. See *supra*, ch. 7.6 in detail.

<sup>64</sup> Neh. 8:6. This is an elegant poetic insertion of a verse. The section *Sefer Yezirah* 1:3 (sec. 3) under discussion compares the ten *sefirot* to the ten fingers, in what I. Gruenwald identifies as the first instance of macrocosm-microcosm theory in Jewish mysticism ("Critical Notes on the *Sefer Yezirah*, 486). R. Isaac takes the image of *sefirot* as fingers of the hand, plus his theory of the mode of apprehension or "grasp" of metaphysical principles through an elevation of thought parallel to the elevation of the principles themselves, and ties them together with the biblical image of a pious raising of hands in praise of God. The third person plural possessive of "hands" in the verse refers to the assembled congregation. In R. Isaac's insertion, "their hands" can refer both to the *sefirot* and to those who apprehend them, a microcosmic act parallel to a macrocosmic process, and very much an act of praise of the divine.

R. Asher b. David explains more explicitly: *Sefer ha-Yihud*, in *Kabbalat R. Asher b. David*, 59: וכשיש בישראל משכילים כשנושאים כפיהם בתפלה נושאים ידיהם לדיום השמים ורומזים בעשר אצבעותיהם להשפיע [שפע כפ"ל] מכל ברכה (When there are adepts in Israel, when they raise their hands in prayer, they raise their hands to the heights of heaven and hint with their ten fingers that efflux should flow from the ten *sefirot*, to bestow blessing upon us).

‘*Atarah* with *Zaddik*, which are the power<sup>65</sup> of the dimension<sup>66</sup> of *Pahad*, with *Pahad* and with *Binah*; and *Hokhmah*<sup>67</sup> mediates all:<sup>68</sup> behold, five overagainst five.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> The term *חֵסֶד* here is used in the sense of effective power or force that derives from a higher source. See E. Ben Yehudah, vol. 3, 2316b-2317b for numerous examples. The idea is that ‘*Atarah* and *Zaddik* enforce the attribute of *Pahad*.

<sup>66</sup> The term *מִדָּה* is one of a set of designations for *sefirah* R. Isaac employs in the *Commentary* (lines 75-76, 124, 353). See *supra*, ch. 8.4. As a standard term for divine "attribute" in Hebrew philosophic literature, it indicates R. Isaac's association of his *sefirah* theory with the philosophic doctrine of divine attributes (See E. Gottlieb, *Nehkharim*, 298). R. Isaac, however, following R. Judah b. Barzilai (*PSY*, 148), also stresses the etymological connection to the notion of measurement and number (lines 75-76). Accordingly, it is translated here and henceforth as "dimension," to convey measure as well as aspect, quality, attribute.

<sup>67</sup> See *supra*, ch. 8.3 for a discussion of the names for the *sefirot*.

<sup>68</sup> The term "mediate" comes from *Sefer Yezirah*, 2:1 (23); 3:3 (28); 3:4 (29, 30); 6:1 (25, 26), where it signifies the action of a middle, moderating principle between two extremes. Certain *sefirot* in R. Isaac's system, those associated with the "middle line," also function as such mediators. See H. Padaya, "Pegam we-Tikkun," 164 n. 30. *Hokhmah* has the distinction of mediating all the *sefirot*, as R. Isaac explains below, line 42.

<sup>69</sup> Several group configurations of the *sefirot* appear throughout the *Commentary*. Here, in a formulation whose main outline became highly influential in the history of Kabbalah, they are divided according to the concept of right and left hands. This is an extension of the fingers and hands image of *SY* 1:3 (3) and its correlation with the midrashic motif of the right hand of divine mercy and left hand of divine rigor (E. g., *Pirkei de-R. 'Eliezer*, ch. 48; *Tanhuma*, Beshallah, 15, on Lam. 2:3, Ps. 118:16).

In R. Isaac's system, the five *sefirot* *Nezah*, *Hod*, *Tiferet*, *Hesed*, *Hokhmah* are implicitly associated

Regarding that which it says **and the covenant of one**: the *yod*,<sup>70</sup> that was upright and became bent,<sup>71</sup> **is aligned in the**

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together here with the right hand of divine mercy, while *‘Atarah, Zaddik, Paḥad, Binah* and again *Ḥokhmah* are grouped together as left-handed rigor. Already R. Asher b. David, R. Isaac's nephew, reports that this grouping was not unanimously agreed upon in his time. Some authorities associated *Neṣaḥ* with the right side and *Hod* with the left, and some had the relationship reversed (*Peruṣ Sem ham-Meforaṣ*, in *Ḳabbalat R. Asher b. David*, 13, lines 9-16). Conspicuously absent from this list is the highest *sefirah*, *Keter* or *Maḥṣavah*, whose place in R. Isaac's enumeration of the ten *sefirot* is subtle and complex. See below, lines 47-60.

<sup>70</sup> According to R. Asher b. David, the letter *yod* represents the "full count of the letter *aleph*," or the number one (*Ḳabbalat R. Asher b. David*, 5, 27). This echoes A. Ibn Ezra, *Sefer ha-Zaḥut*, 27a, and especially *Sefer haṣ-Sem*, 4-6, where he associates the letters *aleph* and *yod* in terms of the relation between the numbers one and ten: **שהוא כמו האחד, כי האחד [!] שמו** **סימן אחד מדבר בעד נפשו, ג"כ היו"ד באחרונה סימן יחיד** (For [*yod*] is like the number one, for [*aleph*] is set as a sign of one who speaks on behalf of himself, so too, the *yod* at the end (of a word) is a sign of oneness). That is, the letter *aleph* indicates first person singular in the future tense, while the letter *yod* indicates first person singular in past tense.

<sup>71</sup> This passage is an interpretation of an aggadic and midrashic theme in light of R. Isaac's theory of divine Names. R. Asher b. David paraphrases R. Isaac's statement and sheds light on its constituent sources and meaning: **אני אומר ששם של אהי"ה ושל ידוד הנקרא שם המפורש האמורים בפרשת ומושה היה רועה הכל שם אחד, פירוש היו"ד שלשם המפורש כנגד הא' שהיתה משלמת חשבון הא' כאשר פירשתי; וה' כנגד הא' והו' כנגד הי' שהיו"ד זקופה היתה ונכפפה להודיע מי שהוא כפוף בעולם הזה הוא זקוף לעולם הבא** (I say that the Name *ḥyh* and the Name *Yhwh*, which is called the Tetragrammaton, that are spoken of in [Ex. 3:1-22] are all one Name. This means that the *yod* of the Tetragrammaton corresponds to the *aleph*, for it completes the number of the *aleph*, as I have explained; and *heh* corresponds to the *aleph* (!, see Ḥasida's note, line 4: it should read *heh*) and the *vav* corresponds to the *yod*, for the *yod* was upright and became bent, to inform that he who is bent in this world will be upright in the world to come). See *Ḳabbalat R. Asher b.*

middle, above, in the tongue,<sup>72</sup> and below it is bent in the

*David*, 27, lines 1-5. In this scheme, R. Asher correlates the four letters of one divine Name to the other, letter by letter in sequence.

The aggadic source for the image and terminology of the bent letter *yod* is *Menahot* 29b: **מַפְנֵי מֶה נִבְרָא: מַפְנֵי הָעוֹלָם הָבָא בִּיּוֹ"ד מַפְנֵי שְׂצָדִיקִים שָׁבוּ מוֹעֲמִים וּמַפְנֵי מֶה כְּפוּף רָאשׁוֹ מַפְנֵי שְׂצָדִיקִים שָׁבוּ כְּפוּף רָאשֵׁיהֶם מַפְנֵי מַעֲשֵׂיהֶן שְׂאִינָן לִזֶּה לִזֶּה** (Why was the world to come created with the letter *yod*? Because the righteous there are few. Why is its head bent? Because the heads of the righteous there are bent because of their deeds, which do not resemble one another). In this aggadah, however, the form of the *yod* is bent in essence, whereas R. Isaac's formulation indicates a temporal dimension: it was straight at one time and became bent. R. Asher's paraphrase indicates that the midrashic version of *ʿOtiot de-R. ʿAkiva*, version B, *Batei Midrasot* vol. 2, 406, may also have been influential in suggesting this temporal sequence: "whoever diminishes himself in this world...inherits the life of the world to come that was created with *yod*." Compare *Ma'aseh Nerkavah, Batei Midrasot*, vol. 1, 62. Also in the background may be a nexus of midrashim that speak of the diminishing of Adam from an upright stance, **קִוְיָה זְקוּפָה**, due to his sin, and the reinstatement of that upright stance in the Messianic Age, from Hag. 12a; *Torat Kohanim*, Behukotai, 3:7; *Beresit Rabbah* 12:5; *Bemidbar Rabbah* 13:11; *Tanhumah*, Bereshit, sec. 6; *ʿOtiot de-R. ʿAkiva*, version A, *Batei Midrasot*, vol. 2, 373 and n. 90.

R. Asher indicates that the overall context in which these midrashim were placed is R. Isaac's theory of the relationship of the letters of the divine Name. In this theory, as it is reflected in the writings of R. Asher and the Gerona circle, the letter *naw* is regarded as implicit in the letter *yod*, that is, *yod* must be pronounced by means of *naw*. See R. Azriel, *Perus hak-Kaddis*, in G. Scholem, *Seridin Hadašim*, 216: **וְאֵין יוֹ"ד בְּלֹא נָא** (there is no *yod* without *naw*), 217: **וְהַעֲלִים הוּא"ו בְּאֵין יוֹ"ד** (the *naw* is hidden in the letter *yod*); and *Perus Yihud ha-Sem*, 218, and n. 8: **וְאֵין יוֹ"ד שְׂאִין וְאֵין מַחְדָּשָׁה בְּסֵתֶר תְּנוּעָתָהּ** (there is no *yod* in which a *naw* is not generated as its hidden vowel). See, also, R. Goetschel, "hyh ʿasher hyh ʿezel . . . Mekubbalei Gerona," *Nehkerei Yerušalayim be-Nahševet Yisrael*, 6:3-4 (Jerusalem, 1987) 287-98; H. Padaya, *Pegam ve-Tikkun*, 176-85.

Putting these elements together, the aggadic and midrashic motifs are interpreted by the Provençal kabbalists as encoding an ontological comparison of the

covenant (of circumcision),<sup>73</sup> and they are in the middle, this parallel to that, resembling the *yod* that is in [the shape of] the brain in the head, standing for the *Hokhmah* which is within,<sup>74</sup> and surrounds all.<sup>75</sup> So, too, the brain

divine Names *ʔhyh* and *Yhwh* in terms of the letters *yod* and *nan*. In the higher divine Name, *ʔhyh*, which corresponds to the world to come, from which all emanated and to which all returns, the *yod*, the third letter, is upright. This uprightness means that the letter *nan*, a vertical line signifying the principle of uprightness, remains implicit and hidden within this letter *yod*, apparent only when the letter is articulated. By contrast, the *yod* of the lower divine Name, *Yhwh*, corresponding to this world, is bent, and the *nan*, now the third letter, is precipitated out as a distinct letter of that Name, a hint of the *yod* of the higher divine Name.

<sup>72</sup> According to R. Isaac of Acre, *PSY*, 386, this represents the *sefirah Binah*: ובינה הוא הלשון.

<sup>73</sup> According to R. Isaac of Acre, *PSY*, 386, this represents the *sefirah Yesod*: וְכֹנֶגֶד הַטִּילָה בְּאֵדָם הִיא הַסְפִּירָה הַנִּקְרָאָה יְסוּד.

The overall idea of these lines seems to be that the Tetragrammaton represents the lower *sefirot*, and is designated in terms of the letter *wan* and the *sefirah Yesod*, its lowest element. As such, the initial letter *yod* is "bent" and contained "in the covenant (of circumcision)." This is to say it is in a compressed and diminished form in the lower sefirotic realm, as compared with its full, upright stature in the upper sefirotic world, in the divine Name *ḥyḥ*. This diminished form is symbolized by circumcision, both graphically, and morally, signifying the curbing of the sexual appetite. Whether this "bent" condition is an aspect of cosmic catastrophe, similar to Padaya's interpretation of the relationship between the letters *waw* and *heh* of the Tetragrammaton (*Pegam we-Tikkun*, 157-280), or whether this is just the essential difficiency in quality of being of a lower level of emanation as compared to a higher, is not entirely clear from this passage.

74 While the term מצות in *Sefer Yezirah* generally means the middle between extremes, R. Isaac also uses it in the sense of "within," that is, that which is

is in the middle of the head, and from there they receive, this way and that, and from every side and every corner there is from it a suckling for all.<sup>76</sup> Therefore it was necessary to say, after this section, **ten and not eleven**, for they are only ten, for the *Hokhmah* is counted with all of them, just as the Name whose beginning is *h* is counted with all of them.<sup>77</sup> **Is aligned:** when you take two *yodin*,

both central and inner. This is similar to R. A. Ibn Ezra's usage in Ex. 8:18: **וְרוּחַ הָאָדָם בְּאִמְצַע הַגּוֹי** (the spirit of man is within the body). See H. Padaya, "Pegam we-Tikḥun," 168 nn. 42, 43.

<sup>75</sup> See A. Ibn Ezra, *Sefer haṣ-Ṣem*, 6a, describing the letter *yod*: **וְצוּרָתוֹ כְּחֻצֵי גִלְגֹּל לְהוֹרֹת עַל כּוּלּוֹ וְהַמָּעַס** (its shape is like a semicircle, to teach about its entire nature, which means that it encompasses all). Compare *Yesod Mor'a*, 19; *Sefer ha-Zahut* 27a.

The idea that the spiritually and ontologically superior entity is both within and surrounding that which is inferior is a Neoplatonic concept rooted in the nature of emanation. In the emanation continuum, the higher is both more interior and more general. This paradox is expressed by Ibn Gabirol in numerous formulations, especially with respect to the general intellect, which, in its oneness, as the origin of all entities, penetrates all entities, and encompasses all entities. See *Mekor Hayyim*, 2:8, 20; 3:15; 5:30. See J. Guttman, *Philosophies*, 99. See, also, *Ṣir ha-Yiḥud*, day 3, describing God: **טוֹבֵב הַכֹּל וּמִלֵּא אֶת כָּל, וּבְהִיּוֹת הַכֹּל אֵתָּה** . **בְּכָל** (Surrounding all and filling all, when all came into being, You are in all).

<sup>76</sup> The example of the brain that is both within the head and yet influences all parts of the body is meant to illustrate that which is both centered within and yet encompasses that in which it is centered, in the sense of influencing it. For the association of *Hokhmah* and the brain, see Abraham Ibn Ezra, Torah Commentary, Ex. 23:25: **כִּי הַנֶּשְׁמָה הִיא הַחֵכְמָה, וּמוֹשְׁבָהּ בְּמוֹחַ הָרֹאשׁ, וּמִמֶּנָּה יֵצֵא כָּח כָּל הַהֲרִגְשׁוֹת וְתַנוּצָת הַחַפֵּץ** (For the soul is wisdom, and its place in the brain of the head, and from it issues the power of all the senses and the movements of the will).

this facing that, they encompass all that is between them,<sup>78</sup> and all suckle from there.

<sup>77</sup> The Name *hyh* refers to *Keter* (Isaac of Acre, *PSY*, 383), which is hidden in *Hokhmah*, and implicit in all *sefirot*. In a similar way, *Hokhmah* is counted with all *sefirot*. R. Isaac states that this aspect of *Hokhmah* explains the thematic transition from *SY* 1:3 (sec. 3) to 1:4 (sec. 4): since *Hokhmah* and *Keter* are counted with all the *sefirot*, it is necessary to clarify which are counted as *sefirot* and what the total number of *sefirot* are. See lines 47-54, below.

<sup>78</sup> A. Ibn Ezra, *Sefer has-Gen*, 6b: the letter *yod*, graphically a semicircle with the value ten, is pronounced by use of the letters יו"ד, which add up to twenty (10+6+4=20), to indicate a full circle that encompasses all: בעבור היותו מקיף, ובמכסא הוא כפול להורות על עצמו.

R. Isaac applies this idea to his enumeration of the *sefirot*. According to R. Asher b. David: ויש שמונין החכמה לשתיים לפי שהיא סובבת הכל, וזהו מה שאמרו רז"ל כשם שיש שכינה למעלה כך יש שכינה למטה, שכן תמצא מחתימת שש קצוות שנחתמו בשמו הגדול, י' למעלה וי' למטה (There are those who count *Hokhmah* as two, because it surrounds all, and this is what the Rabbis said, that just as there is a divine Presence above, so there is a divine Presence below, for so too, you find that regarding the six extremities that were sealed with the great Name, that *yod* is above and *yod* is below). R. Asher here clearly refers to R. Isaac, though as an anonymous opinion dissenting from the consensus, as counting the *sefirah Hokhmah* with both groups of *sefirot*, that is, with all, twice. As such, *Keter* is not counted separately and explicitly as one of the ten, but remains joined with *Hokhmah*, as in lines 48-51, below.

Ten and not nine:<sup>79</sup> even though *Hokhmah* is with all,<sup>80</sup> do not say "how can I say it is a *sefirah*?"<sup>81</sup> And not eleven: and if you say that since *Hokhmah* is the beginning of the thought of speech,<sup>82</sup> how can I not say eleven? Do not say so, and do not separate *Hokhmah*, [for *Hokhmah* is]<sup>83</sup> from *Keter*.<sup>84</sup> Another version: *Binah* is considered<sup>85</sup> the

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<sup>79</sup> SY 1:4 (sec. 4), 141.

<sup>80</sup> See lines 44-45 above.

<sup>81</sup> Even though *Hokhmah* is associated with all the *sefirot*, as stated above, lines 42-45, it is distinguished as a principle in itself, and as such qualifies to be enumerated as a *sefirah*.

<sup>82</sup> The emanative order of the *sefirot* is correlated with the process of speech, divine and human. R. Isaac distinguishes the beginning of speech, the thought of speech, and the cause of the thought of speech, corresponding to *Binah*, *Hokhmah*, and *Keter*, respectively.

<sup>83</sup> MS Leiden 24/25 has this insertion as part of the text.

<sup>84</sup> Improper separation of *sefirot* is the cardinal sin of Kabbalah. See G. Scholem, *Reshit ha-Kabbalah*, 79, n. 2, quoting R. Abraham b. David concerning the crucial importance of the lack of separation between the divine attributes of judgment and mercy: וגם כן בפועל האמת שפעולתם אמת טעם הפרצופין מורה לשני ענינים הא' כי ידוע הוא שנאצלו שני הפכים האחד דין גמור וחבירו רחמים גמורים ואם לא נאצלו דו פרצופין ויהיה כל אחד פועל כפי מדתו יראה כשתי רשויות ויפעל כל אחד בלי חבור חבירו ובלי סיוע שלו אבל עתה שנבראו דו פרצופין כל פעולתם ביחד ובלו (So too, among the workers of truth whose work is true there are two reasons for [being double-faced]. The first is that it is known that two contrary principles were emanated: one that is entirely judgment and its partner that is entirely mercy. If they were not emanated as double-faced, each one would act according to its attribute, and they would appear as two independent divine powers, each one acting without connection to its partner and without its assistance. But now that they were created



beginning of speech.<sup>86</sup> Even though you cannot apprehend the

double-faced, all their actions are together, in equality and with complete unity, and there is no separation between them). This is the first recorded instance of kabbalistic concern for the impropriety of separating divine attributes in consideration of the danger of imputing divine dualism or polytheism. See *supra*, ch. 5.4, concerning R. Isaac's letter to Gerona, where he identifies Elisha b. Abuya's theological sin of "uprooting the plantings," (Ḥag. 15a) with the separation of *sefirot* from *Ein Sof* and from each other.

This issue should be located in context of philosophical discussions of the unity of God, such as Bahya Ibn Pakudah, *Hovot ha-Levavot*, trans. J. Ibn Tibbon, 1:7, concerning Euclid's definition of absolute one: והענין, אשר אנחנו צריכין להעלות על דעתנו מן האחדות, הוא יחידות גמורה ובדידות, שאין עמה חבור ולא דמיון בשום ענין, ולא רבוי ולא מספר בשום פנים, ולא התחבר (The matter of which we must be aware concerning unity is that it is complete oneness and aloneness, it has no connection or comparison to any matter, no multiplicity and no number in any aspect, it is not joined to anything nor separated from anything). See, too, 1:8, 9, and 10: והרבוי הנמצא במדות, רק מצד עצם כבודו, רק מצד קצר כח מליצה הבורא יתעלה איננו מצד עצם כבודו, רק מצד קצר כח מליצה (the multiplicity that is found among the attributes of the Creator is not from the perspective of the essence of His Glory, rather from the perspective of the limited power of expression of a speaker to grasp its nature in one word that would indicate Him). The inseparability of divine attributes as understood by the Jewish philosophers becomes an essential aspect of the kabbalistic concept of the unity of the *sefirot* in the thought of R. Abraham b. David and his son, R. Isaac.

In the present instance, the issue of separation takes on a further significance, as part of what appears to have been an internal debate among kabbalists. R. Isaac's definition of *sefirah* on the basis of this passage is that divine principle which can be distinguished by thought and therefore counted. In this sense, the *sefirot*, while essentially unified, have distinctly discernable qualities. In lines 38-45, above, R. Isaac notes that *Hokhmah* is listed with two sets of *sefirot*, that it "mediates all," and that "it is central and it surrounds all." He says that on this basis, SY warns not to count eleven, but only ten *sefirot*: *Hokhmah* should not be counted twice, inner and outer, above and below. Here, lines 46-49, he notes that even though *Hokhmah* has two aspects, as "with" all

thought of the Scribe, the Author,<sup>87</sup> so as to reflect upon

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the *sefirot* and yet also as the "beginning of the thought of speech," it should not be counted as two. By way of corroboration, R. Asher b. David (*Kabbalat R. Asher b. David*, 23) comments that "there are those who count *Hokhmah* twice because it surrounds all." R. Asher actually seems to justify this view with a statement from the *Bahir*, 171: כַּשֵּׁם שֵׁיט שְׂכִינָה לְמַעְלָה כִּךְ יֵשׁ שְׂכִינָה לְמַטָּה (Just as the divine Presence is above, so the divine Presence is below), that is, there *Hokhmah* is both above and below the other *sefirot*. It should be noted that in context, the *Bahir* seems, in fact, to count *Hokhmah* as one *sefirah* surrounding all. R. Isaac interprets "ten and not eleven" as a refutation of the view of a double *Hokhmah*, one above and one below the other *sefirot*, a view that "separates" one aspect of *Hokhmah* from *Keter*. Instead, R. Isaac asserts that *Hokhmah* comes directly from *Keter* or *Maḥsavah*.

This, R. Isaac's first interpretation of **ten and not nine... ten and not eleven** is significantly different from those of R. Azriel and Nahmanides. His alternative version is similar to theirs, see below.

<sup>85</sup> This follows MS Harvard Heb. 58/11. Other MSS have: "*Binah* is the thought of...", redefining *Binah* in the terms used previously for *Hokhmah*.

<sup>86</sup> There are two major variants to lines 47-49, with minor differences within each group. The translation follows MSS Harvard Heb. 58/11, Cambridge Add. 671, Cambridge Or. 2116,8, Cincinnati 524/3, Montefiore 313.

The other main variant, beginning at line 47, is as follows: "even though it is with all, do not say 'how can one say it is a *Sefirah*?' And not eleven: and if you say that since *Hokhmah* is the beginning of [the thought of] speech, how can one not say eleven? Do not say so, and do not separate *Hokhmah* from *Keter*, which is the thought of the beginning of speech." That which is "with all" is clearly *Hokhmah*, as in the other variant, based on line 44, above. The argument **ten and not eleven** is not quite clear, however. Scholem suggests that the phrase "the thought of" is a mistaken insertion. *Hokhmah* is "the beginning of speech," and *Keter* is "the thought of the beginning of speech." The implication seems to be that *Hokhmah* and *Keter* should not be separated as distinct *sefirot*, a position that is difficult to maintain, since *Keter* is listed here and elsewhere as a *sefirah*.

and extend<sup>88</sup> to the cause of the thought of the beginning of speech, they are nought but ten.<sup>89</sup> And do not say nine, since there is no end to the cause of the thought of the

<sup>87</sup> These two epithets for God seem, in context, to refer to His role as enumerating *sefirot* and composing the letters of divine speech, respectively. The term סופר, writer or scribe, is related to counting, as one who counts letters, in Hagigah 15b, Kiddushin 30a. This is strictly a human professional title, however. Exodus Rabbah 28:3 alludes indirectly to God as סופר, but in the sense of a teacher of Torah. Abraham Ibn Ezra speaks of God as a מחבר לשון הקודש defined as מחבר (author of the [Hebrew] language) in *Sefer Zohar*, ed. G. H. Lipman (Florida, 1827, reprinted Jerusalem, 1970) 14.

<sup>88</sup> The term להתפשט seems to be used here as a kind of calque intended to convey the double entendre of the term s'étendre, as extension in space and in thought, such as s'étendre sur un sujet. It connotes the expansive reach and mastery of thought over an idea or object of thought. There is here a reflection of R. Isaac's theory of cognition, as the expansion of mind along a continuum of hierarchic relations, to the source of a given object or idea. The term התפשט is later used in this sense by Yehiel Nissim da Pisa, *Minhat Kena'ot*, ed. D. Kaufman (Berlin, 1898) 25: אמר משה דרכי הכחות אני יודע אבל איני יודע האריך המחשבה מתפשטת בהם. Compare line 110 below.

<sup>89</sup> *Keter* is the cause of the thought, *Hokhmah*, of the beginning of speech, *Binah*. Even though *Keter* cannot be apprehended, it can still be inferred as the tenth *sefirah*.

This is similar to the interpretations of Nahmanides and R. Azriel. For Nahmanides, ten and not nine means that even though thought cannot grasp *Keter*, a person can perceive that it is a source, however hidden, and therefore fit to be counted as a *sefirah*. (PSY, in *Kiryat Sefer*, 6, (1930) 406, lines 13-17). Similarly, For R. Azriel, ten and not nine means not to exclude *Keter* from the *sefirot* when counting upwards. He adds that it also means not to exclude *Malkhut* when counting downwards. For both, ten and not eleven means do not include 'Ein Sof in the count of *sefirot* (PSY, *Kitvei Ramban*, vol. 2, 454). Nahmanides' interpretation is similar.

beginning of speech, how can I deem it a *sefirah*?<sup>90</sup> Do not say they are eleven, nor nine. Even though speech is within *Ein Sof*, even so, there is a subtle cause or subtle essence which thought apprehends, through reflection upon a hint of it. Therefore it is a *sefirah* in thought, for it is a subtle essence by which there is ten.<sup>91</sup> The things<sup>92</sup> have dimensions and measure, but thought has no measure, so they<sup>93</sup> proceed ten by ten.<sup>94</sup> Therefore, from the subtle come

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<sup>90</sup> This is a restatement of the previous argument.

<sup>91</sup> R. Isaac here defines a *sefirah* at its abstract limit as that which can be distinguished, even indirectly, as an identifiable cause or essence by the faculty of thought. His position is based on the principle cited by Moses Ibn Ezra in the name of Hermes Trismegistus, in *Arugat hab-Bosem*, 123, 134, that the finite mind cannot grasp the infinite. Even though divine speech is rooted in the infinite, it has an essence or causal principle which can be discerned as distinct or discrete in its manifestation, and therefore grasped in an allusive way.

<sup>92</sup> The "things" are the *sefirot*. The term is probably derived from *Hagigah* 12a, אמר רב בעשרה דברים, נברא העולם, evoking the sense of *rei*, expressing the substantiality of the *sefirot* as real attributes. Scholem translates דברים as *logoi*, *Origins*, 114-18. This reading receives support from Azriel of Gerona, *Perush ha-Aggadot*, 56b, lines 17-18: ומן הרצון והדברים (From the Will and the Words come the sayings, which comprise the Will and the Speech that is completed in speech and action). Compare *Ibid*, 41b, lines 5-6. R. Azriel uses the term דברים clearly in the sense of words, compared to "sayings" and generalized as דבור. Here, too, in R. Isaac's Commentary, דברים are contrasted with thought (line 54) and used in a sense parallel to דבור (lines 48-53). Nonetheless, the vagueness and ambiguity of the term may be intentional, to convey both meanings.

<sup>93</sup> The antecedent of the feminine plural here is the *sefirot*.

the inscribed, for ten come from ten, subtle ones from the innerness of the subtle ones.<sup>95</sup> We recognize, by the power of the intimation of thought, that which we apprehend and

<sup>84</sup> This is an interpretation of the end of the current mishnah, *SY* 1:4 (4): להן סוף (Their measure is ten, for they have no limit). See next note.

95 Prior to R. Isaac, the usual interpretation of the endless quality of the ten *sefirot*, understood as principles of number, is the progression of the base ten number system in sets of ten *ad infinitum*. See Saadiah b. Joseph, *Sefer Yezirah*, 54; Dunash Ibn Tamim, *Perus Sefer Yezirah*, (London, 1902), 26-27; Abraham Ibn Ezra, *Sefer ham-Nispar*, ed. M. Silberberg (Jerusalem, 1970) 3; Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 161. There is one distinctive interpretation, however, brought by Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 148, which takes a different approach, positing a set of ten existential categories which are, in themselves, infinite: **יש מי שמפרש ואומר כי: דברים אחדים במנין כנגד אלו י' ספירות ואותן י' דברים אחדים מדתן עשרה שאין להם סוף ופירוש מדתן מלשון מדידה כלומר מדתן של אלו עשר דברים אין להם סוף ואלו הן עומק ראשית ועומק אחרית וכו' (There is someone who interprets saying that the Holy One, blessed be He, created ten unique things, numbered in correspondence to the ten *sefirot*, and the measure of these ten unique things has no limit. The meaning of "their measure" is from the term "measurement," which is to say that the measure of these ten things has no end, and these are "the depth of beginning and the depth of end.")** This interpretation has a proto-kabbalistic conception of *sefirah*-like entities which are created yet infinite; not *sefirot per se*, in the standard pre-kabbalistic sense, rather, entities of a transcendent nature.

R. Isaac puts the standard conception of the infinitude of the *sefirot*, in progressive sets of ten, in a hierarchic, Neoplatonic setting. Refined states of being emanate forth less refined states of being, or in the upward direction, refined, ontologically superior states of being can be inferred from less refined states, in progressive series. The interpretation of the *sefirot* brought by R. Judah b. Barzilai, with its conception of a set of ten unique, infinite principles parallel to the *sefirot*, may have contributed to shaping his conception. See, too, M. Idel, *Has-Sefirot Se-me'al has-Sefirot*, 241-46 regarding three sets of ten *sefirot* contained in the upper three *sefirot*.

that which we should leave, because there is no apprehension by thought through intimation from there on.<sup>96</sup> For in a creature's apprehension through the innerness of the intimation of thought there is no power to apprehend *ʿEin Sof*, for all comprehension is within *Hokhmah* from *Haskel*, which<sup>97</sup> is the subtle intimation of His thought in *ʿEin Sof*. Therefore it says ten and not nine, for thought cannot apprehend so as to give measure above *Hokhmah*, nor even within *Hokhmah*, except through comprehension, as it says, comprehend in wisdom.<sup>98</sup> Comprehend could only be an

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themselves.

<sup>96</sup> The term רמז, "intimation," is used here in a technical sense, following the discussion which opens Halevi's discourse on divine Names in *Kuzari*, 4:3. Commenting on the divine Name "Adonai," HaLevi states: הוא רמז אל הדבר, ואם באמת הוא נעלה מן הרמז, כי הרמז הוא לצד מבלתי צד, כי יש שירמזו אל הדברים הנפעלים מאתו המשמשים לו שמוש ראשון, כאשר ירמזו אל השכל ויאמרו שהוא בלב או במוח, ויאמרו השכל הזה או השכל הלזה, ואין רמז באמת אל מה שאינו נגבול במקום. (It is like an intimation of a thing which, in truth, is elevated beyond intimation. For intimation applies to that aspect which transcends specification, for there are [terms] which intimate matters which are influenced by Him, that serve Him directly, just as one intimates the intellect, saying it is in the heart or brain, or one intimates this or that intellect, even though in truth there is no intimation of that which is not bounded by place). The expression לצד מבלתי צד, in the sense of that which is excluded from, or transcends, a general category, is noted as a Judeo-Arabic idiom by M. H. Gottstein, *Tahbirah*, 78, sec. 179.3.4. Halevi here uses רמז, "intimation" in a manner similar to Moses Ibn Ezra's use of העברה, "metaphor": an indication in finite terms of that which is infinite or transcendent (*ʿArugat hab-Bosem*, 134-37. See *supra*, ch. 7.2). R. Isaac follows HaLevi's usage.

<sup>97</sup> *Hokhmah*.

infinitive, but if it is an imperative, it is only for the adepts.<sup>99</sup> It does not say "comprehend wisdom" or "know wisdom," but **comprehend in wisdom**, for wisdom comes through comprehension,<sup>100</sup> for comprehension is comprehending within wisdom and not comprehending of wisdom, rather to comprehend the comprehension there is in wisdom.<sup>101</sup> And how is this

<sup>98</sup> The phrase "ten and not nine" is explained here as addressing the possibility that the *sefirot Keter* and *even Hokhmah* would not be discernable, that is, counted to yield a sum of ten, were an intimation of them not facilitated through *Binah*.

The various permutations of the term *בינה*, when used in the sense of mental activity rather than for the *sefirah* itself, are here translated as a form of the term "comprehension," rather than the usual term "understanding," to convey the function of the *sefirah Binah* as that which gathers and assesses multiple principles, as in line 74, below.

<sup>99</sup> As an infinitive, "to comprehend in wisdom" describes a paradigmatic cosmic process. As an imperative, an intellectual act at such an exalted level of mind could only be expected of an adept. The term *מסבילים* as denoting an intellectual and spiritual elite, especially one privy to an esoteric understanding of Torah, was used by R. Abraham Ibn Ezra, e. g. in his Torah commentary to Gen. 4:24. From R. Isaac the Blind on, it became the stock designation for kabbalistic adepts.

<sup>100</sup> Wisdom is filtered to the lower world, and the lower faculties, through comprehension. See next note.

<sup>101</sup> R. Isaac's attention to the prepositional prefix *bet*, "in," echoes his comments above, lines 1, 6-7, as well as Bar Ḥiyya's discussion of nine modes of logical inclusion signified by the prefix *bet*, in *Megillat ham-Megalleh*, 6-8, especially his observation concerning the inclusion of species in the more particular individual, 8, lines 7-13: והפרט או הדבר המיוחד אין צריך בצאתו לידי מעשה אל מינו ולא אל כללו ואין המין כולל את האחדים מדרך צאתם לידי מעשה ולא הם יוצאים לידי מעשה מדרך שהמין כולל אותם אבל הבינה והמדע מקיים את צורת המין ומלקט את סימני האחדים ועניניהם הנדמים זה לזה וכולל אותם בלב ומקיים את המין בדעת ואין

comprehending? Comprehend in wisdom and be wise in comprehension, for they are hidden essences that have no inscription in them;<sup>102</sup> there is no power to comprehend them, but rather [to comprehend] that thing which emanates from them. What is the comprehending for that thing, or for an adept who comprehends it?<sup>103</sup> From the inscribed essences there is a comprehending of those that are not inscribed, and from the inner apprehension of their thought there is a

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האחדים צריכים אל המין בקיומן וביציאתם בעולם אבל המין (the particular or the individual does not need the species or the genus in its coming forth into actuality, and the species does not comprise the individuals in their coming forth into actuality, nor do they come forth into actuality by way of their inclusion in the species, rather, comprehension and knowledge establishes the form of the species and gathers the signs of the individuals and those of their aspects that resemble each other and comprises them in the heart and establishes the species in the mind. The individuals do not need the species for their existence or their going forth into the world but the species needs the individuals in order to be established in the heart). Bar Ḥiyya speaks here of the function of comprehension and knowledge in bringing the general into specific existence, a function similar to the relationship of *Binah* to the more generalized faculty of *Hokhmah*. R. Isaac may be reflecting this concept of the more general principle being brought into being through the more specific when he says: ענין ההבנה הוא להבין דבר מתוך דבר וכך אמר: (for wisdom comes through comprehension), line 62. Compare Nahmanides, *PSY*, 407, lines 2-4: בהכמה אין לך בה אלא הבנה שהבנת אותה מתוך דבר אחר והיא הבנה שראית וחכמת בה (Comprehension is to comprehend one thing from another. Thus it says "in wisdom," for you have no access in it except by the comprehension by which you comprehend it from something else. This is *Binah*, in which you gazed and became wise).

<sup>102</sup> Both combinations of wisdom and comprehension, corresponding in R. Isaac's system to the *sefirot* *Hokhmah* and *Binah*, respectively, refer to processes in *Hokhmah*, beyond inscription.



comprehending of their cause in *Ein Sof*.

Probe in them, probe the *Binah* in them, for the term probe only applies *in* something. A person does not say "I probed from it" but "in it", in the cause. Probing is by use of something else<sup>104</sup> that can probe the *Binah* in *Hokhmah*.<sup>105</sup> And inquire of them,<sup>106</sup> of merit and guilt<sup>107</sup> as it is written concerning them "there is no inquiring (Is. 40:28)." Therefore it did not say "inquire in them."<sup>108</sup> The explanation of "inquire of them" is build the frame<sup>109</sup> that is apprehended through perception, and evaluate<sup>110</sup> it

<sup>103</sup> The contemplative process of the adept parallels that of divine mind itself.

<sup>104</sup> The "something else" is most likely "that thing which emanates from them" from line 65, above.

<sup>105</sup> The penetrating quality of the term "probe" is related to that which is "in" *par excellence*: *Binah* which is *in Hokhmah*.

<sup>106</sup> See I. Gruenwald, *SY*, 1:4 (4), 141, for the versions that read *מִהֵן* as opposed to *בְּהֵן*, including Leiden Warn. 24 (5) Cod. Or. 4762.

<sup>107</sup> Or "innocence and guilt." The allusion seems to be to the *sefirot Hesed* and *Gevurah*, merit and guilt, respectively. Compare *Bahir*, 187. R. Isaac interprets the term "inquire" according to its halakhic connotation, as the process of inquiring into testimony concerning the innocence or guilt of a defendant, e. g. Mishnah Sanhedrin 4:1, 5:1.

<sup>108</sup> The full relevant phrase of the verse is *אֵין חֶקֶר לַחֲבוּנֹתָיו*. In R. Isaac's reading this means that the process of "inquiry" does not assess *Binah* directly, but only that structure which derives from it, the *sefirot* emanating from it, "of it."

<sup>109</sup> See *supra*, ch. 8.2. The reference is to the lower *sefirot*.

according to the dimensions of the causes, which emanate from them and are constructed of them.<sup>111</sup> Each matter on its firm footing, its seat. The [Aramaic] translation of "its support" is "firm footing,"<sup>112</sup> from the expression "Your staff and Your support (Ps. 23:4)." This is the line aligned

<sup>110</sup> The terms **הרגש** and **שיעור** are paired frequently by Judah Alharizi, in his translation of Maimonides' *Noreh Nevukhim*, 2:39 (compare S. Ibn Tibbon's version, 2:38). On their own, Alharizi translates **הרגש** as "that which a person senses with the feeling of one of his limbs; **שיעור** as "correct thought" (translator's introduction). He uses them together in 2:39, however, when speaking of the prophet's clairvoyant ability, the power of mind to intuit the future: **ובחזק כח השיעור** (the strength of the power of intuitive perception through which he tells, in an instant, what will be in the future).

Judah Ibn Tibbon uses **הרגש** in the sense of feeling or sensation, e. g., in his translation of Judah Halevi's, *Kuzari*, 3:16. He translates the passage in 2:38 cited above (2:39 in Alharizi's version) with the term **כח המשער**, defined in his *Perus me-han-Nilot Zarot*, entry **כח המשער**, as "the term for that power by which a person considers, without any knowledge, that things will be so."

In the present case, R. Issac uses these terms to convey the method of inductive thinking, beginning with the abstraction of perceptible phenomena and the evaluation of the results into categories according to the more general principles that stand behind them, a two-step intuitive process.

<sup>111</sup> That is, the dimensions that emanate from the causes, or *sefirot*, and are built of them. In so defining the term *hakor*, from *SY*, as the two-step process of comparing categories abstracted inductively from sense with ideal categories corresponding to the lower seven *sefirot* or "frame," R. Isaac may have had in mind the halakhic judicial procedure of *hakirah*, the examining of the empirical testimony of witnesses according to seven pre-established categories of inquiry, Mishnah *Sanhedrin* 5:1 and Talmud *Sanhedrin* 40a-42a. As a cognitive process, this is an elaboration of R. Isaac's theory that the sensible world can be abstracted into forms corresponding to the metaphysical

in the middle,<sup>113</sup> which is *Yesod 'Olam*.<sup>114</sup> And restore *Tiferet*, the Creator upon his dwelling-place. His dwelling-place is His *Nezah* and His *Hod*, which are below,<sup>115</sup> to unite with *Binah*<sup>116</sup> which gazes upon them.<sup>117</sup>

Their measure is ten.<sup>118</sup> Every thing is a dimension<sup>119</sup> and what is above it is its filling,<sup>120</sup> for dimension is a

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structure from which it emanates.

<sup>112</sup> Targum Onkelos to Ex. 21:19.

<sup>113</sup> I.e., "support" is established as synonymous with "staff" of Ps. 23:4, which evokes the "line aligned in the middle."

<sup>114</sup> "Foundation of the world," Prv. 10:25. The reference is to the alignment of *Tiferet* and *Yesod*. See SY 1:3 (sec. 3), which describes a central line between the circumcised tongue and the circumcised male member, associated with these two *sefirot* respectively.

<sup>115</sup> *Tiferet* is "the Creator" upon His throne of *Nezah* and *Hod*. See Scholem, *Origins*, 209-14 regarding the Provençal kabbalists' identification of *Yozer Beresit*, the divine epithet drawn from the mystical schools of the Merkavah and *Si'ur Komah*, with *Tiferet*, and the use of the term *Yozer Beresit* in the kabbalistic fragment cited in the name of R. Abraham b. David, Scholem, *Resit hak-Kabbalah*, 73, n. 2.

<sup>116</sup> The process of unification with *Binah* is an interpretive reference to the phrase *וְהָשִׁיב*, restore or return, from SY 1:4 (sec. 4), cited line 73. Among the cognomina for *Binah* is the term *Tesuvah*. See *supra*, ch. 8.4.1.

<sup>117</sup> Is. 18:4 speaks of God as gazing on His dwelling-place. *נִחַם* is used frequently in Scripture for a spiritual gazing, e. g. Ps. 33:13, 102:20, et al.

<sup>118</sup> SY 1:5 (sec. 7), 143.

<sup>119</sup> This translation was chosen rather than the standard, abstract philosophical term "attribute," based on R. Isaac's emphasis here on the metrical aspect of the term.

power<sup>121</sup> which is emanated from the dimension of the measurer,<sup>122</sup> the essentiality of dimension and the emanation

<sup>120</sup> R. Isaac here gives a literal rendering of the biblical phrase "the earth and its fullness," Ps. 24:1, 50:12, 89:12, placing it in a multiple, relativistic, hierarchical Neoplatonic scheme in which "fullness" is any given ontologically distinct level of being causally prior to a lower level which contains it. See S. Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena*, 19, who notes that of the metaphors used by early Neoplatonists, "...the verb 'to fill' and its compounds, [are] the most common terms applied to the causal relationship. Each effect is literally filled by its cause..." See his note 26 for numerous examples from Proclus and Damascius. There may also be a hint here of talmudic usage of the term *מדה* as measuring vessel, as in Mishnah *Beṣah*, 3:8. See Scholem, *Origins*, 285. See *supra*, ch. 8.1.

<sup>121</sup> Power, *כח*, is used here in the sense of property and agency, rather than to convey the formal Aristotelian concept of latent potentiality. For similar philosophic usage, compare, e. g., Abraham Ibn Ezra, Torah Commentary, Gen. 2:3, 31:19, Dt. 5:26.

Judah Alḥarizi, in his translation of Maimonides' *Moreh Nevukhim*, 1:53, relates the terms *koah* and *middah*, as in the following passages : *והנה התבאר כי הדרכים אשר בקש לדעת והודיעם אותם הם פעלים באים מכה הבורא יתברך והחכמים יקראו אותם מדות... וזה השם ירגילו* (It has been explained that the paths [Moses] sought to know, and of which he was informed, are the effects that come from the power of the Creator, blessed be He, which the sages call attributes... This term has customarily been applied to the powers and faculties of man). Similarly, *loc. cit.*: *והנה התבאר לך כי הדברים [! צ"ל הדרכים] והמדות ענין אחד והם הפעולות הבאים מהבורא יתעלה בזה העולם וכל אשר ישיגו פעל מפעולותיו יתארו הבורא במדה שיבא* (It has been explained that the [paths] and attributes are one and the same. They are the actions that comes from the Creator, exalted be He, in this world. They describe the Creator by whatever they grasp of the actions of His agency, by an attribute from whose power that action comes, according to the term defined by that action). R. Isaac apparently agrees with this characterization of *middah* as the agency resulting from a property, a *koah*.

of essence in *Ein Sof*.<sup>123</sup> Depth is the *Haskef*<sup>124</sup> unto *Ein Sof*. Beginning is the emanation of the power of the depth, which is *Hokhmah*, and the depth is from *Ein Sof*, and all is one. And since thought does not apprehend it, it says ten and not eleven.<sup>125</sup> The depth is the end of the apprehension of thought unto *Ein Sof*. End is *Binah*, which is a principle<sup>126</sup> called *heh*, like the end of the [divine]

<sup>122</sup> Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 148: מדתן עשרה שאין להם סוף ומירוש מדתן מלשון מדידה (Their measure is ten without end. The meaning of "their measure," is from the term "measurement.")

<sup>123</sup> The term "*middah*," one of the terms used in Hebrew philosophical writing to denote divine attributes, applies to the aggregate lower six *sefirot*. See R. Asher b. David, *Sefer ha-Yihud*, in *Kabbalat R. Asher*, 59: ו' ספירות מעשר ספירות ונקרא מדותיו של ה"ה" (Six of the ten *sefirot* are called the dimensions of the Holy One, blessed be He, by which all actions are effected that were prepared in potentiality from the six days of creation). The "measurer" refers to *Binah*, which presides over the lower, measured *sefirot*. The "essentiality of dimension" refers to *Hokhmah*, the interior essence of *Binah*. R. Azriel of Gerona associates the term הויות, essentiality, principally with the *sefirah Hokhmah*, in which the essences begin. See *Perush ha-'Aggadot*, 170, lines 1-2. The "emanation of essence" refers to the action of *Mahsavah*, the highest *sefirah*. To sum up, three hierarchic levels of being are described here, working upwards from dimensionality to essentiality to the initial stage of emanation, corresponding to three sefirotic levels, all part of one, unfolding emanative process.

<sup>124</sup> See *supra*, ch. 8.3, regarding this term. R. Isaac associates *Haskel* with the qualifying term "depth" in the list of *sefirot* in *SY* 1:5 (sec. 7). It is not a *sefirah*, but the extension of the *sefirot* towards *Ein Sof*.

<sup>125</sup> *Haskel* is not counted as a *sefirah*.

<sup>126</sup> See J. Klatzkin, *Thesaurus Philosophicus*, vol.

Name.<sup>127</sup> All the essences and pathways have no impression apprehendable in *Hokhmah*, for that which we mention are the headings of the dimensions,<sup>128</sup> the principle of the beginning of the causes of the separate entities. For those dimensions which have been mentioned are all in *'Ein Sof*. In our language there are only the headings of the dimensions.<sup>129</sup> Their simplicity<sup>130</sup> is without separation,

1, 233, vol. 4, 190-91, for use of the term *מחלה* as *המחלה*, one of the Tibbonite terms of choice for rendering "principle."

<sup>127</sup> R. Isaac justifies the association of *Binah* with "end," through its correspondence with the letter *heh* at the "end" of the Tetragrammaton. While *Binah* actually corresponds to the *heh* that is the second letter of the Tetragrammaton, it is "like" the *heh* which is at the "end." R. Isaac may also be referring to the two-letter divine Name that ends in *heh*.

<sup>128</sup> The phrase *ראשי מדות* appears in *Heikhalot Rabbati*, ch. 3.3, in *Batei Midrashot*, ed. A. J. Wertheimer, 71, but its significance is not clear, and its context sheds little light on its meaning, or its utility for R. Isaac: *ראשי מדות שבראת חבונשים*. In *Hagigah* 13a the term *ראשי מדות* signifies an abbreviated outline or synopsis, the "chapter headings" of esoteric knowledge which the uninitiated are permitted to learn. R. Isaac adapts this connotation of preliminary, incomplete and superficial knowledge, combined with the standard talmudic expression for tip or initial extremity, such as *ראש המזילה*, "the tip of the wick (Mishnah Shabbath 2:4)," to arrive at a Neoplatonic conception: the appearance in this world of the tips, headings or initial aspects of the dimensions, which emanate from sources more deeply and unitively rooted in the sefirotic realm.

<sup>129</sup> Regarding earlier discussions of the limitations on predication of divine attributes as a function of the limitations inherent in human language, see Saadia b. Joseph, *Ha-'Emunot we-had-De'ot*, ed. Landauer, 84.14-86.2), Bahya Ibn Pakudah, *Hovot ha-Levavot* 1:10 (142-45), Maimonides, *Moreh Nevukhim*,

for they are the principles of the causes of the separate

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1:53. While the description of this limited power of predication as "headings," in the sense of rough "chapter headings," seems to be R. Isaac's own, it is based on a conception of a continuum in which divine attributes as they are expressed in human language really do connect with more properly and authentically abstract divine principles that have a more real and truthful existence. This conception, which grants a relative, graded value and relationship between the figurative expression of divine attributes and the reality upon which they are based, appears to derive specifically from the gradation implicit in a passage from *Hovot ha-Levavot*, 1:10 (145):

ואלו היו מספרים אותו בענין שראוי לו מן המלות הרוחניות והענינים הרוחניים, לא היינו מבינים לא המלות ולא הענין, ולא היה אפשר שנעבד דבר שלא נדע, כי לא יתכן עבודת דבר שאינו נודע. על כן היה צריך שתהיינה המלות והענינים כפי כח בינת השומע, כדי שיפול הענין על לבו על דרך הגשמות המובן מן המלות הגשמיות בתחלה, ואחר כך נתחכם לו ונדקדק להבינו ולהודיעו, שכל זה על דרך הקרבה ומליצת הספר, שהענין האמיתי הוא יותר דק ומעלה ומרומם, ורחוק מאשר נוכל להבין אותו על תכונת דקות ענינו. והמשכיל הנלבב ישתדל להתעטף קליפות המלות וגשמותם מעל הענין ויעלה במחשבתו ממדרגה אל מדרגה, עד שיגיע מאמתת הענין הנדרש אל מה שיש בכח יכלתו (If one would speak of Him in a manner befitting Him, in spiritual words and ideas, we would understand neither the words nor the ideas, and it would not be possible for us to worship that which we do not know, for that which is not known cannot be worshipped. Therefore it was necessary that the words and ideas be according to the power of understanding of the listener, in order that the matter be taken to heart in a corporeal way, as understood from the corporeal words at first. Afterwards, as we gain wisdom concerning Him, and are careful to understand Him and know Him, we realize that all this is in the manner of approximation and figurative language, and that the true matter is more refined and exalted and transcendent and far beyond what we can understand by virtue of the refined nature of the matter. The insightful, aroused person will attempt to abstract the shells and corporeality of the words from the matter and ascend in his thought from level to level, until he arrives at the truth of the matter at hand and what is within the power of his grasp). If this passage indeed underlies R. Isaac's thinking on the nature of attributes or dimensions, then in speaking of the "headings of the dimensions" he has accentuated R. Bahya's vision of the graded continuum of the reality of attributes and structured

entities.<sup>131</sup> Zenith is that which supports all,<sup>132</sup> therefore it is placed in the middle;<sup>133</sup> and also since he was obliged to discuss from the mediator<sup>134</sup> which is elevated, from

it in emanationist terms, in which the attributes or dimensions which appear in the phenomenal world are coarse indications of real attributes as they exist, unified, in the sefirotic realm, or ultimately, in the Infinite.

<sup>130</sup> Maimonides, *Moreh Nevukhim*, 1:58, describes God as הַפְּשׁוּט בְּתַכְלִית הַפְּשׁוּטוּת (He is simple in the ultimate degree of simplicity). See S. Ibn Tibbon, *Peruṣ Me-ham-milot Zarot*, entry פְּשׁוּט. See, too, *Hovot ha-Levavot*, 1:10 (157): מִי שֶׁקֶצֶר שִׁכְלוֹ לִהְיוֹן עֲנִין (He whose intellect is too narrow to understand simplicity, should utilize the names).

<sup>131</sup> The idea that all attributes are one in God's essence appears in Saadiah Gaon, *Ha-ʿEmunot ve-had-Deʿot*, ed. Landauer 84.14-86.2; Bahya Ibn Pakudah, *Hovot ha-Levavot*, 1:10 (142). On the development of R. Isaac's unique usage of הַנִּפְרָדִים as the "separate entities" and its relation to the Aristotelian term "separate intellects," see *supra*, ch. 5.2.

<sup>132</sup> The identification of רום, Zenith, as "that which supports all," summarizes R. Judah b. Barzilai's association of רום, as representing the heavens, with the spirit which, despite being lighter and higher, supports the world, according to Onkelos' answer to Hadrian's question הַעוֹלָם עַל מָה הוּא עוֹמֵד. (*PSY*, 159, with reference to Y. Hagigah, 2:1, fol. 7a). R. Isaac does not merely identify Zenith as the heavens, however. According to R. Asher b. David, *Peruṣ Sem ham-Neforaš*, in *Kabbalat R. Asher b. David*, 18, lines 25-26, and R. Isaac of Acre, *PSY*, 388-89, Zenith is the *sefirah Keter*, and this tallies well with R. Isaac's allusive reference to "that which supports all," and "is elevated with all in the Zenith unto *ʿEin Sof* (lines 83-84)."

<sup>133</sup> Zenith, or *Keter*, does not appear at the beginning of *Sefer Yeẓirah's* list of *sefirot*, 1:5 (sec. 7), as might have been expected given its status as the first emanation. Rather, it appears in the midst of the list, in fifth place. R. Isaac justifies this with the argument that its central position conveys the notion



above to below and from below to above, for it is sealed and elevated with all<sup>135</sup> in the **Zenith** unto *ʿEln Sof*.

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that it supports all emanations below it.

<sup>134</sup> The mediator is the *sefirah Hokhmah*, according to line 39 above. The point is that *Sefer Yeḡirah's* list of *sefirot*, which might have been expected to begin with *Keter*, the first emanation, begins with the principle which, in R. Isaac's system, signifies *Hokhmah*, the *sefirah* which mediates all other.

<sup>135</sup> The list of dimensions in *Sefer Yeḡirah* 1:5 (sec. 7) is clear and orderly enough when read simply as cardinal directions and dimensions, but oddly jumbled when read according to their associations with kabbalistic *sefirot* (see line 84). R. Isaac tries to explain why the list of *sefirot* begins with *Hokhmah*, not *Keter*, and why the list alternates back and forth between higher and lower *sefirot* when read kabbalistically. He suggests this conveys the special role of *Hokhmah*, which is "with all," and "surrounds all (line 42)," which mediates and controls the ascent and descent of divine efflux, "from above to below and from below to above," and which is sealed, that is, limited from below by each *sefirah*, and elevated to *Keter* and *ʿEln Sof*.

Nadir is *Ẓaddik*, east is *Tiferet*, west is *Nezah*, north is the fierceness of *Gevurah*,<sup>136</sup> south is *Hod*.<sup>137</sup> Regarding this comes the verse that says "To You, Lord, is the greatness and the power and the splendor and the eternal victory and the majesty, for all in heaven and earth is Yours, Lord, the kingdom and the exaltation as head above all (1 Chr. 29:11)." It does not follow the order of the directions,<sup>138</sup> rather the order of the powers, as they are

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<sup>136</sup> One group of MSS has a variant reading: צפון גבורה ויש אומרים צון בגבורה דרום הוד (North is *Gevurah*, and there are those who speak of fierceness for *Gevurah*, south is *Hod*. See Leiden 24/25 (Cod. Or. 4762), Jewish Theological Seminary 2325/10, Cambridge Or. 2116,8. MS Harvard has : ויש אומרים צפון בגבורה : דרום הוד (There are those who say north is for *Gevurah*, south is *Hod*).

Compare line 340, below, where north is the *sefirah Malkhut*. See I. Tishby's note, Azriel of Gerona, *Peruṣ ha-ʿAggadot*, 142, n. 3, that *ʿoz* stands for either *Gevurah* or *Malkhut*. Compare *ibid.*, 133 and n. 4.

<sup>137</sup> Rationales for the associations between certain directions and *sefirot* are offered in lines 93-98, below. These associations underwent numerous revisions throughout the history of Kabbalah, (see Moses Cordovero, *Pardes Rimmonim*, part 23, under the appropriate entries for the cardinal directions). R. Isaac's Commentary itself contains a number of apparent inconsistencies. West is associated with *Nezah*, lines 84, 340, yet is described in terms applicable to *Malkhut*, lines 87, 95, 338. North is associated with *Gevurah*, line 84, but with *Namlakhah*, line 340. In one group of MSS there is an indication that R. Isaac himself recognized the existence of other kabbalistic opinions supporting different positions. See previous note.

<sup>138</sup> This refers to the directions as listed in order in *SY*, 1:5 (sec. 7).

aligned<sup>139</sup> to pray towards the west.<sup>140</sup> The order of tefillin is from east to west. For the four-headed *sin* is *Hokhmah* and *Binah*, *Hesed* and *Pahad*, this is by day; and the three-headed *sin*<sup>141</sup> is to the right of the person who lays tefillin, which is east when he stands in the south, and the

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<sup>139</sup> This version also appears in MSS Cincinnati 523/3, Cambridge Add. 671, Jewish Theological Seminary 1990, Halberstam 444. Other MSS, Harvard Heb. 58/11, Leiden 24/25 (Cod. Or. 4762), Jewish Theological Seminary 2325/10, Montefiore 313, Cincinnati 524/3, Cambridge Or. 2116,8 read: בְּהַחֲבוּנָם (as they are contemplated...)

<sup>140</sup> Compare lines 340-41, below, where this verse is cited as listing the *sefirot* in the order of the cardinal directions as presented in *SY* 4:2 (sec. 38), recension  $\alpha$  (158). Here, however, the order of directions in *SY* 1:5 (sec. 7), has north before south, and the order of directions is not parallel to the names of *sefirot* taken from the verse.

Regarding prayer towards the west, see Sanh. 91b, concerning the transit of the sun: א"ל עָנִי מִה שְׁקֵעָה: כְּדִי לִיהָן שְׁלוֹם לְקוֹנָהּ בְּמַעֲרֵב. See, too, Solomon Ibn Gabirol, *Keter Malkhut*, ch. 16, line 147; ch. 23, lines 3-4.

Padaya suggests that "west," here, may refer not to the *sefirah Neẓah*, as in line 84 above, but to the talmudic dictum "the divine Presence is in the west (Baba Batra, 25a)," indicating *Malkhut*. See H. Padaya, *Pegam we-Tikkun*, 171 n. 50. If so, the gist of the sentence is that the designations of 1 Chr. 29:11 are not in order of the cardinal directions, but in descending order of emanating powers from upper to lower, all bestowing efflux, or praying, in the direction of the lowest *sefirah*, *Malkhut*. See below, line 95. See, too, *Sefer hab-Bahir*, 156, and Isaac of Acre, *PSY*, 389, both supporting this interpretation.

If west, here, were to indicate the *sefirah Neẓah*, as in line 84 above, then the westerly direction of the verse may refer to the east-to-west order represented by *Tiferet* followed by *Neẓah*, and the list of *sefirah* names in the verse would follow a top-to-bottom, east-to-west order.

<sup>141</sup> Which represents *Tiferet*, *Neẓah*, *Hod*.

four-headed *sin* is in the west. By night, these four are to the south, namely *Nezah*, *Hod*, *Tiferet*, *Hesed*, and the three-headed *sin* to the north: *Zaddik*, *Atarah*, *Paḥad*.<sup>142</sup> One who prays to the west has his left to the south and his right to the north, where the three-headed *sin* is. This is [what is alluded to in] "Your right hand" [repeated] twice (Ex. 15:6): the first is said regarding *Tesuvah* over *Tiferet*,<sup>143</sup> which is toward the right, like "the Menorah in the south,"<sup>144</sup> and the second is said regarding *Tiferet* over *Atarah*,<sup>145</sup> which is His right when one turns to the

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<sup>142</sup> At night there seems to be a general shift downward in terms of which *sefirot* are represented by the letters *sin*: all the left-handed *sefirot* of rigor are group together with the three-headed *sin* to the north; the seven "heads" of the two letters refer only to the lower seven *sefirot*.

The wearing of tefillin at night is cited in *Menahot* 36b as permissible according to the opinion of R. Ashi, but is classified as a precept which should not be divulged. This position was endorsed by R. Abraham b. Isaac of Narbonne, *Sefer ha-ʿEskol*, ed. S. Albeck, (Jerusalem, 1984) 229-30. See, too, *Tur*, O. H. 30, and commentaries.

The notion that the alignment of *sefirot* differs between day and night first appears with regard to prayer, in the position recorded in the name of R. Jacob ha-Nazir in the fragments of the debates between R. Abraham b. David and R. Jacob ha-Nazir, in G. Scholem, *Resit hak-Kabbalah*, 73 n. 2.

<sup>143</sup> This is tefillin by day, with the four-headed *sin* representing the grouping of *sefirot* centered around *Binah* or *Tesuvah*, and the three-headed *sin* centered on *Tiferet*.

<sup>144</sup> *Yuma* 21b. That is, by day, when the wearer of tefillin stands in the south, the three-headed *sin* with the *sefirah Tiferet* is to the right, in the east, as in lines 89-90 above.

<sup>145</sup> This is tefillin by night, with the four-

west.<sup>146</sup> The term *nizrah* (east) refers to that which receives light in order to shine, for it does not say *mazriah* but *nizrah*, a cause<sup>147</sup> of light which receives the

headed *sin* representing *sefirot* centered around *Tiferet*, and the three-headed *sin* representing *sefirot* grounded in *'Atarah*.

<sup>146</sup> This exegesis grapples with certain kabbalistic anomalies in the verse Ex. 15:6, the full text of which is: "Your right hand, Lord, is glorified in power, Your right hand, Lord, shall crush the enemy." The problems with the verse are: first, that the right hand is portrayed with two different sets of attributes; and second, that the right hand, which for the midrashic and especially the kabbalistically-minded typically represents the agency of divine love, is here an agency of divine destruction, a left-handed function. R. Isaac solves both problems by interpreting the handedness of the verse as a reference to the differing positions of the three- and four-headed *sin* on the tefillin under two different circumstances: by day and by night. The glorification of the right hand refers to tefillin by day, where the right side, representing *Tiferet*, *Nezah*, *Hod*, is crowned or glorified by the superior four-headed *sin* representing the *sefirot* above it, collectively termed כח, power. See Azriel of Gerona, *Perush ha-'Aggadol*, 9b. 10a, 42b, 55a, 60b, who generally associates this term with the upper *sefirot* *Hokhmah* or *Binah*. The destructive agency of the right hand is explained by the tefillin by night, in which the three-headed *sin* is to the right, yet represents the *sefirot* of divine destruction and judgment, *Yesod*, *'Atarah*, *Paḥad*.

Regarding those *sefirot* associated with the right hand and those with the left, see Asher b. David, "Perush Shem ha-Meforash," *Kabbalat R. Asher b. David*, 13.

<sup>147</sup> "Cause," as that which serves as receptive capacity as well as agent, is used here in the standard Neoplatonic sense of "intermediate cause." See Judah Halevi, *Kuzari*, 1:1, and especially 5:20: והקדמה השנית להודאה בסבות אמצעיות, אך אינם פועלות, אבל הם סבות על דרך החומר או על דרך הכלים (The second premise is the acknowledgment of intermediate causes, which are not active, but causes in the sense of the material cause or instruments). See, too, Maimonides, *Moreh Nevukhim*, 2:48.

shining of light,<sup>148</sup> Since its face is always towards the west, and it goes that way, west is called "that to which the sun comes (Dt. 11:30 et al)."<sup>149</sup> *Ne'arav* (West) is that which is received<sup>150</sup> in surety from those mixed things which have no impression.<sup>151</sup> *Daron* (South) [from] *di-ron* (which elevates) *Tiferet*,<sup>152</sup> which is received in prayer and activates that which was given to it in custody.<sup>153</sup> *Zafon*

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<sup>148</sup> R. Isaac's etymology recognizes a passive, receptive quality to the *ni-* prefix, patterned after *zarak-mizrak*: a *mizrak*, bowl, is that which receives what is thrown or to be thrown. He does not cite any source, but Jonah Ibn Jannah, *Sefer ha-Rikmah*, trans. J. Ibn Tibbon, ed. M. Wilensky (Jerusalem, 1964) 72 (lines 8-13), suggests that the *ne-* prefix to nouns and adjectives often serves as the nominal equivalent of a verbal *nif'al*.

The conceptual point is that *mizrah* is an appropriate term for *Tiferet* as expressing its middle position in the hierarchy of *sefirot*, receiving from above and bestowing below. Compare *Bahir*, sec. 155.

<sup>149</sup> R. Isaac adduces further proof for the receptive connotation of the prefix *ni-* or *ne-* from the biblical expression *מבא השמש* for west, the direction which *receives* the sun.

<sup>150</sup> *Nezah* is received, in the sense of *collatio*, by the contemplative mind. Compare the similar and obvious passive sense of *מתקבל* in the following sentence.

<sup>151</sup> *Nezah* transmits efflux from the upper *sefirot*, "mixed" in unity.

<sup>152</sup> *Hod*, which is below, elevates *Tiferet* above it.

<sup>153</sup> This refers to the activity of the *sefirah* *Hod*. The functions of the *sefirot* *Nezah* and *Hod* are the subject of ongoing debate and confusion among kabbalists of the thirteenth century. See Asher b. David, "Peruś šem ham-Meforaš," *Kabbalat R. Asher b. David*, 13, lines 9-17. In this lines 95-96, R. Isaac apparently regards both *Nezah* and *Hod* as more

(North) is that which is hidden from one who turns toward it; it is the dimension that has within it the hidden satisfaction of the will of those things which turn toward it.<sup>154</sup> The (shewbread) table was in the north, an allusion [to the fact] that from before God, be He blessed, there is given to each and every corporeal being sufficient for its need.<sup>155</sup> And the unique Lord rules... ever upwards over all.<sup>156</sup> Unique, in that He is unified with all and all is unified in Him.<sup>157</sup> Rules in all of them: this is the

accessible objects of contemplation and prayer, which reflect or transmit to the mind that which is deposited in them in "surety" and "custody" by the upper, more arcane, *sefirot*.

<sup>154</sup> The point is that North, *zafon*, derives etymologically from *zafun*, hidden, representing that principle of divine rigor and justice, which does not accede to the will of its petitioner in any apparent way, its beneficence present but remaining hidden.

Compare David Kimḥi, *Sefer has-Sorashim*, ed. J. H. R. Biesenthal and F. Lebrecht (Jerusalem, 1967, reprint of Berolini, 1847) 317, entry *zafan*: קרא טוב העולם הזה צפון כי לא חשיגהו יד האדם לרצונו כי אם ברצון הבורא והנה צפון (He calls the good of this world "hidden" because man has not the ability to grasp it at will, but rather according to the Will of the Creator, and thus the good is withheld from him as if it is hidden). R. Isaac's and R. David's comments bear a conceptual similarity, and share references to hiddenness and the will of man. Whether they were mutually aware of each other's comments, or whether they had another common source, requires further investigation.

<sup>155</sup> Yuma 21b.

<sup>156</sup> SY 1:5 (sec. 7) reads: ואדון יחיד מושל בכלן... ועד עדי עד (The unique Lord rules over all of them... for ever and ever). R. Isaac reads one of these redundant terms עד as a reference to spiritual direction, upwards, rather than as temporal duration.

rulership that is comprised of all the aforementioned dimensions in *Ein Sof*.<sup>158</sup> From His holy dwelling: these are the patrices.<sup>159</sup> For ever: support, standing, stability, uprightness, regarding something which still is, from the word *od*, which is to say, that it still stands.<sup>160</sup>

<sup>157</sup> R. Azriel identifies the "unique Lord" as a reference to *Ein Sof*, in *PSY*, 455.

<sup>158</sup> The phrase "all of them," from *SY* 1:5 (sec. 7), is interpreted as a reference to the *sefirah* *Atarah* or *Malkhut*, here called *Memshallah*, gathering and comprising all the sefirotic powers above it. R. Isaac's choice of the term *Memshallah* in this instance is apparently an intentional variation on *ממשל* from *SY*, representing the feminine transformation of the rule of *Ein Sof* into the empowered rulership of the lowest *sefirah* which comprises all *sefirot* above it, in which and through which all rule. Here, again, as in lines 93-94 above, R. Isaac, in his choice of the term, may be employing an allusion to the receptive connotation of the *me*-nominal prefix.

<sup>159</sup> The MSS Angelica and Hebrew Union College Cincinnati 524/3 have *הזכות*. The *אבות* "patrices," referring to the *sefirot* *Hesed*, *Gevurah*, *Tiferet*, makes better sense. See Azriel of Gerona, *PSY*, 455: *ממעון קדשו, נקרא גדולה גבורה תפארת, כמא דאת אמרת מעונה אלהי קדם* (From His holy dwelling, which is called *Gedulah*, *Gevurah*, *Tiferet*, as you say, "the dwelling place of God from yore (Dt. 33:27).") See, however, Moses Cordovero, *Pardes Rimmonim*, 23:7, where he explains that the term *זכות*, "merit," can itself designate the *sefirot* *Hesed*, *Gevurah*, or *Tiferet*, citing the opinions of the *Zohar*, II, 251 (*Gevurah*); *Tikkunei Zohar*, 10 (*Hesed*); Joseph Gikatillia, *Sa'arei Or*, ed. J. Ben-Shelomo, vol. 2 (Jerusalem, 1981) 14-16 (implying *Gevurah*); Isaac of Acre, *Me'irat Einayim*, ed. C. Erlanger (Jerusalem, 1975) 69 (as *Tiferet*). In each of these sources, however, reference is to one or the other *sefirah*. R. Isaac here, however, speaks in the plural, referring to a group of *sefirot*.

<sup>160</sup> While the idiomatic meaning of *עד* as forever is clear enough, R. Isaac seems concerned to preclude any interpretation of *עד* that might imply limitation. He therefore places the word etymologically



**Their envisioning:**<sup>161</sup> Envisioning is contemplation of one thing from another,<sup>162</sup> as it says "I will envision to see (Hab. 2:1)," for the divine word appeared to him.<sup>163</sup> Envisioning means that each and every cause receives from a cause higher than itself.<sup>164</sup> For a dimension draws from a dimension that is hewn, and the hewn from the engraved, and the engraved from the inscribed, and the inscribed from the

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in an existential context, connoting "standing existence." See Abraham Ibn Ezra, *Torah Commentary to Ex. 3:15*, regarding the supernal world: וְכָל זֶה הַעוֹלָם כְּבוֹד וְכוֹלֵל עוֹמֵד (This entire world is glory, and it is entirely permanent).

<sup>161</sup> *SY* 1:6 (sec. 8) 143.

<sup>162</sup> Compare Abraham Bar Ḥiyya, *Hegyon han-Nefesh*, 38: הִכָּח הַמְבִיֵּא לְהַבִּין דְּבַר מִתּוֹךְ דְּבַר (the power that enables one to understand one thing from another); also Maimonides, *Hilkhot Talmud Torah*, 1:11: וְיוֹצֵא דְּבַר מִדְּבַר (and deduce one thing from another). This echoes the the talmudic expression for halakhic reasoning, Berakhot 19a, Yebamot 109b: מִדְּמָה מִיֵּלֶתָּא לְמִיֵּלֶתָּא.

<sup>163</sup> The full relevant phrase of the verse is: "I will envision to see what He will say to me." While *צִפִּייה* is generally defined in the Merkavah and Heikhalot literature in visual terms (e. g., Hagigah 15a, Beresit Rabbah 2:6, *Heikhalot Rabbati*, ed. A. J. Wertheimer, vol. 1, 67), the fact that it is followed here by "to see" renders that definition redundant. This, together with the fact that what is to be seen is not itself a visually-related object, but of a different sense-related realm, the divine word, makes this an excellent proof-text for R. Isaac's contention that *צִפִּייה* means not just envisioning or gazing as an act of spiritual sight, but another and very specific intellectual process. It refers to the contemplation or inference of one thing from another, in this case, an object of inner hearing grasped through an object of inner sight.

<sup>164</sup> This passage and its Neoplatonic character is discussed *supra*, ch. 6. R. Isaac's interpretation of "*zefiyatan*, their envisioning," in the sense of

hidden.<sup>165</sup> Everything is this is within that, and this is from within that, and all are tied, this in that and this with that.<sup>166</sup> How do they receive? The manner of their receiving is of something subtle and an essence.<sup>167</sup> Like the appearance: contemplation that has no substance. Appearance is the radiance of the subtle purity<sup>168</sup> of the apprehension

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"layering," follows Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 163.

<sup>165</sup> *Keter*. M. Idel examines the identity of the term *rešimah*, inscribed, according to the Provençal and Gerona kabbalists, and concludes that "the inscribed" is usually associated with the *sefirah Hokhmah*. See "Ha-Sefirot she-me-'al ha-Sefirot," 240, n. 9. Azriel of Gerona, *PSY*, 456, identifies "subtle inscription" with *Hokhmah*, "engraved" with *Binah*, and "hewn" with the letters within *Binah*, and this is in agreement with R. Isaac's hierarchy. This leaves "the hidden" as a reference to *Keter*.

See also *supra*, ch. 6.

<sup>166</sup> Compare line 19, above.

<sup>167</sup> The question of what, exactly, is transmitted in the process of emanation was examined by Maimonides at length in the *Noreh Nevukhim*, 2:4, 12. While R. Isaac here does not reflect the Tibbonite vocabulary of the discussion, his concern to get across the spiritual nature of the substance transmitted is consonant with Maimonides' position. See, too, Judah Halevi, *Kuzari*, 5:12: אם כן האצילות הזאת עצם עשלי בלתי מתגשם עומד בעצמותו (if so, this emanation is an intellectual essence, without corporeality, existing in its essentiality). See discussion *supra*, ch. 5.1.

<sup>168</sup> The term זכות as applied to the purity of perception and apprehension appears in Samuel Ibn Tibbon's translation of Maimonides' introduction to *Avot*, "Shemonah Perakim," ch. 2: זכות התבונה וטוב (purity of understanding and excellence of comprehension is to have a firm grasp of a matter and to understand it quickly, without taking much time).

The pairing of הזכות והזוהר, purity and radiance, appears in one of the recensions of *Pirkei Heikhalot Rabbati* cited by Wertheimer (recension 'ס,

of that which is received,<sup>169</sup> concerning which was said "and they called one to another (Is. 6:3)" and the [Aramaic] Translation of Jonathan [ben Uziel] is "And they receive one from another."<sup>170</sup> Like the appearance of lightning: this is the subtle purity of the apprehension of that which is received. Their limit is not like their dimension.<sup>171</sup> A dimension is something received by the separate things, for

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called *Sefer Heikhalot*, in *Batei Midrashot*, vol. 1, 110, note 2). The language of this passage is an interesting mix of philosophic and Heikhalot diction.

<sup>169</sup> R. Isaac generalizes this phrase from *SY* to apply not just to the appearance of the *sefirot*, but to all modes of appearance and perception *per se*, in a formulation strikingly phenomenological in quality. In this he follows in the general direction of R. Saadiah Gaon in his *PSY*, 2:1, 70, quoted by Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 162, who explains "like the appearance of lightning" as the initial flash of illumination of any object to the mind: רמז כי תחלת כל דבר כי תראה לאדם בדעתו תבריק ככרך כמו להם החרב כן יראה הדבר אצלו בראשונה אחר כך יגלה לו הדבר ויתקן בעצם בעצם עד שיהיה מוכן ומונה לפניו (it alludes to the fact that the beginning of every thing that appears to a person in his mind flashes like lightning, like the blade of a sword; thus it appears to him at first. Afterwards the thing is revealed to him and gradually established until it is ready and set before him). The comparison of fleeting comprehension to lightning and the "flashing blade of a sword," Gen. 3:24, was also used by Maimonides, *Moreh Nevukhim*, introduction. While R. Isaac does not use R. Saadiah Gaon's or R. Judah b. Barzilai's terms, his general notion of "appearance" as insubstantial, as the pure and subtle radiance of that which is grasped, is meant to convey this initial moment of perception or apprehension, as yet without substance, a mere flash.

See, too, Judah Halevi, *Kuzari*, 4:3, 213, lines 6-15; 214, lines 8-16. See *supra*, ch. 7.

<sup>170</sup> The proof-text shows that what is "received" in the heavenly realm is a "calling," something insubstantial.

<sup>171</sup> *SY* 1:6 (sec. 8) describes the *sefirot* in terms

the prophets saw dimensions according to their apprehension,<sup>172</sup> and by virtue of receiving their power they expanded their consciousness more than other human beings,<sup>173</sup> for they gained by this a breadth of soul to extend to<sup>174</sup> particulars within *Ein Sof*.<sup>175</sup> But their limit

of תכליתן, while *SP* 1:5 (sec. 7) describes them in terms of מידתן. R. Isaac draws attention to the distinction and explains it.

<sup>172</sup> Judah Halevi, *Kuzari*, 4:3, 208, lines 1-3; 212, lines 15-18; 216, lines 1-6; 222, lines 2-8. Maimonides, *Yesodei hat-Torah*, 7:1,2; *Moreh Nevukhim*, 2:36, regarding the different ranks of the prophets according to the degree of their intellectual capacities.

<sup>173</sup> Regarding the effect of prophecy in expanding the mind of the prophet, see Maimonides, *Yesodei hat-Torah*, 7:7: הנביא אפשר שתהיה נבואתו לעצמו בלבד להרחיב לבו ולהוסיף דעתו עד שידע מה שלא היה יודע מאותן הדברים לבו ולהוסיף דעתו עד שידע מה שלא היה יודע מאותן הדברים (It is possible that a prophet's prophecy be for himself alone, to expand his heart and increase his mind until he knows what he had not known of the great matters). See, too, *Moreh Nevukhim*, 2:37.

The concept of the reception of the emanation of multiple supernal powers by the mind of the prophet appears in *Sefer ha-Azamin*, 12-13: האופן השני הוא אצילות כח שנאצל מעולם העליון ר"ל מהשכלים הנפרדים על הכה השכלי עד שיתעצם בעצמותם ויצמייר בצורתם ר"ל צורת השכל (The second way is the emanation of a power that emanates from the supernal world, that is, from the separate intellects, upon the intellectual capacity until it is strengthened with their strength and formed in their form, that is, the form of the intellect, and becomes intellectual to the highest degree that is within its power).

The comparison of the expanded intellectual powers of the prophets to the minds of other human beings also appears in *Sefer ha-Azamin*, 12: וישלח בנפשו ענינים יתעורר ויבין בהם ענינים רבים מה שאין ביכולת אדם זולתו לדעתם ולא שיתבונן מהם מה שהוא יבין בשום פנים (And there will be transmitted to his soul matters through which he will be aroused to understand many matters not within the ability of people other than himself to know, of which they will not understand what he understands in any way). See, too, Maimonides, *Moreh*

is the limit of their investigation.<sup>176</sup> For every dimension has a limit and every finite thing has an end, like that which is written "for all finite things I have seen an end" but "Your commandment," even though its beginning has a limit, continually expands "exceedingly (Ps. 119:96)" unto *Ein Sof*.<sup>177</sup> While everything that perishes has a limit,

*Nevukhim*, 2:36,37,38.

<sup>174</sup> See line 50 and note, above.

<sup>175</sup> The theory of knowledge which has as its goal the clear and appropriate comprehension of particulars in their ultimate, general context derives from Abraham Ibn Ezra's Torah Commentary, Ex. 33:21: **כִּי הוּא לְבַדּוֹ יוֹדֵעַ הַפְּרָטִים וְחֻלְקֵיהֶם בְּדֶרֶךְ כָּלֵל** (for He alone knows the particulars and their parts in terms of the general). See, too, his commentary on Gen. 18:21. See Ibn Ezra, *Perusei hat-Torah le-Rabbenu Avraham Ibn Ezra*, ed. A. Weiser, (Jerusalem, 1976), introduction, 36-37. R. Isaac's formulation "to extend to particulars within *Ein Sof*," that is, setting particulars within their infinite context, is essentially a kabbalistic paraphrase of Ibn Ezra's "to know the particulars...in terms of the general."

The general definition of intellect and knowledge as the grasp of specificity or particularity can be traced back to Isaac Israeli, and to al-Kindi. See A. Altmann and S. M. Stern, *Isaac Israeli*, 37-39. See, too, Maimonides, *Moreh Nevukhim*, 1:58, who bases his discussion of divine attributes on the same epistemological goal of the knowledge of particulars.

<sup>176</sup> Investigation was defined by R. Isaac, lines 70-71 above, as the inductive process of extrapolating from the phenomenal to the noumenal. Thus **תְּכִלִּיתָן** refers to the *sefirot* from the perspective of an upward movement: the contemplation of the *sefirot* by the mind, which begins with a finite manifestation and extrapolates endlessly. By contrast, **מִידָתָן** refers to the *sefirot* from the perspective of a downward movement: the limitation and measure placed upon the emanative descent of the influence of the *sefirot* in the creation and governance of the lower world of separation.

"Your commandment" cannot be apprehended by man to the utmost degree of apprehension, for a man grasps nothing but the headings of the dimensions.<sup>178</sup> His word: *Tiferet*, the

<sup>177</sup> With the qualification "even though," R. Isaac seems to acknowledge that this argument runs counter to the premise laid down by R. Baḥya Ibn Pakudah, *Hovot ha-Levavot*, Šar ha-Yihud, ch. 5: כי אין התחלות מבלי (for there are no beginnings without a limit to their beginning).

R. Isaac may also have in mind R. Baḥya's homiletic exposition of Ps. 119:96, loc. cit., ed. A. Zifroni, Introduction, 76. While R. Isaac does not pick up R. Baḥya's definition of "commandment" *par excellence* as "duties of the heart," his description of "commandment" as endlessly branching and spreading out may be at work subliminally in R. Isaac's discussion here.

The term מאד, "exceedingly," is interpreted technically as *Hokhmah* by Asher b. David, "Ma'aseh Bereshit," *Kabbalat R. Asher b. David*, 55, and corrolates well with the expansive ascent of which R. Isaac speaks.

<sup>178</sup> This passage is alluded to and developed by Azriel of Gerona, *Peruš ha-ʿAggadot*, 100-01 (fol. 16b): וכל המצות הם נקראות אמת שנ' וכל מצותיך אמת, ואע"פ (All the commandments are called truth, as it says "all Your commandments are truth (Ps. 119:151).") Even though there are minor commandments and major ones, all commandments are glory...For all commandments have one end, and their goal is without limit. All who engage in the commandments must have the awe of the commandment upon him as if he were crowned and coronated with its glory). Tishby suggests that the statement "all the commandments are glory" means "their origin is from the *sefirot* (100, n. 13)." While "glory" could be interpreted to refer to specific *sefirot*, *Tiferet* and *Malkhut*, and the concept "commandment" was so interpreted by later kabbalists (Zohar, III, 82b; Moses Cordovero, *Pardes Rimmonim*, 'Erkhei ha-Kinuyim, ch. 13, entries מצווה, מצוה), Tishby's more general reading, as referring to the entire realm of the *sefirot*, is justified by the phrase מוכתר ומעומד בכבוד, an allusion to the full range of *sefirot* from *Keter* to

elevation of the word in all of them,<sup>179</sup> for it is almost as if the intent is that the word is elevated,<sup>180</sup> as it is

*Malkhut*. In a similar way, R. Isaac's treatment of "Your commandment," from context corresponding to the "ten *sefirot*...their limit has no end," from *SY* 1:6 (sec. 8), seems to mean the entire realm of the *sefirot*, as the entire realm of divine expression directed to man.

<sup>179</sup> This passage is at the root of the comments of Azriel of Gerona, *PSY*, on this mishnah in *SY*, 1:6, in *Kitvei Ramban*, vol. 2, 455:להסתכל בצפיתן להסתכל במורגש והמורגש במורגש במורגש במורגש במורגש במורגש. ובכל אחד ואחד מהם הקו האמצעי קרוי דברו שהוא אמצעי בהם, והוא מתעלה לקבל (the natural ascends in their vision to gaze at the sensible, and the sensible at the intelligible, and the intelligible at the hidden, and in each and every one of them the middle line is called "His word," which is central in them, and it ascends to receive the efflux of *Hesed*, the Will, with extreme rapidity, running forth and returning). R. Azriel, *Perus ha-Aggadot*, 100, lines 13-16, identifies the term *דבר* with the *sefirot Tiferet* and *Malkhut* (see I. Tishby, loc. cit., note 10). More specifically, in his *PSY* 1:4, *דבר* is identified with *Malkhut*, while in 1:6, quoted above, *דברו* is identified with *Tiferet*.

Putting all this together, R. Azriel's comments can help shed some light on R. Isaac's intent. R. Isaac here is interpreting *דברו*, with the third person singular suffix, as a reference to *Tiferet*, as + *דבר* 'ו, with *vav* representing the six directions unified in *Tiferet*. As such, *דברו*, *Tiferet*, is the ascent of *דבר Malkhut*, בהם, in all the *sefirot*.

<sup>180</sup> MSS Angelica and Hebrew Union College of Cincinnati 523/3 have *כי כמעט רצון הדבר מתעלה*, while the other MSS, Cambridge Add. 671, Harvard Heb. 58/11, Cambridge Or. 2116,8 Cincinnati 524/3, Montefiore 313, Milano-Ambrosiana 57, 32 read *כי כמעט רצון הדבר המתעלה*. In either case, the idea is that the phrase in *SY* 1:6 (sec. 8): *דברו בהן ברצוא* (It is as if His word runs in them) is to be kabbalistically decoded as "*Tiferet* runs, or is elevated, among *them*, the other, lower, *sefirot*."

This reading takes *כי כמעט רצון* as an idiomatic expression introducing an interpretive nuance. An entirely different reading could be: "the will of the word ascends." Compare Azriel of Gerona, *Perus ha-*

written, "God, praised in the great council of the holy ones (Ps. 89:8),"<sup>181</sup> and so too, "and Your Name is awesome."<sup>182</sup> In running forth: it did not say "running," because it is more interior than the Holy Beasts.<sup>183</sup> And according to His statement...they prostrate themselves: prostration is like

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<sup>181</sup> *Aggadot*, 154: רצון המעשה, which G. Scholem reads as "the Will hidden in Thought," and I. Tishby as "the Will which is the source of Thought, or the Will which acts in Thought," *loc. cit.*, 154, n. 15; 156, n. 2. See, too, *PSY*, 1:6 in *Kitvei Ramban*, 455, where רצון is called משר החסד, the efflux channelled through the *sefirah Hesed*. R. Isaac may mean that *Tiferet* ascends as the inner will of הדבר, *Malkhut*. If this is so, then in R. Isaac's thought is already found a rudimentary voluntarism that will become more fully developed in the thought of R. Azriel, in his association of *Keter* and divine Will. See G. Scholem, *Origins*, 343.

The previous reading, however, fits better with the proof-texts brought, none of which support the introduction of the term רצון in the highly-charged sense of "will," which would require considerable explication. See the notes following.

<sup>182</sup> The verse continues: ונורא על כל סביביו (and awesome over all those around Him). R. Isaac's kabbalistic decoding of this verse is: the ten *sefirot*, called "the great council (or mystery) of the holy ones," is quintessentially "awesome," *Tiferet*, the median, mediating, unifying *sefirah*, which is "over all," the word elevated above all others. The pivotal words in this and the following citation are נורא, על, כל, signifying "the elevation of *Tiferet* over all the other lower *sefirot*." See the next note.

The association of נורא with *Tiferet*, third of the lower seven *sefirot* after *Gedulah* or *Hesed* and *Gevurah*, was probably based upon Dt. 10:17 and its popularization in the first benediction of the Amidah, when it is the third term of praise: הגדול הגבור והנורא.

<sup>183</sup> This is part of a phrase from the *Amidah*, of *Rosh ha-Shanah* and *Yom ha-Kippurim*. The full relevant phrase here is ושמך נורא על כל מה שבראת (Your Name is awesome over all You created). R. Isaac's kabbalistic exegesis is: God's Name, which is comprised of all the



one who puts aside his [moral] qualities<sup>184</sup> and occupies himself with nothing but thought alone,<sup>185</sup> attaches to Thought,<sup>186</sup> and exalts thought and subdues the body to strengthen his soul.<sup>187</sup>

*sefirot*, is epitomized in *Tiferet*, the awesome, which is "over," or elevated above all. See preceding note.

<sup>183</sup> "In running" conveys the higher interiority of sefirotic process, as opposed to the mere "running" of the Holy Beasts, (Ez. 1:14) on the angelic level. See R. Isaac's exegetical comments on the letter *bet*, lines 1-2, 6-7, above.

<sup>184</sup> Compare Yuma 23a, Ta'anit 25b: מעביר על מידותיו ; Megillah 28a: וְלֹא עֹמֵד עַל מִדּוֹתָיו.

<sup>185</sup> The contrast between moral qualities, מידות, and thought or intellect, the former considered on a lower level than the latter, occurs in Maimonides, *Moreh Nevukhim*, 3:54. For R. Isaac, this contrast, on the human level, parallels a similar contrast between the lower *sefirot*, called *middot*, associated with moral qualities, such as love, rigor and mercy, and higher *sefirot*, associated with intellectual functions such as thought, wisdom and discernment.

<sup>186</sup> Thought, here, apparently refers to the highest *sefirah*; compare line 132, below. Regarding this usage of the term מחשבה for the highest *sefirah*, see I. Twersky *Rabad*, 274, and G. Scholem, *Origins*, 270-77, who cite Abraham Bar Ḥiyya's concept of המחשבה הטהורה (Pure Thought), as the likely source: *Hegyon han-Nefesh ha-ʿAzuvah*, 39, 41. See, too, Azriel of Gerona, *Perush ha-ʿAggadot*, 82.

The expression "attaches to Thought" is based on the Aristotelian concept of the adherence of the human intellect to the Active Intellect. See Judah Halevi, *Kuzari*, 5:12, who presents, then disputes the standard Aristotelian view. A similar notion of sustained focus of mind described as an attachment or adherence to a higher principle, employing the term דבק, appears in Abraham Ibn Ezra, Torah Commentary, Gen. 28:21, Ex. 33:21, Num. 20:8. R. Abraham Bar Ḥiyya, in other contexts, uses דבק and חבר interchangeably: e.g., *Hegyon han-Nefesh ha-ʿAzuvah*, 39, 40, 41.

<sup>187</sup> The exegetically problematic nature of the

phrase in *SY* 1:6 (sec. 8), "ולפני כסאו הם משתחוים", with its anthropomorphic imagery applied to spiritual entities, was picked up by Judah B. Barzilai, who comments in *PSY* 163: כלום' הם שומעים לו ולצויו בהם כחפצו כן וכן המאמר בכל השתחוויה לא תצא ממשמעות ומעשומה (which is to say, they obey Him, and His commands to them, whatever His will, so it is. This is the significance of all prostration, which does not depart from its meaning and plain sense). Compare Saadiah b. Joseph, *Sefer Yeẓirah*, 73; *Torat ha-Nefesh*, trans. Y. D. Brody (Paris 1896) 11. R. Judah, following R. Saadiah Gaon, shows that the social significance of prostration, as a sign of obedience, can be easily abstracted to refer to a spiritual action. While R. Isaac also sees the need to interpret the notion of prostration abstractly, he takes a different approach, depicting prostration as an image for intellectual contemplation and sefirotic ascent.

The ascetic orientation evident in this passage reflects earlier sources and contemporary parallels. See Moses Ibn Ezra, *'Arugat hab-Bosem*, 120-21, who cites Pythagoras, Aristotle and Ibn Gabirol; Judah Ha-Levi, *Kuzari*, 5:12 (end); Maimonides, *Noreh Nevukhim*, 3:51: יחזק: כל אשר יחלשו כחות הגוף ותכבה אש התאוות, השכל וירבה אורו ותוך השגתו וישמח במה שהשיג (the more the powers of the body are weakened and the fire of the lusts extinguished, the more the intellect is strengthened, its light is increased and its grasp purified, and it rejoices in what it grasps). For a strong contemporary parallel that combines the same ascetic notion with physical collapse, see Abraham Ibn Ḥasdai, *Ben ha-Melekh ve-ha-Nazir*, 207: ואחר שבארנו שהנפש איננה גוף ראוי הוא שנבאר שאין לה יגון ואנחה כי אם בהיותה בגוף וכשתפרד ממנו תהיה אז חזקה ויכולה במעשיה. והאות והטופת בזה כי אנחנו כשנרצה להבין דבר קשה ועמוק נתקבץ הנפש אל עצמה ותשליך ממנה החושים הגופניים כולם עד אשר תשוב כאלו נפרדה מהם. ואז תבין ותשכיל ותוציא מהדברים העמוקים הקשים כל מה שתדע כמו הנביאים עליהם השלום כשתנוח עליהם הרוח היתה נפשם מתקבצת לעצמה והיתה משלכת ממנה כל החושים הגופניים ובזרחה מהם עד שלא ישאר בהם כח (After we have explained that the soul is not a body, it is appropriate that we explain that it has no pain or suffering except for its being in the body, and when it separates from it, it becomes strong and capable in its activities. The sign and proof for this is that when we want to understand a difficult and deep matter, the soul gathers unto itself and throws off from itself all the physical senses

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until it becomes as if separated from them. Then it is able to understand and conceive and elicit from the deep and difficult things whatever it desires, like the prophets, peace be upon them, when the spirit rested on them, their souls gathered unto themselves and threw off the physical senses and fled from them until they no longer retained the strength to stand, and they would fall down and tremble). Compare, too, Maimonides, *Yesodei hat-Torah*, 7:2. In prophecy as described by Maimonides and Ibn Ḥasdai the body collapses from the overwhelming force of the experience. R. Isaac's concern is different: to explain the intentional ritual action of prostration, understood symbolically as the expression of this falling-away of the physical, and to show how it is appropriately predicated of spiritual entities such as *sefirot*. R. Isaac's contemplative interpretation of prostration combined the exegetical concerns of R. Judah b. Barzilai and sources with the ascetic formulae of Maimonides and R. Moses Ibn Ezra.

Set:<sup>188</sup> things that are joined together, resting on their sides, and from above them they are raised, like something raised by something else, like a magnet above and a magnet below.<sup>189</sup> The [Aramaic] translation of "placed" is set,<sup>190</sup> something placed and resting on something else.<sup>191</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> SY 1:7 (sec. 6) 142.

<sup>189</sup> From Plato on, the magnet was a favorite model for conveying the idea of a higher principle supporting, in the sense of lifting, a lower one. See Plato, *Ion*, 533d,e, in *Collected Dialogues*, trans. Lane Cooper, (Princeton, 1971) 219-20: "As I just now said, this gift you have of speaking well on Homer is not an art; it is a power divine, impelling you like the power of the stone Euripides called the magnet...This stone does not simply attract iron rings, just by themselves; it also imparts to the rings a force enabling them to do the same thing as the stone itself, that is, to attract another ring, so that sometimes a chain is formed, quite a long one, of iron rings, suspended from one another. For all of them, however, their power depends upon that loadstone (Jowett: that one stone)." See, too, Eriugena, *Periphyseon*, vol. 1, 520b; Adelard of Bath, *De Eodem et Diverso*, ed. H. Willner, (Münster, 1903) 33. Compare Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY* 246, who compares the magnet that lifts the heavy object to the Creator Who sustains the world; Asher b. Saul, *Sefer ha-Minhagot*, in *Sifran shel-Rishonim*, ed. S. Assaf, 144: הכבוד יהי' סבורך מן היכל הקודש שהוא באמצע והוא נישא את הכל...ודיוממו אבן שואבת שמעמידין אותה למעלה נושא את הכל (the Glory, be it blessed, is from the Holy Temple which is in the middle, and carries all...A model for this is a magnet which one places above, and carries the iron below it).

Unusual in R. Isaac's image is the two magnets, below as well as above, rather than one magnet lifting several pieces of iron. This may be meant to convey the equivalent power of each of the *sefirot*, represented by equally powerful magnets.

<sup>190</sup> Gen. 28:12, in Targum Onkelos.

<sup>191</sup> This interpretation comes from Saadiah b. Joseph, *Sefer Yezirah*, 91-92, by way of Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 163-64.

**Their end in their beginning: a spreading fountain:**<sup>192</sup>

whatever spreads out is all from the source, and if the source ceases, everything ceases;<sup>193</sup> and since at all times they spread from the beginning,<sup>194</sup> it has no end.<sup>195</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> The fountain or spring of water was a stock image for the process of emanation among Neoplatonic writers. See S. Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena*, 17-19, who cites its use by Iamblichus, Proclus, Damascius, Ps. Dionysius and Eriugena. See, also, his article "Platonism, Neoplatonism, Aristotelianism: a Twelfth-Century Metaphysical System," *Renaissance and Renewal in the Twelfth Century*, 518-19, n. 40, for its use by Calcidius. A description of God as the source and spring of Wisdom, pairing the terms מַעֲיֵן and מְקוֹר, occurs in the translation of Saadiah b. Joseph's *PSY* made by Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 275. Compare Saadiah b. Joseph, *PSY*, ed. J. Kafah, 37. Solomon Ibn Gabirol used the image of the flowing spring as the source of creation in *Keter Malkhut*, ch. 9, in *Sirei haḳ-Ḳodes*, ed. D. Yarden, (Jerusalem, 1971) vol. 1, 42-43; and in his *Meḳor Hayyim*, trans. J. Blaustein, 5:41, (Jerusalem, 1926) 216. Judah HaLevi used the image in his poem "E-lohim יְיָ מִי מִשְׁחֵלֶכְהָ": מַעֲיֵן חַכְמָה (A fountain of wisdom goes forth from them, and the source of life is found with them). See, especially, Maimonides, *Moreh Nevukhim*, 2:12, for his discussion of the propriety of the use of the fountain image to describe God and the prophetic process.

<sup>193</sup> The occasionalist notion of continuous divine involvement in continuous creation was endorsed by Abraham Ibn Ezra, *Torah Commentary*, Ex. 3:2. See, too, Judah Halevi, *Kuzari*, 4:26.

<sup>194</sup> Or spread anew. Compare *Mo'ed Katan* 2a: מַעֲיֵן שֶׁיֵּצֵא בְּתַחֲלִילָה (whether from a spring that has flowed forth for the first time...).

<sup>195</sup> R. Isaac, for whom the *sefirot* are not merely numbers but metaphysical principles, omits the standard explanation of this passage offered by most commentators on *SY* up to his time: the characteristic of numbers in base ten to double back on themselves after every series of ten. Rather, he reads it Neoplatonically, as expressing the nature of emanation: the end, as placed or dependent upon the unceasing

Therefore it says **their end in their beginning**, for many strands are extended from the coal, which is one.<sup>196</sup> For the flame cannot stand by itself, but only by something else.<sup>197</sup> For all the things<sup>198</sup> and all the dimensions that appear to be separate have no separation in them,<sup>199</sup> for all is one, like the beginning that unifies all.<sup>200</sup> The word "unique", for the unique Lord,<sup>201</sup> now alludes<sup>202</sup> to a dimension in *Ein Sof*,<sup>203</sup> that has no end from any side.<sup>204</sup> From

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emanation from the beginning, obtains, itself, the quality of endlessness.

<sup>196</sup> See above, lines 3-4.

<sup>197</sup> This is a paraphrase of Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 164: **ואין שלהבת יכולה לעמוד בלא גחלת**.

<sup>198</sup> *Sefirot*. See line 54, above, and note.

<sup>199</sup> See *supra*, ch. 8.4.

<sup>200</sup> That is, according to the image of the fountain, above.

<sup>201</sup> *SY* 1:7 (sec. 6).

<sup>202</sup> Now alludes, as opposed to earlier, *SY* 1:3 (sec. 3), where **יחיד** referred to the centralizing function of the lower *sefirah Yesod*.

<sup>203</sup> That is, the *sefirah Keter* in *Ein Sof*.

<sup>204</sup> This expression, its parallels (e. g. line 337, below), and its underlying conception, derive from the *Heikhalot* tradition, its doctrine of divine Names, and its treatment of the mysteries of the non-spatial quality of the spiritual and of divine omniscience, expressed in terms of omnidirectionality. See "Otiot de-R. 'Akiva," *Batel Midrasot*, ed. A. J. Wertheimer, vol. 2, 364, regarding the sealing of the six cardinal directions with the letters of the divine Names: **וכאי זה צד נתחתמו בהן, ארבע ארבע לכל רוח ורוח** (and in what way are they sealed with them? Four by four letters in each and every direction). See, too, "Ma'aseh

pondering<sup>205</sup> the things hidden from thought, lest it become confused.<sup>206</sup> For from that which one apprehends one can recognize what one does not apprehend,<sup>207</sup> and for this the

Merkavah," *ibid.*, vol. 1, 60, regarding the ministering angels: וכולם נבונים ופזניים לכל צד וצד (all are discerning, and face each and every side).

Compare, too, Maimonides, *Yesodei ha-Torah*, 2:10: אחד מכל צד .

Azriel of Gerona deals at length and in great detail with the theme of divine unity expressed in the omnidirectionality of the divine Names in his monographs "Peruṣ hak-Kaddiṣ," and "Peruṣ Yiḥud ha-Šem," in G. Scholem, "Seridim Hadašim," 216-19. There, the palindrome of the divine Name 'hyh' is interpreted repeatedly and in a variety of formulations as expressing the notion of blessing, or equivalence of power, from all sides: שהוא מתרבה ומתברך ממהותו בכל צד (in that He is increased and blessed from His essence (Scholem, note 4: 'Ein Sof) on every side [217]). R. Isaac's formulation is the bridge between the *Heikhalot* concept and R. Azriel's more technical development. R. Isaac's own opaque statement below, line 337, q. v., may well be the source upon which R. Azriel expatiates.

<sup>205</sup> *SY* 1:8 (sec. 5) 142.

<sup>206</sup> For precedents for this cautionary advice against intellectual overreach, see the discussion of this passage, *supra*, ch. 7.2, with reference to Baḥya Ibn Paḳudah and Moses Ibn Ezra. See, too, Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 66.

<sup>207</sup> See *supra*, ch. 7.2, 191-209. See, especially, Baḥya Ibn Paḳudah, *Hovot ha-Levavot*, 1:10: והמשכיל הנלבב ישתדל להעשים קליפות המלות וגשמותם מעל הענין ויעלה במחשבתו מדרגה אל מדרגה, עד שיגיע מאמתת הענין הנדרש אל מה שיש בכח יכלתו והשגתו (The understanding adept will attempt to abstract the shells of the words and their corporeality from the matter and ascend in his thought from level to level, until he arrives, by the truth of the matter that is sought, at what is within his power to grasp).

Compare the opposing epistemological view, taken by Azriel of Gerona, *PSY* 1:8 in *Kiṭvei Ramban*, vol. 2, 456, who cautions: שלא לדמות הנסתר לגלוי (Your heart from ruminating. One should not compare the hidden to the revealed). He limits the incommensurability of the revealed to the hidden to one

dimensions were made. For language does not apprehend other than that which comes from it,<sup>208</sup> for man does not apprehend the dimension of speech and letters, rather, its dimension is itself, and apart from the letters there is no

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specific issue, however: while the phenomenal world is manifest as a plurality, the hidden world of the *sefirot*, is complete unity.

<sup>208</sup> This analysis of the nature of language is, in part, an extrapolation from Bahya Ibn Paḳudah's discussion of the ineluctable and isolated modality of the individual senses and of the intellect, each limited to its own sphere of receptivity, in *Hovot ha-Levavot*, 1:10: ולכל חוש מהם ענין מיוחד להשיגו ולא ישיג זולתו. כפראים והצורות, אשר לא נשיגם כי אם בחוש הראות בלבד. וכקולות והנגונים אשר לא נשיגם כי אם בחוש השמע בלבד... ואי אפשר להשיג מוחש מבלעדי חושו המוכן לו... וכן (Each sense has a unique subject to grasp, and cannot grasp anything else, such as appearances and forms, which can only be grasped by the sense of sight alone, and sounds and music, which can only be grasped by the sense of hearing alone... A sense object can only be grasped by the sense appropriate to it... So, too, we assert regarding the intellect, which grasps intelligible things).

One of the underlying principles also at work in R. Isaac's formulation is the Pythagorean dictum "similar is comprehended by similar," widely cited in the twelfth century. See Hugh of St. Victor, *Didascalicon*, trans. J. Taylor, (New York and London, 1961) 46-47; 180 n. 11 regarding citations by Chalcidius and William of Conches. See, too, A. Schneider, "Der Gedanke der Erkenntnis des Gleichen durch Gleiches in antiker und patristischer Zeit," *Abhandlungen zur Geschichte der Philosophie des Mittelalters*, BGPM, Supplementband II (Münster, 1923) 49-77.

R. Isaac extends these arguments, with profound insight, to the self-contained, even circular, nature of language, whose adequate correspondence to reality is based on the fact that Creation, according to the tradition of *Sefer Yeẓirah*, and the Torah itself, is a linguistic process.

Compare, too, line 81, above, and note.



dimension.<sup>209</sup> All the awesome dimensions<sup>210</sup> are given to

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<sup>209</sup> R. Isaac's statements on the self-contained, self-referential nature of language, and the identity of the act of intellect with speech or letters as its object, use as their idea structure the speculations of Maimonides, *Moreh Nevukhim*, 1:68. Maimonides employed the Aristotelian concept of the active intellect *in actu* to take the philosophical doctrine of the identity of knower, knowing and known with respect to God and extend it to all intellectual activity in general, human as well as divine : כי אין השכל דבר זולת הדבר : המושכל, הנה כבר התבאר לך כי הדבר המושכל הוא צורת האילן המופשטת, והוא השכל ההוא בפעל, ואינו שני דברים השכל וצורת האילן המופשטת, כי אין השכל בפעל דבר זולת מה שהושכל, והדבר אשר בו הושכלה צורת האילן והופשטה, אשר הוא המשכיל, הוא השכל ההוא בפעל בלא ספק, כי כל שכל פעלו הוא עצמו... כי אמתת השכל ומהותו הוא ההשגה... ואם כן הדבר אשר בו הופשטה צורת זה האילן והושגה בו אשר הוא השכל הוא המשכיל, כי השכל ההוא בעצמו הוא אשר המשים הצורה (For the intellect is not something other than the object of intellection. Behold, it has already been explained to you that the object of intellection is the abstract form of the tree, and this is the intellect itself *in actu*. They are not two things, the intellect and the form of the tree that is the object of intellection, for the intellect *in actu* is not something other than the object of intellection. That by which the form of the tree has been intellected and abstracted, which is the act of intellection, this is the realized intellect *in actu*, without a doubt. For regarding all intellect, its action is itself... For the truth of the intellect and its essence is apprehension... If so, that by which the form of the tree is abstracted and apprehended, which is the intellect, is the act of intellection, for the intellect itself is that which abstracted the form and apprehended it).

Maimonides' analysis is built upon the doctrine of essential divine Attributes as it appears in Saadiah b. Joseph, *Ha-'Emunot ve-had-De'ot*, trans. J. Ibn Tibbon, ed. Y. Fischel, ch. 2, 53. See, too, Maimonides, *Se'monah Perakim*, ch. 8: שהשם יתברך אינו יודע במדע ולא : חי בחיים עד שיהיה הוא והמדע שני דברים... שהוא יתברך שמו God, be He blessed, does not know with knowledge and does not live with life, such that He and knowledge are two things... He, blessed be His Name, is His attributes and His attributes are Him); נמצאת אתה אומר הוא היודע : *idem*, *Yesodei hat-Torah*, 2:10: והוא הידוע והוא הדעה עצמה הכל אחד (It turns out that one asserts that He is the knower, He is the known, and

comprehend, for every dimension is from a dimension that is above it, and they are given to Israel to comprehend, from

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He is the knowledge itself, all is one).

R. Isaac seems to have taken Maimonides' discussion of the identity of intellect, its activity and its object, and applied it formally to the activity of speech and letters, both in the human sphere and in the realm of divine attributes, dimensions or *sefirot*. R. Isaac's emphasis is different, however, and lies closer to the emphasis of the doctrine of the identity of divine attributes and essence: just as there is no divine attribute other than divine essence, there is no attribute or dimension apart from the letters or speech which establish dimensionality in the first place.

R. Isaac may also have used as a reference point the comments of Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 211: והשם הוא הגולה כי בלתי השם לא יתכנו בריות ובשם יתנצר כל דבר ובשם יכול אדם להבין משמו בלתי גולמו אבל הגולם בלתי השם לא נכר... נמצא כל היצור וכל הדיבור יוצא בשם אחד אין חפץ בלי שם (the name is that which reveals, for without a name a creature's existence is not established, and with a name each thing can be recognized. By a name a person can understand, through the name even without the physical substance, but with the physical substance alone it is not recognized... It turns out that all Creation and all speech proceeds by one name, and there is no object without a name or signifier).

In context, the flow of R. Isaac's argument is that the precise referentiality of language to its object is the guarantee that one can accurately infer and extrapolate from the revealed to the hidden.

A variant reading of this passage is found in MSS Cambridge Or. 2116,8 and Harvard: "For from that which one apprehends one can recognize what one does not apprehend, but which comes from it. For a person does not apprehend the speech and the letters, rather the dimension itself; apart from the letters [is] the dimension." This reading, missing the linguistic comments and lacking syntactic and semantic coherence in general, seems to be corrupt.

<sup>210</sup> Judah Halevi, "Elohim יי אלהים יי אלהים", וכמה פנים לפני הנוראים, וכמה אחורים לאחורים הנראים (several faces to the awesome face, and several backs to the visible back): the term "awesome" stands for the most recondite aspect of the divine, in contradistinction to that which is revealed; so, too, for R. Isaac.

the dimension that appears in the heart, to comprehend unto *Ein Sof*.<sup>211</sup> For there is no way to pray other than by the finite *things*.<sup>212</sup> a person receives and elevates in thought unto *Ein Sof*.<sup>213</sup> Thus it says running forth and returning, it returns to the place:<sup>214</sup> for the things, in their swiftness,<sup>215</sup> ascend in their mystery and return to their

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<sup>211</sup> *Supra*, ch. 7.2.

<sup>212</sup> Or words. The reference may also include the *sefirot* as bounded or measured, as discussed by R. Isaac above, line 75, and expounded by Azriel of Gerona, *PSY*, 454, with reference to *SY* 1:5: במשנה זו הזכיר שהכל מאין סוף, ואע"פ שבדברים יש להם שיעור ומדה והם עשר, אותה מדה שיש להם אין לה סוף, כי המוטבע מן המורגש והמורגש מן המושכל מרום הנעלם והנעלם אין לו סוף, אם כן אפילו המורגש והמושכל והמוטבע אין לו סוף, ולכך אמר (In this *mishnah* it states that all is from *Ein Sof*. Even though the *things* [i. e., *sefirot*] have dimension and measure, and they are ten, that measure which they have is endless. For the natural is from the sensible and the sensible is from the intelligible, which is from the hidden zenith, and the hidden is infinite. If so, even the sensible and the intelligible and the natural are infinite. Therefore the dimensions were made, in order to contemplate through them unto *Ein Sof*).

<sup>213</sup> See *supra*, ch. 7.6 for an exposition of this passage.

<sup>214</sup> *SY* 1:8 (sec. 5).

<sup>215</sup> *Mehirut* in the sense of the swiftness and accuracy of divine causality is used to describe the action of divine Names in *Sefer ha-Aẓamim*, 12: ויתפעלו לרוב כח ה' ומהירות פעולתו וממשלתו בכל הכחות הטבעיים ואלו הם עניני השמות וכו'. See, too, Rashi's gloss, *Hagigah*, 12b: שכל מעשה ארץ מתונין ומעשה שמיים במהירות (for all earthly actions are slow, while acts of heaven are done swiftly). The direct thematic source, however, is R. Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 161.

places after their reception.<sup>216</sup> Cut:<sup>217</sup> a thing apportioned and made a measure; and it is called a covenant, for all is created and clarified.<sup>218</sup>

One<sup>219</sup> is the beginning of the essences. One: the breath of the living God: for from the breath is all.<sup>220</sup> Blessed and blessed be...for this is breath: for the voice is by breath;<sup>221</sup> it is the tone of the drawing forth of the

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<sup>216</sup> See *supra*, ch. 7.6, for an exposition of the entire passage, tracing the origins of this theory of the process of the cognition of metaphysical principles, developing concepts from R. Saadiah Gaon and Judah b. Barzilai, and with parallels to Middle Platonic, Hermetic and contemporary Victorine epistemology.

<sup>217</sup> *SY* 1:8 (sec. 5).

<sup>218</sup> R. Isaac connects the idiomatic expression כרת ברית as "establishing a covenant" with its literal, etymological root, כרת as "cut", and the term ברית associated with its etymological root family, ברא, created, clarified. His argument is that creation proceeds by a "cutting," that is, a measuring and apportioning of the infinite into the finite. He may be alluding, further, to this creation-by-limitation as a "covenant," as a guarantee that the measured phenomenal realm will adequately transmit commensurate impressions of the immeasurable noumenal to the contemplative adept. In keeping with the epistemological position R. Isaac has laid out in lines 127-33, such indirect apprehension is the only appropriate access to the noumenal; any more direct route would result in mental distress.

<sup>219</sup> *SY* 1:9 (sec. 10) 144.

<sup>220</sup> Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 179: והלא כל הקולות מן הרוח (Indeed, all voices are from the breath).

<sup>221</sup> R. Isaac is commenting on the complete phrase cited from *SY* 1:9 (sec. 10): blessed and blessed be His Name...voice, breath and speech, this is the [Holy] Spirit. His version, והו רוח, apparently corresponds to MSS 'ה, 'א cited by I. Gruenwald, *SY*, 144. Compare

breath.<sup>222</sup> By the voice is the hewing, for the drawing forth of the voice is interior. With **breath He engraved:**<sup>223</sup> engraving is by voice and hewing is by breath by way of voice.<sup>224</sup> Voice has substance and is nothing but a vessel.<sup>225</sup> **And hewed in it:** by breath itself there is

line 1, note 1, above. This is to say that Name, breath, voice and speech, are all of a piece. What, exactly, their relationship is, R. Isaac goes on to discuss. See Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 179: **כל הקולות מן הרוח הם** (all the voices are from breath).

<sup>222</sup> Compare Abraham Ibn Ezra, Commentary on Psalms, Ps. 150:6: **וישתנו הנעים כפי אריכות הרוח וקוצר** (The tones change according to the length of the breath, the shortness of the voice, its high or low pitch, or its quickness).

<sup>223</sup> *SY* 1:10 (sec. 12) 144.

<sup>224</sup> Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 208: **ובציאת הקול מן הגרון הגיהור יוצא מפה ויחצב דמות אותיות** (when the voice comes out of the throat, the vapor comes from the mouth and hews the shape of letters). This is based on Saadiah b. Joseph, *Sefer Yezirah*, 3:3, 111. According to this account of the process of speech, the voice, originating deeper in the throat, is more interior than the locus of the shaping of the the letters, which is the mouth. This served R. Isaac as his model for the relationship between the more interior engraving by voice and the more exterior hewing by breath, in divine as well as human speech. See, too, Abraham Ibn Ezra, Ex. 3:2, for a similar linguistic model of creation.

<sup>225</sup> Compare Dunash Ibn Tamim *PSY*, ed. M. Grosberg (London, 1902), ch. 6, 48: **הכ"ב אותיות מורות על כ"ב נעים והנעים הם חומר לדבור והדבור יורה על ענינים אשר בנפש...שאלו הנעים הוא רוח נחתך בכלי הדבור** (the twenty-two letters indicate twenty-two sounds, sound is the material for speech, and speech indicates matters in the soul...these sound are breath articulated by the organs of speech). This notion of sound as material is similar to R. Isaac's description of voice as substance and vessel. Whether this or another translation of Ibn Tamim's Commentary was available to R. Isaac directly or indirectly, other than citations in Judah b. Barzilai's *PSY*, is not clear. R. Isaac's comments on

engraving and hewing: according to its subtlety is the subtlety of its hewing, and according to its coarseness is the coarseness of its carving. **And breath is one of them:**<sup>226</sup> it is *Tešuvah*, in which twenty-two letters are inscribed.<sup>227</sup> Not that the letters are something other than the breath, for from the breath itself they are hewn, and the letter is the thing itself;<sup>228</sup> letters, from which issue the

the relationship of breath, voice and speech do have the general ring of Dunash Ibn Tamīm's description of the process of speech, *PSY*, 19-20.

This designation of voice as a vessel falls in a middle position, between the concrete and the abstract use of the term כלי in medieval Hebrew. In Judah Halevi's *Kuzari*, trans. J. Ibn Tibbon, 5:12, "vessel" is used in a fully abstract sense, as the sustaining form of spiritual and psychological activities (279, line 18): וכליה הראשונים, הצורות הרוחניות המצמיירות; בכחה היצרי (Its primary instruments are the spiritual forms shaped within the brain from the living spirit by the power of the imagination).

<sup>226</sup> *SY* 1:10 (sec. 12).

<sup>227</sup> Breath, that is, breath from breath, the second breath, designated רוח מרוח, corresponds to *Tešuvah*, the *sefirah Binah* in which the letters are engraved. The identification of Breath as *Binah*, the third *sefirah*, and as the quarry and storehouse of the engraved letters, appears in *Sefer haḥ-Bahir*, sec. 143. See Azriel of Gerona, *PSY*, in *Kiṭvei Ramban*, vol. 2, 456, who explains that the first "breath" mentioned in *SY* 1:9 (sec. 10), corresponds to the *sefirah Hokhmah*, the second, or "breath from breath," is *Binah*. According to Nahmanides, however, the first "breath" is *Keter*, the second *Hokhmah*; see *PSY*, in *KS*, 6, (1930) 409.

<sup>228</sup> Saadiyah b. Joseph, *Sefer Yeḥirah*, 3:3, 111, Dunash Ibn Tamīm, *PSY*, 45, and Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 208, all explain how letters are shaped in the breath itself. Compare Azriel of Gerona, *PSY* 1:10, in *Kiṭvei Ramban*, vol. 2, 457: כח כולם בכח בינה, ולא תאמר שהם דבר; כל ש"ן של חלוק מן הבינה אלא הם בינה. ורוח אחת מהן. כשי"ן של

engravings.

Water<sup>229</sup> is *Hesed*.<sup>230</sup> Mud is lighter than clay: it is poured from vessel to vessel; for clay is thick.<sup>231</sup> Furrow: it compares water to a furrow consisting of wave-crest upon wave-crest. There is soil by itself, and there are stones, and there are veins of water that are from the viscous rocks,<sup>232</sup> for the earth has masculinity and femininity. There are veins that receive irrigation from here and from there *via* the cavities.<sup>233</sup> The letters are engraved and erected and overhung: there is that letter which is engraved as a kind of furrow; there is that which is erected as a kind of wall; and there is that letter which overhangs as a

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הכילין שהאיות בולטת מן העור ואינה אלא עור (for the power of all of them is in the power of *Binah*. One should not say that they are something distinct from *Binah*, rather they are *Binah*. And breath is one of them. Like the letter *Sin* of the tefillin, in which the letter protrudes from the leather, and it nothing but leather).

<sup>229</sup> *SY* 1:11 (sec. 13) 145.

<sup>230</sup> Water represents the *sefirot* which emanates after *Binah*.

<sup>231</sup> The list of materials in *SY* 1:11 (sec. 13) progresses from refined to coarse.

<sup>232</sup> *Hagigah*, 12a.

<sup>233</sup> *SY* 1:11 begins a discussion that appropriates images from nature to explain the generation of the *sefirot*. Along these lines, R. Isaac takes the opportunity to observe that the geological structure of the natural world reflects sefirotic structure. Stones correspond to the letters (line 20, above) and veins of water correspond to the paths, essences and relations between the *sefirot* (lines 20-24).

kind of ceiling.<sup>234</sup> Therefore, when David dug the pits, and the deep sought to inundate the world, Aḥitofel taught David the forty-two letter divine Name, and he wrote it on a clay shard and tossed it into the deep, so that it not inundate the world, such that the entire world dried up, and he had to say the fifteen "degrees" of the Psalms, corresponding to the fifteen inner degrees, and for every degree [the deep] ascended a degree, and the world was restored to its normal condition.<sup>235</sup> **Fire from water:**<sup>236</sup> *Paḥad* from *Ḥesed*: eight

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<sup>234</sup> R. Isaac interprets the furrow, wall and ceiling of *SY* 1:11 (sec. 13) as referring to the shapes of the letters, with horizontal strokes, furrows and ceilings, below and/or above, and vertical strokes erected left and/or right, a reading that is not at all obvious in context, but which he defends with the aggadah he cites in the following lines. Compare, e. g., Eleazar of Worms, *Sodei Razaya*, ed. S. Weiss (Jerusalem, 1992) 36, who reads the furrow, wall and ceiling as a reference to the mud and clay of *SY*.

<sup>235</sup> Jerus. Sanh. 10:2; Sukkah 53a,b; Makkot 11a. See, especially, Eleazar of Worms, *Sodei Razaya*, ed. S. Weiss, (Jerusalem, 1991) 36, who also cites this aggadah in connection with an explication of *SY* 1:11, and refers specifically to the forty-two letter divine Name, rather than the Tetragrammaton implied in the talmudic version. R. Eleazar of Worms explains that the forty-two letter Name seals the deep and keeps the waters in their place: **הרי עשה את הארץ וברא את הצרור על התהום וחקק עליו שם המפורש בארבעים ושתים אותיות וקבע** **התהום וחקק עליו שם המפורש בארבעים ושתים אותיות וקבע** **התהום וחקק עליו שם המפורש בארבעים ושתים אותיות וקבע** (He made the earth and created the stone that is on the deep and engraved upon it the explicit divine Name of forty-two letters and affixed them upon the face of the deep in order to contain its waters). Eleazar of Worms also alludes to a passage from *Seder Rabbah de-Beresit*, 8, in *Batei Midraṣot*, ed. A. J. Wertheimer, vol. 1, 24, which discusses the sealing power of the forty-three (!) letter divine Name. See note 34, *ibid*.

R. Isaac offers a variation on this theme: the forty-two letter divine Name, which comprises most of the letters of the alphabet, demonstrates the principle



times eight is sixty four, which constitutes the entire frame,<sup>237</sup> and this is *h-s-d*.<sup>238</sup> His habitation is the entire frame.<sup>239</sup> Elevation,<sup>240</sup> like sanctified and elevated, more elevated.<sup>241</sup> Elevation is sealed<sup>242</sup> in *yod*,<sup>243</sup> for this is

that the structural forms of the letters enable them to influence the structure of the world: specifically, that the letters, shaped as furrows, walls and ceilings, are the basis of the power of this extended divine Name to contain the deep.

The pits referred to served as drainage conduits for the altar of the Temple. The "degrees" refer to Pss. 120-34, which begin with the phrase "A Song of Degrees."

<sup>236</sup> *SY* 1:12 (sec. 14) 145.

<sup>237</sup> See *supra*, ch. 8.3.

<sup>238</sup> The reference is to the gematria value of the Hebrew letters of the *sefirah Hesed*, as reflecting the numerical value eight, 'ח and eight squared, ח"ט, which constitutes the numerical value of that subdivision of the *sefirot* termed בנין, the frame or structure, usually considered to comprise the seven lower *sefirot*, but in this case apparently including *Binah* as the eighth component. The notion of squaring the sum apparently refers to combining each of the eight *sefirot* with itself and all others, to express the concept of the unity of the dimensions. The idea is that all of the lower *sefirot* are contained in the *sefirah Hesed*, and like "fire from water," they unfold from *Hesed*.

<sup>239</sup> The term מעון, as an underlying place, corresponds to the בנין.

<sup>240</sup> *SY* 1:13 (sec. 15) 146.

<sup>241</sup> Isaac of Acre, *PSY*, 396, comments on *SY* 1:13 (sec. 15): והנה רום עתה בחולם כי ממנו יצא הכל כי רום (sec. 15): (Elevation here is [vocalized] with a *holam*, for from it comes the totality, for elevation is *Keter*, but [vocalized] with a *suruk* it refers to *Tiferet*). This seems to be a reading of R. Isaac's phrase יותר מרום, that "elevation," רום, *Keter*, is "more," that is, higher, than "elevated," רום, *Tiferet*.

in *Hokhmah*,<sup>244</sup> and sealed in it are three matrices,<sup>245</sup> which are *Binah*, *Hesed*, *Paḥad*. And He set them in His great Name...and sealed in them six extremities, and faced above: He made faces above.<sup>246</sup> For a person finds them on all sides, for above there is nothing but faces,<sup>247</sup> for *Hokhmah*

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This passage might be explained in a slightly different way, though with the same result. The phrase קדוש ורם, or קדוש ורם, in some MSS, may indicate that רם here means *Keter*, that is, the term "sanctified" is another epithet for *Keter*, which is יותר מרם, that is, more elevated, more than any other *sefirah*, and especially more than *Tiferet*. See Azriel of Gerona, *Peruṣ ha-Aggadot*, 49a and 97, note 1; *idem*, *PSY* 1:9, 456: שהקדוש הוא הכח של רום המודמן לקבל מאין סוף (The holy is the power of elevation, prepared to receive from *Ein Sof*). Compare *Sefer ha-Bahir*, 70/30. R. Azriel also explains that *Sefer Yeḡirah*'s list characterizing the *sefirot* as breath, breath from breath, water and air, began from the second *sefirah*, *Hokhmah*, and only in the present *mishnah*, 1:13, is the first *sefirah*, *Keter*, mentioned. (*PSY*, 1:9, 456). Since the term רם is also used in conjunction with *Tiferet*, which would have been the next *sefirah* in order of descent, R. Isaac is making clear that here the term refers to *Keter*.

<sup>242</sup> R. Isaac reads *SY* 1:13 (sec. 15) not חתם רום as a list of verbs, but as "He sealed elevation."

<sup>243</sup> R. Isaac has *SY* 1:13 versions ק.ס., ed. I Gruenwald, 146.

<sup>244</sup> The lower *sefirah Hokhmah*, seals, sets an ontological limit, to the upper *sefirah Keter*. The letter *yod* corresponds to *Hokhmah*: see line 41 above.

<sup>245</sup> *SY* 1:13 (sec. 15). R. Isaac here follows MS Leiden, Warn. 24 (5) Cod. Or. 4762, in ed. I. Gruenwald, 146.

<sup>246</sup> R. Isaac translates ופנה, He turned, according to its literal root, to face.

<sup>247</sup> The sourcetext here is Saadiah b. Joseph, *PSY*, 72, regarding the angels: לפי שהם עשויים פנים לכל רוחות (for they consist of faces in all directions). This

surrounds from all sides.<sup>248</sup> But there are powers above<sup>249</sup> more interior than the other receivers.<sup>250</sup> But<sup>251</sup> the "back" is according to the paucity of reception one receives.<sup>252</sup> And that thing is a face for the receiver that is close,<sup>253</sup>

image was extended by Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 163, to the angelic lightning: **והם בפנים מכל עבריהם וצדיהם** (they consist of faces in all directions and on all sides). R. Isaac develops the notion to become a quality of the upper world, and the world of the *sefirot*, in general.

<sup>248</sup> See lines 41-46. "Faces" is interpreted as the open flow of emanation from its source, *Hokhmah*, as viewed by its receivers, i. e., all the *sefirot* and beings below it.

<sup>249</sup> MS Angelica: **למעין**.

<sup>250</sup> While all is faces above, there is nonetheless a graded hierarchy of powers.

<sup>251</sup> The word **אבל** here and in the previous sentence may be intended to convey the sense "not only this, but..." in a Judeo-Arabic fashion. See M. Gottstein, *Tahbirah*, 59 (16:145a).

<sup>252</sup> In full reception, the source is characterized by "face," in diminished reception, by "back." R. Isaac places the distinction from Ex. 33:23 in an emanation context. While everything above is "faces," since these powers are arranged in graded hierarchy, it gives rise to degrees of receptivity, and the possibility of poor reception, or "back."

<sup>253</sup> The distinction between proximity to, and distance from, an emanative source appears in Isaac Israeli, *The Book of Substances*, in *Isaac Israeli*, ed. and trans. A. Altmann and S. M. Stern, (Oxford, 1958), 88, 102; A. Ibn Ḥasdai, *Ben ha-Melekh ve-han-Nazir*, ed. A. M. Habermann (Tel Aviv, 1950) 199: **כי לפי קרוב כל עצם מהשרש ולפי רחקו ממנו יהיה זכותו ועביו. מפני שכל מה שיהיה מהעצמים יותר קרוב מהשרש והמקור והיכלת והרצון יהיה יותר בהיר וזך ויותר אמתי ברוח הקודש מאשר יהיה הרחק ממנו מן המקום ההוא. וכל מה שיוסיף מרחק הוא יותר חלוש וחשוך ויותר רחוק מרוח השכל וקרוב של הגשמות הגמור... ועל זה הדרך יש לנו לדון עצם השכלים הנפרדים. כי יש שם מלאכים יוסיפו זכות ובהירות וזהר ונקיון ישכל שלם**

to receive from its flow.<sup>254</sup> North and South:<sup>255</sup> North comes to South.<sup>256</sup>

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על מלאכים אחרים ומעלה על מעלתם יותר מהאש על הארץ עד אשר יכלה אל האור השלם אשר אין אור עליו יתעלה ויתרמם (According to the nearness of a substance to, or distance from, the root, is its purity or coarseness. For the nearer a substance is to the root and source and power and will, the greater its radiance, its purity and its truth in Holy Spirit than that which is far from that place. The more the distance is increased, the weaker and darker it is, and the further it is from the spirit of intellect and the closer to complete corporeality...In this manner we can consider the substance of the separate intellects. There are angels which have more purity and radiance and splendor and cleanliness and completeness of intellect than other angels, which are exalted over their exaltation more than fire over the earth, until they are absorbed in the perfect light than which there is no greater, may He be praised).

R. Isaac adapts this scheme to explain the distinction between divine or angelic "face" and "back." "Face" refers to that which is close to its emanative source, "back" to that which is far. Maimonides interprets Ex. 33:23 in a similar way, *Noreh Nevukhim*, 1:37: פנים אל פנים, כלומר מציאות במציאות ("face to face," which is to say, existence to existence, without an intermediary)...ותחזה ית. בתראי, כלומר הנמצאות, אשר באלו אני נוסה מהם ומשליכם ("And you shall see My back, which is to say the beings from which I have turned away, which, in a manner of speaking, I have cast aside, due to their remoteness from His existence, may He be exalted).

<sup>254</sup> Compare line 75, above. The term *משך*, emanative flow, is standard philosophic, especially poetic philosophic usage. See Solomon Ibn Gabirol, *Keter Malkhut*, *Sirei hak-Kodes*, D. Yarden, vol. 1, 43 lines 4-5: למשך משך היש מן האין (to draw forth the flow of existence from nothingness); Judah HaLevi, "E-lohim יל mi amshilekhah", משך נבואה משך ליודעיו (the flow of prophecy He drew forth for those who know Him). Judah Alharizi, *Nusrei Philosophim*, 1:10: ומשך השכל הרבני העליוני (the flow of the divine, supernal intellect).

<sup>255</sup> *SY* 1:14 (sec. 16).

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256 The order of directions in this mishnah, which summarizes the order laid out in the previous five sections, is also the order of hierarchic descent of divine efflux. This is also possibly an allusion to Cant. 4:16: **עוֹרֵי צִפּוֹן וּבֹאֵי תִימָן**.

## Chapter 2

**Twenty-two letters:**<sup>1</sup> it was not necessary to mention the ten *sefirot*, for it has already mentioned them; therefore it only came to mention the twenty-two letters. **Simple:** each one extends by itself and does not invert.<sup>2</sup> Even though we find that the counterpart of odor is odorlessness, and the counterpart of talk is muteness, and so with all the simple [letters],<sup>3</sup> even so, they do not resemble the geminates. For muteness and odorlessness and those similar to them are only absence and lack, like darkness, which is the absence of light,<sup>4</sup> but the geminates,

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<sup>1</sup> *SY* 2:3 (sec. 17) 147.

<sup>2</sup> R. Isaac plays on the double meaning of *פשוט* as "simple" and "extended," to place the letters in the context of the process of emanation. See Judah Alḥarizi's definition of *התפשט* in his introduction to his translation of Maimonides' *Noreh Nevukhim*. (Vilna, 1912) 3: *כשיפוז כח הדבר ויהיה מתרחב והולך* (when the power of a thing disperses and continues to expand). Inversion is a quality of the geminate letters. See below, lines 313-19.

<sup>3</sup> The examples of contrary qualities come from the categories of biological functions listed in *SY* 5:1 (sec. 45) 162: *שתיים עשרה משומות...יסודן ראייה שמיעה* (when the power of a thing disperses and continues to expand). (Twelve simple letters...their foundation is sight, hearing, smell, speech, eating, sexuality, walking, anger and laughter, though and sleep).

<sup>4</sup> Isaac Israeli, *The Book of Substances*, in *Isaac Israeli*, ed. and trans. A. Altman and S. M. Stern, (Oxford 1958) 87: "Firstly, because ignorance has no form or existence; it cannot be a thing's form and cannot be predicated of a thing, because it is

the weak and the emphatic, each one has a cause unto itself.<sup>5</sup>

And the tongue is a rule:<sup>6</sup> *Tiferet* is called "rule," as it is written: "For it is a rule for Israel (Ps. 81:5)."<sup>7</sup> But aleph is a rule,<sup>8</sup> signifies the elevating of the rule and the exalting of its crown,<sup>9</sup> but it does not mention it

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privation, and privation has no existence or form; for instance blindness, which has no form or existence, because it is the privation of sight. Similarly, darkness has no form or existence, because it is the privation of light."

See, too, Abraham Bar Hiyya, *Negillat ha-Megaleh*, ed. A. Poznanski (Berlin, 1924) 5: וכן החשך הוא אפיסת האור (So, too, darkness is the absence of light).

<sup>5</sup> That is, each pair of geminates represents active, opposing qualities, rather than a quality and its absence. Compare lines 313-19 below.

<sup>6</sup> See *SY* 2:3 (sec. 17) 147 note 1. Compare *SY* 2:1 (sec. 23) 151. *Hok* denotes statute, rule, line, boundary and portion, all of which share the sense of something straight, limiting and determined. Therefore the term "rule," in the sense of *regula*, with its legal as well as geometrical connotation, was chosen as the translation for all occurrences in this passage.

<sup>7</sup> "Israel" is an epithet for *Tiferet*. See Tishbi's note, Azriel of Gerona, *Perus ha-Aggadot*, fol. 2b, 68 note 2, to the effect that "Israel" was used most frequently by the Gerona kabbalists as an epithet for *Tiferet*, though on occasion it seems to have stood for *Keter* instead, particularly in the form ישראל סבא (Grandfather Israel). See *Sefer ha-Bahir*, 91/40.

<sup>8</sup> *SY* 3:2 (sec. 26) 152.

<sup>9</sup> This is an allusion to *Keter*. See line 273 below. R. Isaac compares *Tiferet* and *Keter*, both described as "rule," and both *sefirot* serving as mediators balancing between two extremes.

with reference to that elevation until chapter three,<sup>10</sup> where it mentions the innerness of merit and demerit.<sup>11</sup> Since it mentioned here the twenty-two letters, it mentioned the three matrices, even though it was not necessary.<sup>12</sup>

He engraved them<sup>13</sup> in *Tesuvah*.<sup>14</sup> He made amorphous

<sup>10</sup> This refers to chapter three as it appears in certain of the short recensions listed by I. Gruenwald, *SY*, 3:2 (sec. 26) 152: כַּעֲצָר.

<sup>11</sup> "Merit" and "demerit" refer to *Ḥesed* and *Gevurah*: see Azriel of Gerona, *PSY*, 2:1, 458.

R. Isaac, here and below, line 273, is comparing *SY* sec. 23: שְׁלוֹשׁ אֲמוֹת... וְלִשְׁוֹן חֹק מְכַרֵּי־בִינָה יִיָּם, with *SY* sec. 26: שְׁלוֹשׁ אֲמוֹת... אֱלֹהֵי חֹק מְכַרֵּי־בִינָה יִיָּם. He explains the latter as the inner, ideal dynamic of the former condition, the ascent of *Tiferet* towards *Keter*.

On the meaning of elevation, see line 245-46, below, and note 11.

<sup>12</sup> The point is that chapter two of *SY* is devoted to discussing principles that apply to the twenty-two letters in general. A discussion of the three matrices in particular is out of place, and belongs in chapter three. R. Isaac here justifies what is essentially an editing problem in the recension he was using by deeming it a case of association. See *SY*, I. Gruenwald, 147, n. 1.

<sup>13</sup> *SY* 2:2 (sec. 19).

<sup>14</sup> Engraving is the degree of carving of form that occurs at the level of the *sefirah Binah*. The forms that are engraved are the letters. Compare *Sefer ha-Bahir*, 143/49: מַחֲצַב־הַתּוֹרָה, אוֹצֵר־הַחֲכָמָה, מַחֲצַב־רוּחַ אֱלֹהִים, מִלְמַד שְׁחֲצֵב־הַקֶּב"ה כָּל אוֹתֵי־הַתּוֹרָה וְחֻקֵּי בְרֹחַ. (Third, the quarry of the Torah, the storehouse of wisdom (*Hokhmah*), its quarry is the Holy Spirit, which teaches that the Holy One, blessed be He, hewed all the letters of the Torah and engraved them in spirit and made His forms). On the cognomen *Tesuvah* for *Binah*, see *supra*, 8.4.



matter.<sup>15</sup> But he did not wish to speak of<sup>16</sup> inscription, even though we find "inscribed in a true writ (Dan. 10:21)," because inscription is not yet a form until it is first in writing.<sup>17</sup> And hewed them from the letters that were the

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<sup>15</sup> The word גולם for pure, amorphous or primal matter appears in Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 14: ועוד שיש ביצורים דבר שהוא גולם וגוף ויש בו כח להעמיד עצמו והוא הנקרא בלשון ערב גוהר (There is also among creatures something that is amorphous matter and body, that has the power to be self-subsistent, and which is called "substance" (ג'והר) in Arabic). See, also, Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 211. It was the term of choice for Maimonides to represent primal matter throughout *Hilkhot Yesodei hat-Torah*: 2:3; 3:10; 4:6,7. R. Azriel continues use of this term for primal matter (*PSY*, 151, lines 15, 16).

Among the kabbalists, *Binah* is associated with the philosophical category of primal matter, *Hokhmah* with primal form. See Azriel of Gerona, *Perus ha-'Aggadot*, 151, note 7, where Tishbi observes that for the Gerona Circle, based on the teachings of R. Isaac, *tohu* corresponds to *Hokhmah*, *bohu* corresponds to *Binah*. See below, lines 218-20. See Nahmanides, *Torah Commentary*, Gen. 1:1, Azriel of Gerona, *PSY* 1:11, 457; 2:6, 459, and especially R. Jacob ben Sheshet, *Mesiv Devarim Nekho'im*, ch. 9 (32a-33b, 120; 37b-38a, 129), who, as Tishbi notes, consciously cites Abraham bar Hiyya, *Hegyon han-Nefesh*, ed. G. Wigoder, (Jerusalem, 1971) 42, and n. 20, for the identification of *tohu* with primal matter and *bohu* with primal form.

In R. Isaac's scheme, according to the passage under discussion, *Tešuvah* or *Binah* is not itself identical with primal matter. It is the act of engraving letters within *Tešuvah* that creates primal matter *per se*.

<sup>16</sup> Judeo-Arabic philosophic usage of the preposition מן. See M. Gottstein, *Tahbirah*, 96, 6.a,b.

<sup>17</sup> Inscription is the carving activity appropriate to the *Sefirah Hokhmah*. Even though the verse Dan. 10:21 seems to imply that the forms of the letters apply to *Hokhmah*, that is, they are inscribed, nonetheless they remain hidden until they are engraved in *Binah*.

R. Isaac is addressing the exegetical issue that *SY* begins its account of the process of creation *via*

prior foundation,<sup>18</sup> engraved in *Teshuvah*, after the making of the boundaries<sup>19</sup> by the engraving that followed the inscribing. He weighed them, this against that, in order to couple them to make fruits, for it is impossible that there emanate one thing from another without a plumbline.<sup>20</sup> And exchanged them: exchange is included in transformation,<sup>21</sup> as

carving with the action of engraving, rather than the prior and more subtle action of inscribing. See *supra*, ch. 6.

<sup>18</sup> See above, line 20; *SY* 1:2 (sec. 2).

<sup>19</sup> See Azriel of Gerona, *Perush ha-ʿAggadot*, 89, lines 7-17, who explains that "boundary" is the first step and minimum degree of differentiation in the creation of form.

<sup>20</sup> Compare Abraham Bar Ḥiyya, *Hegyon han-Nefesh*, ch. 1, 42-43, where the relationship between amorphous matter and form is compared to the plumbline-and-chaos, plumb bob-and-substance image of Is. 34:11.

Perhaps this passage should read "for it is impossible that there emanate one thing from another without weights (משקלות)." This would mean that the descending process of creation by emanation can only occur through a progressive weighing-down and materialization. That is, in a very literal sense, emanation, as progressive corporealization, involves an increase in the "weight" of the emanating entity with respect to its source. No MSS have this reading, however.

<sup>21</sup> The term "transformation (חלוף)", does not appear in *SY* 2:2 (sec. 19). The digression which follows, comparing the term תמורה, exchange, with חלוף, transformation, apparently derives partly from their association in the biblical verse Lev. 27:10 and its explication in *Temurah* 9a, where these two terms are compared and contrasted.

While the sensibility to distinguish these two terms may be supported by the talmudic passage, R. Isaac does not adopt their actual talmudic definitions. Rather, in the ensuing passage, to line 180, the technical differences he defines among various Hebrew terms for "change" reflect, in part, conceptual

it is written: "the rain has transformed and gone (Cant.

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distinctions used by Abraham Bar Ḥiyya. See *Negillat ham-Megalleh*, 5-6, especially 5, lines 7-12 and following: ומן הדרך הזה תמצא כל החלופים העוברים על גופי היצירות נחלקים לשלשה חלקים. יש מהם ענינים שיש להם חששא וצורה בנמצאות. ויש מהם ענינים שהם אבידת המקרה ואטיפת הצורה ואין להם צורה ולא חששא. ויש מהם דבר שאין לו צורה ואין בו אטיפת צורה אבל תלוי הוא בנמצאות ובמקריהן והוא נמשך אליהן ונמצא בדעת ובלב על גררא עמהם ואין אחד מחוששי (In this manner you find that all the changes that can affect corporeal creatures are divided into three categories. Some of them have aspects that have perceptible substance and form among existents. Some of them involve the loss of accidents and absenting of form, and have neither form nor perceptible substance. And some of them involve a thing that has no form nor the absence of form, but depends rather upon existents and their accidents, and is associated with them in the mind and the heart, while none of the perceptible aspect of corporeality reach or prevail over it). See, too, *Hegyon han-Nefes*, 46: הצורה השלישית... מתגלגלת ומתחלפת מצורה אל צורה על שני דרכים. מהן מפשיטין את הצורה ולובשים צורה אחרת ואינם יכולים להרחיב הצורה ולא להגדילה. ומהן מרחיבין את הצורה (The third kind of form... transmutes and transforms from form to form in two ways. Some divest a form and put on another form, and are unable to expand or enlarge their form. Others expand their form and enlarge it and do not divest it). See the entire discussion, in which he examines the subject of categories of change at great length, 38-50. In the course of his discussions, Bar Ḥiyya uses the terms חלוף, תמורה, but more or less interchangeably, not in the consist manner in which R. Isaac tries to define them. Compare, too, Joseph Ibn Zaddik, *Sefer 'Olam hak-Ratan*, ed. S. Horovitz (Breslau, 1903) 9-15 for a similar discussion.

While R. Isaac's own discussion does not follow Bar Ḥiyya's or Ibn Zaddik's in all respects, there is, nonetheless, a general commonality in their empirical interest in distinguishing various categories of the phenomenon of change. More specifically, R. Isaac puts to use Bar Ḥiyya's conceptual distinction between substantive change *versus* a change in accidental qualities, a distinction based, in turn, on straightforward Aristotelian doctrine, particularly Aristotle's differentiation between between changes of substance and changes of qualities, in *On Generation and Corruption*, 1.4, 319b-320a. Even the illustrative examples of change used by Ibn Zaddik, such as the rain

2:11)." For with respect to the rain, which is sent forth from its cause and returns, as it is written, "unless it has done what I please (Is. 55:11)," "transformed" is written, for it returns to its amorphous matter,<sup>22</sup> and it is possible for it to perform its mission<sup>23</sup> another time by transformation: if a coarse rain is materialized, or a subtle rain.<sup>24</sup> But transformation is not included in exchange,<sup>25</sup> for transformation is a thing that changes from

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cycle, which R. Isaac uses as well, come originally from Aristotle.

In sum, R. Isaac explains the term "exchange" in *SY* on the basis of its appearance in the biblical verse, as expounded in the Talmud in a halakhic context, and placed in an Aristotelian conceptual framework supplied by Bar Ḥiyya, and possibly other philosophical sources such as Ibn Ḥaddik. From Jewish traditional sources he gets the terminological distinctions. From philosophic sources he gets the matching conceptual differences which flesh out his definitions of the terms.

<sup>22</sup> See above, note 15.

<sup>23</sup> The choice of the terms "sent forth," "returns" and "mission" in this sentence was also suggested by the verse Is. 55:11.

<sup>24</sup> The idea is that "transformation" involves a complete change in the subject. The rain that reappears after a period of formlessness may have an entirely different form than the original manifestation.

See Joseph Ibn Ḥaddik, *Sefer 'Olam hak-Katan*, ed. S. Horovitz (Breslau, 1903) 14, for a similar example of the change from form to formlessness and back to form, drawn from the example of the water and rain cycle. Whether R. Isaac was acquainted with this work is unclear. See the editor's introduction, xiii, n. 57, where Horovitz cited various suggestions as to the identity of the translator, including Naḥum ha-Ma'aravi, a later contemporary of R. Isaac's.

<sup>25</sup> Exchange is a more restrictive category within transformation. Compare Aristotelian logic, *Prior*

its root, as it is written, "like a garment You shall transform them, and they shall be transformed (Ps. 102:27)," "a transfer of clothes (Gen. 45:22)," "all transient ones (Prov. 31:8)," for they change from their root.<sup>26</sup> But change is the changing of a thing from dimension to dimension and from color to color<sup>27</sup> and from place to place.<sup>28</sup> Exchange is like a king who has arrived at the limit of his reign, and they remove him from his kingdom and another rules in his stead, better than him<sup>29</sup> or similar to him. For exchange goes from cause to cause and from generation to generation, like David, upon whom was bestowed the majesty of kingship, and that agency<sup>30</sup> operated until the completion of his

*Analytiks*, 25a lines 23-25. See, too, R. Judah b. Barzilai *PSY*, 181: "All voice is not speech, but all speech is voice; and all voice is from breath, but all breath is not from voice."

<sup>26</sup> To evoke R. Isaac's flexible use of the term מלך, synonyms based on the prefix *trans*- have been used. All *trans*- words in this passage translate forms of the word מלך. The idea is that מלך connotes essential change in a single, persisting subject, the people of Ps. 102:27, the genus "clothing" of Gen. 45:22, and the mortals of Prov. 31:8. By contrast, the term תמורה, "exchange," refers to a change of subjects. Transformation is the more essential form of change, and therefore the more inclusive category.

<sup>27</sup> Change of color is one of the examples of inessential change offered by Abraham Bar Hiyya, *Negillat ham-Negalleh*, 5.

<sup>28</sup> Change of place as a form of change is discussed at length by Abraham Bar Hiyya, *Hegyon han-Nefes*, 46-48.

<sup>29</sup> 1 Sam. 15:28.

<sup>30</sup> Samuel Ibn Tibbon in his translation of

allotted destiny arrived. After that began the kingdom of Solomon, upon whom was bestowed the majesty of kingship that was given to his father, until the completion of his allotted destiny, and this one was exchanged for that one. So, too, is the matter of the fluctuating,<sup>31</sup> extending<sup>32</sup> letters, and therefore it says "exchanged them," and not "transformed them."<sup>33</sup>

And He combined them: Thus far, it spoke of the upper world.<sup>34</sup> Now, it speaks of that place from which the separate entities are affected<sup>35</sup> by the extension<sup>36</sup> of the

Maimonides' *Moreh Nevukhim*, 2:12, uses the term מַעֲלֵל in the sense of agent or cause, in the generic sense. So, too, does Jacob b. Reuven, *Milhamot Haš-Šem*, 179 *et passim*.

<sup>31</sup> See line 214, below.

<sup>32</sup> See line 158 above.

<sup>33</sup> The letters themselves do not change or transform, rather, one letter replaces another to create different effects. Therefore *SP*'s use of the term "exchange" is appropriate and precise.

<sup>34</sup> See *supra*, ch. 5.3, regarding the sources for R. Isaac's concept of the upper world in his *Commentary on Sefer Yeẓirah*, as the world of sefirotic unity, in contrast to the world of the separate entities; and as compared with his tripartite system of worlds in his gloss on the first chapter of Genesis, in MS JTS 1887, fol. 29a-b.

<sup>35</sup> The term מַעֲלֵל was used in this sense by Ibn Tibbon in his translation of Judah Halevi's *Kuzari*, 5:10, 20; and by Judah Alḥarizi, in Maimonides' *Moreh Nevukhim*, 1:51.

<sup>36</sup> See Baḥya Ibn Paḥudah, *Ḥovot haḥ-Levavot*, 8:4: וּפְשִׁיטוֹת הַכְדוּר (the extension of the sphere). See J. Klatzkin, *Thesaurus Philosophicus*, 221, entry 2. Compare Judah Alḥarizi's definition of הַתַּפְשִׁיטוֹת as "when

letters. **Combined them:** He coupled them<sup>37</sup> many times. It varied the terminology, saying **weighed them** and **combined them**, for both are an aspect of coupling, according to their innerness, as in the case of inscription, which is more interior than engraving, and engraving which is more interior than hewing. So, too, weighing is more interior than exchange, and exchange than combination. As in the case of flames, as long as they are separate, there is no ability to accomplish an act, until they are all joined with the coal. So too with a tree: each single branch has no strength, each one on its own, except by their joining this one with that one, and this one within that one. Combination itself, as mentioned, is applied to everything that has been mentioned,<sup>38</sup> for nothing is joined without combination. For he wanted to speak by degrees and in order of primacy. For first He made men and then women. First He made Jacob and Esau, with a woman on this side and a woman on that side, and He weighed who was fit to be the mate of this one and who the mate of that one,<sup>39</sup> and this is the weighing: after this shall be that, and after this shall be that. Thus, from

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the power of a thing spreads and continually extends," in his introductory lexicon to Maimonides' *Morhev Nevukhim*.

<sup>37</sup> Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 215, speaks of the procedure of weighing, combining and exchanging of letters as a "coupling (אוייך)."

<sup>38</sup> The examples given above, the flame needing to be joined to the coal for effectiveness, the parts of a tree needing to be joined together for strength, are

the first were created all the souls that would exist in the future,<sup>40</sup> and all the forms that would receive spirit in the future.<sup>41</sup>

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all illustrations of the principle of combination.

<sup>39</sup> *Bava Batra*, 123a. *Sota*, 2a. *Midrash Gen. R.*, 68.

<sup>40</sup> R. Isaac is commenting on the passage from *SY* 2:2, 4 (sec. 19), which reads **וַיִּצְרֵם נֶפֶשׁ כָּל הַיְצוֹר וְכָל הַנְּתִיד לַצּוֹר** (He formed in them the souls of all creatures and the souls of all that would be formed in the future). Thus he comments on both "souls" and "forms," reflecting the terms of the passage. He accentuates the Neoplatonic quality that is already apparent in the passage. Also underlying his language and formulation seems to be Rashi's gloss to *Avodah Zarah* 5a: "The descendant of David shall not come until all the souls of the body have been consumed." Rashi comments: **אֲדָמָה יֵשׁ וְשָׂמָה גִּוּף וּמִבְרָאשִׁית נִוְצְרוּ כָּל הַנְּשָׁמוֹת** (There is a storehouse, and its name is "body," and from the beginning were created all the souls that are to be born in the future, and they were placed there). Compare *Niddah* 13b. See Judah b. Barzilai's summary of commentaries on these talmudic dicta and related midrashic sources, *PSY*, 208. Compare Rashi, *Gen.* 1:14, based on *Gen. R.* 1:19, that all creatures were created on the first day, and put in place on their appropriate succeeding days.

R. Isaac's point is that *SY* depicts the divine activity of "combination" as part of the preparatory process of creation, operating with the souls and forms before they become fully manifest in creatures, a position supported by traditional and philosophic theories of cosmogony. See, e. g., Abraham Bar Ḥiyya, *Negillat ham-Megalleh*, 8-10; 17-19, and see following note.

<sup>41</sup> This is a statement of the principle of creation as a process proceeding from potential to actual couched in philosophic terms picked up from *SY* 2:2,4 (sec. 19), and supported by mainstream Neoplatonic doctrine. Abraham Bar Ḥiyya, *Negillat ham-Megalleh*, 17-19 says specifically that it is the form of a thing that has prior existence *in potentia*, to be actualized at a later time; for example (17): **כָּל דָּבָר וְדָבָר הַנִּמְצָא בְּכָל יוֹר וְיוֹר שְׂצוּרָתוֹ וְדַמּוּתוֹ הִיְתָה נִבְרָאָה בְּתַחֲלָה** (regarding) **וְשׁוֹרֵשׁ הַמִּין הַהוּא וְעִיקְרוֹ נִהְיָה נִמְצָאָה מִלְּפָנִים**



And He formed in them.<sup>42</sup> From the language of figure and form. In them, in the letters themselves He made a form, in order to form another form from it below.<sup>43</sup> So, too, each and every thing is cause from cause, until it arrives at the separate entities, which are below the ten *sefirot*, and the separate entities suck from them like fruits of the tree until the end of the completion of their ripening. With the completion of their ripening, they fall from the place of their sucking and in their place others are regenerated in their stead.<sup>44</sup> Sometimes those which fall, fall in a place such that they make great trees that issue forth their

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each and every thing that exists in every generation, its form and image were created at first, the root of the species and its essence existed from before). See, too, *Hegyon han-Nefesh*, ch. 1, 40-43. Bar Ḥiyya notes that this theory of cosmogony is both the prevailing gentile philosophic view, and a view consonant with, even based upon, Torah tradition (*Ibid.* 41, and note 19, where G. Wigoder notes the Neoplatonic provenance of this theory).

R. Isaac's formulation, picking up on the precise word-choice of the passage from *SY* and its double structure ("He formed the *souls* of creatures, and all that would be *formed* in the future") has the effect of highlighting the parallelism and agreement between a traditional Jewish conception of the pre-existence of souls, based on midrashic sources, cited by Rashi, and the mainstream Platonic, Neoplatonic and Aristotelian doctrine of the pre-existence of abstract forms.

<sup>42</sup> *SY* 2:2,4 (sec. 19).

<sup>43</sup> While the preposition *בם* in *SY* itself should probably be translated "with them," "with" the letters, R. Isaac reads it in terms of his overall Neoplatonic conception of an imbedded hierarchy of ontological levels, one level nested *within* another, forms within letters within *sefirot*. See *supra*, ch. 5.

<sup>44</sup> For an analysis of this passage, see *supra*, ch.

fruit, and so too with their fruit and the fruit of their fruit forever: each one according to the level of the place of its sucking, which was its cause, by virtue of its importance and the importance of its fruit.<sup>45</sup> **That are to be formed in the future:** these are the spirits, which are subtle essences bound in one place.<sup>46</sup> All of them were made

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### 5.1.

R. Isaac uses the image of fruit to represent the "separate entities": the falling of the fruit from the tree expresses the notion of separation from the source, as well as from each other.

<sup>45</sup> The notion that beings can be graded in their perfection according to the level or position of their attachment to the emanated hierarchy can be found in Isaac Israeli's "Book of Substances," *Isaac Israeli*, 93-95; and in Abraham Ibn Ḥasdai, *Ben ha-Melekh we-han-Nazir*, 200: מפני שכל מה שיהיה מהעצמים יותר קרוב מהשרש והמקור והיכלת והרצון יהיה יותר בהיר וזך ויותר אמת מרוח הקדש מאשר יהיה הרחוק ממנו מן המקום ההוא. וכל מה שיוסיף מרחק הוא יותר חלוש וחשוך ויותר רחוק מרוח השכל וקרוב אל הגשמות הגמור...ועל זה הדרך יש לנו לדון עצם (Because the closer an essence is to the root, source, power and will, the brighter and purer and more true it is in Holy Spirit than that which is further from that place. The more something increases its distance, the weaker and more benighted it is, the further it is from the spirit of intellect and the closer it is to complete corporeality...In this manner we should compare the essence of the separate intellects).

<sup>46</sup> This is an allusion to 1 Sam. 25:29, based on the terms of *SY* 2:2 (sec. 19), וצר...היצור...לצור, defined not only as "to form" but "to tie, bind," צרר. The verse associates binding with the condition of the soul, and R. Isaac plays on this meaning. Behind this interpretation may lie the passage from the midrash Eccles. R. 8:11: א"ר חנינא כתיב [זכריה י"ב] ויוצר רוח אדם בקרבו, צר רוחו של אדם בגופו, שאילולא כן כיון שהיתה הצרה באה עליו היה נומלה ומשליכה מקרבו (R. Hanina says "it is written 'He forms the spirit of man within him,' [meaning] He tied the spirit of man to his body, for were it not so, when suffering comes upon him, he would take it and cast it from within him). R. Isaac's use of

from the beginning of creation,<sup>47</sup> though the life of the forms of the souls<sup>48</sup> were formed from an inner power, from something that the heart is not able to ponder.<sup>49</sup> So, too, the perceptible forms are from the power of the awesome causes, that can be apprehended through perception,<sup>50</sup> which are the vessels of the unique inner souls.<sup>51</sup>

the term רוחות, spirits, rather than souls, matches the midrashic text. If so, the "one place" to which R. Isaac says these spirits are bound would be the body, in the sense of individual bodies. On the other hand, this "one place" in which the spirits are bound, in the sense of gathered, may be that "body" to which Rashi refers, as the metaphysical storehouse of souls, *'Avodah Zarah*, 5a.

<sup>47</sup> See notes 40, 41 above.

<sup>48</sup> The identification of soul and spirit with form is an Aristotelian doctrine found in Maimonides, *Yesodei ha-Torah*, 4:8, 9; *Teshuvah*, 8:3; *Moreh Nevukhim* 1:41. Compare Aristotle, *De Anima*, 2:1-3 (412a-415a).

<sup>49</sup> This reference to the innermost origin of the soul may allude to Gen. R. 14:11: חמשה שמות נקראו לה. נפש. רוח. נשמה. יחידה. חיה. ([The soul] is called by five names...). The level of "unique" may be what R. Isaac refers to in line 198 as "bound in one place," and in line 201 as "unique." The "life" he speaks of in line 199 may also refer to this dictum. The innovative point is that the originary essence of human being itself is rooted in the most recondite dimensions of the divine. Compare Nahmanides, *Kitvei Ramban*, vol 1, 392: בראש מקדמי עולמים נמצאתי במכמניו החתומים / מאין 392: המציאני... / שלשלת חיי מיסוד המערכה.

<sup>50</sup> See line 71 and not, above. It is the forms that can be apprehended through intuitive perception, and which, as R. Isaac goes on to say, are the vessels of the souls.

<sup>51</sup> See Judah HaLevi's *Kuzari*, trans. J. Ibn Tibbon, 5:12, where mental forms are described as the vessels of the soul, and the term "vessel" is used in a fully abstract sense: (279, line 18): וכליה הראשונים, הצורות הרוחניות המצמיירות מאמצע המוח מהרוח הנפשי, בכח

**Engraved in voice:**<sup>52</sup> in the drawing out of the tone of the voice the letters are emanated and engraved, as it is written, "the voice of G-d engraves flames of fire (Ps. 29:7)," for the voice divides one letter into many letters through its drawing-out.<sup>53</sup> Voice is inner, for its nature is very subtle, and none apprehend it.<sup>54</sup> **Hewn in breath:** by the

היצרי ([The soul's] primary instruments are the spiritual forms shaped within the brain from the living spirit by the power of the imagination). See line 138, and note, above.

<sup>52</sup> *SY* 2:3 (sec. 17).

<sup>53</sup> See Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 208: וביציאת הקול מן הגרון הגיהור יוצא מפה ויחצב דמות אותיות כפוף ומשום (when the voice issues from the throat vapor issues from the mouth and hews the shapes of the letters, bent and straight). Further on (216-17), he cites an authority speaking of the variable vocalizations of voice that compose speech. These variations are formed by fluctuations in a single letter: תשען על האות ההיא תשען על האות ההיא (you rely on that fundamental letter and bring forth from it resultant [letters]); והקול אשר יסוד דברו אות אחת ואתה תפנה לכמה פנים (the voice, the foundation of whose speech is one letter which you bend in several directions).

Compare Dunash Ibn Tamim, *PSY*, 38-39: כי דברי האדם מוגשמים בכלי הריאה וגרון וחיך ולשון ושנים ובפה וכל אלה הכלים חותכים הרוח היוצאים מן הריאה (for human speech is made physically manifest by the instruments of the lungs, the throat, the palate, the tongue, the teeth and the mouth, and all these instruments cut the breath that issues from the lungs).

This is an example of the literalism, almost hyper-literalism, of kabbalistic exegesis, in which the poetic image of the verse cited is taken as a technically accurate description of the process of divine speech. In particular, the verse distinguishes between the agency of voice and the flames it fashions, and R. Isaac's interpretation highlights and utilizes this distinction, applying it to the relationship between voice and letters. This exegetical approach became characteristic of kabbalistic biblical commentary.

power of *Teshuvah* they are hewn, and they are within *Teshuvah*.<sup>55</sup> The letters have a body and a soul.<sup>56</sup> Fixed in

<sup>54</sup> For the concept of a subtle voice that is not perceived, compare Gen. R. 6:12: ג' דברים קולן הולך מסוף העולם ועד סופו והבריות ביניהם ואינם מרגישים. היום (The voices of three things travel from one end of the world to the other, yet the people in between do not perceive them: the day, the rain, and the soul when it leaves the body). Similarly, *Pirkei de-R. 'Eliezer*, ch 34. ו' קולן (The voices of six things travel from one end of the world to the other, and their voices are not heard).

R. Saadiah Gaon, in his Commentary on *SY*, 2:2, 53, compares voice and speech: ובשלשת אלה אמר הכתוב אין אומר ואין דברים בלי נשמע קולם, והנה הקול הוא מה שאינו מובן, והדברים הם המלים הבודדות, והאמר הוא חבור שתי מלים (regarding these three the verse says "there is no speech, no words, their voice is not heard" (Ps. 19:4), for behold, voice is that which is not understood, words are separate, speech is the composite of two or three words). Whether R. Isaac had R. Saadiah's comment in mind, or even available to him, is not clear. In any case, R. Isaac's conception of voice goes beyond R. Saadiah's notion of mere inarticulateness. For R. Isaac, it is not just physical sound, but the underlying agency or intention of expression. Compare Maimonides' exposition on the voices of the celestial spheres in praise of the Creator, based on his own exegesis of Ps. 19:4, in *Moreh Nevukhim*, 2:5, in which the non-verbal praise of the spheres is regarded as a higher level of intellectual activity than articulated speech.

Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 208, distinguishes between voice and speech, though not in the same manner as R. Isaac: ואין דומה הקול לדיבור כי הקול גרוע הוא ואין לך (voice is not like speech, for voice is inferior, and is not necessarily lingual, while speech is lingual). See, too, 216-17. Compare, too, *Theology of Aristotle*, 18.13-19 in *Plotini Opera*, vol. 2, ed. G. Lewis (Paris and Brussels, 1959) 39, regarding spiritual communication without words.

<sup>55</sup> See line 166, above, and notes.

<sup>56</sup> Compare Judah Halevi, *Kuzari* 4:3, trans. J. Ibn Tibbon, ed. A. Zifrinowitsch, 209 line 6, regarding the four vowel letters אהוי that: והמה כרוחות ושאר (they are like spirits, and the rest of

the sinews of the head.<sup>57</sup> In the breath are all the letters,<sup>58</sup> and the breath is fixed in the mouth. For there is a distinction between the movements of the tongue and the movements of the mouth,<sup>59</sup> for the vessel of the breath is

the letters are like bodies). Compare Abraham Ibn Ezra, *Yesod Mor'a*, ch. 1, (Jerusalem, 1970) 1: **כי התיבות כגויות והמטעים כנשמות** (for the words are like bodies and the cantillation signs like souls); Commentary to Ex. 20:1 in *Perusei hat-Torah*, ed. A. Weiser, 127: **כי המלות הם כגופות, והמטעים הם כנשמות**; *Sefer hab-Bahir* sec. 115/47 and note 2 (the "*Yerushalmi*" to which R. Shimon b. Zemah Duran refers, in *Magen Avot*, 74b, cited by Margoliot, may well be the *Zohar*, which was so called by R. Moses de Leon; see G. Scholem's article on the *Zohar*, *Encyclopedia Judaica*, vol 16, 1210).

<sup>57</sup> *SY*, 2:3 (sec. 17): **קבועות בפה בחמשה מקומות** (fixed in the mouth in five places). In the long recension, this section goes on to list the five places, along the length of the tongue. See "A Preliminary Critical Edition of *Sefer Yeẓirah*," 147, note 2.

See, too, Abraham Ibn Ezra, Torah Commentary, Ex. 3:15, ed. A. Weiser, vol. 2, 29: **ובטל לשון הקודש ראה כי חמש מקומות הם מוצאי האותיות** (The master of the Hebrew language observed that there are five places [in the head] which emit [the sounds of] the letters). He goes on to list the throat, the palate, the tongue, the teeth, the lips. Compare Dunash Ibn Tamim, *PSY*, 38-39: **כי דברי האדם מוגשמים בכלי הריאה וגרון וחיך ולשון ושנים** (for human speech is made physically manifest by the organs of the lungs, the throat, the palate, the tongue, the teeth and the mouth, and all these organs cut the breath that issues from the lungs) R. Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 208 lists the five places as 1) the lungs with the throat, 2) the lips, 3) the palate, 4) the tip of the tongue against the teeth, and 5) the middle of the tongue. Compare line 139.

<sup>58</sup> This is not just a description of a physical reality, but also a parallel kabbalistic statement: breath, signifying the *sefirah Binah*, contains all the letters. Compare *Sefer hab-Bahir*, sec. 143/49. This intended parallelism between physical and sefirotic structure is true, explicitly or implicitly, of all R. Isaac's descriptions.

the movement of the organs of speech that move with them, and they have a fixed place, from which place it is impossible to move.

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<sup>59</sup> R. Isaac accounts for the fact that *SY* specifies that the breath is fixed in the mouth, not the tongue, and possibly accounts as well for the distinction made between tongue and mouth, e. g., in a section such as *SY* 1:3 (sec. 3), i. e., between the covenant of the tongue and the covenant of the mouth. By rights, tongue and mouth should be one general locale, the locus of speech. R. Isaac explains the distinction in terms of their differing movements contributing to the process of speech.

The sphere:<sup>60</sup> something which revolves like a sphere,<sup>61</sup> like the sphere of the head. It is from among the separate entities,<sup>62</sup> and when it rotates it causes everything to rotate with its rotation.<sup>63</sup> Half of the permutations of the

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<sup>60</sup> *SY* 2:4 (sec. 18).

<sup>61</sup> Revolves like a sphere: MS Harvard Heb. 58/11: "revolves from one thing to another like a sphere."

<sup>62</sup> The precise nature of this sphere, as described in *SY*, was debated in the sources available to R. Isaac. How R. Isaac himself understood it is not quite clear from the scanty information his *Commentary* provides. On one hand, his comment that it "revolves like a sphere" implies it is called a sphere only in a figurative sense. This approach follows that of R. Saadiah Gaon, *PSY* 2:5, 84, who suggested that the sphere in which the letters are said to be engraved is so called because the letters combine back and forth in a kind of rotating motion. This interpretation is cited by Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 209, as an exegesis of that recension of *SY* which speaks only of the sphere itself, as a phenomenon associated with the letters alone and not in conjunction with other celestial entities, specifically the celestial Dragon (See I. Gruenwald, "A Preliminary Critical Edition of *Sefer Yeẓirah*," 148). According to Judah b. Barzilai, this approach does not posit the sphere as a distinct entity; the term is merely a description of the metaphysical permutations of the letters.

On the other hand, in calling it "from among the separate entities," R. Isaac grants this sphere real ontological status, and implies a relationship to the celestial spheres. Compare Dunash Ibn Tamim, *PSY*, 70. See Judah Halevi, *Kuzari*, 5:2; and Maimonides, *Yesodei ha-Torah*, 3:1; *Moreh Nevukhim*, 2:9, who speak of a highest sphere, beyond the stars, which moves all other spheres. See the note following.

<sup>63</sup> Judah Halevi, *Kuzari*, 5:2, after describing the action of divine Will on primal matter, states: ואחר כן חייב חפץ האלהי"ם וחכמתו סבוב הגלגל העליון, אשר יסוב פעם בכל עשרים וארבע שעות ויסבב עמו כל הגלגלים (After this the will and wisdom of God impelled the rotation of the highest sphere, which rotates once every twenty-four hours, and causes all the spheres to rotate with it). In Halevi's system, this sphere, clearly celestial, is



letters in the sphere is two hundred thirty one gates, above and below the sphere,<sup>64</sup> for there are four hundred sixty-two alphabetical [permutations],<sup>65</sup> the mnemonic being "you shall turn,"<sup>66</sup> and two of them are called a gate.<sup>67</sup> Forward

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the highest entity of the phenomenal world. Compare Maimonides, *Yesodei hat-Torah*, 3:1; *Moreh Nevukhim*, 1:72, 2:9.

<sup>64</sup> This follows MSS Harvard Heb. 58/11 and Cambridge 671. The Angelica MS appears confused here.

<sup>65</sup> The number of possible combinations of twenty-two letters in sets of two is represented by the binomial coefficient formula  $n!/[m!(n-m)!]$ , where the order of letters in a pair is not significant, and  $n!/(n-m)!$  where the order of letters in a pair is significant, with  $m=2$  and  $n=22$ . Or alternatively,  $[n*(n-1)...(n-m+1)]/m!$  and  $n*(n-1)...(n-m+1)$ , respectively. In this case, there are 462 possible combinations of 22 letters taken in pairs, where order is significant. There would be 231 possible combinations where order is not significant, i.e. where  $ab$  is considered identical to  $ba$ . R. Isaac does not explain the number 231 in *SY* in terms of insignificant order, however, since *SY* 2:4 (sec. 14) itself insists order is significant, as R. Isaac notes in the following sentence. Rather, 231 represents a halving of the number of possible combinations, situating them above and below the sphere, as implied by the phrase in *SY* 2:4 (sec. 18) וְזֶה סִימָן לְדַבֵּר: אִם לְטוֹבָה לְמַעַל מִכְּנֹג, וְאִם לְרָעָה לְמַטָּה מִכְּנֹג (and this is the sign of the matter: whether for good, above, from pleasure, or from evil, below, from plague). Compare Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 209-10, who explains the two halves as the one sphere rotating backwards and forwards, or as two spheres or wheels, a wheel within a wheel, echoing Ez. 1:16, making one complete, solid structure with outside and inside wheel, above and below.

<sup>66</sup> This follows the MS Harvard 58/11, the idea being that "it shall turn," with a *gematria* of four hundred sixty-two, relates to the function as well as the composition of the sphere. The reading in the Cambridge and Amsterdam MSS seems confused.

<sup>67</sup> The number 462 represents the possible combinations of 22 letters in sets of two. The set is

and backward: as a sign of the matter: forward is *'oneg*, backward is *neg'a*. And all speech:<sup>68</sup> if a creature does not speak it is nothing,<sup>69</sup> for the completion of speech is only

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called a "gate." See R. Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY* 209.

<sup>68</sup> *SY* 2:2,4 (sec. 19).

<sup>69</sup> R. Isaac is explaining the apposition of creature, *יצור*, and speech, *דיבור*, in *SY* 2:4 (sec. 19): *נמצא כל היצור וכל הדיבור יוצא בשם אחד* (it turns out that all creatures and all speech issue through one name). The general provenance of his position is the standard Aristotelian doctrine cited by most Jewish philosophers from Onkelos on, that speech is the distinctive essence of human nature. See Targum Onkelos, Gen. 2:7; Solomon Ibn Gabirol, *Tikkun Middot han-Nefesh*, (1807) 7: *הנפש הדברנית* (the speaking soul [i.e., the rational soul]); Judah Halevi, *Kuzari*, 5:12, 272, line 8: *ומה שנתייחד בו האדם ויקרא הכה הדברי* (What distinguishes a man is called the power of speech); *Ibid.*, 5:12, 276: *וכל הכחות מהותיהם כלים בכליון כליהם, ואין עמידה אלא למדברת* (All these powers [of the soul] cease to exist with the destruction of their organs, and there is no permanence except for [the power of] speech); Abraham Bar Hiyya, *Hegyon han-Nefesh*, 38: *כי גדר האדם המודיע את שרשי יצירתו הוא ההי הדברן* (For the definition of man that indicates the roots of his created form is "the animal that speaks"; *Idem*, *Megillat ham-Megalleh*, 58; See, especially, Maimonides, *Moreh Nevukhim*, 1:72, who says: *הדבר שייחד בו האדם...אילו דמית בנפשו אחד מבני אדם נשלל זה והוא כה המדבר* (That which distinguishes man is the faculty of speech...if you would imagine a human being lacking this power, left only with the animal faculty, he would perish immediately). Maimonides' explanation for the necessity of speech in man is naturalistic, however, while R. Isaac's, as the example which follows demonstrates, is categorical and formal. Further, R. Isaac, whose objective is to explain the statement in *SY* 2:4 (sec. 19) "all creatures and all speech issue through one name," asserts that not just man, but all creatures in general are nothing without speech. What, exactly, he has in mind is not quite clear, unless it be in reference to Rava's artificial man in the example he cites immediately following, which is "nothing" in comparison to the human being it was intended to emulate.

through breath. Whereas<sup>70</sup> Rava created a man, he returned him to dust, because he did not know how to introduce breath into him such that he could speak and exist thereby.<sup>71</sup> In one name: their root is in one name, for the letters are the visible branches, like the flickering flames, which have motion, which are attached to the coal, and like the twigs of a tree and its branches and boughs, whose root is in the tree.<sup>72</sup> So, too, weighing is from hewing, and exchange is from weighing, and from exchange is form. All the things are made into form, and all forms issue from but one name, like a branch that issues from the root, so it turns out that everything is within the root, which is one name, therefore it says at the end one name.<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> And whereas: A concessive clause showing Arabic influence in the use of *בְּכֵן* for *כִּי*: see M. Goshen-Gottstein, *Taḥbirah*, 131, sec. 239.a.

<sup>71</sup> *Sanh.* 65b, and Rashi, *loc. cit.* The relationship between speech and breath, particularly the notion that the absence of speech signifies the absence of animating breath, is reflected in a nexus of *aggadot* and *midrashim* concerning the creation of Adam as a *golem* or inanimate mass, into whom breath and speech were placed as the completion and perfection of his form. See, e. g., *Sanh.* 38b; *Yalkut Simonī*, Gen. no. 34; Gen. R. 14:8, 24:2. Any or all of these *midrashim* could have served as adequate sources for R. Isaac here.

<sup>72</sup> See lines 3-6, above.

<sup>73</sup> R. Isaac explains the dictum of *SY* 2:4 (sec. 19) on the basis of his thoroughgoing theory of emanation, in which all phenomena can ultimately be traced back to the effects of the one divine Name.

Void<sup>74</sup> is an essence that has no form,<sup>75</sup> emanated from

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<sup>74</sup> *SY* 2:5 (sec. 20).

<sup>75</sup> See above, line 166, and note. Abraham bar Ḥiyya, *Hegyon han-Nefesh*, ed. G. Wigoder, (Jerusalem, 1971) 42, and n. 20, identifies *tohu* with primal matter and *bohu* with primal form.

See Azriel of Gerona, *Perus ha-ʿAggadot*, 151, note 7, where Tishbi observes that for the Gerona Circle, based on the teachings of R. Isaac, *tohu* corresponds to *Hokhmah* as primal matter, the essence which has no form, and *bohu* corresponds to *Binah*, as primal form. See, too, Nahmanides, *Torah Commentary*, Gen. 1:1, and especially R. Jacob ben Sheshet, *Mešiv Devarim Nekhohim*, ch. 9 (32a-33b, 120; 37b-38a, 129), who, as Tishbi notes, consciously cites Bar Ḥiyya as his source and precedent. Compare Asher b. David, *Kabbalat R. Asher b. David*, 52b.

Here, however, R. Isaac states that *ההו* on the one hand, is an "essence that has no form," which would imply identification with the *sefirah Hokhmah*, yet, on the other hand, it emanates from the summons of *Teshuvah*, that is, from *Binah* and the sefirotic efflux it draws from above to the *sefirot* below (see following note). This apparent discrepancy is resolved in the formulation of R. Azriel of Gerona, which makes explicit some of the implicit premises of R. Isaac's system. He explains that the system of *sefirot* and letters is not one-dimensional. Rather, it operates on multiple, parallel levels of imbedded hierarchy. The arrays of *sefirot* and letters appear in parallel sets at different levels of being. In his comment on *SY* 2:6, *PSY*, ed. H. D. Chavel, 459, R. Azriel says that *tohu* is associated with *Binah*. More explicitly, in *PSY* 1:11, 457, he says: *ומה שנקרא בכח ראשון נתיבות נקרא בכח שני ספירות, ובכח שלישי אותיות, ובאותן האותיות חצב בהן תהו, שזה כח ההויות שאין בהן רשימה, ובהו, כח ההויות שיש בהן רשימה* (what are called "pathways" in the first power are called "*sefirot*" in the second power, and "letters" in the third power. Within those letters He hewed *tohu*, which is the power of the essences that have no impression, and *bohu*, the power of the essences that have an impression). On the first level, corresponding in a general sense to what will be called the *sefirah Hokhmah*, is the set of what will later be manifest as ten *sefirot* and twenty-two letters, appearing as a sum of thirty-two "pathways," undifferentiated with respect to their nature as *sefirot* or letters. On the second level, emanating from the first and corresponding to the *sefirah Binah*, the set of ten *sefirot* appear in

the summons of *Tešuvah*,<sup>76</sup> from which darkness issues,<sup>77</sup> and

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their ownmost nature. On the third level, emanating from the second and corresponding to the lower frame of seven *sefirot*, the set of twenty-two letters appear in their ownmost nature. Each successive level is ontologically dissimilar to the one above from which it issues, while reproducing a formal similarity to the level above in terms of the order and character of its constitutive entities. This means that formally speaking, *tohu* is parallel to *Hokhmah*, and represents the power of formless essence. At the same time, in terms of ontological position, *tohu* as such appears on the third level or set of emanations, the level of the letters, emanated from the second level, *Binah*, and called collectively "the summons of *Teshuvah*."

<sup>76</sup> On the phrase *הזמנת התשובה*, translated here as the "summons of *Tešuvah*," the invitation, preparation, commission, elicitation of the *sefirah Binah*, which summons forth and elicits the lower *sefirot*, see *supra*, ch. 8.4. See, especially, the use of the term *זימון* in the context of an emanated hierarchy by Abraham Bar Hiyya, *Megillat ha-Megalleh*, 22-23: *שהאור אשר הבדיל במעלה הרביעית הוא קרוא ומזומן לשוב אל מקומו הראוי לו מעלה החמישית [נ"א השלישית החמישית] ויהיה פירוש ויקרא בכאן וזימן. ואהה מוצא לשון קריאה שהוא לשון זימון* (For the light which was distinguished on the fourth level is called and summoned to return to its proper place at the fifth [var: third and fifth] level. The explication of "called (Gen. 1:5)" is "summoned." You find the term "calling" for the term "summons" in many places).

I. Tishby, *Peruṣ ha-ʿAggadot le-R. Azriel*, 133, line 10 and n. 6, defines the expression as "the efflux of *Binah* that is prepared to descend to the *sefirot* of the frame. In this sense this expression is brought four times in [*PSY* of] R. Isaac the Blind (*SY* 2:6 and 4:3)."

Compare Asher b. David, *Ma'aseh Beresit*, in *Kabbalat R. Asher b. David*, 54: *ועוף יעופף על הארץ. הזמנת החסד והחסד לתפארת ולעטרה שיהו עוף יעופף על הארץ. "...birds that fly over the earth (Gen. 1:20)," the summons of Hesed and Pahad to Tiferet and from Tiferet to 'Atarah, this is "birds that fly over the earth," that each one emanates from its power to Tiferet and 'Atarah). According to this usage, הזמנה is another term for emanation, or the elicitation of efflux, and is applicable to any sefirah in its relation to a sefirah*

therefore it says "the locks of your hair are like purple (Cant. 7:6)."<sup>78</sup> *Tohu* (void) is in the manner of the expression "regretting the earlier deeds," erasing what had been.<sup>79</sup> So, too, the void is the impression of the essences,

below it. Similarly, from the perspective of the recipient, *ibid.*: כל זריכות לקבל כל אחת ואחת שפע לפי פעולתם (and the powers that receive a summons, each one must receive efflux according to its activity).

*Ma'arekhet 'Elohut* turns this term into a direct epithet for the seven lower *sefirot*: "The adepts call the seven *sefirot* and the drawing of efflux one from the other "summons" and since they are dimensions of the third (i.e. *Binah*), they add and say "the summons of the third (ch. 4, end, fol 74b)." According to Tishby, "the explanation of the *Ma'arekhet*...does not agree with the original meaning."

<sup>77</sup> *Hagigah* 12a: תנא תהו קו ירוק שמקיף את כל העולם כולו שחמנו יצא חושך (It is taught: *tohu* is a green line that circumscribes the entire world, from which darkness issues).

<sup>78</sup> The proof-text shows that from the "head," symbolizing *Binah* and the *sefirot* above it, dangles and descends a purplish darkness. Compare Azriel of Gerona, *PA*, 5, lines 4-5, commenting on the continuation of same verse: מלך אסור ברהמים, כבר ידעת כי הנשמה החכמה כח במוח ומשם מתפשט הכל, והאדם כלול מכל הדברים הרוחניים, על כן אמ' מלך הוא התשובה קשור ברהמים, דמה מקום המוח לרהמים ("The king is bound in her tresses," you already know that the soul, *Hokhmah*, is a power in the brain and from there extends to all. Man is comprised of all the spiritual things. Therefore it says "the king," which is *Tesuvah*, "is bound in her tresses": it compared the site of the brain, to strands of hair, *fills* in the vernacular).

R. Isaac may be reading the term ארגמן, not as purple, however, but in line with his father's definition, in his animadversion to Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, *Hilkhot Klei ham-Mikdash*, 8:13: לי נראה ארגמן (It seems to me that *argaman* is woven from two species or three colors, thus it is called *argaman* (the woven)). If so, the verse is brought to show that multiple entities, *tohu* and darkness, emanate from the upper *sefirot*.

for it has no form. From the subtlety of essence, which is substantial, is made the thick air,<sup>80</sup> from which comes a substantial darkness,<sup>81</sup> which is matter, which is *substance*.<sup>82</sup> Therefore it says "darkness, cloud (Deut. 4:11)."<sup>83</sup> The example is the darkness of Egypt,<sup>84</sup> and

<sup>79</sup> *Kiddushin* 40b.

<sup>80</sup> The term "עב", thick, is used frequently by the Tibbonites in contradistinction to דק, subtle or refined, to convey relatively more material substance. See J. Klatzkin, *Thesaurus Philosophicus*, vol. 2, 118.

The concept of a more material *versus* a more subtle air appears in Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 184: הוא הרוח הנראה ויש מפרשים שהוא האויר הדומה לערפל... והרוח ההיא כתמורת עשן הדק והדק הוא האויר המוקף בין שמיים לארץ והרוצה לראותה יכול לראות הבית שיש בו חלונות כאשר יצא קו השמש על החלונות לפניו הבית אז יראה במדת הקו קשור בעמוד (This is the visible air. Some explain that this is air which resembles darkness... This air is like fine smoke, and this fineness is the air which is bounded between the heavens and the earth. Whoever wants to see it can look at a house which has windows. When a ray of sunlight enters a window into the house one can see a line like a pillar from the windows, and this is the air). Here, too, air is associated with darkness, as R. Isaac proceeds to do.

<sup>81</sup> The repetitive use of the term ממש, substance, in context with darkness, is not just an address of *SY* 2:5 (sec. 20), it is also likely to be an allusion to Ex. 10:21: וימש חשך, a darkness which may be felt. This is substantiated in the reference to the Egyptian plague of darkness in lines 221-22 following. In this way, R. Isaac explains the transition stated simply in *SY* 2:5, that "He formed matter from void," by supplying the middle term, taken from *Hagigah* 12a interpreting Gen. 1:2, that darkness issues from the void, and matter from darkness.

<sup>82</sup> *SY* 2:5 (sec. 20) reads יצר מהוה ממש (He formed matter from the void). See Ex. R. 14:1. R. Isaac is explaining this process by supplying an intermediate stage of partial materiality between the immaterial void and matter itself.

<sup>83</sup> The proof-text seems to support the notion of a

therefore they knew that all that darkness was from a supernal cause. *ʿAfelah* (pitch-darkness)<sup>85</sup> is more than darkness, for it does not even have air, and *ʿalata* (gloom)<sup>86</sup> is composed of both of them.

Great pillars<sup>87</sup> are from the geminate letters<sup>88</sup> which are from the great ones,<sup>89</sup> which are roots. The roots are inner essences which are included in the ten *Sefirot*: they are the six extremities<sup>90</sup> and the "summons of *Teshuvah*" which is "the hiding of His power (Hab. 3:4)."<sup>91</sup> Those seven geminate letters, which are the **great pillars**, are those of whom it is said "who pastures among the lilies (Cant.

progression of densities, darkness, followed by cloud, a "thick air."

<sup>84</sup> Ex. 10:21. See Ex. R. 14:1, and Rashi's commentary, *loc. cit.*

<sup>85</sup> Ex. 10:22, et al.

<sup>86</sup> Gen. 15:17.

<sup>87</sup> *SY* 2:5 (sec. 20).

<sup>88</sup> The association of the "pillars" with the seven geminate letters is based on the verse Prov. 9:1: *חצבה עמודיה שבעה* (...she has hewn her seven pillars).

<sup>89</sup> The *sefirot*, as he goes on to explain.

<sup>90</sup> *SY* 1:13 (sec. 15). These are the cardinal directions of *SY* 1:5 (sec. 7), each associated by R. Isaac with one of the lower six *sefirot*. See lines 82-84, above.

<sup>91</sup> This phrase from Hab. 3:4 was used as an independent descriptive divine attribute by Solomon Ibn Gabirol, "*Keter Malkhut*," *Sirei hak-Kodesh*, 1:22:1, 38 line 6. Compare *Sefer hab-Bahir*, 148/50: *מאי חביון* (What is "the hiding of His power?" That light which was concealed and



2:16)." The "*bet*"<sup>92</sup> alludes to that which is exalted above the *serafim*.<sup>93</sup> It is written "for all,"<sup>94</sup> which is *Yesod* *'Olam*, which is of the six extremities,<sup>95</sup> and which is set in judgment.<sup>96</sup> Therefore it says "who pastures among the lilies," who pastures<sup>97</sup> his world among these six things,<sup>98</sup>

hidden). The *Bahir* uses this as an epithet for *Binah*, and R. Isaac's usage concurs.

<sup>92</sup> The reference is to the letter *bet* of בְּשׁוֹשַׁנִּים.

<sup>93</sup> *Pirkei de-R. Eliezer*, ch. 4, has an angelic hierarchy in which the *serafim* are the highest order of angels, closest to the divine Presence. See, too, Eccles. R. to Eccles 10:20. *Serafim* are also implicitly the highest order of angels according to the *Kedushah* of *Yozer* in the daily prayer service. Alternative systems list *serafim* as of middle rank, e. g., Maimonides, *Yesodei ha-Torah*, 2:7.

In this case, the prefix 'ב' apparently signifies the lowest *sefirah*, *Malkhut*, exalted above the highest angels, the *serafim*. This lowest *sefirah* is "in" the group of six *sefirot*. As such, it is the seventh of the lower group of *sefirot* corresponding to the seven geminates and seven pillars.

<sup>94</sup> 1 Chr. 29:11.

<sup>95</sup> The point is to identify the phrase כִּי כָל, "for all," of 1 Chr. 29:11 as one of the sefirotic epithets, along with the five more obvious descriptive attributes of the verse, for a total of six *sefirot* that comprise a unified group, alluded to in the verse Cant. 2:16. In other words, 1 Chr. 29:11 corroborates Cant. 2:16 as a proof-text for the notion of a special aggregate of six lower *sefirot*.

<sup>96</sup> *Yesod* is aligned with the *sefirot* of rigor and judgment. See lines 38-39 above.

<sup>97</sup> In the sense of "shepherds," directs and controls.

<sup>98</sup> The word שׁוֹשַׁנִּים, lilies, is read as שֵׁשׁ שָׁנִים, six years or six lower *sefirot*, according to the classic midrashic hermeneutic technique that permits minor variations in the vocalization of a word. See I.

which are the forefathers<sup>99</sup> of all offspring.<sup>100</sup>

**That is not caught:**<sup>101</sup> darkness that is subtle,<sup>102</sup> which is an air so subtle that it passes behind the spheres and the firmaments and within them by virtue of its great subtlety, and is not caught. The air caught within a leather bag, however, is coarse. No obstacle hinders the subtle, supernal air, for it is subtle, and according to its subtlety is its strength, for by that subtlety it has strength such that a wall or partition cannot stop it.<sup>103</sup> It is from among the inner spiritual essences that are not perceived, that appear to the heart. **He hewed** from them, and there were emanated from them bodies which are perceived.

Heinemann, *Darkhei ha-ʿAggadah*, (Jerusalem, 1970) 126-29.

<sup>99</sup> The patrices or forefathers are listed by Asher b. David as the *sefirot Gedulah, Gevurah, Tiferet*, in *Sefer ha-Yihud, Kabbalat R. Asher b. David*, 56. In *Ma'aseh Beresit*, *ibid.*, 54, *Tiferet* and *ʿAtarah* are also called *patrices*. Apparently the term can be used generically of all the lower *sefirot*, as is the case in R. Isaac's usage in the present instance.

<sup>100</sup> See Ezra b. Solomon of Gerona, *Perus le-Sir has-Sirim*, to Cant. 2:16, in *Kitvei Ramban*, vol. 2, 492.

<sup>101</sup> *SY* 2:5 (sec. 20). "Caught" is used here in the sense of "perceived," and was chosen with an eye towards R. Isaac's explanation.

<sup>102</sup> The association of air and darkness appears in Saadiah Gaon, *Ha-ʿEmanot we-had-De'ot*, 1:5, 34.

<sup>103</sup> This discussion of the supernal as opposed to physical air is based directly on R. Saadiah Gaon's Commentary to *SY*, 4:1, 107; *Ha-ʿEmanot we-had-De'ot*, ch. 2, 57 (...which is subtler than all, and stronger than all), 67. See, too, Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 178,

Twelve [letters] simple<sup>104</sup> in their subject-matter, [which are] twelve pillars: for all things are essences from within essences, faces within faces, faces from within faces. He envisions,<sup>105</sup> as they have said "He glanced into the Torah."<sup>106</sup> And the sign of the matter: it used the term "sign" to hide the matter.<sup>107</sup> Twenty-two objects: each of the twenty-two letters is a great object.<sup>108</sup> What is an "object?" Material that comprises a vessel, but it comprises a vessel like the stones of a tower: it has many stones, and each one is a name in itself, and all of them are called by one name, which is "tower."<sup>109</sup>

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and compare 211-12, 340-2. See J. Dan, *Torat has-Sod*, 171-74.

<sup>104</sup> *SY* 2:3, (sec. 17).

<sup>105</sup> *SY* 2:5 (sec. 22).

<sup>106</sup> Gen. R. 1:2. "They" refers to the rabbis. The point is that spiritual "envisioning" or "glancing" is one of the constitutive processes of creation.

<sup>107</sup> Sign, in rabbinic usage, usually revelatory of an inner condition, can also denote something overly concise, therefore obscure and recondite. See Num. R., 14:12: "Why can a person not adjudicate from words of Torah? Because it is closed up and entirely of signs...But from the words of the sages a person can adjudicate properly because they explicate the Torah." Also, see *Bava Batra*, 123a, where signs between Rachel and Leah are secretive.

<sup>108</sup> This means they have a supernal, metaphysical existence.

<sup>109</sup> R. Isaac explains *SY* 2:5, (sec. 22), as referring to the relation between a compound and its

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constitutive elements, each element a distinctive  
existent unto itself, and all combined into a unique  
and unified whole.

## Chapter 3

**Their foundation:**<sup>1</sup> the foundation comes from them, and they are its cause.<sup>2</sup> The foundation of the three matrices is *Binah*.<sup>3</sup> These statements only mention perceptible causes from causes which are not perceived, and therefore they are called matrices.<sup>4</sup> Afterwards it calls them patrices.<sup>5</sup> A real

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<sup>1</sup> *SY* 3:1 (sec. 23). See I. Gruenwald, "A Preliminary Critical Edition of *Sefer Yeẓirah*," 151, n. 1.

<sup>2</sup> Compare lines 26-27 above, where R. Isaac explains the letters as a "foundation," not regarding the *sefirot*, but for what the letters, in turn, will generate. The *sefirot*, there as here, are called the "causes" of the letters. R. Isaac is reading *SY* 3:1 (sec. 23 and note 1) as follows: שלוש אמות אמ"ש יסודן (Three matrices: the letters 'ms are their foundation). In other words, the entities that on the sefirotic level are called collectively "matrices," have, on the alphabet level below, letters called "foundations," specifically אמ"ש. The corresponding *sefirot* are the "causes" of the foundation letters.

<sup>3</sup> R. Isaac identifies the matrices as *Binah*, *Hesed*, *Pahad*, line 152 above. See, too, line 17, above, and note. *Binah* is the "foundation" of the three matrices in the generic sense of the term "foundation," as the prior and higher emanative source. This is not a direct interpretation of the term "their foundation" from *SY* 3:1 (sec. 23). Compare Azriel of Gerona, *PSY*, 1:10, in *Kitvei Ramban*, vol. 2, 456.

<sup>4</sup> According to R. Isaac's reading, the matrices are not identical with the foundation letters אמ"ש, rather, they are the *sefirot* which parallel these letters. Thus, R. Isaac explains that *SY* does not specify the names of the matrices, the unperceived causes. Only the names of the foundation letters are specified, consonant with their nature as perceptible causes.

R. Isaac's explanation for the term אמות may

Hand,<sup>6</sup> for sometimes a person weighs with the palms of his hands, according to what is written: "and by the skillfulness of his hands he guided them (Ps. 78:72)." The hands also receive blessing.<sup>7</sup>

**אור, a mystery...concealed<sup>8</sup> from the prophets.<sup>9</sup> And**

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refer to their generative properties, imperceptible causes which give rise to perceptible causes. He may, however, be focussing on their hidden quality, in which case he could have in mind a reference to *Berakhot*, 53b, *Sabbat*, 77b, *Pesahim*, 75b, regarding גחלים אוממות, dark or dim coals.

<sup>5</sup> *SY* 3:2 (sec. 27). R. Asher b. David identifies the patrices as the *sefirot Gedulah, Gevurah* and *Tiferet* in his *Perus Sem ham-Meforash*, in *Kabbalat R. Asher b. David*, 13 (compare his *Sefer ha-Yihud*, *ibid.*, 56. R. Isaac, in what seems to be an equating of matrices and patrices, may refer either to the overlap of the *sefirot Hesed* and *Din*, or to the ultimate unity of all *sefirot* in general.

<sup>6</sup> Rashi, *Torah Commentary*, Ex. 14:31.

<sup>7</sup> The point seems to be that the expression כף חובה should not be understood as merely abstract and directional, in the sense of "to the side of merit or demerit," nor even in the figurative sense of a scale pan. Rather, the כף signifies an entity in itself, a *sefirah* that performs functions analogous to those of a human hand that weighs and that receives efflux or "blessing" from *sefirot* above it. Thus the allusion to Rashi's comment on Ex. 14:31, cited in the previous note, is *apropos*.

<sup>8</sup> *SY* 3:2 (sec. 24).

<sup>9</sup> The allusion is to *Berakhot* 34b: "All the prophets only prophesied regarding the messianic era, but regarding the world to come, "the eye has not seen (Is. 64:3)." The matrixes unfold from *Binah* and are represented essentially by *Binah*, the concealed. R. Jacob b. Sheshet speaks of a nexus of associations between the upper *sefirot*, the biblical *Eden*, and the verse Is. 64:3 (*Mešiv Devarim Nehokhim*, ch. 9, lines 71, 110ff, 125, 396, 434). The "world to come" as an epithet for *Binah* becomes standard among later

wondrous, in that it ascends upwards,<sup>10</sup> and these are things to which descent does not apply.<sup>11</sup> And sealed with six: םשׂ, םשׂ, םשׂ, םשׂ, םשׂ, םשׂ,<sup>12</sup> which are within the Name, as is written in the first chapter,<sup>13</sup> in which the six extremities are sealed.<sup>14</sup> For the Name is sealed in all, and all is

kabbalists (see, e. g., *Zohar*, 2:27b, 115b; 3:278a. It appears the connection was already made by R. Isaac.

<sup>10</sup> Compare Azriel of Gerona, *PSY*, 3:2, 460: מופלא. שהוא מכה התשובה ומתעלה עד כתר עליון (Wondrous: in that it comes from *Teshuvah*, and is elevated unto *Keter Elyon*). Both R. Isaac and R. Azriel explain hiddenness as an effect of ascent. On the meaning of ascent and descent of the *sefirot*, see the following note.

<sup>11</sup> See H. Padaya, *Pegam ve-Tikkun*, 173, n. 54, 174-77, regarding the definition of "ascent" and "descent" in R. Isaac's system. According to Padaya, the descent of a *sefirah* can be understood in two ways: positively, to bestow blessing upon beings below; negatively, in the sense of exile and diminished reception from above. It also implies vulnerability to influence and negative impact from below. The upper three *sefirot* are immune to such influence or descent. The ascent of a *sefirah* connotes its joining to a higher *sefirah* resulting in a stabilizing of efflux and general sefirotic harmonization. As Padaya notes, ascent may be the effect of human theurgic activity, such as prayer. See her analysis, 233-51.

<sup>12</sup> The explicit permutations of the three letters is laid out in *SY* 3:8 (sec. 35). I. Gruenwald notes, however, that this text does not appear in any of the short recensions ("A Preliminary Critical Edition of *Sefer Yezirah*, 155 n. 1.). Even so, it would have been known to R. Isaac from Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 219-20, or from other recensions of *SY* with which he would have been directly familiar, or he could have worked out the permutations himself.

<sup>13</sup> Lines 17-19, above.

<sup>14</sup> *SY* 1:13 (sec. 15).

sealed in it.<sup>15</sup> **Rings:** what is the meaning of a ring? The finger goes into it. It is something that is fastened to something that fastens something else, and from that to which it is fastened comes its power, for as long as that seal ring is on one's finger, it receives increase by sealing with them.<sup>16</sup> All these are awesome powers, these from within those, the inner ones among them from those more interior to them, this from that and this from that.<sup>17</sup>

And divided into male and female:<sup>18</sup> according to the letters which come into contact with each other, according to their order is their ultimate effect.<sup>19</sup> If the majority of the feminine [letters] are on one side, the minority is

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<sup>15</sup> Lines 17-19, above.

<sup>16</sup> The image is of a seal ring, moved by the force of the finger it sits on. R. Isaac reads the term "rings" from *SY* as an image for the hierarchy of connected sefirotic powers. The plural "with them," which appears in masculine or feminine form in all the MSS, apparently refers to the multiple layers of the seal ring, all of them moved with the motion of the finger.

<sup>17</sup> For this rhetorical flourish, evoking multiple hierarchical levels in a *Heikhalot* style, see line 19, above, and note.

<sup>18</sup> See I. Gruenwald, "A Preliminary Critical Edition of *Sefer Yeẓirah*," 151 on *SY* 3:2 (sec. 24): this text appears only recensions n...j.

<sup>19</sup> Lit., "the completion of their work." This is a technical expression, from *Sabbat*, 75b, meaning the final step in the manufacturing process which gives an object its ultimate character. It is used here in the sense of "ultimate effect," in that, while each letter of a word has its own property, the ultimate effect of their combination depends on the order of the letters.



nullified in its minority by virtue of the majority. For *shin* is fire, it has femininity,<sup>20</sup> and when it is contiguous with air,<sup>21</sup> which has male and female,<sup>22</sup> then the feminine prevails. When air and water<sup>23</sup> are contiguous, the majority of air is male and the minority female, therefore masculinity prevails over femininity.<sup>24</sup> The turning<sup>25</sup> of

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<sup>20</sup> This association between fire and femininity is made by Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 220, without explanation: **אש נקבה** (fire is feminine). Other commentators, such as Dunash b. Tamim, do not associate a particular gender with a particular letter; rather, it is the order of letters that results in overall masculinity or femininity (*PSY*, 53-58).

<sup>21</sup> Signified by the letter *aleph*.

<sup>22</sup> Shabbetai Donnolo, *Sefer Hakmoni*, ch. 3: **יש אויר בעולם המוליד ומצמיח ומפריא זכרים...ויש אויר בעולם נקבות** (There is air in the world that gives birth to, grows and bears males...and there is air in the world that gives birth to, grows and bears females). Air as containing both male and female elements is also implicit in its role as mediator between water and fire, *SY* 6:1 (secs. 25, 26).

<sup>23</sup> Signified by the letter *mem*. According to Shabbetai Donnolo, *loc. cit.*, wetness gives rise to masculine creatures.

<sup>24</sup> Water is masculine, according to Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 220: **ונקבה מזכר כגון ארץ ממים** (female from male, for example, earth from water). R. Isaac here apparently means that the combination of air, which is both masculine and feminine, and water, which is masculine, produces a preponderance of the masculine, to units to one, and therefore masculinity prevails. R. Isaac's explanation of the gender of the matrices is based on material from Shabbetai Donnolo and Judah b. Barzilai. While the later assume these associations and give them no particular emphasis, R. Isaac develops the relationships systematically.

<sup>25</sup> The term **הפוך** is used in the sense of general change and variation of form, of turning, but not necessarily to the reverse or opposite, as in Abraham

these letters is like the rotating of a sphere, from *'oneg* to *neg'a* and *neg'a* to *'oneg*.<sup>26</sup> Our teacher says<sup>27</sup> that everything is engraved upon the sphere. Just as this is so for all the species in the world, so too for all the letters in their entirety, each single one of them has an engraving,<sup>28</sup> for good and for bad.<sup>29</sup> Sometimes the engraved letters come in contact for good, and sometimes the result of the engraved letters is for bad. For the matter does not depend on the varying contact of the letters, rather, the letters themselves, each thing and letter being engraved in

Bar Hiyya, *Hegyon han-Nefesh*, ch. 1, 39, regarding the forms of earthly beings: **שהצורה הנמצאת באלו מהתפכת ונחלפת** (for the form of these things changes and alters). Similarly, Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 209, referring to recensions of *SY* 2:4 (sec. 18) that read "sphere," and not "dragon and sphere" : **ורוצה לומר גלגל : לבדו על לשון היסוד האותיות וחזרתן והיפוכן לזו עם זו** (The intent of saying "sphere" alone is in the sense of the turning and returning of the letters, and their changing from this to that).

<sup>26</sup> This is a reference to *SY* 2:4 (sec. 18).

<sup>27</sup> For the question of attribution and authorship of the *Commentary* raised by this reference to "our teacher," see *supra*, ch. 2.4.1.,

<sup>28</sup> This idea is a conflation of the prevailing twelfth-century concept of the *aplanos*, the sphere containing the shapes of all things, (Adelard of Bath, *Quaestiones Naturales*, ch. 76, in Berakhya ha-Nakdan, *Dodi ne-Nekhdi*, ed. and trans. H. Gollancz, (London, 1920), 160), with the *Heikhalot* concept of the *pargod*, the heavenly curtain into which is woven the forms of all creatures (*Seder Rabbah de-Beresit*, in *Batei Midrasot*, vol. 1, 44), together with the concept of the sphere of the letters in *Sefer Yezirah*. See G. Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 72, 367 n. 114. See *supra*, ch. 2.4.1, for a discussion of these doctrines.

<sup>29</sup> From *SY* 2:4 (sec. 18): **אם לטובה למעלה מענג, ואם**

its place to accomplish an act.<sup>30</sup> Sometimes the letter itself changes from good to bad and from bad to good.

*Non* is quiet:<sup>31</sup> Silence, "subtle quiet (1 Kings 19:12),"<sup>32</sup> as it is written, "a time to be silent, and a time to speak (Eccles. 3:7)." This is *Hashmal*, about which they have said "at times they are silent, and at times they

לרעה למטה מנוגע.

<sup>30</sup> Compare lines 252-56, where it is the order of contact that determines the ultimate effect of the letters. Here, where R. Isaac states that each letter itself is determinative of an outcome, without reference to its combination with other letters, the issue centers around the good or bad quality of the letter, based on *SY* 2:4 (sec. 18).

In this case, the place in which each letter is engraved may have something to do with the sefirotic context of the letters, particularly regarding the lower seven *sefirot*. With respect to the issue of good and bad effects, the letter may acquire the character of the *sefirah* with which it is associated in its engraving, for good or for bad. Compare, for instance, Azriel of Gerona's comment, regarding the motion of the sphere of the letters, in his *PSY*, in *Kitvei Ramban*, vol. 2, 459: פנים ואחור. פנים זה רחמים, אחור זה הדין (Forward and backward. Forward is Mercy, backward is Judgment). The *sefirot* provide a context for the letters, in this case, in terms of the direction of their motion on the sphere. Similarly, in R. Isaac's system, there seem to be two dimensions that affect the ultimate meaning of a combination of supernal letters: their order in contact with other letters; their individual position in relation to the *sefirot*, and the quality they acquire in that relationship.

<sup>31</sup> See I. Gruenwald, "A Preliminary Critical Edition of *Sefer Yezirah*, 152, (secs. 25, 26) and notes. Gruenwald places this *mishnah* in context of the third chapter of the long recension, as it appears here in R. Isaac's Commentary, though Gruenwald notes its position as 6:1 in most short recensions. This *mishnah* is 3:3 in Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 216.

For the variant מ"ם דיוממה see Gruenwald's apparatus.

speak."<sup>33</sup> For silence precedes the sibilance of speech from above to below: *ḥas-mal*, and from below above: *mal-ḥas*.<sup>34</sup> All the letters are divided into silent, sibilant, and their intermediate.<sup>35</sup> In each one of the letters is all letters, but each one has a root<sup>36</sup> of its own. All ten *sefirot* are in each and every letter.<sup>37</sup> Therefore it says "*aleph* with all of them and all of them with *aleph*, *bet* with all of them and

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<sup>32</sup> This proof-text is brought by Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 221.

<sup>33</sup> *Hagigah*, 13b.

<sup>34</sup> Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 221, explains that the silence that initiates speech is the closing of the lips to form a consonant, followed by an opening through which issues a sibilant or vocalic sound. R. Isaac seems to refer to this explanation.

The association of *ḥas-mal* with "from above to below," and *mal-ḥas* with "from below to above," may also be based on Judah b. Barzilai's depiction of the closing and opening of the lips in speech as upward and downward movements. In *ḥas-mal*, the lips begin open, and move together, what Judah b. Barzilai calls a downward motion, from above to below; in *mal-ḥas*, the lips begin closed and move apart, what he calls an upward motion. For R. Isaac, this process also has its metaphysical counterpart.

In *Hagigah* 13b, the composite name *Ḥasmal* is explained: "when the divine Word goes forth from the mouth of the Holy One, blessed be He, they are silent; and when the divine Word does not go forth from the mouth of the Holy One, blessed be He, they speak." Above to below is silence, then speech; below to above is speech, then silence.

<sup>35</sup> This reading of the three matrices as categories under which all letters fall is implied in the discussion of the process of speech by Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 221.

<sup>36</sup> Or principle.

<sup>37</sup> See *supra*, ch. 6, for a discussion of lines 264-71, this concept of mutually imbedded principles,

all of them with *bet*,"<sup>38</sup> for how can there be a comparing unless one of the letters includes all?<sup>39</sup> For instance, *aleph* contains the first ten *sefirot*, which are engraved in breath from breath.<sup>40</sup> In each and every one are something like subtle essences, inner, hidden, immaterial. All that would in the future be hewn from them was already in them, just as within a person were all his offspring.<sup>41</sup> So too regarding each letter within the pillars of the letters.<sup>42</sup> For this is their engraving within the forms of the great letters:<sup>43</sup> closed within them, hidden and recondite, was all

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and its precedents in Aristotle, Proclus and R. Moses Ibn Ezra.

<sup>38</sup> *SY* 2:2, 4 (sec. 19).

<sup>39</sup> Based on Maimonides, *Moreh Nevukhim*, 1:56, trans. S. Pines, 130: "Know that likeness is a certain relation between two things and that in cases where no relation can be supposed to exist between two things, no likeness between them can be represented to oneself. Similarly in all cases in which there is no likeness between two things, there is no relation between them."

<sup>40</sup> Compare line 10, above, that the *sefirah Hokhmah*, symbolized here in the letter *aleph*, contains all *sefirot*, and lines 54-56, that all the *sefirot* are contained in infinite series in *Maḥṣavah*.

"Engraved in breath from breath," based on *SY* 1:14 (sec. 16), refers to the *sefirah Binah*. See lines 139-41, above. Compare Azriel of Gerona, *PSY*, in *Kitvei Ramban*, vol. 2, 457.

<sup>41</sup> While this common-sense concept does not require any traditional source, examples of precedents include Gen. R. 24:2, regarding Adam's vision of all future generations of his descendants inscribed in his unformed matter; Sanh. 37a on Gen. 4:10, that capital punishment based on mistaken testimony destroys not only the individual but all his future offspring.

<sup>42</sup> Lines 224-27, above.

that would eventually be hewn from them and emanated from them, in the same way the essences were placed within *Hokhmah*, as we have explained.<sup>44</sup> For all things go by way of *Binah* in *Hokhmah*, as it is written, "I sought comprehension in books (Dan. 9:2)."<sup>45</sup>

*Aleph* is a rule:<sup>46</sup> the elevation of the rule and the exaltation of its crown.<sup>47</sup> Three patrices<sup>48</sup> related to the

<sup>43</sup> Lines 224-27.

<sup>44</sup> See line 10 above.

<sup>45</sup> Books, *Sefarim* represent *Hokhmah*, as in line 17 above. The idea is that *Binah*, the emanation of *Hokhmah*, is yet contained within it. The proof-text alludes to this relationship in a formal, rather than semantic, way, with the preposition "in." This kind of formalistic interpretation becomes a distinctive hallmark of kabbalistic exegesis.

<sup>46</sup> *SY* 3:2 (sec. 26). See line 162 above and note.

<sup>47</sup> See line 163, above. Azriel of Gerona, *PSY*, 3:1 in *Kitvei Ramban*, vol. 2, 460, explains: פִּירוּשׁ. אֵלֶּף חֶקֶר. כְּתָר עֲלִיּוֹן הַנִּקְרָא אֵלֶּף הוּא הַנִּקְרָא אֵלֶּף חֶקֶר, וְכֵשֶׁאִינוֹ מִתְעַלֶּה הַתְּסַאֲרָה לְמַעַלָּה נִקְרָא לְשׁוֹן חֶקֶר וְהוּא אֲמֻצֵּי וּמְכַרִּיעַ יְמִין וּשְׂמָאל וּבִינָתִים (*Aleph* is a rule. This means *Keter* 'Elyon: when *Tiferet*, which is called a rule, ascends to *Keter* 'Elyon, which is called *aleph*, it is called "*aleph* is a rule." When *Tiferet* does not ascend above, it is called "the tongue is a rule," and it is central and mediates between right and left, in the middle). The identification of the letter *aleph* with *Keter* 'Elyon, is based on its association with the divine Name 'hyh, already attested in the fragments ascribed to R. Abraham b. David and R. Jacob ha-Nazir, in G. Scholem, *Resit Haq-Qabbalah*, 73-74, note 2: אֵלֶּף הוּא כְּנֻגַּד כְּתָר עֲלִיּוֹן .

R. Isaac, here and above, line 163, is comparing *SY* sec. 23: שְׁלוֹשׁ אֲמוֹת... וְלְשׁוֹן חֶקֶר מְכַרִּיעַ בִּינָתִים with *SY* sec. 26: שְׁלוֹשׁ אֲמוֹת... אֵלֶּף חֶקֶר מְכַרִּיעַ בִּינָתִים. He explains the latter as the inner, ideal dynamic of the former condition, the ascent of *Tiferet* towards *Keter*. The *sefirah* *Tiferet*, when characterized by

matrices.<sup>49</sup> They have mates through exchange;<sup>50</sup> not exchange in the sense that this should be nullified and that should come to be, but rather, this exerts its power and that exerts its power, just as there is *אש* in one place, and from there comes one effect, and in another place there is

*aleph*, is in an elevated state, in intimate relation with the *sefirah Keter*.

On the meaning of the ascent and descent of the *sefirot*, see H. Padaya, *Pegam ve-Tikkun*, 173-75, and n. 54, and note 11, in this chapter, above.

According to R. Isaac and R. Azriel, the *sefirot* are arranged, in an abstract sense, bi-symmetrically, according to function, with *Keter* and *Tiferet* defining a median line and sharing a parallel, mediating function *vis a vis* the other *sefirot*: *Keter* at the highest level, *Tiferet* in the middle.

<sup>48</sup> SY 3:2 (sec. 27).

<sup>49</sup> See lines 226-29 above, and note: the six lower *sefirot* are all called *patrices*. See, too, lines 243-44 and note 5, above.

<sup>50</sup> Compare Asher b. David, "Perush Shem ha-Meforash," *Kabbalat R. Asher b. David*, 13: יש והנצח מפורשים אותו שהוא ענף הראשון וחלק אחד מחלקי הגבורה הנחלקה לד' מיני כפרה, שג' שזכרנו הגדולה והגבורה והתפארת הם אבות והשאר ענפיהם, וכל עניין נצוח הוא חלק אחד מחלקי הגבורה; ויש מפרשים שהנצח הוא חלק ראשון ממדת החסד... (There are those who explain *Nezah* as the first branch and one part of the portions of *Gevurah*, which are divided into four kinds of atonement (*Yuma* 86a). For the three we have mentioned, *Gedulah*, *Gevurah* and *Tiferet*, are patrices, and the rest are their branches. Everything about *Nezah* indicates it is one part of the portions of *Gevurah*. There are others who explain *Nezah* as the first part of the dimension of *Hesed*.; For *Hod*, similarly, there are those who explain that it is one of the parts of *Gevurah*). This passage may be a paraphrase of R. Isaac's account of the patrices. If so, R. Isaac means that the three patrices, *Gedulah*, *Gevurah* and *Tiferet*, are ramified into three more *sefirot*, their mates or branches, *Nezah*, *Hod*, and *Yesod*, respectively.

שם and from it comes another effect.<sup>51</sup> From each of their exchanges comes an effect having no resemblance one to another, according to the exchange. In world<sup>52</sup> deals with the things, but the things do not move from their place.<sup>53</sup> And year<sup>54</sup> is below world, consisting of

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<sup>51</sup> Compare lines 170-80 above, where R. Isaac defines תמורה, exchange, as the replacement of one principle, which has run its course or has been nullified, with another principle. Here he uses the same term, but modifies the definition to mean exchange, not in the sense of permanent replacement, but as alternating prominence among a set of equal and persisting principles. In lines 170-80 above, the subject was the permutations of the letters. Here, the issue is the changing effects of the combined activity of the three patrices or *sefirot*, hence the modified definition.

<sup>52</sup> SY 3:3 (sec. 28); 3:5 (sec. 31).

<sup>53</sup> The patrices, or *sefirot*, cause a myriad of effects in the world of separation, but they themselves remain in their place in unity. The notion that "the things do not move from their place" refers to a nexus of concepts that trace back to R. Saadiah Gaon *Sefer Yezirah*, ed. J. Kafah, 72, with reference to SY 1:6 (sec. 8), that the divine word in the *sefirot* runs forth and returns, and appears as if it does not move from its place. This passage is quoted by Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 162-63: כי זה המספר כשתספור עד עשרה תשוב ותוסיף חשבון תמיד עד אין מספר אצלנו כמה שנה' בהן והחיות רצוא ושוב כמראה הבזק הן הולכות ובאות ויראו כמו שאינם זזים ולא מניחים מקומם (Regarding this number [system], when you count ten, you return and add sums continually without end from our perspective, as it says, "and the Holy Beasts ran forth and returned like the appearance of lightning," they go forth and come back and seem as if they do not move and do not leave their places). While R. Saadiah Gaon uses this concept to explain the base-ten number system, Judah b. Barzilai applies it to the process by which Heaven controls the lower world. R. Isaac's usage is based on that of Judah b. Barzilai, together with other sources. See *supra*, ch. 7.6 for a fuller discussion.

<sup>54</sup> SY 3:4 (sec. 29); 3:5 (sec. 31).



twelve months that function in the functioning of the world.<sup>55</sup> The months differ one from the other, and in year there are differing elements.<sup>56</sup>

Three matrices:<sup>57</sup> things that emanate, and are emanated and received one from another. But when it arrives at the world of the separate entities,<sup>58</sup> they are only called

<sup>55</sup> *SY* 6:3 (sec. 48) introduces the term מְנַהֲגִים in a temporal sense: מזלות וחדשים ומנהיגים (Zodiac constellations, months and guides). See, too, Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 223: וכן נמי בשנה שתולדותיה ומנהגותיה קור וחום ורויה חום נברא מאש להיותו מתנהג בשנה... (So, too, in year, whose effects and functions are cold and heat and moisture [or temperance]. Heat is created from fire to function in the year). These associations may have suggested R. Isaac's choice of terms here.

Variants of the term נהג connote function, operation, governance and direction of the changing patterns of the world in the framework of time or year. The term הנהגה העולם further carries the connotation of the natural order and patterned operation of the world, as in *Avodah Zarah*, 54b: עולם כמנהגו נוהג (the world operates according to its natural order).

<sup>56</sup> R. Azriel of Gerona alludes to this formulation in his *PSY* 3:4, *Kitvei Ramban*, ed. H. D. Chavel, 461, and interprets it in an astrological vein: כי בהתחדש אור הדיש במזלות ובהתחדש צמחי האדמה בשנה כן יתחדשו תולדות הנפש, כי בעלי חיים הנולדים בשנה זו אינם דומים לבעלי הנפש, כי בעלי חיים הנולדים בשנה זו אינם דומים לבעלי הנפש (For with the renewal of light among the constellations, and the renewal of the vegetation of the earth during the year, so, too, the offspring of soul are renewed, for the animals that are born in this year do not resemble the animals born in another year).

<sup>57</sup> *SY* 3:2-5 (secs. 24-31).

<sup>58</sup> The indefinite pronoun "it" here seems to refer to the underlying, unfolding continuum of being itself. It is also possible to read this as a reference to *SY* itself, i. e., when the discussion in *SY* 3:2 (sec. 27) arrives at the consideration of the realm of the separate entities. It may also be an idiomatic expression, rendering in an active form the static connotation "at the level of..." The first reading seems preferable, however, and is supported by the

patrices,<sup>59</sup> from whom are progeny.<sup>60</sup> For at first [they are matrices,]<sup>61</sup> for the patrices themselves are so called, like

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similar usage in line 281 following.

<sup>59</sup> The terms **אם ואב** both denote fundamental and originary principles in talmudic and philosophic Hebrew. R. Isaac detects a subtle distinction between the terms, however. Matrices connote a more original and primal source. Patrices connote more mutually differentiated categories. Both, however, are terms for *sefirot*. See J. Klatzkin, *Thesaurus Philosophicus*, vol. 1, 17, 49.

<sup>60</sup> *Sabbat* 49b, 73a; *Bava Kama* 2a: **אבות מכלל דאיכא** (Patrices implies there are progeny). In other words, *sefirot* considered in their own recondite being are called matrices, characterized by unity based on mutual, multidirectional emanation: "things that emanate, and are emanated and received one from another." When they are considered in terms of their effects in the realm of the separate entities, they are called patrices, viewed as a unidirectional cause-and-effect relationship, with an eye towards their progeny, in the spirit of the Talmudic dictum.

<sup>61</sup> There is confusion regarding this phrase in the text. Most MSS read **אבות אם' כי מתחלה**. The intent of the abbreviation is unclear: "says," or "matrices." Either way, the result is difficult to render conceptually. Three MSS, however, indicate another reading. JTS 839/ Halberstam 444 has: **כי מתחלה אמר**, translated "for at first they are matrices, for the patrices are so called." MS Cincinnati 532/3 shows signs of confusion on the part of the scribe: **אבות אם' כי מתחלה [נקראו]**, translated either "for at first they are called matrices, the patrices..." or "for at first the matrices are called patrices." Montefiore 313 has: **אבות [אמות]**, translated "for at first they are matrices, patrices, for the patrices themselves are so called."

Based on these signs of conceptual and scribal confusion, the above translation was reconstructed. The original may have had **אמות**, which was abbreviated **אם'** when the copyist could not make sense of it. The idea is that the patrices were originally matrices, in the sense that they were originally included within them, emanated from them, overlap them and remain joined to

flames from coals. When it arrives at the separate entities it becomes the effect that issues from all the matrices. From all the connections we have spoken of<sup>62</sup> patrices are made, to make connections in the separating of all the things that made progeny.<sup>63</sup> Even though we speak of separate entities, it does not depart from the connected things,<sup>64</sup> for all draws from there. Therefore every thing is sealed with these patrices, and it speaks of how world, year and soul are made of them, and those connections, all of them, are created and emanated from them.<sup>65</sup> Man himself is constructed with letters,<sup>66</sup> and when he was constructed, the

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them "like flames from coals." This is essentially a paraphrase of the previous sentence.

<sup>62</sup> Lines 273-76 above.

<sup>63</sup> The description is of the recombination of elements in the realm of the separate entities. This notion of the combination or joining of separate elements reflects terminology from Bahya Ibn Paḳudah's *Hovot ha-Levavot*, 1:6: **וְכִשְׁנֵעִין בְּצִמְחִים וּבְבִעֵלֵי חַיִּים, נִמְצָא מְחוּבְּרִים מֵהִיסּוּדוֹת הָאַרְבַּעָה וְהֵם: הָאֵשׁ וְהָרוּחַ וְהַמַּיִם וְהַעֲפָר, וְהֵמָּה נִחְלָקִים וְנִפְרָדִים וְאֵין בָּנֹו יְכוּלֵת לַחֲבֹרָם הַחֲבוּר הַמְּבִעֵי...אֵךְ הַחֲבוּר שֶׁחִבְּרָה אוֹתוֹ הַתּוֹלְדָה הוּא חֲבוּר מִתּוֹקֵן וְקִים (when we examine plants and animals, we find them composed of the four elements, which are: fire, air, water and earth. They are divided and separated, and we have not the power to join them in a natural connection...but the connection in which they are connected by Nature is a fixed connection lasting until the time of the end).**

<sup>64</sup> The realm of the *sefirot*.

<sup>65</sup> The reference is to *SY* 3:2-5 (secs. 27-31) which speaks of the creation of the patrices in world: heaven, earth and atmosphere; in year: heat, cold and temperance; and in soul: head, stomach and body.

<sup>66</sup> This is the explicit doctrine of the entire

supernal breath that governs that frame, governs all.<sup>67</sup> The result is that all is connected among supernal beings and among lower beings,<sup>68</sup> and he is of world, year and soul. For

second half of *SY* 3:4-6:4 (secs. 30-62), which compares the parallel constructions of world, year and soul by the permutations and combinations of the letters. This doctrine is also the basis for the development of the legends and theories of the *golem*, the artificial man created by letter combinations, from the talmudic period onward. See G. Scholem, "The Idea of the Golem," in *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*, (New York, 1965) 158-204.

<sup>67</sup> Compare Shabbetai Donnolo, *Sefer Hakmoni*, ch. 1: ופירוש נעשה אדם בצלמנו כדמותנו. לאחר שברא הקב"ה את כל העולם...נתינעך ברוחו הקדוש לבראות את האדם, שיהיה כמנונה ושומרו ואדון כל הבריות... (The interpretation of "let us make man in our image and like our form." After the Holy One, blessed be He, created the entire world...He took counsel with His holy spirit to create man, that he should be a ruler, guardian and lord of all creatures...); Abraham Bar Hiyya, *Hegyon han-Nefesh*, 55: ונמצא האדם כולל את כל הפעולות המשתמשות בשאר בעלי חיים ומוסיף עליהם הנשמה הנפוחה בו...וזה לך הפרש שני, האדם מוכבד בו על כל הנמצאים תחת השמש. והפרש שלישי, (It turns out that man comprises all the actions that operate in the other living creatures, and there was added to them the soul that was blown into him...This is a second distinction, that man is honored, by virtue of [the soul], over all other creatures under the sun. A third distinction is that the Holy One, blessed be He, set him to rule over them).

The abovementioned interpretations of the rulership of the human soul over the lower world follow the lines of the verse Gen. 1:26, without offering a systematic explanation of this status. R. Isaac, here and in lines 288-89, hints at a more integral relationship between the divine, the human soul, and the world, in which the soul is the channel and mediating instrument for divine control of the world as a whole. This doctrine of the centrality and exalted status of the human soul echoes that of R. Abraham Ibn Ezra in a number of passages in his works, e. g. Ex. 3:15; Ps. 22:21. See D. Rosin, "Die Religionsphilosophie Abraham Ibn Esra's," *NGWJ*, 42 (1898) 445-57.

all that is in world, is in year, and all that is in world and year, is in soul,<sup>68</sup> and the soul<sup>70</sup> outweighs all.<sup>71</sup> The

<sup>68</sup> The phrasing בעליונים ובהחתונים reflects Gen. R. 8:11: הרי אני בורא אותו מן העליונים ומן החתונים (Behold, I shall create him from the supernal beings and from the lower beings). The context is interpretation of Gen. 1:26. Compare *Avot de-R. Nathan*, ed. S. Schechter, (New York, 1967) recension A, ch. 31, 46a: אבל הקב"ה...ברא את כל העולם כולו וברא את השמיים ואת הארץ עליונים ותחתונים ויצר באדם כל מה שברא בעולמו (But the Holy One, blessed be He...created the entire world, He created the heavens and the earth, supernal beings and lower beings, and formed in man all He had created in His world).

<sup>69</sup> *Sefer Yeẓirah* describes the similarities between world, year and soul in terms of parallels. See *SY* sec. 53 and n. 1, a mishnah that appears only in certain long recensions, but expresses the spirit of *SY* 3:3-6:1 (secs. 28-58). R. Isaac, however, takes a further step and describes these three realms as nested within each other. His precedents include numerous midrashic dicta, such as *Avot de-R. Nathan*, ed. S. Schechter, (New York, 1967) recension A, ch. 31, 46a: אבל הקב"ה...ברא את כל העולם כולו וברא את השמיים ואת הארץ עליונים ותחתונים ויצר באדם כל מה שברא בעולמו (But the Holy One, blessed be He...created the entire world, He created the heavens and the earth, supernal beings and lower beings, and formed in man all that He created in His world). See, too, "Aggadat 'Olam Katan," in *Bet ham-Midrash*, A. Jellinek, (third edition, Jerusalem, 1967) vol. 5, xxv; 57-59: תנו רבנן ברייתו של עולם כעין ברייתו של אדם וברא שכל מה שברא הקב"ה בעולמו ברא באדם...אמר רב י"ב מזלות ברא הקב"ה בעולם כולם ברא באדם (The sages taught: the creation of the world is like the creation of man, for all that the Holy One, blessed be He, created in His world He created in man...Rav said, the twelve signs of the zodiac that the Holy One, blessed be He, created in the world, were are created in man). Here, man is considered a microcosm according to the temporal as well as spatial forms of the macrocosm.

See, too, Shabbetai Donnolo, *Sefer Hakmoni*, ch. 1.: וכאשר ברא האלהים בתחלה בראשית את העולם הזה הגדול כן (As God created this macrocosm at the beginning of Creation, so He created and formed from the macrocosm man, who is a microcosm).

things separate from each other, for they are essences from within essences. But from the beginning of the separate world, they are perceptible progeny, formal,<sup>72</sup> which have finitude.

<sup>70</sup> *Neshamah* as opposed to *nefesh*.

<sup>71</sup> In the sense of containing all. Or R. Isaac may be using the term *מכרעת* as it is used in *SY*, in the sense of mediate, balance and determine, as that which joins all. In *SY*, however, the phrase is *מכריע בינהיים* (e. g., *SY* 2:1 (sec. 23, et al.), while here it is *מכרעת את הכל*, supporting the former reading.

<sup>72</sup> This adjectival usage is rare. E. Ben Yehudah, *Milon ha-Lashon ha-Ivrit*, vol. 6, 5443, and J. Klatzkin, *Theasaurus Philosophicus*, vol. 2, 239, cite examples from mainly thirteenth-century translations and later.

Heat is created from fire:<sup>73</sup> He is not concerned to mention that heat is created from heaven which was created from fire first;<sup>74</sup> he mentions only the patrices and their descendants, and their descendants' descendants forever.<sup>75</sup> Temperate from breath: from air which is breath,<sup>76</sup> but he was not concerned to mention anything but the patrices, in order to clarify the start of each and every descendant. Therefore he uses the term first,<sup>77</sup> for man is a great seal<sup>78</sup> having a beginning<sup>79</sup> and end comprising all

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<sup>73</sup> *SY* 3:4 (sec. 29).

<sup>74</sup> According to *SY* 3:3 (sec. 28): שמים נבראו תחלה (The heavens were created first from fire).

<sup>75</sup> The fact that the order of creation skips the middle term "heavens" is merely a stylistic simplification and not meant to convey anything substantive. R. Isaac, fully committed to the concept of hierarchy, is sensitive to any apparent irregularity in the gradual hierarchic unfolding of creation.

<sup>76</sup> As in *SY* 3:3 (sec. 28).

<sup>77</sup> *SY*, 3:3 (sec. 28). Hebrew: תחלה.

<sup>78</sup> In *Merkavah* tradition, a seal is that which binds a being or class of creatures, setting limits to its power to prevent it from doing damage. See "Seder Rabbah de-Bereshit," in *Batei Midrašot*, ed. A. Wertheimer, vol. 1, 20-21, 24; "Midrash 'Otiot de-R. 'Akiva," *Ibid.*, vol. 2, 363-65. See N. Sed, *REJ*, 124 (1965) 28, 46. In *Sefer Yeẓirah*, seal has the more neutral connotation of spatial or existential limitation. See, e. g., *SY* 1:13 (sec. 15), and 3:5 (sec. 31), where in each case the seal is effected by supernal letters. A seal also hides a secret (*SY* 3:2 (sec. 24). See I. Gruenwald, "Critical Notes on *Sefer Yeẓirah*," *REJ*, 134, (1973), 510. G. Scholem, *Origins*,

creatures.<sup>80</sup> So too, heaven was created first,<sup>81</sup> for it was

32, 330. Judah b. Barzilai discusses of the concept of "seal" as it applies to the process of Creation, *PSY*, 112, 186, and especially 202, 219, where he defines "to seal" as to create a finite world, and bind the world in the finitude of space.

R. Isaac appropriates the term seal from these sources and places it in a Neoplatonic context to denote the limits set within the process of emanation, fixing a given being or level of creation in its ontological status in the continuum. See his further discussion of the meaning of "sealing," lines 299-303 below. The association between man and seal may have been suggested or supported not only by its use in connection with the human soul in *SY* 3:5 (sec. 31), but also by the Mishnah *Sanhedrin*, 37a: הקב"ה טבע כל אדם בחותמו של אדם הראשון (The Holy One, blessed be He, stamped all men with the seal of Adam).

Compare *Sefer hab-Bahir*, 30. Asher b. David, *Kabbalat R. Asher b. David*, 5. Eleazar of Worms, *PSY*, 4b, defines "sealed" as "closed (סָתָם)." .

<sup>79</sup> Hebrew: תחלה.

<sup>80</sup> See Abraham Bar Ḥiyya, *Hegyon han-Nefesh*, 38: ואני אומר, כי החכמים ההם התחילו במחקרם מצורת האדם ובאו להראות כי הוא היה סוף הנבראות (I say that those sages began their inquiries from the form of man, and demonstrated that he was the end of the created beings). Compare, too, *ibid.*, 55. R. Isaac's conception of man as the "great seal," based in part on this formulation of Bar Ḥiyya's, as well as the Genesis account of cosmogony that lists man as the last creature in the order of creation (Gen. 1:26-31), implies more than the mere parallelism of the standard, prevailing concept of man as microcosm. For R. Isaac, the process of creation is hierarchic, linear and unified. The form of man is not merely similar to that of world. Creation is a single process that culminates in man, whose form comprises and "seals," that is, finalizes the entire creative unfolding that precedes him.

Compare Azriel of Gerona, *Perush ha-Aggadot*, 67 (5): האדם כלול מכל הדברים הרוחניים (Man is comprised of all the spiritual things). See Tishbi's note 7, and the citation from Ezra of Gerona: וצריך אתה לדעת כי אדם וחוה נעשו ונבראו בששי בחותם הכל והוא כלול מן הכל (You should know that Adam and Eve were made and created on the sixth day, with the sealing of the totality, and he is comprised from all). Compare *Sefer hab-Bahir*, 82/36,



the first of the separate entities, and he was not concerned to speak other than from the beginning, which is the

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172/55.

B. Stock, *Myth and Science in the Twelfth Century*, (Princeton, 1972) 197-200, notes that while the notion of man as microcosm was a commonplace by the twelfth century, the particular formulation which regards the full being of man not only as comprising all elements of creation, but as the culmination of the continuous, hierarchical process of Creation, was the theme of a particular strain of Platonic thinkers, from Macrobius and Eriugena, to the Porretani and Bernard Silvester. See 197, note 70 for his summary of the literature on *homo microcosmus*.

The more immediate question is how this dictum, "for man is a great seal having a beginning and end comprising all creatures," fits in with the flow of the argument at hand. The problem is the assertion in *SY* 3:3 (sec. 28) that "the heavens were created first," that this one, essentially spiritual, element of creation has temporal and ontological precedence over the other elements of creation. R. Isaac justifies this, implicitly, by reference to the human form: "man... has a beginning and an end." Man, as the seal or formal limit of creation, the all-comprising microcosm, serves as a paradigm useful for an inductive understanding of Creation. Just as his beginning, whether understood temporally or even anatomically, as a reference to the head, takes precedence over and gives initial direction to the other parts of the body (see above, lines 42-43), so, too, "the heavens were created first." Head corresponds to the heavens in *SY* 3:4 (sec. 30).

A similar pattern of argument is used by Azriel of Gerona, *Perus ha-Aggadot*, 67/5, in which he justifies the anthropomorphic concept of the divine tephillin, from *Berakhot* 6a. He supports the notion that the upper *sefirot* direct and influence the lower *sefirot*, by reference to the structure of human being: כְּבֹד יִדְעָה כִּי הַנֶּשְׁמָה הַחַכְמָה כֹּחַ בְּמוֹחַ וּמִשָּׁם מֵתַנְשֵׁם הַכֹּל, וְהָאָדָם כְּלוֹל מִכָּל הַדְּבָרִים הָרוּחָנִיִּים, עַל כֵּן אָמַר מֶלֶךְ הָיָה הַתְּשׁוּבָה קֶשֶׁר בְּרֵהִמִּים, דְּמָה מְקוֹם הַמוֹחַ לְרֵהִמִּים בְּלִעְזָא מִילָשׁ (You already know that the wise soul is a power in the brain, and from there all extends. For man is comprised of all the spiritual things. Therefore it says "the king," which is *Tešuvah*, is bound "in her tresses (Cant. 1:13),": it compared the site of the brain to tresses, *pilus* in [Latin]).

<sup>81</sup> *SY* 3:3 (sec. 28). See, too, Gen. R. 1:15.

matrices. For each and every descendant, by the power of the seal by which they are sealed in the patrices, make descendants.<sup>82</sup> But if they are separated from the patrices, even if they are sealed by a descendant of the patrices, they cannot make descendants,<sup>83</sup> for all things return to the root of their principle.

And He sealed in them:<sup>84</sup> after the making of the bundle,<sup>85</sup> it is sealed with one letter,<sup>86</sup> in order to

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<sup>82</sup> "Sealing" here means "binding to the source." The effect of sealing is not only to establish a being as a subsisting and stable level of emanation in itself, but to maintain an emanative connection between that being and its source.

<sup>83</sup> This explanation of infertility may refer to observations such as that of Abraham Ibn Ezra in his Torah Commentary, Gen. 1:11: **כִּי פִרִי כָל אֵילָן מוֹרֵכֵב לֹא יִצְמִיחַ זֵרְעוֹ** (For the seed of the fruit of all grafted trees does not grow).

<sup>84</sup> *SY* 3:5 (sec. 31).

<sup>85</sup> Note variants: **אֲחֵרֵי הַעֲשׂוֹת הַדְּבֹר** (after the making of the word).

See Asher b. David, *Kabbalat R. Asher b. David*, 57, who defines the lower seven *sefirot*, unified and joined with each other, as the "bundle": **וְעַל הַמַּצָּאם יָחֵד** (With regard to their existence together without separation they are called "bundle," as it says "a bundle of myrrh is my beloved to me (Cant. 1:13)"). See, too, Azriel of Gerona, *Perus ha-Aggadot*, 66-67/ 4-5, esp. 67, note 1, with reference to a citation of R. Isaac the Blind by Ezra of Gerona: **וּבְהִפָּרְדֵּם [הַנִּשְׁמוֹת] מִן הַגּוּף בְּמִצְוַת אֱדוֹנֵיהֶם** (When the souls separate from the body by divine command, if it is worthy, it returns and is bound in *Tiferet*, which is the "bundle of life (1 Sam. 25:29)"). This is not a contradiction. *Tiferet* is the central, unifying *sefirah* of the lower six or seven. See, too, *ibid.*, 74/12. The verse 1 Sam. 25:29 served R. Isaac's students, and, from the evidence of his usage here, R. Isaac himself, as an apt biblical expression for the unification of

maintain everything,<sup>87</sup> so that in world, male and female not change,<sup>88</sup> and so too in year, and so too in soul, which

the *sefirot* among themselves, as well as for ultimate human felicity understood as the binding of the human soul to the *sefirot*.

R. Isaac's reading of *SY* 3:5 (sec. 31) can be paraphrased as follows: the "three matrices," corresponding, in R. Isaac's system, to *Binah*, *Hesed*, *Gevurah*, (line 152 above), are "inscribed, hewn and combined," that is, ramified into the "bundle" of the six lower *sefirot*.

<sup>86</sup> This passage should be correlated with lines 334-38, below, where R. Isaac states that the "six extremities" are sealed with one letter, the letter *aleph*. Here, the "bundle," corresponding to the "six extremities," is sealed with one letter. Compare, however, lines 151-52, above, where the three matrices themselves are sealed with the letter *yod*.

R. Isaac phrases *SY* 3:5 (sec. 31) as follows: שלוש אימות אמ"ש: חקקן חצבן צרפן וחתם בהן. שלוש אימות בעולם, (Three matrices) ושלוש אימות בשנה. ושלוש אימות בנפש, זכר ונקבה, (Three matrices) ו, מ, ש: He inscribed them, hewed them, combined them and sealed them. Three matrices in world, three matrices in year, and three matrices in soul, male and female). Accordingly, he inserts and elaborates his interpretation of sealing by a single letter. The matrices of world, year and soul are a separate issue. This is unlike the readings of other, earlier commentators, Judah b. Barzilai, for instance (*PSY*, 224), for whom the matrices of world, year and soul are themselves the agents of the sealing.

<sup>87</sup> The function of letters in sealing, in the sense of maintaining or fixing the process of creation, is a *Heikhalot* concept. See lines 17-18 and note, above. Compare Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 202.

<sup>88</sup> *SY* 3:5 (sec. 31) reads: "Three matrices in world, three matrices in year, and three matrices in soul, male and female." R. Isaac reads the last clause, "male and female," as applicable to all three categories, world, year and soul. See Shabbetai Donnolo, *Sefer Hakmoni*, ch. 3, who explains that all three realms, world, year and soul, have male and female elements; and Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 220, who expounds the male and female principles in world.

The function of sealing in general is to impart stability, according to its usage in *Heikhalot*

receive one from the other, for this is below that.<sup>89</sup>

Therefore all the descendants are sealed with the patrices.

For each and every letter has a body, a spirit and a soul.<sup>90</sup>

literature. In the present case, however, "not change" may have the further technical meaning found in the writings of Asher b. David and Azriel of Gerona, according to whom sealing with the letter *aleph* of the divine Name imparts the immutability of divine unity to that which is sealed. See Asher b. David, "Peruṣ Ṣem ham-Meforaš," in *Ḳabbalat R. Asher b. David*, 15; Azriel of Gerona, "Peruṣ Yiḥud Haṣ-Ṣem," in G. Scholem, *Seridim Ḥadašim*, 218.

<sup>89</sup> The arrangement of World, Year and Soul in linear, hierarchical order, connected by emanation, is not a necessary inference from *SY* itself. In *SY*, 3:3-5 (secs. 28-31) these realms are merely parallel. Azriel of Gerona, *PSY*, 460, makes clear the Neoplatonic provenance of R. Isaac's arrangement: **שהכח נמשך מן האותיות לעולם ומן העולם לשנה ומן השנה אל הנפש. ועל דרך זה אמרו חכמי המחקר אור השכל נאצל על הגלגלים ומן הגלגלים אל הכוכבים ומן הכוכבים אל בני אדם** (for the power is drawn from the letters to the world, and from world to year and from year to soul. In a similar way the philosophers said that the light of the intellect emanates upon the spheres, and from the spheres to the stars and from the stars to human beings).

<sup>90</sup> See line 205, above. Each letter reflects the triadic structure of soul, year, and world in its body, spirit and soul. R. Isaac defines the body of the letter as its vocalization through breath, the soul as its mental intent, lines 302-03, below. Compare *Ma'amar 'al Penimut hat-Torah*, in *Kiṭvei Ramban*, ed. H. D. Chavel, vol. 2, 469: **כי התנועות הן כדמיון הצורה והאותיות כדמיון החומר** (for the vowels are like the form and the consonant letters are like the matter). R. Isaac, too, may have identified the spirit of the letter as its vocalic pointing in particular, not just its vocalization in general.

The precedents for this spiritualized interpretation of the letters can be found in Halevi and Abraham Ibn Ezra. Compare Judah Halevi, *Kuzari*, trans. J. Ibn Tibbon, 4:3 (ed. A. Zifrinowitsch, 209, line 6), with reference to the four vocalic letters used in the divine Name: **והמה כרוחות ושאר האותיות כגופות** (they [the letters *aleph, heh, vav, yod*] are like spirits and the rest of the letters are like

It receives power from the inner intent<sup>91</sup> of thought, which crowns it,<sup>92</sup> to establish it in its status, and to add to its strength and increase<sup>93</sup> to receive power over which it

bodies). Compare Abraham Ibn Ezra, *Yesod Mor'a*, 1: כי (for the words are like bodies and the meanings are like souls). From Halevi, R. Isaac gets the contrast between the spirit and the body of the letters. From Ibn Ezra, R. Isaac gets the third term, the meaning or mental intent.

<sup>91</sup> The term תכלית here is used in the sense of purpose or mental intent, one of the definitions offered by S. Ibn Tibbon, *Perus me-ham-Nilot haz-Zarot*, entry *takhliṭ*: תכלית שם משותף... ויאמר תכלית בענין תכלית כוונה בדבר... ואני הוטרתי עליו ברוב המקומות מלת כונה, ( *takhliṭ* is an amphibolous term... *takhliṭ* is used regarding a thing's purposeful intent... In most places I have added the word "intent," saying "purposeful intent," to enhance clarity). R. Isaac, too, couples the term with an indicator of mental activity, in the phrase תכלית דעת (mental intent), line 303, below.

<sup>92</sup> Based on *SY* 3:6-8 (secs. 32-34): וקשר לו כתר (and He tied a crown on it). Compare *Menahot* 29b: בשעה שעלה משה למרום מצאו להקב"ה שיושב וקושר כתרים לאותיות (When Moses ascended on high, he found the Holy One, blessed be He, sitting and tying crowns on the letters); *Midraṣ R. 'Akiva ben Yosef 'al hat-Tagin*, in *Batei Midraṣot*, ed. S. A. Wertheimer, vol. 2, 471: דורש (the interpreter of the crowns of the letters). Behind R. Isaac's account of the divine and human psychological process of verbalizing thought stands aggadic and midrashic accounts of the crowning of the letters. R. Isaac interprets the divine activity of crowning letters metaphysically, in a manner similar to sealing, in the sense of establishing as an entity in stable relation to its divine source, and applies it analogically, microcosmically, to the process of the expression of human thought in speech.

<sup>93</sup> The term תוספת is used by J. Ibn Tibbon in the sense of growth throughout his translation of *Hovot ha-Levavot*, e. g., *Se'ar hap-Perišut*, ch. 1: בגופות עפריות מקבלות הגידול והתוספת במצוץ המזון והראויים להם (in earthly bodies that are subject to growth and increase by means of food appropriate to them). R. Isaac seems to be employing the term in an abstract

can rule.<sup>94</sup> The body of the letters, of which we spoke, is breath, and their purpose is according to the purpose of the mental intent of the one who expresses them. Male with נשׁ:<sup>95</sup> this is when the woman ovulates first, and thereby gives birth to a male,<sup>96</sup> for the descendant of fire comes first,<sup>97</sup> and afterwards comes the drop from the male and

sense based on this usage.

<sup>94</sup> Based on *SY* 3:6-8 (secs. 32-34): המליך את אלף (He set *aleph* to rule over air and tied upon it a crown). See lines 311-12, below. R. Isaac's explanation of the effect of the ruling and crowning of the letters follows the discussion of Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 224-25, especially 224, where he states: המליך אל"ף ברוחות פ' הכי כלום' נתן הבורא ממשלה ומלכות ונח באל"ף וברא ממנה רוח והמליכה עליו להיותה אמו ושרשו ומלכו וקשר לו כתר לא' והם תאגיי אפ' [צ"ל תאגיים] כמשרש בספר תאגיים. ויש מי שרוצה למרש וקשר לו כתר שהוא אמור בדמיון למי שהזכיר שהמליך א' על רוח בא לומר בדמיון ("He set *aleph* to rule over air," which is to say that the Creator gave rulership and kingship and power to *aleph* and created from it air and set [*aleph*] to rule over [air], to be its matrix and root and king. "And tied upon it a crown," on the *aleph*, which are the crowns as explained in the *Book of Crowns*. There is a commentator who wishes to interpret "He tied upon it a crown," as being said figuratively. Since it mentioned "He set *aleph* to rule over air," it comes to say figuratively that He tied upon it a crown, for there is no king without a crown of kingship).

R. Isaac's paraphrase, which states that it is the inner intent of thought, divine and human, rather than the Creator in a general sense, which crowns and empowers the letters, gives to R. Judah b. Barzilai's explanations a more systematic metaphysical and psychological twist.

<sup>95</sup> *SY* 3:6 (sec. 32).

<sup>96</sup> *Niddah* 25b, 28a, 31a: אמר ר' יצחק אשה מזרעת (R. Isaac says, when a woman ovulates first, she gives birth to a male; when a man impregnates first, she gives birth to a female).

overpowers it, and the spirit enters the drop, into its letters, at the moment that it is fire. The male brings water,<sup>98</sup> in which is breath,<sup>99</sup> which is *ʾMS*,<sup>100</sup> the causal principle it utilizes. For the male brings water upon the *sin* of the female, and therefore she gives birth to a male.<sup>101</sup> And female with *ʾSM*: for the water of the drop from the male comes first within her by his inseminating first, and the fire of the female attaches to it, along with the breath implanted in it. According to the inversion of the letters, the created form changes, from male to female and from female to male. Sometimes the infant is sexless or an androgyne,<sup>102</sup> according to the changing inversion of the

<sup>97</sup> Fire is female, associated with the letter *shin*, according to Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 220, 225.

<sup>98</sup> Water is male, associated with the letter *mem*, according to Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 220, 225.

<sup>99</sup> The letter *aleph* precedes, and is therefore within, the letter *mem*.

<sup>100</sup> The order *ʾ, M, S*, is explained as *ʾ* imbedded in *M*, implanted in a pre-positioned *S*. The *ʾM* builds upon the *S*. Compare lines 302-03.

<sup>101</sup> R. Isaac conflates *SY*, 3:6 (sec. 32) with the talmudic dictum from *Niddah* 31a to mutually elucidate both. He applies the linguistic theory of *SY* as a technical scientific explanation for the talmudic dictum, and uses the temporal sequence specified by the talmudic dictum to explain the significance of the differing order of the letters *ʾMS*. Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 225 confessed that he did not have a convincing explanation for the identification of *ʾMS* as male and *ʾSM* as female. R. Isaac's explanation may well be original.

<sup>102</sup> A discussion of the sexual aberrations of the sexless or androgynous person is the context for the

letters *ḥms*.

**Installed:** all installation in the form of any created form is coupling.<sup>103</sup> For everything was in *Binah*, and it installed.<sup>104</sup> For a king takes counsel, and every piece of advice can speak and rule over him.<sup>105</sup>

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citation of R. Isaac's dictum in Niddah 28a, 31a.

<sup>103</sup> See lines 181-82, above. The impact of the letters on the elements is described by R. Isaac as a coupling, following Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 215.

The translation of "installed," in the anthropomorphic sense of "installed as king," into more neutral, abstract terms, as "coupling," justified by the context of discussion, "the form of any created form," alludes to a disposition of thought similar to Maimonides'. In his discussion of divine attributes, *Moreh Nevukhim*, 1:54, Maimonides insists that attributes which are expressed in terms of moral qualities must, when predicated of God, be translated into ontological terms.

<sup>104</sup> The joining of letters and patrixes is effected in the *sefirah Binah*.

<sup>105</sup> R. Isaac puns on the connection between the *hiph'al* and the *niph'al*, to express the mutuality of the process of the installation of a letter over an element, as a bilateral coupling, not just an imposition. The king who is installed to rule over his subject, *himlikh*, also receives advice from his subject, *nimlakh*, and in this way is himself ruled.



## Chapter 4

**Geminates:**<sup>1</sup> for after the cause of life emanates the cause of death.<sup>2</sup> It is the accented form<sup>3</sup> that indicates the effects of the life cause, while the death cause is soft.<sup>4</sup> But there are those who say that the life cause is silence and quiet and softness, and the death cause is strength and sibillance and accented and sharply articulated.<sup>5</sup> There is a

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<sup>1</sup> *SY* 4:1 (sec. 37).

<sup>2</sup> R. Isaac is explaining the initial list in this section of *SY* which mentions only the positive member of the given pairs of opposites listed later: יסודין חיים ושלום וחכמה וכו'... תמורת חיים מוות (Their foundation is life and peace and wisdom, etc... The opposite of life is death.) He explains that the positive member of the pair is primary.

<sup>3</sup> Accented with a *dagesh*.

<sup>4</sup> This is also the position of the *PSY* 4:1 from the circle of the Ḥasidei Ashkenaz but attributed to R. Saadiah Gaon.

<sup>5</sup> See Berekhiah b. Natronai ha-Nakdan, *Dodi we-Nekhdi*, Munich Codex, ed. H. Gollancz (Oxford, 1920) 32, who paraphrases Adelard of Bath's comparison of the relationship between soul and body in the processes of death and life: מאחר שברצון הבורא פרידתם ובעל כרחם, למה תצא זאת מלפניו להוציאה מן הגוף ובהבלים ובקושי, והיא בלם ובנחת ובחכמה בלא הרגש להתחבר עם הגוף, למה תהיה הפרידה ובכאי ובאנחה, והזיווג מתוך ונחמד (Since their separation is by the will of the Creator, and under duress, why has He decreed that [the soul] be taken out of the body with pain and difficulty, while she was joined to the body in silence, in ease, cleverly and without sensation? Why should her separation be with tears and groans, and her coupling so sweet and delightful?). R. Isaac's comment may be a paraphrase of Berekhiah's description, put into the idiom of *Sefer Yeẓirah*; or he may be quoting another source who had already composed the paraphrase; or, simply, he may be expressing a prevailing view, to which Berekhiah, and Adelard, also

distinction between the geminate and the simple letters. Even though we find among the simple letters that the opposite of sight is blindness and so forth,<sup>6</sup> even so, they are not geminate but simple, for this cause is not a cause that comes from itself, but the removal of sight.<sup>7</sup> But the way the geminates behave<sup>8</sup> is that after the life cause emanates the death cause, the good emanates from the depth of good, and evil emanates from the depth of evil,<sup>9</sup> and this is good from good and evil from evil.<sup>10</sup> If you ask "how is

attest.

The two opposing views of the life and death principles cited by R. Isaac differ essentially in their focus. That which characterizes life as strong and death as soft or weak centers on their effects. That which characterizes life as soft and death as strong or harsh focusses on their causal processes.

<sup>6</sup> Sight is associated with the simple letters, *SY* 5:1 (sec. 45).

<sup>7</sup> Isaac Israeli, *Book of Substances*, in A. Altmann, S. M. Stern, *Isaac Israeli*, 87: "as for blindness, it has no form, because it is the privation of sight." Abraham Bar Ḥiyya, *Megillat ha-Megalleh*, ch. 1, 5: וכן החושך הוא אסיפת האור (so, too, darkness is the absence of light).

<sup>8</sup> This word choice reflects the language of *SY* 4:1 (sec. 37) itself.

<sup>9</sup> *SY* 1:5 (sec. 7).

<sup>10</sup> *SY*, 6:2 (sec. 60): רע מרע וטוב משוב (evil from evil and good from good) ; *Menahot* 53b; J. Alḥarizi, *Nusrei ha-Philosophim*, 2:1, (1807), 7b: ואמר טוב מן ואמר רע מן הרע עשותו (He [Socrates] said the good is made by the good and the evil from the evil).

R. Isaac explains the mechanism of the emanation of opposites from the geminates as based on their rootedness in the *sefirot*, particularly *Ḥesed* and *Gevurah*, the depth of good and the depth of evil,

fire from water?"<sup>11</sup> one should say that from ten *sefirot*, which are inner essences, that are so because their innerness is within *Hokhmah*, for they are roots from the One: good and evil are within them.<sup>12</sup> For they begin to grow like a tree whose beginnings are not recognized until they become a sprout.<sup>13</sup> But these<sup>14</sup> are not so, for they are letters, which are like branches of a tree. For the geminates are progeny of the ten *sefirot*,<sup>15</sup> which are

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respectively. Compare Azriel of Gerona, *PSY*, 454 on *SY* 1:5. The beneficial aspect of a geminate is rooted in the depth of good, while its injurious aspect, which is a self-standing principle and not just an absence of the good, is rooted in the depth of evil. In this way he also explains the otherwise problematic dictum of *SY* 6:2 (sec. 60) "evil from evil and good from good," which, on the face of it, implies a theologically dangerous dualism. Instead, this dictum is interpreted as referring to an even more integrated, unified process: the emanation of these opposites, and their offshoots, from the two "depths," the *sefirot* which are necessarily unified.

<sup>11</sup> A reference to *SY* 1:12 (sec. 14): ארבע - אש (Four - fire from water). To paraphrase: "how does the *sefirah* *Gevurah* come from its opposite, the *sefirah* *Hesed*?"

<sup>12</sup> The *sefirot*, even those expressing opposite characteristics, are all one. This is a kabbalistic explanation of the doctrine that came to be known in Christian scholastic theology as *coincidentia oppositorum*, the unity of all opposites in God. Earlier discussions of this concept in Jewish sources include Judah HaLevi, *Kuzari*, 2:2; Maimonides, *Moreh Nevukhim*, 1:53.

<sup>13</sup> This image is used above, lines 4-6, 213-16.

<sup>14</sup> The geminates.

<sup>15</sup> In R. Isaac's hierarchical system, *sefirot* and letters are superimposed upon each other, nested within each other.

matrices, which are three triads,<sup>16</sup> and one<sup>17</sup> is with all of them,<sup>18</sup> and therefore they are called ten.

**Geminates:** that each one plus another one are included in their principles.<sup>19</sup> **Soft:** there is softness for good and there is softness which is for evil. **And hard:** there is hardness for good and hardness for evil. So with each and every attribute: there is good that is for evil, and there is evil that is for good.<sup>20</sup> Therefore it is said **geminates**

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<sup>16</sup> How exactly R. Isaac apportions nine *sefirot* in three triads is not clear. In line 152, above, he identifies the three matrices with the *sefirot Binah, Hesed, Pahad*. Azriel of Gerona, who endorses this position, explains that these three are doubled below to six (*PSY*, 1:10, 456). This scheme would not account for nine *sefirot* in any natural grouping, however. In another place, Azriel of Gerona identifies the matrices as *Gedulah, Gevurah, Tiferet* (*PSY* 3:2, 420). In this approach, there would be another triad *sefirot* above and a third triad below. R. Isaac himself may be using the term "matrices" in a non-specific sense, as applying to all the *sefirot*, which can be grouped in three triads in a number of ways, to comply with *SY*'s notion of three matrices.

Isaac of Acre suggested that the three matrices are *Binah, Tiferet, Yesod*, each standing as the bottommost *sefirah* of a triad (*PSY*, 383). This is not supported by the words of R. Isaac the Blind's own commentary, however.

<sup>17</sup> **האחת**, feminine, referring to a *sefirah*, the *sefirah Hokhmah*.

<sup>18</sup> See line 44, below. The triple triad structure appears in *SY* 6:3 (sec. 48), in relation to the matrices and geminates: **שלושה - אחד אחד לבדו עומד. שבעה** (Three - each one stands alone. Seven - three divisions upon three and one is a rule that mediates between).

<sup>19</sup> Each is composed of a pair of opposites in principle.

<sup>20</sup> This reflects the sentiment of rabbinic

which are exchanges, for the principle itself which is good is exchanged in itself to effect evil,<sup>21</sup> like the wicked, who invert the attribute of mercy to cruelty, and the righteous invert the attribute of judgment to the attribute of mercy.<sup>22</sup> Corresponding to:<sup>23</sup> seven inner geminates,<sup>24</sup> and the branches from them correspond to them, like seven days, seven weeks, seven years, seven sabbatical cycles.<sup>25</sup>

expressions such as Gen. R. 68: "There is no evil that does not have some good in it"; *Tanḥum'a*, introduction, sec. 9: "There is no good that does not have evil in it."

<sup>21</sup> That is, the principles of the geminates are not exchanged or transformed into something else, but rather, the geminates themselves are the double, exchanging principles.

<sup>22</sup> Gen. R., ch. 33:4: **אוי להם לרשעים שהם הופכים מדת רחמים למדה** (Woe to the wicked, to change the attribute of mercy into the attribute of judgment); **תפלתן של צדיקים מהפכת דעתו של הקב"ה ממה"ה ממה"ה** (*Sukkah* 14a: **אכזריות למדת רחמנות** (The prayers of the righteous change the mind of the Holy One, blessed be He, from the attribute of cruelty to the attribute of mercy)).

<sup>23</sup> *SY* 4:2 (sec. 38): **שבע כפולות... כנגד שבע קצוות** (Seven geminates... corresponding to seven extremities).

<sup>24</sup> The seven extremities of *SY* 4:2 (sec. 38) refer, in R. Isaac's system, to the seven lower *sefirot*, which are the inner principles of the seven geminate letters. Therefore R. Isaac calls them "seven inner geminates," to which their offspring, the seven letters, correspond.

<sup>25</sup> The reference is to *SY* 4:3 (sec. 39, short recensions), which cites the correspondence between seven geminates, seven days, and seven weeks, upon which R. Isaac expands to include seven years and seven sabbatical cycles. *SY* itself states that the seven geminates are the archetype of all sets of seven: **לפיכך חבב שביעי תחת כל השמים** (therefore the seventh is beloved under all heaven). See Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*

Extremities,<sup>26</sup> from the term "end," and all of them<sup>27</sup> are from *naw naw*.<sup>28</sup> Thus it is written "in six troubles He

249, who extrapolates in a similar way.

<sup>26</sup> *SY* 4:2 (sec. 38). Lines 330-38 are carefully annotated and insightfully analyzed by H. Padayah, "Pegam we-Tikkun," *Mehkerei Yerushalayim be-Mahshevet Yisrael*, vol. 6, nos. 3-4 (1987) 157-285. The present annotation of these lines is in large part indebted to her work.

<sup>27</sup> All "ends."

<sup>28</sup> The MSS Milano-Ambrosiana 57, 32; Harvard Heb. 58/11; and Cincinnati 523/3 read *וכולן מששה ששה* (and all of them are from sixes). In this version, the masculine form of the number and its referent are unclear, and the meaning of the phrase is nearly unintelligible. MSS Cambridge Add. 671; Halberstam 444; Montefiore 313 read: *וכולן מן' ו'* (and all of them are from *naw naw*). MSS Cambridge Or. 2116,8 and Cincinnati 524/3 read *מן' .* MSS JTS 2325/10 and Leiden 24/25 have *מן' .* This group of MSS, which have the letter *naw* in some form, rather than the number "six," would seem to have the original version here. The idea is that the term *קצה*, direction or extremity, in its plural form hints at its own kabbalistic meaning, by way of a grammatical pun: the doubled *naw*, which can represent the *plene* form for writing and enunciating the letter *naw* itself, signifies the third letter of the Tetragrammaton, as well as the number six, and corresponds to the six lower *sefirot*. This is why R. Isaac sees the need to comment on the derivation of the word *קצוות* from *קצה*, an otherwise obvious and unnecessary explanation. His purpose is to contrast and highlight the *naws* of the plural form in comparison to the singular, and set up his interpretation. The other MSS, which can be assumed to be later, scribal emendations, spelled out the letter *naw* as the number six, and missed the point.

This renders unnecessary Padayah's attempt to justify R. Isaac's mention of the number six at this point by reference to the long recension of *SY* cited by Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 231 ("Pegam ve-Tikkun," 164, n. 25). Several of the short recensions, upon which R. Isaac's commentary is based, also speak of six directions, and an example of these, too, is cited by Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 231, 246. See I. Gruenwald, "A Preliminary Critical Edition of *Sefer Yezirah*," 157. As

will deliver you (Job 5:19)." It did not say "from six," but "in six." They are the troubles that afflict others, but for you they are laughter.<sup>29</sup> For the seventh which mediates<sup>30</sup> is the second letter of the Name,<sup>31</sup> because its essence is

it happens, R. Isaac's interpretation of the letter *vav* as a reference to the six *sefirot* and the third letter of the Tetragrammaton works well whether or not he was using one of those texts. It also explains his otherwise inexplicable shift into a discussion of the letters of the divine Name in the lines following. See a further development of this doctrine in Asher b. David, *Sefer ha-Yihud*, in *Kabbalat R. Asher b. David*, 57.

<sup>29</sup> I. e., the righteous person is not saved "from" the six, but "in" and "by" the "six," the six lower *sefirot* which are the basis for the geminates which can have both a benificent and a harmful aspect.

Padayah suggests that the term "laughter" here has an eschatological connotation, based on aggadic passages such as *Berakhot* 31a on Ps. 126, and *Sota* 49a ("Pegam ve-Tikkun," 164, nn. 27, 28). Add to the list *Nakot* 24b, where the very incident that saddens the sages provokes laughter in R. Akiva, as a sign of coming redemption.

<sup>30</sup> R. Isaac is explaining the contrast in *SY* 4:2 (sec. 38) between the initial sum of "seven geminates," and the ensuing division into "six directions" and the seventh, called the "holy temple." See Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 246. *SY* states this seventh principle is *מכיון באמצע* (lined up in the middle), in the middle of the six directions. R. Isaac, here and in lines 39-40 above, associates this central position with the function termed "mediating," balancing between extremes, whether in divine qualities such as grace and judgment, or the extremities under discussion here.

<sup>31</sup> It is the second letter of the Tetragrammaton, as opposed to the third letter, which designates the lower six *sefirot*. This second letter is the seventh *sefirah*, which, as Padayah notes, corresponds to *Binah*, counted as seventh beginning from *Yesod*, at the bottom ("Pegam we-Tikkun," 164, n. 29). It is both part of the grouping of six, as its basis, and yet distinct. R. Isaac explains this distinctiveness expressed in *SY* by virtue of its representing a different letter of the

*aleph*,<sup>32</sup> and by *aleph* the Name is elevated.<sup>33</sup> It is the inner Name<sup>34</sup> by which the Name<sup>35</sup> is elevated. For we say

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Tetragrammaton.

<sup>32</sup> R. Isaac is concerned to prove that *Binah* should be considered a mediating *sefirah*, as indicated in his interpretation of this section of *SY*, whereas this role had been previously ascribed to *Hokhmah*, lines 39-44. He shows that the essence of *Binah* is the even more interior *Keter*, the *aleph* of the divine Name *ʿhyh*. The question here is why R. Isaac found it necessary to relate *Binah* to *aleph* and *Keter* to justify its mediating role? He could just as well have demonstrated its rootedness in *Hokhmah*, which has been established as a mediator. It seems he is interested in an explicit proof of *Binah*'s mediating role, from *SY* itself, in his identification of *aleph* is a rule mediating between (*SY* 6:1 (sec. 26) as denoting *Binah* itself. See lines 163-4, 273, above, where *aleph*-rule denotes *Keter-Binah*, and tongue-rule is *Tiferet*. Further, the direct pairing of *Keter* and *Binah* is indicated by the divine Name *ʿh* itself, according to his doctrine and the doctrine of his Provençal predecessor, R. Jacob Ha-Nazir.

<sup>33</sup> In the Neoplatonic sense of returned to its source. See *supra*, ch. 8.4.1.

<sup>34</sup> Padayah, "Pegam we-Tikkun", 166, n. 35b, notes the use of the term "inner" by R. Isaac to refer not only to that which is esoteric and hidden, but also that which is ontologically higher. See, too, I. Twersky, *Rabad*, 243, n. 16.

In R. Isaac's system, the divine Name *ʿhyh* ranks ontologically higher than the Tetragrammaton. Earlier precedents for this ranking include Judah Halevi, *Kuzari*, 4:3. More explicitly, Abraham Ibn Ezra, *Sefer haš-Šem*, ch. 8, (Fürth, 1834, reprinted Jerusalem, 1970) 19a, says: והנה שם בן ב' אותיות הוא שם שקבלו הנכבדים שאינם גופות, וככה השם שהחלתו א'. ובעבור זה יקראנו כל אדם בכל מקום כמכתבו. והנה ידמה לכבוד השם שהוא נעלה על כל כבוד וכל הוספת כמו השכינה שהיא בין המלאכים (Behold, the two letter Name is the Name received by the glorious ones that are not corporeal, so, too, the Name that begins with *aleph*. Because of this, it is pronounced by all men in all places in the way it is written. And it is compared to the glory of God exalted beyond all glory and all possible excess, like the divine Presence that is among



regarding it: "Your Name is awesome,"<sup>36</sup> for this is *aleph* is a rule,<sup>37</sup> which is *Tešuvah*,<sup>38</sup> which consists of *ḥ*,<sup>39</sup> and

the angels in the heights that move the hosts of heaven). By contrast, the Tetragrammaton is the Name that expresses the divine Presence that adheres to Israel and the lower world. Having ranked the Name *ḥyh* higher than the Tetragrammaton, Ibn Ezra has to account for the fact that the higher Name is pronounced as written, while the lower Name is not pronounced as written, but traditionally given instead a protective epithet (*Pesahim* 50a). He explains that the higher Name is more accurately reflective of its incorporeal status, and requires no concealment, while the lower Name, attached to and reflecting the physical world, must be concealed.

The supreme status of the divine Name *ḥyh* is stated explicitly in the kabbalistic doctrine of R. Jacob ha-Nazir, who assigns *yh* to *Ḥokhmah* and *ḥ* to *Keter* *‘Elyon* (see the fragment cited by G. Scholem, *Rešit ha-Kabbalah*, 73-74, n. 2). See R. Goetschel, "'ḥyh ašer ḥyh' ḥel Meḳubbalet Gerona, Meḥkerei Yerušalayim be-Maḥsevet Yisrael, vol. 6, nos. 3-4 (1987) 287-98 for a summary and analysis of the doctrines relating to this Name among the Gerona kabbalists.

<sup>35</sup> Tetragrammaton.

<sup>36</sup> *‘Amidah* prayer for the Days of Awe (Scholem). Compare lines 115-16, above. The full phrase is וְשִׁמְךָ נִרְאָה עַל כָּל מַה שִׁבְרָאָה (You Name is awesome above all that which You have created). See Padayah, "Pegam we-Tikkun," 166, n. 36, who suggests that the "awesome Name" is the Tetragrammaton, associated with *Tiferet*, and it is this Name which is elevated. It may be, however, that R. Isaac is providing one of his hyperliteral interpretations, reading the liturgical phrase to say there is a divine Name which is "above" "all the *מה*," the "whatness," i. e., above even the *sefirah* *Ḥokhmah*, associated with the term *מה*, whatness, lines 25-26, above.

<sup>37</sup> *SY* 6:1 (sec. 26).

<sup>38</sup> See lines 163-4, 273, above, where *aleph-rule* denotes *Keter-Binah*, or *Tešuvah*, as that which elevates and returns to the source, and *tongue-rule* is *Tiferet*, that which is elevated.

therefore it is counted by number as one letter, as if it is *aleph*.<sup>40</sup> The seal of *aleph* is from all sides, beginning and end,<sup>41</sup> but the median *aleph*<sup>2</sup> of the Name is like the

<sup>39</sup> See the fragment of R. Jacob ha-Nazir, G. Scholem, *Resit haḳ-Ḳabbalah*, 73, n. 2, who associates this Name with *Keter*. R. Isaac is refining this doctrine: the *aleph* is *Keter*, the combination *aleph-heh* denotes *Binah*, or *Tešuvah* elevating towards *Keter*.

<sup>40</sup> *Aleph is a rule* is counted according to its inner essence, only the letter *aleph* is mentioned as such, even though it is a composite.

<sup>41</sup> See *Batei Midrašot*, vol. 1, *Seder Rabbah de-Berešit*, 20-21, 23-24; and especially vol. 2, *Ṣotiot de-R. Akiva*, 363-64: וכמה הן אותיות שבהן נתחתמו שמים וארץ, שתיים עשרה הן...ואלו הן שתיים עשרה אותיות שנאמר אהי"ה אשר אהי"ה אהי"ה שלחני עליכם. שלש פעמים אהי"ה הרי שתיים עשרה אותיות. וכאי זה צד נתחתמו בהן. ארבע ארבע לכל רוח ורוח, שתי אותיות מלמעלה לכל רוח ושתי אותיות מלמטה לכל רוח, א"ה מלמטה ו"ה מלמעלה, א"ה מלמעלה ו"ה מלמטה. ורוח רביעית פתוחה ועומדת ואינה חתומה, יש זמן שהיא פתוחה ועומדת ואינה חתומה, ויש זמן שהיא חתומה, ובזמן שהיא חתומה אינה חתומה אלא בי"ה ו"ה, ו"ה מלמעלה ו"ה מלמטה. ומפני מה יש זמן שהיא פתוחה מפני שידר בה הקדוש ברוך הוא בלבבל את הלשון...ובבה ירד על הר סיני...ובבה עתיד לירד (How many are the letters with which heaven and earth were sealed? They are twelve...And these are the twelve letters, as it says "hyh aser hyh, hyh sent me to you (Ex. 3:14). Three times hyh is twelve letters. How were they sealed with them? Four by four for each and every direction, h below, yh above, h above, yh below. The fourth direction stands open and is not sealed. There are times it stands open, and there are times it is sealed. At the times it is sealed it is only sealed with yhwh, yh above, h below. Why are there times it is open? Because the Holy One, blessed be He, descended through it to confuse the languages...and He descended through it upon mount Sinai...and in the future He will descend through it to Jerusalem to renew the world).

R. Isaac's doctrine of the function and relation between the divine Names *hyh* and *yhwh* builds upon this passage from the *Ṣotiot de-R. Akiva*. Here are the themes of the sealing of the world on all sides with these Names, and the higher status of the divine Name *hyh*, with the Tetragrammaton *Yhwh* functioning as the gate for the divine Presence to descend to the lower

soul:<sup>43</sup> were it not for the spirits, the bodies could not

world.

There is an echo, in R. Isaac's phrase "beginning and end," of the terms "above" and "below" in this midrashic passage. The actual conception behind the phrase, however, is laid out explicitly by R. Asher b. David, and following him, R. Azriel of Gerona. In his *Perus Sem Ham-Meforash*, in *Kabbalat R. Asher b. David*, 3/15, R. Asher b. David demonstrates the way each of the four vowel letters that compose the divine Names, אהיו, unfold from each other phonetically, following the paradigm of their enunciation in speech. He shows that the ultimate, complete order of letters, based on their full, phonetic pronunciation, is אהיו. This is the "sealing" with the letter *aleph* "at the beginning and the end," expressing the absolute divine unity. According to R. Asher: אילו הם האותיות אהיו, הנסתרות בסתר התנועות, וכל אלו יוצאות מתחלת סתר התנועה הבא מן הא' עד סופה. וזהו סדרן: תחלת תנועת הא' א, ואין א בלא ה"א, ואין היו"ד [צ"ל ה"א] בלא יו"ד, ר"ל בסתר תנועת הצרי מביא יו"ד... ואין יו"ד בלא ו', ובאות הו' נרמזת הא' בסתר הבא מתחלת תנועתה. ומורה שהא' הזאת כל סתר בא ממנה, והיא המתחלת והיא המשלמת, לפי שהיא נקראת בתחלה בא (These letters, *ahwy*, are the ones hidden in the hidden vowels, and they all issue from the beginning of the hidden vowels that issues from the letter *aleph* until its end. This is their order: the beginning vowel of *aleph* is *yo*, and there is no *yo* without *heh*, and there is no *heh* without *yod*, that is, the hidden vowel of the *l* [the *heh* pronounced *hei*] brings *yod*... and there is no *yod* without *waw*, and in the letter *waw* the *aleph* is alluded to in the vowel that is hidden at the beginning. This shows that all vowels come from this *aleph*. It is the one that begins and it is the one that completes, since it is read at the beginning and the end). See, too, his discussion in *Sefer ha-Yihud*, 57.

This doctrine of the unfolding of the vowel letters from each other is clearly a development of Judah Halevi's explanation of the meanings of the divine Names, as composed of the four Hebrew vowel letters, אהיו, in *Kuzari*, 4:3 "the spirit in the bodies of the consonants." R. Isaac's overall conception of the relationship between the divine Name אהיו and the Tetragrammaton may well have been a meditation on the passage in *Ṣoṭṭot de-R. Akiva* cited above, and fleshed out with the linguistic explanation of Halevi.

An account similar in form but differing in details is offered by Azriel of Gerona, in G. Scholem,

stand,<sup>44</sup> but if all were spirit<sup>45</sup> a name could not be invoked.<sup>46</sup> Therefore *heh* does not change, rather, it is

*Seridim Hadasim*, 216-19, and 218, n. 8; and "Kabbalot R. Yaakov ve-R. Yizhak Benei R. Yaakov ha-Kohen," *Hada'ei ha-Yahadut*, vol. 2 (1927) 231-32). In R. Azriel's conception, the order of the unfolding of the vowels of the divine Name is given as *ḥyh* or *ḥywh*, also with the letter *aleph* at the beginning and the end. See Padayah, "Pegam ve-Tikkun," 167, n. 40, who distinguishes between R. Isaac's and R. Azriel's interpretations and their eschatological implications. According to R. Azriel, there is a flaw evident even in the supreme divine Name *ḥyh*, which will be completed with an *aleph* at the end only in the Messianic era. For R. Isaac, this Name is fully intact as is; rather, it is the Tetragrammaton that must be rectified.

<sup>42</sup> Based on *SY* 4:2 (sec. 38): והיכל הקודש מכוון באמצע (and the holy temple is lined up in the middle). While the *aleph* seals on all sides, it is also in the middle, as the essence of the Name. See Padayah, 168, n. 42, who translates "median" as "inner," and shows its explicit use in this fashion in the Neoplatonic doctrine of Abraham Ibn Ezra, Ex. 8:18 (57).

<sup>43</sup> *Berakhot* 10a, where five parallels between God and the soul include: just as God fills the entire world, so the soul fills the entire body; just as God dwells in the inner recesses, so the soul dwells in the inner recesses.

<sup>44</sup> See G. Scholem, *Qabbala: das Buch Bahir*, (Leipzig, 1923) 87-89, who analyzes the sources underlying this concept, from Judah Halevi, and Abraham Ibn Ezra, and from earlier Muslim and Christian writers. Especially striking is the parallel between R. Isaac's formulation and that of the eighth-century English scholar Alcuin; in his *Didascalia* (PL 101, col. 855): "Vocales sunt sicut animae, consonantes sicut corpora. Anima vero et se movet et corpus. Corpus vero immobile est sine anima. Sic sunt consonantes sine vocalibus."

<sup>45</sup> That is, if all the letters of the divine Name were of equal ontological status.

<sup>46</sup> R. Isaac justifies the according of a higher, more spiritually interior ontological status to the letter *aleph*, in comparison to the other vowel letters

elevated and called a full name<sup>47</sup> that "shall not waver (Ps.

of the divine Name. Spirits and bodies correspond to vowels and consonants, both mutually dependent for verbal expression. See line 205, above. With regard to the vowels themselves that are under consideration here, if all the vowels were on the same ontological level, "if all were spirit," there would be no articulation of a name, in this case, a divine Name. The *aleph*, however, is the inner vowel that moves and originates the other vowels, together forming a Name.

G. Scholem, *Qabbala: das Buch Bahir*, (Leipzig, 1923) 87-89, analyzes the sources underlying the conception that vowels and consonants, corresponding to spirits and bodies, are mutually necessary. He cites not only Judah Halevi and Abraham Ibn Ezra, but earlier Muslim and Christian writers as well. According to Scholem, this motif was widespread and common in all three cultures. Compare Judah b. Barzilai, *PSP*, 211-12.

<sup>47</sup> Padayah, "Pegam we-Tikkun," 169, understands the *heh* here as the final letter of the Tetragrammaton, not the second letter that has been under discussion thus far. The allusion is to the eschatological doctrine of the truncated divine name from Ex. 17:16, where the incomplete Name is associated with unredeemed status of the world, epitomized in the ongoing war against the tribe of Amalek. When Amalek is defeated, the Name will be complete. This reading is supported by implication from the monograph by Azriel of Gerona, "Peruṣ Yihud Haš-šem," in G. Scholem, *Seridim Hadašim*, 219. See Scholem's note, 219, n. 2.

Padayah cites the relevant midrashic source for the eschatological concept expressed here: *Pesikta de-R. Kahana*, ch. *Zakhor*, 53. There, as she notes, the term שם שלם (complete Name), rather than שם מלא (full Name), is used, so she cites a parallel late midrash, *Sekhel Tov*, 325 on Ex. 17:16, where the latter term is used. Parallels to *Pesikta de-R. Kahana* are found in *Pesikta Rabbati*, ch. 12, 51; *Midraš Tehillim*, 9:10; Eliezer ha-Kallir, *Yoger le-Parshat Zakhor*; *Maḥzor Vitry*, 8; Rashi on Ex. 17:16, Ps. 9:8

See, however, the gloss of the Tosaphist, *Berakhot* 3a, who paraphrases the interpretation of the *Kaddis* in *Maḥzor Vitry*, 8: מכאן יש לטעור מה שפי' במחזור וימרי יהא שמיא רבא שזו תפלה שאנו מתפללין שימלא שמו כדכתיב [שמות י"ז] כי יד על כס י"ה. שלא יהא שמו שלם וכסאו שלם עד שימחה זרעו של עמלק (From this one may refute the interpretation in the *Maḥzor Vitry* "may His Name be great," that this is a prayer we pray that His Name may become full, as it is written "For the hand is on the

112:6), " as Rabbi Akiva said,<sup>48</sup> it shall not waver, your

throne of *yh*," that His Name will not be complete nor His throne complete until the seed of Amalek is wiped out). Here, in the paraphrase of the Tosaphist, the term *שֵׁם מְלָא שָׁמָּה* appears. See Padayah's analysis of the eschatological interpretations of the Kaddish among the students of Rashi, and their impact on the R. Isaac the Blind and his students, 251-71.

The term *שֵׁם מְלָא* itself also appears in Gen. R. 13:3 on Gen. 2:4, in the context of the completion of Creation: *מִזְכִּיר שֵׁם מְלָא עַל עוֹלָם מְלָא* (it mentions a complete Name for a complete world), referring, however, to the combined use of two divine Names, the Tetragrammaton and *אלהי"ם*. R. Isaac cites this midrash in his gloss on Genesis 1:1-2:4, MS JTS 1887, fol. 29b: *בְּיוֹם עֲשׂוֹת הַשֵּׁם אֱלֹהִים לֹא הָיָה שֵׁם מְלָא עַד שֶׁנִּבְרָא אָדָם בְּצֶלֶם* ("On the day the Lord God made... [Gen. 2:4] the Name was not full until man was created in the image of God, and the seal was complete). There, the idea is that the lower world was created with the letter *heh* of the divine Name, but the Name was not complete until the creation of man.

A third possible interpretation of *שֵׁם מְלָא* comes from grammatical and masoretic terminology: the writing of a word *plene*, with the appropriate, fully explicit vowel letters, *א, ו, י*. See E. Ben Yehudah, *Milon*, vol. 4, 3005. Here, the composite divine Name is formed from a complete enunciation of its key constituent letters, beginning with *aleph*, and ending with a *heh* whose full expression draws after it an additional *aleph* to complete the Name, as alluded to by R. Isaac in lines 334-35, and more explicitly described by R. Asher b. David, "Peruṣ Sem ham-Meforaš, *Kabbalat R. Asher b. David*, 3/15, and R. Azriel of Gerona, "Peruṣ Yiḥud Haš-Sem," in G. Scholem, *Seridim Hadašim*, 218. See note 41, above.

This third interpretation need not preclude the previous two: all three may be superimposed in R. Isaac's use of the term *שֵׁם מְלָא*, full Name. If so, then it may be that R. Isaac's account of cosmic development underlying lines 334-38 features the sealing of Creation, and the fullness of the divine Name, consequent upon the creation of Man; the implicit flaw in that Name represented in the negative principle embodied by the tribe of Amalek; and the restitution of the fullness of the Name in the Messianic age, when the final letter *heh* of the Tetragrammaton will be elevated and re-attached to its root and "read" as a whole Name, concluding with *ה"א*, *plene*, ending with the letter *aleph*. See Padayah, "Pegam we-Tikkun," 187-96.

name is with you:<sup>49</sup> to whatever side, there is no wavering,  
and all turn to the west to pray.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>48</sup> Padayah discusses the problems and possibilities concerning this attribution, 170, n. 48. Among them is Prof. J. Liebes' suggestion that it is a quote from an as yet unidentified liturgical poem. It may, however, be a reference to the central theme of the passage from *ʿOtiot de-R. Akiva*, in *Batei Midraṣot*, vol. 2, 364, on the letter *heh*, upon which R. Isaac's present discussion is partly based, which describes the sealing of all directions with the divine Name *ʾhyh*. If so, the quote would not be the phrase immediately following, "it shall not waver, your name is with you," but the phrase following that, "to whatever side."

<sup>49</sup> Padayah, 170, suggests "Your Name is with You" means the divine Name is fully connected and complete. This is confirmed explicitly by Azriel of Gerona, "*Peruṣ Yihud Haṣ-Ṣem*," in G. Scholem, *Seridim Hadaṣim*, 219, who states that in the Messianic era, the 'י of the Tetragrammaton will be together with the initial ה"י, and the final 'ה will be together with the 'י to be a "complete Name."

<sup>50</sup> See lines 86-90 above, where it is the *sefirot* as well as man that pray towards the west at night. See Ezra of Gerona cited in Azriel of Gerona, *Peruṣ ha-ʿAggadot*, 71/133-72/134. Padayah, "Pegam ve-Tikkun," 171, n. 50, interprets this phrase to mean that all the *sefirot* turn towards the west, to pray on behalf of the fallen divine Presence indicated in the as yet incomplete divine Name.

On the notion of the divine Presence in the west, see the opinion of R. Abahu, *Bava Batra*, 25a, where the significance of direction is also an issue of prayer and worship. See Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 204-05, who discusses this talmudic passage and the traditions concerning the prophets who recognized the divine Presence in the west: *שהשכינה במערב ושם היו משהחזיים לבוראם* (the divine Presence is in the west, and there they would bow to their Creator). See, also, *Batei Midraṣot*, vol. 2, *ʿOtiot de-R. Akiva*, 363-64, where the four "direction," that of the Tetragrammaton as opposed to the Name *ʾhyh*, remains open and vulnerable. Though this direction is not identified in that text, R. Isaac may have conflated this concept with the aggadic passages cited above, and identified it as "west."

Holy:<sup>51</sup> the summons of *Tešuvah*, which is in its place.<sup>52</sup> The extremities of above, *Hesed*, the head, that

<sup>51</sup> *SY* 4:2 (sec. 38). Scholem notes that R. Isaac here follows the short recensions which read: שבע קצוות: מקום קצות ומקום קדוש, מקום מוכן במקום - אחת .

<sup>52</sup> Based on the language of *SY* 4:2 (sec. 38): מקום קדוש מקום מוכן במקומו (a holy place, a place prepared in its place). The "holy place" is identified with the "holy Temple" at the end of the section; in R. Isaac's system this is the *sefirah Binah*. The significance of the term and the dynamic it represents can be clarified by a comparison to line 133, above, which speaks of the proper "place" of the *sefirot* in relation to the individual adept. The *sefirot* "return to their place" after being grasped in contemplation by the praying adept below. Here, the process of emanation of efflux to the lower *sefirot* is referred to as the "summons of *Tešuvah*," of the *sefirah Binah*. This complex of *sefirot* is "in its place," in its proper position, in the ascending reversion of the *sefirot* from below, as well as the summoning forth of efflux to those lower *sefirot* from above. See *supra*, ch. 8.4.1, for a discussion of the uniquely and characteristically Neoplatonic mode of causality implied in the phrase "the summons of *Tešuvah*."

The process of reversion to the proper place on a personal, epistemological level is paralleled on a concomitant cosmic, eschatological level, which is the topic under discussion in the present passage. Judah b. Barzilai, commenting on the same passage from *SY* in his *PSY*, 233: מיום שהרב בית המקדש נהמשה ממליא של מעלה וכביכול אין בית דין של מעלה השכינה במקומה וכן נמי (from the day that the holy Temple was destroyed the heavenly agencies have been diminished and it is as if the supernal court, the divine Presence, is not in its place, and so, too, the divine Presence has been exiled from the terrestrial Jerusalem). In the condition of exile, the divine Presence is not in its place. The final redemption, on a metaphysical level, involves its return to its proper place. In R. Isaac's Neoplatonic terms, the supernal Temple is called "holy" when its efflux to the lower *sefirot* and their reversion is in its proper place, that is, when the *sefirah Binah* and its power to summons above and below operates in its integrity.



which is crowned;<sup>53</sup> below, *Yesod 'Olam*; east, *Tiferet*; west, *Nezah*; south, *Hod*; north, kingship.<sup>54</sup> **Extremities**, in the

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<sup>53</sup> The list of cardinal directions and their corresponding *sefirot* presented here differs from that listed above, lines 82-84. Here, the upward direction, *מַעְלָה*, is *Hesed*; there, the upward direction, called *רום*, is apparently *Keter*. Here, north is *Mamlakhah* or *Malkhut*; there it is *'Oz Gevurah*. While both lists represent directions, however, their context is different. Here, the directions refer to the lower six *sefirot* corresponding to the geminate letters. There, the reference is to the "depths," the full set of ten *sefirot*. It may well be that these apparent discrepancies are intentional shifts in the allocation of the *sefirot*. That which signifies *Keter* in the full list of "depths" becomes *Hesed* in the lower list of geminates, though its inner relation to *Keter* is retained in R. Isaac's allusion to "that which is crowned." While *Hesed* is that *sefirah* of the frame that is "above," it is not the highest *sefirah*. It is "above" as the head is above, and yet crowned by something higher, by *Keter*. North in the list of "depths" is *'Oz Gevurah*, specifically the full power of divine strength, while in the lower list of geminate directions it is reduced to *Mamlakhah*.

Compare Azriel of Gerona, *PSY* 1:5, 455. While R. Azriel's list differs from R. Isaac's, he states specifically that the same cardinal direction signifies a different *sefirah* on the hidden plane, the "depth," from that on the revealed plane, the "direction." See, too, R. Azriel's list of directional correspondences in his *Perus ha-'Aggadot*, 71/133, which matches up a little more closely to that of R. Isaac's, and Tishby's note 4, that the doctrine of sefirotic directions among the Provençal and Gerona kabbalists was still in a state of flux.

<sup>54</sup> Compare line 84 above. North, here, is associated with *Malkhut*, and there, line 84, with *'Oz Gevurah*, the fierceness of *Gevurah*. See I. Tishbi's comment, Azriel of Gerona, *Perus ha-'Aggadot*, 80/142, n. 3, that *'Oz* may signify either *Gevurah* or *Malkhut*. Azriel of Gerona also identifies north with *Malkhut*, *'Atarah*, *ibid.*, 71/133. In this sense, *'Oz Gevurah* would mean the actualized power of *Gevurah*, or *Malkhut*. But see previous note: that while here north is *Malkhut*, there, line 84, R. Isaac stresses it is *'Oz Gevurah*, *Gevurah* in its full strength.

order of the verse "To You, God, is the greatness and the power... (1 Chr. 29:11)."<sup>55</sup> And the Temple: this is *Tesuvah* and its summons.<sup>56</sup> And it carries, like the soul that carries all.<sup>57</sup> He engraved them:<sup>58</sup> until things emerge into

<sup>55</sup> Compare to lines 84-87, above. This passage is a restatement of that passage above.

<sup>56</sup> The full description from *SY* 4:2 (sec. 38) is: והיכל הקודש מכוון באמצע והוא נושא את כולם (and the holy Temple aligned in the middle, and it carries them all). Here, "*Tesuvah* and its summons" refers to the upward-drawing power of *Binah*, that which carries all, its function in the gathering reversion of all things to their source. See *supra*, ch. 8.4.1.

<sup>57</sup> See R. Isaac's Letter to Gerona, in G. Scholem, *Te'udah Hadašah*, 144: כל הנשמה היא הבינה ("All that is soul," this is *Binah*). Compare Jacob ha-Nazir, in the fragment brought by G. Scholem, *Resit haḳ-Kabbalah*, 73, n. 2, who compares the *sefirot Hesed* and *Binah*: והבינה כנשמה לו (*Binah* is like a soul to it). Padaya, "Pegam ve-Tikkun," 168, n. 43, draws attention to the parallel between R. Isaac's formulation and that of Asher b. Saul of Lunel, *Sefer haḡ-Minhagot*, in S. Assaf, *Sifran Sel Rišonim*, 144: הכבוד יהיה מבורך מהיכל הקודש שהוא באמצע והוא נושא את הכל... ודוגמתו אבן שואבת שמעמידין אותה למעלה ונושאת את הברזל מתחתיה, ומצאתי בהגדה בא וראה שלא כמדת הב"ה מדת בשר ודם, משאו למעלה והוא מקום המשא, אבל הב"ה הוא עליון והוא נושא הכל מתחתיו (The Glory is blessed from the holy Temple, which is in the middle and carries all... Its model is the magnet which is placed above and carries the iron beneath it. I have found in an *aggadah* (*Midraš Tehillim* to Ps. 18, ed. Buber, 144): "come and see, that the nature of the Holy One, blessed be He, is not like the nature of flesh and blood, whose burden is above and he is the place of the burden, while the Holy One, blessed be He, is above, and He carries all beneath Him). R. Asher is clearly working off the passage under discussion in *SY* 4:2 (sec. 38). See I. Twersky, *Rabad of Posquières*, 28, regarding the mystical inclinations of R. Asher b. Saul, younger brother of Jacob ha-Nazir.

Generally speaking, the comparison of an aspect of divinity to the soul follows in the tradition of *Berakhot* 10a, where five parallels are drawn. Padaya, *loc. cit.*, notes the influence on R. Isaac of Abraham Ibn Ezra's concept of the universal soul.

actuality,<sup>59</sup> it does not say **He engraved them.**<sup>60</sup> **Planets in world:** supernal planets, which are like a field in which planets are sown,<sup>61</sup> and their fruit are the planets that are visible.<sup>62</sup> **Seven by seven:**<sup>63</sup> all is in sevens: seven from

<sup>58</sup> *SY* 4:3 (sec. 39).

<sup>59</sup> Hebrew: **לבוש**. This is the Tibbonite term of choice for the Aristotelian concept of actuality, in contrast to potentiality. See J. Klatzkin, *Thesaurus Philosophicus*, vol 2., 199-200.

<sup>60</sup> See lines 166-68, above.

<sup>61</sup> The direct source is *Sefer haḳ-Ḳomah*, JTS MS 1892, translated and annotated by M. S. Cohen, *The Shi'ur Qomah: Liturgy and Theurgy in Pre-Kabbalistic Jewish Mysticism*, (Lanham, MD, 1983) 230 and 232, n. 7: "And before Him is a field sown with stars." See, too, *Merkavah Selemah*, ed. S. Mossayef, (Jerusalem, 1921, reprinted, Jerusalem, 1972) 39b. The same source is brought by Azriel of Gerona, *Peruṣei ha-ʿAggadot*, 98-99.

R. Isaac uses this description as an advantageous means for preserving his Neoplatonic hierarchy of being. The stars, or more accurately, the planets described in *SY* 4:3 (sec. 39), could not be the visible, physical stars or planets of the sky themselves: these are not the direct result of spiritually refined permutations and combinations of the geminates. Rather, another metaphysical level is interposed, a supernal "field of stars," from which the physical stars or planets grow or emanate. See the following note.

<sup>62</sup> In *Sefer haḳ-Ḳomah*, cited in the previous note, there is no direct statement about the ontological location of the stars sown in the field. R. Isaac interprets this field and its stars as supernal archetypes one ontological level higher than the visible stars. Continuing with the agricultural image, the visible stars issue as fruit from the supernal stars. This reading is supported from the general context of the *Sefer haḳ-Ḳomah* passage, in which the field of stars is grouped with angelic entities, and even the physical and meteorological phenomena mentioned in the passage are apparently intended to be archetypes positioned in heaven, not in the physical

seven from within seven. For the seven geminate letters comprise all and are the totality of all.<sup>64</sup> The planets which benefit or harm<sup>65</sup> are from them<sup>66</sup> and so too, until there extends from them the twelve regions.<sup>67</sup> Days in year:

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world.

<sup>63</sup> *SY* 4:3 (sec. 39). This is the version of only three short recensions, noted by Gruenwald as כסר . See I. Gruenwald, "A Preliminary Critical Edition of *Sefer Yeḡirah*," 158. It is also the version used by Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 239.

<sup>64</sup> Compare lines 264-65, above. Here, the geminates, corresponding to the lower seven *sefirot*, have the further distinction of collecting and comprising the efflux of all that is above them.

<sup>65</sup> Shabbetai Donnolo, *Sefer Ḥakmoni*, introduction, with respect to his Babylonian teacher: ולמדני לידע המזלות והכוכבים המטיבים והמריעים (and he taught me to know the signs of the zodiac and the planets that benefit and harm). The function of the planets, to benefit or harm, corresponds to the function of the geminates: see line 348, below.

<sup>66</sup> I. e., the planets which influence terrestrial events derive from the seven geminates.

<sup>67</sup> The reference is to regions described in *SY* 5:1 (sec. 47), and ultimately to the twelve signs of the zodiac which correspond to them. The continuity between the sets of seven and the sets of twelve is established by *SY* itself, 6:3 (sec. 48): אחד על גבי ג' וג' על גבי י"ב וכולן אדוקין זה בזה (one over three, three over seven and seven over twelve, and all of them are joined together). See, too, Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 251, 258.

The continuum of relationship between the seven planets and the twelve signs of the zodiac was discussed in *Pirkei de-R. Ḥeiezer*, ch. 6, but there, the zodiac is on a higher level than the planets. In the systems of R. Judah b. Barzilai and R. Isaac, the seven geminates have ontological priority over the twelve simple letters and their correspondences. See, too, Shabbetai Donnolo, *Sefer Ḥakmoni*, ch. 6, who interprets the section from *SY* cited above: "the seven are rulers over [the twelve], and the three are rulers

the days are called gates.<sup>68</sup> And a little is forty.<sup>69</sup> In this manner are all things.<sup>70</sup>

Two stones: these are the letters,<sup>71</sup> as it says "sacred stones (Lam. 4:1)."<sup>72</sup> And within them are engraved:<sup>73</sup> in the

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over the seven."

<sup>68</sup> This comment is unclear. In *SY* 4:3 (sec. 39), the term "gates" applies not to "days in year" but to "soul," signifying the apertures of the body, specifically of the head; see Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY* 240. It may be that R. Isaac here refers to the phrase in the traditional liturgy for the evening prayer, **בְּחִכְמָה פִּתַּח שְׁעֵרִים** (with wisdom He opens gates), understood as signifying the start of a new day. The significance of this identification is still obscure.

<sup>69</sup> R. Isaac here is following the version of *SY* 4:4 (sec. 40) brought by Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 239, a version not found in any of the recensions noted by I. Gruenwald, "A Preliminary Critical Edition of *Sefer Yeẓirah*," 158-59. In R. Judah b. Barzilai's text, the calculation of the permutations of sets of seven letters is given as an approximation: **חמשת אלפים ויותר** (five thousand and a little more). Judah b. Barzilai himself goes on to say: **ויותר קמנא הוא ארבעים** (a little more is forty), i. e., the "little more" referred to amounts to forty additional permutations. R. Isaac here is simply citing R. Judah b. Barzilai's point of information.

<sup>70</sup> In context, this comment seems to refer to the exemplary calculations of the permutations of sets of letters in *SY* 4:4 (sec. 40). R. Isaac is simply saying that the calculations can be continued in the same manner *ad infinitum*.

<sup>71</sup> Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 240: **שתי אבנים פי' ב' אבנים הם ב' אותיות שהאות נקרא אבן שכל אבן לשון עיקר** (Two stones, the meaning of two stone is two letters, for the letter is called a stone because all stones connote essence, root and foundation).

<sup>72</sup> The proof-text is read taking "sacred" in the sense of supernal, as well as a kabbalistically specific reference to the source and repository of the letters, the *sefirah Binah*, as in line 339 above.

cavities engraved in the seven geminate letters are engraved seven firmaments.<sup>74</sup> Geminate: in that each one is doubled to two, to benefit and to harm.<sup>75</sup> The good attribute is more abundant,<sup>76</sup> for it is the root of all,<sup>77</sup> and the root of the cause which emanates therefrom is an attribute,<sup>78</sup> except that there were inner attributes which as yet did not come

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<sup>73</sup> *SY* 4:4 (sec. 42).

<sup>74</sup> *SY* 4:4 (sec. 42). Scholem has "six firmaments," but all MSS, and *SY* itself, have "seven." This sentence as a whole has numerous variants, a function, perhaps, of its obscurity. R. Isaac's general intent is to offer an interpretation of *SY*'s comment that the seven firmaments are engraved "in" the seven geminates: "in" in the sense of "in the cavities." He may mean that it is the spaces within the letters, rather than the formative lines of the letters themselves, that generate the firmaments, which are themselves spaces. It may be that the possibility of pointing the geminates with a *dagesh* emphasizes their inner spaces, their "cavities."

<sup>75</sup> Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 229: לפי שאלו השבעה הן דגשות ורפיות ויסודן חיים ושלום בא לדמות להן ז' דברים (since these seven are accented and weak, and their foundation is life and peace, it compared to them seven things that are exceedingly good, and in their doubling you find that their inversions are evil).

<sup>76</sup> *Sotah* 11a, *Sanhedrin* 100b, and *Yuma* 76a (with the emendation of R. Joel Sirkis).

<sup>77</sup> Hebrew: שהיא עיקר הכל. The translation here follows MSS Adler 671, Harvard Heb. 58/11, Cambridge Or. 2116.8, Cincinnati 524/3, Montefiore 313.

Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 229: לפי שאלו השבעה הן דגשות ורפיות ויסודן חיים ושלום (since these seven are accented and weak, and their foundation is life and peace), i. e., while the geminates influence for benefit or harm, their fundamental nature is beneficial.

<sup>78</sup> I. e., a single attribute.

to light<sup>79</sup> and from there they were divided,<sup>80</sup> for in one attribute are set many powers.<sup>81</sup> When a wicked man acts foolishly with that attribute which harms, it benefits, for evil is benefit for him,<sup>82</sup> like someone who eats a dish

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<sup>79</sup> Each geminate letter is a single entity, while the multiple aspects they exhibit indicate an inner multiplicity *in potentia*.

<sup>80</sup> The phrase *ומשם נתחלקו* may be a distant allusion to Gen. 2:10: *ומשם יפרד* (and from there it divided). It appears R. Abraham Ibn Ezra also understood this verse as an allusion to the process of emanation from unity to multiplicity, in his comment on Gen. 3:24: *ידע כי כל מה שמצאנו כתוב הוא אמת, וכן היה ואין בו ספק, ויש בו סוד, כי מאור השכל יצא החפץ, ומהשני העולה למעלה, כי תנועת החפץ לפניו הוא גם עלה תאנה לאות, ונקרא השלישי בשם הבחינה, כי בתחלה יש כח בלי מפעל. והמבין זה הסוד יבין איך יפרד הנזר. וזה סוד גן עדן, וכתנות העור, גם יורה זה הסוד שיש יכולת באדם שיחיה (Know, that all we find written is true, so it happened and without doubt, but there is also a secret meaning, for from the light of the intellect comes the will, and from the second [comes] that which rises above, for the motion of the will in inward, and the fig leaf is a sign. The third is called discernment, for at first there is potentiality without an agent. One who understands this secret understands how the river divides, and this is the secret of the Garden of Eden, and the coats of skin. This secret also teaches that there is in man the ability to live forever, and the wise shall understand, for this is the whole of man).*

This verse that came to be used as a stock illustration for the emanation of the world of multiplicity from the world of unity in later Kabbalah. See Bahya b. Asher, *Be'ur 'ai hat-Torah*, Gen. 2:9, ed. H. D. Chavel, vol. 1 (Jerusalem, 1974) 68; *Sefer haz-Zohar*, vol. 1, 26a-27a, 34a, 35b, 59b, 74b, et al.

<sup>81</sup> Maimonides, *Moreh Nevukhim*, trans. S. Ibn Tibbon, 1:53, trans. J. Alharizi, 1:52: *ויהיה הפועל אחד ויתחייבו ממנו פעולות מתחלפות* (that there should be one agent from which diverse actions derive). The context of the discussion is the theory of divine attributes, *middot* in Alharizi's translation.

<sup>82</sup> A corollary of *Yebamot* 103a: *כל טובתן של רשעים*

which benefits him one time, and hurts him another time, even though the taste has not changed.<sup>83</sup> **Geminate:** faces from within faces, powers from within powers.<sup>84</sup> Those things which are the attribute of judgment are within the attribute of mercy,<sup>85</sup> like a flame bound to a coal,<sup>86</sup> and just as evil

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רעה היא אצל צדיקים (All that is good for the wicked is evil for the righteous).

<sup>83</sup> Compare Maimonides, *Perus̄ ham-Misnayot, Semonah Peraḳim*, (introduction to *Avot*) trans. S. Ibn Tibbon, ch. 3, who offers a similar analogy between medical and moral illness: וכמו שחולי הגוף ידמו, להפסד הרגשותיהם, במה שהוא מר, שהוא מחוק ובמה שהוא מתוק שהוא מר...כן חולי הנפשות, רצוני לומר, הרעים ובעלי מדות הרעות, ידמו במה שהוא רע, שהוא טוב, ובמה שהוא טוב שהוא רע, והאדם הרע יתאוה לעולם הפלגות, אשר הן באמת רעות, וידמה בעבור חלי נפשו שהן טובות (Just as those who are physically ill imagines due to the deficiency of their senses, that what is bitter is sweet and what is sweet is bitter...so, too, the spiritually ill, meaning, the wicked and those of evil traits, imagine that what is evil is good and what is good is evil. The wicked person lusts for the world of excesses, which are in truth evils, and he imagines, due to the sickness of his soul, that they are good). See, too, *Mishneh Torah*, De'ot, 2:1. The precise example R. Isaac uses, of a dish of food that has different effects though its taste is the same, is not identical to Maimonides' example. The overall context, however, a comparison of good and wicked men, the use of a medical analogy dealing with the sense of taste, and the overall thrust, that good and evil are perceived relative to one's spiritual condition, is similar in both.

<sup>84</sup> Line 19 above.

<sup>85</sup> R. Asher b. David explicitly identifies the attribute רחמים or mercy with the *sefirah Tiferet, Kabbalat R. Asher b. David*, 13, and this becomes standard among all later kabbalists. This identification seems to be implicit here, as the discussion goes on to show. See second note following.

<sup>86</sup> *SY* 1:7 (sec. 6). In *SY*, this phrase is applied to the *sefirot*. For R. Isaac, the geminates also correspond seven of the lower *sefirot*, and all are part



is done with judgment, so, too, good is done with judgment.<sup>87</sup> When there is no good attribute in a man, the things that are judgment<sup>88</sup> become separated,<sup>89</sup> in order to judge him with great judgments.<sup>90</sup> For the wicked person does not adhere to the attribute of good, such that it would emanate upon him, and therefore one of the powers of

of the same emanative hierarchy, so the same phrase is appropriate.

<sup>87</sup> *Berakhot* 48b. The idea is that the attribute of judgment properly nests within the attribute of mercy, the *sefirah* *Gevurah* within the *sefirah* *Tiferet*, in a state of unity, such that judgment can effect both good and evil. R. Asher b. David discusses at length the sefirotic theory involved, in his "*Peruṣ Ṣeloṣ-Esre Middot*," *Ḳabbalat R. Asher b. David*, 43. See M. Gavrín, "Tefisat ha-Ra' be-Mahṣevet R. Yizḥak Saginahor we-Talmidaw be-Gerona," *Da'at*, 20 (1988) 37-38.

<sup>88</sup> R. Asher b. David speaks of four divisions of judgment, based upon the various modes of punishment distinguished in the Bible and Talmud. These may correspond to the plural "things" to which R. Isaac refers. See Asher b. David, "*Peruṣ Ṣeloṣ-Esre Middot*," *Ḳabbalat R. Asher b. David*, 30, 38-39.

<sup>89</sup> The lack of good in a wicked man is mirrored in the sefirotic world, where the elements of judgment appear separated, for punishment. R. Asher b. David explains that none of the *sefirot* are ever separated in actuality. Rather, because of their unity, God can activate any or all of them as He pleases: וְיָהוּהוּ הַיְיחוד הַשְּׁלֵם, שְׁאֵין מִדָּה נִפְרֶדֶת וְחִלּוּם לִפְנֵי שֶׁהוּא יָכוֹל לַפְעוּל בְּכוֹלָם כְּאַחַת, אוֹ בְּאַחַת וְכוּלָּל בָּהּ אֶת כּוֹלָם אוֹ מִקְצֵתָן לִפְנֵי רִצּוֹנוֹ (This is the perfect unity, for there is no separate and distinct attribute before Him. He can operate in all of them at once, or in one and include in it all of them or some of them, according to His will).

<sup>90</sup> Ex. 6:6; 7:4. Behind the theology of evil outlined here is the Exodus story, in particular an interpretation of the manner in which judgment was executed against the Egyptians in the plague of the first-born, where removal of divine protection left the Egyptians prey to the agency of the "destroyer," Ex.

judgment separates out so as not to do them good.<sup>91</sup>

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12:13, 23.

<sup>91</sup> Some confusion in number of persons seems to have crept into the copying of this passage, and some MSS share a significantly different reading as well. MSS Harvard Heb. 58/11, Cambridge Add. 671, Cambridge Or. 2116,8, Halberstam 444, Cincinnati 524/3 and Montefiore 313 read: **ולכן נפרדו אדם מכחות הדין כדי שלא לעשות להם טוב** (Therefore a man is separated from the powers of judgment, so as not to do them good).

Maimonides, *Moreh Nevukhim*, 3:51, explains the suffering and punishment meted out to the wicked as a result of his being separated from the emanative flow of divine intellect: **אבל בהסיב מחשבתו מהשם, אשר הוא אז נבדל מהשם, והשם נבדל ממנו, והוא אז מזומן לכל רע שאפשר שימצאנו** (When, however, he turns his thought from God, being then separated from God, God is separated from him, and he is then prey to every evil that can be found).

R. Isaac's account shares some features with that of Maimonides. Both locate the initial cause of misfortune in man's disconnection from God, with a reciprocal divine disconnection from him. Both speak in terms of emanation, of the wicked man's separation from divine emanation. For Maimonides, however, misfortune is not an effect of divine power, it is the result of being left to the vicissitudes of life once the protection of divine power is removed. Therefore, providential care depends on whether one is intellectually connected to or separated from God. In R. Isaac's explanation, however, good and evil are both of divine origin, a position for which there was general precedent in Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 262 and Abraham Bar Ḥiyya, *Hegyon han-Nefesh*, ch. 4, 123. For R. Isaac, though, good and evil are not merely effects of divine action, but actual divine principles rooted in the geminate letters and, ultimately, the *sefirot*. Accordingly, he explains the misfortune of the wicked man as separation from the divine principle of good, by virtue of which he is left to the influence of divine counter-principle of severe judgment. The alienation of the wicked provokes a reciprocal shift in the apportionment of the divine powers of the geminate letters, resulting in an apparent separation of the power of punitive judgment which acts to mete out punishment. Yet even here, R. Isaac's formulation of the way in which the wicked are punished bears some similarity to Maimonides': the judgment comes about *in absentia*, not by direct action but by a separation of

**Soft and hard:**<sup>92</sup> there are kindnesses granted with expansiveness and blessings, and those which are drawn with clenched fist<sup>93</sup> and with difficulty; so too **strong and weak**, and each of them is good and evil. **Death:** there is a death which is a kindness, in order to honor him in the world to come,<sup>94</sup> so that the attribute of punishment, which is about to spread forth, shall not prevail over him, and the attribute of peace draw him, as it says, "the righteous is taken away from the evil to come. He shall enter peace... (Is. 57:1,2),"<sup>95</sup> and it is written, "precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His pious ones (Ps. 116:15)."<sup>96</sup> **War:**<sup>97</sup> there is war which is for the benefit of the

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one of the powers of judgment "so as not to do them good."

<sup>92</sup> *SP* 4:1 (sec. 37).

<sup>93</sup> Ps. 77:10.

<sup>94</sup> This phrase is based on *Midrash Deut. R.*, 7:11: כַּשֶּׁם שֶׁגִּידַלְתִּי אֶתְכֶם בְּעוֹלָם זֶה כֵּן אֲנִי מַגְדִּיל וּמֵיִקֵּר אֶתְכֶם לְעוֹלָם הַבָּא (Just as I magnified you in this world, so I shall magnify and honor you in the world to come. From where [is the proof]? As it says, "an honored son is Ephraim to Me (Jer. 31:19)."

<sup>95</sup> *Bava Kama*, 60a, which states the idea and brings the proof-text from Is. 57:1; and see Rashi, *loc. cit.* R. Isaac adds the proof-text from the following verse, with his typical hyper-literal kabbalistic interpretation: the righteous person "enters peace," that is, the sefirotic attribute of peace, *Yesod* or *Tiferet*. See Azriel of Gerona, *Perus ha-Aggadot*, 30/92, and Tishby's note 2.

<sup>96</sup> This verse serves as the proof-text for the antecedent idea, that the death of the righteous is for the sake of their honor in the world-to-come, based on interpretations from Gen. R. 62:2; Ex. R. 52:3.

combatant, involving no death and no pain, such as the battle of David with Goliath, and no loss, and even more than this.<sup>98</sup> Folly is ignorance, in the sense that *sakhal* (ignoramus) with a *samekh* is the counterpart of *sekhel* (intelligence).<sup>99</sup> For from the excess with which a person gazes at that which man cannot grasp, he becomes ignorant.<sup>100</sup> So, too, wisdom itself, for one who delves deeply in it beyond his grasp, that wisdom itself becomes folly for him.<sup>101</sup> Poverty is when no livelihood remains for a person from all his wealth.<sup>102</sup> There is poverty which is for good, when a person was judged for death, and his

<sup>97</sup> *SY* 4:1 (sec. 37), see I. Gruenwald's apparatus for those versions with "war" instead of "evil."

<sup>98</sup> I. e., even reward, as in 1 Sam. 17:25.

<sup>99</sup> The notion that folly is the opposite, not merely the absence, of wisdom, is expressed with reference to a word-play among two synonyms: *sakhal*, with a *samekh*, meaning ignorant, and *sekhel*, with a *sin*, meaning intelligence.

<sup>100</sup> Compare Baḥya Ibn Paḳudah, *Hovot ha-Levavot*, trans. J. Ibn Tibbon, 1:10, ed. A. Zifroni, 156-57: "If we trouble our intellects to grasp the essence of His glory and to imagine Him figuratively in our minds, our intellects will be stricken, and we will not even grasp that which we know, as happens to our eyes when we stare at the sun directly." See *supra*, ch. 7.2, for other sources, especially Moses Ibn Ezra, and an analysis of this motif.

<sup>101</sup> R. Isaac's point is that ignorance is not the absence of intelligence, but the exhaustion of intelligence that strains to grasp too much and reverts to its opposite.

<sup>102</sup> R. Isaac explains poverty not as the absence of wealth, but the integral opposite of wealth, the exhaustion of wealth.

poverty is his atonement, as if he has died.<sup>103</sup> It is possible that what a person has lost shall accomplish a meritorious deed, in order that his loss be considered for good.<sup>104</sup> **Desolation:** if one does not sow, one's field will not be blighted.<sup>105</sup> **Beauty:** from Beauty. When one does not conduct oneself within that dimension from which beauty is granted, the beauty turns into another dimension, which is ugliness,<sup>106</sup> just as a wealthy person who does not diminish

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<sup>103</sup> *Avodah Zarah* 5a; *Nedarim* 7b, 64b.

<sup>104</sup> *Yerushalmi Yuma* 5:2, from the prayer of the High Priest on Yom Kippur: ואם יצא עלינו חסרון ביום הזה (and if a loss befalls us today or this year, may our loss be a loss for the sake of a meritorious deed).

<sup>105</sup> I. e., desolation is not the absence of seeding but its opposite, the destruction of that which has been seeded.

<sup>106</sup> Judah Halevi, *Kuzari*, 2:62: כי זה מחקי כחות השכינה, כי היתה בישראל במעלת הרוח בגוף האדם. מועילה אותם החיות הא-להית ונותנת להם זיו והדר בגופותם ובתכונותם ובמשכניהם, ובעת שמתרחקת מהם, מסתכלת עצתם ויהכערו גופיהם וישתנה יופים, וכשהיא מתרחקת מיחידים נראה (This is one of the rules of the powers of the divine Presence, that when Israel is on a level comparable to that of the spirit in the body, the divine life enhances them and grants them splendor and beauty in their bodies and natures and dwellings, but when it distances itself from them, their insight becomes foolish, their bodies become ugly and their beauty is altered. When it distances itself from individuals, the sign of the distancing of the divine Presence appears on each and every person).

R. Isaac's statement shares with this passage from the *Kuzari* both the idea that beauty does not merely depart, but turns into its opposite, and that the bestowal of beauty or ugliness is determined by a higher principle. In Halevi's account, however, the process by which the nation or the individual merits beauty or ugliness is still somewhat theistic. In R.

his property for the sake of charity, in the end will lose his property.<sup>107</sup> **Slavery:** for the dimension comes from judgment.<sup>108</sup> The headings of the dimensions appear as many, but in their beginning they are only one.<sup>109</sup> Thus there are many, up to **seven firmaments**. Geminates are supernal spiritual entities,<sup>110</sup> set between life and peace.<sup>111</sup> All of

Isaac's account, the process has become more deistic, a mechanical response based on a person's relationship to a specific divine attribute. This is consonant with R. Isaac's agenda, to explain divine process in the terms of *SY*.

<sup>107</sup> *Temurah* 16a, *Tanḥum'a*, *Mišpatim* 15, *Midraš Soḥar Tov*, *Mishle*, 11. This dictum regarding the inversion of wealth to poverty for lack of charity is brought as a proof for the mechanical nature of the inversion from beauty to ugliness. The talmudic and midrashic sources present the process as automatic, occurring without theistic mediation, and this is the quality R. Isaac is looking to substantiate.

<sup>108</sup> See lines 353-56. Slavery is a negative quality, a result of judgment as opposed to mercy.

<sup>109</sup> See lines 80-81 and notes 125, 126 above; lines 124-25 above. This is a re-statement of the standard Neoplatonist concept of emanation. Compare Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*, prop. 11, trans. and ed. E. R. Dodds, 13.

<sup>110</sup> See S. Pines, "Al ha-Munah 'Ruḥaniyot' u-Mekoroṭav we-al Mishnato šel Yehudah Halevi," *Tarbiẓ* 57 (1987-88) 511-43, for an account of the history of the term מַנְיָוִיּוֹת from the Platonists, through the Muslim writers, to Halevi, Maimonides and the Tibbonites. Pines tracks the use of this term as originally denoting a level of incorporeal intermediaries below the Platonic forms, responsible for directing phenomena of the lower world. Muslim philosophers and historians, and Jewish philosophers used the term in a largely negative sense, with reference to the spirits of the planets and lower phenomena in pagan idolatrous and astrological cosmologies. Pines notes, however, that for Halevi, the term had a less pejorative, more generic connotation

them are given over to the rule of the soul,<sup>112</sup> but are not permanent,<sup>113</sup> and their paradigm is the seven apertures of the head.<sup>114</sup>

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(528). In *Sefer ha-ʿAzamim*, the term is employed both with reference to pagan astrological cosmology as well as in a neutral, technical sense, as a level of incorporeal intermediaries in an elaborate hierarchy from the material world up to the Creator (e. g., 29). R. Isaac appropriates the term as a convenient way to express the ontological status of the geminates, corresponding to but on a level below the lower seven *sefirot*. See Pines' remarks, 512, n. 9.

<sup>111</sup> That is, between *Binah* and *Yesod*. Compare Azriel of Gerona, *Perus ha-ʿAggadot*, 3/65, 30/92, n. 2.

<sup>112</sup> Which pole of each pair of opposites is in effect at a given period depends on the merit of the individual. See Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 229.

<sup>113</sup> They are not ontologically permanent essences. See line 12, note 25, above; line 205.

<sup>114</sup> Based on *SY* 4:3 (secs. 39, 41), which associates the seven geminates with the apertures of the head.

## Chapter 5

**Simple letters:**<sup>1</sup> consider that the foundation of the simple letters, "one is she,"<sup>2</sup> and one thing directs them.<sup>3</sup> For it does not say **their foundation** with respect to the **directors**,<sup>4</sup> rather with respect to the results of the

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<sup>1</sup> *SY* 5:1 (sec. 45).

<sup>2</sup> Hebrew: **חושב כי אחת היא יסוד הפשוטות**. The unusual, slightly poetic syntax here flags a biblical allusion to Cant. 6:9: **אחת היא יונתי המתי וכי**. This is supported rhetorically by the attention-grabbing introductory word "consider," and grammatically by the non-agreement of gender between the feminine form of "one" and the masculine "foundation," indicating "one" modifies a hidden subject. The biblical allusion is to the feminine persona of the Song of Songs, midrashically associated with the divine Presence. The kabbalistic allusion, most likely, is to the lowest *sefirah*, *Atarah*, *MemSalah* or *Mamlakhah*, the feminine divine Presence of the Song of Songs, and the implicit term modified by the feminine "one." R. Isaac does not explicitly develop the relationship between the simple letters themselves and the last *sefirah*. It seems plausible, though, that *Memshalah*, as described in line 99 as comprising all the dimensions, would be the one, unique foundation of all the simple letters, each of which has a single principle, in contrast to the geminates, which correspond to *Binah* and *sefirot* below it. This is perhaps obliquely confirmed by Ezra of Gerona, *Perus le-Sir haS-Sirim*, *Kitvei Ramban*, vol. 2, 512, who speaks of the twelve diagonals of the cardinal directions unified in the Land of Israel, associated with the *sefirah Malkhut*. See, too, line 386, below, where the twenty-two letters collectively are associated with the *sefirah Yesod*.

<sup>3</sup> As opposed to the geminates, which comprise a double principle.

<sup>4</sup> *SY* 5:2 (49).



structures of the simple letters.<sup>5</sup> For the foundation of the simple letters is in the head,<sup>6</sup> but not one of the directors is in the head: their paradigms are below them.<sup>7</sup> Therefore when it says **there are twelve directors in the soul**,<sup>8</sup> it does not apply to the beginning of things, rather, it is speaking of their paradigms corresponding to them.<sup>9</sup> But the foundation of the simple letters are precisely sight, hearing, those sense functions by which a person functions.

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<sup>5</sup> The "directors" are described in *SY* 5:2 (sec. 49) as organs of the body, while the "foundations" described in *SY* 5:1 (sec. 45) are discrete activities of the bodily faculties. The term "structures" refers to the bodily structures, the organs themselves. Compare R. Isaac's interpretation of the term "foundation" above, lines 26-27, not as cause but as the result or effect of a cause. Here, the simple letters are the singular causes of the discrete activities of the bodily faculties, which are the "foundations."

<sup>6</sup> This refers to the senses and other functions listed in *SY* 5:1 (45), whose location are generally in the head. Compare Judah Halevi, *Kuzari*, 2:26, ed. A. Zifrinowitsch, 97: **והוצרך אל החושים הנראים והנסתרים, והיה הראש מחניהם** (He needs the apparent and the hidden senses, whose seat is the head); Abraham Ibn Ezra, Torah Commentary, Ex. 23:25: **ומושבה היא החכמה, ומושבה כל ההרגשות ותנועת החפץ** (for the soul is wisdom, and its seat is in the brain of the head, and from it goes forth the power of all the senses and movements of the will).

<sup>7</sup> The list of directors is in *SY* 5:2 (sec. 49). They are limbs and organs of the trunk of the human body. In R. Isaac's Neoplatonic hierarchy, they are on an ontological level below that of the senses and functions listed in *SY* 5:1 (45).

<sup>8</sup> *SY* 5:2 (49).

<sup>9</sup> The term "directors" does not, in this case, mean a set of higher principles, directing the soul, but rather the organs by which the body is directed.

**Twelve** corresponding to<sup>10</sup> **twelve directors**: they are simple; the functions and senses are not double. They extend<sup>11</sup> throughout the entire body, and it is not possible to move without them. There are some of them that extend even in animals, even though they are spiritual,<sup>12</sup> and they emanate from the simple letters. Corresponding to them is **the right hand and the left hand**.<sup>13</sup> Even though they are not according to their paradigm, they were formed in the body in correspondence to their number.<sup>14</sup> Corporeal beings emanate from spiritual beings,<sup>15</sup> and the functions are spiritual.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> R. Isaac's terminology here echoes that of Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 252, on the same section of *SY*.

<sup>11</sup> The pun seems intentional: the simple letters, **פשוטות** are also those which extend, **מתפשטות**, throughout the body.

<sup>12</sup> Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 264, also treats the issue of the presence of certain sentient, higher faculties in animals.

<sup>13</sup> This follows several short-recension variants to *SY* 5:2 (sec. 49) listed by I. Gruenwald, "A Preliminary Critical Edition of *Sefer Yeẓirah*," 166: MSS Paris 802 (4), foll. 57b-59b; Leiden, Warn. 24 (5) Cod. Or. 4762, foll. 140b<sup>16</sup>-142a; British Museum 600 (1), foll. 2a-3b.

<sup>14</sup> Even though the bodily organs listed in *SY* 5:2 (sec. 49) do not correspond point for point to the sense faculties and functions listed in *SY* 5:1 (sec. 45), they correspond in number, that is, both organs and functions are twelve in number.

<sup>15</sup> See line 370, above.

<sup>16</sup> R. Isaac here follows the gist of Abraham Ibn Ezra's discussion of the spiritual qualities of the human senses and faculties, Ex. 23:26: **כי הנשמה היא החכמה, ומושבא במוח הראש, וממנה יצא כל ההרגשות והנועות** (For the soul is wisdom, and its seat is in the

**Their dimensions:**<sup>17</sup> these are the chief dimensions which are created from them,<sup>18</sup> whether for elevating or for descent, to stand or to go, all issue from there.<sup>19</sup>

**Diagonals:** something sharp at both ends that is wide in its middle: this is a diagonal.<sup>20</sup> **Northeast**, and so for each and every boundary.<sup>21</sup> Even though there is upper and lower, all are on a diagonal; without them there are only four.<sup>22</sup> **Arms**,

brain of the head, and from it comes the power of all the senses and motions of the will).

<sup>17</sup> *SY* 5:1 (sec. 47). See I. Gruenwald, "A Preliminary Critical Edition of *Sefer Yeẓirah*," 163, apparatus, which notes that this phrase appears in most versions. See Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 254.

<sup>18</sup> From the simple letters.

<sup>19</sup> The directional diagonals define all motion.

<sup>20</sup> These are the minimum requirements for a shape which has a diagonal. Compare Judah b. Barzilai's discussion of diagonals, *PSY*, 253, on which this definition is based.

<sup>21</sup> The diagonals are oriented between the six major cardinal directions. See note following.

<sup>22</sup> "Four" is the correct reading, as in MSS Montefiore 313, Harvard, Cambridge Add. 671, Cincinnati 524/3, Cambridge Or. 2116, 8. Other MSS have "eight." Compare the analysis of Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 253-54, upon which this observation is based. What *SY* calls the "twelve boundaries of the diagonals" of three-dimensional space are the imaginary end points, or "boundary" points of the axes lying between the six cardinal directions. R. Isaac here is simply offering a clear method for visualizing their placement. If the diagonals are considered on a two-dimensional plane, without upper and lower, there are only four: northeast, northwest, southwest, southeast. When the third dimension is added, up and down, there are three end-points, upper plane, horizontal plane, and lower plane, in each of the four diagonal directions, for a sum of twelve.

some of which ascend and some of which descend.<sup>23</sup> **Signs of the Zodiac:**<sup>24</sup> these are the directors in the world, from the expression "He shall pour water (Num. 24:7)."<sup>25</sup> But "constellations"<sup>26</sup> is from the expression "He that scattered Israel (Jer. 31:9)."<sup>27</sup> This goes to this place and this goes to that place.<sup>28</sup> **With which**<sup>29</sup> is *Yesod 'Olam*.<sup>30</sup> Twenty-two takes precedence here over ten.<sup>31</sup> The third Name is *Hesed*

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<sup>23</sup> *SY* identifies the diagonals with the biblical "arms of the world," Dt. 33:27. R. Isaac explains that this is in consideration of their extension above and below the horizontal, in the functional manner of arms.

<sup>24</sup> *SY* 5:2 (sec. 49).

<sup>25</sup> See J. Ibn Jannah, *Sefer haš-šorašim*, trans. J. Ibn Tibbon, (Berlin, 1896 reprint), 257-58, entry מִזֵּי, who brings this proof-text. See E. Ben Yehudah, *Milon*, vol. 4, 2882, n. 1. In context here, for R. Isaac, the proof-text shows that the root of the term מִזֵּי is the pouring or directing of emanative influence.

<sup>26</sup> Job 38:31, 32; Gen. R. 10:7.

<sup>27</sup> J. Ibn Jannah, *Sefer haš-šorašim*, trans. J. Ibn Tibbon, (Berlin, 1896 reprint), 257-58, entry מִזֵּי, compares מִזֵּי and מִזֵּל, but does not bring this proof-text.

<sup>28</sup> The constellations in general are scattered helter-skelter across the sky, while those constellations that are designated as the signs of the Zodiac apply to a relatively narrow band in the sky.

<sup>29</sup> *SY* 5:3 (sec. 51).

<sup>30</sup> The *sefirah Yesod*, the Foundation of the world, with reference to *SY* 5:3 (51): שְׁבַע יְסוּד.

<sup>31</sup> R. Isaac is calling attention to the structural parallel between this section of *SY* and *SY* 1:1 (sec. 1). Here, the twenty-two letters are the subject of discussion, not the ten *sefirot* or the thirty-two pathways.

and *Pahad*,<sup>32</sup> and the fourth is *Keter*, in which are divided all the things and the hosts made by the Name.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> In R. Isaac's system, the third divine Name listed in *SY* 5:3 (sec. 51), according to all variants, the Name *צבאות*, stands for the *sefirot Hesed* and *Pahad* together. Their inclusion together in one plural divine Name indicates the intimate relationship of these two *sefirot*. See the fragment of the teaching of R. Abraham b. David brought by G. Scholem, *Resit hak-Kabbalah*, 79, n. 2, which confirms this concept. See Nahmanides, *PSY*, 403-4, who also associates this divine Name with the same *sefirot*. Later kabbalists, however, identified this Name with the *sefirot Neẓah* and *Hod*. See Moses Cordovero, *Pardes Rimmonim*, 20:12 (Jerusalem, 1962) 95d-96b.

<sup>33</sup> The fourth divine Name in *SY* 5:3 (51) varies according to the recension. See I. Gruenwald, "A Preliminary Critical Edition of *Sefer Yeẓirah*," 167, apparatus, for variants in the order of divine Names. See, too, Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 257, for a variant not brought by Gruenwald: *שבהן יסד י"ה ה' צבאו"ת אלהי"ם*. In many of the recensions brought by Gruenwald, and that of Judah b. Barzilai, the fourth Name is *אלהי"ם היים*, which may be that intended by R. Isaac, described as containing all *sefirot*.

## Chapter 6

The supernal world is air and water and the power of fire third.<sup>1</sup> In the world<sup>2</sup> of separation, fire surrounds the firmament above us, and water is below, with air in between.<sup>3</sup> In the soul, fire is above, water in between, and air, which is below, is the middle line from the brain to the coccyx.<sup>4</sup> In year, cold is from water, and heat is from fire; temperance provides satisfaction for all from air mediating in between.<sup>5</sup> And officers:<sup>6</sup> officer below officer.<sup>7</sup> For fire carries water:<sup>8</sup> a fire pan over an iron

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<sup>1</sup> Based on *SY* 1:9-12 (secs. 10-14).

<sup>2</sup> *SY* 6:1 (sec. 58).

<sup>3</sup> R. Isaac explains the apparent discrepancy between the orders of the elements in *SY* 1:9-12 and 6:1 in terms of the different levels of the cosmic hierarchy to which they apply.

<sup>4</sup> These associations are based on *SY* sec. 62, where "head," above, corresponds to "heat" or fire, "stomach," in between, corresponds to cold, and "trunk," which R. Isaac defines as extending down to the coccyx, corresponds to "air," in the lower position.

<sup>5</sup> This sentence is based on *SY* 3:3 (sec. 28).

<sup>6</sup> *SY* 6:1-2 (sec. 59).

<sup>7</sup> The officers are arranged in nested hierarchical sets. This is R. Isaac's interpretation of *SY* 6:1-2: חק עשרה שלשה ושבעה ושנים עשר ופקידים בתלי וגלגל ולב (The rule is ten, three, seven and twelve, and officers in Draco, sphere and heart).

<sup>8</sup> This phrase is apparently brought as a version

pot, and beneath it water sits in the bottom of the iron pot:<sup>9</sup> when the fire burns, some of the water is diminished, for the fire carries it.<sup>10</sup> On his throne, without exertion,<sup>11</sup> for all turn towards His glory,<sup>12</sup> and facing His throne they shine.<sup>13</sup> Like a king in the province: to command

of the text of *SY* 6:1 by Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 257, 259: וזה סימן לדבר שהאש נושאה את המים .

<sup>9</sup> The definition of *אנטיכי* used by R. Isaac is not that of the Mishnah *Sabbat*, 41a: a double-walled vessel, in which the inner hollow holds water, and the space between the walls holds coals (Rashi). Rather, he uses a definition implying it is a vessel for holding coals, suspended in the hollow of another vessel, holding food, as in Jerusalem Talmud *Beza*, I, 6c: כהדא אנטיכי נפלה, and *Mo'ed Katan* 28b. This example is intended to match the structural order of the world according to *SY* 6:1, with fire above causing the water below to rise in evaporation. See following note.

<sup>10</sup> Compare Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 259: ויש מי שמפרש שהאש נושאה את המים שמבעבע את המים כשהן בכלי (Someone explains that fire lifts up water in that it boils water when the water is in a pot and is heated). R. Isaac offers an empirical proof from an example even closer to the physical reality, with the fire positioned on a stand above the water, likened to the heavenly fire above the earthly water.

<sup>11</sup> Compare *Seder Rabbah de-Berešit*, in *Batei Midrašot*, vol. 1, 45: וכל העולם כולו תלוי בזרועו של אדון ואין יגיעה (The whole world hangs on the arm of the Lord without effort).

<sup>12</sup> See Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 234.

<sup>13</sup> A poetic allusion to Num. 8:2. The entities under discussion are the celestial luminaries, ruled by the constellation Draco on the ecliptic. The lights of the Menorah are compared to the planets and celestial luminaries in *Targum Ps.-Jonathan* b. 'Uziel, Ex. 40:4, and R. Isaac may have this set of associations in mind here. See Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 259, who also discusses the celestial luminaries in general in his gloss on Draco in *SY* 6:1-2, and compares them to the Menorah.

his servants and respond to each and every one and labor in their affairs. Like a king at war: he turns to emanate his good spirit upon the worthy, and his bad spirit upon rebels. This corresponding to that:<sup>14</sup> what is life to this is death to that, such as cold and wet, hot and dry.<sup>15</sup> Sometimes they injure each other, and sometimes they benefit. One by one each alone stands:<sup>16</sup> for it is not double. It says from *MS*,<sup>17</sup> which are patrices, for the beginning of the sparks and the hewings of the frame issue from them. Seven... divisions:<sup>18</sup> *Hesed-Pahad-Tiferet*, and below *Nezah-Hod-Zaddik*. Mediates: and the mediator is in between, the line from above to below.<sup>19</sup> Three upon three and one mediates between:<sup>20</sup> of the seven geminates it speaks...<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> *SY* 6:2 (sec. 60).

<sup>15</sup> See lines 350-52 above.

<sup>16</sup> *SY* 6:3 (48).

<sup>17</sup> *SY* sec. 62.

<sup>18</sup> *SY* 6:3 (sec. 48): שבעה - שלשה חלוקין על שלשה (Seven - three divisions upon three, and one is a rule that mediates between).

<sup>19</sup> R. Isaac gives his kabbalistic interpretation of this passage from *SY* which speaks of seven divided into two groups of three with one in the center as referring to two groups of three *sefirot* each and one in the middle, the central line.

<sup>20</sup> *SY* 6:3 (48).

<sup>21</sup> R. Isaac explains that this section of *SY* 6:3 (sec. 48), which begins as a discussion of the twelve simple letters, shifts, rather suddenly and obscurely, to a discussion of the structure of certain unidentified groupings of three, seven and twelve. In



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context, these groups certainly refer to the letters, as matrixes, geminates and simple letters; but *SP* does not state it clearly. R. Isaac therefore identifies the structure "three upon three and one mediates between" as a reference to the geminate letters.