

Chapter 1

Abraham Abulafia and *Unio Mystica*

I

R. Moses ben Maimon—Maimonides—is the most prominent Jewish author of the Middle Ages. He was a sober lawyer, an important philosopher and physician, an influential spiritual leader, and the subject of fervent devotion as well as bitter attacks. He is unquestionably a central figure in Jewish philosophy. His works have been disseminated, debated, interpreted, and printed again and again.

R. Abraham Abulafia, was a different figure; of poor halakhic education, and a mediocre thinker if judged as a philosopher. Like Maimonides, however, he was the subject of admiration and bitter critiques. Unquestionably, he is a central figure in Jewish mysticism. Abulafia's works were disseminated, debated, and interpreted, but not printed until the second part of the nineteenth century, when less than one percent of his prolific literary output was edited by Adolph Jellinek.

The sober Maimonides and the enthusiastic Abulafia are, *prima facie*, two antipodes of the Jewish medieval intellectual and spiritual arena. Nevertheless, Abulafia is one of the first commentators of Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed*, the first scholar who at least temporarily made his living teaching the *Guide* to students, and the only author who has written three commentaries on the secrets alluded to by Maimonides in his book.¹

Abulafia's deep interest in Maimonides' *chef d'oeuvre* might be explained merely as a biographical incident; he began to study the *Guide* in the early sixties of the thirteenth century,² years before he received the first revelation at Barcelona, in 1270.³ However, this is not sufficient. Abulafia's contemporaries, Kabbalists like R. Isaac Ibn Latif, R. Moses de Leon, and his own student, R. Joseph Gikatilla, began their intellectual careers under the influence of Maimonides, or at least avidly interested in his teachings.⁴ A few years later, however, they shifted toward theosophical speculations⁵ or neo-Platonic thought⁶, becoming critical towards Maimonides and Aristotelianism, or, at least, indifferent to this brand of thought. The single Kabbalist who remained relatively faithful to Maimonides' teachings was Abulafia, despite a tremendous shift in his *Weltanschauung*.

The differing attitudes toward Maimonidean thought among the Kabbalists are the result of two different metaphysical stands. The theosophical Kabbalists, represented by Gikatilla and de Leon, focused their interest upon the nature of ten *sefirot* or divine potencies, which are situated above the ten separate intellects central to Maimonides' metaphysics. According to the theosophical Kabbalists, the Aristotelian philosophy is concerned with a realm inferior to the *sefirot*; to use Louis Gardet's term, this view can be called "un distinction hiérarchisée," or, a hierarchical distinction.⁷ Abulafia did not accept the importance of the *sefirot* as a special realm beyond the ten separate intellects; roughly speaking, he agreed with Maimonides' metaphysics, but differed by emphasizing the significance of the spiritual possibilities inherent in the Aristotelian scheme. Abulafia was interested in the intensification of the spiritual life, not in the discovery of new realms for contemplation.

The medieval Aristotelianism, according to Maimonides, is primarily a descriptive system: it includes long discussions on the nature of God, the universe, *Torah*, and man, whereas its prescriptive part is rather poor and vague; it recommends Aristotelian works as the main texts of an ideal curriculum which proposes the indirect perception of God's attributes through the medium of contemplation of nature.

Abulafia's doctrine is almost exclusively prescriptive; his acceptance of the Maimonidean scheme continues until his last works; however, he added elaborate techniques for attaining mystical experiences in this life, which, though obviously non-Maimonidean, could be understood in Maimonidean terms.⁸

To illustrate Abulafia's use of philosophical, mostly Maimonidean, terminology, I should like to quote a pertinent passage, from one of Hans Jonas' papers:

Without an antecedent dogmatism there would be no valid mysticism. And mysticism, let it be noted, wants to be "valid", namely, more than a revel of feeling. The true mystic wants to put himself into possession of absolute reality, which already is and about which doctrine tells him . . . Having an objective theory, the mystic goes beyond theory; he wants experience of and identity with the object; and he wants to be able to claim such identity. Thus, in order that certain experiences may become possible and even conceivable as valid anticipations of an eschatological future, or as actualizations of metaphysical stages of being, speculation must have set the framework, the way, and the goal—long before the subjectivity has learned to walk the way.⁹

Though Jonas was exclusively concerned with ancient texts, Hermetic or patristic, his diagnosis of the relation between philosophy and mysticism is surprisingly adequate also for Jewish authors like Abulafia. Aristotelian thought, (mainly its psychological theories as interpreted by Maimonides, Avicenna, and Averroës), supplied the framework and the goal. The specific techniques, were inherited from other sources, or partly invented by Abulafia himself.¹⁰ I should like to elaborate here upon the goal of Abulafia's mystical activity (i.e. *unio mystica*) and its sources in the philosophical medieval heritage. I suppose that some of Abulafia's mystical experiences were interpreted by him, as unitive states.

II

Before proceeding with the discussion of Abulafia's view of *unio mystica*, some remarks upon Scholem's opinion of *unio mystica* in Judaism are pertinent. According to Scholem,

it is only in extremely rare cases that ecstasy signifies actual union with God, in which the human individuality abandons itself to the rapture of complete submersion in the divine stream. Even in this ecstatic frame of mind, the Jewish mystic almost invariably retains a sense of the distance between the Creator and His creature . . . he does not regard it as constituting anything so extravagant as identity of Creator and creature.¹¹

This view of the most intimate connection of the human soul with God as adhesion or communion—versus *unio mystica*—seems to be an important specific illustration of Scholem's Hegelian¹² theory of the emergence of mysticism.¹³ To him, the very existence of mysticism is possible only after two periods of religious development: the mythical epoch, when "the abyss between Man and God has not become a fact of

the inner consciousness"; and the period of "classical religion" when there was "a vast and transcendental Being and Man, the finite creature." A third period, when the phenomenon of mysticism became possible, is, in Scholem's view, the romantic period of religion: "Mysticism does not deny or overlook the abyss; on the contrary, it begins by realizing its existence, but from there it proceeds to a quest for the secret that will close it, the hidden path that will span it." Therefore, mysticism can be regarded as the Hegelian synthesis, which includes both the thesis—the first period which denies the divine transcendence—and the antithesis, where the transcendence is central. So also in the case of *unio mystica* according to Scholem: even in its extreme forms, the gap between the Divinity and the human cannot be totally bridged.

Since Scholem's denial of the extreme form of *unio mystica* in 1941, no close examination of this thesis was undertaken by scholars of Jewish mysticism,¹⁴ whereas experts of other religious mysticism unconditionally accepted it and used it in their studies.¹⁵

I should like to argue three points: (1) that Scholem's view, while correct in general¹⁶ and insofar as it concerns the theosophical Kabbalah (i.e. the main strain of Jewish medieval mysticism which deals with the nature of the *sefirot* and the relations between the commandments and divine harmony) is, wrong with regard to the second important brand of Kabbalah, or the ecstatic or prophetic Kabbalah. (2) that the divergence of the two types of Kabbalah on this issue, stems from their differing conceptions of man, as well as the nature of Divinity. And (3) that the influence of philosophical psychology on the ecstatic Kabbalah is the main reason for the emergence of the extreme type of expressions concerning *unio mystica* in the mysticism of Abulafia and his disciples.¹⁷ I would now like to explore this last assertion and its implications concerning the nature of the various forms of Jewish mysticism.

III

Maimonides' *Guide* is based upon the assumption that *imitatio Dei* can be achieved in the practical domain, with human science being limited to the terrestrial realm.¹⁸ In other words, man *cannot* attain an accurate knowledge of the separate intellects, or of God's nature, *a fortiori* the union of his soul or his intellect with them while alive.

Nevertheless his immediate followers have openly rejected the Maimonidean reticence regarding the possibility of a mystical union. His son, R. Abraham Maimuni, asserts that: "by the union of his (i.e. the righteous) soul and intellect, with the active intellect, he and he become

one entity.”¹⁹ R. Samuel Ibn Tibbon, the famous translator of the *Guide*, and one of the most important devotees of Maimonides’ thought, writes:

The soul then unites with the Intellect and they become one single thing, for then, the soul becomes divine, of a higher order, immortal as is the Intellect with which it has united, the Intellect [I say] whose being is separate from matter.²⁰

Both authors continued philosophical traditions already existing in twelfth-century Spanish thought;²¹ but their flagrant contradiction with the doctrine of “the great eagle” indicates that a shift towards a more mystical stand took place already at the beginning of the thirteenth century in the very strongholds of Maimonidean thought.²²

Their explicit statements about the possibility of a union with the active intellect notwithstanding, evidence about an actual experience of such a union is reported neither in Maimuni’s, nor in Ibn Tibbon’s works. Moreover, in Ibn Tibbon’s passage, the unitive experience is explicitly connected with the eschatological condition of the righteous, whereas Maimuni refers, in the context of his discussion on union, to a Rabbinic *dictum*, implicitly giving his thought an eschatological turn. Therefore, though the union, even total fusion, of the human soul or intellect with the active intellect, was theoretically well-known in Maimonidean circles, it was neither a confession of a personal experience nor a prescription for a type of religious life in this world. Ibn Tibbon’s stand on union represents an attempt to infuse in Maimonides’ thought an Averroistic direction;²³ Abraham Maimuni may have also been influenced by this brand of thought,²⁴ though Sufic material may have influenced him as well.²⁵

Therefore, the two greatest authorities on the matter of Maimonides’ thought, preceding those of Abulafia, explicitly accepted non-Maimonidean Averroistic conceptions of uniting *unio mystica* with the active intellect. Abulafia seems to ignore Maimuni’s works, written in Arabic in the relatively remote Egypt; however, he knew at least one of Ibn Tibbon’s works,²⁶ written in Hebrew and in Abulafia’s geographical vicinity, Provence, and he could even read, in his intellectual ambience,²⁷ Ibn Tibbon’s Hebrew translation of some of Averroes’ most significant texts dealing with the possibility of conjunction with the active Intellect.²⁸

In his *Commentary on the Secrets* included in the *Guide*, Abulafia explicitly states that the ultimate transformation of human intellect into the *intellectus agens*, or even God, takes place during the mystical experience. Speaking about the perfect actualization of the intellectual faculty by the active intellect, Abulafia asserts that:

he prophesies, according to the entity which causes him to pass from

potentiality into the final and perfect actuality and he and he become one entity, inseparable during this act.²⁹

Elsewhere Abulafia elaborates upon the process of prophesying:³⁰

The [place of the] beginning of the real prophecy³¹ is the inner intellectual faculty³² which is created in the heart through the agency of seventy languages, by the 22 sacred letters, all of them being combined in the heart, *in virtu*, by the process of combination of letters done by the intellectual faculty, and *in actu* by *intellectus agens*, which is divine, religious, and prophetic.³³ And from him [the inner intellectual faculty] there will be an emanation on the imaginary faculty and from the imaginary [faculty] [the emanation will pour upon] the appetitive [faculty] and from the appetitive [faculty] on the sensitive [faculty] and from the sensitive on the designative [faculty] which is designed on the book. And it [the prophesying emanation] will also turn to the inverse direction and will reach a high status. It will separate from the designated [status] [and will turn] to the sensitive [faculty] and from the sensitive to the appetitive and from it to the imaginative and from it to the inner rational cogitative [and] designative [faculty] and from it to the prophetic [faculty] and from it to the [*intellectus*] *agens* and will unite with it after many hard, strong and mighty exercises, until the particular and personal prophetic [faculty] will turn universal, permanent, and everlasting like the essence of its cause, and he and he will become one entity.

Abulafia describes what seems to be a complete circle.³⁴ Beginning with God, and then the *intellectus agens*, the emanation descends upon the human faculties and turns into a written message; thereafter it returns to its origin, causing the ascension of the intellectual faculty and its fusion with the divine *intellectus agens*. A comparison of this passage with other of his writings, enables us to perceive this quotation as dealing with the transformation of spiritual effluence from the *intellectus agens* (elsewhere denoted as “primordial speech”)³⁵ into a written book, through the mediation of the various human inner senses, functioning as an organ of this transformation. However, the particular intellect, while serving as a channel for the divine communication to men, is itself activated and is enabled, by the use of techniques based upon linguistic elements, to unite with the *intellectus agens*. It is obvious that Abulafia’s terminology was attentively chosen: the human intellectual faculty is named *dibbur* whereas the universal intellect (“*dibbur qadmon*”) and each of the higher separate intellects are described as “*dibbur*”.

The human prophetic faculty is “particular and personal” vis à vis the universal prophetic faculty. The similarity of these terms conveys the possibility of continuity between human reason and the active intellect:

the particular can turn universal since each is but another aspect of the same intellectual essence. According to Abulafia: "The divine separate intellect and the hylic emanated intellect are two valid witnesses, though they are one."³⁶ We can hardly miss the Averroistic background of this statement: Though this intellect is only the lowest among the separate intellects—according to the accepted view of medieval Arab or Jewish Aristotelians—it seems that a perfect union with it still deserves the title of *unio mystica*, since it is the total fusion of the human intellect with a comprehensive entity—the divine active intellect. Also, because the spiritual nature of this intellect seems to be, according to Abulafia, similar to God, a clear distinction between the union of the human intellect with the *intellectus agens*, or with God, is rather difficult:

"image" in this context is a name which designates the natural form, which is [the form of] the species, and it is the soul, which is the human rational intellection, which is similar to the divine [rational intellection] with which it is united and from which its existence [stems] and from It is its being, providence and perpetuity. This is why it is written that [man] was created in God's image and likeness. And the meaning of this secret is that "image", which is the name of the soul which survives after the death, the perpetuity of its survival depends upon its likeness to its Creator, concerning the intellection, the existence and the eternity and the dominion, until this image's name will be like the name of its Master, and it [image] is the special name of the *Intellectus Agens*, an image like his image, as it is written on it and God created man in His Image, in the image of God He created him. The duplication of these words hints to the creator and to the creature, which is called with the name of the creator; this fact hints that they [the Creator and the creature] are one entity, inseparable.³⁷

The ambiguity of the identity of the Master, the Artificator, is crucial: these terms may stand for both God and the *Intellectus Agens*, the latter being denominated, as seen above, as divine. The soul becomes "similar to the divine intellection" and, furthermore, we read about "its likeness to its creator". It is obvious that according to Abulafia, the last term of reference of the soul is the "divine", be it the active intellect, or be it the supreme Deity. The intellectual human faculty is assumed to reach the most similarity to the divine attributes while alive, in order to assure its *post mortem* survival. The two kinds of intellections completely fuse in a supreme act of intellectual love:³⁸

The name [of God] is composed from two parts since there are two parts of love³⁹ [divided between] two lovers, and the [parts of] love turn one [entity] when love became actuated. The divine intellectual love and the

human intellectual love are conjoined being one. Exactly so the name [of God] includes [the words] one one,⁴⁰ because of the connection of the human existence with the divine existence during the intellection—which is identical with the intellect in [its] existence—until he and he become one [entity]. This is the [great] power of man: he can link the lower part with the higher one, and the lower [part] will ascend and the higher [part] will descend and will kiss the entity ascending towards it, like a bridegroom actually kisses his bride out of his great and real desire, characteristic of the delight of both, from the power of the name [of God].

The similarity of this passage to the quotations from *Sitrei Torah* is obvious; but in the last description of the conjunction between two kinds of intellections, there is no mention of the active intellect at all, only the “divine existence” being viewed as the entity with which the “human existence” is united. This is also the case in Abulafia’s interpretation of Moses’ transfiguration:

His higher soul longed to unite with her root, which is the beginning without end, and the end without beginning . . . and God, may He be exalted, has poured upon him, out of the efflux of His Goodness . . . until He caused his intellect to pass slowly from its human potentiality and caused it to become divine actuality.⁴¹

Here the actualization of the human intellect is synonymous with its becoming divine. This process of deification by intellection is a natural event, since:⁴²

all the inner forces and the hidden souls in man are differentiated in the bodies. It is however in the nature of all of them that when their knots are untied,⁴³ they return to their origin, which is one without any duality, and which comprises the multiplicity.

Interestingly enough, Scholem has interpreted this passage as dealing with the connection between the human soul and “the stream of cosmic life—personified for him [Abulafia] in the *intellectus agens* of the philosopher.” Nevertheless, Stace, apparently deliberately ignoring Scholem’s interpretation of the text, writes:

The untying of the knots of the souls means their liberation from the fetters of finitude so that they return to their origin, which is the Infinite One.⁴⁴

It seems that Stace’s intuition on the real significance of Abulafia’s passage, can be corroborated by other discussions found in the writings of the

Kabbalist. On the same page, Abulafia indeed describes man in these terms:⁴⁵

the ultimate composite,⁴⁶ which is man, who comprises all the *sefirot*, and whose intellect is the active intellect; and when you will untie its knots, you will be united with it [the active intellect] in a unique union.

The affinity between Abulafia's description of Divinity as comprising the multiplicity and his perception of man as comprising both the ten *sefirot* and the active intellect, is obvious. This perception of Abulafia's intention to compare man and his intellect with Deity, is corroborated by his own statement in one of his untitled works:⁴⁷

. . . and since God wanted us, He announced to us . . . the mysteries of this world, which is sealed with His name,⁴⁸ in order to untie all the knots, by whom they [the knots] were knotted according to Him [the name] and with it [the name] we were composited, so that we are able to become simple⁴⁹ [spiritual], loose from all remaining compositions, and he will remain uncomposite, neither the composition of his natural disposition, nor material composition, and we shall become innovated entities, possessing simple [spiritual] ideas, separated of any matter and composited of all forms; we shall become the caused [entities], of all the divine causes, the simplest of them being composited out of all the others and the most composite of them being the simplest one [the most spiritual].

According to Abulafia, the untying of knots results in a total spiritualization of human intellect, which leaves the material knots and becomes bound to spiritual bonds, passing from the most composited being in the material realm, to the most composited entity in the spiritual world (i.e. formed out of the forms—the ideas—separated from matter). This total transformation renders the stripped human intellect similar to God, who is presented as the most composite out of the simplest [i.e. spiritual] entities. It seems that God is the first composite entity, whereas man is the last (i.e. ultimate composite one).

Man therefore undergoes a spiritual transition from his natural condition as a composite entity in the material realm, to his *status* as a composite entity in the spiritual realm, thus making him similar to God and, according to the passages out of Abulafia's letter, making him capable of forming a perfect union with the active intellect and, afterwards, with God.

This gradation is evident from Abulafia's statement in his *Ḥayyei Ha'Olam HaBa'*:

the benefit of the knowledge of the name [of God] is its being the cause

of man's attainment of the actual intellection of the active intellect and the benefit of the intellection of the active intellect is the ultimate aim of the life of the intellectual soul and it is the reason of the life of the next world; this aim is the union of the soul, by this intellection, with God forever.⁵⁰

Here, the Kabbalist unequivocally states that the soul can unite not only with the active intellect but with God Himself, evidently asserting the possibility of the supreme *unio mystica*. According to another text of Abulafia, if the mystic:⁵¹

has felt the divine touch and perceived its nature it seems right and proper to me and to every perfected man that he should be called "master" because his name is like the Name of his Master be it only in one, or in many, or in all of His Names.⁵² For now he is no longer separated from his Master, and behold he is his Master and his Master is he; for he is so intimately united⁵³ with Him, that he cannot by any means be separated from Him, for he is He . . . and there is no difference between them, except that his Master has his supreme rank by his own right and not derived from other creatures, while he is elevated to this rank by the intermediary of creatures.

This passage is of utmost importance for the understanding of Abulafia's view of *unio mystica* as well as Scholem's view of Abulafia. The Kabbalist directly asserts that after the identification of the mystic with his Master, both of them are on the same rank: it is the supreme rank; the difference between them is merely "historical": the human intellect becomes universal *post rem*, whereas the Master is universal *ante rem*. Furthermore, the connection between the mystic and the Master is so close that "he cannot by any means be separated from Him, for he is Him." Therefore, Scholem's translation of the word "dibbuk" as "adhering" seems to miss the point. Since, according to Abulafia, there is no more separation, why not regard the conjunction as an outright union? Scholem has attempted to attenuate the unitive overtone of the formula "He is he" or "huwa huwa", by interpreting it as a "famous formula of advanced Moslem pantheism." However, the context where the formula occurs does not support this opinion; as a pantheistic affirmation, without unitive insinuation, this formula may appear only as a confession which is not connected to a transformation of the mystic's personality. However, when such a transformation is explicitly asserted, the formula "hu' hu'" indicates a recognition of the nature of the *new* state the mystic has reached. It is not the "unity of being" "waḥdat al wuḡud" that is affirmed by Abulafia, but the union of being with God.

To suppose that this passage deals with *unio mystica* is confirmed also by the transfer of the Divine Name or Names to the mystic. This transfer is already known in Jewish mysticism, in connection with Enoch's translation into an angel—Metatron. In the ancient Jewish mysticism, a metamorphosis of the patriarch into a high angel is accompanied by his receiving one or seventy divine names, although the concept of union is unknown to the ancient texts.⁵⁴

The similarity of Abulafia's assertion about the mystic who receives a divine name, to the ancient Jewish view of Enoch's translation, is obvious. Like the case of Enoch, Abulafia suggests a deep transformation of the mystic's personality, which takes place during the unitive experience.

IV

Before leaving our discussion of *unio mystica*, let me present an intriguing passage found in a treatise which was written either by Abulafia, or more probably, by one of his disciples:⁵⁵

He told me: Thou art my son, this day I have begotten you [Psalm 2,7], and also: See now that I, even I, am he [Deut. 32,39], and the secret [of these verses] is the union of the power—i.e. the supernal divine power⁵⁶ called the sphere of prophecy⁵⁷—with the human power; and it is also said: I I [Jes. 43,11].

Therefore, beside the formulae “He is He”, and “I am He and He is I” we get the formula “I - I”: its Biblical sources notwithstanding, the signification of this phrase is given by the Kabbalist as union of the human and the divine. We may then ask the intention of the author who has chosen to use the formula “I - I” in lieu of “I am He”, since in both cases, the basic meaning is the mystical union. In other words, who is the real speaker, God, as in the Biblical sources, or the mystic, who may pronounce this formula as the assertion of his identity with God (perceived as the I-ness)? I am inclined to accept the second solution for two reasons: (1) Preceding the above-mentioned passage, the author quotes a midrashic interpretation on the meaning of the name “Eheyeh asher Eheyeh”:⁵⁸

And it is written: I am with you in trouble etc. [Psalms, 91,15] and this is in entirety when you will be with Him. But if you are not with Him, He also will not be with you; however, if you are with Him [then] from your flesh;⁵⁹ and I shall tell you: “But my dwelling,” [signifies] “But I am with you” [and signifies] I shall be a dwelling. This is the way our [ancient] sages interpreted this secret in connection with the name I shall be

whatever I shall be, and the Holy, may He be blessed, said to Moses: Moses, be with me and I shall be with you. And the adduced proof [for this interpretation] is from the verse: The Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand [Psalms, 121,5] as it is exposed in Midrash Hashkem.⁶⁰

Here the Divinity is completely passive, and His activity is described as purely reactive to the human initiative. The meaning of the appellation "I shall be whatever I shall be" is, in this Kabbalist's view, "I shall be wherever you will be". In other words, the activation or actuation of the human intellect is tantamount to the dwelling of the Divine within the human.

Furthermore, the duplication of the divine name: "I shall be whatever I shall be" is clearly related to the "I - I" in the passage immediately following our quotation. The divine existence, then, seems to be tantamount to its I-ness; both are closely correlated to human intellectual activity.

Because of this correlation, it seems that the phrase: "I - I" is an exclamation by a mystic, indicating his awareness of becoming divine. (2) An interesting parallel to our analysis of the passages of *Sefer HaMamad*, can be adduced from a discussion of the Spanish philosopher and theologian, Ibn Sabin. Professor Shlomo Pines has kindly drawn my attention to an interesting interpretation of Al-Hallaj's dictum "'Ana al-Ḥaqq", found in Ibn Sabin's, *Yemenite Answers to Sicilian Questions*,⁶¹ according to the Spanish author: "I" is related to the term "anniyah", which can be conceived both as "existence"—including divine existence—as in the regular philosophical usage of this term,⁶² and as "I-ness". Therefore, Al-Hallaj's exclamation expresses, according to this view, not only the identification, or identity, of a particular mystic with God, but also the possibility of applying the I-ness to the Godhead by the mystical union of human with divinity, or as a result of such an event.

V

It is worth remarking that Abulafia's mysticism includes not only the transformational unitive component, but also a limited pantheistic facet; according to this Kabbalist, the various intellectual parts of the existence are part of one *continuum*.⁶³

Intellect is a term [applied] to the entity which rules over everything, i.e. the first cause of all; and it is⁶⁴ called the form of the intellect. The [term] intellect is also [applied] to the entity separated from matter,⁶⁵ which is emanated⁶⁶ from the first cause; by the means of this emanation the first entity rules over the moving heavens.⁶⁷ However⁶⁸ He, may He

be exalted, is the simple⁶⁹ intellect. The [term] intellect is the name of the first cause which is close and acts upon whatever exists beneath the heavens,⁷⁰ and this is the active intellect which causes [the emergence of] the intellect in the human soul. Therefore there are three stages, all three being but one essence; God, His emanation which is separated [from matter], and the emanation of this emanation which is attached to the soul and the soul is attached to it in a very tenacious way, though the two [i.e. the soul and the emanation of God's emanation] are but one essence.

Essentially, all the intellectual phenomena are one; therefore, the actualization of the human soul is tantamount to her divinization, or to put it in Abulafia's own words:

the grasping [of the soul] the human intellect which is emanated from the separated active intellect, causes the union of the soul to her God; this union is the cause of the soul's eternal life, similar to the life of her God.⁷¹

The acquisition of the intellect renders man similar to the supernal man (i.e. the spiritual world):⁷²

the supernal man has four [elements] which are: soul,⁷³ emanated intellect,⁷⁴ separated intellect,⁷⁵ and the first cause of all; so also the terrestrial man has four [elements] which are: soul, emanated intellect, separated intellect and the first cause of all.

The integration of intellectual forces into the human *aggregatum* joins them to the spiritual *continuum* whose first part is God.⁷⁵ The human intellect is a humanized God; therefore, the total union of human soul to God, and even her fusion with Him can be easily deduced from the common denominator of God as intellect, intelligibilia and intellection, and separate intellects—all of which are various aspects of the spiritual.⁷⁶ This view may be defined as a "limited pantheism", and is described by Abulafia as the presence of the separate (i.e. the spiritual) everywhere.⁷⁷ A visual representation of Abulafia's intellectual pantheism is found in the collectanea which include excerpts from *'Or HaSekhel*; there a flame is painted, with God at its top, while its lowest point is human intellect.⁷⁸

The immediate source of Abulafia's view is obvious; it is Aristotelianism which presented God as the intellect, intelligible, and intellection.⁷⁹ This conception was introduced in Jewish thought by R. Abraham Ibn Ezra⁸⁰ and endorsed by Maimonides in the *Guide*.⁸¹ Jewish philosophers, however, never intended to integrate their perception of Divinity into a mystical approach that uses the intellectualization of God as a means to bridge the

gap between the human and divine intellect. Moreover, Maimonides stressed a distinction between the human mode of intellection and the divine one.⁸² We see again the emergence of one of Abulafia's mystical views (i.e. the intellectual pantheism) as an elaboration of already existing philosophical conceptions.

VI

The texts discussed above, convincingly indicate that Abulafia maintained that the human intellect can fuse with the active intellect and even with God Himself. This view, explicitly based upon philosophical epistemology, places Abulafia among the "mystical theorists", to use Dodds' terminology.⁸³ The question must be asked if these theoretical statements could be connected with the details of Abulafia's biography; an affinity, or affinities between his texts and his life would indicate that general assertions, relevant for all "prophets" (i.e. mystics) are meaningful also for Abulafia's own spiritual activity. It seems to me that there are reasons to believe that Abulafia's mystical theory regarding the possibility of *unio mystica* corresponds to other pertinent biographical events, such as the following:

a) Abulafia inherited, or developed, highly complicated techniques, whose final purpose was to attain "prophecy" (i.e. a mystical experience). These techniques are exclusively based upon linguistic elements, such as those mentioned in the analysis above wherein the combinations of letters and the divine names were mentioned. Though there is no explicit statement on the practical arrival of *unio mystica* through the use of these techniques in Abulafia's extant writings, we cannot ignore the possibility that such an experience indeed occurred. Mystical experiences of other types—revelatory or demonic experiences—were related in Abulafia's autobiographical remarks.

b) The first and most elaborated discussions on the nature of the union of human intellect with higher entities, occur in *Sitrei Torah* and in the commentary to *Sepher HaYashar*. Both were written in 1280 when Abulafia was forty years old. This age was considered by philosophers and Kabbalists—including Abulafia himself—as the acme of human intellectual development. Abulafia expressed this view in two books written in 1280.⁸⁴ Therefore, it would seem reasonable to link the emergence of discussions about *unio mystica* with those about the perfection of the intellect to the same year. This would indicate that Abulafia reached a union with the "divine existence" in 1280. This year was of utmost importance for Abulafia's spiritual life; it was the date when he was supposed to meet

the Pope. The encounter never took place, however, because of the sudden death of the Pope.⁸⁵ It may be pertinent to this discussion to remark that the preceding years were a period of intensive revelations, which inspired Abulafia to meet with the Pope.⁸⁶

c) In 1279 Abulafia began the writing of a series of prophetic books. The last of them, and the single extant one, was composed in 1288.⁸⁷ Abulafia's commentary to the *Book of the Testimony*, written in 1280 in Rome,⁸⁸ includes intercalations of phrases stemming from the original book, and beside them, Abulafia's interpretations.⁸⁹

He⁹⁰ said that he was then at Rome and [God] revealed him what he shall do and what he shall say in His Name, and he will announce to everyone that: The Lord reigneth, let the people tremble [Psalms, 99,1] . . . And he said: and I have called his name Shaddai like My name⁹¹ and its secret⁹² is the corporeal Shaddai and you shall understand its meaning. And he also said: He is I and I am He; and it is forbidden⁹³ to disclose this issue in a more explicit fashion than was already done. But the secret of the corporeal name⁹⁴ is the Messiah of God and Moses will rejoice etc.

The intent of this cryptic passage is to convey the Messianic installation of Abulafia as the spiritual King of Israel. As part of the process, his name is changed to Shaddai. Abulafia probably hints that he, namely, "the corporeal Shaddai" is the Messiah of God. In this context, the occurrence of the formula "He is I and I am He" is highly significant: its affinity to the other formula, "He is he" is obvious, and its connection to Abulafia is almost explicit. It seems, therefore, that the prophetic and messianic tension, which characterizes this period of Abulafia's life, is fraught with an additional dimension: the experience of a mystical union. A decisive piece of evidence marking 1280 as the year when Abulafia experienced mystical union is found in *Ḥayyei Ha'Olam HaBa'*, the most important handbook of ecstatic techniques, written in Rome in 1280:⁹⁵

in this manner he should transpose all its letters [of the Divine Name] frontwards and backwards, using many tunes . . . ⁹⁶ and he must master very well the secrets of the law and their science in order to recognize [the meaning of the combinations of letters resulting from] the transposition of the combinations and his heart will become aware of the intellectual, divine and prophetic mental concept. And the first thing which will come out of the combination [of letters] during his concentration⁹⁷ upon it, is the emergence of fear and trembling upon him, the hairs of his head will stand up whereas his limbs will convulse. Afterwards, if he is worthy [of this experience] the Spirit of the living God will dwell upon him . . . and he will feel as if his whole body, from tip to toe, were anointed with the unction oil, and he will be the Messiah⁹⁸ of God and His messenger

and he will be called the angel⁹⁹ of God, and his name is like the name of his Master¹⁰⁰ which is Shaddai which was named as Metatron,¹⁰¹ the Angel of Presence.

Here, Abulafia is not only theoretically examining the union with Metatron (i.e. the active intellect), but also the corporeal and spiritual phenomena accompanying this experience. A passage asserting the “apotheosis” of the mystic occurs in the commentary to *Sefer HaMeliz* written in 1282 at Messina:¹⁰²

By his intellect he [the mystic] became superior to their species¹⁰³ and he became different from them and became [part of] another species, divine,¹⁰⁴ after he was human.

According to Abulafia, the mystic’s duty is to remain in the spiritual state known as the unitive experience. The only reason “to return from God”¹⁰⁵ or to escape this state, is when there is an urgent need to instruct the people, in order to bring them “under the wing of the Divine Presence.”

It seems therefore that Abulafia’s “objective” treatment of the problem of the union between the human and the divine intellects reflects not only his acceptance of philosophical epistemology, but also his personal experiences which occurred exactly the same year. In other words, Abulafia read Maimonides in Avicennian and Averroistic keys, decoded his own spiritual adventures according to Maimonides’ teaching in the *Guide*, and added philosophical conceptions out of Arabic philosophy.

At this stage in our discussion, we must seriously question Abulafia’s use of Maimonides’ teachings and his *Guide* as a point of departure for his non-Maimonidean view of *unio mystica* (which probably points to a real mystical experience). It is obvious that philosophy supplied him with concepts and terms, but why did he stick to the *Guide*, interpreting its secrets which hint at the possibility of mystic union, instead of commenting upon the *Song of Songs*?

It seems that one answer can be found in Abulafia’s peculiar method of interpreting the *Guide*. In contrast to all the other commentaries on the *Guide*, which follow the sequence of chapters as they are written by the author, Abulafia’s three commentaries exclusively treat the thirty-six secrets which, in his view, are hidden in the *Guide*.¹⁰⁶ He comments upon each of the secrets, bringing together other pertinent discussions in the *Guide*, and attempting to uncover Maimonides’ remarks on the way the book is to be decoded.¹⁰⁷ Why was Abulafia so eager to reveal Maimonides’ secrets? It is because of his feeling that he is the Messiah and his period is worthy of such a disclosure.¹⁰⁸ What is the nature of these secrets?

According to Abulafia, Maimonides' *Guide* (I, 71), has reconstructed the lost secrets of the Law, the "Sitrei Torah". Since biblical stories are viewed as allegories of spiritual progression of the human soul,¹⁰⁹ the Law, according to Abulafia, is aimed at directing man to attain the prophetic experience. By decoding Maimonides, then, Abulafia has revealed the true Jewish path of the ultimate felicity¹¹⁰—a path relevant to everyone, everywhere.

According to Maimonides and Abulafia, the *Guide* is a crucial stage where biblical secrets were recrystallized, after their loss during the exile period. Abulafia seems to have perceived his commentaries as furthering the disclosure of the secrets, which were germane to his own mystical experiences. He has found in Maimonides not only a reliable source of philosophical terminology, but also a respectable and authoritative intermediary between biblical spirituality, as he has conceived it, and his own spiritual experiences. Moreover, the philosophical terminology served as keys to self-understanding, and as a way of communication; in Abulafia's period, the Aristotelian epistemological concepts were already spread among the Jewish *intelligentsia*. Abulafia uses the terminology to convey the significance of his mystical experiences as he understood them, though they are almost totally absent in the short descriptions of his visions. We may add to Hans Jonas' view, that speculation was one of the main sources for the language used in speaking about intellectual mysticism, by observing that philosophical jargon molded the raw material of the inner experience into messages that became intelligible to the educated audience. The occurrence of philosophical terminology in Abulafia's work also seems to be a deliberate attempt to allure or attract philosophically biased Jewish scholars to his Kabbalah, in that it served to bridge philosophical scholarship and the more advanced stages of Kabbalistic training.¹¹¹

It is worthwhile to compare Abulafia's transformation of Maimonides' philosophical system with a parallel phenomenon in Christian mysticism. Meister Eckhart similarly transforms and uses philosophical material, including Maimonides' *Guide*, as starting points for his own theosophy. In both cases, Aristotelian elements serve as important instruments for the formulation of intellectual mysticism. According to Eckhart, "God and I, we are one in pure knowledge."¹¹²

The phenomenological affinity between Abulafia and Eckhart's mystical use of Aristotelian concepts is remarkable. Though they were of different mental and spiritual constitutions, they casually used and misused philosophical views in order to express their *intuiti mystici*. Like other prominent mystics, such as Pseudo-Dionysios, Shankara or Ibn Arabi, they express their experimental knowledge of God in philosophical idioms; the respective philosophical systems served to explain idiosyncratic

experiences in universal terms, thereby transforming the perceptions of their unitive lives into intellectual formulations.

VII

The mystical achievement according to Abulafia, consists of the fusion of the human intellect and the active and/or the divine intellect. This is made possible by the reduction of ideal human being to its intellectual faculty. This reduction, or simplification is the *sine qua non* for an individual's attainment of the universal or the divine. The prophetic Kabbalah can properly be described as the way of disintegrating the human *aggregatum*, and uniting its highest component with its source; other facets of the personality, the material or the emotional, are suppressed. This type of intellectual mysticism needs, theoretically speaking, neither the halakhic way of life, nor the Jewish community as a means for its consummation; the techniques of Abulafia are non-halakhic ways of cleaving to God, and they can be perfectly exercised only in complete solitude.¹¹³ These two features sharply distinguish the ecstatic Kabbalah from the main trends of Kabbalah in general; almost all other types of Kabbalah are chiefly interested in the halakhic *dromenon*, which, when performed according to the Kabbalistic intention, are directed to restoring the primordial dynamic unity in the bosom of the revealed divinity: the ten *sefirot*. This type of activity requires highly educated and spiritually powerful personalities, who are able to perform the Kabbalistic ritual.

This performance employs all of the main facets of the human being and integrates the Kabbalist in the communal rituals. The theurgical Kabbalah, as opposed to the ecstatic one, was theosophically oriented and only secondarily interested in the mystical accomplishment of every Kabbalist. This theurgical trend is a continuation of ancient Jewish conceptions concerning the ultimate role of the performance of the commandments.

Abulafia's Kabbalah, based on the Aristotelian view of God as the intellect, the intelligible, and the intellection, was unable to influence processes in the divine realm, nor was it interested in seriously discussing the meaning of the actual performance of Jewish commandments; it was concerned only with the ultimate intellectual rationale of some commandments. This type of Kabbalah therefore represents a major departure from the development of the medieval Kabbalah. The most important symptom of this departure is its urge to immerse into the ocean of Divinity instead of the effort to contribute to the divine harmony. Though deeply interested in the perfection of the individual, the ecstatic Kabbalah ends

with his complete disintegration; this is obviously the continuation of the philosophical tendency to suppress the non-intellectual parts of the human personality, reducing him to a purely intellectual being.

The theurgical Kabbalah, notwithstanding its theosophic tendency, aimed at the amplification of the Kabbalist's capacities; or, to use Jungian terminology, the theurgian Kabbalist underwent a process of individuation,¹¹⁴ vis à vis the "regression" of the intellect into the bosom of divinity according to the prophetic Kabbalah. In other words, Jewish mysticism may be described as a realm whose border with philosophy is a region of passive contemplation and where the inhabitants tend towards solitude and intellectual inwardness. Governing this parcel is the active intellect, whereas its Lord is Aristotle's self-intellecting first cause.

In the opposite direction, Jewish mysticism is a greater domain, deeply penetrated by halakhic activity, where energized contemplation is attained in communal worship. This realm is directly governed by divine potencies or powers—the *sefirot*—whose lord is either the Neoplatonic-biased concept of *Ein Sof*, or, more rarely, the concept of the anthropomorphic supernal essences forming the hidden primeval Adam.¹¹⁵ The ecstatic Kabbalah presents the mystic as a receptacle of divine emanation and energy; a quasi-female intellect impregnated by the active intellect which is treated as a male.¹¹⁶ In the theurgical Kabbalah, the mystic is viewed as a source of energy which is projected into the realm of *sefirot*; the last of them, *Malkhut*, is sometimes conceived as the supernal wife of the righteous.¹¹⁷ The basic divergence between the two types of Jewish mysticism may be illustrated by a comparison of two dicta: the theosophical Kabbalah would prefer as its slogan the biblical verse, "And thou, Solomon my son, know thou the God of thy father, and serve him" (I Chronicle, 28,9). Here, knowledge of God is presented, but only in anticipation of the proper religious service, the latter being the ultimate purpose of man.¹¹⁸ Abulafia and his disciples, however, would choose the well-known maxim "He who knows himself knows his Lord," whose metamorphoses were traced by A. Altmann. Knowledge of God is treated as the highest perfection of man, and it is explicitly connected, according to several medieval philosophers, with man's union with the active intellect.¹¹⁹

The typology above notwithstanding, I should like to point out what seems to be a striking discrepancy between our description of the prophetic Kabbalah, and the personality of its most important exponent, Abraham Abulafia. He was indeed a very active figure, roaming from city to city and acquiring devotees and disciples through his teaching, prolific writings, and intensive preaching to Jews and Christians. Nevertheless, this activity, fraught with messianic overtones, was considered, by Abulafia, to be a necessary evil, obviously inferior to the experience of being with God.

Thus, his public activity was considered an escapist interruption to the unitive experience.¹¹⁹

VIII

Most of the above-mentioned texts remained in long-forgotten manuscripts, and, prima facie, exert little influence on the development of Jewish and European thought. Nevertheless, it seems that some themes of Abulafia's thought found their way to a larger intellectual audience than one might expect. The *Sitrei Torah* is extant in at least twenty-five manuscripts,¹²⁰ and small portions of it were printed anonymously.¹²¹ Furthermore, it was translated, together with other works of Abulafia, into Latin, and it became one of the cornerstones of Pico della Mirandola's Kabbalah, as the late Haim Wirszubski has convincingly proved.¹²² I should like to suggest that Pico's view on man's union with God might be influenced by Abulafian views.¹²³

On the other hand, Abulafia's passage from *'Or HaSekhel*, dealing with human intellectual love and "divine intellectual love", was copied by a late fifteenth-century author and printed one hundred years later. For the time being, the last phrase is closest to the wording of Spinoza's famous expression, "*amor dei intellectualis*."¹²⁴

Notes to Chapter 1

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1. See Moritz Steinschneider, "Die Hebräischen Commentare zum 'Führer' des Maimonides", *Festschrift A. Berliner* (Frankfort, 1903): 345-363; Altmann, "Maimonides' Attitude" pp. 200-219; Idel, *Abraham Abulafia* pp. 8-12, Wirszubski (note 18 below).

2. Cf. Adolf Jellinek, *Bet Ha-Midrash*, vol. III (Jerusalem, 1938) p. XLI (German section).

3. See Idel, "Abulafia and the Pope", p. 1-2 n.3.

4. Isadore Twersky, "Religion and Law" in *Religion in a Religious Age* (ed. S. D. Goitein, Cambridge, Mass., 1974) p. 74.

5. See Scholem, *Major Trends* pp. 194-195.

6. See S. O. Heller-Willensky, "Isaac Ibn Latif—Philosopher or Kabbalist." In *Jewish Medieval and Renaissance Studies*, ed. A. Altmann (Cambridge, Mass.

1967) pp. 185-237.

7. Louis Gardet, *Études de philosophie et de mystique comparées* (Paris, 1972) pp. 268-270; see also Scholem, *Major Trends*, pp. 23-4.

8. Idel, *The Mystical Experience* pp. 13-71. Abulafia was deeply influenced by Maimonides' theory of prophecy: see idem, *Abraham Abulafia* pp. 86-128 and compare to Altmann "Maimonides' Attitude" p. 206.

9. Hans Jonas, "Myth and Mysticism: A Study of Objectification and Interiorization in Religious Thought" *Journal of Religion* 49 (1969) pp. 328-329.

10. Idel, *The Mystical Experience* pp. 22-24.

11. Scholem, *Major Trends* pp. 122-123; compare also pp. 55-56; idem, *Kabbalah* pp. 174-176; idem, *The Messianic Idea* pp. 203-204. A more cautious formulation can be detected in Scholem's relatively late paper "Mysticism and Society" *Diogenes*, vol. 58 (1967) p. 16: "The Jewish mystics used the term *devequth* to denote this ultimate aim. The term, meaning literally "cleaving" or "adhering" to God . . . The necessity to compromise with medieval Jewish theology dictated this terminology, not the act itself, which *may* or may not include a state of mystical union."

Scholem's assumption that the use of the rather ambiguous term *devequth* was dictated by the need to compromise with Jewish theology, i.e. the philosophically biased thought, is not supported by the following discussion; not only has Abulafia been influenced by philosophical unitive terminology; we can find philosophical texts which openly speak about the possibility of total union with God: see, e.g. the statement of one of Abulafia's contemporaries, R. Isaac ben Yeda'iah who wrote about the Nazirite that by the disattachment of his soul from matter and the purification of his intellect, he will find a direct presence of God "and his soul will cleave to Him in a complete and unseparable union, which lasts forever." *Commentary on Avot* (Jerusalem, 1973) p. 65. cp. also to p. 62 and for another discussion of the same author, adduced in Marc Saperstein "R. Isaac b. Yeda'ya: A Forgotten Commentator on the 'Aggada" *REJ*, vol. 138 (1979) p. 31. Saperstein has the merit to have established the real author of this commentary.

On Abulafia's influence on R. Abraham Shalom, a fifteenth-century Jewish theologian, see Chapter IV where I have evinced the influence of Abulafia's description of *unio mystica* in 'Or Ha-Sekhel.

12. The unfolding of the Hegelian mold of Scholem's view was briefly described by Natan Rotenstreich, *Judaism and Jewish Rights* (HaKibbutz Hameuchad Publishing House, 1959) pp. 119-120 (Hebrew).

13. Scholem, *Major Trends* pp. 7-8.

14. Minor exceptions are the statements of Tishby, *The Wisdom of the Zohar*, vol. II p. 289 n. 69; Gottlieb, *Studies* pp. 237-238; Altmann, *Faces* pp. 78-79, 89-90, and note 38 below. See also, Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* ch. III-IV.

15. See Robert C. Zaehner, *Hindu and Muslim Mysticism* (University of

London, 1960) p. 2; and *At Sundry Times—An Essay in the Comparison of Religions* (London, 1958) p. 171.

16. See Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* ch. III-IV.

17. We are concerned here only with Abulafia's own view of *unio mystica*; the views of his followers can be the subject of another study; see Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* ch. IV and essay VII below.

18. See Shlomo Pines, "The Limitations of Human Knowledge According to Al-Farabi, Ibn Bajja, and Maimonides" In *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature*, ed. I. Twersky (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard U. Press, 1979) pp. 82-109; also Pines, "Les limites de la metaphysique selon Al-Farabi, ibn Bajja et Maimonides . . .," in *Miscellanea Mediaevalia*, Vol. 13/1 (Berlin, New York, 1981) pp. 211-225. This agnostic position notwithstanding, Maimonides was considered by some Jewish and Christian Kabbalists as a genuine mystic: see Gershom Scholem, "Maimonide dans l'oeuvre des Kabbalistes" *Cahiers juifs* 3, (1935) pp. 103-112; Chayyim Wirszubski, "*Liber Redemptionis*—the Early Version of R. Abraham Abulafia's Kabbalistic Commentary on the *Guide of the Perplexed* in the Latin Translation of Flavius Mithridates," in *Divrei Ha-Akademia Ha-Le'umit Ha-Yisraelit Le-Mada'im*, vol. III (Israeli Academy of Science, Jerusalem, 1970) pp. 139-149. This "Kabbalization" of Maimonides is generally connected with conceptions belonging to Abulafia's Kabbalistic school. I subscribe to Pines' assertion that ". . . Maimonides is no mystic. His intention is not to recommend progressive detachment from the knowledge of all things that are not God, but to further that kind of knowledge by teaching people to avoid misplaced references to God's essence"; in the "Translator's Introduction" to *The Guide of the Perplexed*, tr. S. Pines, (Chicago, 1963) p. xcvi. For a mystical interpretation of Maimonides' thought see David Blumenthal "Maimonides' Intellectualist Mysticism and the Superiority of the Prophecy of Moses" *Studies in Medieval Culture* vol. X (1981) pp. 51-67.

19. *Milhamot HaShem* (Hanovre, 1840) p. 22. See Vajda, *Recherches*, p. 27 n. 2.

20. Samuel Ibn Tibbon, *Ma'amar Yikkawu Ha-Mayyim* (Presbourg, 1837) p. 91. See Georges Vajda "An Analysis of the Ma'amar Yiqqawu ha-Mayim by Samuel b. Judah Ibn Tibbon" *JJS*, X (1959) p. 147 n. 28; idem *Recherches*, p. 26 n. 3.

21. Compare R. Yehudah ha-Levi's presentation of the philosophic view in *Kuzari* I, 1; IV, 13 cf. Vajda, *Recherches* p. 23 n; idem, "An Analysis", p. 147 n. 28.

22. Vajda, *Recherches* p. 27 n. 2.

23. As pointed out by Vajda, *Recherches*, pp. 27-28 n. 3.

24. Maimuni highly appreciated Ibn Tibbon, and could be influenced by his Averroistic view.

25. See the bibliography referred to by Gerson D. Cohen, "The Soteriology

of R. Abraham Maimuni" *PAAJR*, 35 (1967) p. 25 n. 2.

26. See Idel, "On the History" p. 16. Abulafia uses Ibn Tibbon's translation of *The Guide*.

27. Abulafia's teacher, R. Hillel ben Samuel of Verona, introduced him to the *Guide* and also copied at length, parts of Averroes' treatise on the conjunction with the active intellect (see n. 28 below) in his work *Taḡmulei HaNefesh*. Though this book was written only years after the meeting of Abulafia with R. Hillel, it seems reasonable to suppose that R. Hillel could be one of the sources of Abulafia's knowledge of Averroes; on Hillel's usage of Ibn Tibbon's translation, see Joseph B. Sermoneta, *Hillel ben Samuel ben Eleazer of Verona and His Philosophy* (Ph.D. thesis, University of Jerusalem, 1961) pp. 355-401 (Hebrew).

28. See J. Hercz, *Drei Abhandlungen über die Conjunction des separaten Intellects mit dem Menschen von Averroes (Vater und Sohn), aus den Arabischen übersetzt von Samuel Ibn Tibbon*, (Berlin, 1869); see also the anonymous undated Hebrew translation of Averroes' *Über die Möglichkeit der Conjunction oder Über den Materiellen Intellect*, ed. Ludwig Hannes (Halle, 1892). On the problem of union in Averroes see Alfred Ivry "Averroes on Intellection and Conjunction" *JAOS* 86 (1966) pp. 76-85 and Philip Merlan, *Monopsychism, Mysticism, Meta-consciousness* (The Hague, 1963).

29. *Sitrei Torah*, Ms. Paris, BN 774, fol. 140a.

30. *Ibid.*, fol. 155a. Compare this text to the quotation which R. Isaac of Acre quotes in the name of R. Nathan, in his book *Me'irat 'Einayim*, cf. essay VII n. 50. R. Nathan, which in my opinion, was a student of Abulafia, describes the descent of the divine intellect, through the intellectus agens until the level of human soul which is lower than the passive intellect, and then the human soul's return to, and union with, the divine intellect. On the affinity of R. Nathan's text to an Averroistic view see Hercz (n. 28 above) p. 22 (Hebrew part). R. Nathan seems to have been one of Abulafia's disciples: see chapter V.

31. "Amitat ḤaNevuah"

32. "Dibbur Penimi"

33. This expression occurs again in Abulafia's other work, *Ḥayyei Ha'Olam HaBa'*, Ms. Oxford, 1580, fol. 11a; which was composed in the same year as *Sitrei Torah*, namely, 1280.

34. Compare to the circle which occurs in Ibn al-Sid Al-Batalyawsi's (1052-1127) *Book of the Circles*: see David Kaufmann, *Die Spuren Al-Batalajusis in der jüdischen Religionsphilosophie* (Leipzig, 1880) p. 25 (Hebrew part). Though the elements of these two circles are not identical, they share a common feature: the *intellectus agens* is considered both the origin and the end of man's psychological activity. Furthermore, in the quotation from Abulafia's *Sitrei Torah*, he uses the concept of "prophetic faculty" in this seems to be the unique passage in all of Abulafia's numerous works where it occurs. This concept may stem from

Al-Batalyawsi's view of "the prophetic soul"; see Kaufmann, *ibid.* pp. 15-16 (Hebrew part). Moreover, according to both Al-Batalyawsi and Abulafia, the prophetic faculty unites with the *intellectus agens*: see Kaufmann, pp. 15-16. Finally, Abulafia uses in his *Sitrei Torah* the term "ma'agalei ha-meziut," (the circles of existence) which, though missing in Al-Batalyawsi's work, conveys a concept central to its outlook (see Ms. Paris, BN 774, fol. 118a). Al-Batalyawsi's book might have been already translated by 1280, when Abulafia had written his *Sitrei Torah* by Moses Ibn Tibbon (according to Colette Sirat, *REJ* 138 (1979) p. 505, Ibn Tibbon's last dated traduction was done in 1274). It is also possible that another Hebrew translation of this work, done by R. Salomon Ibn Daud (See Benjamin Richler, *Kiryat Sefer*, vol. 53 (1978) p. 577) may be dated in the middle of the thirteenth century, if R. Makir, for whom the translation was dedicated, is the son of R. Sheshet Nasi, who flourished in the first third of the thirteenth century in Provence.

35. "Dibbur Kadmon" cf. Abulafia's epistle called *Ve-Zot Li-Yihudah*, ed. by Adolf Jellinek, *Auswahl Kabbalistischer Mystik*, (Leipzig, 1853) vol. I p. 16 (Hebrew Part); there Abulafia describes the union of the inner intellectual faculty with the supernal logos. On the *intellectus agens* as "speech" (i.e. reason), see Idel, *Abraham Abulafia* pp. 92-93. The ascension of the intellectual faculty beyond the "primordial speech" (i.e. the *intellectus agens*), and its readiness to receive the "divine speech" probably points to the possibility of contact between the human and the divine. Compare to the quotation adduced in note 50 from *Ḥayye Ha'Olam HaBa'*.

36. *Sitrei Torah*, Ms. Paris, BN 774, fol. 131b.

37. *Sitrei Torah*, Ms. Paris, BN 774, fol. 120a.

38. *'Or HaSekhel*, Ms. Vatican, 233, fol. 115a. Compare also to another passage from the same work printed and discussed by Francesco M. Tocci, "Una Tecnica recitativa e respiratoria di tipo sufico nel libro *La Luce dell'Intelletto* di Abraham Abulafia," in *Annali della Facolta di Lingue e Letterature Straniere di Ca' Foscari*, vol. XIV, 3 [1975] p. 227. On page 236, n. 36, Tocci asserts that "devekut", which occurs in the Abulafian text is "analogo ma no identico a quello di unio mystica."!

39. "Love" (in Hebrew, "Ahavah") is formed of letters whose numerical value is 13: two loves 13+13=26: see note 40 below. Abulafia's theory on the nature of love is mainly Maimonidean, though the sexual imagery is more pronounced: see Idel, *The Mystical Experience*, ch. IV. Georges Vajda, *L'Amour de Dieu dans la theologie juive du Moyen Age* (Paris, 1957) pp. 203-204, 299.

40. The divine name is composed of four letters whose numerical value is 26. In Hebrew, "one"—'Eḥad—is formed from letters whose numerical value is 13; twice "one" is therefore the numerical value of the divine name. See note 39 above.

41. Ms. Paris, BN 774, fol. 118a.

42. *VeZot LiYihudah*, (see note 35 above) p. 20. I accepted Scholem's

translation, almost entirely, see *Major Trends*, p. 131; on the forces and souls distributed in bodies, compare the second text adduced in note 38 above.

43. On the meaning of this phrase see Scholem, *Major Trends*, p. 131; Idel, *The Mystical Experience* pp. 134-137. On binding and loosing see also Mircea Eliade, "The "Gods who Binds" and the Symbolism of Knots" *Images and Symbols* (New York, 1969) pp. 92-124; J. Duncan M. Derrett, "Binding and Loosing (Matt. 16:19; 18:8; John, 29:23)" *JBL* 102 (1983) pp. 112ff.

44. W. T. Stace, *Mysticism and Philosophy* (London and Basingstoke, 1972) p. 116.

45. Jellinek, *Auswahl* (n. 35 above) p. 20.

46. This term stemming from the *Guide*, II, 40 occurs several times in the Abulafian literature: see Ms. Sassoon, 290, p. 234 and the anonymous works *Ner 'Elohim*, Ms. Munchen, 10, fol. 143a; the anonymous work *Sha'arei Zedek*, Ms. Jerusalem, 8° 148, fol. 55b-56a. However, it seems that Maimonides' description of man indicates the result of the process of creation, whereas Abulafia's use of the phrase points to the ontological *status* of humanity. Cf. also the material referred to by note 72 below.

47. Ms. Sassoon 290, pp. 234-235. "Notarot" is obviously a pun: it may mean both "remaining" and "untied".

48. According to Jewish ancient texts, the world was created by and was sealed with the name of God at the time of creation: see Nicholas Sed, *La Mystique cosmologique juive* (Paris, Berlin, New York, 1981) pp. 79-131. Abulafia presents his teaching as a technique of untying the knots which emerge with the creation of the world or of man.

49. This verb means "to strip oneself" and figuratively points to the separation from materiality. See also n. 69 below.

50. Ms. Oxford 1580, fol. 41b. See also n. 35 above and 71 below.

51. Abulafia's commentary to his *Sefer HaYashar*, written in 1279, Ms. Rome, Angelica, 38, fol. 31b-32a; Ms. München, 285, fol. 26b. I have generally accepted Scholem's rendering of this passage.

52. See Joseph Dan, "The Seventy Names of Metatron" *Proceedings of the Eighth World Congress of Jewish Studies*, Division C (Jerusalem, 1982) (English Section) pp. 19-23.

53. Scholem translated "adhering".

54. The apparently earliest known text which uses the phrase "hu' hu'" in the context of Enoch's translation into Metatron, was written by a thirteenth-century anonymous Kabbalist, whose discussion remained in Ms. Oxford, 1947, fol. 10a-10b. It is pertinent to our discussion that Enoch's translation is due to his intellectual activity, the ancient mystic conception of corporeal ascension and

metamorphoses being interpreted here figuratively. Compare also to R. Baḥiya ben Asher on Genesis V, 24, who asserts that Enoch cleaved to the supernal light through his endeavour to understand the nature of Metatron. See also n. 98, 123, below.

55. Ms. Oxford 1649 fol. 206a.

56. The comparison of these phrases to two passages above (notes 37-38) convincingly evinces that here we have an elliptic expression, which points to the divine intellectual power and the human intellectual power.

57. "Galgal ha-Nevu'ah": "the sphere [or circle] of prophecy" may stand for the union of the two powers into one sphere during the prophetic experience; Compare to the view of the anonymous Kabbalist, a disciple of Abulafia, who wrote in his work *Sha'arei Zedek*, Ms. Jerusalem, 8° 148, fol. 55a:

because Yod, whose form is a semisphere will move whenever its sphere will be fulfilled . . . and this is the matter of the terrestrial man who will ascend and become supernal [man], i.e. the man who is [sitting] upon the chair.

Here, the perfect sphere or circle stands for the perfect man, who is, in Abulafia's view, the prophet. Compare also to *Sha'arei Zedek*, fol. 56 ab. In another anonymous treatise of Abulafian mold, *Ner 'Elohim*, Ms. München, 10, fol. 139a, we learn about the prophetic vision which is connected with "the sphere of law." See also Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, ch. IV.

58. *Sefer ha-Malmed*, Ms. Oxford 1649, fol. 205b. For an interesting parallel to this usage of the formula "I am what I am" see Eckhart's assertion that "were I wholly that I am, I should be God", cf. C. F. Kelley, *Meister Eckhart on Divine Knowledge* (New Haven and London, 1977) p. 210 and p. 273, n. 85. For the influence of Maimonides on Eckhart and the parallelism between the latter's and Abulafia's relation to Maimonides see Scholem, *Major Trends* p. 126, and note 112 below.

59. The author obviously hints to the verse "From my flesh I behold God" (Job, 19:26). For the mystical interpretations of this verse, see Altmann, "The Delphic Maxim" pp. 208-213 and Chapter VII below, n. 132, where references to interpretations from the works of another ecstatic Kabbalist, R. Isaac of Acre, are quoted.

60. On this Midrash see H. G. Enelow "Midrash Hashkem quotations in Alnaqua's Menorat ha-Maor" *HUCA* 4 (1927) pp. 311-343, especially p. 319. Compare also to the quotation discussed in my paper "The Magical and Theurgic Interpretation of Music in Jewish Sources from the Renaissance to Hassidism" *Yuval*, vol. 4 (1982) p. 47 (Hebrew Section), and Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, ch. VIII, par. I.

61. Louis Massignon, *Receuil des textes inedits concernant l'histoire de mystique en pays d'Islam* (Paris, 1929) p. 127. See also R. C. Zaehner, *Hindu and*

Muslim Mysticism (London, 1960) pp. 113-114.

62. Franz Rosenthal "Al-Sayh al-Yunani and the Arabic Plotinus Source" *Orientalia*, vol. 21 (1952) pp. 478-480, Shlomo Pines, "Ecrits 'Plotiniens' Arabes et Tradition 'Porphyrienne'" in *Le Neoplatonisme* (Paris, 1971) pp. 303-313.

63. The text translated above is the summary of Abulafia's discussion in his *'Or HaSekhel*, Ms. Vatican, 233, fol. 117b-118b, as it is found in two *collectanaea* of Kabbalistic materials: Ms. Oxford, 1949, Ms. Paris BN, 776, fol. 192b. The slight differences between Abulafia's version and that in the *collectanaea* will be pointed out in the following footnotes.

64. "and . . . of the intellect" missing in *'Or HaSekhel*.

65. In Abulafia's work: "from all matter" ("Mikol ḥomer").

66. "an emanation emanated" in Abulafia: "sekhel nishpa".

67. Here a lengthy discussion on the nature of the intellect and *intelligibilia* occurs in Abulafia's work.

68. "However . . . intellect" missing in *'Or HaSekhel*.

69. I.e., the most spiritual intellect; see also note 49 above.

70. Some statements on the various religious terms referring to the active intellect, occurs in *'Or HaSekhel*.

71. *'Or HaSekhel*, Ms. Vatican 233, fol. 119b. Compare to the text referred to in note 50 above.

72. *Ibid.*, fol. 119a. cf. the material referred to in note 45 above.

73. I.e., *anima mundi*, which is referred to as "the soul of heaven": "nefesh ha-shamayim" *'Or HaSekhel*, fol. 118a.

74. I.e., the human intellect; compare to the prior quotation and to note 36 above.

75. I.e., the ten intellects separated from matter or only the active intellect: see *Guide I*, 68 (Pines' translation, p. 164).

76. The supernal world is referred to as supernal man also in the *collectanaea* mentioned above (note 63): "The Supernal Man points to the Supernal World, the Spiritual [One] that is the world of the Separate Intellects." Ms. Paris, BN 766, fol. 193a.

77. *'Or HaSekhel*, Ms. Vatican, 233, fol. 118a. Compare to the *Guide II.6* (Pines' translation, p. 264) on the forces which pervade reality; this discussion of Maimonides is quoted in one of Abulafia's commentaries on the secrets of the *Guide*, *Sefer Ḥayyei HaNefesh*, Ms. München, 408, fol. 90b.

78. Ms. Paris, BN 766, fol. 192b. Compare to Maimonides' statement that it is impossible to divide the spiritual realm in the *Guide II.4*. See also Idel, "Between

the Concept of Sefirot as Essence or Instruments in Renaissance Kabbalah” *Italia*, vol. III, no. 1-2 pp. 99-100, n. 70 (Hebrew).

79. *Metaphysics* 1072b, 18-27. See Richard McKeon, *The Basic Works of Aristotle* (Random House, New York, 1941) p. 880.

80. See his commentary on *Exodus*, XXXIV, 6. Ibn Ezra asserts in his treatise *Yesod Mora*, ch. X, that the soul can cleave to God. Ibn Ezra influenced Abulafia’s thought and he is quoted by him several times.

81. *Guide*, I, 68 (Pines’ translation, p. 163); *Hilkhot Yesodei Torah*, II 6, 10.

82. *Ibid.* I, 55.

83. See E. R. Dodds, *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety*, (Cambridge, 1969) p. 70.

84. See Idel, “On the History,” p. 8.

85. Idel, “Abulafia and the Pope,” pp. 8-9.

86. *Ibid.* pp. 2-6.

87. Idel, *Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 13-15.

88. *Ibid.* p. 14.

89. Ms. Rome-Angelica, 38, fol. 14b-15a, Ms. München, 285, fol. 39b.

90. I.e., the author, namely Abulafia.

91. See above the texts from *Sefer ha-Yashar* and the quotation from *Ḥayyei Ha’Olam HaBa’*, cited immediately below.

92. “Sod” its meaning is *gematria*: see n. 94 below.

93. literally “impossible”.

94. The Hebrew phrases: “corporeal name”—“HaShem HaGashmi,” the Messiah of God, “Mashiaḥ HaShem” and Moses will rejoice “Ysmaḥ Moshe” have the numerical value of 703.

95. Ms. Paris, BN 777, fol. 109a.

96. On this issue see Idel, *The Mystical Experience* ch. II.

97. “*Behitbodeduto*”: for this significance of the term see Chapter 7.

98. A clear pun upon the double meaning of the root m-sh-ḥ: “to anoint” and “Messiah”. It is worth remarking that Enoch’s transformation into a high angel, one of the “Glorious Ones”, is described as anointment with oil: see II Enoch, *Le livre des Secrets d’Enoch*, ed. A. Vaillant (Paris, 1952) 26; 18-27; 2. Abulafia regarded the mystic union in terms very close to Enoch’s translation: see notes 52, 54 above.

99. In Hebrew “mal’akh” signifies also messenger.

100. Cf. *BT, Sanhedrin*, fol. 38b.

101. The Hebrew letters of Shaddai and Metatron have the same numerical values, i.e. 314. Cf. also the aforementioned passage out of *Sefer Ha'Edut*.

102. Ms. Rome-Angelica, 38, fol. 9b; Ms. München, 285, fol. 12b.

103. I.e., the human species, which is described beforehand as including figuratively beasts and animals, in comparison to the nature of the mystic.

104. In the Rome manuscript, the version is "‘Eloah" i.e. God, and I prefer the reading of the München Ms: "‘Elohi" "divine".

105. *Ḥayyei Ha'Olam HaBa'*, Ms. Oxford, 1582, fol. 79b. See also Idel, *Abraham Abulafia* pp. 404-405. Compare also to the sequel of the passage quoted above from the commentary of *Sefer HaMeliz*.

106. For the list of those secrets, see Idel, *Abraham Abulafia*, p. 9.

107. Cf. Maimonides' *Introduction* to the *Guide* (Pines' translation, pp. 6-7).

108. See Idel, "Abulafia and the Pope", p. 3.

109. Cf. Idel, *Abraham Abulafia* pp. 185-192, 239-240.

110. The titles of Abulafia's three commentaries on the secrets included in the *Guide* are highly significant: a) *Sefer HaGeulah*—the Book of Redemption; b) *Sefer Ḥayyei HaNefesh*—the Book on the [Spiritual] life of the Soul; c) *Sefer Sitrei Torah*—the Book on the Secrets of the Law. Since these commentaries are but three versions of a single list of secrets, it seems that their titles are, at least partially, synonyms: the real redemption is the true life of the soul which can be attained through knowledge of the secrets of the law. See especially Abulafia's statement in his introduction to *Sitrei Torah*: "All the secrets [of the *Guide*] are thirty-six, and whoever will meditate upon them in order to understand them by the means of speculation and to comprehend their real meaning, he will be redeemed (*Levit. XXV, 31*)". Ms. Paris, BN 774, fol. 117a. Here, Abulafia hints to the redemptive role of the 36 secrets, skillfully using the pun upon "Ge'ulah tiḥieh lo": lo = 36; He regards the two purposes of the *Guide* as the explanation of the homonimies in the Bible and of the parables found in the prophecies, whereas the two aims of his commentary are the explanation of the cause of the life of the intellectual soul and of the worship of God out of love; cf. Ms. Paris, BN 774, fol. 115b.

Therefore, in the introduction to *Sitrei Torah* Abulafia overtly hints to both the redemption and the spiritual life of the soul, as emerging out of Maimonides' *Guide*. In his introduction to *Ḥayyei HaNefesh*, we read:

I will open my mouth (to speak) without parables or allegories in order to save the intellectual soul from the elements . . . and I shall tell her secrets.

Ms. München, 408, fol. 1b. Again, the three main motifs occur together: the salvation of intellectual soul by disclosure of secrets.

111. See R. Shelomo ben Abraham Ibn Adret, *Responsa* (Vienna, 1812) fol. 71c-72a no. 548 where he characterizes Abulafia's books as a mixture of philosophical discussions and "gematriaot" both of them used in Abulafia's exegesis of the Jewish texts. Compare also the description of one of Abulafia's students to a dialogue with his master: "why then do you, Sir, compose books in which the methods of the natural scientists are coupled with instruction in the Holy Names?" He answered: "For you and the likes of you among the followers of philosophy, to allure your human intellect through natural means, so that perhaps this attraction may cause you to arrive at the knowledge of the Holy Name." Adduced by Scholem, *Major Trends*, p. 149.

112. Meister Eckhart, *Die deutschen Werke*, vol. I, ed. J. Quint (Stuttgart, 1938) p. 90. Cf. Kelley, *Meister Eckhart* (n. 58 above) p. 26. Eckhart, like Maimonides and Abulafia, designates God as Intellect; he asserts, like Abulafia, that the human intellect can be assimilated to the unconditional Intellect (see Kelley, p. 204, 235). Moreover, according to Kelley (p. 205) "when contemplation is pure . . ." the term I or Selfhood refers to the Light of Intellect-as-such" and compare this view to our discussion in part IV above, especially n. 87.

113. Abulafia seems to be the first Kabbalist who stresses the importance of solitude as a condition for Kabbalistic spiritual activity; see Idel, *The Mystical Experience*, pp. 37-39.

114. According to the *Zohar*, the highest spiritual *status*: the *neshamah*, is acquired by the means of Kabbalistic performance of commandments. Salomon Munk's remark that the Zoharic psychology is influenced by the philosophical view of conjunction, is to be taken *cum grano salis*; see his *Melanges de philosophie juive et arabe* (New York, 1980) pp. 279-280.

115. See Moshe Idel "The Image of Man above the Sefirot". *Daat*, vol. 4 (1980) pp. 41-55 (Heb.).

116. Idel, *The Mystical Experience*, pp. 184-194, and see above, note 38.

117. See Chapter 7 n. 66.

118. See R. Meir ben Salomon Ibn Avi Sahulah's definition of Kabbalah as the science of the ten *sefirot* and mystical significance of the commandments. Cf. Scholem, *Les origines de la Kabbale* p. 48.

119. Altmann, "Delphic Maxim" p. 228; see also Altmann "Ibn Bajja on Man's Ultimate Felicity" *Studies in Religious Philosophy and Mysticism* (Ithaca, New York, 1969) pp. 73-107.

120. See Idel, *Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 42-43 n. 43; on the influence of this book see p. 12.

121. See *Liqqutei Shikhehah ufeah* (Ferrara, 1556) fol. 23r-35v.

122. Haim Wirszubski *A Christian Kabbalist Reads the Law*, (Jerusalem,

1977) pp. 23, 30-31, 38 (Hebrew); Compare also his article referred to in note 18 above.

123. See *Oratio on the Dignity of Man*, trans. by A. Robert Caponigri, (Chicago, 1967) pp. 8-9, 14, especially pp. 9-10 where the transformation of Enoch into “the angel of divinity” i.e. “malakh HaShekhinah”, is referred to. Compare note 54, 98 above. On the influence of Maimonides’ concept of death by kiss on Pico’s view of *mors osculi* see Haim Wirszubski, *Three Studies in Christian Kabbala* (Jerusalem, 1975) pp. 11-22 (Hebrew); cf. Edgar Wind, *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance* (Penguin Books, 1967) pp. 154-157.

124. See Chapter 4 below.