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Letter Permutation Techniques, Kavannah and Prayer in Jewish Mysticism

Abstract:

The article presents an analysis of a mystical practice of letter permutation conceived as part of the practice of "kavannah" in prayer. This practice was articulated by a 13th century anonymous ecstatic kabbalist writing in Catalonia. The anonymous author draws on earlier sources in the kabbalah and Ashkenazi spirituality. The article explores the wider connection between ecstasy and ritual, particularly prayer in the earlier stages of Judaism and its development in medieval theology and kabbalah. The anonymous author describes a unique permutation technique capable of inducing ecstatic experiences as part of the liturgical ritual.

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Moshe Idel has written at length on many topics on the history of Jewish Mysticism and *Kabbalah*[1]. In this article, I will focus on two subjects that have received his special attention in numerous studies. The first one is the study of mystical technique and mystical experience in general and their relation to traditional Jewish prayer and liturgical ritual in particular.[2] The second is the analysis of mystical and ecstatic models in the history of Jewish Mysticism and particularly Ecstatic Kabbalah.[3] In what follows, these two areas will be discussed and explored, as will the nexus between liturgical practice and ecstatic experience.

In fact, that nexus is quite broad. Despite some important exceptions, these two subjects have been historically interconnected. That is to say the methods used by most Jewish mystics in their attempts to achieve ecstatic experience were tied into traditional Jewish practices: the performance of the *mitzvoth* (commandments) in general and liturgical prayer and the study of Torah in particular.[4]

One of the outstanding exceptions to this rule is the 13th Century ecstatic kabbalist, Abraham Abulafia. Abulafia's brand of Ecstatic Kabbalah incorporated techniques and ecstatic experiences that Moshe Idel defines as essentially detached from the performance of the commandments and from the act of liturgical prayer.[5] In Idel's eyes, Abulafia's techniques and experiences are 'a-nomian' in character, meaning that his mystical techniques, which involved permutations of letters and holy names, were not designed to accompany any particular commandment or ritual. A different view has been expressed by Elliot Wolfson, who has argued that *halakhic* practices are in fact an essential component of Abulafia's mystical techniques. Furthermore, Wolfson claims that in the Jewish world of the 13th century it did not exist any notion of an 'a-nomian' Jewish spirituality. In Wolfson's view, Abulafia's techniques and experiences should be classified as 'hypernomian' rather than 'a-nomian'.[6] Idel has defended his own position on several occasions, in particular focusing on prayer and on the performance of commandments such as the donning of *tefillin* (phylacteries) in Abulafia's Kabbalah.[7]

Leaving aside the dispute about Abulafia's relationship to the commandments, in the following I will concentrate on the nexus between ecstatic religious experience and ritual practice by analyzing the role played by the notion of *kavannah*[8] in the performance of liturgical prayer and blessings. In particular, I will focus on a technique of letter permutation designed to produce ecstatic experiences as described in the writings of a 13th Century anonymous kabbalist who wrote an enigmatic commentary on the prayers and the benedictions.[9] I have published a comprehensive analysis and a critical edition of this commentary[10] in which I conclude that the anonymous author wrote the commentary in the years 1260-1270 in Catalonia.[11] Written before or parallel to the time that Abraham Abulafia began his writing career, the Anonymous Commentary to the Prayers shows many similarities to the Ecstatic Kabbalah espoused by Abulafia, and I consider it part of the earlier stages of Ecstatic Kabbalah in Spain.[12]

The anonymous author of the Commentary was apparently a member of a group of ecstatic kabbalists who studied Linguistic Kabbalah and various commentaries to *Sefer Yetzirah* (Book of Creation) that were available at that time in Barcelona.[13] Three prominent members of this circle of ecstatic kabbalists are known of at this stage: Baruch Togarmi, who wrote an enigmatic commentary on *Sefer Yetizrah*; Abraham Abulafia, who testified that he visited Barcelona in the year 1270 and intensively studied Linguistic Kabbalah and commentaries on Sefer Yetzirah while there; and Yosef Gikatilla, a young student of Abulafia.[14] The anonymous writer of the Commentary to the Prayers should be situated within this context. At this time, in Barcelona he may have been exposed to Linguistic and Ecstatic Kabbalah, to Ashkenazi Esotericism, and also to Jewish Theology.[15] Moshe Idel has suggested that the neglected commentary had some influence on Christian mysticism, in particular on Ramon Lull[16] and later on Pico Morandola.[17] A recently discovered and published partial Latin translation of the Commentary that was prepared for Giovanni Pico, Count of Morandola seems to support Idel's contention.[18] In order to provide the relevant background for my analysis of the unique nexus between the mystical technique of 'letter permutations' and *kavannah* in prayer and blessing in the Anonymous Commentary, I will first present a survey of the nexus between prayer and ecstatic and mystical experience in Jewish Mysticism and Jewish Theology prior to the development of Ecstatic Kabbalah in 13th century Spain.

I: Kavannah in Early Rabbinic Sources

The nexus between Jewish liturgical prayer and mystical practice has its roots in ancient Jewish Mysticism. The link between prayer and pre-kabbalistic 'Merkavah Mysticism' is well established.[19] In contrast, early rabbinic sources do not elaborate on mystical dimensions to the performance of the act of the prayer.[20] Whilst rabbinic sources do discuss a requirement that an individual must have *kavannah* ('intention') in order to partake in liturgical prayer, it remains unclear what kind of intention is meant by this term.[21] The *Tosefta*, for instance, states that "One must pray with the intention of the heart (*kavannath ha-lev*)", but provides no further explanation as to what that means.[22] Other sources seem to relate to *kavannah* in prayer as a focusing of the imagination or of some other mental capacity on the *Axis Mundi* situated between the physical Temple in Jerusalem and the 'celestial Temple.'[23]

Shlomo Naeh has demonstrated how some of the *Tannaim* attempted to reconstruct institutionalized communal prayer by instituting a hierarchy that distinguishes

between 'ecstatic prayer' and 'regular prayer'.[24] The ecstatic kind of prayer was differentiable in its external form from the 'regular' prayer. Some of the *Tannaim* distinguished between a 'regular' prayer, which requires some kind of intention or *kavannah*, on the one hand, and a type of ecstatic prayer that possesses a man and takes control of his speech, on the other. The line was drawn, in other words, between the prayer of the heart and the prayer of the ecstatic tongue.[25] Naeh concludes that some of the *Tannaim* conceived of institutionalized prayer as being based on the phenomenon of ecstatic prayer as practiced by the *Hasidim Ha-Rishonim* ('Early Pious Ones'). This group, described in some of the sources as having engaged in intense ecstatic modes of prayer, seems to have focused not on conscious intentions of the heart, but rather on ecstatic techniques. Later, Talmudic sources, basing themselves on alternative descriptions of the *Hasidim Ha-Rishonim*, tended to prefer the 'regular' prayer with its requirement of conscious intention of the heart.[26] In other early rabbinic sources that discuss the need for a mental component to accompany the physical performance of commandments, even in the cases where such a component is deemed necessary, it rarely if ever has any mystical content.[27]

Despite the absence of contemplative or mystical content to the notion of *kavannah* in the performance of the commandments or in the act of prayer, one can find in the rabbinic literature a theurgist understanding of *halakhic* practice.[28] In the theurgist strands of the literature, the power relationship between human beings and God is tied to the theomorphic human body.[29] In other words, the effect of a specific ritual or *mitzvah* is based not on mental intention or *kavannah*, nor on any contemplative, noetic or spiritual union with the divine, but rather on the corporal, somatic performance of the commandment itself.[30]

In a recent article, I explored a possible connection in rabbinic literature between liturgical prayer and a mystical practice that involved a contemplative envisioning of the *Merkavah* 'in the heart.'[31] I found a connection between the *Kedusha* (sanctum) sections that were incorporated into the Jewish institutionalized communal prayer, and a practice of envisioning *Merkavah* content during the recitation of the daily prayer. The content that is envisioned is alluded to in the *Kedusha* sections themselves and appears in sources known as *Ma'aseh Merkavah* texts or prayers.[32] These rabbinic discussions, which refer to *'Uvanta De-Liba'* ('comprehension/perception of the heart'), are exceptional and were later used by medieval rabbinic authorities as sources on which to ground their revolutionary internalizing of the practices of prophecy, visionary mysticism and prayer.[33]

II: The Emergence of Mystical Understandings of Prayer in the Medieval Period

In the 9th and 10th century, rabbinic authorities began reflecting more systematically on the vast rabbinic and mystical literature as part of an attempt to offer a comprehensive outlook on the theological and spiritual aspects of the Jewish tradition.[34] Using philosophical insights, categories and structures, the Jewish esoteric tradition was reconstructed in a creative outburst that lasted for centuries. The absorption of psychological and epistemological concepts led to an internalization of the institutions of prophecy and visionary mysticism and of parts of *halakhic* practice.[35]

A few rabbinical statements alluding to *'Uvanta De-Liba'* mentioned above[36] and

theological insights were used and enhanced by Rav Hai Gaon and some followers in the eleventh and twelfth centuries in Italy and Ashkenaz to articulate and develop a rationalist introverted interpretation of visionary mysticism relating to visionary prophecy and mystical technique.[37] The public domain which was the locus of religious performance now came to be accompanied by a mental, imaginative, or spiritual realm internal and to some extent private to man. The formation of a mental medium allowed for the development of advanced techniques of mental concentration that later evolved into the *kavannah* techniques of early Kabbalah.

Several ideas influenced the particular understanding of the notion of *kavannah* that emerged by the 13th Century in kabbalistic circles. One idea that affected this new understanding was a distinction that was created by theologians including Bahya ibn Paquda and Abraham ibn Ezra between what came to be known as 'commandments of the heart' and the rest of the *mitzvoth*. This *halakhic* category was understood as involving spiritual and mystical transformations, which would take place 'in the *heart*.' A second source of influence came from the traditional rabbinic description of prayer as *avodath ha-lev* ('worship of the heart').[38] This appellation understandably led to prayer being viewed as the proper context during regular, day-to-day life for the implementation of the transformative notions infused into the 'commandments of the heart.' The designation of 'commandments of the heart' as a separate category of *mitzvoth* and the understanding that these commandments have spiritual and contemplative content was thus combined with a classic rabbinic understanding of prayer as 'worship of the heart' and as conditioned on intention of the heart.[39] The creation of an inner space—imagination or 'the heart'—based on the notion of *'Uvanta De-Liba'* (perception of the heart) was combined with the category of the 'commandments of the heart' and with the notion of 'worship of the heart.' Gradually, this led to the defining of this inner space as the locus of mystical and liturgical worship.[40]

For instance, an example of this pre-kabbalistic tendency can be found in the ideas of Maimonides who demanded from the contemplative and enlightened elite the splitting of one's consciousness, one part engaging in mundane affairs while the other concentrating on the divine.[41] Whilst engaged in ceremonies and ritual or whilst acting in the public sphere, the elite are required, according to Maimonides, to concentrate their thought on God gradually establishing a constant mental connection with the divine. An earlier example can be found in the thought of Bahya ibn Paquda. Ibn Paquda's celebrated book, *Hovoth Ha-Levavoth* ('Duties of the Heart') represents an attempt to view *Halakhah* as an instrument for the fulfillment of particular spiritual and mystical goals, some which derive from Sufi sources. The 'commandments of the heart', such as the commandment to love God and to cleave to him, were interpreted by Ibn Paquda as commandments for the highest transformation of one's being, mind, and heart.[42] This transformation was conceived by Ibn Paquda not only as an integral part of *halakhic* practice but as its ultimate goal, meaning that all other norms were but means leading the enlightened individual towards the highest and most final goal, namely a pure, mystical love of God that was conceived of as a mystical union with the 'divine light.'[43]

At this stage, one can find a tendency to associate the cleaving to God that is implied in the spiritual interpretation of the 'commandments of the heart' with the act of prayer and liturgical worship. Institutionalized prayer, in other words, came to be viewed as the time and place to realize one's 'inner', spiritual duties.[44] Idel writes of the

theologians that were active prior to the Kabbalah that they had a vision of prayer "as a moment of recollection, of contemplation, of search for an apprehension of the divine, or even a mystical union. The medieval Jewish philosophers were above all concerned with the intellectual or inner prayer..."[45] The creation of the category known as 'commandments of the heart' allowed Ibn Paquda to insert Sufi mystical content into Jewish religious practice using a powerful *halakhic* category that would be influential in later developments in Jewish theology. Ibn Paquda's innovation allowed, for example, theologians such as Abraham ibn Ezra[46] and Maimonides to fuse into the 'worship of the heart' their own perceptions of the final and most advanced forms of worship.[47] Despite the fact that Ibn Paquda's book was translated into Hebrew for the first family of kabbalists in Provence, there exists no unequivocal evidence that his writings influenced the Kabbalah of the 13th Century.[48] Nevertheless, the idea that the 'commandments of the heart' are related to spiritual and mystical transformation did find its articulation in 12th Century Jewish Theology and later also in early Kabbalah.[49]

Prayer was conceived by some 12th century Jewish thinkers as the proper moment to achieve concentration of thought, various kinds of contemplative concentration, and even a mystical union with the spiritual and noetic realms.[50] Judah Halevi for instance, in his work, the *'Kuzari'* implies that the daily prayers and benedictions provide unique opportunities to activate in one's memory and imagination ancient memories of the Jewish history of cleaving to God, and to reinforce memories of collective and perhaps even private moments of intimate conjunction with the divine.[51] Maimonides' famous phenomenology of prayer as the 'worship of the heart' leads to his understanding of prayer as the proper moment and context in daily life to concentrate ones heart and thoughts on God. In his model, this would ultimately lead to the ultimate, 'loving' worship of God that situates itself in an ongoing concentration of thought on the divine.[52]

In all of the above cases we find that the liturgy is the framework in which the higher purposes of spiritual transformation and the encounter with the divine can be achieved. For some, liturgical worship is even an instrument for achieving these goals. Thus, the nexus established between the 'commandments of the heart' and the 'worship of the heart' allowed for a new understanding of spiritual and mystical prayer to emerge. It should be noted that, at this stage, the spiritual practices which accompanied prayer did not yet involve any letter permutation techniques.

III: Divine Names: Ashkenazi Influences on Early Kabbalah

In Ashkenazi mystical traditions, which in many respects continued the ancient forms of 'visionary' mysticism, we find an elaborate use of linguistic and numerological techniques, as well as a discussion of a linguistic ontology derived from *Sefer Yetzirah*.[53] It is clear that certain mystical prayer techniques involving the use of divine names 'migrated' from Ashkenaz to Spain and in particular to Catalonia.[54] Moshe Idel has demonstrated, for example, how a particular Ashkenazi esoteric tradition involving the vocalization of the divine names penetrated into the Nachmanidean School of Kabbalah in Barcelona.[55] There is also evidence of Ashkenazi influence on early Ecstatic Kabbalah including that of the Anonymous Commentary on the Prayers.[56]

The Ashkenazi tradition of letter combination techniques was centered on elaborate interpretations of *Sefer Yetzirah* and involved the portrayal of the process of God's

creation. Complex techniques were developed that involved creating, manipulating, and meditating upon combinations of letters and divine names. For instance, the letters of the *Tetragrammaton* would be combined with each of the letters of the alphabet, or individual letters would be joined to all of the other letters of the Hebrew alphabet.[57]

In Ashkenazi interpretations of the liturgy, references can be found to rituals resembling magical practices. The fact that some parts of the Jewish liturgy are centered on material and mundane needs provided an adequate background for the employment of linguistic techniques correlated to magic, as a tool to effectively produce the mundane aims specified in the daily prayer. The magical techniques based on linguistic components were correlated to one of the most fundamental dimensions of prayer as an instrument for the fulfillment of human needs. The demand, often stressed amongst practitioners of magic, for strict accuracy in the recitation of the linguistic components of a ritual, finds articulation in Ashkenazi commentaries on the liturgy. There, we find a practice of counting the exact number of letters in the different components or meta-components of the liturgical text.[58]

Daniel Abrams has demonstrated how an Ashkenazi technique of counting letters served also as a technique for inducing altered states of consciousness. This mystical technique that involves counting the numerical value of the letters of a prayer was practiced by Ashkenazi masters and similar techniques were later used by ecstatic kabbalists like Abraham Abulafia.[59] The *halakhic* authority Jacob ben Asher, whose family migrated from Ashkenaz to Spain, reported that the German Hasidim 'were in the habit of counting or calculating every word in the prayers, benedictions, and hymns, and they sought a reason in the Torah for the number of words in the prayers.'[60]

This element in Ashkenazi commentaries of the liturgy is highly relevant in attempting to understand the technique of letter permutation in the Anonymous Commentary since it provides a meta-linguistic structure that approaches the liturgical text not only as a body of propositions or as a coherent text but rather as a sequence of letters that is subject to powerful linguistic techniques. The belief that, at least on one level, the liturgical text is a linguistic substratum that can be manipulated by powerful linguistic techniques, that this substratum can have particular magical effects regardless of the semantic layer, and that the same techniques may produce ecstatic effects, constitutes important background to the Anonymous Commentary.

The well known esoteric tradition, transmitted by Nachmanides in his commentary on the Torah, that the Torah can be viewed as one long name of God made up of a specific sequence of letters, was influential in the Ecstatic Kabbalah.[61] Nachmanides, who wrote a short commentary on the first chapter of *Sefer Yetzirah*, was very careful, however, not to employ any active letter permutation technique as a hermeneutic or mystical tool. He thus limited the influence of *Sefer Yetzirah* and Ashkenazi innovations based on that work to a minimum.[62] The application of a sophisticated system of letter combination on a substratum of letters originates in Ashkenaz and was used by the Anonymous Commentator, who combined this theory with kabbalistic-mystical and theurgical notions of *kavannah* in prayer. Similar linguistic structures were adopted and used by Abraham Abulafia as a technique to attain prophecy and induce ecstatic experiences[63] and as part of a very sophisticated exegetical technique.[64] Abulafia and the Anonymous Commentator were particularly interested, as Idel has noted, in the dynamic aspects of the Ashkenazi techniques that involved recitation of the divine names. The movement of linguistic techniques based on *Sefer Yetzirah* from Ashkenaz to Catalonia found its expression in the letter permutation techniques used in the early Ecstatic

Kabbalah.[65] The Anonymous Commentary used meta-linguistic structures of letter permutation similar to those of the earlier Ashkenazi mystical tradition both as its main ontological structure[66] and as a technique of *'kavannah'* in prayer that was intended to induce ecstasy and prophecy during the performance of the ritual.[67] It should be noted that Ashkenazi traditions were not the only influencing factor in the emergence of letter permutation techniques in Catalan Kabbalah.[68]

IV: Kavannah in Early Kabbalah

Without undermining the importance of Ashkenazi Esotericism and other possible sources analyzed above in influencing the innovative interpretations of *kavannah* and *devekuth* in the early *Kabbalah*, I would suggest that the movements in theology and techniques of meditation that were based on the *Tetragrammaton* were more fundamental in this development. The early kabbalists made explicit use of the writings of Maimonides in order to reconstruct their notion of contemplative *kavannah* and mystical conjunction.[69] Others, although influenced by Maimonides' theology, were also critical to some degree of his purely rationalistic interpretation of prayer and of the notion of *devekuth*.[70] It is my opinion that the kabbalistic notion of *kavannah* in prayer did not represent a rebellion against theological interpretations such as those of Maimonides, but rather a sophisticated adaptation that fused together theurgy, contemplative mysticism, magic, and Ashkenazi traditions.[71] These notions, in turn, were fused with Ashkenazi and Neo-Platonic structures, thus allowing for the mystical *kavannah* of early Kabbalah to emerge. With the emergence of medieval Kabbalah, a strong affinity developed between liturgical worship, mystical practice, and ecstatic experience.[72] The contemplative, Neo-Platonist kind of mysticism practiced by Yitchak Sagi Naor and his disciples, was based on three fundamental concepts: *devekuth* - mystical union with the godhead; *kavannah* - mystical intention and concentration of thought during performance of ritual; and *theurgy* - an exchange of power between the illuminated and the godhead. The unique combination of contemplative elevation of thought and soul, mystical union with the divine, and theurgist practice intended to affect the godhead, formed the central core of the early kabbalistic understanding of *kavannah* .[73]

For the early kabbalists, praying and observing the *mitzvoth* in a proper state of *kavannah* was the locus of religious action and mystical experience. In their eyes, this concept stood at the heart of the ancient mystical tradition. Philosophically oriented practices involving concentration on the *Tetragrammaton* merged with Neo-Platonic techniques of elevation and union of thought, and with theurgist practices that find their origins in rabbinic sources.[74] *Kavannah* came to include a contemplative ascension of thought and sometimes of the soul which would cleave to and thus unify the godhead. The first kabbalists borrowed from philosophical practices involving concentration upon the divine name (taken from Abraham ibn Ezra and Maimonides) and the appellation, 'worship of the heart', in order to situate their new understanding of *kavannah* in prayer and blessings.[75] *Kavannah*, as the early kabbalists understood it, included a series of procedures that were to take place first in the human mind or heart and later in the parallel aspects of the Divine: concentration, elevation, conjunction[76], manipulation of the letters of the *Tetragrammaton*, and various theurgist acts intended to cause unification and movement of power between the kabbalist and the dynamic yet unified godhead. The philosophical practices involving contemplation and concentration on the

divine name were thus developed into a fully-fledged set of practices based on a Neo-Platonic understanding of elevation of thought and mystical union as articulated in earlier Jewish and Arab Neo-Platonic spirituality.[77] As a result, they developed a Neo-Platonic type of mystical practice that is executed during the performance of the commandments and especially as part of the *kavannah* in prayer and blessings.[78]

These mystical interpretations of *halakhic* practice were almost always presented as being as ancient as the law itself. [79] This was particularly true of the tradition concerning mystical utilization of the divine names, which has roots in the ancient liturgical worship that took place in the Temple in Jerusalem.[80] The centrality of the divine names in the ancient temple worship, according to the early kabbalists, was replaced with a similar centrality in the revised liturgy. In addition to the association with ancient temple worship, kabbalistic *kavannah* also came to be viewed as continuous with the practices of a group of pietists referred to in the *Mishna* as the *Hasidim Ha-Rishonim* ('Early Pious Ones'), who reportedly would spend an extended period of time directing their thoughts toward God before beginning the recitation of their prayers.[81]

The early kabbalists understood *kavannah* as follows. The practice would begin in the human domain, with the visualization of the letters of a name in the heart or imagination.[82] The elevated thought would then penetrate the divine realms, where it would unite with the divine name or versions of the divine names embodied in the *Sefiroth* and in the 'divine letters'. The unification of the divine name and the metaphysical letters and the unification of the divine realm would thus be accomplished through the union of the divine and the human. Once the mystical union is established, divine power would 'flow' from the higher realms to the lower, from the higher *Sefiroth* to the lower ones, and ultimately into the human mind, into mundane reality and into human history. The benediction or prayer was understood as a theurgist act drawing blessing to the divine name and to the human who is cleaving to God.[83] Since some of the divine names on which kabbalists would meditate are constituted by a complex system of letter permutation that makes use of verses from the Torah, as in the case of the divine 'Name of 72 Letters,' and since the act of *kavannah* was based on concentration upon letters of the divine names, a connection was established between *kavannah* and complex linguistic systems. The mystical notion of *kavannah*, then, was viewed as an attempt to elevate the human thought up the ladder of divine emanation and eventually to join human thought with the higher aspects of the godhead, especially to the triad of the Noetic *Sefiroth*[84] and to the 'metaphysical' letters of the *Tetragrammaton*.

Together the cleaving of human thought to 'divine thought'[85] and the process of drawing light and power into the godhead and into the human mind[86] constitute the innovation in the way that the early kabbalists conceived of traditional liturgical practices. This way, through their understanding of the notion of *kavannah*, the early kabbalists transformed *halakhic* ritual into a powerful mystical contemplative instrument, designed both to affect the godhead and to draw the human being and the divine closer.[87] Thus, this circle of kabbalists, active during the first half of the 13th Century in Gerona, Catalonia, offered a fully-fledged contemplative mysticism coupled with a revolutionary understanding of Jewish ritual practice. The Anonymous Commentary was influenced by their unique, mystical understanding of *kavannah* and quotes from them extensively.[88] Combining this understanding with a technique most likely derived from Ashkenazi Esotericism, as well as with a particular theory about the utilization of divine names in prayer and liturgy that is articulated in the book of *Bahir*[89], the Anonymous Commentator created a new and unique brand of Ecstatic Kabbalah.

V: Ecstasy and Prayer in the Anonymous Commentary:

The Commentary on the Prayers and Benedictions written, as I have argued, by an anonymous author in Catalonia in the third quarter of the 13th Century, quotes extensively from the *Bahir*[90], from Ezra ben Solomon's commentary on the Talmudic exegesis and Song of Songs,[91] and from the 'long version' of the 'Book of Contemplation.'[92] The Anonymous Commentator presents a linguistic ontology deriving from *Sefer Yetzirah*, with special emphasis on the linguistic components of divine letters and alphabets. At the same time, he articulates an extraordinarily complex technique of letter permutation that is presented as a method of attaining ecstasy during the recitation of prayers and blessings. This unique letter permutation technique is in some respects similar to techniques described by Abraham Abulafia and by later ecstatic kabbalists.[93] It is unique, however, in its complicated application to prayer and *kavannah* and in its complex understanding of liturgical ritual. Although the specific technique of letter permutation used by the Anonymous Commentator was apparently drawn from Ashkenazi interpretations of *Sefer Yetzirah*, the correlation between the letter permutation technique and *kavannah* is unique to the Anonymous Commentary.

The author of the Anonymous Commentary made use of notions of kavannah that already existed in the early Kabbalah, particularly that of the Gerona Circle and the *Bahir*. Chiefly, the author borrowed the understanding of *kavannah* as the contemplative union of the human thought with the linguistic realm of the divine alphabet, and the idea of theurgist actions that can induce the drawing of light and power from these metaphysical alphabets into the human realm. By combining these elements with Ashkenazi linguistic ontology and technique, the Anonymous Commentator created a unique kind of Linguistic-Ecstatic Kabbalah that, to the best of my knowledge, cannot be found in any other kabbalistic text.

The conception of kavannah as centered on meditation upon divine names and of these divine names as complex linguistic entities constituted through a process of letter permutations, led to a kind of mystical practice that used the divine names as a substratum for the linguistic technique of letter permutation. The understanding of *kavannah* as an act of concentration, conjunction and permutation of the letters that make up metaphysical entities which are perceived as divine 'names' (such as the *Sefiroth*) was drawn by the Anonymous Commentator from Catalan Kabbalah. This conception was combined with a sophisticated technique of letter permutation which was applied to the liturgical text and to the complex divine names. Letter permutation functioned not only as an ontological scheme but also as a hermeneutical technique that could be applied to other texts such as the Torah and *Midrashic* works. It also served as a mental technique capable of producing ecstatic experiences. We find then that the same mystical technique served both as an ontology and as a magical-mystical technique. Since the different dimensions were seen as interconnected and governed by the same meta-linguistic structure, the manipulation of that meta-linguistic structure through meditative contemplation was thought to lead to effective 'results' in all of these dimensions.

VI: Linguistic Continua and 'Cord-Like' Ontology

The main 'form of order'94 found in the Anonymous Commentary is the 'Linguistic Form,' developed from *Sefer Yetzirah*, ordering both ontology and ritual practice. Comprehension of this linguistic system is the key both to interpreting the liturgical text and ceremony and to activating *kavannah* during mystical liturgical practice.[95] The linguistic system is based on four 'divine alphabets.' Each alphabet is made up of the 22 Hebrew letters and all four alphabets are situated on special metaphysical circles. Each one is conceived of as a 22-letter 'name of God'.[96] These 'divine alphabets' have a similar ontological status to the *Sefiroth*, based on the idea in *Sefer Yetzirah* that the basic divine components are ten *Sefiroth* and 22 divine letters. The 'Linguistic-Theology' of the Anonymous Commentary is based on these four divine alphabets.[97]

The alphabets in the Anonymous Commentator's system together form a linguistic continuum.[98] This continuum begins with the first and highest alphabet, the highest aspect of the linguistic godhead. The highest alphabet emanates the lower three alphabets which, in turn, culminate in the spirit of the individual kabbalist who holds and manipulates the Hebrew letters in his mind and on his tongue. The three alphabets that lie between the highest one and the human being are interconnected and are part of a 'cord-like' linguistic continuum. They are accessible to human comprehension and, accordingly, are subject to human manipulation by means of conjunction, meditation upon the divine letters, and combination of particular letters. New permutations of letters from the divine alphabets, in turn, create new names or sequences of letters that may be used during liturgical rituals. The divine 'Name of 72 Letters' is considered by the Anonymous Commentator to be paradigmatic of the capacity of the circles of alphabets to create divine names given the appropriate linguistic substrata, and is itself used as a substratum for many techniques of letter permutation in Ecstatic Kabbalah.[99]

The Anonymous Commentary suggests that just as the 'Name of 72 Letters' was drawn from the Torah and is used as a magical-mystical device[100], as a substratum for a technique of letter permutation, the text of the liturgy itself can be used in such a manner as well. Doing so would result in the formation of different names that may be used as part of the prayer, particularly in the parts of the liturgy that are concerned with the fulfillment of mundane, physical needs.[101] This is connected to the previously mentioned tradition, transmitted by Nachmanides and Ezra ben Solomon, which views the Torah as a long sequence of letters that constitutes a single name of God.[102] The conception of divine names created by circles of alphabets and the idea that different linguistic substrata can be used in techniques of letter permutation led the Anonymous Commentator to create a sophisticated system of letter permutation that uses the text of the liturgy itself as a substratum for generating 'divine names' that have the power to affect the world in various ways if used correctly during the liturgical ceremony.

The identification of the alphabets with the divine names allowed the Anonymous Commentator to connect the pre-existing theosophical-theurgist notion of *kavannah* based on divine names to this linguistic technique. The divine alphabets function as the divine names and as the *Sefiroth* in the theosophical-theurgist scheme. The divine names are conceived of as complex linguistic entities represented on divine circles and, as such, they are subject to the permutation technique.[103] *Kavannah* involves concentration of thought on the linguistic entities considered 'meta-alphabets', followed by permutation of the relevant letters of the divine 'meta-names.' The text of the liturgy itself is

used as a substratum for the linguistic technique; its letters are 'absorbed' into the encircling alphabets that constitute the letter permutation system. The permutations of the specific letters absorbed from the text of the liturgy then serve as a substratum for a mystical-magical technique of permutation. The outcome of such permutation is that the 'inner essences' of the letters merge together and this essence is drawn towards the human world, achieving a particular outcome in direct correlation to the specific letters processed.

The connection between the alphabets, the letter permutation technique, and the divine names are the key in attempting to understand the mystical notion of *kavannah* in the Anonymous Commentary. The understanding that the letter permutation technique involves the breaking down of divine names into discrete components and their reformulation into new names is well developed, as Moshe Idel has demonstrated with respect to the Ecstatic Kabbalah of Abraham Abulafia.[104] This process was believed to dramatically affect the human consciousness and to lead to ecstatic experiences. According to Abulafia, the structure of the divine names must then "be destroyed in order to exploit the 'prophetic' potential of the Names and to create a series of new structures by means of letter combinations. In the course of the changes taking place in the structure of the Name, the structure of human consciousness likewise changes."[105]

In a similar manner, the anonymous author uses his own technique to 'break down' the liturgical text and create new combinations of letters, thus affecting the worshiper's consciousness as well as the divine and human worlds. Every act of *kavannah* involves the mental permutation of a specific sequence of letters from the three lower alphabets in accordance with the liturgical text and context. The technique 'absorbs' elements of the liturgy and subsequently functions as a kind of magical tool, creating new and dramatic affects. Using a series of charts, the worshiper recognizes key terms in the liturgical text and correlates them to specific letters that 'govern' these elements, objects, and needs.[106] The act of permutation is executed in the 'dimension' of human thought that has elevated itself to the realm of the metaphysical alphabets, working on letters that appear like "great mountains."[107]

Since the godhead himself is 'made' out of the Hebrew alphabet and since the human spirit has the capacity to use the 'Godly Language' and to manipulate its ingredients, it is possible for the human thought to attain comprehension of *all* phenomena using this linguistic science, to influence the inner dynamics of the godhead, and to draw power from the divine letters into the human world. Inside the human mind, these monadic essences[108] can then be translated into semantic propositions disclosing secretive, mystical information. Alternatively, they may be translated into an angelic being with the capacity to affect the mundane needs mentioned in the prayer, or into the revelation of such a being as part of an ecstatic experience undergone by the worshiper.

Since the linguistic continuum is a 'cord-like' ontology, the physical features throughout the continuum are identical, differing only in their inner or spiritual qualities.[109] Each letter is thought to be a complex entity including a physical body, a formal representation, and a soul or inner essence.[110] Moshe Idel has noted that the Anonymous Commentary is one of the first kabbalistic texts to articulate a monadic theory of the Hebrew Alphabet.[111] Since each letter consists of a body and a spiritual essence, it is possible, as part of a linguistic-talismanic liturgical practice, to draw the inner essence or power from the letters of the godhead toward the human spirit.[112] Permutation of letters results in the creation of a new letter sequence, thus allowing for the content, 'light' or 'voice' to be transmitted 'through' the letters down into the human mind and human

reality. Each sequence of letters serves as a channel or 'cord' allowing for specific content to descend. These letter sequences transmit their mystical content in a manner comparable to the way in which 'regular' sequences of letters transmit meaning. The liturgical text is perceived as a chart or a map indicating the relevant sequences of letters that need to be 'arranged' above in the linguistic divine realm. Once the appropriate sequences of letters are combined, the specific content can be transmitted from the divine to the lower realms of existence. The inner essences of the letters are manipulated by kabbalists who must know the exact elements that are involved in each part of the prayer. Linguistic techniques performed during prayer and daily benedictions thus have the power, according to the Anonymous Commentary, to unify the linguistic mind with the divine powers that exist inside the letters of the divine alphabets.

VII: Hyper-Linguistic Kabbalah and Ecstatic Prayer in the Anonymous Commentary

The Anonymous Commentary presents an interesting and complex kind of Linguistic-Ecstatic Kabbalah which uniquely fuses the notion of *kavannah* in prayer and benedictions with mystical technique and ecstatic experience. The Commentary is considered the earliest source in the history of Jewish Mysticism to develop a clear and articulated practice of *kavannah* that is based on a technique involving letter permutation.[113] According to Idel, the term *'kavannah'*, as used in the Anonymous Commentary, "describe[s] the synthesis between the liturgical ritual and a mystical technique very similar to that of Abulafia"[114].The linguistic techniques and the linguistic experiences were embodied in (or, in Moshe Idel's view, artificially imposed on) the already existing liturgical text and ceremony.[115] The belief that permutation of letters can be used to draw the 'monadic essence' of letters into the human mind is well developed in Ecstatic Kabbalah, but only in the Anonymous Commentary is this technique identified with *kavannah* in prayer.[116] Though less influential than Abraham Abulafia's Ecstatic Kabbalah, the version created by the Anonymous Commentator—a type of Linguistic-Ecstatic Kabbalah—was distinct. The existence of this model demonstrates that already at the early stages of Ecstatic Kabbalah at least one attempt had been made to construct a 'nomian' kind of Ecstatic Kabbalah. In the Anonymous Commentary, the relationship between the human and the divine is mediated by linguistic entities tied to the Hebrew alphabet. This allows for *halakhic* practices, in particular those that are language-based, to be viewed as instruments for contemplation and manipulation of the linguistic divine. Prayers and blessings that are centered on the divine names become the key in a process of contemplation, elevation, and union with the 'higher' linguistic realms. By concentrating on linguistic elements of *halakhic* practice, the kabbalist can connect to and act upon the corresponding linguistic elements—in particular the divine name—in the higher, metaphysical realms, actively 'opening' channels of letters transmitting mystical content from above.

The linguistic elements of the prayer and the blessings are accompanied by a contemplative component that was adapted from Ezra ben Solomon's Neo-Platonic type of *kavannah*.[117] The worshiper must concentrate on and conjoin his thought to the divine alphabets as a preliminary condition for the permutation itself. He must prevent his thought from drifting away[118] and only then can he implement the technique of letter permutation. Ezra ben Solomon and other early kabbalists used Neo-Platonic theories of

elevation of thought and mystical union to enhance the spiritual and mystical dimensions of prayer. For them, this aspect of the liturgical performance was carefully and closely embedded into the ritual and into the liturgical texts.

In the Anonymous Commentary, on the other hand, the meta-linguistic structure of alphabet permutation is developed independently of prayer and liturgy. The meta-structure and technique were apparently adapted from Ashkenazi understandings of the linguistic ontology found in *Sefer Yetzirah*. In other words, this scheme was articulated independently of any ritual or commandment, and was later applied by the Anonymous Commentator to the prayer ritual.

A key difference between Ezra ben Solomon's theory of *kavannah* and the ecstatic *kavannah* of the Anonymous Commentator can be found in the ways that each of them understood the relationship between *kavannah* and the liturgical text and ceremony. For Ezra ben Solomon, *kavannah* is an integral part of the prayer itself; in other words, it is part of a practice that involves a definite text whose semantic layer is considered important. Thus, a balance is maintained between the mystical-theurgist elements that are added to the ritual and the original practice itself, which preserves its original content as well. While the worshiper pronounces the divine name as part of the blessing or prayer, he performs a mystical practice.[119] This practice does not prevent the reading of the other parts of the text and does not undermine the conventional performance of the prayer and blessing.

In the case of the Anonymous Commentator's practice, however, the mystical technique is more powerful than the original text and ceremony. The Anonymous Commentator's technique, based on discrete letters and their 'monadic essences,' ultimately fragments the liturgical text. Since the linguistic technique breaks the words of the liturgy into discrete sets of letters independent of their original configuration and meaning, the technique can be said to relate to the text of the liturgy on a sub-semantic level. This might lead one to question whether in fact this scheme can accurately be described as 'nomian.' The claim could be made that the use of such a powerful technique, with its focus on the sub-semantic, would lead not to a 'nomian' understanding of liturgical practice, but rather to an 'a-nomian' interpretation. By making use of this powerful linguistic instrument, the worshiper absorbs and then fragments the liturgical text; this might be understood as 'a-nomian' in the sense that the conventional, semantic understanding of the liturgy becomes irrelevant.[120] This would seem to suggest, then, that the Anonymous Commentary should be viewed as a kind of ecstatic-magical manual to the prayer book rather than as a commentary in the regular sense. This type of interpretation should be compared to Abraham Abulafia's most advanced technique of Torah interpretation in which he breaks the canonical text into discrete letters which consist of divine names.[121]

VIII: The Letter Permutation Technique

The letter permutation technique is based on a rich matrix of objects, concepts, and names, corresponding to particular letters in the different divine alphabets. This system of representation and organization of concepts has roots in *Sefer Yetzirah*.[122] The permutation technique thus involves a system made up of dynamic parts that are connected to the alphabetical ontology. Before one can make use of the technique, one must gain understanding both of the dynamics of letter permutation and of the web of inter-

relations between the various particulates as represented in special charts.[123] This knowledge is derived, learned, and meditated upon independently and prior to the performance of any ritual. During the act of *kavannah*, then, the kabbalist combines different letters of the liturgical text—their 'roots'—in the divine realm. Letters situated in one of the three lower alphabets are combined into a unique permutation. Their discrete monadic essence is thus drawn out, combined with other essences, and transmitted through the prism of the lower alphabets into the human mind and the physical world.

The magical-talismanic model centers on the human capacity to draw the divine power of the letters into the mundane realm and to satisfy concrete needs specified in the words of the prayer. The talismanic instrument is constituted of the letters themselves, which are both the source of power and a device serving as a transmitter of mystical power, light, and speech. The mystical content is drawn from the metaphysical realms into the human world, which is itself conceived of as a linguistic matrix of letters. Through the permutation technique, the kabbalist can create 'channels' of power that allow the multiphase content to descend from the linguistic divine down to a reality that is constituted of and governed by letters. The aim of this practice is twofold. First, this mystical technique is a way to transform the human mind and unite it with the linguistic godhead. Second, the permutation of letters draws emanation from the higher alphabet through the lower alphabets and, ultimately, down to man. This emanation, as stated, can be experienced as a mystical revelation of linguistic content, light, or speech. Alternatively, mystical content may be drawn into the mundane realm as a 'magical' instrument used to change history and affect physical reality. The Anonymous Commentator in fact testifies that he personally witnessed an individual achieving an angelic revelation by using this technique:

> And the ministering angels rushing to execute God's will are countless and they fly in space from every side and every corner. And no man is granted permission to see them unless they come to him on a specific mission as in the case of Abraham (Genesis 18 2) [...] And I can testify that I was sitting and learning with an individual who was granted such permission, thus two angels came to him and granted him secrets concerning the future, and indeed after a short while I witnessed the truth that they predicted...[124]

This description of revelation in angelic form is reminiscent of the revelations described by Abraham Abulafia, in whose writings we find descriptions of divine letters being revealed on some occasions in the form of secret-revealing angels.[125]

When practicing the letter permutation technique, the liturgical agent must concentrate on the correct alphabet and he must choose the proper letters for manipulation from that alphabet. Selection of the appropriate alphabet and letters is a condition for effective execution of the prayer ritual and achievement of this-worldly results. The Anonymous Commentator states: "One who knows the right name for each of the different needs mentioned during the prayer can ask for his needs during these benedictions according to his wishes."[126] Certain portions of the liturgy are considered by the Anonymous Commentator to be the proper points at which to influence the inner dynamics of the divine alphabets. These portions include, for example, the sections that praise God and invoke God's glory; the act of praise thus induces the drawing of blessings from the higher parts of the godhead into the lower. Other sections of the liturgy that include concrete requests concerning mundane affairs are interpreted as magical

sequences. By applying the appropriate manipulation of letters, these sequences can be used to draw specific types of mystical influence 'down' into the human world and, in that way, to fulfill the concrete and specific needs specified in the semantic meaning of the relevant prayers:[127]

> This is the complete intention (*kavannah*) when the blessing flows from its source, the first and highest alphabet, towards the specific letter of the lower alphabets that the specific matter we are praying for is correlated to. And then the benefit will flow to the man from those specific [lower] letters of the three lower alphabets. And this is the secret of the benediction:
>
> Man should always set his attention on the divine matters or on the purpose of comprehending the [Divine] names and the Mystical secrets-thus he should set his attention towards the letters of the two first and higher alphabets, to the specific letter on those alphabets that the matter is correlated to. However if the matter that concerns the man is constituted of the lower two alphabets he should set his attention towards those two lower alphabets. And if he is asking for mundane matters that are made out of form and matter he should focus his mind on the relevant letters from the third and lowest alphabet [...] and if he is concerned with matters that are constituted of the three lower alphabets he should combine his attention on all of the three alphabets [...] and all the three lower alphabets are considered to be one name, essentially one name of 22 letters, and they all have one source and they all have one source of emanations above...[128]

While 'working on' a part of the liturgy that is concerned with praising God, one should manipulate—in accordance with the relevant charts—letters from the higher alphabets. On the other hand, when 'working on' a section associated with the fulfillment of mundane needs, such as the 12 'middle benedictions' in the traditional *Amidah* prayer, one should manipulate letters from the lowest alphabet. If the technique is performed through the higher realm of the godhead, then the 'matter' drawn down into the human mind is translated into linguistic content manifested as higher secrets. If the kabbalist draws on the second alphabet, he may experience a mystical conjunction with the divine light that constitutes the higher levels of the godhead.[129] If the monadic essence is drawn into the semantic layers of the human mind, it might materialize as an inner speech or as an angelic revelation of ideas and secrets.[130] If the technique is focused on the lower alphabet, the power drawn into the mind will be concrete in character, answering specific, concrete questions. The power drawn from the lower alphabets would thus tend to consist more of information relating to this-worldly, mundane affairs, sometimes transmitted through an 'angel' intermediary.

IX: Ecstatic Voices of Prayer

Moshe Idel has analyzed the importance of the vocal element in the performance of the Jewish rituals and in the study of Torah.[131] One of the prominent features of the Linguistic-Ecstatic model of Kabbalah is the strong connection between linguistic technique and linguistic revelation. The practice of praying using a linguistic-mystical *kavannah* technique was thought to have the potential to induce an ecstatic experience, often involving the receiving of messages through 'inner speech.' The manipulated let-

ters were thought to have the capacity to transmit, through the channels of letters, these voices from the divine to the human realm.[132]

The Anonymous Commentator writes about a particular stage toward the end of the liturgical prayer, known as the *Nefilath Apayim* (literally, 'falling on the face'). During the *Nefilath Apayim*, the worshiper bows down, and at this point in the liturgy, may add a personal prayer. The drama of 'falling down' indicated to the author that this is the precise moment in the liturgical ceremony that the ecstatic experience might occur. The prayer thus climaxes in an ecstatic experience that resembles some of the prophetic experiences described in the Bible, in which prophets were driven to bring their faces to the floor as a result of an overwhelming ecstatic experience.[133] Some believe that this 'falling down' was in fact part of an active technique, used to induce the ecstatic experience. Like the prophets, then, the kabbalist falls on his face in order to be able to receive the powerful ecstatic content that he drew from the metaphysical letters in the earlier stages of the prayer. The same energy now "explodes" in the kabbalist's mind in different forms: it may be realized in angelic form or, alternatively, it might manifest itself as inner, ecstatic speech without any physical representation:

> The second matter related to *'Nefilath Apayim'* is the matter of blocking one's eyes from looking at mundane matters during the prophetic experience and thus disturbing the inner voice whose speech is heard from inside, since it is possible to hear the inner voice without having a vision of the source of the voice[134], a voice revealing secrets and answering your questions. And this esoteric matter transcends human comprehension and understanding, allowing only those that were granted from above the capacity to experience such ecstatic matters. It is impossible to provide any analysis of these matters [...] and I know only of a few men that experienced these kinds of revelations (alluding to the angelic revelation described earlier).[135]

We can thus see that prayer, in the Anonymous Commentator's scheme, is the context not only of the mystical technique, but also of the ecstatic experience that results from the use of that technique. The ecstatic experience is undergone during the final sections of the prayer, while the earlier parts of the prayer are dedicated to the build-up of ecstatic energy that is drawn down from above and finally 'realized' at the end of the prayer. In the earlier stages of the prayer, then, the worshiper is drawing energy for fulfilling theurgist and magical ends, but ultimately also with the aim of producing an ecstatic experience. Another possibility in the Anonymous Commentator's model is the receiving of 'answers' at a later point as part of a dream; this notion was further developed in later Ecstatic Kabbalah.[136]

X: Prayer and Ecstasy in Later Kabbalah

The Anonymous Commentary is the first source in the history of Kabbalah to make use of letter permutation as a *kavannah* technique during prayer. The use of letter permutation techniques as a device for achieving ecstasy and inducing divine revelation was, however, a common theme. Such techniques were important, for example, in the Ecstatic Kabbalah developed by Abraham Abulafia and by the 14th Century kabbalist, Yitzhak from Acre.[137] The latter kabbalist was influenced by Natan ben Sa'adyah Har'ar, the author of the ecstatic kabbalistic treatise, *Sha'arei Tzedek*, and a student of Abulafia

who gave personal testimony to the efficacy of techniques of letter permutation.[138] Letter permutation techniques continued to be important in 16th Century Kabbalah,[139] and in *Hasidism*.[140] Examples of ecstatic techniques, sometimes tied to *halakhic* practice and liturgical prayer, are common in the later kabbalistic sources of the 16th Century and can be found in the writings of Eliezer Azikri,[141] Joseph Karo, Moses Cordovero[142], and Hayim Vital.[143]

In his comprehensive study of 18th Century Hasidism, Moshe Idel analyzes one of its important kabbalistic sources: Moses Cordovero's synthesis between talismanic forms of prayer and ecstatic techniques involving permutation of letters.[144]

Idel concluded that "at the end of the fifteenth or very beginning of the sixteenth century a clear conception of letters as talismanic objects, which can be traced to works that deal with permutations of letters from Abulafia's school, was in existence; in some of these texts an allusion or direct mention of prayer in notable".[145]

In his book, *Pardes Rimmonim*, Cordovero describes several letter permutation techniques that are used as part of the *kavannah* during prayer. He states: "a prayer using *Kavannah* must draw the spiritual force from the supernal levels downwards unto the letters he is pronouncing so as to be able to elevate these letters to that supernal level, in order to hasten his request."[146] Although I have not been able to find evidence that Cordovero knew the Anonymous Commentary, it does seem to be the case that the Anonymous Commentary is one of the earlier sources of Cordovero's synthesis.[147] Jewish mystics who were influenced by Ecstatic Kabbalah, including those influenced directly by Abraham Abulafia, usually preferred to develop in their own teachings elements of a 'nomian' kind of Ecstatic Kabbalah. In several instances they grounded their ecstatic techniques and experiences in the performance of the *mitzvoth* and especially the act of prayer.[148] For instance, the 16th Century kabbalist, Hayim Vital, presents a 'nomian' technique practiced during prayer that can induce an ecstatic experience during the act of prayer:

> The Secret of Prophecy is certainly a voice sent from above to speak to this Prophet, and the Holy Spirit is likewise in this manner. However, because the voice is supernal and spiritual, it is impossible for it to be made corporeal and enter the ears of the prophet, unless it is first embodied, in that same physical voice that emerged from the prophet while engaged in [the study of the] Torah and prayer and the like. It then embodies itself in it and is connected to it and comes to the ears of the prophet, so that he hears. But without the human voice it cannot exist...that selfsame supernal voice comes and is embodied within his voice.[149]

Vital claims that the secret of the prophecy is received during prayer and Torah studying. While the prophet is praying, the divine voice is embodied in the human voice and in that way the prophet undergoes the prophetic experience. In suggesting this, Vital may have had in mind the important work of the 14th Century *halakhic* authority, Jacob ben Asher, who was influenced by Yitzhak from Acre and by Yona Hasid of Gerona,[150] and who wrote the following about the prayer of the *Hasidim Ha-Rishonim* of the *Mishna*:

> They used to concentrate their minds and use *kavannah* in prayer in order to reach an ecstatic state of *'Hitpashtuth Ha-Gashmiuth'*, meaning that their spiritual dimension left their material body and their noetic spirit was empowered up to the point that they were close to prophecy...[151]

According to this interpretation of the purpose of the prayer, the *kavannah* prac-

ticed by ancient holy men involved a technique for achieving ecstatic experiences which were understood as a form of prophecy. As Moshe Idel has demonstrated, this kind of synthesis between ecstatic experience and liturgical prayer continued to be central in later developments in Jewish Mysticism, up until and including the emergence of Hasidism in the 18th Century.[152]

Notes:

1 This study in Ecstatic Kabbalah is presented to my teacher Professor Moshe Idel in gratitude for his scholarship and generosity.

2 Moshe Idel, 'Kabbalistic Prayer and Colors', *Approaches to Judaism in Medieval Times*, Vol. III, ed. D. Blumenthal, Atlanta 1988, pp. 17-27; Moshe Idel, 'Some Remarks on Ritual and Mysticism in Geronese Kabbalah', *Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 3 (1993), pp. 111-130; Moshe Idel, 'On R. Issac Sagi Nahor's Mystical Intention of the Eighteen Benedictions', *Massu'ot, Studies in Kabbalistic Literature and Jewish Philosophy in Memory of Prof. Ephraim Gottlieb*, eds. M. Oron and A. Goldreich, Jerusalem 1994, pp. 25-52 (Hebrew); Moshe Idel, 'Prayer in Provence Kabbalah', *Likkutei Tarbiz* 6 (2003), pp. 421-442 (Hebrew) ;Moshe Idel, *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia*; Moshe Idel, *Golem: Jewish Magical and Mystical Traditions on the Artificial Anthropoid*, Albany 1990; Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah and Eros*, New Haven & London 2005, pp. 22-44; Moshe Idel, *Absorbing Perfections: Kabbalah and Interpretation*, New Haven and London 2002, pp. 352-389; Moshe Idel, *Enchanted Chains: Techniques and Rituals In Jewish Mysticism*, Los Angeles 2005. Moshe Idel, *Ascensions on High in Jewish Mysticism: Pillars, Lines, Ladders*, Budapest 2005.

3 Moshe Idel, *Abraham Abulafia's Works and Doctrine* (PhD Diss, Jerusalem 1976)(Hebrew); Moshe Idel, *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia*, Albany 1988; Moshe Idel, *Language, Torah and Hermeneutics in Abraham Abulafia*, Albany 1989; Moshe Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, Albany 1988; Moshe Idel, *Le Porte Della Giustizia Saare Sedeq*, Milano 2001; Moshe Idel, 'Abraham Abulafia and Unio Mystica', *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature*, Vol. 3, edited by I. Twersky and J. M. Harris, Cambridge 2000, pp. 147-178; Moshe Idel, *Hasidism: Between Ecstasy and Magic*, Albany 1995.

4 See Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, New Haven and London 1988, pp. 267-271; Moshe Idel, *Absorbing Perfections*, pp. 218-219; Moshe Idel, 'The Qedushah and the Observation of the Heavenly Chariot', *From Qumran to Cairo: Studies in the History of Prayer*, edited by J. Tabory, Jerusalem 1999, pp. 7-15 (Hebrew).

5 See Moshe Idel, *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia*, New York 1988, pp. 8-9; Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, pp. 74-75, 97-102; Moshe Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, New York 1988, p. 18.

6 See, Elliot Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia-Kabbalist and Prophet: Hermeneutics, Theosophy and Theurgy*, Los Angeles 2000, pp. 178-228. For his discussion on Abulafia's letter permutation techniques, see pp. 197-205. .For his definition of the term 'hypernomian' see p. 209.

7 See, Moshe Idel, *Le Porte Della Giustizia Saare Sedeq*, pp. 147-163; Moshe Idel, 'The Kabbalistic Interpretation of the secret of Arayyot in early Kabbalah', Kabbalah 12 (2004) (Hebrew), pp. 157-159, 180-184. For Abulafia's view on Tefillin, see Wolfson, *Abulafia*, pp. 191-195, 209-210, and cf. Moshe Idel, 'On the meaning of the term Kabbalah- between the Ecstatic and the Sefirotic schools of Kabbalah in the 13th Century', *Peamim* 93 (2003) (Hebrew), p. 51; Moshe Idel, 'The Kabbalistic Interpretation of the secret of Arayyot in early Kabbalah', p. 159; Moshe Idel, *Le Porte Della Giustizia Saare Sedeq*, p. 296.

8 The Hebrew term *kavannah* can loosely be translated as 'intention', though the way the term was understood has differed meanings in different historical periods and amongst different groups. The meanings of the word *kavannah* will be returned to later in this article.

9 See, Moshe Idel, *Abraham Abulafia's Works and Doctrine*, pp. 77-78, 84; Moshe Idel, 'Ramon Lull and Ecstatic Kabbalah', *Journal of the Warburg and the Courtauld Institutes* 51 (1988), pp. 170-174; Moshe Idel, *Hasidism*, pp. 156, 339 and note 50; Moshe Idel, *R. Menachem Recanati the Kabbalist*, Vol 1, Tel Aviv 1998, (Hebrew), pp. 111-113. Moshe Idel, *Le Porte Della Giustizia Saare Sedeq*, p. 148; Moshe Idel, 'Ashkenazi Esotericism and Kabbalah in Barcelona', *Hispania Judaica* 5 (2007), p. 104; Gershom Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, translated by A. Arkush and edited by R. J. Werblowsky, New Jersey 1987, p. 345, note 291; Gershom Scholem, *Kabbalah*, Jerusalem 1974, p. 179.

10 Adam Afterman, *The Intention of Prayers in Early Ecstatic Kabbalah: A Study and Critical Edition of an Anonymous Commentary to the Prayers*, Los Angeles 2004 (Hebrew). Cf. Saverio Campanini, 'Yehudah ben Nissim Ibn Malka: Perush Ha-Tefelot', (Appendix) in: Giulio Busi, *Catalogue of the Kabbalistic Manuscripts in the Library of the Jewish Community of Mantua*, Firenze 2001. See also the partial publication of the first part of the commentary by Abraham Joshua Heschel, 'Perus al Tefillot', L. Ginzberg & A. Weiss (eds.), *Studies in Memory of Moses Schorr*, New York 1945, pp. 113-126.

11 Cf. Saverio Campanini and Guilio Busi's claim that the commentary was written by Yehdau Ibn Malka in Campanini, *Perush ha-Tefelot*, pp. 219-241; and see my set of objections to that claim: Afterman, *The Intention of Prayers*, pp. 23-34. See also, Moshe Idel, 'Reflections on Kabbalah in Spain and Christian Kabbalah', *Hispania Judaica* 2 (1999), p. 8 ; Moshe Idel, *Hasidism*, p. 339 n. 50; Moshe Hallamish, *'L'eyla Mikol Birchata – Towards a History of the Hebrew Version'*, *Kenishta: Studies of the Synagogue World*, Edited by J. Tabory, Ramat Gan 2007, pp. 87-88 and note 18 (Hebrew); and Guilio Busi, *Qabbalah* Visiva, Torino 2005, p. 137 notes 266, 268, where he claims that I chose for my edition of the anonymous commentary the worst manuscript without providing any account. Despite his claim, any reader can find a detailed account of the long process of evaluation of different manuscripts (Afterman, *The Intention of Prayers*, pp. 199-205) including justification for my choice of MS London, British Library, Add 27009 (Margoliouth 751), from the larger family of manuscripts, as the manuscript to publish. Regarding the British Library MS that Busi himself wrote elsewhere in his edition (p. 241) : "the text that we [Campanini & Busi] consider for the most reliable version of the larger family [is] Ms. London, British library, Add 27009 (Margolioth 751)". The same MS was used by Busi himself as the main MS for his apparatus, and was apparently at the time considered by Busi to be "the most reliable version of the larger family". I consider the larger family to be on the whole a more reliable set of versions of the commentary I chose to publish the British Library MS 27009, the most reliable within this group. Interestingly, although Busi and Campanini do explain their reasons for choosing the smaller family of MSS they do not provide an explanation for their choice of the Mantua MS from within the small family. I, for instance, preferred a different MS from the small family for my apparatus. Regarding my objection to the identification of Ibn Malaka as the author of the Commentary (Afterman, pp. 23-34) and to the identification of one of Ibn Malka's books as the lost Commentary on Pirkie De Rabi Elezar (Afterman, pp. 27-28), Busi prefers to attack me ad hominem rather than to address my arguments. See, moreover, Campanini and Busi's claim that the alleged author Ibn Malka was the first author to quote from the Zohar in Campanini, 'Perush Ha-tefelot', pp. 231-232, 308. Cf. Afterman, *The Intention of*

Prayers, p. 28. See also the evidence analyzed by Moshe Idel suggesting that Ibn Malka did not live after the middle of the 13th century in Moshe Idel, 'The Beginning of Kabbalah in North Africa? –A forgotten document by R. Yehuda ben Nissim ibn Malka', *Peamim* 43 (1990) (Hebrew), pp. 4-15. Busi's and Campanini's attempt to identify the anonymous author with Ibn Malka leads, in their words, to 'annoying circularity' (p. 223). See my detailed analysis of the problems involved in this identification in Afterman, the *Intention of Prayers*, pp. 23-34.

12 See Afterman, *The Intention of Prayers*, pp. 16-23; Moshe Idel, 'Ashkenazi Esotericism', p. 104.

13 On this group of ecstatic kabbalists active in Barcelona see, Moshe Idel, 'The Vicissitudes of Kabbalah in Catalonia', *The Jews of Spain and the Expulsion of 1492*, ed. M. Lazar, Los Angeles 1997, pp. 31-35; Idel, 'Ashkenazi Esotericism', pp. 69-70, 103-104; Haviva Pedaya, *Vision and Speech: Models of Revelatory Experience in Jewish Mysticism*, Los Angeles 2001, (Hebrew), pp. 193-194; Afterman, *The Intention of Prayers*, pp. 17-18.

14 See Idel, *R. Menachem Recanati*, pp. 33-35.

15 See Idel, 'Ashkenazi Esotericism'. See Afterman, *The Intention of Prayers*, pp. 17-19

16 Idel, 'Ramon Lull', pp. 170-171; Moshe Idel, 'Dignitates and Kavod: Two Theological Concepts in Catalan Mysticism', *Studia Luliana* 36 (1997), pp. 69-78; Harvey J. Hames, *The Art of Conversion: Christianity and Kabbalah in the Thirteenth Century*, Leiden 2000, pp. 135-136; Afetrman, *The Intention of Prayers*, pp. 132-133.

17 Idel, 'Ramon Lull', p. 170 note 6, 171-172; Idel, 'Reflection on Kabbalah in Spain and Christian Kabbalah', *Hispania Judaica Bulletin* 2 (1999), p. 12.

18 See, Saverio Campanini, 'Perush Ha-Tefelot', pp. 233-238.

19 Alexander Altmann, *Faces of Judaism: Selected Essays*, Tel Aviv 1983, pp. 44-67 (Hebrew); Michael Swartz, *Mystical Prayer in Ancient Judaism*, Teubingen 1992; Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, New York 1954, pp. 57-63; Gershom Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition*, New York 1965, pp. 9-30, 101-117; Elliot Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines*, pp. 98-105; Philp Alexander, 'Prayer in the Heikhalot Literature', *Priere Mystique at Judaisme*, ed. R. Goetschel, Paris 1987, pp. 43-64; Moshe Idel, 'The Qedushah and the Observation of the Heavenly Chariot', pp. 7-15; Peter Schaefer, *The Hidden and Manifest God*, p. 165; Adam Afterman, 'Ma'aseh Merkava in Rabbinic Literature: Prayer and Envisioning the Chariot', *Kabbalah* 13 (2005), pp. 253-255 and notes 15-17 (Hebrew); Rachel Elior, 'Mysticism, Magic and Angelology - The Perception of Angels in Hekhalot Literature', *JSQ* 1 (1993\1994), pp. 43-51; Rachel Elior, 'From earthly Temple to heavenly shrines : prayer and sacred song in the Hekhalot literature and its relation to Temple traditions', *JSQ* 4 (1997), pp. 217-267.

20 See Menachem Lorberboum, *A Theoretical Analysis of the Rabbinic Notion of Kavannah in the Commandments*, M.A thesis, Hebrew University 1988 (Hebrew); Ephraim E. Urbach, *The Sages: Their concepts and Beliefs*, Jerusalem 1998 (Hebrew), pp. 45-46, 344-347. Garb, *The Manifestations of Power*, pp. 34-35. Cf. Elliot Wolfson, 'Iconic Visualization and the Imaginal Body of God: The Role of Intention in the Rabbinic Conception of Prayer', *Modern Theology* 12 (1996), pp. 137-178. Cf. Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Theology of Ancient Judaism*, Volume one, London & New York 1962, pp. 153-169 (Hebrew).

21 See, Ephraim Urbach, *The Sages*, p. 345. *Mishna Berakhoth*, 5, 1; *Tosefta Berakhoth*, 3, 4.

22 *Tosephta Berakhoth*, 3, 4; 2, 2.

23 See Saul Lieberman, *Tosefta ki-Fshutah*, vol 1, Jerusalem 1992, (Hebrew), pp. 43-

44 and note 65; Ephraim Urbach, *The Sages*, p. 45; Uri Erlich, *Studies in Jewish Liturgy: A Reader*, selected by H. Mack (*Likkurei Tarbiz* VI), Jerusalem 2003, pp. 477-491. (Hebrew); Wolfson, 'Iconic Visualization'.

24 Shlomo Naeh, "Creates the Fruit of Lips": A Phenomenological Study of Prayer According to Mishna Berakot 4:3, 5:5', *Tarbiz* 63 (1994) (Hebrew), p. 210-212.

25 Naeh, 'Creates', p. 193.

26 Naeh, 'Creates', p. 218.

27 See, I. Tishby, *The Wisdom of the Zohar*, Volume Two, Jerusalem 1982, pp. 247-248 (Hebrew); Ron Margolin, *The Interiorization of Religious Life and Thought at the Beginning of Hasidism: Its Sources and Epistemological Basis*, PhD Dissertation, Jerusalem 1999 (Hebrew), pp. 91-95; Jonathan Garb, *Manifestations of Power in Jewish Mysticism: From Rabbinic Literature to Safedian Kabbalah*, Jerusalem 2005 (Hebrew), pp. 28-46

28 Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, New Haven and London 1988, pp. 156-199; Idel, *Enchanted Chains*, pp. 165-168 ; Jonathan Garb, *Manifestations of Power*, pp. 28-46; Jonathan Garb, 'Kinds of Power: Rabbinic texts and the Kabbalah', *Kabbalah* 6 (2001), pp. 45-71.

29 Yair Lorberbaum, *Image of God: Halakhah and Aggadah*, Tel Aviv 2004 (Hebrew).

30 See Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah and Eros*, pp. 22-35.

31 Adam Afterman, 'Ma'aseh Merkava in Rabbinic Literature: Prayer and Envisioning the Chariot', *Kabbalah* 13 (2005), pp. 249-269 (Hebrew); Daniel Abrams, 'A neglected Talmudic reference to Maase Merkava', *Frankfurter Judaistische Beiträge* 26 (1999), pp. 1-5.

32 See Ezra Fleischer in *Likkutei Tarbiz* 6 (2003), pp. 210-213, 301-350 (Hebrew); Moshe Weinfeld, *Early Jewish Liturgy: From Psalms to the Prayers in Qumran and Rabbinic Literature*, Jerusalem 2004, (Hebrew), pp. 167-178, 228-235; Altmann, *Faces of Judaism*, pp. 44-51; Scholem, *Jewish Gnosticism, Merkabah Mysticism, and Talmudic Tradition*, pp. 101-117; Daniel Abrams, "Ma'aseh Merkabah" as a literary work : the reception of Hekhalot traditions by the German Pietists and kabbalistic reinterpretation', *Jewish Studies Quarterly*, 5,4 (1998), pp. 329-345.

33 Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines*, pp. 109-119, 144-160; Ron Margolin, *The Interiorization of Religious Life and Thought*, pp. 176-179, 196-200; Adam Afterman, 'Ma'aseh Merkava', pp. 249-252; Moshe Idel, *Ascensions on High*, pp. 32-54; Moshe Idel, 'From Italy to Ashkenaz and back : On the circulation of Jewish mystical traditions', *Kabbalah* 14 (2006) pp. 48-58, 94.

34 See, *The Philosophy of Judaism: The history of Jewish philosophy from Biblical times to Franz Rosenzweig by Julius Guttmann*, translated by David W. Silverman, New Jersey 1988; Alexander Altmann and S. M. Stern, *Isaac Israeli: A Neoplatonic Philosopher of the Early Tenth Century. His Works Translated with Comments and Outline of his Philosophy*, Oxford University Press 1958.

35 See Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, pp. 90-91; Idel, *Ascensions on High*, pp. 28-36; (Hebrew); Afterman, 'Maaseh Merkavah' ; Ron Margolin, *The Interiorization of Religious Life ad Thought*, pp. 80-210.

36 Afterman, 'Maase Merkava'.

37 See, Moshe Idel, 'From Italy to Ashkenaz and back', and Moshe Idel, 'To the Metamorphoses of an ancient technique for prophetic Vision in the middle Ages', *Sinai* 86 (1980), pp. 1-7 (Hebrew).

38 See *Sifre on Deuteronomy*, Finkelstein Edition, New York and Jerusalem 2001, section 41, p. 88; Wolfson, *Through the Speculum that Shines*, pp. 290-291.

39 See, *Tosefta Brachot*, chapter 3, 6.

40 See Elliot Wolfson, *Through the Speculum that Shines*, pp. 125-187.

41 See, Aviezer Ravitzky, *Maimonidean Essays*, Tel Aviv 2006, (Hebrew) pp. 42-58; David Blumenthal, 'Maimonides: Prayer, Worship and Mysticism', in: *Priere, Mystique et Judaisme*, ed. R. Goetschel, Paris 1984, p. 9; Lawrence Kaplan, *'"I Sleep but my Heart Waketh": Maimonides' Conception of Human Perfection', The Thought of Moses Maimonides: Philosophical and Legal Studies*, eds. I. Robinson, L. Kaplan and J. Bauer, Lampter 1990, pp. 163-164.

42 See Diana Lobel, *A Sufi-Jewish Dialougue: Philosophy and Mysticism in Bahya Ibn Paquda's Duties of the Heart*, Philadephia 2007, pp. 177-242; Sara Sviri, 'Spiritual Trends in Pre-Kabbalistic Judeo-Spanish Literature: the Case of Bahya ibn Paquda and Judah Halevi', *Donaire* 6 (1996), pp. 78-84; Aharon Mirsky, *From the Duties of the Heart to Songs of the Heart: Jewish Philosophy and Ethics and their influence on Hebrew Poetry in Medieval Spain*, Jerusalem 1992, pp. 288-299 (Hebrew).

43 See Ibn Pakuda, *Hovoth Ha-Levavoth*, section 10, chapter 1.

44 See, Idel, *Enchanted Chains*, pp. 190-195.

45 Idel, *Enchanted Chains*, p. 190.

46 See for instance Abraham Ibn Ezra's interpretation on *Hosea* (4:15); Abraham Ibn Ezra, *Yesod Mora Ve-Sod Torah: The Foundation of Piety and the Secret of the Torah*, edited by J. Cohen and U. Simon, Ramat Gan 2002, pp. 140-145; R. Abraham ben Nathan of Lunel, *Sefer Hamanhig*, Edited by Y. Raphael, Jerusalem 1978, p. 85.

47 See, Lobel, *A Sufi-Jewish Dialogue*, pp. 233-239;

48 This interesting fact was drawn to my attention by Professor Moshe Idel. On the issue of possible Sufi influence on early kabbalah see, Pedaya, *Vision and Speech*, pp. 171-200; Compare for instance to Idel, 'Ashkenazi Esotericism', p. 73 and note 11. Idel, 'The interpretation of Arayyot', p.183.

49 See Ezra ben Solomon, *Treatise on the 613 Commandments*, Jerusalem 1964, pp. 521-523.

50 See, Herald Kreisel, 'From Conversation to Contemplation: the Transformation of essence of Prayer in Medieval Jewish Philosophy in Provence', *Shefa Tal: Studies in Jewish Thought and Culture presented to Bracha Sack*, Edited by Z. Grees, H. Kriesel and B. Huss, Beer Sheva 2004, (Hebrew) pp. 59-83.

51 Judah Ha-Levi, *Kuzari*, Part 3, 11-17. On Jewish memory embodied in *halakhic* ritual, see Moshe Idel, 'Memento Dei – Remarks on Remembering in Judaism', *IL Senso Della Memoria* (Convegno Internazionale), Roma 2003, pp. 143-192.

52 Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed*, translated by S. Pines, Chicago and London 1962, III: 51, p. 621.

53 See, Scholem, *Major Trends*, pp. 98-103 ; Daniel Abrams, 'From Germany to Spain: Numerology as a Mystical Technique', *JJS* 47 (1996), pp. 85-101; Moshe Idel, *Enchanted Chains*, pp. 109-114, 125-133, 168-172.

54 Moshe Idel, 'Ashkenazi Esotericism', Scholem, *Origins*, pp. 97-123.

55 See Moshe Idel, 'Ashkenazi Esotericism', pp. 69-85.

56 See, Idel, 'Ashkenazi Esotericism', pp. 94-99; Afterman, *The Intention of Prayers*, pp. 115-117.

57 See, Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, pp. 99-100.

58 Joseph Dan, *The Esoteric Theology of Ashkenazi Hasidism*, Jerusalem 1968, pp. 76-78 (Hebrew).

59 Abrams, 'From Germany to Spain', pp. 92-94, 100.

60 Jacob ben Asher, *Arbaah Turim, Orach Hayim*, section 113, translated and quoted by Gershom Scholem, *Major Trends*, p. 100.

61 See Idel, *Absorbing Perfection*, pp. 321-324; Afterman, *The Intention of Prayer*, pp. 10 note 6, 43-45 and note 43; Gershom Scholem, 'The Name of God and the Linguistic theory of the Kabbala', *Diogenes* 79 (1972), p. 78; Haviva Pedya, *Nachmanides: Cyclical Time and Holy Text*, Tel Aviv 2003 , pp. 173-178; Ezra ben Solomon's Talmudic exegesis, MS. Vatican 294, fol34a; Isaiah Tishby, *Commentary on Talmudic Aggadoth by Rabbi Azriel of Gerona*, Jerusalem 1982, pp. 37-38.

62 See the statement of Shem Tov Ibn Goan, a student of Nachmanides school, in his treatise, *Badei Ha'aron*, Jerusalem 2001, p. 1, were he testifies that subjects connected to Sefer Yetzirah were not included in the kabbalistic curriculum of Nachmanides and his circle.

63 Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, pp. 98-102; Idel, *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 22-23; Moshe Idel, *Golem*, pp. 96-104; Idel, 'Ashkenazi Esotericism', pp. 102-103.

64 See Moshe Idel, *Language, Torah and Hermeneutics*, pp. 95-119; Idel, *Absorbing Perfections*, pp. 265-271.

65 See Moshe Idel, 'Ashkenazi Esotericism', pp. 102-103; Daniel Abrams, 'From Germany to Spain'.

66 See Afterman, *The Intention of Prayers*, pp. 38-58.

67 Afterman, *The Intention of Prayers*, pp. 87-98.

68 See, Nicolas Sed, 'Le Sefer ha-Razim et la methode de "combination de Letters"', *REJ* 130 (1971), pp. 295-304; Moshe Idel, 'Ashkenazi Esotericism and Kabbalah in Barcelona', p. 100, note 105.

69 See, for instance, *R. Asher ben David His Complete Works and Studies in his Kabbalistic Thought*, edited by Daniel Abrams, Los Angeles 1996, (Hebrew), p. 80; *Commentary on Talmudic Aggadoth by Rabbi Azriel of Gerona*, Edited by Isaiah Tishby, Jerusalem 1982 (Hebrew), p. 20 and note 11.

70 See, Scholem, *Origins*, p. 382.

71 Cf. Joseph Dan, 'The Emergence of Mystical Prayer', in: Joseph Dan, *Jewish Mysticism: The Middle Ages*, Hoboken 1998, pp. 221-257. See also Elliot Wolfson, 'Beneath the wings of the Great Eagle: Maimonides and thirteenth-century Kabbalah', *Moses Maimonides (1138-1204); His Religious, Scientific, and Philosophical "Wirkungsgeschichte" in Different Cultural Contexts*, Edited by, Görge K. Hasselhoff and Otfried Fraisse. Würzburg, Ergon Verlag 2004, pp. 222-223.

72 See, Gershom Scholem, *Origins*, pp. 188-198, 205-248, 274-288, 299-309, 381-382, and 412-418; Gershom Scholem, 'The concept of Kavvanah in the Early Kabbalah', *Studies in Jewish Thought*, edited by A. Jospe, Detroit 1981, pp. 162-180..

73 Scholem, *Origins*, pp. 100-102, 412; Scholem, 'The Concept', pp. 168-174; Idel, 'On R. Issac Sagi Nahor's mystical intention', pp. 30-35 ; Moshe Idel, 'Prayer in Provence Kabbalah', pp. 277-280; Moshe Idel, 'Some Remarks on Ritual and Mysticism in Geronese Kabbalah', *Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 3 (1993), pp. 111-130; Moshe Idel, 'Prayer in Provence Kabbalah', *Likkutei Tarbiz* 6 (2003), pp. 421-442 (Hebrew) ; Moshe Idel, 'Kavvanah in Prayer in early Kabbalah- between Ashkenaz and Provence', *Porat Yosef: in honor of Dr. Josef Safran*, New Jersey 1992, pp. 5-14 (Hebrew); Moshe Idel, *Enchanted Chains*, pp. 21-22, 66-67, 132-133, 172-180; Elliot Wolfson, *Through a Speculum That Shines*, pp. 288-306; Elliot Wolfson, *Language, Eros and Being*, New York 2004, pp. 122-125, 207-212, 218-220,246-255, 263-265, 348-351; Elliot Wolfson, 'Mystical-Theurgical Dimensions

of Prayer in Sefer ha-Rimonim', *Approaches to Judaism in Medieval times* 3 (1988), pp. 41-

80. Haviva Pedaya, *Vision and Speech*, pp. 140-207; Jonathan Garb, *Manifestations of Power in Jewish Mysticism*, pp. 74-112.

74 See Idel, *Kabbalah-New Perspectives*, pp. 173-199.

75 See Wolfson, *Language, Eros and Being*, pp. 207-212, 219-220.

76 Wolfson, *Language, Eros and Being*, p. 209.

77 One example of importance is the Neo-Platonic spirituality of the 11th century mystic and poet, Solomon ibn Gabirol, who offered a fascinating attempt to synthesize Jewish Mysticism including both 'Visionary Mysticism' and Sefer Yetzirah' with Neo-Platonic notions of spiritual transformation and mystical union. Specifically, Ibn Gabirol developed a practice of concentration, elevation, and mystical union centered on the divine wisdom identified with the 'Sefirath Hokhmah' of Sefer Yetzirah.

78 See Scholem, *Origins*, pp. 243-248, 299-308, and 412-420.

79 See Ezra ben Solomon, *Commentary on Song of Songs*, Chavell edition, Jerusalem 1994, p. 478

80 See Sandra Valabregue-Perry and Adam Afterman, 'The Utilization of Divine Names in the Temple Worship on the Day of Atonement', "*In This Way He is to Enter into the Holy*": *Holiness in Time and Man*, Jerusalem 2005, pp, 125-129 (Hebrew).

81 *Mishna Berakhoth*, 5, 1.

82 See Wolfson, *Through the Speculum that Shines*, pp. 289-306. Wolfson, *Language, Eros and Being*, pp. 122-123.

83 Afterman, *The Intention of Prayers*, pp. 80-82, 90-92, 111-112, 121; Idel, 'Some Remarks on Ritual and Mysticism', pp. 123-125; Haviva Pedaya, *Name and Sanctuary in the Teaching of R. Isaac the Blind: A Comparative Study in the Writings of the Earliest Kabbalists*, Jerusalem 2001, pp. 163-164 (Hebrew); Wolfson, *Through a Speculum That Shines*, p. 292; Idel, 'On R. Issac Sagi Nahor's Mystical Intention', pp. 31-38; Scholem, *Origins*, pp. 65, 100-102, 195-196, 306; Gershom Scholem, 'The concept', p. 168, 174; *Bahir*, Daniel Abrams edition, Los Angeles, sections 66, 77-78, 80-83, 87, 95.

84 Moshe Idel, 'Powers of Thought in Jewish Mysticism', *I Poeteri Della Mente E Gli Stati Di Coscienza*, Rome 2004, pp. 80-82.

85 Scholem, *Origins*, pp. 126-127, 271-289.

86 See, Elliot Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines*, pp. 297-300; Scholem, *Origins*, pp. 299-309, 412-430; Haviva Pedia, *Vision and Speech*, pp. 140-207.

87 Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, p.269.

88 See, Afterman, *The Intention of Prayers*, pp. 118-131.

89 On this theory as articulated in the *Bahir* see Afterman, *The Intention of Prayers*, pp. 73-74, 80-81, 90-91, 139-142, and 162; Scholem, *Origins*, pp. 100-102, 194-196.

90 See Daniel Abrams, *The Book Bahir: An Edition Based on the Earliest Manuscripts*, Los Angeles 1994, p. 72.

91 Afterman, *The Intention of Prayers*, pp. 118-131.

92 Afterman, *The Intention of Prayers*, pp. 117-118; Mark Verman, *The Books of Contemplation*, Albany 1992, p. 64, p. 75 note 122, p. 76 note 128; Scholem, *Origins*, p. 345 note 291.

93 Moshe Idel, *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 13-52.

94 This term is used by Moshe Idel in Idel, 'On Some Forms of Order in Kabbalah', Daat 50-52 (2003), pp. 45-49.

95 See *Commentary*, Afterman Edition, pp. 209-213.

96 See Afterman, *The Intention of Prayers*, pp. 52-56.

97 See Afterman, *The Intention of Prayers*, pp. 38-54.

98 On the linguistic continua see Moshe Idel, *Enchanted Chains*, pp. 25, 53-58; Afterman, *The Intention of Prayers*, p. 96.

99 See Moshe Idel, *Nocturnal Kabbalists*, Jerusalem 2006, (Hebrew), pp. 110-116.

100 The Anonymous Commentator analyzes the first 'name' of the '72 Letter Name': the name [Vav Hey Vav] that is used as a magical name: "The first name derived from the 72 letter name is 'vhv' and this name is capable of rescue and survival" (*Commentary*, Afterman edition, p. 211).

101 *Commentary*, Afterman Edition, pp. 209-211; Afterman, *The Intention of Prayers*, pp. 101-104.

102 See, Elliot Wolfson, *Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 200-201; Moshe Idel, *Absorbing Perfections*, pp. 321-326; Gershom Scholem, 'The Name of God and The Linguistic Theory of Kabbala', *Diogenes* 79 (1972), p. 78; Haviva Pedya, *Nahmanides*, pp. 173-178 (Hebrew); Afterman, *The Intention of Prayers*, pp. 10, 44.

103 See Afterman, *The Intention of Prayers*, pp. 35-57.

104 See Moshe Idel, *The Mystical Experience*, pp. 13-52.

105 Moshe Idel, *The Mystical Experience*, p. 19. Idel, *Hasidism*, pp. 57-58.

106 See Afterman, *The Intention of Prayers*, pp. 57-59.

107 See *Commentary*, Afterman Edition, p. 210 (with correction based on the apparatus on p. 295): "Each one of the letters of the Alphabet contains a great principle and secret and a hidden reason (content), and each of them is a great mountain which it is prevented to climb on". On the notion of letters appearing as mountains in Ecstatic Kabbalah, see Moshe Idel, *The Mystical Experience*, pp. 101-102, 156 note 128.

108 See Moshe Idel, *Hasidism*, pp. 153-156.

109 See Moshe Idel, *Enchanted Chains*, pp. 59-60

110 *Commentary*, Afterman Edition, p. 209.

111 Moshe Idel, *Hasidism*, P. 339 note 52.

112 See *Commentary*, Afterman Edition, pp. 209, 255, where the author quotes from earlier kabbalistic authors: Ezra ben Solomon's Commentary on the Talmud, printed in *Likutai Schkecha u Pea*, fol 4a, and Isaac the Blind's commentary on the Book of Creation, appendix in: Gershom Scholem, *The Kabbalah in Provence*, Jerusalem 1963 (Hebrew), pp. 10, 14.

113 See, Afterman, *The Intention of Prayers*, pp. 87-98; Idel, *Enchanted Chains*, p. 181.

114 Idel, *Hasidism*, p. 156.

115 See Idel, 'Ramon Lull', p. 172: 'at least on the basis of the commentary on the liturgy, the anonymous author has artificially superimposed an exegetical technique which does not clarify the text being commented upon'. Afterman, *The Intention of Prayers*, pp. 18-22, 62-64

116 Idel, *Hasidism*, pp. 155-156.

117 See, *Commentary*, Afterman Edition, p. 231,288; Afterman, *The Intention of Prayers*, p. 92.

118 See Ezra ben Solmon's Commentary on the Agadoth, *Likutai Sichecha Upea*, 17a.

119 See Moshe Idel, 'On R. Issac Sagi Nahor's Mystical Intention of the Eighteen Benedictions'; Idel, R. Menachem Recanati, pp. 131-141; Wolfson, *Through a speculum that shines*, pp. 288-306; Pedaya, *Vision and Speech*, pp. 140-162; Afterman, *The Intention of Prayers*, pp. 119-129.

120 See Idel, 'Ramon Lull', p. 172.

121 Idel, *Hasidism*, p. 57.

122 See *Sefer Yetzirah*, chapters 3-6.

123 On the special charts used in the letter permutation technique, see Afterman, *The Intention of prayers*, pp. 56-59; and the charts in the *Commentary*, Afterman Edition, pp. 213-215, 228-229.

124 *Commentary*, Afterman Edition, p. 285. For a detailed analysis of the ecstatic experience see Afterman, *The Intention of Prayers*, pp. 107, 194-198.

125 See Moshe Idel, *The Mystical Experience hin Abraham Abulafia*, pp. 86-100; Moshe Idel, *Enchanted Chains*, pp. 97-102. Afterman, *The Intention of Prayers*, pp. 194-198.

126 *Commentary*, Afterman Edition, p. 286.

127 Afterman, *The Intention of Prayers*, pp. 189-193.

128 *Commentary*, Afterman Edition, pp. 230-231 and p. 258; Afterman, *The Intention of Prayers*, pp. 93-94.

129 The second alphabet is referred to by the name 'Ancient Light,' and by cleaving to that light the soul "cleaves to the bright light and receives the holy spiritual power." *Commentary*, Afterman Edition, p. 256.

130 See Afterman, *The Intention of Prayers*, pp. 106-108.

131 Moshe Idel, 'The Voiced Text of the Torah', *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift Fur Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte* 68(1994), pp. 145-166; Idel, *Enchanted Chains*, pp. 196-211; Idel, 'Reification of Language in Jewish Mysticism', *Mysticism and Language*, ed. S. Katz, New York 1992, pp. 52-53; Idel, *Hasidism*, pp. 147, 160-170; Scholem, 'The Name of God', pp. 186-188.

132 See Afterman, *The Intention of Prayers*, pp. 112-113, 180-181, and 196-197.

133 See Haviva Pedya, *Vision and Speech*, pp. 47-90.

134 Like in the case of an angelic revelation discussed earlier.

135 *Commentary*, Afterman Edition, p. 286.

136 See Moshe Idel, *Nocturnal Kabbalists*, Jerusalem 2006, (Hebrew), pp. 15-36, 109-116. See also the earlier version in English, 'Nocturnal Kabbalists', *Archaves* 4 (2000), pp. 49-74.

137 Moshe Idel, *Nocturnal Kabbalists*, (Hebrew) pp. 20-23.

138 See Moshe Idel, *Natan ben Saadya Har'ar: Le Porte Della Giustizia-Saare Sedeq*, Milan 2001.

139 R. J. Zwi Werblowsky, *Joseph Karo: Lawyer and Mystic*, London 1962, pp. 38-39.

140 Moshe Idel, *Hasidism*, pp. 56-57.

141 Werblowsky, *Joseph Karo*, pp. 63-65.

142 Idel, *Absorbing Perfections*, p. 370-376.

143 Idel, *Enchanted Chains*, pp. 58-59; Werblowsky, *Joseph Karo*, pp. 66-80.

144 Idel, *Hasidism*, pp. 154-170.

145 Idel, *Hasidism*, p. 158.

146 Moses Cordovero, *Pardes Rimmonim*, Gate 32, ch. 3, fol 79a. Translated and quoted by Moshe Idel, *Enchanted Chains*, p. 183.

147 Idel, *Hasidism*, p. 339, note 52 and p. 350, Note 123; Afterman, *The Intention of Prayers*, pp. 66-67, 108.

148 See Moshe Idel, *Hasidism*, pp. 103-145; Moshe Idel, *Enchanted chains*, pp. 180-188, 196-202.

149 *Sefer Ha-Gilgulim*, Vilna 1866, fol. 60a-b. Translated and quoted in Moshe Idel, *Enchanted Chains*, p. 198; Werblowsky, *Joseph Karo*, p. 70.

150 See Werblowsky, *Joseph Karo*, pp. 61-62, p. 64 note 1; Moshe Idel, *Natan ben Saadya Har'ar: Le Porte Della Giustizia-Saare Sedeq*, pp. 300-301.

151 R. Jacob ben Asher, *Arbaah Turim, Orach Hyyim, Hilkhot Tefillah*, 98; Idel, *Hasidism*, pp. 64-65.

152 Idel, *Hasidism*, pp. 103-145; Idel, *Absorbing Perfections*, pp. 377-389.