

Chapter One

Techniques for Attaining Ecstasy

Abraham Abulafia's system differs from that of other medieval Jewish thinkers in presenting a detailed, systematic path enabling the seeker to attain to mystical experience. In this system various concepts used to describe reality by Arab and Jewish philosophers are transformed into subjects of personal experience by means of a suitable technique. This technique paves the way towards the zenith of mysticism: the total unity between man's intellect and the supreme Being, whether this is understood as God or as the Active Intellect. While other medieval thinkers as well saw this experience as their soul's desire, which they strove to attain with all their strength, we nevertheless do not find in philosophical works of this period any detailed, specific instructions as to the means of realizing such contact. The discussions by R. Abraham ibn Ezra and Maimonides and by their disciples concerning the nature of 'prophecy,' in which they saw the hallmark of this ideal experience are not to be read as concrete instructions, rooted in a specific path towards the realization of the desired goal. They rather describe a phenomenon from the distant past, namely, Biblical prophecy, without claiming—although not explicitly denying—that similar experiences are possible within their own generation.

In my opinion, the path propounded by Abulafia in his books is an adaptation of the Jewish mystical traditions which he had learned from the Ashkenazic world of Franco-Germany to the spiritual needs

of Jews educated within the philosophical schools of Spain and Italy, which primarily thought in Maimonidean concepts. To these were added elements originating in mystical techniques outside of Judaism—Greek-Orthodox hesychasm, Indian Yoga and possibly also Sufism. The last mentioned is, however, primarily visible in the writings of his students, rather than in Abulafia's own writings. We shall therefore begin by describing the elements of technique as they appear in the writings of Abulafia and his disciples. As recitation of the Divine Names was the main technique developed by this school, we shall begin our discussion with this topic.

1. The Ecstatic Character of the Recitation of the Divine Names

The recitation of the Name or Names of God as a means of attaining ecstasy is a widely-known mystical practice, playing a significant role in techniques known from India, Tibet and Japan, in Islam and in Orthodox Christianity. We shall not discuss these techniques in detail here; some will be mentioned again at the end of this chapter for purposes of comparison with the material found in Abulafia. Before discussing Abulafia's system, however, we shall examine the Jewish precedents for use of the Divine Names in order to achieve changes in human consciousness. In late antiquity, in *Hekalot Rabbati* we read:

When a man wishes to ascend to the Merkavah, he calls to Suryah, the Prince of the Presence, and adjures him one hundred and twelve times with the Name *ṭwṭrsy'y h'*, which is read *ṭwṭrsy'y zwrṭq ṭwṭrky'l ṭwṭgr 'srwyly'y zbwdy'l wzhrry'l ind'l šqhwyzy' dhyṭwryn w'dyrryryn Ha-Shem Elohei Yisra'el*. He may neither add nor subtract from these one hundred and twelve times—for were he to add or subtract he might lose his life—but he shall recite the names with his mouth, and the fingers of his hands shall count one hundred twelve times—and immediately he ascends to and rules the Merkavah.¹

A similar passage appears in another treatise belonging to this literature:

His mouth utters names and the fingers of his hands count one hundred eleven times; so shall whoever makes use of this aspect [i.e., technique], let his mouth utter names and the fingers of his hands count one hundred eleven times, and he must not subtract from these names, for if he adds or subtracts, he may lose his life.²

Both these passages would seem to imply that this refers to an established custom connected with the "descent to the Merkavah." Similar methods were used during the Gaonic period; in one of his responsa, R. Hai Gaon (939-1038) writes:

And likewise [regarding] a dream question: there were several elders and pious men who [lived] with us who knew them [the Names] and fasted for several days, neither eating meat nor drinking wine, [staying] in a pure place and praying and reciting great and well-known verses and [their] letters by number, and they went to sleep and saw wondrous dreams similar to a prophetic vision.³

In another responsa, R. Hai Gaon testifies that:

Many scholars thought that, when one who is distinguished by many qualities described in the books seeks to behold the Merkavah and the palaces of the angels on high, he must fast a number of days and place his head between his knees and whisper many hymns and songs whose texts are known from tradition. Then he will perceive within himself and in the chambers [of his heart] as if he saw the seven palaces with his own eyes, and as though he had entered one palace after another and seen what is there.⁴

The former passage from R. Hai Gaon refers to "great and well-known verses and letters by number"; G. Vajda contends that the sense of the phrase *letters by number* refers to groups of letters which equal one another in their numerical value (i.e., gematria).⁵ In my opinion, this refers to the use of the Divine Name of seventy-two letters: the "great and well-known verses" are probably the three verses, Exodus 14:19-21, each one of which contains seventy-two letters in the Hebrew original, i.e., "letters in number." The second quotation also seems to me to be connected with the use of Divine Names. In *Sefer ha-⁵Aruḳ* of R. Nathan b. Jehiel of Rome (1035–ca. 1110), we again read in the name of R. Hai Gaon, that "*Pardes* is that which is expounded in *Hekalot Rabbati* and *Hekalot Zutraṭi*; i.e., that they would perform certain actions, and pray in purity, and use the crown and see the *Hekalot* and the bands of angels in their position, and see how there was one chamber after another, and one within another."⁶ G. Scholem has suggested that the expression "use the crown" signifies the use of the Divine Name.⁷ A younger contemporary of R. Hai Gaon, Rabbenu Ḥanannel, many of whose ideas were borrowed from the works of R. Hai, likewise writes about the sages who entered *Pardes*, stating that they "prayed and

cleansed themselves of all impurity, and fasted and bathed themselves and became pure, and they used the names and gazed at the *Hekalot*."⁸ In Rashi's opinion, the ascent to heaven signifying the entry into *Pardes* was performed "by means of a name."⁹

Similar testimony appears among the Ashkenazic Hasidim; *Sefer ha-Hayyim*, attributed to R. Abraham ibn Ezra, presents an interesting description reflecting the widespread use of Names:

A vision (*mareh*) occurs when a man is awake and reflects upon the wonders of God, or when he does not reflect upon them, but pronounces the Holy Names or those of the angels, in order that he be shown [whatever] he wishes or be informed of a hidden matter—and the Holy Spirit then reveals itself to him, and he knows that he is a worm and that his flesh is like a garment, and he trembles and shakes from the power of the Holy Spirit, and is unable to stand it. Then that man stands up like one who is faint, and does not know where he is standing, nor does he see or hear or feel his body, but his soul sees and hears—and this is called vision and sight, and this is the matter of most prophecy.¹⁰

The disputant of the anonymous author of *Sefer ha-Hayyim*, R. Moses Taku (ca. 1235), describes a similar technique in a surviving fragment of his book, *Ketav Tammim*:

And two of those who were lacking in knowledge [among] the schismatics [thought] to make themselves prophets, and they were accustomed to recite Holy Names, and at times performed *kawwanot* during this recitation, and the soul was astounded, and the body fell down and was exhausted. But for such as these there is no barrier to the soul, and the soul becomes the principle thing [in their constitution] and sees afar; [but] after one hour, when the power of that Name which had been mentioned departs, he returns to what he was, with a confused mind.¹¹

The last two passages corroborate one another: during the procedures of reciting the Names, the body trembles violently, freeing the soul from its dependence upon the senses and creating a new form of consciousness. The process is in both cases compared to prophecy; one should note that prophecy is also mentioned, in a similar context, in R. Hai Gaon's previously quoted words: "similar to a prophetic vision."

R. Eleazar of Worms (ca. 1165–ca. 1230, the *Roqeah*), a contemporary of the above-mentioned anonymous author of *Sefer ha-Hayyim*, also knew the technique of recitation of the Names of

God—a usage likely to bring about results similar to those mentioned in the works of R. Hai Gaon or in *Sefer ha-Hayyim*. These are his comments in *Sefer ha-Hokmah*.¹²

*Abg ytz*¹³—these the six letters, each and every letter [standing for] a [Divine] name in its own right¹⁴: *A - Adiron*; *B - Bihariron* ; *G - Gihariron*; *Y - Yagbihayah*; *T - Talmiyah*; *Z - Zatnitayah*. By rights, one oughtn't to write everything or to vocalize them, lest those lacking in knowledge and those taken [sic—should be 'stricken'] in understanding and of negligible wisdom use them. However, Abraham our father passed on the name of impurity to the children of the concubines, in order that they not know the future by means of idolatry.¹⁵ Thus, some future things and spirits were revealed to us by means of the [Divine] attributes, through the pronunciation of the depths of the Names, in order to know the spirit of wisdom—thus far the *Sefer Yirqaḥ*.¹⁶

R. Eleazar of Worms' statements reflect an awareness of the antiquity of involvement in Divine Names and their recitation as a means of acquiring knowledge of the future or various wisdoms; the patriarch Abraham already knew these secrets and attempted to conceal them from the children of the concubines, and they were subsequently passed down from generation to generation until the Jewish medieval mystics. The expression, "pronunciation of the depths of the names," is particularly interesting in light of the fact that Abulafia—who explicitly admits to Eleazar's influence—was to see his own Kabbalah, that of Names, as the deepest path within the Jewish esoteric tradition. All of these quotations share the fact that they were formulated outside of the framework of the great speculative systems of the age—the Aristotelian and the Neoplatonic. Indeed, they reflect those types of approaches which Mircea Eliade, the scholar of comparative religions, would designate as "shamanistic."

Upon the emergence of philosophy, the use of Divine Names became transformed into a means for realizing forms of consciousness which transcend the ordinary frame of mind. R. Isaac ibn Latif (ca. 1210–ca. 1280) writes in *Ginzè ha-Melek*.¹⁷

The attainment of [knowledge of] the existence of God is the highest form, including three kinds of comprehension (*hasagah*),¹⁸ which are: conceptual comprehension, prophetic comprehension, and that comprehension which is hidden until the coming of the Righteous one, who shall teach [it]. The first kind is the comprehension of the existence of a first cause for all [things], by means of conclusive

proofs: this is speculative philosophical comprehension, grasped through knowledge of those things which exist apart from the First Cause. The second kind is comprehension that the First Cause acts by a simple will, designated as spiritual speech, and this is [known as] prophetic comprehension, grasped by means of the Divine influx emanated upon the prophets by knowledge of the secret of His glorious names, through the comprehension of each one of them and of their wholeness; this level is one to which the master of conceptual speculation has no entry. The third kind is comprehension of this knowledge by means of the Name which is completely and utterly hidden [and] described as within, and this is the essence and the highest of comprehensions, and it is this one which is reserved in the future for those who fear God and contemplate His name [Malachi 3:16].

The first kind of understanding mentioned here is that of natural theology based upon philosophy, which is the province of "scholars of speculation." The second is a combination of the approach of R. Solomon ibn Gabirol (ca. 1020–ca. 1057; known in Latin as "Avicembrol"), which asserts the identity of will and speech,¹⁹ and speculation upon the Divine Names. At the time, the explicit connection between prophecy and contemplation of the Divine Names was an unusual one and, in my opinion, is indicative of the penetration into Ibn Latif's thought of a view from one of Abulafia's sources. The third kind of comprehension mentioned above involves the hidden Name of God; this is an allusion to the Name ^hwy, which was considered the hidden Name of God both by the circle of *Sefer ha-ʿIyyun* and by Abulafia.²⁰ The similarity to Abulafia is particularly great, as both Abulafia and Ibn Latif believed that knowledge of the hidden Name of God will be realized in the times of Messiah. In *Ôzar ʿEden Ganuz*, Abulafia writes:²¹

What we have seen in some of the books of those sages²² concerning the division of the names is that one who has knowledge of their essence will have a great and wondrous superiority in Torah and wisdom and prophecy above all his contemporaries. These are the things which God has chosen above all else in the world of the soul; therefore, He has given them to the soul *in potentia*, and when they go from *potentia* to *actu*, the soul acts on another soul, so that the souls are renewed, and this knowledge shall save many souls from Sheol.

Three different approaches to the Divine Names appear in this passage: that true knowledge of the Names is liable to make one wise; that they are capable of bringing an individual to the level of

prophecy, i.e., to a mystical experience; and that they contain hidden powers to change reality by "renewal" of souls. All three of the approaches combined here—the informative, the magical, and the ecstatic—were present within the circle of Kabbalists whom Abulafia knew. R. Moses b. Simeon of Burgos, described by Abulafia as one of his students, writes:

It is truly known that those prophets who concentrated intensely in deed and in thought, more so than other people of their species, and whose pure thoughts cleaved to the Rock of the World with purity and great cleanliness—that the supernal Divine will intended to show miracles and wonders through them, to sanctify His great Name, and that they received an influx of the supernal inner emanation by virtue of the Divine names, to perform miraculous actions in physical things, working changes in nature.²³

These words of R. Moses of Burgos indicate that a technique for receiving prophetic flow by means of Divine Names was known in Spain in the second half of the thirteenth century. As we shall see below in the chapter on prophecy and music, Abulafia's approach to music was likewise known to the circle of R. Moses of Burgos.

Before we continue to analyze Abulafia's technique, I should like to mention one feature common to all the passages quoted above: namely, that they refer to the Divine Names as distinct linguistic units, which the one 'prophesying' must repeat several times. In these passages, the Name is not broken down into a multitude of units, which constantly change by means of different combinations and vocalizations. This technique of breaking-down or atomizing the Name is the most distinctive characteristic of Abulafia's technique; the Holy Name contains within itself 'scientific' readings of the structure of the world and its activities, thereby possessing both an 'informative' character and magical powers. It is reasonable to assume that both qualities are associated with the peculiar structure of the Name.²⁴ However, in Abulafia's view this structure must be destroyed in order to exploit the 'prophetic' potential of these 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. As Abulafia indicated in a number of places,²⁵ the Divine Name is inscribed upon man's soul, making it reasonable to assume that the process of letter-combination worked upon the Name is understood as occurring simultaneously in the human soul: "In the thoughts of your mind combine and be purified."²⁶ We shall now see

how the Divine Names are used as a means of attaining mystical experience or, as Abulafia writes,²⁷ "in the name my intellect found a ladder to ascend to the heights of vision."

Just as the letters themselves generally appear on three levels—writing, speech and thought²⁸—so do the Names of God; one must 'recite' the Names first in writing, then verbally, and finally mentally. The act of writing the combination of the letters of the Divine Names is mentioned in several places in the writings of Abulafia and his followers, only two of which we shall cite here: "Take the pen and the parchment and the ink, and write and combine Names"²⁹ and, in *Ša'arê Zedeq*,³⁰ "when midnight passed [over] me and the quill is in my hand and the paper on my knees."

The second level, that of verbal articulation, is more complex, including several components which must be analyzed separately: 1) the seeker of mystical experience must sing the letters and their vocalization (this point will be discussed separately in the chapter on music and prophecy); 2) he must maintain a fixed rhythm of breathing; 3) his head must be moved in accordance with the vocalization of the letter pronounced; 4) he must contemplate the internal structure of the human being. These last three procedures will be discussed below at greater length.

The third level involves the mental combination of the Divine Names: "Know that mental [letter-]combination performed in the heart brings forth a word, [the latter] being [the result of the letter-]combination, entirely mental and born from the sphere of the intellect,"³¹ A brief description of the movement from one level to another appears in *Ôzar Eden Ganuz*:³²

One must take the letters *ḥmš yhw*, first as instructed in the written form which is an external thing, to combine them, and afterwards one takes them from the book with their combinations, and transfers them to one's tongue and mouth, and pronounces them until one knows them by heart. Afterwards, he shall take them from his mouth [already] combined, and transfer them to his heart, and set his mind to understand what is shown him in every language that he knows, until nothing is left of them.

An explicit process of interiorization is presented here: the letters of the Divine Name undergo a process of 'purification' by which they are transformed from tangible letters, existing outside of the intellect, into intellectual letters, existing in the heart. This process is one of construction of the intellect, beginning with sensibilia and ending in intelligibilia. Thus, through the combination of the letters on all three

levels, one may arrive at the highest level of consciousness: prophecy, or mystical experience. Several passages will be cited below indicating that this technique allows a 'prophet' to achieve unique spiritual attainments. The Castilian Kabbalist R. Isaac b. Solomon ibn Abi Sahula, a contemporary of Abulafia, writes: "It is known that when he received this verse ('I am that I am' [Ex. 3:14]), Moses our teacher, of blessed memory, attained the very essence of wisdom and the highest level in the renewal of miracles and wonders, by the combination of its letters."³³ The process of attaining wisdom is described in impressive terms in Abulafia's *Ḥayyê ha-Nefesh*:

And begin by combining this name, namely, *YHWH*, at the beginning alone, and examine all its combinations and move it and turn it about like a wheel returning around, front and back, like a scroll, and do not let it rest, but when you see its matter strengthened because of the great motion, because of the fear of confusion of your imagination and the rolling about of your thoughts, and when you let it rest, return to it and ask [it] until there shall come to your hand a word of wisdom from it, do not abandon it. Afterwards go on to the second one from it, *Adonay*, and ask of it its foundation [*yesodo*] and it will reveal to you its secret [*sodo*]. And then you will apprehend its matter in the truth of its language. Then join and combine the two of them [*YHWH* and *Adonay*], and study them and ask them, and they will reveal to you the secrets of wisdom, and afterwards combine this which is, namely, *El Šadday*, which is tantamount to the Name [*El Šadday* = 345 = *ha-Šem*], and it will also come in your portion. Afterwards combine *Elohim*, and it will also grant you wisdom, and then combine the four of them, and find the miracles of the Perfect One [i.e., God], which are miracles of wisdom.³⁴

From this passage, as well as from the one cited above from *Ôzar 'Eden Ganuz*, we learn that one must combine the letters of a given Name, and then combine them in turn with the combinations of the letters of another Name. This activity is referred to by Abulafia by the term *Ma'aseh Merkavah*, i.e., the act of combining [*harkavah*] the letters of one Name in another, which brings about the receiving of metaphysical knowledge, i.e., the standard meaning of *Ma'aseh Merkavah* in Abulafian Kabbalah. In *Sefer ha-Ôt*, p. 75, we read:

One who concentrates upon the Ineffable Name which is combined in twelve ways—six of them inverted—which causes the grandeur of Israel, shall rejoice in it, and the joy and happiness and gladness will combine in the heart of each one who seeks the Name, in the Name *Yh'whdyhnhw Eloha El Šadday YHWH Zewaot*.

The first and second of these Names are combinations of one Name within another: *YHWH - ADNY - YHWH - YHWH*.³⁵

2. Combinations of Letters of the Divine Names

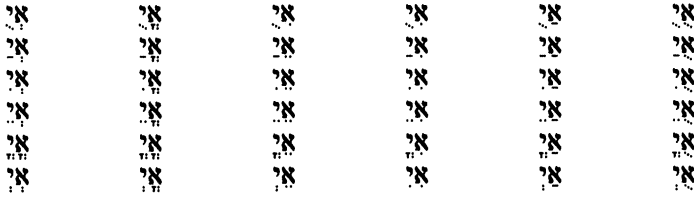
The two Divine Names most frequently used by Abulafia in letter-combination are the Name of seventy-two letters, whose combinations are mostly described in *Ḥayyê ha-‘Olam ha-Ba*, and the Tetragrammaton (the Name of Four Letters or the “Ineffable Name”), details of whose combinations are discussed in *Ôr ha-Sekel*. We shall begin our discussion with the latter.

The method of combination expounded in *Ôr ha-Sekel* is exemplified by the use of the letter *Aleph*, which is combined in turn with each of the letters of the Tetragrammaton, so that one arrives at four combinations, as follows: *’y’h’w’h*. Each of these units is in turn vocalized by every possible permutation of the five vowels, *ḥolam, qamaz, ḥiriq, zere, qubuz*, in the sequence of both *’y* and *y^c* and so on. One thereby derives four tables, each containing fifty vocalized combinations. The following is an example of one of these tables:³⁶

א	א	א	א	א	א	א	א	א	א
א	א	א	א	א	א	א	א	א	א
א	א	א	א	א	א	א	א	א	א
א	א	א	א	א	א	א	א	א	א
א	א	א	א	א	א	א	א	א	א

This table, as we have mentioned, is one of four in which the letter *aleph* is combined with the four letters of the Divine Names. But, as Abulafia states in the book, it is not only by chance that he ‘chose’ this form of combination as an example; in his view, the letter *Aleph* constitutes part of the hidden Divine Name, *’hw’y*.³⁷ However, this explanation seems a kind of exegesis of material which he already

found in his earlier sources. In one of the works of R. Eleazar of Worms (ca. 1165–ca. 1230), we find a combination-technique quite similar to that of Abulafia; in this technique, the letter *Aleph* is also combined with each of the four letters of the Tetragrammaton, each unit being vocalized by two vowels. We shall cite one example:³⁸



The main difference between Abulafia's table and R. Eleazar's lies in the total number of vowels used: rather than five vowels,³⁹ as in Abulafia, in R. Eleazar there are six, by means of the addition of the *šewa*. The total number of combinations thereby increases geometrically. In my opinion, Abulafia adapted an Ashkenazic system of combination to the Sephardic system of vocalization, based upon five major vowels; the *šewa*, counted as a vowel by the Ashkenazim, disappeared, thereby decreasing the total number of vocalized combinations. Abulafia, for whom this system of combination was exemplified by the use of the letter *Aleph* and the other letters of the Ineffable Name, saw this as an allusion to his view that the Name *ḥwy* is the Hidden Name of God.

Whereas the system described above is based upon a square, each of whose sides contains a different combination of the letters of the Divine Name, the system found in *Ḥayyê ha-'Olam ha-Ba* is based upon the circle. The Name of seventy-two letters is recited while contemplating circles, each of which contains nine letters out of the 216 letters of the Name; one thereby arrives at a system of twenty-four circles, containing *in toto* all in all the Name of seventy-two letters. It seems to me that the source of this system can also be identified; in the longer commentary to Exodus by R. Abraham ibn Ezra (1089–1164), the author describes the mathematical qualities of the letters constituting the Ineffable Name, and thereafter writes that "all of the numbers are nine from one direction, and ten from the other direction. If one writes the nine in a circle, and doubles over the end

with every number, one will find the units on the left side, and the tens, which are like units, on the right side."⁴⁰ It seems unlikely to assume that Abulafia based his system in *Ḥayyê ha-ʿOlam ha-Ba* upon circles of nine letters by mere chance, without any relation to the above quotation from Ibn Ezra's commentary.⁴¹ As was the case in the adaptation of R. Eleazar of Worms' system of combination to the Sephardic system of grammar, here Abulafia incorporated the idea of the nine-letter number into a circle with the seventy-two letter Name. It is worth mentioning that the nine letters within a circle reappear in Abulafia's *Sefer ha-Haftarah*,⁴² where they appear within the circle of the letters of the forty-two letter Name, while preserving the number nine. We should also note that the use of concentric circles in order to combine the letters of various Divine Names likewise appears in other works of Abulafia, such as *Imrê Šefer*⁴³ and *Gan Na'ul*.⁴⁴ It is also interesting to note that circles including Divine Names appear in Islam as well, as one learns from a study by G. Anawati,⁴⁵ although I have not yet found significant points of contact between the use of the circle in Abulafia and in the Arabic sources.

Techniques for Recitation of the Names

As we have seen above, the procedure for reciting the Name contained a number of elements, each of which will now be enumerated separately.

A. *Breathing*

Any technique in which the pronunciation of letters occupies a central place must attach importance to proper principles of breathing. Discussions of breathing appear in Yoga, in Sufism and in Hesychasm, albeit with different emphases.⁴⁶ Abulafia's writings contain brief statements about and allusions to a technique of breathing to be practiced by one who pronounces the Ineffable Name. We shall attempt here to analyze the fragmentary material which has come down to us. The most significant of these passages appears in *Mafteah ha-Šemot*,⁴⁷ where it states:

One must take each one of the letters [of the Tetragrammaton] and wave it with the movements of his long breath (!) so that one does not breathe between two letters, but rather one long breath, for however long he can stand it, and afterwards rest for the length of one breath. He shall do the same with each and every letter, until

there will be two breaths in each letter: one for pausing when he enunciates the vowel of each letter, and one for resting between each letter. It is known to all that every single breath of one's nostrils is composed of taking in of the air from outside, that is, *mi-ba''r le-ga''w* [from outside to inside], whose secrets allude to the attribute of *Gevurah* and its nature, by which a man is known as *gibbor* [mighty]—that is, the word *ga''w ba''r* [a rearrangement of the consonants of the word *gibbor*]—for his strength by which he conquers his Urge.⁴⁸ As in the secret of *abg ytz qr' s'n* with *ygl pza šqw zyt*,⁴⁹ composed of the emission of breath from within to outside, and this second composition is from *g''w* to *b''r*.

This passage combines together two significant elements: the technical description of breathing, and the theoretical discussion of the meaning of breathing. The technical aspect includes three different elements, comprising one unit: 1) the intake of air, namely, breathing; 2) the emission of air while pronouncing the letter and its vowel; 3) the pause between one breath and the next. In his epistle *Ševa' Netivot ha-Torah*, p. 7, Abulafia refers to "the secret of the Name and the vocalization of some of its letters, their knowledge, and the resting breath, the interrupting [breath] and the extending [breath]." Comparison of the three terms used in *Sefer Mafteah ha-Šemot* indicates that the resting breath is parallel to the phrase, "he shall rest for the length of one breath"; the extending breath parallels the intake of air before pronouncing a letter, "so that he not breathe between two letters, but takes one long breath, as much as he is able to stand in length"; while the interrupting breath is parallel to the emission of air which accompanies the pronunciation of the letter, "one for pausing, as at the time of pronouncing the vowel of that letter." Abulafia refers to three breaths elsewhere as well,⁵⁰ but only for purposes of *gematria*, without any technical interpretation likely to assist in the understanding of his approach.

The division of the breathing process into three stages is not new; it already appears in Yoga, in which the process of breathing is divided into *puraka*, the intake of breath; *recaka*, the emission of breath; and *kumbhaka*, the retention of air.⁵¹ True, there is no exact parallel between the retention of breath in Yoga, whose aim is to use up the oxygen present in the air one breathes by means of slight physical effort, to the state of rest mentioned by Abulafia, which follows the emission of breath. It may be that the word 'halt,' which refers to the holding of the air in order to pronounce the letter of the Divine Name, is a parallel to the halt practiced in Yoga, but we cannot state this with any certainty.⁵² In both systems, one arrives at an extremely slow pace of breathing, which is a goal in and of itself in

Yoga, and in practice also in Abulafia. Without stating so directly, he emphasizes the need for a long period of emission, on the one hand, and the maximum exploitation of the air held in the lungs, on the other: "that he should not breath between two letters except for one long breath, for so long as he is able to stand." Indeed, in *Pe^ḥulat ha-Yezirah*, he states that "one should pronounce one letter of the Name with a great voice, in one breath, until he exhausts his breath from breathing out."⁵³ In *Ôr ha-Sekel*, he similarly states:

When he begins to pronounce one letter with a given vocalization, one should remember that it alludes to the secret of the unity, so do not extend it more than the length of one breath and do not interrupt it during that breath at all until you complete its expression. And extend that [particular] breath in accordance with the strength of the length of one breath, as much as you are able to extend it.⁵⁴

As we have seen, one ought to extend both the breath and its emission. The same is not true, however, for the pause between breaths; *Mafteah ha-Šemot* speaks of the pause as equalling the length of one breath, while in *Ôr ha-Sekel* there is a slight variation:⁵⁵

Do not separate between one breath and the breath of the letter, but cling to it, whether one long breath or a short one. . . . But between the letter of the Name and the *Aleph*, in the direct ones, or between the *Aleph* and the letter of the Name, in the inverted ones,⁵⁶ you may take two breaths—no more—without pronouncing anything. At the end of each column, you may take five breaths, and no more, but you may also breathe less than five breaths.

Hayyê ha-^ḥOlam ha-Ba gives a different version, which allows for the possibility that one may take three breaths between the pronunciation of each letter.⁵⁷

Another rule entailed in the art of pronouncing the Names refers to the prohibition against pronouncing the letters while breathing in: "and it is possible that the speaker [i.e., the person who recites] may breathe, and will not speak with his lips between the emission of air and its intake, but he is not allowed to speak with his mouth and take in the breath together,⁵⁸ but that the speech and the emission of air may occur together."⁵⁹

Turning to the theoretical significance of breathing, we find that the process of intake and emission of air is alluded to in the afore-cited passage from *Mafteah ha-Šemot* by the words *mi-ba'r le-ga''w*, which symbolize the attribute of *Gevurah* within man—that is, his ability to

overcome his evil Urge. For this reason, man pronounces the Name of forty-two letters⁶⁰ incorporating the expression *qera^c satan* ["cut off Satan"] which corresponds, in my opinion, to "conquering his Urge." The ability to overcome corporeality, tantamount to the Evil Urge and to Satan, by means of breathing is likewise alluded to in another formulation from *Ḥayyê ha-^cOlam ha-Ba*:

And you may yet again, if you wish, breathe three breaths which are one. . . . And immediately the Satan will die, for they were enemies to the perceptions which are in the blood of man, and the blood is the animal [attribute]. But the secret of the one breath is *Šadday*—[i.e.,] *Šin Dalet Yod*—and that is the second seal . . . which killed the demons with the seal of the Messiah, which kills the evil blood, and also kills the evil attribute, so it immediately dies by the hand by the strength of those three breaths.⁶¹

The function of the three breaths which are one is that, as they constitute one unit connected with the pronunciation of one letter, they may destroy or murder the Satan and the imagination, i.e., the adverse perceptions inherent in the blood of man, in the evil blood, etc. On the other hand, the breath is the means of strengthening the spiritual element in man: the "precious hand," *Šadday*, the seal of Messiah.⁶² Elsewhere in the same work, Abulafia writes about:

. . . eighteen breaths, which will add to you years of life, which are the life [in gematria: 18] of the soul, from the two creatures in which there is the life of the soul. And there are in you two nostrils in which they are mingled, and understand this, for they are the nostrils of the soul, whose secret is the two cherubim, and they are two chariots which force the Shekhinah to dwell on earth and to speak with man.⁶³

This passage suggests the ability of the breath to bring about a mystical experience, and through that the survival of the soul.⁶⁴ The two aspects of breath—that of overcoming corporeality and of strengthening spirituality—are symbolized by the two angels, Gabriel and Michael: "from his two nostrils one may recognize the two archangels, of whom it is said that the names of all the angels change in accordance with their work and their deeds and their activities,⁶⁵ [i.e.,] Michael and Gabriel."⁶⁶ In Abulafia, Michael is identified with the Active Intellect or Metatron, while Gabriel is identified with Sandalphon, to whom is encharged the corporeal realm.⁶⁷ In two other passages, we learn of the service and knowledge of God with the help of breathing: "Remember *Yah* and his activities, for He is the

one who seals and makes an impress—know *Yah* through your breath.⁶⁸ “All that has breath shall praise *Yah*, Hallelujah⁶⁹ and it is said,⁷⁰ ‘with each and every breath that is within you praise God.’”⁷¹

In conclusion, we must mention the connection between breathing and the recitation of the Name as it appears in *Rešit Hokmah*.⁷² The sixteenth century Safedian Kabbalist, R. Elijah de Vidas, quotes therein a certain book not mentioned by title, as follows:

There are 1080 divisions to an hour, corresponding to which the Tetragrammaton is combined and permuted in various combinations of vocalizations of the alphabet, in a total of 1080 combinations. These 1080 combinations correspond to the 1080 breaths which a man breathes, and to each breath there corresponds one letter of the name of four letters, which gives vitality to that breath. And this is alluded to in,⁷³ “For by every thing which comes from the mouth of God may man live.” As God gives breath and life, it is appropriate that all his [man’s] breaths be devoted to the service of the Creator, and to this our sages referred in Genesis Rabba [in their interpretation of] the phrase “all that has breath shall praise *Yah*.” [Ps. 150:6]

The connection between the act of breathing and the recitation of the 1080 combinations of the Ineffable Name, with all possible vocalizations,⁷⁴ is made here, to the best of my knowledge, for the first time. It is based upon R. Eleazar of Worms’ *Eser Hawayot* and on the quotation from *Ôr ha-Sekel*, both of which appear in *Pardes Rimmonim*,⁷⁵ the major work of de Vidas’ master, R. Moses Cordovero. From a practical viewpoint, it is difficult to imagine that one may breathe 1080 times in one hour, particularly when one also needs to pronounce letters; in any event, such a pace would seem to contradict Abulafia’s whole approach. However, the very occurrence of the breathing technique together with the pronunciation of letters of the Divine Name evinces the practice of an Abulafian-like technique among the Safedian Kabbalists, a fact further strengthened by other evidence.

B. *Shaking of One’s Head*

In Abulafia, the act of pronouncing the letters is accompanied by motions of the head corresponding to the vowels of the letters pronounced. A detailed description of this practice appears in *Ḥayyê ha-‘Olam ha-Ba*,⁷⁶ quoted here *in extenso*:

After you begin to pronounce the letter, begin to move your heart and head: your heart by your intellection, because it is an inner [organ], and your head itself, because it is external. And move your head in the form of the vowel [-point] of the letter which you are pronouncing. This is the manner of the form of the motion: know that the vocalization which is above is called *Holam*, and that alone is marked above the letter, but the other four vowel sounds are below the letter. And that [vowel] which is above the letter *Aleph*, which you pronounce with the letter *Kaf* or *Qof*: do not in the beginning incline your head either to the right or the left, nor below or above at all, but let your head be set evenly, as if it were in a scale [i.e., balanced], in the manner in which you would speak with another person of the same height as yourself, face to face. Thus, when you extend the vowel of the letter in its pronunciation, move your head up towards the heavens, and close your eyes and open your mouth and let your words shine,⁷⁷ and clear your throat of all spittle so that it not interfere with the pronunciation of the letter in your mouth, and in accord with the length of your breath shall be the upper movement, until you interrupt the breathing together with the movement of your head. And if after uttering [the letter] there is a moment left to complete the breath, do not lower your head until you complete everything.

The process described here in detail is also alluded to briefly in *Sefer Or ha-Sekel*.⁷⁸


And your head is crowned with *tefillin*, facing east, for from there light emerges to the world, and [from] there you may move your head towards five directions. And on [the vowel] *holam* begin from the center of the east, and purify your thoughts, and lift your head with the breath bit by bit until it is complete, and your head shall be facing up. And after this is completed bow down to the earth once . . . and on [the vowel] *zerê* move your head from left to right, and on *qamaz* from right to left.

As one can clearly see, the head motions are simply attempts to imitate the written form of the vowel sounds, an attempt repeated in the use of music, where the vocalization is transformed into musical notes, as we shall see in the next chapter.

C. The Hands

We find a description in *Sefer ha-Hešeq* of the hand movements to be performed during the pronunciation of the Divine Names.⁷⁹

This description is unique in Abulafia's extant works and it reflects the position of the hands during the Priestly Blessing:

"Let my prayer be acceptable as incense, the offerings of my hands as sweet meal-offerings."⁸⁰ And lift your eyes up to the heaven, and lift your left and right hands, like the lifting up of hands of the *kohen*, who divides his fingers, five on one side and five on the other, with two on the right and two on the left [in each hand], the two smallest fingers, *qemizah* and *zeret* (i.e., the little finger and the ring finger) joined together, and these two next to them also joined. And divide between them with the thumb stuck out by itself, and your hands shall also be in this form— —and your tongue shall separate between them, like a balance stone . . . [here details of the pronunciation are given] . . . and immediately put down your hands, which you lifted before God with ease, in the image of the ten Sefirot from the right, like the image of the ten fingers, five over against five, to the right and left. And you have switched the powers and made meritorious the one who was guilty; therefore place your left hand on your heart, spread out with the five fingers, and above it place your right hand, outstretched with its five fingers, to indicate that the meritorious one has overcome him . . . and if you wish to lift your hands for a longer period of time, you are allowed to do so; but if not, you need not worry.

Thus far, we have described those actions which one is to perform while pronouncing the letters. A separate chapter will be devoted to the song or "melody," as Abulafia calls the pronunciation of the letters in different tones. We shall now turn to the third stage of the pronunciation of the Divine Name, namely, the inner activities performed in the "the heart," that is, with the powers of the soul: the intellect and the imagination.

4. The Inner Pronunciation

From the mid-thirteenth century, there appears in Hebrew mystical literature a technique, one of whose components is the imagining of the letters of the Divine Names. Evidence of such a practice appears in R. Isaac Ibn Latif, who enumerates three different stages of contemplation of the letters of the Divine Name. In his *Zurat ha-^cOlam*, which was apparently written at the end of the second third of the thirteenth century, he writes:⁸¹

The desired end is to strip the Name of [its] matter and to imagine

it in your mind, although it is impossible for the imagination to depict it without some physical image, because the imagination is not separate from the *sensibilia*, and most of what is attained by the activity of the imagination is performed through the contemplation of the shape of the letters and their forms and number. And it must also be understood that its letters [i.e., those of the Divine Name] are that which make it move and speak, and that the other letters move about, but one cannot image them in speech except for the letters of the Name, even though they do not become mingled and do not change their places in the squaring of the numbers. . . . And it is known to anyone who is wise of heart that when the imagination goes away, so do the letters. Therefore, the straightforward intellect must strip this Name of simple matter, and imagine it in the form of pure mind.

The subject of this passage is the letters of the Divine Name, ³*hwy*, which enliven speech and shoe numerical counterparts (i.e., 1, 5, 6, 10) each retain their final digit when they are squared.⁸² According to Ibn Latif, there are three levels of contemplation of these letters: the material, the imaginative, and the intellective. The second stage is to be understood, in my opinion, as the depicting of the letters in the power of the imagination, without the physical presence of the written letters. These imaginary letters are thereby transformed into an object of contemplation of the intellect just as, according to the Aristotelian theory of knowledge, an imaginary form is the material for intellectual activity.

Ibn Latif's words indicate that the technique which he discusses at length in several places was already in use some time before its occurrence in Abulafia. In the latter's *Ḥayyê ha-'Olam ha-Ba*, we read:

Prepare your true thoughts to imagine the Name, may He be Blessed, and with it the supernal angels. And visualize them in your heart as if they are human beings standing or sitting around you, and you are among them like a messenger. . . . And after you have imagined this entirely, prepare your mind and your heart to understand the thoughts whose matters are to be brought to you by the letters you have thought of in your heart.⁸³

It becomes clear several pages later that this refers to the letters of the Ineffable Name, of which it is said that they are the ones portrayed "and he shall close his eyes and intend in his thought, and the first intention is that he is to imagine that there are four camps of the Indwelling, or a Tabernacle around them, and four beautiful flags in round forms surrounding the fifth camp."⁸⁴ Following this

passage, Abulafia describes the image that is to be imagined: the seventy-two letters Name in the center, with the four Names of four letters in the four corners of the square. Next to the seventy-two letter Name is written thirty-two [probably an allusion to the thirty-two *netivot* mentioned in *Sefer Yezirah*]; this is an allusion to the gematria: $72+32=104=4 \times 26$ [26 is the gematria of the Tetragrammaton].

One also ought to note here the parallels to the techniques of imagining in the writings of other Kabbalists. Abulafia's younger contemporary, R. Joseph b. Shalom Ashkenazi, cites an extremely interesting quotation in the name of "the philosophers." This quotation, to be discussed below, is important in a number of different respects; I shall confine myself here to mentioning just one of them. The unidentified philosophers cited, who were presumably contemporaries or predecessors of Abulafia, proposed a technique of contemplation quite similar in several respects to that contained in the above quotations from Abulafia, though not identical with it. The following is the text of the passage:⁸⁵

The philosophers have already written on the issue of prophecy, saving that it is not improbable that there will be a person to whom things will appear in his imaginative faculty comparable to that which appears to the imaginative faculty in a dream. All this [could take place] while someone is awake, and all his senses are obliterated, as the letters of the Divine Name [stand] in front of his eyes, in the gathered colours. Sometimes he will hear a voice,⁸⁶ a wind, a speech, a thunder and a noise with all the organs of his hearing sense, and he will see with his imaginative faculty with all the organs of sight, and he will smell with all the organs of smell, and he will taste with all the organs of taste, and he will touch with all the organs of touch, and he will walk and levitate. All this while the holy letters are in front of his eyes, and its colours are covering it; this⁸⁷ is the sleep of prophecy.

The similarity of the content of this quotation to Abulafia's teaching is interesting, despite the fact that he is clearly not the author quoted here; the contemplation of the letters of the Divine Name as a technique for bringing about 'prophecy' is clearly parallel to Abulafia's own path. Moreover, the quotation of these words in the name of "the philosophers," despite the fact that it is mingled with ideas from *Sefer Yezirah*, fits the mixture of Maimonidean philosophy and *Sefer Yezirah* mysticism characteristic of Abulafia's own writings. Nevertheless, the presence here of a certain motif which is definitively rejected by Abulafia—i.e., "and its colors are enwrapped in it"⁸⁸—makes it difficult for us to identify this passage with any

likelihood as one of the "lost" writings of Abulafia. Yet it is precisely this conclusion, taken together with the quotation from Ibn Latif, which is significant for our understanding of the development of the teaching of this ecstatic Kabbalist. Abulafia did not create a new theory, but developed an already existing tendency, albeit one in some respects rather different from that expressed in his works.

R. Isaac of Acre, an ecstatic Kabbalist of the late thirteenth and early fourteenth century, saw the act of imagining of the letters composing the name of God as a means of achieving the life of the world to come. These are his words in *Me'irat 'Enayim*:⁸⁹

I, Isaac the young, the son of Samuel, of Acre, may it speedily be rebuilt, say [as follows], to the elite as well as to the vulgus: that whoever wishes to know the secret of attaching one's soul above and cleaving one's thought to Almighty God, so that one may acquire the World to Come with that same constant thought, without interruption, and God will always be with him, in this [world] and the next [do as follows]: Let him place before his eyes and his thought the letters of the Ineffable Name, as if they are written before him in a book, in Assyriac writing, and let him visualize each letter before his eyes as great, without limits. I mean by this to say that when you envision the letters of the Ineffable Name before your eyes, [imaginatively] put your mind's eye on them but the thought of your heart be on the Infinite [*Ein Sof*], [the envisioning and the thought] both concomitantly. And this is the true cleaving of which Scripture said, "to cleave to Him."⁹⁰ "and to Him shall you cleave,"⁹¹ "and you who cleave,"⁹² etc. And so long as the soul of man cleaves to the Name, may He be blessed, no evil shall befall you, and you shall come to no error in any matter, either intellective or sensory, and you will not fall into the hand of chance, for so long as one is cleaving to God, may He be blessed, he is above all chance and rules over them.

Another sentence in the same work describes the technique of imagination:

I, Isaac . . . of Acre, have come to write a tradition pertaining to the intention of the punctuation of the Holy Name . . . of which whosoever knows it will think in his heart of its vocalization as if it is vocalized before him.⁹³

In a magical passage appearing in the manuscripts, the idea of imagination appears as follows: "Another way. *YHWH* with the vocalization of *devareka*. Imagine in your mind the letters of the Ineffable Name before your eyes, in a circle colored red as fire, and

your thought shall perform much. From Rabbi Tanhum."⁹⁴ The expression, "your mind shall perform much," and the end of the previous passage from *Me'irat 'Enayim*, suggest an explicitly magical direction, conveying a technique, the main element of which is the attainment of cleaving to God (*devequt*).⁹⁵ It may be that R. Isaac of Acre combined Abulafia's teaching with a magical understanding of the imagining of the letters of God's Name which also was practiced in the thirteenth century.

In conclusion, it is worthwhile citing a few comments concerning the imagining of the letters from MS. Sasson 290, p. 648:

You may picture the Ineffable Name like the white flame of the candle, in absolute whiteness, and the light in your looking at the candle, and even when there is no candle, remember the flame, and there you may see and look at the light, from the pure white light. And one must always imagine that you are a soul without a body, and the soul is the light, and you are always within the above-mentioned flames, by way of the pure clouds. And strive to be pure and full, and if it is daytime wearing *zizit* and *tefillin* and the ring upon your finger, and at night as well the ring upon your finger. And be accustomed to cleanliness in that house where you stand in the sanctuary of God, within His precious, holy and pure names.

I have discussed the visualization of the Divine Names at some length, because it concerns an extremely widespread technique, known to a number of different Kabbalists. However, there is one point which is critical for the understanding of Abulafia's doctrine: what he assumes to be a means, in the passages we have cited from *Hayyê ha-'Olam ha-Ba*, become (in other passages of his to be discussed in the third chapter) the goal. The letters of the Divine Name are not only a component of the method of cleaving to God; the process of imagining the letters in the first stage precedes the vision of the letters in the final stage of the ecstatic process.⁹⁶ This distinction between technique and goal is not clear in other authors, so that in their descriptions the imagining of the letters is transformed into immediate cleaving to them. Finally, let us note that the technique of imagining already appears in the early thirteenth century mystic Ibn Arabi.⁹⁷

Another interesting element of Abulafia's technique of contemplation appears in *Hayyê ha-'Olam ha-Ba*. In several places there, he refers to a technique of recitation and contemplation connected to the three main organs of the body: the head, the belly, and the torso:

And he should again pronounce the head of the end, which is *L*

[lamed], and imagine as if you are gazing at your belly, and do not breath between pronouncing the place of your organ and pronouncing that letter which rules over that organ.⁹⁸

Elsewhere in the same work we read:

Again, go and mention the head of the middle of the Name. You already know that you ought to pronounce [the names of] the organs from what I have said, that there are so to speak three spots on your head: the inside, which is the head of the head; the middle, which is the inside of the head; and the behind, which is the end of the head. And likewise imagine as if there are three points on your torso, which is the place of your heart: the head, which is the center of the middle; the middle, which is the middle of the middle, which is but one point in its center; and the behind, which is the end of the end. And likewise imagine that there are three points in your belly: the front, which is the point of your navel, the head of the end; the middle, which is the point of your entrails; the middle of the end, and behind, which is the point of the end of your spine, which is the place of the kidneys where the spinal cord is completed, the end of the end.⁹⁹

This passage is based upon the pronunciation of the letters of the Name of seventy-two letters, consisting of units of three letters, each three of which constitute one column. A unit consists of a beginning, the first letter; a middle, the second letter; and an end, the final letter. It follows from this that, by reciting a column of nine letters pertaining to the bodily organs, one thereby refers to the human head, torso, and belly. An error in the recitation of one letter is likely to bring about a change in one of the organs of the body, for which reason the name of seventy-two letters also includes the combination *Mum* [defect].¹⁰⁰

What are the sources of this technique? The reference to the navel leads G. Scholem to think that there is a connection between Abulafia and the school of hesychasm, which practiced the contemplation of one's navel.¹⁰¹ But it seems to me that precisely that opinion which he sees as "one which is difficult to imagine" is the correct one; namely, that this technique came about through an internal development, based upon study of *Sefer Yezirah*. In *Ḥayyê ha-ʿOlam ha-Ba*, it states:

Know that there are within man three matters created by the three pillars [i.e., primary letters], *ʾmš*, combined with *yhw*, and these are the angels of fire, wind and water. Behold, the head is created by three forms of fire, corresponding to *taʿq* [corresponding to] fire,

and the belly [is created of] water, corresponding to $s^c d$ [corresponding to] water, and the torso, created from the wind, corresponding to tm^d [corresponding to] wind.¹⁰²

This division of the human body originates in *Sefer Yezirah* iii, 4, where it states "[There are] three pillars [called] $mš$ in the soul: fire, water and wind. The head is created from fire, the belly is created from water, and the torso, which is created from wind, mediates between them." Abulafia added a new element to this division, occurring already in *Baraita de-Mazalot*,¹⁰³ in which the astrological signs are divided into three groups, each element belonging to another group: $\text{ḥ}^q = \text{ṭaleh}$, *Aryeh*, *Qešet* (i.e., Aries, Leo, Sagittarius) = fire; $tm^d = \text{Te'omim}$, *Moznayim*, *Gedi* (i.e., Gemini, Libra, Capricorn) = wind; $sa^ad = \text{Sartan}$, Aqrav , *Deli* (i.e., Cancer, Scorpio, Aquarius) = water. Through this, there came about the view that the three parts of the human body are likewise connected to the three letters.

Abulafia used the letters of the Name of seventy-two letters rather than the initials of the names of the constellations. Viewed in this way, it is clear that according to his approach the navel is no more than one of the nine points of the human body, and that there is no special significance to its contemplation. It is worth mentioning here the magical character of the technique of pronouncing the name of the organ and the letter appointed over it. In *Ḥayyê ha-^cOlam ha-Ba*, Abulafia writes:

Head and belly and torso, that is, the head, beginning inside the end. The "head" is the first point that you imagine in it; the "end" is the purpose of the head, and is like a tail to it, and the belly is likewise like a tail to the head, and is the image of the torso, wherein the heart is located. And the image that you ought to imagine at the time of pronunciation, in order to change within that image the nature of [one] part of the bodies, alone or with others, is: think in your heart the name of that thing, and if it is [composed] of two letters, such as *yam* [sea], and you wish to invert it, and the name of the reversal is *yabašah* [dry land], the companion of *yam* with *yabašah*, and this is "beginning and end, *yah*." But the middle is *me-yabeš yam*; behold, *Yah meyabeš Yam* (God makes dry the sea), for He in truth makes the sea into dry land. And pronounce in this image whatever you remember, and thus you will first say *heh*, in the middle of your head, and draw it within your head as if you were contemplating and see the center of your brain, and its central point in your thoughts, and envision the letter *heh* inscribed above it, which guards the existence of the points of your brain.¹⁰⁴

We may now understand Abulafia's remarks in *Pe'ulat ha-Yezirah*:

Begin at the head of your head, until there the first eight lines to preserve the head, and he shall mention the second eight lines to fulfill the first, in the first order, and he shall mention the eight third lines, the storm and the wind, and one image emerges.¹⁰⁵

There is no doubt that this refers to the head, the torso and the belly, with the help of a slightly different classification: (a) the head; (b) the first [*qama*; the correct reading may be *qômah*—stature]; (c) end. As in *Ḥayyê ha-'Olam ha-Ba*, the letters of the Name of seventy-two letters, which are pronounced over the organs of the body, are here mentioned in order to create the homunculus, while while in *Ḥayyê ha-'Olam ha-Ba*, "in order to change nature," namely the spiritual nature of man—his psyche. It is worth mentioning that this technique incorporates two different planes of activity: the letters must be pronounced while one envisions in one's mind the place which they influence.

The magical character of this technique is manifested in R. Judah Albotini's *Sullam ha-'Aliyah*. Here the author copies almost word for word, the relevant passages from the two major works by Abulafia, *Ôr ha-Sekel* and *Ḥayyê ha-'Olam ha-Ba*.¹⁰⁶ Prior to describing the above-mentioned technique, the author writes:¹⁰⁷

. . . that the angels were created and all creatures were made from the twenty-two letters and their combinations and their permutations, and as fire by nature warms, and water cools, so do the letters by their nature create all sorts of creatures, and [fulfill] the requests of those who mention them with wisdom and knowledge. Of this our sages said¹⁰⁸ that Bezalel knew how to combine the letters with which heaven and earth were created. Likewise, the other prophets and pious men in each generation, by means of the combination and permutation of letters and their movements, used to perform miracles and wonders and turn about the order of Creation, such as we find it explained in our Talmud¹⁰⁹ that Rabba created a man and sent him to R. Zeira.

5. Preparations for Recitation

Having described the details of the technique of reciting the Divine Name, we shall now discuss the necessary preparations related to this act. In two of his books, *Ḥayyê ha-'Olam ha-Ba* and *Ôr*

ha-Sekel, Abulafia describes these conditions:

. . . At the time that you wish to recite this Ineffable Name as engraved above with its vocalization, adorn yourself and seclude yourself in a special place so that your voice will not be heard to anyone apart from yourself, and purify your heart and your soul from all thoughts of this world.¹¹⁰

Elsewhere, he writes:

Be prepared for thy God, o Israelite! Make thyself ready to direct thy heart to God alone. Cleanse the body and choose a lonely house where none shall hear thy voice. Sit there in thy closet and do not reveal thy secret to any man. If thou canst, do it by day in the house, but it is best if thou completest it during the night. In the hour when thou preparest thyself to speak with the Creator and thou wishest Him to reveal His might to thee, then be careful to abstract all thy thought from the vanities of the world.¹¹¹

A similar description is repeated in *Sefer ha-Hešeq*:

When you wish to recite the Name of seventy-two letters, following the preparation we have mentioned, you must arrange to be alone in a special place, to pronounce the secret of the Ineffable Name, and to separate and isolate yourself from every speaking creature, and from all vanities of [the world, so as not to view them as] attributes [of God]. And also so that there not remain in your heart any thoughts of human or natural things, of either voluntary or necessary [matters], as if you are one who has given a writ of divorce to all forms of the mundane world, as one who has given a testament in the presence of witnesses in which he orders [another] to take care of his wife and his children and his property, and has relieved himself of all involvement and supervision and transferred it from himself and one away.¹¹²

The two main stipulations appearing here—separation from the vanities of the world and isolation in a special house for the purpose of this recitation—reappear in *Ša'arē Zedeq*:

He should also ascend to purify his soul above all other wisdoms which he has learned; the reason for this being that, as they are natural and limited, they contaminate the soul and prevent the Divine forms, which are extremely fine, from passing through it . . . therefore one must isolate oneself in a special house, and if the house is such that he will not even hear a voice, this is even better.¹¹³