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THE LIGHT OF THE INTELLECT

Abraham Abulafia

Abraham ben Samuel Abulafia *was a Sicilian Kabbalist born in Saragossa, Spain, in 1240. He is considered as one of the most important, but also most complex, figures in Jewish mysticism. During his early youth he traveled to Palestine and Italy, studying philosophy under Hillel ben Samuel ben Eliezer of Verona. Upon his return to Spain, his thirst for knowledge led him, in his thirties, to the world of speculative and operative Kabbalah. He immersed himself in the* Sefer Yetzirah *(Book of Creation) and began to teach a kind of Kabbalistic "Yoga" based upon the ontological value of Hebrew letters, numbers, and vowel points, as well as a rigorous moral and spiritual ascesis. He taught that a complex science of combinations, permutations, and invocations of these symbols gives access to the highest spiritual realities and may even confer a "prophetic" status. After his attempt to convert the Pope—who died from apoplexy one day before Abulafia's arrival—in 1280, he appeared as a prophet and Messiah in Sicily. He was condemned by Rabbi Solomon ben Adret and had to leave Sicily. His end is unknown. With him the Kabbalah took a definitely visionary and prophetic turn, with a special emphasis on the mysteries of the Tetragrammaton.*

It is well known that the letters (of the Hebrew alphabet) have no vibration of their own, and therefore the Blessed God set into nature, in accordance with the Intellect, powers into the whole mouth in order to bring the letters into pronunciation, according to the form of their existence as found in books. And vowel-points were set into the letters to demonstrate the vibration of pronunciation in their translation from the book to the mouth. Thus the vibrations are essentially the letters of the mouth, and accidentally, the letters in the book. And joined to this by necessity with the places of the various vibrations, for nothing will vibrate without place and time. The elements of space are the dimensions, and the elements of time that are the cycles through which it is measured in divisions such as years, months, days and the like. And because of the dimensions, a person must know (how) to lengthen the pronunciation of each of the letters.

And this is the secret of the pronunciation when you wish to mention this glorious (divine) Name: Make yourself right and isolate yourself in a special place, so that no one will hear your voice except you, then purify your heart and your soul from all thoughts of this world. Then imagine in that moment that your soul is separated from your body, removed from this world, and living in the world-to-come, which is the source of the life that

exists distributed in all that lives. This is (identical with the Active) Intellect, which is the source of all wisdom, understanding, and knowledge of the Supreme King of kings, the Holy, Blessed One, whom all revere with a great awe—and this awe of one who has attained (such spiritual heights) is a double awe: (comprising) the awe (that comes of) love (of God) and the awe (that comes from) ascent. When your mind (*da'at*) comes to cleave to (the divine) Mind (*da'at*), it puts knowledge (*da'at*) into you. Your mind must turn aside from itself all extraneous knowledge, apart from the knowledge (*da'at*) of (God), which joins you and (God) by virtue of (God's) honored and awesome Name. And therefore, you must know the form of its pronunciation, and this is its configuration: These are the twenty-five "forward" (permutations). There are another twenty-five "backward" (permutations), and here they are: In this same way, (permute) with (the letter) *hay*, and similarly with *vav*, and similarly with the last *hay.* (Note by Moses Cordovero: We have abbreviated this, and even corrected it accordingly, because the author of *Sefer HaNikkud* confused the issue by means of a poem to obscure it, but he reveals it at the end of his work, so we will explain it as is fitting and proper. Now we return to his words:)

This is the configuration: When we begin to pronounce the *'alef*, in whatever configuration you pronounce it (i.e. with whatever vowel), because it alludes to the secret of (divine) unity, you should not lengthen it beyond one breathe. And do not interrupt it in any way at all until you have completed its pronunciation. Lengthen this particular breath, according to your breathing ability, for as long as you are able to hold it. And chant the *'alef*, or whatever letter, while in the form of the vowel-point (as explained below): Thus the *cholem* (with the sound of "o") is above (the letter). When you begin to pronounce it, turn your face to the east, (looking) neither up nor down, and sit wrapped in clean, pure white robes over all your garments, or with your *tallit* over your head, wearing *tefillin* (and) facing east because that is the direction from which light enters the world. With (each of) the twenty-five (pairs of letters) you must move your head (correctly).

In the case of *cholem*, begin facing due east, purify your thoughts, and raise your head little by little as you breathe (out), until you are finished with your head facing upwards. After you have finished, prostrate yourself on the ground once. Do not make a distinction between the breath of the *'alef* and that of the letter attached to it (in the pair), apart from one breath, either short or long. Alternatively, between each letter of the name, whether "forward" or the reverse, you may breathe twice without pronouncing (anything), but no more; however, you have the option of fewer. When you have completed each

row, you have the option of breathing five times only, but no more; however, you have the option of fewer. If you change or deviate from this order while (proceeding through) the row, return to the beginning of that row, until you have said it correctly.

By analogy with the shape of the *cholem* which draws (one) upwards, (you must) sing the *chirek* (with the sound of "ee," which) draws (one) downwards. Thus you may draw down supernal power to adhere to you. In the case of *shuruk* (with the sound of "oo"), neither raise nor lower your head, but push it forwards at a middle level. In the case of *tsere* (with a sound of "ay") push your head from left to right, and in the case of *kamatz* (with the sound of "ah") from right to left.

In any case, if after completing this, you see a form before you, prostrate yourself before it immediately. And if you hear a voice, either loud or soft, and want to understand what it is saying, answer it immediately. Say: "Speak my lord, for your servant is listening" (I Samuel 3:9). (But then) do not speak at all, but listen carefully to what it may tell you. If you experience great terror, which you cannot bear, even in the middle of the pronunciation, prostrate yourself immediately. And if you do not hear or see (anything), abandon this for the rest of that week. It is good to use this pronunciation (technique) once a week, in a form that "runs and returns" (Ezekiel 1:14), for with regard to this matter a covenant has been made.

So, what can I add further, to make this known to you? For it is well known that if you are wise, you can understand this entire order from hints. If you feel that your intellect is weak in wisdom, or in (knowledge of) *kabbalah*, or that your thought is strongly bound to the vanities of time, do not pronounce the name, lest you sin more.

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