

**HESED AND THE WAY OF *EL***

***SHA'AREI 'ORAH***

**GATES OF LIGHT**

**BY JOSEPH GIKATILLA**

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Thesis Submitted In Partial Fulfillment

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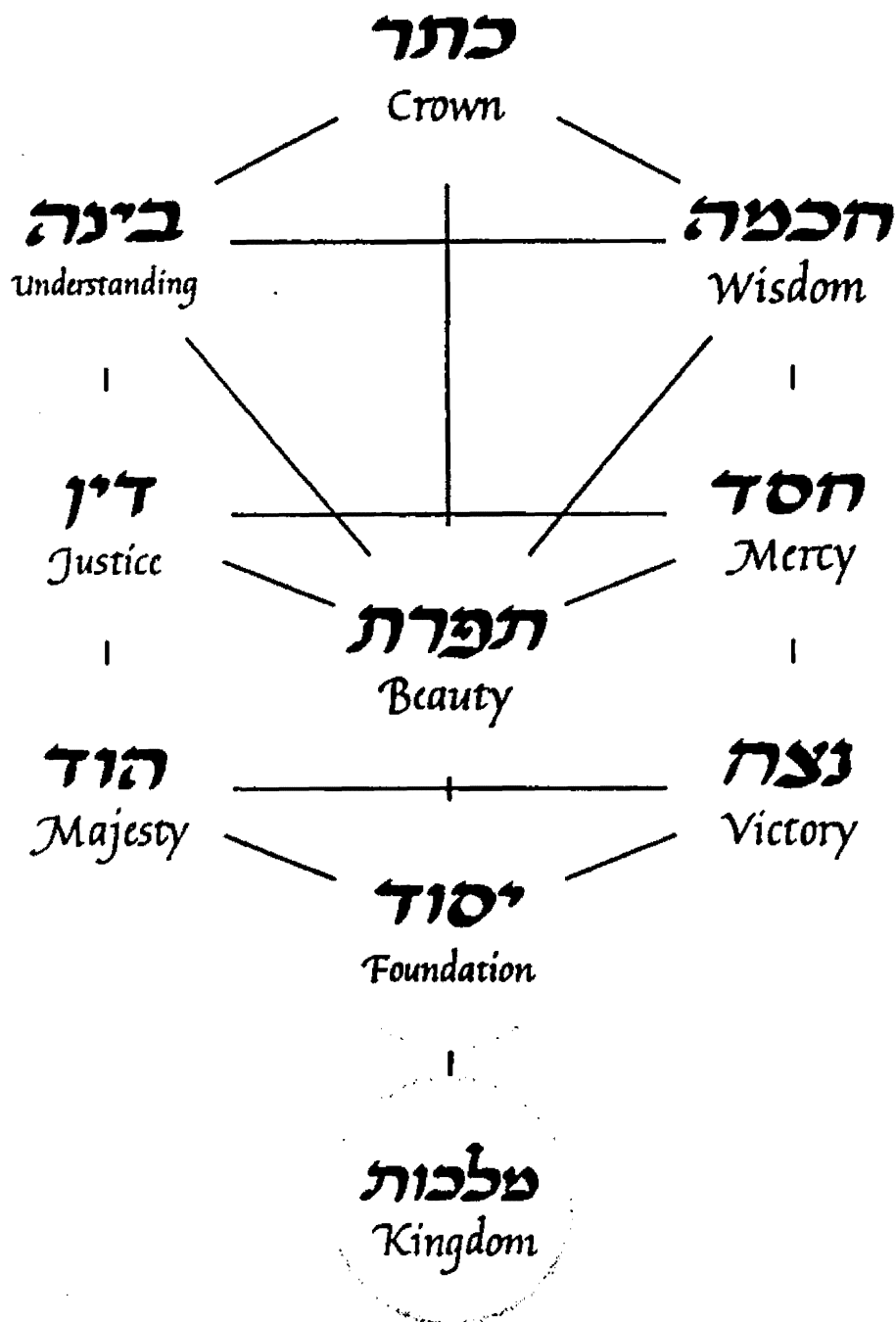
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# GATES OF LIGHT



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## INTRODUCTION

Jews have forever struggled to experience God and to understand the role of God in the world. From Abraham to Moses to the present, we have longed for regular intimate divine contact. We have struggled to understand how justice is dispensed and how forgiveness, mercy and lovingkindness are granted. We wonder about punishment for evil, in a world created by a benevolent God, a God who, we pray, loves the created world.

For some, understanding God can only occur through philosophical reflection. Such reflection and acquisition of metaphysical knowledge does not seek a unitive experience with God. It is in no way an ecstatic, consciousness-altering endeavor (philosophy). For others, encountering God is a unitive experience, a merging of self with God, which involves a departure from a normal state of consciousness. Whether through the recitation of divine names or the manipulation of letters of Torah, it is through a rigorous mystical practice that human beings experience intimacy with the Divine (ecstatic kabbalah).

Finally, for others, God is met through Divine emanations. God's essence flows through and into the universe, by means of an organized, and highly symbolic, emanatory system. For these kabbalists, a proper observance of the *mitzvot*, the divine commandments, has a direct effect on God. The natural result of a religious life, of the actions of each and every one of us, causes God's abundance to flow, to emanate, into the material world – or not (theosophic kabbalah).

The great, 13<sup>th</sup> Century, Spanish kabbalist, Joseph Gikatilla, offers a striking and novel understanding of these distinct traditions. In a bold theological step, he does not



choose between these three quite different paths. For Gikatilla, one need not make a choice between them. One does not exclude another. Gikatilla's work suggests that the philosophical, mystical and theosophical paths can and should be unified. They can and should exist in harmony with one another.

Avraham our Father understood that God created multiple paths to Himself: the philosophical the mystical and the theosophical. According to Maimonides, Abraham was a philosopher. But according to Gikatilla, Abraham was also a mystic. For along with his deep study, examination and understanding of God, Abraham planted one Tree at the 'Well of Seven,' (at *Be'er Sheva*). With the planting of this Tree, Abraham implanted the notion of one God, who is intimately involved with humanity.

Furthermore, through the person of Abraham, Gikatilla suggests to us that the single God has multiple pathways, to and from the Source. This singular Well of Seven beautifully symbolizes how unity can at the same time give way to a multiplicity, seven in particular. And the notion of seven, suggests the seven Divine emanations, *sefirot*, accessible to the material world.

Gikatilla goes beyond, however, a unifying of the ideas of philosophy and ecstatic and theosophic kabbalah. Relying further on Abraham, Gikatilla seeks to prove a radical proposition: that God's essence is mercy. The deepest core of God, to Gikatilla, consists of lovingkindness. Like a scientist detailing the biological system of a universe, a living being, Gikatilla explains the way in which the divine forces bless human beings with mercy and lovingkindness. For Gikatilla, through Divine emanations, God programmed the world to offer forgiveness and mercy as a matter of course.

In this thesis, my principle method for exploring these two subjects is an analysis of the *sefirah* or *middah* of *Hesed*, lovingkindness, in Gikatilla's book entitled *Sha'are 'Orah*, Gates of Light (SO). Gikatilla, who lived in Castile, Spain, wrote *Sha'are 'Orah* in around '1290, within a few years of the composition of the *Zohar*, the most famous kabbalistic text. Of this work, Gershom Scholem stated the following: "The Gates of Light, is still the best work on the subject. It gives an excellent description of kabbalistic symbolism and also analyzes the motives which determine the correlation between the *Sefiroth* and their Scriptural symbols."<sup>1</sup>

Further, Scholem describes the *sefirot* and the system they establish in the following way:

the potencies and modes of action of the living God. . . [Here, God] emerges from His hiddenness and ineffable being, to stand before us as the Creator. . . What constitutes the special mythical structure of the Kabbalistic complex of symbols is the restriction of the infinitely many aspects under which God can be known to ten fundamental categories [that we call the *sefirot*].<sup>2</sup>

As an aide in my task of analyzing the Chapter on *Hesed*, I seek also to determine the manner or extent to which the opening Introduction to *Sha'are 'Orah* informs Gikatilla's vision of the *sefirotic* system, specifically the seventh *sefirah*, emanation, that of *Hesed*, lovingkindness.

In analyzing Gikatilla's Introduction and the chapter on *Hesed*, I will use the following approach. First and foremost, rather than offering a thematic organization, divorced from the progression of the text as it was written by Gikatilla, this commentary simply moves through the chapter on *Hesed*, from the beginning to the end. Although I

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<sup>1</sup> Scholem, Gershom, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, 212.

<sup>2</sup> Scholem, Gershom, *Kabbalah & Its Symbolism*, 100-101

am not attempting to provide a translation, in many places I offer a literal translation of the text, in order to give context to the passages that I delve into deeper. As I proceed, through the text I comment on various issues raised and I focus to a very significant degree on the proof-texts upon which Gikatilla relies.<sup>3</sup>

Before beginning the textual analysis itself, however, I first will provide a discussion of the development of some of the primary ideas that Gikatilla takes up, at least by implication, in *Sha'are 'Orah*. Second, I will discuss the three primary influences on his life and work: Maimonidean philosophy, Abulafian kabbalah and theosophic kabbalah. Third, I will offer a brief discussion of the life and literary work of Gikatilla. Fourth, I will analyze the Introduction and then the chapter on *Hesed*. Finally, I will offer a conclusion suggesting the . . .

A. Development of Kabbalistic Ideas and the Language of *Sefirot*

Gikatilla completed *Sha'are 'Orah* at the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, a time of a great literary flourishing among Jewish students of kabbalah, the primary area of practice for Jewish mystics. Rather than jumping directly to a discussion of *Sha'are 'Orah*, however, I first will explore the development of ideas that lead up to Gikatilla and his time.

Any study of Jewish mysticism must touch on the founding Biblical text, which is found in the first chapter of the Book of Ezekiel. Ezekiel was a prophet who lived before and after the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, which occurred in 586 BCE.<sup>4</sup> The Book of Ezekiel opens with the prophet reporting a mystical vision. In his vision, he saw

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<sup>3</sup> For translations of passages from the TaNaKh, I have relied upon the JPS translation.

<sup>4</sup> Blenkinship, Joseph, A History of Prophecy in Israel, 194-207. Scholars have not determined the precise dates of Ezekiel's mystical vision, whether before or after the fall of the Temple, or where Ezekiel lived when he recorded the vision.

a fire with a gleam of amber. And even further at the center, he saw the figures of four creatures. They had the figures of human beings, but each with four faces and four wings and each one's wings touched the wings of the other. They had human hands below their wings. Each had four faces: a human face in the front, a lion on the right, an ox on the left, an eagle in the back. The fire, with its radiance and lightning, kept moving about among the creatures. There was a wheel next to each of the four creatures.<sup>5</sup>

Somehow, Ezekiel sensed that God was in control. "Wherever the spirit impelled them to go, they went." "When they moved I could hear the sound of their wings, like the sound of *Shaddai*." And finally: "Above the expanse over their heads was the semblance of a throne . . . and on top, upon the semblance of throne, there was the semblance of a human form." Ezekiel described this human form as "the semblance of the Presence of the Lord."<sup>6</sup>

Here, Ezekiel lays the foundation for the tradition of a chariot. It is a chariot that carries God, at God's will. It is a chariot that has four wheels and four humans carrying or supporting each of the four legs of the throne. The experience of God is defined largely by the fire, the brilliance of light. Ultimately, the mystical text grows into a body of literature called *Maaseh Merkavah*, the Divine Chariot.

From this founding Biblical text, we move to the early rabbinic texts, circa 200 CE, which was approximately 1000-1100 years before Gikatilla began writing. In the *Mishnah*, we find a prohibition against speculating about four things: "Whosoever

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<sup>5</sup> Ezek. 1:1-10.

<sup>6</sup> Ezek. Ch. 1.

speculates upon four things, a pity for him! He is as though he had not come into the world: what is above, what is beneath, what is before, what is after.”<sup>7</sup>

Despite the prohibition in the *Mishnah*, we find a clear Jewish interest in questions of cosmology and cosmogony. For example, in *Mashekhet Hagigah*, we learn in the name of Rav that “by ten things was the world created: by wisdom, by understanding, by reason, by strength, by rebuke, by might, by righteousness, by judgment, by lovingkindness, and by compassion.”<sup>8</sup> We also see in several places a rabbinic interest in the instruments of creation, those being the spoken word.<sup>9</sup> In these two texts the rabbis observe 10 statements of God that formed the creative cosmogony.

Furthermore, we see recorded instances of mystical practice. First and foremost, we find in *Hagigah* 14b the Talmudic record of the mystical experience of four famous rabbis: Ben Azzai, Ben Zoma, Aher and Akiva. We can see from the painful conclusion of all but R. Akiva, the Talmudic warning against a mystical search for what is above, beneath, before and after. As only Rabbi Akiva survived this experience, we must assume that the Talmudic tradition thought it important to reinforce the warning of the *Mishnah*.

In a famous correspondence, Hai Gaon seeks to define and limit the nature of mystical practice, called ‘*merkavah* mysticism.’ Hai Gaon, the 13<sup>th</sup> century head of the Babylonian academy in Sura, and the then recognized world-leader of the Jewish community, wanted to circumscribe the then-current understanding of the purpose and

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<sup>7</sup> *Mishnah Hagigah* 2:1. Scholem also began his discussion of kabbalistic ideas with this *Mishnah*. See, *Kabbalah*, 12.

<sup>8</sup> *BT Hagigah* 12a.

<sup>9</sup> *Mishnah Avot*, ch. V.; *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer*, ch. III.

course of the mystical experience. For Hai Gaon, the mystic did not travel any geographic distance. Rather, the mystic's journey was of an entirely internal nature. It was, at best, a journey to the "innermost recesses of the heart."

"You may perhaps know that many of the Sages hold that when a man is worthy and blessed with certain qualities and he wishes to gaze at the heavenly chariot and the halls of the angels on high, he must follow certain exercises. He must fast for a specified number of days, he must place his head between his knees whispering softly to himself certain praises of God with his face towards the ground. As a result he will gaze in the innermost recesses of his heart and it will seem as if he saw the seven halls with his own eyes, moving from hall to hall to observe that which is therein to be found."

Then, ignoring our Mishnah passage, there is *Sefer Yetzirah*, the Book of Creation, which seeks explicitly to reveal the mystical origins of the universe. Likely composed 100-200 years after the Mishnah, in the 4<sup>th</sup> century C.E., by an anonymous author, this is deemed by most to be the first Jewish mystical text.<sup>10</sup> According to many, *Sefer Yetzirah* was the first text to use the term *sefirah*.<sup>11</sup> In *Sefer Yetzirah* the word probably relates to the concept of 'numeral' and it is there identified with the number ten<sup>12</sup>. The word *sefirah* becomes a central idea in the realm of theosophical kabbalah. "All later theologians undoubtedly drew the term *sefirah*, as well as many other terms that became central to Jewish philosophical and mystical speculation in the Middle Ages, from this short tract."<sup>13</sup>

The original meaning of the term *sefirah* in *Sefer Yetzirah*, however, is quite different from the meaning that future kabbalists gave to it. In *Sefer Yetzirah* the *sefirot*

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<sup>10</sup> Saadia Gaon, who wrote a commentary on *Sefer Yetzirah*, disagreed that this was a mystical text. He understood it to be a book of cosmology.

<sup>11</sup> Dan, Joseph, *Early Kabbalah*, 7.

<sup>12</sup> *Id.*

<sup>13</sup> *Id.*

are fixed and static elements of cosmogony and cosmology.<sup>14</sup> The primary subject of concern in *Sefer Yetzirah* is the moment that and the means by which God created the world. The text begins with the statement that God created the world out of 32 *netivot*, paths of wisdom. This is the subject of the entire first chapter of *Sefer Yetzirah*. The number 32 is the sum of the 10 digits from 1-10, plus the 22 Hebrew letters. After Chapter One, the book explores the mystical and cosmic, creative capacity of the Hebrew letters, as well as the creative power of the Divine Names. According to Dan and many others, the cosmology and terminology of *Sefer Yetzirah* 'have no prior source in Hebrew literature.'<sup>15</sup>

Although *Sefer Yetzirah* introduces the term *sefirah*, the term comes to acquire a very different meaning from what it originally intended. In the mid to late 12<sup>th</sup> century, approximately 100 years before the work of Gikatilla and his peers in Castile and central Spain, *Sefer ha'Bahir* (the *Bahir*, the Book of Brilliance) appeared in France. The *Bahir* was the first Jewish text to conceive of God in terms of a set of dynamic *sefirot*, or divine, emanated powers.<sup>16</sup> With the appearance of this text, we find Jewish thinkers incorporating and, even moreso, reshaping Neoplatonic thought, which had focused on the emanation of fixed divine potencies. This Neoplatonic body of thought represents one of the foundations of the theosophic notion of the *sefirot*. In this body of thought, God is understood as 'an unfolding of ten divine potencies or emanations.'<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> *Id.*, 14.

<sup>15</sup> *Id.*, 7

<sup>16</sup> *Id.*, 13.

<sup>17</sup> I understand that there is disagreement about the origin of these ideas. I am in no way seeking to comment on whether the idea of divine potencies or emanations was originally

The *Bahir* made new and important contributions to Jewish ideas of God, in addition to introducing the idea of dynamic, divine emanations or powers. First, it offered the idea that the divine world includes both masculine and feminine elements.<sup>18</sup> The *Bahir* uses the imagery of Queen, Bride, Sister, Wife, Daughter and Matron, reminiscent of the Gnostic terminology, "the daughter of light."<sup>19</sup> Although the notion of the *Shekhinah* had been a part of rabbinic literature for over 1000 years, the feminine gender of the word itself never inspired an explicitly feminine vision of God, before the *Bahir*.<sup>20</sup>

Second, and also likely from a Gnostic source, the *Bahir* portrayed the emanated powers, the divine world, as a living tree – a unity of intertwined limbs, roots, trunks, leaves, buds and sprouts.<sup>21</sup> Ben-Shlomo, in his *Mavo*, Introduction to SO, describes the Godhead of the *Bahir* as "a system of powers," an "endless organism of spiritual limbs. The connections between the limbs form a drama within the divine realm and the results [of this drama] determine the situation of the world and of history."<sup>22</sup>

Third, the *Bahir* introduces the idea that 'the evil elements in the universe are no more than divine emissaries: obedient messengers of the divine command. In such a case evil is not an independent force; the messengers are not evil in essence, nor is there an

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a Jewish idea taken by the Neoplatonists or vice-versa. See Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, 116-17.

<sup>18</sup> Dan, 29.

<sup>19</sup> Id.

<sup>20</sup> Id.; See also, Ben Shlomo, *Introduction to Sha'are 'Orah*, 10. Also Idel offers several other bases underlying the masculine and feminine aspects of the Divine.

<sup>21</sup> Id., 30.

<sup>22</sup> Dan, 9.



independent divine source of evil.<sup>23</sup> Finally, as mentioned, is the system of ten divine powers, *sefirot*, arranged in a specified sequence. The *Bahir* creates a whole new way of thinking about the *sefirot*. This is the most important influence of the *Bahir* in that it changes fundamentally the idea of the emanated powers.

Commenting in essence on *Sefer Yetzirah*, the *Bahir* asks the question: why are these powers called *sefirot*? "The heavens declare/*mesaprim* the glory of God."<sup>24</sup> Here we have a play on the root of the verb. The root, *S,Ph,R* contains three different ideas. First, it relates to the notion of a number and counting. So, the verse could be understood as the 'the heavens number/count the glory of God' as in the counting, *SaPar*, of a fixed number as was identified by the *Sefer Yetzirah*. Second, there is a connection to the word *SaPiR*, as in the enormously valuable gem we know as sapphire. The idea is that the *sefirot* illuminate our understanding of God like a precious and radiant gem. Third, the root is suggestive of the dynamic *sefirot*. The declaration of the heavens is obviously pointing to the spiritual powers called *sefirot*.<sup>25</sup>

B. Kabbalah Moves South – From Narbonne & Provence, France  
to Castile, Spain

Living in Narbonne, France, and relying significantly on the *Bahir*, in around the year 1200, Isaac the Blind became the preeminent teacher of kabbalah. First, his

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<sup>23</sup> Ben Shlomo, Introduction to Sha'are 'Orah, 36-38.

<sup>24</sup> Psalm 19:2.

<sup>25</sup> For this passage I relied on a number of texts, including Dan's Early Kabbalah, Idel's New Perspectives and Ariel's The Mystic Quest. In addition, Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan explains that there are three underlying aspects to this root *S,Ph,R*. First, there is the *sefer*, which relates to the physical form of the letter and pertains to the continuum of space/universe. *Sephar* or number relates to sequence and more specifically to time. Finally, *sippur* or communication or story/telling, relates to the mind or to the spiritual realm. The Book of Creation, Translation and Commentary, Aryeh Kaplan, 20-21.

teachings revolved around Chapter 1 of the Book of Genesis. For Rabbi Isaac, this first chapter of Genesis is the story of theosophy, rather than a history of the creation of the material world. He believed that the creation of the physical world was a later stage in the process of creation. Stated differently, the emanation of the *sefirot* preceded the appearance of the heavens and the earth.<sup>26</sup> Rabbi Isaac also laid out a system of symbols for the ten *sefirot* that became the standard for most of the later kabbalists.<sup>27</sup> These symbols, the lower six in particular, were based on a single verse in the Chronicles. They are *gedulah, gevurah, tiferet, netzach, hod* and *malkhut*. "Thine, O Lord, is the Greatness, and the Strength, and the Beauty, and the Victory, and the Majesty . . . Yours is the Kingdom."<sup>28</sup> During the 100 or so years following the appearance of the *Bahir*, its ideas moved southward, first into Northern Spain, largely through the work of Isaac the Blind and his disciples.

Beginning in Gerona, Spain, the southward movement of the ideas of the *Bahir*, traveled through Catalonia, Aragon and finally into Castile. Two of Isaac the Blind's greatest students, Rabbi Ezra and Rabbi Azriel, moved from Provence, France to Gerona, Spain. Together they turned the Kabbalah into "an active spiritual and intellectual force within medieval Jewish culture."<sup>29</sup>

According to R. Ezra of Gerona, the emergence of the *sefirot* into existence from their hiddenness is tantamount to the formation of 'attributes and instruments which are finite and can be apprehended.' R. Asher envisioned the six days of creation as six

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<sup>26</sup> Dan, 32.

<sup>27</sup> *Id.*, 31.

<sup>28</sup> I Chron. 29:11.

<sup>29</sup> Dan, Early Kabbalah, 34.

extremities corresponding to the six *sefirot*. He described them as 'instruments of the inner spirit.' Thus, they accepted and expanded the *bahiric* idea of *sefirot* as both instruments and vessels.<sup>30</sup>

The penetrating depth of the kabbalistic ideas coming from Gerona, caused them to move southward throughout the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> Centuries, until reaching Castile, the home of Moshe de Leon, the author of much of the Zohar, and of Joseph Gikatilla, the author of SO. The town of Castile, in Spain, came to be a place where a diverse and sophisticated group of kabbalists gathered at the end of the 13<sup>th</sup> Century. Thus, it was truly a center of kabbalistic thought and development, reflecting a vast range of Jewish learning and Jewish mystical practice. And it was Joseph Gikatilla pulled together three of the major metaphysical/mystical movements of his age: Maimonidean philosophy, Abulafian ecstatic/prophetic kabbalah and theosophic kabbalah.

## CHAPTER ONE

### A. Three Influences On Gikatilla: Maimonidean Philosophy; Ecstatic or Prophetic Kabbalah (Abraham Abulafia); Theosophical Kabbalah

As mentioned above, before moving directly to SO and the work of Joseph Gikatilla, I will offer a brief background of the three primary influences on Joseph Gikatilla's work and kabbalistic, mystical life. These three influences are: Maimonidean philosophy, Abulafian mystical kabbalah, and theosophic kabbalah.<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Idel, Moshe, New Perspectives, 142.

<sup>31</sup> Maimonides lived from 1135-1204. Abulafia lived from about 1240-1291. Theosophic kabbalah flourished in France and Spain from 1100 through the life of Gikatilla and beyond.

## 1. Philosophy & Maimonides

Although the philosophers took up many issues, I want to briefly touch on 3 of the questions they faced. 1) What can we say about God's essence? 2) Can anything be said of God's actions? 3) What is the relationship between the Intelligences/emanations and God?

### a) Can anything be said of God's essence?

The general problem for the philosopher was how to describe God. Stated differently, a primary goal for the philosopher was to understand the essence of God. Many resorted to the language of Aristotle. For example, they used terms such as the First Cause, Pure Form, the Form of Forms, or even The One.<sup>32</sup> Absent from their descriptions of God was any personal quality. God is simply pure and clear form. Further, God's connection to the world is expressed only in his existence and not in his volitional actions.<sup>33</sup> This understanding of God is different from both Maimonides and from the God of the religious Jewish community.

The general problem for the philosopher was whether we could accurately say anything about God.<sup>34</sup> According to the philosophers, one can say very little, if anything, of a positive nature in describing God. To attribute any positive quality to God, would be to limit God's infinite and unknowable nature. According to Maimonides, one can say nothing positive about the essence of God. One can only say what God is not.

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<sup>32</sup> Ben Shlomo, Introduction to Sha'are Orah, 14

<sup>33</sup> Id.

<sup>34</sup> Ben Shlomo, Introduction, 14

b) Can anything positive be said of God's actions?

Maimonides departs from the strict Aristotelian idea that nothing can be said even about God's actions. He agrees that we can say nothing about God's essence, but he disagrees about whether we can speak of God's actions.<sup>35</sup> Ben-Shlomo describes it this way: "Indeed, Rambam tries to save the Personal/Imminence of God, by means of modifiers of action. They are positive descriptions, but they say nothing about the essence of God Himself. They only point to or indicate God's connections to the world."

God's relationship to the material world is as an effluence of divine bounty that overflows through the Separate Intelligences to the lower orders of creation, the celestial spheres and the sub-lunar world.<sup>36</sup> This unceasing flow is necessary for the continued existence of the Intelligences. Here, Maimonides could speak of God as the transcendent and efficient cause of the universe.<sup>37</sup>

c) The Emanations and the Problems of: Oneness, Change and the Personal God

Related to the concern for God's essence and actions is the question concerning the relationship between God's self and the emanations or *sefirot*. Understanding this relationship produces the following additional questions: First, if God is one, how can there be emanations? Wouldn't the existence of emanating *sefirot* destroy the unity of God? Second, if somehow the *sefirot* do not destroy God's unity, wouldn't they at least violate the principle that God cannot change? For anything that changes, anything that

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<sup>35</sup> Id., 14-15

<sup>36</sup> Guide I:58, 69, 72, II:12. Although Maimonides was opposed to theosophic kabbalah, his notion of Separate Intelligences seems like a fairly close relative, cousin maybe, to the *sefirot*.

<sup>37</sup> Guide, I:63-64.

has motion, must be temporary. Anything that changes cannot be eternal. Thus, there can be no change within God and anything that experiences change is necessarily not a part of God. Finally, if God does not change, how can there be a personal God? As each individual is different and each individual experiences change throughout life, how can God be involved with individuals without also involving change in God's self? Doesn't a specific response to the needs of an individual require a change on the part of God?

## 2. Abulafian Prophetic/Ecstatic/Linguistic Kabbalah

### a) Background and technique of Abraham Abulafia

For the philosopher, the *sefirot* are highly problematic. They violate God's unity and God's unchanging quality. Similarly, the idea that God is a personal God also violates the notion of an unchanging God. These ideas, although very much in the realm of the philosopher, become central as well to the theology and mythical practice of Abraham Abulafia, the second and primary influence on Joseph Gikatilla. Having been a serious student of Maimonides, he was profoundly shaped by these philosophical ideas.

Abraham Abulafia, who was born in 1240 in Sargasso in the province of Aragon, was highly indebted to Maimonides. Abulafia describes Maimonides to be an important influence and he sees himself very much of a disciple of Maimonides.<sup>38</sup> In the course of offering some background about Abulafia's life, I will try to show how it was the Maimonides had such an influence on Abulafia.

As a teen, after the death of his father, Abulafia moved to Eretz Yisrael and lived there for only a few years.<sup>39</sup> He moved to Capua, Italy, where he studied philosophy and

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<sup>38</sup> Idel article ON ABU

<sup>39</sup> Idel, Moshe, The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia, 2-3.

especially Maimonides' Guide of the Perplexed, with R. Hillel of Verona.<sup>40</sup> After some unknown period of time he returned to Catalonia and began to study the Kabbalah, which he had earlier opposed. In the early 1270's, Abulafia went to Castile where he taught the Guide to Joseph Gikatilla and to R. Moses b. Burgos.<sup>41</sup>

Based on a vision he had in 1270, in which he was commanded to meet with the Pope, he sought on numerous occasions, unsuccessfully, to arrange a meeting with the Pope.<sup>42</sup> This vision produced messianic dreams for Abulafia, which eventually evoked extreme criticism from the Rashba, the leading rabbinic figure of Spain. Ultimately, probably in the mid-1280's, Abulafia had no choice but to go into exile on an island near Sicily.<sup>43</sup> He likely died towards the end of the year in 1291.<sup>44</sup>

Abraham Abulafia describes his kabbalistic system with two basic terms: Prophetic Kabbalah and the Kabbalah of Names. Prophetic Kabbalah refers to the goal of his mystical practice – the attainment of 'prophecy or ecstasy.' This means the experience of revelation, and union with the Divine. The Kabbalah of Names refers to a primary mystical technique used by Abulafia, to achieve the prophetic or ecstatic goal of his mystical practice. His Kabbalah of Names explores and utilizes the nature of Divine Names in order to attain ecstatic mystical experience.<sup>45</sup> The recitation of the Names of God as a means of attaining ecstasy is a widely known mystical practice, playing a significant role in techniques from India, Tibet and Japan, in Islam and Orthodox

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<sup>40</sup> Id., 8-9.

<sup>41</sup> Id.

<sup>42</sup> Id.

<sup>43</sup> Id.

<sup>44</sup> Id.

<sup>45</sup> Idel, Kabbalah of Divine Names, 110-111.

Christianity.<sup>46</sup> Idel offers numerous examples of Jewish texts that understand and practice this tradition of uttering Divine Names.

"In every place where I will have my Name mentioned, I will come to you and bless you."<sup>47</sup> Based on this verse and others, Abulafia believed that the ultimate mystical practice was in the recitation of God's name.<sup>48</sup> Through the recitation of Divine Names, God's *shefa* or Intellectual abundance enters into the mystic. This description was influenced by Maimonides and Ibn Ezra who wrote: "and the angel which is between man and his God is intellective."<sup>49</sup>

There were various practices for reciting the Divine Names, each of which involved a number of elements. One element or technique involved the breath. Abulafia was quite clear that proper breathing could bring about a mystical experience, and through that the survival of the soul.<sup>50</sup> In addition, the manner of pronunciation of the letters was critical for a mystical experience.<sup>51</sup> Proper visualization of the Divine Names was also an important element to the mystical experience.

One does not find in Abulafia experiences of contemplative mysticism that are continued over an extended period of time. Instead, his approach is passionate and intense; and for this reason, the duration of his individual mystical experiences was

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<sup>46</sup> Idel, The Mystical Experience in Abulafia, 14.

<sup>47</sup> Ex. 20:21.

<sup>48</sup> Idel, The Mystical Experience in Abulafia, 87.

<sup>49</sup> Id., 89. "The angel who advises you of the secret of God is named Gabriel, and he speaks from the first verse of the holy name mentioned by you, and he shows you the wonders of prophecy, for that is the secret of: 'In a vision I will make myself known to him, in a dream I will speak to him,' for 'vision,' which is the secret of the verse, equals Gabriel, and 'dream,' whose secret is 'Edo' is Enoch." Gabriel has the value of 246. Id., 89.

<sup>50</sup> Idel, The Mystical Experience in Abulafia, 27.

<sup>51</sup> Id., 30.



limited. As Idel understands this phenomenon, it is impossible for the mind to function on such an intense level for any extended period of time.<sup>52</sup> Abulafia's system directs one towards short bursts into Eternal Life, followed by a rapid return to the life of this world.<sup>53</sup>

The ecstatic, prophetic nature of the God-encounter distinguishes Abulafia's kabbalah from other kabbalistic systems, in both its essential purpose as well as the techniques for its attainment. "Rather, the goal of prophetic qabbalah was to extricate the soul from the so-called 'knots' which bind it to the material world, and thereby allow the soul to conjoin with certain cosmic, spiritual forces which Abulafia associated with the Active Intellect. Ostensibly, this would enable the individual soul to experience a state of prophecy."<sup>54</sup>

For the ecstatic kabbalist, the purpose of religious life was/is to experience individual union with God and this could be achieved through the recitation or manipulation of divine names and the letters of Torah. These kabbalists merged the philosopher's emphasis on knowledge, with the mystical focus on divine names and letters. Thus, they came to believe that knowledge of the permutations of the Names of God was the highest form of comprehension of the divine. Abulafia wrote that knowledge of Divine Names had three different possibilities. True knowledge: 1) is liable to make one wise; 2) can bring an individual to the level of prophecy, to a mystical

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<sup>52</sup> Id., 40.

<sup>53</sup> Id.

<sup>54</sup> Blickstein, 13.

experience; 3) can change reality by 'renewal' of souls. Abulafia wrote that "in the Name my intellect found a ladder to ascend to the heights of vision."<sup>55</sup>

b) Ecstatic Kabbalah/Abulafia and Maimonides/Philosophy

Abulafia, following Maimonidean philosophical views, rejected the *sefirot*, the divine emanations, or at least believed them to be inferior to prophetic kabbalah. Abulafia believed that the *sefirot* created 10 gods and therefore destroyed the unity of God.<sup>56</sup> Furthermore, Abulafia believed that the *sefirotic* system created a God who changes, another serious violation of Jewish belief about God.<sup>57</sup> Similarly, even if the desire for a personal God were reasonable, for Abulafia, such a God would involve change – something that the philosopher in Abulafia could not accept. Thus, Abulafia believed that the *sefirotic* system was profoundly flawed.

Instead, Abulafia advocates a theology of intimate, mystical contact with God. In lieu of kabbalistic theosophy, Abulafia seems to stress the understanding of God as Intellect/Intelligible Act of Intellection/Active Intellect, a definition allowing for the union of the actualized human intellect and the divine Intellect.<sup>58</sup> Thus, it is apparent that the language Abulafia chose to explain his theology seems to be drawn from the work of Maimonides.

I want to point out one final aspect of Abulafia's kabbalah. Although the *Mishnah* states that "One who pronounces the Name in its letters [i.e. as it is written] has no share in the World to Come,' Abulafia claims the exact opposite. For him, the way to

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<sup>55</sup> Idel, The Mystical Experience in Abulafia, 18-20.

<sup>56</sup> Id., 8.

<sup>57</sup> Id.

<sup>58</sup> Id., 8.

attain the World to Come is precisely, and only, by pronouncing the Ineffable Name. Further, Abulafia's system is based upon the performance of acts that constitute definite halakhic transgressions.<sup>59</sup>

In stark contrast to theosophic kabbalists, *mitzvo*t for Abulafia were quite unrelated to the prophetic or ecstatic experience.<sup>60</sup> Abulafia teaches that the unitive experience consists primarily of the pronunciation of Divine Names and a complex technique involving such components as breathing, singing and movements of the head – techniques that have nothing whatsoever to do with the traditional commandments of Judaism.

I suspect that one of the ways to have become accepted as a Jew of significance, a Jew to be taken seriously, in 13<sup>th</sup> century Jewish life, was to be a student and proponent of Maimonides. Thus, it makes sense that Abulafia would have wanted to represent his work as a natural and small extension of Maimonidean thought and practice. On the other hand, to be seen as radically departing from Maimonides could have been a more risky endeavor. For four reasons, I wonder if Abulafia's kabbalah has been over-identified with Maimonidean philosophy.

First, the goal of Abulafia's mystical practice was profoundly different from the goal of Maimonides' philosophical/metaphysical endeavor. An ecstatic encounter with God seems quite different from what Maimonides described in any of his writings. Second, the nature of the Abulafian mystical experience was profoundly un/ir/rational.

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<sup>59</sup> *Id.* at 41. I suspect that one might reasonably argue that the work and thought of Medieval philosophy supported Abulafia's anti-nomian thought and practice.

<sup>60</sup> Idel, Moshe, The Mystical Experience in Abulafia, 8-9, 40.

The experience described by Abulafia was anything but a rational encounter, grounded in metaphysical, scientific, mathematical knowledge.<sup>61</sup>

Third, the technique used by Abulafia seems radically different from anything Maimonides ever described in his writings. Neither the manipulation of the letters of Torah nor the recitations of Divine Names are practices that Maimonides ever promoted. Fourth, and finally, Abulafia's mystical practice was profoundly and admittedly anti-nomian. He knowingly violated halakhic strictures in the course of his mystical work. It strikes me as quite unlikely that Maimonides would have supported a mystical practice with such anti-*halakhic*, anti-nomian implications.

David R. Blumenthal of Emory University has argued that, in fact, Maimonides was a mystic – an intellectualist mystic, to be precise. According to Blumenthal, through an examination of Maimonides' use of various Arabic terms, one can discern the nature of his mystical [awareness]. Even Blumenthal's analysis, however, leaves me believing that whatever mystical practice Maimonides endorsed, none represent a close connection to the mysticism of Abulafia.

The first example of intellectual mysticism, involves Maimonides' use of the term wahy. According to Blumenthal, this refers to the highest level of prophecy, like Abraham, and to the second degree of prophecy as well. This form of prophecy is characterized by a prophet who 'preaches to men by speculation and learning' and 'teaches men and explains to them with speculative proofs.' Id. at 28. Even this, however, sounds quite different from an Abulafia ecstatic or prophetic mystical

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<sup>61</sup> Idel, Infinites of Torah, 149.

experience. They were quite solitary experiences and he was in no position to offer sophisticated teachings.<sup>62</sup>

With the Arabic root wsl, Maimonides also speaks of the conjunction of the intellects of man and God. Blumenthal explains that this means, “intellectual contacts which communicate learned things similar to that which is derived from speculation.” Again, I cannot imagine that Abulafia was capable of communicating ‘learned things’ during his mystical ecstasy.

Blumenthal further points out Maimonides’ focus on ‘knowing’ God. “Unto thee it was shown, that you might know that the Lord . . .” “Know this day, and lay it to thy heart.” “Know that the Lord is God.”<sup>63</sup> According to Blumenthal, Maimonides also lays a daily schedule of preparation for the devotee.<sup>64</sup> With this, Maimonides in no way describes any practices resembling Abulafian kabbalah. Based on my reading of Blumenthal, I agree that Maimonides had something of a mystical interest. However, I see little evidence in the Blumenthal’s article suggesting that it sufficiently resembles Abulafian mystical techniques or goals.

### 3. Theosophic Kabbalah<sup>65</sup>

The kabbalistic system referred to as theosophical kabbalah is defined by two goals: (1) understanding the nature of the divine system, including both its concealed and

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<sup>62</sup> Idel, The Mystical Experience in Abulafia, 9.

<sup>63</sup> Deut. 4:35, Deut. 4:39, Psalm 100:3.

<sup>64</sup> Blumenthal, David, Maimonidean Intellectualist Mysticism And the Superiority of the Prophecy of Moses, 33.

<sup>65</sup> According to Ben-Shlomo, as between the philosophers and many kabbalists, there was disdain. For some of the kabbalists explained their feelings like this: “Regarding the philosophers, whose wisdom you praise, know that in truth the place where their heads stand, stand our feet.” Introduction, 13.

revealed aspects; and (2) the role of *mitzvot* and their effect upon the Divine world.<sup>66</sup>

Before discussing these two subjects, however, I want to offer what I think is the most central and compelling point, concerning theosophic kabbalah and its understanding of the *sefirotic* system.

For theosophic kabbalists, the *sefirot* and their number are not philosophical terms. For such kabbalists, the source of their *sefirotic* insight is neither logic nor experimentation. Rather, the source of their insight is divine revelation through mystical interpretation.<sup>67</sup> The *sefirot* are symbols and so is their number. "The *sefirot* express ten extremities or polarities in a three-dimensional world: up, down, east, west, north, south (spatial dimensions); beginning and end (temporal dimension); and good and bad (the moral dimension)."<sup>68</sup>

"The world of *Sefiroth* is described as a mystical organism, a symbol which has the additional advantage of supplying the Kabbalist with a ready justification for the anthropomorphic mode of Scriptural expression. The two most important images used in this connection are that of the tree and that of man. . . The ten *Sefiroth* constitute the mystical Tree of God or tree of divine power each representing a branch whose common root is unknown and unknowable. . . And this tree of God is also, as it were, the skeleton of the universe; it grows throughout the whole of creation and spreads its branches through all its ramifications."<sup>69</sup>

Symbolism must not be confused with rational or logical analysis. Symbolic expression hints at a truth. It is very different from the truth itself. Thus, the criticism that the *sefirot* create ten gods rather than one is simply a misunderstanding of the

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<sup>66</sup> *Id.*, 41.

<sup>67</sup> *Dan*, 9.

<sup>68</sup> *Id.*

<sup>69</sup> Scholem, *Major Trends*, 214

symbolic meaning of the *sefirot*. Anyone who takes the symbol, the tip, to be the whole truth is mistake.<sup>70</sup>

The theosophic symbol is the maximum approximation that can be achieved by human language, of a hidden, mystical truth that is beyond logic and expression.<sup>71</sup> The symbol is the only means by which the truth can be communicated. The concept of ten *sefirot*, therefore, does not denote ten divine powers; rather, it suggests that the human word 'ten' is the closest approximation to something beyond comprehension.<sup>72</sup> Similarly, the terms for emanation are only the closest words in language that symbolize a mystical process that is utterly hidden. *Id.* at 10.

It should be understood however that different kabbalists gave the same terminology and symbolism different meanings. "Thus, the adherence to a system of symbols came to reflect the Kabbalah's external conservatism as it conceals an internally free and revolutionary character."<sup>73</sup>

a) Dynamic vs. Static God

Like the philosophers, one of the major challenges faced by the kabbalists was the problem of a dynamic God, a God that changes. But, the kabbalists came up with a brilliant solution to this problem. They distinguished between the two sides of God – the *Ein Sof* and the *sefirot*. *Id.* at 15. What the philosophers say about God relates to the *Ein Sof*. This is the hidden God, the hidden foundation of existence, the Neoplatonic understanding of the divine. *Id.* This is the Great Reality, the Root of All Roots, 'that

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<sup>70</sup> Dan, Early Kabbalah, 9.

<sup>71</sup> *Id.*

<sup>72</sup> *Id.*, 9-10.

<sup>73</sup> *Id.*, 10

which no thought can comprehend.' This is the hidden side of divinity. This is not the God spoken of in Torah, by the prophets or in the writings.

The God spoken of in Torah, that is the God revealed in the ten *sefirot*.<sup>74</sup> Ben-Shlomo explicitly points out that these are not two separate entities. The *sefirot*, which describe the actions of God, also are spiritual entities that flow from the *Ein Sof*, by means of emanation.<sup>75</sup>

"The *sefirot* are the bridge across the abyss, the connective tissue between the infinite God and the finite world. They are the link that makes it possible to preserve God's absolute unity while preserving the relationship between God and man. . . By differentiating between *Eyn Sof* and the *sefirot*, it possible to say that do is incorporeal, immaterial, and unchangeable while still preserving the traditional notion of God who spoke at Sinai. All the references to the traditional notion of an active, personal God refer to the *sefirot* . . ."<sup>76</sup>

b) *Sefirot* as Essence Of God, Created by God, or Emanation From God

Idel suggests that there are three (3) different answers to the question concerning the ultimate essence of the *sefirot*. First, the *sefirot* are part of the divine nature and partake in the divine essence. The first person to propound this idea was R. Isaac the Blind. In his thought there was an identity between the Godhead and the *sefirot*. The *sefirot* were part of the essence of God. Second, the *sefirot* are not divine in essence, although they are closely related to divinity. They serve either as God's instruments in creating and governing the world, or as God's vessels for delivering the divine influx into the lower worlds. Finally, the *sefirot* are sometimes understood as the divine emanations within created reality, constituting, as it were, the imminent element of divinity.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Id., 16

<sup>75</sup> Id., 17.

<sup>76</sup> Ariel, The Mystic Quest, 67.

<sup>77</sup> Idel, New Perspectives, 137.



One of the primary questions for the kabbalists was how God's presence moves from the hidden, unknowable realm of *Eyn Sof* to the revealed realm of the emanated *sefirot*. There were two possibilities: first, *Eyn Sof* could be one of the 10 *sefirot*, part of the *sefirotic* system. In this system then *Eyn Sof* would be infusing the second *sefirah*, that being *hochmah*. The alternative is that *Eyn Sof* is totally separate from the *sefirotic* realm and thus has to enter into that realm through the *sefirah* of *Keter* or *Ratzon*.<sup>78</sup> Ben Shlomo explains that many kabbalists solved this problem in the following manner. *Id.* at 19. They identified the first *sefirah* with the quality of Divine Will and the subsequent *sefirot*, as well as the essence of the different actions of God, of *El*. Specifically, these are the colorful actions of the Divine Will.<sup>79</sup> The two subsequent *sefirot*, *Hokhmah* and *Binah* distinguish the thoughtfulness and preparation of *El*.<sup>80</sup> *Hokhmah* incorporates the spiritual plan of all existence. It is simply the point from which all existence derives.<sup>81</sup> With the *sefirah* of *Binah*, the process of differentiation begins in the world. The seven lower *sefirot* are distinct within the *sefirah* of *Binah*. It is as if *binah* is pregnant, with the womb of a mother.<sup>82</sup>

Ben-Shlomo points out that if *Keter* is *Ayin*, then *Hokhmah* is the *Supreme* or *Highest Yesh*. It is the beginning of material existence. The kabbalists formed and embraced the idea of *yetziat ha'yesh, min ha'Ayin*.<sup>83</sup> This is the emanation of the *sefirah* of *Hokhmah* from the *sefirah* of *Keter* and of the seven lower *sefirot* from the *sefirah* of

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<sup>78</sup> Ben Shlomo, *Introduction*, 18-19.

<sup>79</sup> *Id.*

<sup>80</sup> *Id.*

<sup>81</sup> *Id.*

<sup>82</sup> *Id.*

<sup>83</sup> *Id.*, 20.

*Binah*. The highest three *sefirot*, *Keter*, *Hokhmah*, and *Binah*, identify the volitional and considered actions of God. The next five *sefirot*, beginning with *Hesed*, express the principled and moral-based introduction to the lower *sefirot*.<sup>84</sup>

According to Ben-Shlomo, Gikatilla never makes totally clear what he believes concerning the relationship between *Eyn-Sof* and *Keter* and *Hokhmah*.<sup>85</sup> Gikatilla tells his readers several times that one must further study and learn this subject directly from a teacher of kabbalah.<sup>86</sup> He does explain, however that *Keter* is the cause of the *sefirotic* emanations and He/*Keter* is the provider of the great *shefa*, the divine abundance and that it is to *Keter* that we direct our religious prayers and our divine service.<sup>87</sup> *Keter* is the power or force that unifies the *sefirot*. The exalted level of *Keter* enables it to oversee and understand its dual purpose. *Keter* unifies within itself the hidden aspect and the revealed aspect of divinity.

c) Role of *Mitzvot*

"[T]he process of creation involves the departure of all from the One and its return to the One, and the crucial turning-point in this cycle takes place within man, at the moment he begins to develop an awareness of his own true essence and yearns to retrace the path from multiplicity of his nature to the Oneness from which he originated."<sup>88</sup>

In order to understand the role of *mitzvot* in theosophic kabbalah, one must understand the interrelationship between God and the *sefirot*, the Torah and the human being. The general progression is as follows: First, as we have already learned above,

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<sup>84</sup> Id.

<sup>85</sup> Id. 30-31.

<sup>86</sup> Id., 30.

<sup>87</sup> Id., 32.

<sup>88</sup> Id.

God is identified with the *sefirot*, with the ten Divine emanations. Second, God is identified with the Torah. The Torah is seen as representing the body of God. Third, the *sefirot* are identified with the human being. Just as the *sefirot* reflect the structure of the divine, so too do they reflect the structure of man. By means of the *sefirot*, man acquires a divine structure.

There is a famous kabbalistic saying: "What is below is above and what is inside is outside."<sup>89</sup> Thus, if we are below then we are also above. If our actions are below they also are above. But this statement only captures part of the point. Also crucial to the power of ritual is something that Scholem calls the magical aspect of the world of *sefirot*. "For in the kabbalistic view everything not only *is in* everything else but also *acts upon* everything else."<sup>90</sup> With this view we can more clearly understand the kabbalistic understanding of *mitzvot*. Thus, we reach the next major idea. Since man has a divine structure, man's actions and attributes naturally can have an impact on the divine.

i) Identity of God and Torah

"God is not something transcending the Torah, the Torah is not outside of God and He is not outside of the Torah, and that is why the sages of the Kabbalah were justified in saying that the Holy One, blessed be He, is Himself the Torah."<sup>91</sup> Here, just as God is infinite, so too is Torah. Like God, Torah contains the secrets of the universe.

ii) Identity of *Sefirot* and Man

"If the *Sefirot* in which God reveals Himself assume the form of man, making him a microcosm in himself – a doctrine which found universal acceptance among the

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<sup>89</sup> Id., 122.

<sup>90</sup> Id.

<sup>91</sup> Scholem, Kabbalah & Its Symbolism, 123.

kabbalists – then man on earth is obviously capable of exerting an influence upon the macrocosm and upon primordial man above.”<sup>92</sup>

iii) Identity of Man and God

The identity of man and God in theosophical kabbalah enabled these kabbalists to build a critical and a beautiful bridge between *halakhah* and the well-being of the divine realm. The deeds performed by a person, not only influence our earthly world, but they also have an impact on the upper realms. Further, every detail of *halakhah* and proper performance of a *mitzvah* influences the *sefirotic* system. Ultimately, the oneness of God depends on the proper actions of mankind – specifically, the proper and thorough performance of the *mitzvot*.

iv) The Power of *Mitzvot* Upon God

Based on this understanding of the relationship of God to Torah, as explained by R. Menahem Recanati, the theosophical kabbalists believed that ritual observance, *mitzvot*, play a central role in the well-being of God and human. Simply put, deriving from Torah and therefore from God, Jewish ritual takes God into action. Ritual action is related to divine action. “The richly diversified life of His unity, achieves its symbolic expression in ritual.”<sup>93</sup>

Scholem offers another penetrating statement by the brilliant kabbalist R. Isaac the Blind. “Those who carry out the *mitsvah* always do two things. They *represent* in a concrete symbol its transcendent essence, through which it is rooted in, and partakes of,

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<sup>92</sup> Scholem, Kabbalah, 153.

<sup>93</sup> Id.

the ineffable. But at the same time they transmit to this transcendent essence an influx of energy."<sup>94</sup>

Recanati and others go so far as to say that not only do our ritual actions have an impact on the divine realm, God's well-being itself is dependent upon our actions.

"Those who perform the ritual, 'lend stability, as it were, to a part of God Himself, if it is permissible to speak in this way.'"<sup>95</sup> Ultimately, the purpose of ritual is the creation of unity. This is a unity of the individual him/herself, but also a unity between above and below, between heaven and earth, the heights and the depths of the cosmos.<sup>96</sup>

#### 4. Abulafian Kabbalah vs. Theosophical Kabbalah

##### a) Physical/spiritual duality

Abulafia's system is dominated by two major concepts: the intellect and the imagination. The literal meaning of the Torah is associated with the imagination, while its esoteric meaning is associated with the intellect.<sup>97</sup> Abulafia and ecstatic kabbalah rejected the theosophic affinity for symbolism. Ecstatic kabbalah emphasized, more than theosophical kabbalah, the chasm between the spiritual and the material. With the goal of attaining liberation from the bonds of corporeality, ecstatic Kabbalah worked on the

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<sup>94</sup> Id., 124-125.

<sup>95</sup> Id., 125.

<sup>96</sup> Long before the kabbalah, the Talmudists played with the idea of a correspondence between the commandments of the Torah and the structure of man. The 248 commandments correspond to the 248 members of man, the 365 prohibitions to the days of the year. Thus, each member of man's body is made to fulfill a commandment. Further, the 10 Commandments came to symbolize the 10 *sefirot* in the body of *Adam Kadmon*, which is also the structure of God. Here, we begin to see that the human is a microcosm for the world and that man's action restores the structure of *Adam Kadmon*. Id., 128.

<sup>97</sup> Idel, The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia, 73.

means of severing the connection between the human soul and its body. As a corporeal being, the body could not serve as a point of departure for metaphysical meditations.

On the other hand, theosophical Kabbalah conceived the specific structure of the body as a powerful symbol of the *sefirotic* realm, and its contemplation as an important way of fathoming the structure of the Deity. Therefore, despite the profound difference between the human and the Divine, these two entities shared a common structure, such that man as symbol permitted the mystic an ascent beyond the material world.<sup>98</sup>

b) Role of symbols

Abulafia regarded the literal meaning of the Torah as utterly negative, or even demonic. On the other hand, the theosophical kabbalist believed that just as the human body reflects the higher theosophy, so did the plain meaning of the text; neither the body nor the text needed to be destroyed in order to attain ultimate esoteric knowledge. Both were starting points for contemplation, material to be penetrated without obliterating its basic structure. For the theosophist, the basic unit was not the letter, freed of its links to the Torah text, but the word, which remained generally intact while its esoteric meaning alluded to a divine hypostasis.<sup>99</sup>

Ecstatic Kabbalah prescribed mystical techniques for the attainment of the perfection of the individual, to be used in total isolation. Theosophical Kabbalah emphasized the role of the community as a unity able to act in an other-oriented way for the benefit of the Godhead more than for its own welfare.

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<sup>98</sup> Idel, New Perspectives, 207.

<sup>99</sup> Id., 208.

## CHAPTER TWO

### I. The Essential Brilliance of Joseph Gikatilla's *Sha'are 'Orah*

Gikatilla did not believe that one has to choose between philosophy and Abulafian and theosophic kabbalah. He taught, although not in philosophical language, that the three can and should be unified. He created a kabbalah that focused on the philosophical goals of knowledge and understanding. But, our search for knowledge and understanding, according to Gikatilla, should focus on the Divine Names, which was a central object of Abulafian kabbalah. Furthermore, like Abulafia, our knowledge of the Divine can grow out of esoteric interpretive practices such as gematria.

Finally, Gikatilla systematically places all of this knowledge within the theosophic system of *sefirot*. The knowledge that we search for, offers us a deep understanding of God's emanatory process. It teaches us how we can seek to influence the divine; how our religious practice, when directed to the proper Divine Name, can influence the cosmic forces in the world; and, how we can cause God's abundant mercy to flow into our lives.

#### A. Life And Historical Background Of Joseph Gikatilla

Joseph Gikatilla was born in approximately 1248 in the Spanish Castilian town of Medinat Celim. Unfortunately, very little is known about Gikatilla's family background. He died at about 74 years old, in 1322. He was a prolific writer of kabbalistic texts, credited with writing dozens of texts during the course of his lifetime.

Two of his most important works were *Ginnat Egoz* (GE), the Garden of the Walnut, and *Shaarei Orah* (SO), Gates of Light. As will be discussed below, these works are understood as coming out of two very different kabbalistic traditions. GE, the earlier

text, written in his mid-20's, comes out of the tradition primarily associated with Abraham Abulafia, a tradition of linguistic kabbalah or prophetic/ecstatic kabbalah.

It is fairly widely agreed that in this first stage of his career Gikatilla was a highly esteemed peer or colleague of Abraham Abulafia. According to Idel, Abulafia taught Maimonides' Guide for the Perplexed, to Gikatilla.<sup>100</sup> In 1285, Abulafia spoke of Gikatilla in the following way: "... there were two (mystics) in Medinacelli: R. Samuel the prophet who received some (qabbalah) from me, and R. Joseph Gikatilla who was highly successful in that which he learned with me and advanced on his own. The Lord was with him."<sup>101</sup>

What is confusing about this statement is that it was written approximately 10 years after Abulafia left Castile and thus quite a long time after Gikatilla and Abulafia had worked/studied together.

As stated, this early stage of Gikatilla's career is most prominently defined by his work entitled, *Ginnat Egoz*, Garden of the Nut, which was written in 1273-74. Scholem stated that "Gikatilla wrote *Ginnat Egoz* . . . with the purpose of explicating the method of prophetic qabbalah."<sup>102</sup> Moshe Idel describes GE as a work of linguistic kabbalah. Other works during this stage of his career include *Perush al Shir ha'Shirim*, a poem entitled *Bagdashah*, *Iggare ha'Emunah*, *Sefer ha' Niggud* and numerous other works only found in manuscript.

In the second and latter stage of Gikatilla's career/life, his principal works were *Sha'are Tzedek*, Gates of Righteousness, and *Sha'are Orah*, Gates of Light. The most

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<sup>100</sup> Idel, The Mystical Experience in Abulafia, 3.

<sup>101</sup> Blickstein, 112.

<sup>102</sup> Scholem, Major Trends, 194.



famous work of this period, and the primary subject of this thesis, is *Sha'are Orah*. SO, written approximately 20 years after GE, is an analysis of the divine *sefirot* or *middot*, and thus understood as a work of theosophic kabbalah. Idel notes that Gikatilla wrote at least four (4) texts on the subject of theosophic kabbalah.<sup>103</sup> During this period of his life, Gikatilla was no longer a part of the Abulafian kabbalistic circle. Rather, in this latter stage, it appears that Gikatilla was something of a colleague and definitely a contemporary of Moshe de Leon, the likely author of the primary text of the Zohar.

Significantly, Yehuda Liebes has helped us to know that Gikatilla composed a composition, among others, that is possibly the basis of material that became part of the Zohar, specifically the *Idrot*.<sup>104</sup> One example, according to Liebes, is relevant to our text. God's thirteen attributes of compassion emanating from the highest *sefirah*, are likely the same as the esoteric Zoharic text, involving God's 13 locks on his beard (*Tikunnei DiKena*).<sup>105</sup>

Virtually every attempt to examine these two works central to Gikatilla's literary life, has observed a profound shift in his understanding of God and the world. Moshe Idel describes this shift as follows: "Indeed, the divergences between the two stages of Gikatilla's . . . thought are so stark and substantial that it is hard to believe [he] could have written such vastly differing works."<sup>106</sup> Thus, in addition to the dearth of information about his family background and personal life, we are also limited in our ability to explain the course of his intellectual and literary life.

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<sup>103</sup> *Sha'are 'Orah, Historical Introduction* by Idel, xxxi.

<sup>104</sup> Liebes, Yehuda, *Studies in the Zohar*, 99.

<sup>105</sup> *Id.*, 100.

<sup>106</sup> *Sha'are 'Orah, Historical Introduction*, xxiv.

Despite the difficulty in understanding the course of Gikatilla's intellectual and mystical life, we can identify several pivotal influences on his thought and religious life. I will focus on three of these influences. They are: 1) Abulafian kabbalistic ideas, which heavily drew on Maimonidean philosophy; 2) Maimonidean rationalist philosophy; and 3) theosophic kabbalah, which is generally not seen to be philosophically oriented.

B. Ginnat Egoz & Potential Similarities To SO

In 1273-74, Gikatilla wrote *Ginnat Egoz*, Garden of the Nut, his most important work in the first half of his literary career. He wrote this text in a small Castilian town of 20-30 Jewish families.<sup>107</sup> As I have not read GE, I want only to offer a few ideas based on the analysis by Blickstein.

1. Ginnat Egoz and its potential relationship to SO

"Scholars have neither determined precisely the central theme and purpose of GE nor have they identified correctly its proper mystical-literary context."<sup>108</sup> The book has been variously described as a 'work dealing with divine names,' as 'an introduction to the mystic symbolism of the alphabet . . . and Divine Names,' as an attempt to reconcile philosophy with mysticism, and as a "work of prophetic qabbalah."<sup>109</sup> "Scholem and others who have described GE as a work of prophetic qabbalah have fundamentally misinterpreted GE and have placed it within the wrong mystical-literary setting."<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> Blickstein, 3.

<sup>108</sup> Blickstein, 21.

<sup>109</sup> Id., 22-24.

<sup>110</sup> Gikatilla totally rejects any metaphysical similarity between YHVH and the Intelligences. These Intelligences, which are pure form, are created, according to Gikatilla and are therefore inferior to YHVH. Thus, they are subject to apprehension by humans. Id., 44-45.

According to Blickstein, religious rationalism together with letter and number symbolism is the distinctive quality of Gikatilla's *Ginnat Egoz*.<sup>111</sup> He uses letter and number symbolism to explain the cosmological origins of the universe from the Divine Name, YHVH. The physical universe is ontologically constituted from letters and numbers.<sup>112</sup> Gikatilla saw the Torah as one great repository of esoteric ideas, written in cryptic fashion or code form. The Torah, then, is ultimately a secret book, and letter and number symbolism is the key to its secrets.<sup>113</sup> I offer these conclusions of Blickstein because despite the common understanding that GE and SO represent two profoundly different works, suggesting almost a schizophrenic kind of personality, there seem to be a number of meaningful similarities between the two texts.

## 2. Potential similarities between GE and SO

Based largely on Blickstein's work, I want to suggest the following seven similarities, between GE and SO: i) the desire to prove that the universe derives from one core place; ii) the purpose of mystical pursuits is not prophetic or mystical union with God; iii) serious kabbalistic practice can have an impact on the cosmic/divine realm; iv) the absolute centrality of the divine name, YHVH; v) each divine name emanates from YHVH; vi) no positive attributes may be predicated of God; vii) the grounding philosophical-kabbalistic ideas in Torah is the principal technique and purpose of kabbalistic practice.

In GE, Gikatilla seeks to show that the physical world derives from letters and numbers. In SO, he seeks to show that the world derives from divine names. In fairness,

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<sup>111</sup> Id., 46-48.

<sup>112</sup> Id., 50.

<sup>113</sup> Id., 52.

it seems that he is not concerned with the physical world per se, rather he is concerned with the metaphysics of God's *Middot*.

Second, in neither GE nor SO, is Gikatilla interested in ecstatic or prophetic union with God. Third, in both works, whether through knowledge of numbers and letters or through knowledge of divine names, humans can influence the divine realm.

Fourth, both works are abundantly explicit about the centrality of YHVH. Fifth, and similar to number four, both works emphasize that all divine names emanate from YHVH. "The goal of GE is to show how the entire universe as well as the divine names and the Torah, ontologically emanated from the four letters."<sup>114</sup> The Divine Name is the metaphysical origin of all language, the Torah, and the physical universe. It is the source of all being."<sup>115</sup>

Sixth, it seems to be the case, based on Blickstein's analysis of GE, that no positive attributes may be predicated of God. Finally, Gikatilla's principal practice in both texts is to take kabbalistic ideas, whether relating to divine letters, numbers or divine names, and ground the ideas in Torah. Blickstein makes it clear that this is a central Gikatilla method in GE.

"We should not view letter and number symbolism in Gikatilla's writings, as a technique which he used to produce new philosophical-qabbalistic ideas. Rather, as he tells us in his introduction to GE, it is a technique by means of which 'the principles of our faith may be grounded in the foundations of our Torah.'"<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>114</sup> *Id.*, 68.

<sup>115</sup> *Id.*, 70 - 71.

<sup>116</sup> *Id.*

### 3. Influence of Maimonides upon – Abulafia and Gikatilla

Maimonidean philosophy, influenced both prophetic and theosophic kabbalah. Abulafia capitalizes on Maimonides' idea that contact with God occurs through the intellect, through the human acquisition of metaphysical knowledge. Humans receive from the ever-flowing fountain of the Active Intellect. Further, following after Maimonides, Abulafia was quite concerned that theosophic kabbalah violated the unity of 'God created by the 10 divine entities.

In *Sha'are 'Orah*, besides the emphasis upon the precise performance of *mitzvot*, the emphasis on intellectual understanding and thorough knowledge likely derives from the influence of Maimonidean philosophy upon Gikatilla. Furthermore, it is even possible, that the kabbalistic emphasis on *mitzvot*, also is connected to or raised higher by Maimonides

Maimonides believed in the importance of harnessing and organizing the vast array of *mitzvot*. He cared so deeply in this mission that he wrote the text that transformed Jewish life forever, the Mishneh Torah. Theosophic kabbalists believed in the importance and the power of an organized and systemic religious/ritual observance. Building upon and benefiting from Maimonides' monumental work, they came to believe that the proper practice of the *mitzvot* must have cosmic implications. They believed that through the practice of *mitzvot*, Jews would come to have a deeper knowledge of God.

Maimonides, most likely, did not believe in or highly value a mystical merging of human and God. Humans can and do share in the divine *shefa*, albeit in differing degrees. But ecstatic and prophetic mystical experience does not seem to be the goal of

Maimonides' understanding of the Active Intellect, which was available to humans through the mastery of metaphysical knowledge.

For Gikatilla, like Maimonides, ecstatic and prophetic experience was not the goal, in either GE<sup>117</sup> or SO. In neither of these texts does he speak of or promote ecstatic merging with God. Similarly, like Maimonides, he most often speaks the language of understanding and knowledge. Whether it was the knowledge of the letters and numbers, or the knowledge of the divine names, for Gikatilla the connection with God was significantly intellectual.

#### 4. Sha'arei 'Orah

Written by Gikatilla before 1295, *Sha'are 'Orah* is a classic of theosophic kabbalah. In this body of thought, God is understood through His Divine Names. For Gikatilla, to understand the names of God is to understand: a) that which God expects from us; b) how human actions affect the divine realm; and c) how the forces of God naturally respond to the events in the human and earthly realm.

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<sup>117</sup> Id.

### CHAPTER THREE

#### A. Introduction To *Sha'are 'Orah*<sup>118</sup>

In this chapter I will seek to analyze the Introduction to Joseph Gikatilla's *Sha'are Orah*. My analysis will have two areas of focus. First, I will set forth what appear to be the goals of this text, as identified by Gikatilla. Second, I will identify the issues – philosophical, theosophical or otherwise – that Gikatilla raises.

#### B. Format Of Book – Reply To A Letter

Before setting out on this task, I want to consider the significance, if any, of the format of this text. He begins and structures the work, as a response or reply, to a letter apparently written to him seeking advice. An anonymous person apparently wrote Gikatilla asking about the *netiv*, the path, to the names of God. Gikatilla does not tell us whether the letter-writer asked specifically about the theosophic system of *sefirot*. It also is unclear if the letter asks about the reciting or uttering of the names of God, or inquires of the metaphysical truths connected to the names of God. Gikatilla's description of the request as having an interest in the *netiv*/path in the matter of divine names, might subtly direct our attention to *Sefer Yetzirah*, which begins by explaining that the world was created through 32 *netivot* of wisdom. These *netivot* might be distinct from *d'rakhim* in that the former generally refer to a path of a personal nature, while the latter suggests just a path, a way, without any calling upon a personal connection.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> *Sha'are 'Orah* was first published in 1560 and recently published in Jerusalem in 1970.) Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 112.

<sup>119</sup> Kaplan, Aryeh, (translation of) *Book of Creation*,

C. Goals – Why Seek Understanding Of God's Names? Why Names? Why Gates?

Gikatilla's immediate and introductory reply to the letter is that he feels compelled to inform the inquirer of "how the light of God is disseminated". Like so many kabbalists and so many of their texts, light is a central image. Although the kabbalah has numerous ways of explaining light imagery, I want to offer one. Ultimately, the passion for experiencing and knowing God is a passion for truth, for essence and, on an experiential level, light evokes an experience where there is nothing hidden. Embraced by light, one is able to fully observe, understand and experience the deepest essence. When all is transparent, there is nothing concealed, everything is revealed.<sup>120</sup> Gikatilla's second goal is to explain the path that God desires from us. Third, he offers the reasons, five in particular, why one should care to understand the attributes of God.

The five reasons are as follows: a) only after one calls to God, will God answer; b) after having called to God, such a person will be among those who are close to or in the midst, the presence, of God; c) such a person will love God with all his soul; d) such a person will delight in God; and finally e) God will grant the yearnings of the heart of such a person.

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<sup>120</sup> Idel, The Mystical Experience in Abulafia, 80-81. According to Idel, Abulafia distinguished between levels of prophecy based on light and speech. Prophecy translated into speech was of a higher order than prophecy immersed in light. Thus, the title Gates of Light might have been a way for Gikatilla to disagree with Abulafia's view of mystical experience.



a) Why Ascending Gates?

I also want to briefly address Gikatilla's choice of format: an ascent through Gates. *Sha'are 'Orah* begins at the first Gate, the lowest emanation of God and progressively ascends through the next higher gate, until reaching the top. First, with this approach, Gikatilla gives the text a mystical quality. We sense that we are moving up and up, closer and closer to the Divine source. Second, the passage through Gates has a long history. The ancient *Heikhalot* literature, adapted by the *Merkavah*, the Hasidei Ashkenaz and then Abulafia, used consciousness-altering methods to pass through the divine gates. So, by choosing the imagery of gates, Gikatilla could again, in the same way he sought to recast our understanding of Divine Names, seek to recast the notion of Gates.

b) Why Divine Names?

Interestingly, Gikatilla does not address directly the reason why Divine Names become the central, defining object of his kabbalistic system. I want to offer one answer to this question. Divine Names have a colorful and diverse history. In fact, they were centrally important to the ecstatic kabbalah of Abulafia, who would recite such Names for the purpose of ecstatic and prophetic God-encounters. As for theosophical kabbalah, the Torah was understood to be one long name for God and as well, nothing other than a collection of Divine Names.<sup>121</sup> Furthermore, Maimonides explicitly acknowledged the significance of Divine Names. "It is well known that all the names of God occurring in

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<sup>121</sup> Scholem, Symbolism, 36-38.

Scripture are derived from His actions, except one, namely, the Tetragrammaton, which consists of the letters *yod, hey, vav* and *hey*.<sup>122</sup>

Around the 3<sup>rd</sup> century CE, Divine Names were understood to have something of a magical power. At that time, there was a mystical literature, called *Heikhalot*, which understood that below God were halls, sometimes 7, through which seekers of God had to pass. At the gate of each palace, the mystic had to show the doorkeepers the 'seals,' which were secret Names of God.<sup>123</sup> This tradition became important to the *Merkavah* mystics and then to the German Hasidei-Ashkenaz, a group of mystically-oriented pietists.<sup>124</sup> These mystics added to the idea of Sacred Names, the possibility that numerological links could reveal secret meanings of the Torah.

This tradition of the magical power of Divine Names, from *Heikhalot* to *Merkavah* to Hasidei Ashkenaz, became for Abulafia a defining feature of his mystical work and Gikatilla encountered this mystical practice, in the time he spent with Abulafia. Thus, by focusing on Divine Names, we see that Gikatilla could recast this piece of his formative training. He could remove the magical and ecstatic components of Divine Names that was so central to Abulafia. He could add a more explicit mystical quality to the Maimonidean notion of Divine Names. And finally, he could infuse the theosophical passion for Divine Names, with a deeply philosophical quality.

Furthermore, seeking to undermine from the outset Abulafia's view of Names and Light, Gikatilla proceeds to explain, implicitly, why Abulafia's primary mystical practice

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<sup>122</sup> Maimonides, Moses, Guide For The Perplexed, Part I, Chapter 61.

<sup>123</sup> Scholem, Gershom, Kabbalah, 17-20.

<sup>124</sup> Id., 32.

is misguided. It is misguided, for one, because Jewish law and tradition forbid the recitation of Divine Names.

D. Issues Raised In The Introduction

1. We may not utter God's names

It is striking that Gikatilla begins the content of his text with a prohibition against uttering divine names. As explained above, Gikatilla had a close connection to Abraham Abulafia, in the first half of his active kabbalistic life. One of Abulafia's primary mystical practices was the uttering of divine names. He would seek to achieve an ecstatic or prophetic mystical experience by means of reciting Divine Names. At the outset, Gikatilla makes the bold statement that Abulafia's practice is wrong. It is bold in that he is, in essence, openly criticizing and rejecting the work of an important former colleague.

Strikingly, however, at the same time Gikatilla affirms Abulafia's great regard for the Divine Names. Gikatilla affirms Abulafia's mystical instinct that the path to God is primarily through Divine Names. Although he will affirm the central importance of Divine Names, Gikatilla will change drastically the manner in which Divine Names enable one to encounter God, as well as endow them with symbolic value.

The key here is the following: Gikatilla is teaching that the Names themselves are not the source of power and blessing. Rather, it is the attributes associated with the Names that creates power and blessing. In fact, in the absence of divine attributes, Divine Names are more likely to be a curse than a blessing.

Gikatilla offers an explicit and extensive analysis of why one is prohibited from uttering the names of God.<sup>125</sup> The letter-writer does not explicitly refer to the practice of uttering God's names, or at least Gikatilla does not say so. Nevertheless, Gikatilla begins his response with 5 proof texts supporting his warnings against uttering the names of God.

a) Humility & Fear: Divine Names as *Pardes*

First, as a matter of our profound duty to live with humility, we should not engage in the practice of uttering divine names. We should be in great fear of God. We simply are not worthy of uttering God's names for our own personal use. Since the upper and lower divine beings stand with awe and fear of the Divine Name, who are we humans to think ourselves worthy of uttering the Names. See (Nahum 1:6). "Who can stand before His wrath? Who can resist His fury? His anger pours out like fire, and rocks are shattered because of Him."

Gikatilla wants to discourage if not terminate the practice of uttering the divine names by creating great fear about the consequences of this mystical practice. The prophet Nahum offers a scary and painful picture of God – a God who is vengeful, fierce and a God who does not remit all punishment. All of created life seems to exist in a state of fear – or at least we should.

Here we have a striking, almost paradoxical opening to Gikatilla's book. Much of *Sha'are 'Orah*, and for sure the chapter on *Hesed*, is offered to show a God who is primarily defined by lovingkindness. Yet, in this Introduction and in the opening of the

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<sup>125</sup> *Sha'are 'Orah*, Page 45, Line 8 et seq.

Introduction, Gikatilla starts off with a textual reference painting a very different image of God, and particularly YHVH.<sup>126</sup>

Despite this potential paradox, Gikatilla furthers his point concerning the prohibition of uttering Divine Names. He seeks to deepen the fear of engaging in such activity. Specifically, he introduces the imagery of water, which is taken from the *Hekhalot* literature. "What then of one loathsome and foul, Man, who drinks wrongdoing like water!" (Job 15:16.) אִיךָ כִּי נִתְעַב וְנִאֲלַח אִישׁ שֶׁתָּה כַּמַּיִם עוֹלָה.<sup>127</sup>

With this text, Gikatilla seeks to appeal to our sense of humility, our tremendously diminutive quality in relation to God. If the heavenly, celestial forces quake at God's power, all the more so that we humans should feel such fear and humility. None of us was the first person born. None of us have had the privilege of listening in on the council of God. Each of us is quite fallible. And much of our talk, many of our words are useless and of no worth. Thus, he ultimately suggests, how could we possibly think that we are worthy of uttering divine names!!!

But on a mystical, kabbalistic level, Gikatilla uses this text to remind us of the famous passage in the Talmud, Hagigah 14b, in which the four rabbis entered Pardes, the Heavenly Garden. For there, R. Akiva warned, "when you come to the place of pure marble stones, do not say 'water, water.'"<sup>128</sup> As the Talmud tells us, three of the rabbis failed to survive this experience. Only R. Akiva, who understood the danger and the prohibition against uttering names, magical or symbolic words, survived the experience.

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<sup>126</sup> Throughout I will use YHVH as referring to the four-letter Tetragram, *yud, key vav, key*.

<sup>127</sup> *Sha'are 'Orah*, Page 45, Line 12 et seq.

<sup>128</sup> Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 18.

In fact, one who uses the Names of God in such a way is as if he strikes the *keter* of *malkhut* – the crown of the kingdom – a reference to the *Shekhinah*.<sup>129</sup> Hillel says [in Aramaic]: A name made great is a name destroyed. . . And the one who uses the crown passes away.”<sup>130</sup> With this point, Gikatilla might be saying to Abulafia that by reciting the Divine Name, Abulafia is depriving himself of experiencing even the most accessible aspect of God. Further, by rejecting knowledge of the Divine Names, in the context of the *sefirotic* system, Abulafian mysticism deprived one of true knowledge of God.

b) No Portion In The World To Come

Second, we must accept the teaching of the Sages, who said: “Anyone who utters the name of God as rendered by its letters has no portion in the world to come.”<sup>131</sup> This text is fairly explicit as to the absolute prohibition against uttering the name of God. Gikatilla reasons that if the practice of uttering the names of God deprives us of our portion in *olam ha'ba*, then surely we should not be engaged in such a practice.

c) Jewish Law/Text Prohibit Uttering of Divine Names<sup>132</sup>

Third, Gikatilla cites the 10 Commandments. “You shall not raise in vain the name of YHVH your God.” (Exodus 20). לֹא תִשָּׂא אֶת שֵׁם יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְשׁוֹן. Here, Gikatilla wants to show that if the Torah meant only to prohibit lying in the name of God, it would have used the language of *lo tishava . . . sheker* (do not swear . . . falsely), rather than “*lo tissa . . . b'shav*” (do not raise in vain the name of God). Gikatilla teaches that the Torah must have had a larger agenda. Recitation of Divine Names for

<sup>129</sup> Mishnah Avot 1:13.

<sup>130</sup> See also Avot d'Rabbe Natan 12.

<sup>131</sup> Sanhedrin 10, Mishnah 1.

<sup>132</sup> Sha'are 'Orah, Page 45, Line 16 et seq.

the selfish purpose of an ecstatic mystical experience constitutes a 'raising in vain of the name" of God. Here, to find authority for this position embedded in the Ten Commandments, surely strengthens Gikatilla's case.

Fourth, "For the name of God I proclaim . . . They [the Israelites] may only give glory to God." (emphasis added) (Deuteronomy 32). With this proof-text, Gikatilla wants to establish that the prohibition includes Moses. First, God delivers the prohibition in the Ten Commandments. Here Moses throws in his weight of authority to this prohibition.

Fifth and finally, "Anyone who does not tend to the glorification of his Creator would be better off not having been created."<sup>133</sup> Gikatilla reminds us that the Sages, who did possess secrets of the Holy Names as received from the prophets, used the Names only for the glorification of God and only during times of oppression. The practice of uttering Divine Names is not in the nature of glorifying the Creator. Gikatilla suggests here that the manipulation and speaking of divine names is primarily a self-serving practice that does not glorify God, but that seeks to satisfy the appetite of the mystic.

d) Gikatilla – Schizophrenia or Natural Evolution

All of this is in striking contrast to the kabbalah of Abraham Abulafia. One might see Gikatilla as something of a schizophrenic, in light of his change of heart/mind in the middle of his life. On the other hand, this clear shift in focus might call on observers to seek a less critical explanation of Gikatilla's shift. Is it possible, for example, that in the earlier stage of his life he was not so assuredly a subscriber of Abulafian kabbalah? After all, Blickstein points out that even in *Ginnat Egoz*, in which he fully uses Abulafian

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<sup>133</sup> *Sha'are 'Orah*, Page 46, Line 12 et seq.

methods, Gikatilla does not seek the Abulafian goal – the ecstatic/prophetic experience. In this light, Gikatilla's shift away from recitation of Divine Names to the knowledge and understanding of Divine Names, might not represent such a radical shift. Rather, his attempt to integrate the Divine Names into the realm of theosophical kabbalah, might have been quite a systematic transition.

Gikatilla continues to build his case against Abulafia's ecstatic mysticism with several Biblical citations. "If the sinners tempt you, do not accept."

בְּנֵי אָם יִפְתּוּךָ חַטָּאִים אֶל הַבָּא. Proverbs 1:10. Here, he virtually declares

Abulafia to be a sinner. In light of the evidence he brought prohibiting the recitation of Divine Names, Gikatilla likely saw people who ignored the prohibition as sinners.

Further, this Proverb begins with an explicit and emphatic urging for us to pursue wisdom and knowledge and to realize that this pursuit begins with a fear of God, rather than a bold and self-involved desire to unite in ecstasy with God.

## 2. Knowledge of Divine Names Is The Key to Everything In Life And Leads To A Craving of God

After completing his lengthy argument against the utterance of the Divine Names, Gikatilla states explicitly that it is permissible to seek to comprehend the intention, the meaning, of each of God's names, "*l'hasig kavvanat kol shem v'shem*" that is in the Torah.<sup>134</sup> Here, Gikatilla continues to distinguish between two very different activities: the mystical, Abulafian practice of reciting or uttering Divine Names for the purpose of achieving prophetic union, versus the acquisition of knowledge and understanding of the role and interplay of the Divine Names in our world.

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<sup>134</sup> *Sha'are 'Orah*, Page 47, Line 5 et seq.



"I will keep him safe, for he knows My Name. When he calls on Me I will answer him."<sup>135</sup> (Psalm 91.) אֲשַׁגְּבֶהוּ כִּי יָדַע שְׁמִי יִקְרָאֵנִי וְאֶעֱנֶהוּ. Our well-being is not connected to the utterance of God's Name but rather to our knowledge and understanding the significance/meaning of God's Names. Psalm 91 states explicitly why and when God will keep us safe: only when/after we have knowledge of His Name. And only after acquiring this knowledge will our call to God evoke an answer from God. Utterance of God's Name(s), not based on an understanding of the divine name, will neither grant for us safety from God or an answer from God.

Having given his clear warnings against the practice of uttering God's names, and his support for understanding the deeper meanings of God's names, Gikatilla sets out to list the attributes of God that are connected to each of the Divine Names. Here we see are introduced to the heart, to Gikatilla's ultimate point -- Divine Names offer blessing only when we understand the divine attributes that are attached to the Divine Names.

### 3. Knowledge of Divine Names & Fear of God

Knowledge of the Divine Names is the key to everything that a person needs in the world and will lead a person to fear, to hold in awe, and to crave God. For Gikatilla, the intersection between knowledge and fear constitutes 'being close to, or in the midst of God.'

When a person arrives at this intersection of knowledge and fear, he will be worthy of God's nearness and his prayer will become efficacious. "I will keep him safe for he knows My Name." Psalm 91. אֲשַׁגְּבֶהוּ כִּי יָדַע שְׁמִי יִקְרָאֵנִי וְאֶעֱנֶהוּ. Again, it is not the uttering of the Name that matters. Rather, based on Gikatilla, what counts

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<sup>135</sup> Sha'are 'Orah, Page 47, Line 13 et seq.

with God is the knowledge, the understanding of the divine attributes associated with God's names.

a) Knowledge Allows For Efficacious Prayer

Gikatilla offers three Biblical instances of human prayer, Daniel, Jacob and Hannah, to extend his point that understanding of the Divine Names makes for efficacious prayer.<sup>136</sup> Each of these Biblical figures seems to understand the *middah* or attribute of specific names of God. Therefore, each was able to connect his/her prayer to the appropriate Divine Names. I think there are several significant aspects to the prayers offered by each of these characters.

First, each character recognized YHVH to be the central Divine Name. Second, each connected the attribute of *Rahamim* to the Divine Name YHVH. Finally, each character offered an additional Divine Name in prayer that was appropriate to the situation. Fourth and finally, these 3 characters used the Divine Name in prayer that relates to the bottom three *sefirot*.

As for Daniel, we see a prayer for God's mercy and compassion for a sinful people, as well as a sinful Daniel. Daniel, two times in Chapter 9, understands *Rahamim* to be a central *middah* of God. Further, the name by which he addresses God is *Adonay Eloheinu ha'Rahamim*.<sup>137</sup> Daniel prayed to Adonay, אֲדֹנָי. Adonay, אֲדֹנָי, is a Divine Name associated with the lowest *sefirah* of *Malchut* or *Shekhinah*. Gikatilla explains, in the first chapter of *Sha'are 'Orah*, that the name "is merciful and from it we are pardoned for each transgression and sin. . . When this attribute wants to exact judgment on Israel it

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<sup>136</sup> *Sha'are 'Orah*, Page 47, Line 18 et seq.

<sup>137</sup> Daniel 9:9, 9:18.

is filled with lovingkindness and mercy, and sometimes transforms the attribute of stern judgment into one of mercy.”

As for Jacob, he directs his prayer to *El Shaddai*, in asking that the ruler of Egypt, Joseph, show mercy, *Rahamim*, to the other sons, and specifically to Judah and to Benjamin. This attribute, according to Gikatilla’s second chapter, is associated with the second *sefirah*, from the bottom. After *Shekhinah*, the *sefirah* of *El Shaddai* is the most accessible. And the Divine Name *El Shaddai* has the attribute of preventing tribulation from occurring in the world.

Finally, we reach the prayer of Hannah. Interestingly, we do not see a direct reference by Hannah to God’s *middah* of *Rahamim*. However, Hannah also prays “*lifnai YHVH*,” (before God) and after she conceived and gave birth, she again directed her prayer to YHVH.

If we ask how Hannah’s prayer is connected to *Rahamim*, I sense two possibilities. First, the essence of her prayer concerns her own womb, *rehem*, quite possibly the most primal, and primary, place of *Rahamim*. Second, as we see in the chapter on the seventh *middah*, Gikatilla might be suggesting that since YHVH is *Rahamim Gemorim*, Hannah’s prayer was inherently, and knowingly, a prayer for God’s highest mercy.

Furthermore, there is an additional reason that Gikatilla offers Hannah’s prayer. Her prayer was directed to God in the Divine Name of *Adonai Tzevaot*. This name is associated with the third lowest *sefirah*, after *Shekhina* and *El Shaddai*. The attribute of this Divine Name draws from *Hesed Elyon*, the highest source and form of lovingkindness.

We can now see that Gikatilla's three examples of prayer help us travel up the first three/four *sefirot*. By following these three biblical characters, we have passed through the first three divine gates. Daniel prayed to *Adonay*, a Divine Name associated with *Shekhina* or *Malhut*, the first *sefirah*. Jacob prayed to *El Shaddai*, a Divine Name associated with *Yesod*, the second *sefirah*. And Hannah prayed to *YHVH Tzevaot*, a Divine Name associated with both *Netzach* and *Hod*. Thus, by raising these three moments of prayer, Gikatilla has helped us travel up the first four *sefirot*. Further, we now are ready to ascend the remaining six *sefirot*, which Gikatilla helps us to do.<sup>138</sup>

i) The Central Role of Abraham – The Earthly Founder of  
*Hesed*

After referring to these biblical characters, Gikatilla takes up his study of Abraham, who will become the central figure in the study of *Hesed*. The reason for Abraham's central importance is that he was the first Biblical figure who: a) identified God as master of the universe; and b) associated *Hesed* with God; and c) recognized that specific Divine Names apply to specific attributes of God.

Gikatilla points out that Abraham was the first to refer to God as *Adon*.<sup>139</sup> In Genesis 15:2 and 15:8, Abraham calls out to God, using the name *Adonai YHVH*. This

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<sup>138</sup> Throughout the chapter on *Hesed*, we will encounter each of the remaining six *sefirot*, *Tiferet*, *Din*, *Hesed*, *Binah*, *Hokhmah*, and *Keter*. Subtly imbedded in this method as well, is the idea that all of the *sefirot* are contained within each *sefirah*.

<sup>139</sup> See b. Berachot 7b

name is a reference to the *sefirah* of *Din*. The reason that God answered Daniel is because of the merit of Abraham, for using the same name that Abraham used – *Adon*.<sup>140</sup>

Here, Gikatilla returns to Torah, in part to prove that understanding and knowledge of Divine Names is the authentic religious endeavor. But also, for Gikatilla and mainstream theosophical kabbalah, all questions can be answered by Torah. It is the words of Torah to which we turn in order to encounter God. "Not only does the infinity of the Torah reflect God's infinity, but apprehension of this infinity offers now a way to cleave to Him. 'Since God has neither beginning nor end, no limit at all, so also His Perfect Torah, which was transmitted to us, . . . neither limit nor end.'"<sup>141</sup> Thus, Abulafia's attempt to deconstruct Torah, by letter permutations or by rearranging the words of Torah, is an unreliable, unauthorized and dangerous activity.

Ironically, the case could be made on behalf of Abulafia: the utterance of Divine Names by these biblical characters might support the mystical practice of reciting Divine Names! A likely response to the Abulafia case highlights the importance of the philosopher-profile attributed to Abraham.

Maimonides goes to great lengths to present Abraham as a self-made philosopher/metaphysician.<sup>142</sup> And Gikatilla seems to embrace this understanding of Abraham as well.<sup>143</sup> Consider the way that Gikatilla describes Abraham's path to God: "When Abraham came and looked, peered, researched and understood the secret/essence

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<sup>140</sup> *Id.* Interestingly, Gikatilla does not focus explicitly on Abraham's reference to and reliance upon the name YHVH, which suggests a balancing of judgment and mercy, through the *middah* of lovingkindness, *Rahamim*.

<sup>141</sup> Idel, *Infinites*, 147-48 (citing Moshe de Leon and another kabbalist.)

<sup>142</sup> *Guide*, Part III, Ch. 29.

<sup>143</sup> *Sha'are 'Orah*, Page 37, Line 21.

of the Great God and how He created the world from the side of *Hesed* . . ."<sup>144</sup> Based on this passage, it seems quite clear that Gikatilla adopted Maimonides' view of Abraham's philosophical achievements. Further, it is also significant that nowhere does Maimonides or Gikatilla point us to a text suggesting that Abraham participated in Abulafian, ecstatic kabbalistic practices. Rather, Gikatilla sees Abraham using his philosophical sophistication for one primary purpose – to learn that *Hesed* was the material, the means by which God created the world. Furthermore, through Abraham's philosopher credentials, the Talmud and Gikatilla can argue/conclude that Jacob, Hannah and Daniel's informed utterance of Divine Names, was based on the philosophical knowledge that Abraham brought to Israel.

4. YHVH Is The Ultimate Name, Not Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh:

All of Torah Hangs On YHVH/Rahamim!<sup>145</sup>

From here, Gikatilla takes up the centrality of the divine name YHVH. He moves deeply into the theosophic nature of God and thereby undermines the way in which Abulafia featured the name YHVH. The four-letter Tetragrammaton is the name upon which all of Torah, and all of life depends. For the kabbalists, YHVH, the trunk, represents the *sefirah* of *Tiferet* and the *middah* of *Rahamim*. Here, Gikatilla begins to build his case that the world, despite its outward appearance, has lovingkindness, *Rahamim*, at its essence. Woven into the biology of the universe, *Rahamim* is like the founding genetic material. No matter how hidden and tarnished this essential core might

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<sup>144</sup> Id.

<sup>145</sup> *Sha'are 'Orah*, Page, 48, Line 3 et seq.

be, Gikatilla seeks to enhance and to elevate our vision of the kind of world that we can create.

According to Gikatilla, everything hangs upon, depends upon the Tetragram.<sup>146</sup> By implication, therefore, everything hangs on God's attribute of *Rahamim*. *Rahamim*, lovingkindness, becomes the trunk, the body of the tree. It is lovingkindness that actually nourishes the branches, the leaves and the fruit. Even the roots of the divine tree, which wind ever-upward into the heavens, are known by the name *Ehyeh Asher Ehyeh* and therefore depend upon the trunk. These roots, also known by the Divine Name *Keter*, the divine crown, do not possess the most important name. Rather, it is the trunk, it is *Rahamim*, lovingkindness, that possesses the most important Divine Name. For the trunk is necessary in order to reveal the power of the Divine Roots to the world. All life-sustaining elements flow through the trunk, through YHVH. Thus, all of Torah and all of life depend upon YHVH, upon *Rahamim*.

The tenth and most inaccessible Divine Name is *Ehyeh*.<sup>147</sup> This is the name and aspect of God that is totally concealed. Gikatilla enlightens us to the hidden quality of *Ehyeh*, by reminding that it refers to the roots of the tree – the part of the tree that is fully concealed from the human eye. Gikatilla also points us to whatever it is that precedes even the roots. He points us to the invisible material that allow for roots and the capacity

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<sup>146</sup> *Sha'are 'Orah*, xxx.

<sup>147</sup> *Ehyeh*, as in *Keter*, is the activity of *Rahamim Gemurim*, absolute mercy. This is the Name that brings goodness and gives mercy not out of judgment but out of absolute mercy. This is dealt with at more length in the next chapter.

I recognize that there is a disagreement between different kabbalists about whether *Eyn Sof* is part of the *sefirotic* system and therefore synonymous with *Keter*, or whether it is totally separate from this system, in which case *Keter* becomes an emanated aspect of the *Eyn Sof*. Needless to say, I am not seeking to address this question.

for life itself. Because of the completely hidden nature of *Ehyeh*, Gikatilla emphasizes that *Ehyeh* is not the Name upon which all Divine Names depend. For *Ehyeh* is prior to all revealed existence. In the realm of *Ehyeh*, even Divine thought, *Hokhmah*, has not yet been revealed to the created universe.

For Gikatilla and other theosophical kabbalists, Torah and all existing life hang on the core of revealed existence. Torah is about lived life. It is about that which can be experienced. It is not about the impossible – the self-involved urge to unite with the unknowable. And this opportunity to create a life, for Gikatilla, is clearly an enormous gift, an enormous act of *Rahamim*. Thus, it is the revealed aspect of the divine tree, the trunk, that sustains us. It is the trunk, YHVH, the attribute of *Rahamim* that is at the core of life.

And pointing us to the middle of the divine tree, the trunk, resonates with a physical image that humans are able to comprehend. The beginning of revealed existence is where we begin to see the tree. This is the trunk as it rises out of the ground. This trunk, this carrier of all that sustains life, is the place of YHVH. No wonder that YHVH is known by the name *Rahamim*. Thus, it is *Rahamim* that unifies all of the Divine Names. They all meet in the trunk, at the attribute of lovingkindness and in the Divine Name of YHVH.

a) The Entire Torah is YHVH

Having made his case that both Torah and life hang upon *Rahamim*, Gikatilla continues to build his vision of a world defined primarily by *rahamim*. Gikatilla has now created a theology that is a subtle of Abulafian theosophic kabbalah. Like Abulafia, Gikatilla has made the pursuit of Divine Names the highest religious virtue. Also like



Abulafia, he has placed the Tetragram at the top of the top, in the ranking of Divine Names. YHVH is the most pivotal and centrally important of all the Divine Names.

At the same time, Gikatilla has drastically departed from Abulafia. Abulafia's kabbalah did not offer a new vision of the world. It was not a religious practice that could shape a communal experience of the world. It could not shape an alternative, communal vision for the world. This is central piece of Gikatilla's brilliance. He offers an alternative vision of how we might understand the world. He might say: "Yes, the world is terribly flawed. But, because its core is *Rahamim*, we have a chance to return the world to its essence and to allow *Rahamim* to again shape our lives.

The entire Torah is a tapestry of the Divine Names. "*Torat YHVH temimah*."<sup>148</sup> (Psalm 19). תּוֹרַת יְהוָה תְּמִימָה. "The Torah of YHVH is complete." This can be translated or understood in several similar ways. The theosophic understanding is: 'The Torah is completely YHVH.' All the words of Torah are connected to YHVH and every word is part of YHVH. Even moreso, all of Torah is *Rahamim*. To think that a word of Torah is not connected to YHVH would be to reference a Torah that is incomplete. Similarly, we could focus on the *semikhut* of *Torat-YHVH*. 'The Torah of YHVH is complete, whole, lacking of nothing.' Torah consists entirely of YHVH, *Rahamim*. Perhaps all of Torah equals YHVH. All of Torah is designed to establish *rahamim* as the essence of life.

From here, Gikatilla lists the cognomens connected to each of the holy names of YHVH. Gikatilla wants to show how *Rahamim* flows into all the other Divine Names. It does not apply solely to YHVH. He begins with *El* and *Elohim*. Gikatilla's choice of

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<sup>148</sup> *Sha'are 'Orah*, Page 48, Line 19 et seq.

YHVH, *El* and *Elohim* is important in that these three divine names correlate with the three *sefirot* of *Hesed* (lovingkindness), *Din* (judgment, punishment) and *Tiferet* (the balancing of *hesed* and *din*, which is *rahamim*). These divine names also correlate to the *sefirot* associated with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, which Gikatilla will focus on in his chapter on *hesed*. For Gikatilla, the knowledge that all of Torah and all of life depends upon, even hangs on the divine name YHVH, will cause one to yearn for, crave and cleave to his Name. Furthermore, such knowledge and understanding will cause one to fear and hold God in awe.

And isn't this really true! If we truly internalized the notion that YHVH represents *Rahamim*, pure lovingkindness, our craving and longing for God, as well as our desire not to disappoint God, would likely never cease. This is an amazing notion, an insight that seems elegantly and simply true.

And in essence this is how Gikatilla concludes this idea. Internalizing that God's essence is *Rahamim*, will enable one to also internalize the purpose and inherent value of *Binah*, the fear of God. We cannot have love without a fear of disappointment. "Then you will understand the fear of God, And you will attain a knowledge of God."

אִן תִּבִּין יִרְאַת יְהוָה וְדַעַת אֱלֹהִים תִּמְצָא: Proverbs 2:5. Understanding

(*Havana/Binah*) of YHVH, understanding that God's essence is *rahamim*, will and should evokes a fear/awe of God. Thus, the fear itself can deepen one's intimate knowledge (*Daat*) of God.

B. Language Is Only A Signpost Or Symbol For Understanding – We Can Know Nothing Of God's Essence

1. Abulafian Criticism of Symbol and Anthropomorphism

Abulafia was highly critical of theosophists for numerous reasons, two of which were: a) the shortcomings of theosophical symbolism; and b) the strong theosophic drive to anthropomorphize the Divine. In the following section of Gikatilla's Introduction, Gikatilla seems to be addressing these Abulafian criticisms. In a subtle way, as well, Gikatilla seems to highlight that he is closer to Maimonidean thought than is Abulafia. For Maimonides was explicit that the language of Torah was, in part, a language of symbolism.<sup>149</sup>

It is a *clal gadol* that despite the importance of seeking knowledge and understanding of the Names of God, one should never think that humans can grasp the true essence of God.<sup>150</sup> The celestial entities do not know God's place, much less his true essence. Ezekiel teaches that even the angels recognize God's distance and their inability to know God's place. בָּרוּךְ כְּבוֹד יְהוָה מִמְּקוֹמוֹ. "Blessed is the glory of God from His place" – in each place that He exists. And all the more so that human beings cannot know the place(s) of God. For the physical places and anthropomorphic appendages associated with God in Scripture do not teach us anything about God's essence. Thus, Gikatilla teaches here that to seek a unitive or ecstatic connection with God is to seek an experience that is illusory.

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<sup>149</sup> The Guide, Part I, Ch. 26 et seq.

<sup>150</sup> Sha'are 'Orah, Page 49, Line 5 et seq.

## 2 God's limbs are symbols; they are not like the limbs of man

The illusory nature of ecstatic pursuit is highlighted by the fact that God's limbs have no comparison to and in no way resemble the limbs of man. Although we are created in God's image, one should not think that the limbs of God in any way resemble the limbs of man. Although they teach and they testify to God's greatness and truthfulness, no person is able to understand or to contemplate the essence or nature of God or God's limbs, which Torah refers to as *yad, regel, ozen* and other similar body parts. Further, even though Torah teaches that we are created *b'tzelem u'dmut*, one should not think that a human eye resembles a divine eye, or a human hand resembles a divine hand etc. On this point Gikatilla seems strikingly close to Maimonides.<sup>151</sup>

Although the terms arm, eye, hand etc. do reflect the deepest essence of God and they are the source of divine abundance that emanates to all that exists under the dominion of God, the essence of the divine limbs is not the same as the essence or nature of human limbs. For as Isaiah proclaimed, no one can be compared to God. "To whom can I be compared?" Isa. 40:25. וְאֵל מִי תִדְּמִינִי וְאַשְׁחֶה.<sup>152</sup>

In this Isaiah quote, we see a text that begins by emphasizing the mortality of man, in contrast to the limitless God. It then seeks to correlate God and knowledge and wisdom and it highlights the profoundly limited, intellectual capacity of the human. "Who has plumbed the mind of the Lord? What man could tell Him His plan? Whom did He consult, and who taught him? Who guided Him knowledge and showed Him the path of wisdom?" Man can never know what God knows: how God created the world

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<sup>151</sup> The Guide, Part I, Ch.'s 25-28.

<sup>152</sup> Scholem, Major Trends, 221. This, according to Scholem, could be a reference to *Keter*.

from the beginning, and how God will be God for eternity. "He never grows faint or weary, His wisdom cannot be fathomed."<sup>153</sup>

Here, we also see Gikatilla wanting to weigh in on the philosophical question of whether humans can know anything about God's essence. The philosophers state that we can say and know nothing about God's essence. The kabbalists agree but also believe that we can begin to understand God's attributes. Gikatilla agrees with our ability to speak of God's actions, but with the sensitivity of a philosopher, he wants to clarify that even our ideas about God's actions/*Middot* are not truly related to the notion of God's doings in the world.<sup>154</sup>

Gikatilla is also speaking to Abulafia at this point. The subject is the role of symbolism and the anthropomorphosis of God. For Abulafia, the highest purpose of Torah and mysticism is not to understand a divine text.<sup>155</sup> Rather, the text becomes a pretext for pursuing a mystical experience, and a collection of letters meant to be rearranged. The text needs to be destroyed in order for it to reach its highest value.<sup>156</sup>

This view of Torah is profoundly inconsistent with Gikatilla's kabbalah. Theosophists, including Gikatilla, believe that Torah is a manifestation of God.<sup>157</sup> To read Torah is to read God. And to rearrange or deconstruct Torah is to rearrange and deconstruct God – something we are not meant to do! Thus, the great effort that Gikatilla makes to interpret and reinterpret Torah, and to rely on Torah texts to prove his case, is

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<sup>153</sup> Isaiah 40:13-14, 28.

<sup>154</sup> Ben Shlomo, *Introduction to Sha'are 'Orah*, n. 18.

<sup>155</sup> Idel, *Language, Torah & Hermeneutics*, xiv-xv.

<sup>156</sup> *Id.*

<sup>157</sup> Scholem, *Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*, 124.

an effort that is implicitly critical of Abulafia and implicitly celebrates the "infinities" of understanding offered by Torah.

Theosophy understands that not only is the world defined by a God's *sefirot*, so is the single human being. "What is below is above."<sup>158</sup> Each of us is defined by the earthly version of the *sefirot*.<sup>159</sup> With a parallel *sefirotic* system in the human being, the idea that the lower *sefirot* support the upper *sefirot* is only one step away. The upper rest upon the lower. And that is precisely where Gikatilla goes next.

C. *B'tzelem Elohim: God's Limbs/Attributes and Human Limbs/Attributes*

Gikatilla wonders why we are made with the limbs that we have.<sup>160</sup> He teaches that the reason we have limbs is because God wanted to grant merit to the human being. Thus, He created us with limbs. But God created man with hidden and revealed limbs just as some aspects of God are hidden and some are revealed. Further, as God's limbs are symbols, so too with human limbs.<sup>161</sup> They are symbols that hint at the spiritual powers that are parallel to the divine world. *Id.* More specifically, our limbs support the seat of the divine, mystical *Merkavah* or chariot. The upper limbs, of God, rest upon the lower limbs, of man. Here, *B'tzelem elohim* (in the image of God) begins to mean, that just as God's limbs are symbolic, so are our limbs symbolic.

One's ability to become a seat for the *Merkavah*, however, depends upon the ability to purify his/her limb(s). Any limb or organ that we purify, that we use in a sacred

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<sup>158</sup> *Id.*, 122

<sup>159</sup> *Id.*, 128

<sup>160</sup> *Sha'are 'Orah*, Page 50, Line 1 et seq.

<sup>161</sup> Ben Shlomo, *Introduction to Sha'are 'Orah*, 49, n. 19.

way, becomes a seat for the Divine presence.<sup>162</sup> Thus, if we are careful about what we look at, then our eyes may become the eyes of the Divine Chariot. If we use our hands and/or legs in Divine service, then they too can become a seat for the *Merkavah*. The *Merkavah* represents the *Shekhinah* or *Malchut*, the most immanent, accessible, aspect of God. Thus, as the human being purifies his actions, and thereby purifies his limbs, it is as if our limbs gain the strength to support a piece of the divine chariot. Upon this seat sits the presence of God, the *Shekhinah*.

With this highly symbolic use of Divine Names, Gikatilla seems to be commenting on an important deficiency of Abulafian practice. For Abulafia, the quality of one's *halakhic* life, and even one's moral life, does not seem relevant to one's ability to attain prophetic ecstasy. The sacred work of the community, and even of the individual, is not being tested, in one's endeavor into ecstatic kabbalah. Not so, in the theosophic dream of becoming a limb that supports the *Merkavah*. The strength to be a supporting limb depends enormously upon the ritual and ethical behavior of the individual, upon the positive role one is called to play in the community.

#### 1. The Divine Chariot And The Human Carriers Of The Chariot<sup>163</sup>

Gikatilla takes this point further, by applying it directly to our patriarchs. He utilizes the long-standing tradition that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob represent the earthly

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<sup>162</sup> *Sha'are 'Orah*, 50

<sup>163</sup> The *Merkavah*, Divine Chariot, goes back to a body of literature called '*Merkavah* mysticism' and the *Heikhalot Rabbati*. This literature, based initially on the opening chapter of Ezekiel, imagines a divine chariot, *Merkavah*. See Tishby, I., Wisdom of the Zohar, 587 et seq. Carrying the *Merkavah* are various attendants. Resting upon the *Merkavah* is a divine throne. Sitting on the divine throne is the divine king. The attendants dwell in halls, often 7 of them, which are below the divine king. The soul's deepest desire is to reach this highest realm, so that it can contemplate the splendor of the *Shekhinah*. But this ascent is highly dangerous.

carriers of the divine *Merkavah*.<sup>164</sup> This notion derives primarily from several verses in Genesis, as interpreted in *Bereishit Rabbah* 47, which are discussed just below.

However, the kabbalistic insight is that these Biblical characters represent divine *sefirot* and the *sefirot* therefore become the supporters and carriers of the *Merkavah*.

The first verse Gikatilla relies upon to prove that the patriarchs are carriers of the *Merkavah*, is a reporting of God's promise to Abraham that Sarah shall bear a son whose name will be Isaac. There, God states that His covenant with Abraham "is an everlasting covenant for his offspring to come." When God finishes explaining his promise to Abraham, the text states: (Gen. 17:22): אֲבָרָהָם: מֵעַל אֱלֹהִים. "He/God rose/departed from upon Abraham." The critical words are 'rose from upon.' Gikatilla interprets this to mean that God was resting upon Abraham, as if Abraham was a support for the seat that God sits upon, a carrier of the *Merkavah*.

Remarkably, in two other instances, we have a very similar description of God's location vis-a-vis Jacob. In the first passage, we learn of the ladder that was the subject of Jacob's famous dream. In this dream, Jacob has a vision in which angels are ascending and descending a ladder that reaches to the sky. God stood next to, or upon (*al'av*) Jacob, in this dream. וַיַּחֲזֶה יְהוָה יְדִיחוֹ נֹצֵב עָלָיו. Gen. 28:13. Second, we look to the famous wrestling match between Jacob and the human-like angel, in which the angel changes Jacob's name to Israel. At the end of this encounter, God again departed from upon Jacob. Again, since the text tells us that God left 'from upon' Jacob, many interpret

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<sup>164</sup> *Sha'are 'Orah*, Page 50, Line 9 et seq.



this to mean that God was resting upon him (*va'yaal mei'al'av*), from the spot where He had spoken to Jacob. וַיַּעַל מֵעָלָיו אֱלֹהִים בַּמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר אֲתָו.

Again, Gikatilla translates these statements to mean that God rose from upon, *mei'al'av*, Abraham and Jacob. The fact that each of these moments were covenantal in nature, likely bolsters the mystical reading. That God departed from upon both Abraham and Jacob, at the conclusion of a covenantal moment, reasonably evokes a bold interpretative understanding. If nothing else, it justifies, at least to some degree, the possibility that there was a close, intimate relationship between God and the patriarchs, a relationship that could call for a literal reading of the language "*va'yaal mei'alav*." God rose from upon Abraham/Jacob.

It also is interesting that the absence of any text making reference to Isaac does not deter Gikatilla, or others, from including Isaac as part of the seat of the *Merkavah*. God's literal resting upon Abraham and Jacob, gives rise to the idea that the two of them, as well as Isaac, served as a seat for God. As a result, they became the living entities upon and through which God's Presence/*Shekhina* could flow and enter into the rest of created existence.

## 2. The Sefirotic Carriers – Abraham, Isaac and Jacob Supporting the *Merkavah*

Beyond identifying the patriarchs as the supporters of the *Merkavah*, Gikatilla identifies the specific relationship of each patriarch to the *Merkavah*. Abraham holds up the right side of the Chariot, the *tzad yamin*. How do we know that it is the right side? In Parashah *Lekh Lekha*, God tells Abraham to go, to go out from his homeland. And he does so. Abraham follows God's command. He sets out. And the Torah offers a specific

report of the direction of his journey. וַיֵּסַע אַבְרָם הַלֹךְ וְנֹסֵעַ הַנֶּגֶב. Avram journeyed by stages to the Negev.” To go toward to the Negev, after traveling east, is to turn to the south, to the right.

a) Abraham/Hesed Supports the Right

Furthermore, Gikatilla explains that the *sefirah* of *Hesed* is the first holder of the *Merkavah*. Here, Gikatilla promotes his vision of a world that is most defined by the generous quality of lovingkindness. Abraham supports the right side, for he represents the *middah* of *Hesed* (Genesis 12:9). Thus, Abraham’s movement to the right becomes the starting point for the support of the *Merkavah*.

As pointed out above, for two reasons the context of this passage offers a poetic quality to this proof-text. First, in this passage, Abram becomes the first human being to respond to God’s command. Abram’s fulfillment of God’s command makes him the natural choice as the one to begin the tradition of supporting the *Merkavah*. Second, this passage represents Abram as one who carries God and God’s message with him. After all, God says “*Leh leha*”, “Go out . . . Journey to . . .” Thus, Abram’s fulfillment of God’s command evokes the imagery of Abram’s physical movement, and it connects quite nicely to the *Merkavah*, a vehicle in motion, also carrying God and God’s message.

b) Isaac/Pahad/Din Support the Left

Isaac is across from Abraham, holding the *tzad smol*, the left side, which is the *middah* of fear or *pahad*. (Genesis 31:53). וַיֵּשְׁבַע יַעֲקֹב בְּפִיחַד אָבִיו יִצְחָק. The context of this verse is interesting for its varied connections with judgment and justice. Lavan asks, “May the God of Abraham and the god of Nahor ‘judge between us.’” Gen. 31:53. And earlier in this passage we see Jacob asking Lavan, “What is my crime, what

is my guilt that you should pursue me?" In addition, Jacob seeks acknowledgement for all the good deeds he has done, under difficult conditions, over the 20 years of service to his father-in-law. The narrative puts forward the idea of a God defined by the values of justice and mercy.

However, the fact that Isaac is not directly linked to the *Merkavah* through a verse of his own, should not go unnoticed. Just as no verse is directly connected to Isaac, so too he is not directly connected to a *middah*. Rather, Isaac is connected to his *middah* and to the *Merkavah* through a verse that actually focuses on Jacob. The verse connects to Isaac only through his *middah* of *Pachad*, which is the attribute associated to the Divine Name of *Din/Gevurah*. I wonder if Isaac's more tenuous connection to the *Merkavah* subtly supports Gikatilla's view that God ultimately gave priority to *Hesed* and *Rahamim* over *Din*.

c) Jacob/Emet/Rahamim Support the Middle

Jacob holds the *tzad kav*, the middle path, balancing the two paths of Abraham and Isaac. Jacob is the symbol of the *sefirah* of *Tiferet*. *Tiferet* is associated with the divine name YHVH and it is the middle, the trunk of the divine tree. *Tiferet* comes to balance the *Hesed* of Abraham and the *Din* of Isaac.<sup>165</sup>

"Jacob was a mild man and sat between the tents." (Genesis 25:27).

וַיֵּשֶׁב יַעֲקֹב אִישׁ תֵּם יֹשֵׁב אֹהֳלִים. This is understood to mean that Jacob sat between two specific tents: the tent of Abraham on the right and the tent of Isaac on the left. This interpretation is interesting for several reasons. First, Abraham died a mere 20 verses

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<sup>165</sup> It is not clear, however, how this narrative concerning Esau's sale of the birthright, exemplifies Jacob's role of promoting the *sefirah* of *Tiferet*, *Rahamim*, and balances the attributes of *Hesed* and *Din*.

before our verse. Thus, to say that one of the two tents was Abraham's suggests something other than that this was the tent in which Abraham physically resided. In fact, it could strengthen Jacob's connection to Abraham if we interpret it to mean that even after Abraham's death, Jacob's commitment to preserve the tradition of Abraham remained as strong even after Abraham's death.

Second, to sit evenly, which might mean to judge evenly, between the two tents, seems fundamentally related to the quality associated with *Tiferet*. And for Jacob to act fairly, with *Hesed* toward Isaac, is a sign of a truly righteous individual, since the Torah tells us in the verse immediately following our verse, that Isaac favored Esau. Gen. 25:28.

d) The Journey of the Chariot From Magic and Mystery to the Knowledge of Attributes and Righteous Deeds

It is important to point out that in the kabbalistic literature of his time, there already existed the idea of two (2) chariots, a higher and a lower chariot.<sup>166</sup> So here, Gikatilla is describing the lower chariot, which is supported by the patriarchs; but, not only the patriarchs. For the *Merkavah* had four wheels, each of which requires an attendant. Thus, who does Gikatilla understand to be at the fourth wheel? Gikatilla points us to the tradition that King David, the founder of the kingship, represents the *sefirah* of *Malkhut* or *Shekhinah* (the "Divine Presence"), which constitutes the fourth leg of the chariot. Together, David and the Patriarchs represent the 'four lower legs of the Throne' as well as the four *sefirot* of *Malchut*, *Tiferet*, *Din* and *Hesed*.<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>166</sup> Tishby, Wisdom of the Zohar, Account of the Chariot, 588.

<sup>167</sup> Scholem, Kabbalah, 111.

One of the particularly important aspects of this symbolism is the emphasis on good deeds, on righteous behavior. First, Gikatilla's focus on the righteousness of the Patriarchs serves to unify, to bring healing to God. This is a very traditional idea within the body of theosophic kabbalah.<sup>168</sup> In addition, this emphasis on righteous action over mystical techniques, serves also to distinguish Gikatilla from Abulafia. Abulafian mysticism does not emphasize the importance of moral and ethical behavior.

Gikatilla also emphasizes that according to Resh Lakish, *Ha'Avot heim Ha'Merkavah*.<sup>169</sup> "The Patriarchs (collectively), they are the *Merkavah*." Resh Lakish and the Sages did not say that the Patriarchs, individually, were the *Merkavah*, or that any individual limb could stand without the others. Here, only in their collectivity, only in providing balance to each other, could they come to represent the *Merkavah*. This is also an important theosophic point. Abraham's *Hesed*, lovingkindness, must be opposite Isaac's *Din*, strict justice, balancing one another. Both of these must be harmonized by Jacob's *Emet*, truth.

That the Patriarchs collectively can provide the balance necessary to support the Divine *Merkavah*, relates to a further theosophic idea. As stated, the divine *sefirot* exist within the human being as well. Thus, with a direct tie between God and human, theosophical kabbalists believe that the work of humans affects the well-being of God. Through our actions, and particularly through the *mitzvot* that we perform, we can have an impact on the divine realm. We can purify ourselves, such that we are able to support

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<sup>168</sup> Scholem explains that after the sin of Adam and Eve and sins committed by the later generations, the *Shekhinah* became exiled from the people. However, the good deeds of the Patriarchs served to 'set this fundamental fault in creation aright and to serve as a paradigm for those who after.' *Id.* at 164.

<sup>169</sup> *Sha'are 'Orah*, Page 50, Line 9, 16-18 et seq.

a leg, a limb, of the Divine Throne. Each of us can purify a limb, or limbs, to such a degree that any of our limb(s) can become a *kiseh* for the divine.

In the mystical mind, this is the ultimate experience and purpose of life. We are here to allow our souls to glimpse the divine, to look onto the Divine Chair. Each of us, craves to become a resting place for the Divine Presence. Thus, Gikatilla has configured a theosophical conception of the Divine, into a *Merkavah* experience. In so doing, the theosophist, who previously only encountered God through emanations, can now pursue the *Shekhinah*, through the imagery of Divine Throne.

Furthermore, this system is starkly different from the mysticism of Abulafia. There, the focus is not on seeking to unify and bring healing to God. Rather, the focus is to create a paranormal state of consciousness in the mystic. Under such altered states, the mystic is able to have an intimate experience with God.<sup>170</sup> For Abulafia and his mystical practice, the individual seeks personal, momentary transformation, in uniting with God. For the theosophists, the individual seeks to bring healing and greater unity to God, through the wholesome performance of divine *mitzvot*.

Gikatilla explores further the dependence of God's well-being upon the limbs of the human being. He states, "the *middot* are drawn after the limbs." In other words, the deeds of our limbs determine or define the quality and worthiness of our *middot*, our personal qualities. This statement also suggests that God's attributes are defined, in part, by the deeds committed by our limbs. This points to several radical, albeit mainstream idea within theosophic kabbalah. First, the idea that God is not whole is fundamentally

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<sup>170</sup> Idel, The Contribution of Abraham Abulafia to the Understanding of Jewish Mysticism, 124-125.

contrary to the monotheistic conception. Second, human beings have the capacity to cause brokenness within God, and to return God to a state of wholeness.

Through understanding and emulating God's attributes/*middot*, we can bring unity to God. How does Gikatilla prove that this proposition is true? He studies in great depth what God does in the aftermath of the Israelites' building of the Golden Calf, the ultimate sin and the ultimate damage to the relationship between God and human. God cuts a *Brit*, a covenant, with the Israelites. This covenant is founded on understanding the 13 Divine *middot*. (Exodus 34:6-7). God tells Moses to come up to Mt. Sinai, to seek atonement on behalf of the Israelites.

Relying on a passage in the Talmud, Gikatilla understands how in the future, God will exercise His attribute of judgment.<sup>171</sup> From this passage, Gikatilla discerns the core material with which God constructed the world – or at the least, the world of punishment and forgiveness, strict justice and mercy. Here, Gikatilla offers an understanding of the moral fiber, the biologic material that defines the way in which the world grants mercy and lovingkindness to highly-fallible human beings.

In the Gemara passage, God takes on the role of *shaliach tzibbur*, prayer leader, he dons a *tallit*, passes before the ark and teaches Moses that "Any time Israel sins let them perform before Me this procedure and I shall forgive them." The procedure is the recitation of the 13 *middot*, attributes. In the Exodus passage, it is God who recites these attributes, in the presence of Moses, while he was with God on Mt. Sinai. Ex. 34:6.

The imagery here is beautiful. The verb *ya'avov* suggests the passing before the *Aron HaKodesh* of the *shaliach tzibbur*, the prayer leader. The performance "before Me

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<sup>171</sup> b. Rosh HaShanah 17b.

(God)" is a two-fold reference. First, it refers to our recitation of the 13 *middot* in a sanctuary or congregational setting, primarily on Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur. Passing before the Ark, the *Aron HaKodesh*, constitutes passing "before Me (God)." For the *Aron HaKodesh*, containing the *Sefer Torah*, symbolically represents the immanent presence of God, the *Shekhinah*. Here, Gikatilla relies on the Talmud, to prove and promote the theosophical idea that our observance of prayer and *mitzvot* has divine implications. We can have an impact on God and God's exercise of judgment and mercy.

Second, in fulfilling the procedure that God prescribed in Exodus, we also are reenacting God's actions. Originally it was God who recited the attributes. Now, learning from God's modeling, we are the ones reciting the Divine attributes. God has told Moses, in essence: 'You Jews, utter the words that I/God uttered. Engage in the same acts as I engage in, and you will have an effect on Me, on the Divine.' That is exactly the idea that theosophical kabbalah is built upon. Our actions affect God, our actions are divine actions.<sup>172</sup>

In these verses from Exodus, we encounter two critical ideas, placed in direct relation to one another. First, we read a direct reference to God's *Middot*, God's characteristics, attributes. Second, we are introduced to the Divine Names that will represent the focus of Gikatilla's chapter on *Hesed*. These are the two ideas that ultimately frame the core of *Sha'are 'Orah*. The way to a meaningful and sustained experience of God is through a deep understanding of the attributes associated with the

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<sup>172</sup> One additional side-note to this is that the same text could be used to promote the importance of the recitation of God's names. In the *sugya*, it seems that it is the recitation of these *Middot* that is the key. The passage makes no mention and does not appear to emphasize an understanding or knowledge of the divine names. Recitation before God seems to be what is called for.



Divine Names. Understanding the workings of the attributes, for Gikatilla, is to be the primary kabbalistic activity. Such an understanding will refine to the highest degree, our appreciation for righteous and religious actions. Ultimately, it is our actions, our religious observance and our ethical behavior, that will enable us to approach and get a glimpse of the Divine Chariot, and to bring healing to the brokenness of the Divine.

This repeated emphasis to pursue understanding fits also with Gikatilla's concluding comment to the Introduction. Knowledge and understanding of the source of the living waters is Gikatilla's final idea. Here, his reference to water returns us to the warning with which he began the Introduction. Ultimately, we should know our limitations. Those who enter Pardes will likely not survive. A serious pursuit of God is dangerous. Rabbi Akiva warned against speaking: 'water, water.' With a return to water imagery, Gikatilla reminds us that the waters are to be embraced through knowledge and understanding of the attributes associated with the Divine Names. The waters are not to be embraced through recitation of Divine Names or the permutations of divine letters.

At this point, Gikatilla has laid a very solid foundation for the ideas he takes up in his chapter on *Hesed*. He has taught us about the absolute prohibition of reciting or uttering Divine Name, for the purpose of having a ecstatic, mystical experience. He has encouraged us to seek understanding about the Divine Names and most importantly, the attributes associated with them.

The understanding of divine attributes associated with the Divine Names is the primary mystical activity. Ultimate knowledge and experience with God happens by means of this kind of knowledge. To pursue such knowledge gives us the possibility of a *Merkavah* experience. With the purification of our deeds and religious observances, as

well as an understanding of the divine attributes, we can become carriers of the *Merkavah*. To be a carrier of the Divine Chariot is not a paranormal experience happening in a private, solitary space. It is an experience that occurs very much within our daily lives, and very much within our Jewish community.

## CHAPTER IV

### HESED, GATE FOUR, SEFIRAH SEVEN

#### A. Introduction – Gikatilla's Method

In this chapter, Gikatilla focuses on three ideas. First, he transitions from the subject of the prior chapter of *Sha'are 'Orah*. In that prior chapter, the subject was the Divine Name *Elohim* and the attributes of *Din* and *Gevurah*, strict justice and punishment. Having analyzed these Names and attributes, Gikatilla picks up with a detailed explanation of how the forces of *Hesed* and *Rahamim* ultimately govern the forces of *Din* and *Gevurah*. Stated differently, Gikatilla explains that in a systematic, predictable way, the agents appointed to execute the judgments of *Elohim* ultimately submit themselves and their authority to the attributes of *Hesed* and *Rahamim*.

Second, like a scientist who explains the forces of nature, Gikatilla explains how the Divine Names establish a world whose core essence is mercy and lovingkindness. He does this by systematically explaining the 13 Divine Attributes, *middot*. Third and finally, Gikatilla explains how the Patriarchs cause and enable the Divine structure to reveal itself in the earthly realm. For they establish a lower world in which *Hesed* and *Rahamim*, mercy and lovingkindness, predominate over strict justice and punishment.

Gikatilla focuses heavily on the Patriarchs. And he prepares us for such a focus by beginning the chapter with a central and crucial teaching connected to Abraham. With this text, Abraham becomes for Gikatilla the most important Biblical character. Through Abraham, Gikatilla builds his entire kabbalistic system, blending philosophy, mysticism and theosophy, which features a world defined by *Hesed* and *Rahamim*.

B. The Sefirah of Hesed Is Represented by the Divine Name El

Gikatilla identifies *El* as the Divine Name connected to the seventh gate, the gate of *Hesed*.<sup>173</sup> By understanding this essential teaching, Gikatilla believes that whenever we read the name *El*, we will understand the secret meaning of the text. The Divine Name *El* governs the forces or attributes of *Hesed* and *Rahamim*. This is the secret and the essence of the *middah*, attribute, that Abraham inherited. As it is stated: "Abraham planted a tamarisk at *Be'er-Sheva*, and invoked there the name of the Lord, the Everlasting God."<sup>174</sup> "*VaYikra sham, b'shaym YHVH, El Olam.*"

This is one of the central Biblical proof-texts in Gikatilla's work. This passage in the Book of Genesis remarkably supports three of Gikatilla's goals: to establish Abraham as a, or the defining character in the Bible and in the future course of human history; to associate Abraham with the divine name of *El*; and, to tie every Divine Name to the ultimate name, YHVH.

In this Genesis passage, Abraham refers to God as *El Olam*, the Eternal *El*, naturally connecting Abraham to this particular Divine Name. Second, as YHVH is part of the text, Abraham explicitly identifies *El Olam* with YHVH. Further, with the compelling imagery of this Genesis passage, Gikatilla reminds us of seven theosophic ideas. First, Abraham's planting of a tree reminds us of the divine tree in the Garden of Eden. Second, by means of this planting, Abraham represents an ascent to and contact with the seventh divine gate, that of *El*. Thus, it points us to the seven gates or *sefirot*;

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<sup>173</sup> *Sha'are 'Orah*, Page 31, Line 1 et seq.

<sup>174</sup> Gen. 21:33. One aspect of this is the symbolism of water. Gikatilla likely offers this verse, in part, because of its reminder of danger – "water, water." Water is often a warning to the mystic to beware of the limits of mystical insight and contact with God.

through which humans access and connect with God. Third, this tree-planting identifies the moment that humans, Abraham in particular, implanted or introduced YHVH into the earthly realm. Fourth, *Be'er Sheva* represents the immanent presence of God, the *Shekhinah*. Fifth, the planting itself occurred at *Be'er Sheva*, which was the place of an ancient well of water. This well, with its image of water, suggests God's role in the world as the source of life – the source of potential, of health and blessing of all kind. And as well, it suggests danger, pain and loss, for those who feel entitled to know the deepest essence of God.

Sixth, with the grammatical structure of *Be'er Sheva*, we are brought to a singular well, containing seven pools. This image subtly reminds us that the seeming plurality of the *sefirotic* system, is entirely consistent with the unity of God. Finally, I want to point out that the narrative content of this scene is of a covenantal nature. It describes two human beings, Jew and non-Jew in fact, treating each other with trust and respect. Trust and respect then are the qualities that lead to the oath sworn to by both Abraham and Abimelech. Is it possible that Gikatilla is teaching that these are the qualities that enable human beings to reach the seventh *sefirah*, the highest divine emanation accessible to human beings?

Remarkably, this transaction, which is grounded in trust and respect, immediately precedes the moment that God calls to Abraham for the ultimate test – the *Akeidat Yitzhak*. I do not want to make more out of this than is fair, but it is a striking notion for Gikatilla to take up. First Abraham identifies God as *El*, the divine name that oversees the qualities of *Hesed* and *Rahamim*. Then, immediately after the scene at *Be'er Sheva*, we read of God's test of Abraham, when He tells Abraham "to take up" his son Isaac for

a sacrifice. This progression of events can surely raise the question – was the test of Abraham by God a test coming from God's *Hesed* and *Rahamim*? How so? Or maybe the point is not in trying to psychoanalyze God but to try to connect with and internalize the experience of Abraham. Only after we have built a relationship with God, deriving from *Hesed* and *Rahamim*, will God seek to test us?

C. Proverb 8 And The Sefirotic Tree and Sexual Imagery

After showing that Abraham implanted for the rest of us, access to the divine tree, Gikatilla begins to explain the manner in which *El*, as the overseer of *Hesed* and *Rahamim*, interacts with God's attribute of judgment. In order to do this Gikatilla introduces a fascinating verse from *Mishlei* (the Book of Proverbs). "I endow those who love me with substance (with *yesh*), I will fill their treasuries." Proverb 8:21. This quote and the Proverb as a whole suggest at least three kabbalistic ideas. Further, it offers an insight into Gikatilla's teaching on how *Hesed* and *Rahamim*, through the *middah* of *El*, influence the punitive and judgmental qualities of God.

First, one can easily see how this Proverb might refer to the divine *sefirot*. Second, we learn about the relationship of intimacy between *Hokhmah* and *Binah*. Third, the functionings within the higher realms of *Hokhmah* and *Binah* offer insight into the humanly-accessible, earthly realms. Further, the Proverb suggests what I might call a theology of compassion that Gikatilla teaches in this text.

From the outset of Proverb 8, one can see how verse 1 may well be telling us about the *sefirotic* system. At the very beginning of the Proverb we see a discussion between *Hokhmah* and *Binah*, the first two *sefirot* (after *Keter*). The text suggests to the reader that it actually is God speaking, although through these qualities of *Hokhmah* and

*Binah*. In essence, through the *sefirot* we are having an encounter with God even though it is not God's essence that is present.

"It is Wisdom (*Hokhmah*) calling,  
Understanding (*Binah*) raising her voice.  
She takes her stand at the topmost heights,  
By the wayside (*Alay derekh beit netivot*), at the crossroads." Proverb 8:1-2.

The Proverb begins with *Hokhmah*. Since we can say virtually nothing about the *Eyn Sof*, it makes sense that the Proverb begins where it does.<sup>175</sup>

Second, *Hokhmah* and *Binah* are fully personified, filled with emotions, needs and values. Initially *Hokhmah* speaks and then *Binah*.<sup>176</sup> These Divine Attributes express their need to communicate with one another. For the kabbalah, the text suggests a relationship of partners and lovers, male and female. "I (*Hokhmah*) Wisdom, live with Prudence." "*Ani Hokhmah, shakhanti armah.*" Proverb 8:12. This verse suggests an intimate relationship between *Hokhmah* and *Binah*. In the highly personified interpretation of this text, *Hokhmah* obviously has a partner, a lover, with whom He resides.

First *Hokhmah* explains his living arrangement, then he articulates the values that are dear to him, which are: knowledge and insight; fearing the Lord, which means to fear to evil; and, hating pride, arrogance, the evil way and duplicity in speech. Proverb 8:12-

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<sup>175</sup> Some kabbalists believed that *Eyn Sof* and *Keter* were synonymous. Gikatilla was never clear about his opinion on this subject.

<sup>176</sup> "The Lord created me at the beginning of His course, As the first of His works of old." "*YHVH kanani reishit . . .*" 8:22. This was before the material world existed. (8:22-29). It is a harkening back to Creation, but also a new insight into Creation. The traditional kabbalistic interpretation is that *Hokhmah* created *Elohim*, which comes to be *Binah*. Thus, Genesis 1 is the story explaining God's creation of the *sefirot*. In the Proverbs text, it seems that YHVH is bringing *Hokhmah* into being, although the identity of *Hokhmah* is inferred.

13. Of course, *Binah* must represent all that is dear to *Hokhmah*. The Proverb also tells us that it is *Binah*, the female, who seeks relationship, contact, with humanity. "O men, I call to you; My cry is to you mankind." Proverbs 8:4. *Hokhmah* and *Binah*, like human beings, are committed to and engaged in a love relationship and in so doing, they nourish the kabbalistic instinct to understand divine through living, dynamic attributes, *sefirot*.

Further, in engaging in this relationship of love, they infuse love and relationship into the organizing fabric of the universe. And their insatiable need for each other suggests a deeper kabbalistic message. Justice and lovingkindness must both exist. We cannot survive without both. Each brings out the best of the other. The world cannot stand in the absence of either.

Following the traditional *sefirotic* course, and its highly sexual imagery, the divine path begins with the male on top and the female below. The male, *Hokhmah*, descends into the female, *Binah*, and provides the necessary seminal material, for full emanation to occur within the womb of *Binah*.<sup>177</sup> *Binah* thus represents the vessel that carries and gives birth to all of material existence. She also represents the crossroads, the junction between the inaccessible divine realm (*Binah* and *Hokhmah*) and the material, earthly realm (*Binah* and *Hesed*), the realm of babies, of human beings.

The explicit sexual and birthing imagery here is quite powerful. For anyone who has ever witnessed the birthing moment, the kabbalistic idea deeply resonates with the most profound mystery, the most divinely filled moments. Despite the wisdom of modern science/medicine, the developmental process up to and including birth, is nothing

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<sup>177</sup> The use of the word *netivot*, paths, might suggest a harkening back to the *Sefer Yetzirah*, which begins by stating that the world was created through 32 *netivot*.



if not a miracle. The evolution within the womb, from a tiny organism to a human being with all of the potential for human fulfillment represents the pinnacle of the miraculous, unknowable, Divine mystery. And then, in a moment, the mystery becomes a living, breathing, vulnerable child; a soul – to know, to hold, to love and to cherish, with all the signs of a Divine spark.

D. *Yesh Mei'Ayn – Material Existence Derives From Divine Nothingness*

I also wonder whether one of the more elusive kabbalistic ideas underlying Gikatilla's choice of Proverb 8, relates to the idea of *Yesh mei'Ayin*. This is the idea that in the beginning there was nothing other than God and that God created the universe, the *Yesh*, out of no-thing-ness, *Ayin*. We see that Proverb 8 is very much about creation. Beginning with 8:22, the verse immediately following the verse quoted, up through 8:30, the Proverb teaches about the creation of *Hokhmah*. "The Lord created me at the beginning of His course, As the first of His works of old." Based on what follows in the verse, it is clear that this is not a reference to God's creation of the heavens and the earth, "*ha'shamayim v'ha'aretz*," Thus, to take this verse seriously one must consider that God created something prior to the heavens and the earth – *Hokhmah*.

And verse 30 states, "I was with Him as a confidant," before creation of the material world. Thus, one can reasonably interpret this as suggesting that before God's creation of the material world, God created some non-material aspects of existence, i.e. *Hokhmah*. Although the identity of the speaker in verse 22 is not made explicit, I believe that it can legitimately be interpreted as *Hokhmah*, particularly as both 8:1 and 8:12 make explicit reference to *Hokhmah*.

Understanding this Creation story as God's creation of *Hokhmah*, serves to promote the notion of *Yesh mei Ayin*, which was an important concept for Gikatilla. He strongly opposed Aristotelian and mystical views suggesting that God created the *sefirot* from pre-existent matter. Thus, by citing this Proverb, Gikatilla can offer his philosophic message about creation without making it the focus of his work.

a) *Binah's Judgment Submits to Hesed and the Role of Yesh*

The Proverb 8 also teaches that *Binah* is associated with strict justice and punishment. After learning about *Hokhmah* and his values and dreams, we hear from *Binah*.<sup>178</sup> The text states: "I am *Binah* and *gevurah* is mine." "*Ani Binah, li gevurah.*"<sup>179</sup> *Binah* teaches us that through her, kings reign, rulers decree, princes rule – these are great men, all righteous judges. Three verses later, *Binah* explains that she walks on the path of *tzedek* and the paths of justice, the *netivot mishpat*.

Having been exposed to *Binah*, we are now ready to explore the agents that enforce divine decrees. And to understand the agents of enforcement, one must understand the relationship between *El*, *Elohim*, the Great Sanhedrin, and the 310 encampments. First of all, Gikatilla teaches that all references in Torah to *Elohim* are references to the Great Sanhedrin and implicitly relate to the activity of *Din*, judgment.<sup>180</sup> Here, Gikatilla offers a fascinating explanation of the divine forces or agents that perform the work of *Elohim*. He explains that there are 310 camps or agents, of the *middah* of *din* or judgment. These camps travel around the world and each camp is responsible to execute a specific set of judgments, whether for the bad or for the good.

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<sup>178</sup> Proverb 8:12-14.

<sup>179</sup> Proverb 8:14.

<sup>180</sup> *Sha'are 'Orah*, Page 32, Line 1 et seq.

b) Yesh & The Camps Of Judgment

Gikatilla utilizes his old handy companion, gematria, to solve a piece of the Proverb's puzzle. "I endow those who love me with *Yesh*."<sup>181</sup> But what does it mean to endow one with *Yesh*? This mysterious statement suggests to Gikatilla that the verse calls for a mystical reading. So Gikatilla recognizes that *Yesh* has the numerical value of 310. With this, he makes the leap that there are 310 camps or agents responsible for enforcing judgments and for depriving the wicked of all the good things.<sup>182</sup>

It seems that Gikatilla reads Proverb 8:21 to mean that, 'God will fill the treasuries of the lovers of God with *Yesh*.' Because lovers of God are surely worthy of all good things, Gikatilla reasonably assumes that the contents of the treasuries must be different kinds of goodness – wealth, honor, goodness etc. From this insight Gikatilla draws another inference. If God fills the righteous with *Yesh*, then the wicked are likely deprived of *Yesh*.

Gikatilla then goes a step further, in explaining the system by which the righteous are rewarded of *Yesh* and the wicked deprived of such reward. He concludes that just as *Hesed* and *Rahamim* are highly personified divine personalities, so is *Yesh*. *Yesh* seems to represent both the contents of the treasury and also the personified agent(s) of *Din* and *Elohim*, who watch over the goods that fill the treasury. By enforcing the judgments issued by *Elohim*, *Yesh* thereby deprives the wicked of wealth, honor, and goodness.

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<sup>181</sup> *Sha'are 'Orah*, Page , Line 21

<sup>182</sup> I am unclear about he how draws the inference that since *Yesh* has a numerical value of 310, there must be 310 enforcing camps.

This is how the system works according to Gikatilla.<sup>183</sup> The attributes of *Din/Elohim* draw out all kinds of wealth and goodness that they (*Din* and *Elohim*) deny to the wicked, due to the judgments pending against them (the wicked). While for the righteous, their treasuries are filled with all kinds of goodness, with *tov*, *osher*, *nekhasim* v' *kavod*, which together are called *Yesh*. All of these treasuries are hidden away and prepared for the righteous for *la'atid la'voe*," a time in the future.

In the meantime, when the 310 camps/agents go out from the Great Sanhedrin to enforce all the judgments, with truth and faithfulness, *emet v'emunah*, they neither add nor detract from the decrees issued by the Sanhedrin. This is called *Elohim*, who in fact is the True God, "*Elohim emet*." In this way, *Din/Elohim* come to serve the higher cause of *Hesed* and *Rahamim*. Stated differently, this is how Judgment can be used for the good.

Gikatilla implicitly tells us, by his willingness to utilize the technique of gematria, that it is not inherently inconsistent with theosophical kabbalah. Although gematria is generally associated with an Abulafian kind of mysticism, Gikatilla teaches that so long as gematria is used to enhance our understanding of divine attributes, it is an entirely legitimate interpretative tool.

Furthermore, it seems quite possible that Gikatilla's interest in the creation of *Hokhmah* is not purely philosophical. For woven into his discussion of the 310 camps is the idea that above all of the camps, above the Great Sanhedrin and the *middah* of *Elohim*, is the *middah* of absolute mercy, *Rahamim ha'gemorah*. This is the *middah* of

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<sup>183</sup> *Sha'are 'Orah*, Page 30, Line x – Page 31, Line

*Keter*.<sup>184</sup> In this realm, there is not even a trace of *Din*. Rather, *Keter* consists entirely of *Rahamim* and *Hesed* and *Hemla* and *Hanina*. *Id.*

We learn in the *Idrah Rabbah*, a part of the mystical text called the Zohar, an explanation that relates to the ultimate source of lovingkindness in the world. We learn in the *Idrah Rabbah* that the highest *sefirah*, *Keter*, actually consists of pure mercy. He explains here how this source of mercy can be activated, primarily through the knowledge and religious practice of the *tzaddikim*, the most righteous individuals. These people have the ability to direct their actions and their prayers to the proper Divine Name, to *El*, and thereby save the world from many of its problems. Here, we have an explicit example of how prayer and righteous deeds below, have an impact on the judgments above.

c) Gematria (Numerology) As Key To Divine Mystery

At this point, Gikatilla utilizes gematria to explore another esoteric connection between *El* and *Keter*.<sup>185</sup> He notes that *El* has the numerical value of 31, one-tenth of *Yesh*, 310. This could serve several purposes. First, that *Yesh* has one-tenth the value of *Elohim* might reinforce the conclusion that *El* is one of the 10 gates/*sefirot*. Second, according to Gikatilla, it suggests that the 310 camps are duty-bound to make a 10% tithe, a *ma'aser*, to *Keter* “*Ki ha'middah ha'zot, ha'elyonah, sh'hee rahamim gemurim nikreit El. V'hu ha'ma'aser shel ha'makhanot ha'nikraim Yesh.*” “For this highest

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<sup>184</sup> Ben Shlomo makes this clear in his footnote. See n. 1, p. 32.

<sup>185</sup> *Sha'are 'Orah*, Page 32, Line 8, et seq. Gematria is the practice of attributing numerical value to Hebrew words, in order to uncover a mystical meaning embedded in the text.

attribute, pure mercy, is called *El*. And *He/Keter* is the tithe of the Camps that are called *Yesh*."

According to Gikatilla, it seems that this tithe is made when there is a *tzaddik* able to direct his actions and his prayers, to the *middah* of *El*, although Gikatilla does not explain how this works. The tithe comes in an unusual but fascinating form. When the 310 Camps see *El* coming out from her Hall, they quickly disperse, run away and hide from the presence of her, *El*'s, glory. In this way they are no longer able to execute the judgments they had set out to enforce. The Camps no longer have the power to exact any punishment or cause any destruction in the world. At this point, they cannot cause any evil to befall anyone. Thus, it seems that the 310 camps, in their highly personified form, offer their tithe by giving up their right to execute judgment to *El*. Because of the direct connection between *El* and *Keter*, the camps' sacrifice of their vested authority to execute judgment constitutes a tithe to *Keter*. Further, an act of *Hesed* becomes a new form of tithe.

Gikatilla is not satisfied, however, with the connection he has established between *El* (*Hesed* and *Rahamim*) and *Keter*, pure *Rahamim*.<sup>186</sup> He seeks additional authority for the claim that *Keter* is defined by pure *Rahamim*. Thus, he relies on a prayer in the *Selichot* liturgy that says: "*El melekh yosheiv al kiseh rahamim*." The personified king, *El*, sits on a throne that concretizes or materializes the human quality of mercy. Mercy, *Rahamim*, is the stuff of the throne upon which *El* sits. Furthermore, he takes the opportunity to utilize the text of the liturgy to assert that prayer must obviously be the vehicle or activity that can activate God's mercy and kindness in the world. In fact, he

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<sup>186</sup> *Sha'are 'Orah*, Page 32, Line 20, et seq.

states that the holy and pious people are quick to pray to the *sefirah* of *El*, at times of great trouble.

From here, Gikatilla seeks to further humanize this teaching. He transitions from the idea of activating *Rahamim* and *Hesed*, to the human manifestation of these qualities, in the persona of Abraham. He teaches about Abraham's abundant efforts to internalize, to personify, the values of *Rahamim* and *Hesed*, through the many trials that he accepted upon himself.

For this Gikatilla relies upon the blessing of King Melchizedik to Avram:

"*Baruch Avram l'El Elyon.*"<sup>187</sup>

"Blessed be Avram of God Most High."<sup>188</sup>

Creator of heaven and earth. (14:19)

And blessed be God Most High,

Who has delivered your foes into your hand." (14:20)

"*Va'yiten lo ma'aser mi'kol.*" "And [Abraham] gave him a tenth of everything."

This is a remarkable passage for several reasons. First, it could be read to show Abraham as a creator of the world. Verse 19 seems to describe Abraham, while verse 20 appears to describe God. And from Gikatilla's perspective, Abram was a creator of worlds. First and foremost, he created a world that recognized YHVH as the one God. Second, by picking up on the fact that this statement of Melchizedik was offered as a blessing, it seems to support the notion that prayer/blessing has cosmic implications. Third, that this blessing is offered by a non-Jew, the king of *shalem*, wholeness, seems meaningful (at least to me), although I do not know how Gikatilla might have integrated this idea.

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<sup>187</sup> *Sha'are 'Orah*, Page 32, Line 25 – Page 33

<sup>188</sup> Ben Shlomo does not point us to this text but it seems rather clear that this was an inadvertent omission.

Fourth, the passage tells us that Avram gave to Melchizedek a tenth, *ma'aser mi'kol*, of everything. It is striking to understand this text as Abraham giving his tithe to the sovereign of wholeness. With this proof-text from Torah, Gikatilla is further laying the foundation for the identification of Abraham and *Hesed* through his connection to the divine name *El*. In other words, how is it that Abraham is connected to *Hesed*? Here, Gikatilla establishes the connection through the divine name *El*. First, Melchizedek associates Avram with *El*. The essence of his blessing for Avram is that Avram be "of *El Elyon*," that Avram be attached to, defined by *El Elyon*. And if we read to the end of this narrative, we find that Avram was so rigorously honest and righteous in his dealings with another sovereign ruler, the King of Sodom, that he was unwilling to take "so much as a thread or a sandal strap" of what was not his.<sup>189</sup>

Then, Gikatilla reminds us of the Abraham text we discussed earlier, in which Abraham himself referred to God as *El Olam*. As a result of these two Torah texts, Gikatilla teaches that Abraham was entitled to inherit the *middah* of *El*. With this inheritance, no one was able to raise a claim against Abraham, because the *middah* of *El* was available to him. This is essence or the secret of *Hesed Avraham*.

E.     The Divine Attributes – *El, Rahum, Hanun, 'Erekh 'Apayim, Rav Hesed, V'Emet*

Gikatilla, however, continues to build his case that Abraham inherited the attribute of *Hesed*, through the *middah* of *El*. He asks, what is the essence of *El*? His answer derives largely from the 13 *middot* or attributes of God, as recited by God to Moses on Mt. Sinai. "The Lord! The Lord! a God compassionate, and gracious, solow to

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<sup>189</sup> Gen. 15:23.



anger, abounding in kindness and faithfulness, extending kindness to the thousandth generation, forgiving iniquity, transgression, and sin; yet He does not remit all punishment, but visits the iniquity of parents upon children and children's children, upon the third and fourth generations."<sup>190</sup> "YHVH, YHVH, El – Rahum, v'Hanun, 'Erekh 'Apayim, Rav Hesed, Ve'Emet . . ." The place to begin with this verse is the very beginning: "YHVH, YHVH, El . . ."

a.) The Attribute of El

Gikatilla teaches that these 13 *middot* reveal the essence of the *middah* of El.<sup>191</sup> To understand the 13 *middot*, Gikatilla cites a verse from Psalms, which appears to be King David's understanding of the *middot*. "Atah Adonai, El, Rahum, v'Hanun, 'Erekh 'Apayim, Rav Hesed, ve'Emet." "You Adonai, El . . ."<sup>192</sup> Gikatilla seems to understand this verse in an abbreviated way: 'You Adonai, are El, and your attributes are the following: *rahum*, v'*hanun*, *erekh apayim*, *rav hesed*, v'*emet*.'

Before analyzing the attributes, Gikatilla seeks to justify his emphasis upon the merciful quality of the Divine attributes. He offers the stark conclusion that El, or Hesed, is the essence of the highest *middah*, which is *Rahamim gemurim*, pure mercy. *Rahamim gemurim* is a reference to *Keter*.<sup>193</sup> Thus, Gikatilla has shown that the beginning of all existence, the *sefirah* of *Keter*, is defined by pure mercy. And, just as the essence of divine existence is *Hesed* and *Rahamim*, so too is the essence, the foundation of human existence. Abraham represents the beginning of human existence. For he was the first to

<sup>190</sup> Ex. 34:6-7.

<sup>191</sup> *Sha'are 'Orah*, Page 33, Line 8 et seq.

<sup>192</sup> Psalm 86:15.

<sup>193</sup> Ben-Shlomo, *Sha'are 'Orah*, 32, n. 1

understand that YHVH was God and he understood that *El* is one of the merciful attributes of YHVH.

As all of the Camps of punishment stand before and offer their tithe to *Keter*, they are also standing before *El*, Abraham. Thus, Gikatilla reasons that since Abraham inherited the *middah* of *El*, he naturally received of the assets/*nahalot* of the 310 Camps that are called *Yesh*. This helps to explain the essence of the Proverbs verse "*L'hanih ohavai Yesh*." "The lovers of me/God, will inherit *Yesh*."<sup>194</sup> Gikatilla actually interprets *ohavai* as *ohavi*, the lover, rather than 'the lovers' of Me/God. The lover referred to here is Abraham. For Gikatilla, this verse means that Abraham, the first to love God, will inherit *Yesh*.

b) The Attribute of *Rahum* (Mercy)

At this point, Gikatilla begins to explain Psalm 86:15, beginning with *rahum*.<sup>195</sup> The essence of *rahum* is the *middah* of *El*. When *rahum* sees that the forces (the Camps) of the Great Sanhedrin have gone out to enforce a judgment, *El* causes *rahum* to be brought upon the subjects of the punishing verdicts issued by the Great Sanhedrin. This in turn causes the Camps to disperse and flee, and thereby saves the individual from the decree of punishment. This is the essence of *rahum* that is the *middah* of *El*, according to Gikatilla.

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<sup>194</sup> *Sha'are 'Orah*, Page 33, Line 18, et seq.

<sup>195</sup> *Sha'are 'Orah*, Page 33, Line 20, et seq.

c) The Attribute of Hanun (Graciousness)

After *raham* comes *hanun*, which serves a very similar function as *raham*.<sup>196</sup> It seems that Gikatilla identifies two specific differences between the two. First, *hanun* works explicitly with those who are unworthy of mercy. Their receipt of mercy is a *matnat hinam*, a free, unearned gift. Although Gikatilla implies that *raham* also comes for the benefit of the unworthy, he does not explicitly describe *raham* in this way. Second, Gikatilla states that *hanun* comes to save individuals from *ha'onesh ha'gadol*, the great punishment, whereas it appears that *raham* saves people from all kinds of punishments.

d) The Attribute of 'Erekh 'Apayim (The Elongated Nose)

Gikatilla then moves on to 'Erekh 'Apayim, the elongated nose, which is symbolism from the Zohar.<sup>197</sup> 'Erekh 'Apayim comes to assist those who are unworthy of assistance from either *raham* or *hanun*. 'Erekh 'Apayim comes out and demands that the Court wait to punish the individual. "Hamteenu!" "Wait and don't punish Ploni immediately! Even though he is not worthy of of *raham* or *hanun*, he may do *teshuvah*." And then the Capms abide by the wish of 'Erekh 'Apayim and wait to enforce the punishment.

This is not yet the essence of 'Erekh 'Apayim.<sup>198</sup> Gikatilla explains at this point that he must reveal this Great Secret, *Sod ha'Gadol ha'zeh*, concerning 'Erekh 'Apayim. In the Bible, God's anger is conveyed through the nose, the flaring of nostrils, that often happens when someone is angry. The, Idra Rabbah, one part of the Zohar, uses the

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<sup>196</sup> *Sha'are 'Orah*, Page 33, Line 26, et seq.

<sup>197</sup> *Sha'are 'Orah*, Page 34, Line 1, et seq.

<sup>198</sup> *Sha'are 'Orah*, Page 34, Line 6 et seq.

feature of the Nose in a related way. Underneath the Zoharic concept, is the idea that a flaring of nostrils causes a shortening of the Nose. Thus, the Zohar reasons that God's anger and the shortening of His nose go together. And implicit in the Zohar is that the opposite must also be true. If God's nose grows, then His anger and His need to punish must be in decline. This is called '*Erekh 'Apayim*'. In the Zohar, the Nose oversees the enforcers of judgment. For example, the Nose has the capacity to influence the timing of any enforcement. When God's nose is extended, it contains and prevents the Camps, the enforcers of judgment, from doing their work. The essence of '*Erekh 'Apayim*' is that when the *middah* of *El* wants to extend *Rahamim* to an undeserving person, it is able to extend the great nose of God. By extending God's nose, *El* prevents the Camps from executing judgment, since they are still within the length of God's nose. And so long as they are within the domain, the length of God's nose, they are not able to exact punishment. By preventing the Camps from doing their work, *El* gives unworthy individuals a longer period to do *teshuvah*. And this is the great secret of '*Erekh 'Apayim*'!

The Zohar goes to great lengths to anthropomorphize God! Here, Gikatilla enters fully into the symbolism and myth of the Zohar. However, we might stop to consider how Gikatilla-the-Maimonidean fits into the passage about '*Erekh 'Apayim*'. There is one likely possibility. First is that on this subject, Gikatilla might be as far from the philosophical Maimonides, as Abulafia was with his recitation of Divine Names and letters, in search of an ecstatic/prophetic mystical experience. Similarly, it is doubtful that Maimonides would have agreed that the One God is as responsive to our individual personal lives, as the attribute of '*Erekh 'Apayim*' suggests.

On the other hand, Gikatilla's attempt to describe '*Erekh 'Apayim* has a metaphysical quality. He seemingly treats this subject, and each of the Divine Attributes, as subjects of metaphysical inquiry. He inquires of and analyzes them as if they are entities that bear directly on the nature and foundation of our existence. In this way, I would say that Gikatilla takes a Maimonides-like method or process and applies it to an exclusively and explicitly theosophic area of interest.

(i) *Binah's Submission To Hesed, Through the Attribute of Tehillah (Praise)*

To further illuminate the workings of '*Erekh 'Apayim*, Gikatilla calls on a verse from Isaiah.<sup>199</sup> "For the sake of My name I control My wrath (*aarikh api*); To My own glory, I am patient with you (*ehhetam lakh*)."<sup>200</sup> Based on this verse, he explains that among the holy *hokhamim*, scholars of Mishnah and Talmud, were individuals with the ability and power to extend God's nose – to cause God to be more patient and more forgiving. Through their holiness and their prayer they could protect the community of Israel and prevent for them great suffering. In these circumstances, the Camps assigned to execute judgment are unable to cause harm to Israel. Rabban Gamliel was one of those righteous Jews with such powers.

The Second Century Rabban Gamliel knew that praise of God, *Tehillah*, was directly connected to God's attribute of *Binah*. Thus, like *Binah*, *Tehillah* is the attribute that governs God's system of judgment and punishment.<sup>201</sup> Gikatilla calls this insight, that *Tehilla* is *Binah*, another secret of '*Erekh 'Apayim*. Thus, the verse "*U'tehillati*

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<sup>199</sup> *Sha'are 'Orah*, Page 34, Line 18 et seq.

<sup>200</sup> Isaiah 48:9.

<sup>201</sup> *Sha'are 'Orah*, Page 34, Line 27

*ehhetam lakh*,” now means – “And my *Binah* (rather than my praise) will choose to be patient with you.”

To flesh out this idea, Gikatilla explains that the *sefirah* of *Binah*, that is called *Tehillah*, is one *middah*/attribute deriving from two *middot*, tied to *Rahamim Gemurim*, which is the highest *sefirah*, *Keter*. Here, Gikatilla is reminding us of the upper three *sefirot*, which are all connected to one another. *Binah* derives directly from *Hokhmah*, which derives from *Keter*.

Gikatilla, it seems, is seeking to show how *Binah* is intimately connected to *Rahamim*, even though *Binah* itself is the *middah* of judgment and punishment. Thus, it is important here for Gikatilla to explain how the *sefirah* of *Binah*, which controls judgment and punishment, is itself derived from *Keter*, pure mercy, *Rahamim Gemurim*.

*Binah*, which is called *Tehillah*, gives strength to the heavenly court, which is called *Elohim*.<sup>202</sup> However, when *Keter* (*Rahamim Gemurim*) flows its abundance upon *Binah*, then *Binah* causes *Keter*'s *Rahamim*, lovingkindness, to flow upon the *middah* of *Din*. This commences the process of the lengthening of God's nose, also called *Arikkh Anpin*.

e) The Attribute of *Rav Hesed* (Abundance of *Hesed*)

At this point, Gikatilla returns to the next phrase in the verse from Psalms – *Rav Hesed*.<sup>203</sup> There are those who are not worthy of *raham*, *hanun* or *'Erekh 'Apayim*, and are worthy of being punished immediately. Gikatilla asks what the *middah* of *El* does in such a situation? To answer this question, Gikatilla looks to the Book of Job. “Truly

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<sup>202</sup> *Sha'are 'Orah*, Page 35, Line 1 et seq.

<sup>203</sup> *Sha'are 'Orah*, Page 35, Lines 11

God does all of these things; Two or three times to a man.”<sup>204</sup> In examining the context of this statement, we can discern what “all of these things” are that God does. The chapter describes God in the role of a Judge who finds guilt, but also who is seen as One, as Redeemer who forgives and thereby gives a second or third chance.<sup>205</sup> In verse 33:27, we see this most clearly: “He (a guilty man) says to men, ‘I have sinned; I perverted what was right; But I was not paid back for it.’” The text then tells us that God “redeemed him from passing into the Pit.” (33:28). And immediately following this verse is our verse. God does all these things (forgive/redeem), two or three times for a person. It is not that the prior sins are erased. Rather, after skipping over the first two, they are simply not included in the punishment. Thus, with Gikatilla’s interpretation, after removing the first two sins, the rest of the sins and the merits are placed on a balance scale. If the hand of the scale is untipped, neither pointing to sin nor to merit, *El* causes the scale to tip to the side of merit. This is *Rav Hesed*. The abundance of *Hesed* tips the scale.

f) The Attribute of *Ve'Emet* (Truth)

Finally, Gikatilla turns to the last word of the statement – *V'emet* – and he asks, What is *V'emet*? Even when a person’s sins so outweigh his merits that he cannot benefit from the *middah* of *Hesed*, still *El* brings forth *Hesed* and *Rahamim* in two ways.<sup>206</sup> First, if the person is liable to *kareit*, to be cut off from the community, *Hesed* counts every little merit, including every good conversation engaged in by the person, in order to lighten the punishment so that the person’s suffering will not be too great. Second, for the person whose punishment is lighter than *kareit*, at the end of the imposition of the

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<sup>204</sup> Job 33:29.

<sup>205</sup> Job 33:18-30.

<sup>206</sup> *Sha'are 'Orah*, Page 36, Line 1 et seq.

punishment, the *middah* of *Rahamim* is very precise in counting even the smallest conversation that will happen in the future, after the punishment has been completed. For Gikatilla, this is the meaning of *V'emet*.

Gikatilla has concluded his explication of the Divine Attributes. He has systematically explained how all of God's qualities promote and seek to ensure that mercy and lovingkindness will prevail in the world. He has explained how we are given the opportunity to do *teshuvah*, repentance, and how our first two sins are ignored for the purpose of granting us mercy. For Gikatilla, these processes represent the defining fabric of the Divine Plan and the Divine system of punishment, justice and mercy.

Every time we see in the Torah the name *El*, we must include in it the *middot* of *Hesed* and *Rahamim*.<sup>207</sup> Often times the Torah uses *El* when it is referring to *Hesed*. Gikatilla wants us to understand how this works.<sup>208</sup> *Hesed* is the act of bringing goodness to an individual when, according to the side of *Din*, goodness is not necessary. Unnecessary acts of kindness have their source in *Hesed*. And the reason for such acts of *Hesed* is because *Hesed* preceded the world. *Hesed* was the material with which God created the world. To prove this proposition, Gikatilla points us to Psalm 89:3 and beautifully misreads the passage. "*V'amarti, Olam Hesed yibanei*."<sup>209</sup> "I said that *Hesed* will build the world."

Gikatilla takes the idea very seriously that the world was created with the material, the stuff of *Hesed*. "*Ki b'h'esed elyon' nivra ha'olam*." Ben-Shlomo explains that this is a reference to *Keter*. *Keter* made creation possible through the attribute of

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<sup>207</sup> *Sha'are 'Orah*, Page 36, Line et seq.

<sup>208</sup> *Sha'are 'Orah*, Page 37, Line 1 et seq.

<sup>209</sup> *Sha'are 'Orah*, Page 37, Line 6 et seq.



*Hesed*. Gikatilla also offers the verse "*Kol orkhot Hashem Hesed*." "All the pathways to/of God are *Hesed*." Finally, God begins and ends the Torah with acts of kindness.<sup>210</sup> God granted *Hesed* to Adam *Ha'Rishon* by providing coats of skin to Adam and Eve, and He granted *Hesed* to Moses by burying him at the end of his life. All of these texts bolster Gikatilla's case that *Hesed* is the primary building material of the world.

5. Divine Sefirot and Human Sefirot

a) Abraham As Hesed

After focusing on Adam and Moses, and reinforced the idea that God created the world with *Hesed*, Gikatilla returns to Abraham.<sup>211</sup> When Abraham searched, examined and understood the great secret of God, and how He created the world with *Hesed*, Abraham stood and held the *middah* of *Hesed* in his hand. Abraham saw that at that time, all the children of the world practiced idolatry, so he stood before the people of the world and announced to them: "All the gods of the peoples are mere idols, for the Lord made the heavens."<sup>212</sup>

Based on this verse, Gikatilla emphasizes that Abraham's God was the creator of all worlds, the One who brings death and life, takes us down to Sheol and raises us up. And this is exactly the issue that Gikatilla addresses. He points us to the midrashic profile of Abraham's life. As we learn in Tanna D'Bei Eliyyahu (Rabba), Abraham taught Nimrod and the Chaldeans about the folly of their idol worship and survived King Nimrod's attempt to kill him by smoke or fire. After he was saved from the great fire of

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<sup>210</sup> b. Sotah 14a.

<sup>211</sup> Sha'are 'Orah, Page 37, Line 21 et seq.

<sup>212</sup> Psalm 96:5

Nimrod, Abraham, Sarah and all of his party were exiled from the land of Ur, which the midrash understands as the land of fire.<sup>213</sup>

Gikatilla asks implicitly: how did Abraham escape Nimrod's horrible attempt to kill him?<sup>214</sup> The answer he offers is that the *middah* of *Hesed* concentrated upon Abraham and said from above: "*Ani kadamti l'olam b'midat hesed, v'hayiti yihida ba'olam.*" This can be translated as God making the following statement: "I preceded the world with *Hesed*. (Prior to my creation of *Hesed*) I/God/*Keter* was alone, I was the unity, of the world."<sup>215</sup> However, I understand this statement differently. I sense that there are two parties speaking. It is not only God speaking. First, God says: "I preceded the world with the *middah* of *Hesed*." Then *Hesed* says: "As the essence of *Keter*, I was alone in the world."

For Gikatilla, this does not only inform us of the divine *sefirot*. It must also be teaching about the relationship between God and human. Gikatilla imagines God making the following remarkable statement: "*V'hinei Avraham yehid ba'olam, v'makdeem oti b'middat hesed.*" "[Originally], Abraham was alone in the world. He/Abraham gave Me/God priority, by means of his attribute of *hesed*."

For at least 3 reasons, this is a profoundly meaningful and deeply theological statement. First, it makes sense that if Abraham functioned through the attribute of *Hesed*, just as *Hesed* was first in the world, so too was Abraham. Second, Gikatilla understands God as longing to be given priority. God has vested human beings with the

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<sup>213</sup> Gen. 15:7.

<sup>214</sup> *Sha'are 'Orah*, Page 38, Line 7 et seq.

<sup>215</sup> *Sha'are 'Orah*, Page 38, Line 7. This is the translation of Avi Weinstein. It seems, however, that Weinstein was working with a different text. He does not translate the second part of the quote.

power to make God – God. Third, Abraham did precisely this – not primarily through acts of pious prayer and mitzvah doing, but by his acts of *Hesed*. Acting in the world with *Hesed* is what it apparently means to give God priority.

Surprisingly, these statements that Gikatilla attributes to God and *Hesed*, as far as I can tell, are not found among our corpus of rabbinic texts.<sup>216</sup> Thus, as he often does, Gikatilla is eager to tie these beautiful ideas to a text. He calls on a verse from the prophet Micah. "*Titen emet l'Yaakov, hesed l'Avraham.*" Give *Emet*/truth to Jacob and *Hesed* to Abraham."

b) Isaac As Din/Pahad

After this, Gikatilla focuses on the role of Isaac. Isaac came to proclaim the attribute of fear.<sup>217</sup> If one does not serve God, he will be punished as one who rebels against his master. Thus, Isaac sought to instill fear. With this fear, we will be brought under the wings of the *Shekhinah*. This is the essence of *Pahad Yitzhak* and the inheritance of Isaac. With this attribute, Isaac would warn and rebuke people that they uphold the Great Sanhedrin, which judges the wicked with the *middah* of *Pahad* (strict justice). To prove the validity of this deep message, Gikatilla cites Isaiah 33:14. "*Pahdu b'tzion hata'im.*" "Sinners in Zion are frightened (*Pahad*)."

At this point, we now understand that Abraham rebuked people from the aspect and with the *middah* of *Hesed*, while Isaac did so from the aspect of *Pahad*.<sup>218</sup> Each offered rebuke in the way that was natural for him; one with *Hesed*, the other with *Pahad* and *onesh*; one with a positive *mitzvah*, the other with a negative *mitzvah*.

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<sup>216</sup> Neither Ben-Shlomo nor Weinstein indicate a prior source for these statements.

<sup>217</sup> *Sha'are 'Orah*, Page 38, Line 22 et seq.

<sup>218</sup> *Sha'are 'Orah*, Page 39, Line 1 et seq.

c) Jacob as Tiferet: The Seal of God – From Magic to Truth

Finally, we reach the point of Jacob.<sup>219</sup> He did not adopt a third and different *middah*. Rather, as was already discussed, he held and upheld the attributes of Abraham and Isaac. He held the *middah* of *Hesed* with the *middah* of *Pahad*. He announced to all, the greatness of their truthfulness – to the *emet*, the truthfulness, of these two *middot*. He held them in truth, with a *lev shalem*, a whole, unified heart/mind.

Here, Gikatilla offers what he calls the sealed and hidden secret “*sod hatum v'satum*.” Jacob was the middle line, the *kav ha'emtza'i*. This is the essence of the date palm.<sup>220</sup> Jacob held the central branch between the two *middot* and entered between them. This symbolizes the *middah* adopted by Jacob. He took the *middah* of Abraham, the positive *mitzvah*, which is *Hesed* and the *middah* of Isaac, the negative *mitzvah*, which is *Pahad*. He held them equally, not tilting to the right or to the left. This is the *middah* of *Emet*, of truth. This is the name given to Jacob, *ish emet*. Here, Gikatilla returns to the verse about Jacob offered earlier. “*V'Yaakov ish tam, yoshev ohalim*.” “Jacob was a pure man, a dweller of tents.” When God saw that Jacob took these two *middot* equally, He gave to Jacob the Seal of God, which is *Emet*.

Gikatilla furthers his point that Jacob represents the *middah* of *Emet*, with a reference in the Talmud. God gave to Jacob His seal, which is *Emet*.<sup>221</sup> The relationship between God and Jacob is compared to a king who finds a faithful servant and says to him: “*Harei hotam'i masur b'yadekha, kakh masar Hashem l'Yaakov hotamo sh'hu*

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<sup>219</sup> *Sha'are 'Orah*, Page 39, Line 10 et seq.

<sup>220</sup> According to Weinstein's translation, this is a reference to the ritual waving during Succot. P. 279.

<sup>221</sup> *Sha'are 'Orah*, Page 39, Line 23 et seq. Shabbat 55a

*emet*." "Behold, My seal is transmitted into your hand. Thus, God delivered to Jacob his seal, which is *Emet/truth*." From this we can derive the following proposition: the seal of *Hesed* and the seal of *Pahad* are like one seal.

It is quite possible that Gikatilla wants to again take an old idea and remind us of its reinterpreted meaning. The predecessors to Abraham Abulafia, the Hasidei Ashkenaz, adopted practices involving seals of God. These in essence were magical seals. In their attempt to ascend further into the heavens, these mystics needed to pass through gates. In order to pass some gates, they needed to provide a magic seal. As this kind of idea certainly came down to Abulafia, it is possible that Gikatilla wanted to subtly comment on one of the Abulafia mystical techniques: the use of words and letters as magic seals. Thus, Gikatilla chose to turn our attention to a seal that represents Truth, *Emet* and turn our focus to the Talmud, which teaches explicitly that God's seal is *Emet*. This is a seal that is not meant to satisfy the individual and solitary desire for ecstatic contact with God. Rather it is a seal that might affect our daily lives and inform our ritualized religious practice. And Gikatilla offers even further proof of the fact that God's seal is Truth? From Jeremiah, who states: "*V'Hashem Elohim emet*." "YHVH our God is Truth."<sup>222</sup> Gikatilla reasons: if YHVH is identified with Truth and Truth is identified with Jacob, YHVH must be associated with Jacob.<sup>223</sup>

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<sup>222</sup> Jer. 10:10. JPS translation is: "But the Lord is truly God." This seems like a very reasonable translation in the context of the Jeremiah passage. However, I think that Gikatilla was trying to capture the aspect of God's seal that is truth.

<sup>223</sup> Citing several proof-texts, Gikatilla tried to further prove that Jacob inherited the seal of YHVH, with which the world was created and with which every creature is sustained. By means of the seal of YHVH all children of the world are judged with the justice of truth/*Emet*. Here Gikatilla helps us understand how Jacob's holding of YHVH, the *middah* of Abraham, *Hesed*, also represents his holding of *Emet*. To hold one, YHVH, is

Jacob stood in the place of each of the patriarchs and held on with the attribute of all three of them. He was the one who connected all three and he was the Middle Line, even though the one who carried attribute first, Abraham, is above the one who carries it last (Jacob).<sup>224</sup> The patriarchs came to the world to represent the human manifestations of the divine attributes.<sup>225</sup> Together, they represent the essence of the statement of the Shema. Hashem is our God, Hashem is One. Each of them came to represent the essence of a divine attribute: Abraham with the *middah* of *Hesed*, Isaac with the *middah* of *Pahad*, and Jacob with the *middah* of *Emet*. And they knew that the secret is to unify the individual *sefirot* to a unity of One.<sup>226</sup> Further, YHVH, *Rahamim*, is the attribute that balances Abraham's *Hesed* and Isaac's *Din*. That is what we mean when we recite the *Shema*.

For the last piece of this chapter, Gikatilla emphasizes his two principal Biblical characters, Abraham, who represents *El* and *Hesed* and Jacob who represents YHVH and *Rahamim*. He points us to the verse from Micah: "*Titen emet l'Yaakov, hesed*

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to hold the other, *Emet*. This is the essence of: "*V'Hashem Elohim emet.*" "*Mishpatei Hashem emet.*" "The judgments of God are truth." Psalms 19:10. And also the prophet Malachi who said: "*Torat emet hayta b'pi'hu.*" "The Torah of truth was on his lips."

<sup>224</sup> Gikatilla also furthers his concern for perfecting our limbs, and our actions with a cite to Jacob's sons. Just as the Tetragram, YHVH, stands in the middle, so too does Jacob stand in the middle, for he represents *Tiferet*. Since Jacob merited the right to have the name YHVH upon him, he also merited to father the 12 tribes of Israel. For the number 12 is also the number of letter combinations that can be made from the Tetragram. And just as Hashem is called *Emet*, so too Jacob's sons "*zera emet*," the "seed of offspring of truth." They are the offspring that came from *Emet*, from Jacob. This should be understood as a statement of fact. They were the offspring of Jacob, who is called *Emet*. With this, Gikatilla reminds us that although we were originally provided with the best seeds, we have tainted our truthful and righteous beginnings.

<sup>225</sup> *Ben Shlomo*, 40, n. 16.

<sup>226</sup> *Id.*, n. 17.

*l'Avraham.*" "Give truth to Jacob, lovingkindness to Abraham."<sup>227</sup> He asks how it is that God can act toward the Jews with two attributes – *Hesed* and *Emet*, rather than one? He offers the following answer. There are times when we are lacking and not worthy of goodness or *Rahamim*, Thus, when we are judged, *middat Avraham*, which is the *middah* of *Hesed*, appears at the court as our advocate. And *Hesed* says: "What is my son's justice/punishment?" If *He/Din* insists on imposing punishment, *Hesed* offers the following argument. If the individual is not worthy of good favor under the strictures of law, then grant him goodness based on *Hesed/Me*. *Hesed* explains: "*Ani aviheim, v'heim yorsheem oti.*" "I am their father and they will inherit Me." Just as Abraham served God from the aspect of *Hesed*, so too is it appropriate that God grant kindness to His children (either God's or Abraham's) from the aspect of their father's *Hesed*.

So, in the chapter on *Hesed*, we have seen Gikatilla take us on a remarkable mystical journey. Particularly if we include the references in the Introduction of the *Sha'are 'Orah*, to Daniel, Jacob and Hannah, we have had the privilege of traveling through all ten *sefirot*. Moreover we have made our journey with many of the most important and celebrated Biblical characters. With the prayers of Daniel, Jacob and Hannah, we ascended through the bottom four *sefirot*, as Hannah's prayer to YHVH *Tzevaot*, enabled us to pass through both *Netzah* and *Hod*. We then ascended through the Fifth, Sixth and Seventh *sefirot* with Jacob in *Tiferet*, Isaac in *Din* and then Abraham in *Hesed*. Furthermore, Gikatilla explained the biology, if you will, of the top three *sefirot*. He described in great detail how *Din's* attribute of judgment submits to the pure mercy of the highest *sefirah Keter*, which comes down to it/*Din* through the *sefirah* of *Hokhmah*.

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<sup>227</sup> *Sha'are 'Orah*, Page 40, Line 22 - Page 41





## CONCLUSION

To recite Divine Names is strictly and profoundly prohibited. We are unworthy of such recitations. It is dangerous for us to engage in such recitations. God forbids it in the Ten Commandments. Moses has forbidden it as well. And because we could never really speak accurately of God, to recite God's names would in essence be an abuse of and cause injury to the Divine Names and the Divine essence.

What we can do is to acquire understanding and knowledge about the Divine Names, and in so doing we will learn about the attributes of God, the functionings of the Divine ways. In Gikatilla's chapter on *Hesed*, we encounter the incredible notion that God created the world with the fabric of *Hesed*. *Hesed* and *Rahamim* are the defining, formative material with which God created the world. The highest aspect of God, *Keter*, is nothing other than pure mercy, *Rahamim Gemurim*.

Even the agents of God who have the job of enforcing punishment and strict justice, ultimately serve the God of *Hesed*. Even they submit themselves to God's attribute of *Hesed*. Our praise, our *Tehillah* of God is in fact our praise of *Binah*, the attribute of justice. But in our praise of justice, we inspire the attributes of mercy, of *Rahamim* and *Hesed*. This is the way the world works. Gikatilla suggests that it can be studied as one would study the metaphysics of the universe.

The metaphysics of lovingkindness, of *Hesed*, is a profound and inspiring idea. To teach human beings that God in fact is *Hesed*, seems quite bold. It pushes us to internalize the idea that we are the ones who prevent *Hesed* from governing the world. We are responsible for the absence of God, the absence of *Hesed*, in the world. If and when we commit ourselves to a world of God, we will be able to produce and experience

a world of *Hesed*. In essence, although we think we understand the world, although we think we understand the truth and the reality of existence, we are wrong. The truth, the ultimate reality of the world is profoundly different from what we generally see and experience.

And here, Gikatilla makes another radical point. He seeks to turn on its head, our understanding of truth. In three places, Gikatilla seeks to define for us the notion of truth, *Emet*. We think we understand the meaning of truth. Gikatilla would likely tell us that we're mistaken. In his chapter on *Hesed*, Gikatilla offers us *Elohim Emet*, (the God of truth) and the God who grants *Emet*, one last act of *Hesed*, after having granted *Rahum*, *Hanun*, *'Erekh 'Apayim* and *Rav Hesed*. Truth in both of these instances is defined by a granting of *Hesed*.

Third and finally, Gikatilla offers the role of God's seal that he gives to Jacob. This is the seal of *Emet*, which is the seal and *sefirah* of *Rahamim*, the quality of mercy. In a beautiful way, Gikatilla seeks to shape our understanding of truth so that it is integrally and intimately bound to *Hesed*, lovingkindness. *Ha l'vai!*

In my opinion, Gikatilla achieved a great deal in *Sha'are 'Orah*. He taught that one need not and should not choose between philosophy and mystical and theosophical kabbalah. A full life of Divine worship requires components of all three. However, he made it quite clear that we are forbidden and we take great risks, if we seek to have mystical experiences that we are simply not created to have. God did not create us to unite with God. God created us to use our Godly powers TO LIVE FULLY here in the human realm.

As stated at the outset, Gikatilla did not believe that one has to choose between philosophy and Abulafian and theosophic kabbalah. He taught, although not in philosophical language, that the three can and should be unified. He created a kabbalah that focused on the philosophical goals of knowledge and understanding. But, our search for knowledge and understanding, according to Gikatilla, is not devoid of deep spiritual passion and an insatiable thirst for Divine awareness. Everything we do can and should be seen as having Divine significance, Divine power. We have the power to reveal God and to heal God's brokenness.

For several reasons, both Gikatilla's method and message resonate with me. First, regarding his method, Gikatilla engages in a beautiful and eternal Jewish practice. He takes old and established Jewish ideas, and with great loyalty he seeks to renew them. Through a reshaping of the old ideas, Gikatilla seeks to transform the old into the new, without ignoring and neglecting the tradition of the past. In fact, through his novel and innovative reshaping of philosophical, mystical and theosophical ideas, he has reinforced, if not enhanced, the traditional communal activity – the performance of *mitzvot*. This is a religious endeavor from which liberal Jews can learn much. We are talented and successful at attending to the modern time and speaking the contemporary language. We are less talented and successful at holding on, with love and loyalty, to the old communal practices that have played so important a role in the survival of our people.

As a liberal Jew, I sometimes find that we create lives that are defined by little boxes, boxes that are mostly closed to one another. We have our box of 'academic' learning. We pursue knowledge of history and science and seek to uncover the original meanings of our tradition's texts. And filling that box represents a major chunk of our

energy. And we have boxes filled with the spiritual activities of life. We often do poorly, however, at connecting the two boxes, enabling them to inform and enrich one another.

As for the message that Gikatilla offers, I also am quite moved. If only the rest of us could understand the spiritual metaphysics of the world in the way that Gikatilla teaches it. How might the world be different, if we truly believed that the core, the essence of creation is *Hesed*? What could we accomplish if we believed this in the depths of our being?

The fabric of the world is lovingkindness, mercy. Truth is inherently a loving and merciful quality and an inherently loving and merciful deed. In fact, there is no truth, in the absence of lovingkindness. How might we know when truth exists in the world? When we see, experience and share from within ourselves, lovingkindness, mercy, and compassion, to all the other living creatures – then we will know that truth exists in the world.

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## הקדמה

1 שאלת ממני אחי ידיד נפשי להאיר לפניך נתיב בענין שמותיו  
של הקב"ה יתברך ויתברך, להפיק בהם רצונך ולהגיע בהם  
למחוז חפצך. ולפי שראיתי כוונתך ישרה וטובה יותר משאלתך,  
הוצרכתי להודיעך איזה דרך יחלק אור ומה הוא הדרך שהשם  
5 יתברך חפץ או אינו חפץ. וכשתגיע לידיעת דבר זה או תקרא  
וי"י יענה, ותהיה מן הקרובים אליו ותאהב אותו בכל נפשך,  
ותתענג על ה' ויתן לך משאלות לבך.

הלא ידעת אם לא שמעת אלהי עולם י"י, מפניו יחילו עליו  
נים ותחתונים, מפחדו תרעש הארץ ולפניו ועמו מי יעמוד ומי  
10 יקום בחרון אפו (נחום א. ו). הן בקדושתו לא יאמין ושמים  
לא זכו בעיניו, אף כי נתעב ונאלח איש שותה כמים עולה  
(איוב טו. טז—טז). והיאך ישתמש ילוד אשה בשמותיו הקדר  
שים ויעשה מהם גרון לחתוך בו. ומי הוא זה ואי זה הוא אשר  
מלאו לבו לעשות כן לשלוח יד בכתר מלכות ולהשתמש בו?  
15 והנה אמרו רז"ל: כל הווגה את י"י באותיותיו אין לו חלק  
לעולם הבא. והנה קדוש עליון ר' חנינא בן תרדיון שלא היה  
הווגה את י"י דרך חול ודרך תשמיש, זולתי דרך כבוד כדי ללמוד  
ולהבין דרכי י"י יתברך ועם כל זה נענש, אנו העניים והחסרים  
קל וחומר. הלא תראה מה שכתב י"י יתברך בתורתו: לא תשא  
20 את שם י"י אלהיך לשוא (שמות כ. ז). ואף-על-פי שבא להור-

1 אזהרה כנגד שימוש תועלת, מאגי, בשמות הקודש.

2 עיין אבות א יג, ואבות דרבי נתן יב.

3 סנהדרין י משנה א.

4 עיין עבודה זרה יז ע"ב—יח ע"א.

5 עיין דברים רבה ב, לו.

היה על שבועת שקר הוציא הדבר בלשון שיש משמעות שלא  
תשא את שמו על שפתך לבטלה; שהיה יכול לומר לא  
תישבע בשם יי' אלהיך לשקר, אבל כשכתב לא תשא וגו'  
שמע מינה תרתי. ומשה רבינו עליו השלום כשעלה למרום למד  
ממלאכי השרת סוד הזכרת יי' יתברך, והזהיר את ישראל  
על זה ואמר: כי שם יי' אקרא הבו גודל לאלהינו (דברים לב,  
ג). ואם מלאכי מעלה מחזירים בהזכרת יי' יתברך, על אחת  
כמה וכמה רימה ותולעה, וכל שכן המתפתה ברעתו להשתמש  
בכתר קונו. קל וחומר שאין בזמן הזה בקיאיין בהזכרת יי'  
ובשימושו על דרך הפעולה. ואם כן לא יעלה ביד המזכיר  
רק איבוד עולמו ומעלה חרס בידו, ועל כיוצא בו אמרו רז"ל:  
כל שלא חס על כבוד קונו ראוי לו שלא בא לעולם.  
ועתה בני שמע בקולי ותהיינה אוניין קשובות לעצתי. בני,  
אם יפתוך חטאים אל תאבה (משלי א, י). אם יאמרו: לכה  
אתנו וגמסור בידך שמות והזכרות שתוכל להשתמש בהם,  
בני אל תלך בדרך אתם; מנע רגלך מנתיבתם, כי אותם השמות  
והשימושים כולם מיני רשת ומכמורת לצורך בהם הנפשות  
וללכת לאבדן. ואם באמת היו ביד החכמים הראשונים שמות  
הקדושים מקובלים מפי הנביאים, כגון שם של ע"ב, שם  
של מ"ב, ושם של י"ב, ושאר שמות הקודש הרבה, והיו יכו-  
לים לחדש בהם אותות ומופתים בעולם, לא היו משתמשים  
בהם לצרכם רק בעת הגזירה לפי שעה או על צד קידוש  
השם. כגון, רבי מאיר שהציל אחות אשתו מקובה של זונות,  
ואמר לאותו הכותי השומר: בכל שעה שתראה עצמך בצער  
אמור אלהי מאיר ענני ואתה ניצול. ואף-על-פי שאמר כך  
לאותו הכותי, בשעה שנצרך רבי מאיר וראה עצמו בסכנה,  
לא נשתמש בשם אלא ברח לו. כדאיתא בפרק קמא דעבודה  
זרה. או בעניין חוני המעגל, או בעניין רבא עם שבור מלכא

קבלה מעשית. חגיגה טו ע"א.

שמות הקודש השונים שלכל אחד מהם מספר אותיות מסוים, עיין  
רשי סוכה מה ע"א, קידושין עא ע"א.

עיין עבודה זרה יח ע"א-ע"ב.

כדאיתא בפרק סדר תעניות. כשכרה שיתין וקפא תהומא  
ובעא למשטפא לעלמא כדאיתא פרק החליל ובסנהדרין.  
פיוגור האמת ומסורת הברית כי הרוצה להשיג חפציו בעניין  
שמותיו של הקב"ה הוא שישתדל אדם בכל כוחו בתורה להשיג  
זונת כל שם ושם מאותן שמות הקודש הנזכרים בתורה,  
כגון: אלהי, יה, יהוה, אדני, אל, אלוה, אלהים, שדי, צב,  
אות, וידע אדם ויבין כי כל שם ושם מאלו השמות כולם  
הם כדמיון מפתחות לכל דבר ודבר שאדם צריך לכל צד ועניין  
בעולם. וכשיתבונן באלו השמות, ימצא כל התורה והמצוות  
מלוי בהם; וכשידע זונת כל שם ושם מאלו השמות, יכיר  
וידע גדולת מי שאמר והיה העולם, ויפחד וירא מלפניו ויש-  
תוקק וינסוף ויתאוה להידבק בו מתוך ידיעת שמותיו יתברך,  
ואז יהיה קרוב ליי' ותהיה תפילתו מקובלת, ועל זה נאמר:  
אשגבהו כי ידע שמי יקראני ואענהו (תהלים צא, טו). לא  
אמר הכתוב אשגבהו כי יזכור שמי, אלא כי ידע שמי —  
הידיעה היא העיקר, ואחר כך — יקראני ואענהו; כלומר,  
כשיצטרך לדבר ויתכוון באותו השם שאותו הדבר שהוא צריך  
תלוי בו, אז 'אענהו'. הלא תראה כי בעת הצרה הזכיר יעקב  
אל שדי ואמר: אל שדי יתן לכם רחמים (בראשית מג, יד).  
ודניאל כשהתפלל אל המקדש אמר: והאר פניך על מקדשך  
השם למען אדני (דניאל ט, יז). ואף-על-פי שדרשו רז"ל  
בברכות: למען אברהם שקרא אדון, עדיין צריכין אנו  
למודעי, וזנה כשהתפללה שיתן לה יי' זרע אנשים מה כתיב?  
יי' צבאות אם ראה תראה בעני אמתך (שמואל א א, יא). ואף-  
על-פי שדרשו בו בברכות מה שדרשו, עדיין יש עיקר  
ושורש פנימי לדבר, ולא לדרשא קאחינא אלא לעיקרא דמלתא

תענית כב ע"א; שם כד ע"ב.

עיין סוכה ג ע"א; מכות יא ע"א.

במקום להשתמש בשמות בשימוש מעשי, ראוי ללמוד את משמעותם  
הסמלית ולהתכוון אליהם בתפילה ובעשיית המצוות, ועל-ידי כך יפעלו  
את פעולתם בעולם.

ברכות ז ע"ב. עיין שם לא ע"ב.



קאטינא. האחר שכן הוא. צריכין אנו למסור בידך עיקר ושורש להישען עליו.

דע כי כל שמותיו הקדושים הנזכרים בתורה כולם תלויים בשם בן ד' אותיות שהוא יהוה. ואם תאמר והלא שם אהיה הוא העיקר והמקור? דע כי שם בן ד' אותיות הוא כדמיון גוף האילן, ושם אהיה הוא עיקר האילן הזה וממנו ישתרשו שורשים ויתפשטו ענפים לכל צד וצד, ושאר כל שמות הקדוש כולם בדמיון ענפים וסנכנים נמשכים מגוף האילן, וכל אחת מן הענפים עושה פרי למינהו<sup>15</sup>. ומלבד שמות הקדוש הירד עים שאסור למחוק, יש כמה כינויים אחרים תלויים בכל שם ושם, כגון שתאמר כינויו של יהוה מי הם: גורא, גושא, עוזר, עובר על פשע, כינויו של אל מי הם: כגון גדול, רחום, וחנן, כינויו של אלהים מי הם: כגון אדיר, שופט, דיין, ולכל אחת מאלו הכינויים יש כינויו אחרים תלויים בכל כינוי וכינוי מאלו, והם שאר כל מלות התורה. עד שנמצא כל התורה כולה נארגת על הכינויו, והכינויו על השמות, והשמות הקדושים כולם תלויים על שם יהוה וכולם מתאחדים בו. נמצאת כל התורה כולה נארגת על שם יהוה ולפיכך נקראת תורת יי תמימה<sup>16</sup> (תהלים יט, ז). נמצאת למד כשתבין כוונת שמות הקדוש למשפחותיהם ותשיג הכינויים המיוחדים לכל אחד מהם, אז תראה שהכול תלוי בשמו הגדול יתברך ותכסוף ותשתוקק להידבק בו ותירא ותפחד ממנו, ואז תבין יראת יי ודעת אלהים תמצא (משלי ב, ה) ותכנס בכלל אותם שנאמר

<sup>15</sup> השם בן ארבע אותיות הוא ספירת תפארת, שהיא הספירה המרכזית ומסומלת בגזע האילן שממנו יוצאים הענפים — הספירות. השם אהיה (מלשון הפסוק אהיה אשר אהיה) הוא ספירת כתר, הספירה הראשונה שהיא מקור הספירות והיא מסומלת בשורש האילן. מן הספירות עצמן מסתעפים כוחות גוספים — השמות האחרים והכינויים המוזכרים בהמשך.

<sup>16</sup> התורה כולה היא מערכת אחת של שמות קדושים הנכנים על שם ה' המייצג את הספירה המרכזית, תפארת (על תפיסה של אריגת התורה משמות קדושים עיין במבוא).

בהם 'אשגבהו כי ידע שמי' (תהלים צא, טו) ואז תבין כמה הוא עובש המזכיר שם שמים לבטלה, כל שכן ההוגה את השם באותיותיו, קל וחומר המשתמש בו. וקודם שאתחיל בכוונת החיבור יש לי להקדים לפניך הקדמה אחת והיא זאת.

כלל גדול: דע כי אמיתת עצם הבורא יתברך איננה מושגת לזולתו ואין בכל המוגי מעלה יודע מקומה כל שכן עצם אמי-תתו יי הלא תראה מלאכי מעלה מה הם אומרים: ברוך כבוד יי ממקומו (יחזקאל ג, יב) בכל מקום שהוא. ואם עליונים כך, תחתונים על אחת כמה וכמה. אם כן כל אותם העניינים שאנו קורים בתורה, כגון יד ורגל, אתן ועין, ושאר כל כיוצא בהם, מה הוא? דע והאמן כי כל אותם העניינים אף-על-פי שהם מורים ומעידים על גדולתו ואמיתותו, אין כל בריה יכולה לדעת ולהתבונן מהות אותו הדבר הנקרא יד ורגל ואוזן וכיוצא בהם. ואם אנו עשויים בצלם ודמות, אל יעלה בדעתך, כי עין בצורת עין, ממש, או יד בצורת יד ממש, אבל הוא עניינים פנימיים ופנימים לפנימיים באמיתת מציאות יי יתברך, אשר מהם המקור והשפע יוצא לכל הנמצאים בגזירת השם יתברך<sup>17</sup>. אבל אין מהות יד כמהות יד, ולא תבניתם שווה, כמו שאמר: ואל מי תדמינוי ואשוה (ישעיה מ, כה). ודע והבן שאין בינו ובינינו דמיון מצד העצם והתבנית, אלא כוונת צורות האברים שבנו שהם עשויים בדמיון סימנים, עניינים סתומים: עליונים שאין הדעת יכולה לדעתם אלא כדמיון זכרון: כמו שכותב 'ראובן בן יעקב', שהרי אין אלו האותיות ואין זו הצורה עצמה של ראובן בן יעקב צורתו ותבניתו ומהותו, אלא זיכרון — שזה ראובן בן יעקב הכתוב הוא סימן כנגד אותו עצם ותבנית הידוע הנקרא ראובן בן יעקב<sup>18</sup>. ולפי שיי יתברך רצה לזכור

<sup>17</sup> לשון אופיינית לציון מעמדו של האל הטראנסצנדנטי, אך יש לשים לב שלחלן שער ה הערה 33 נאמרים דברים אלה על ספירת כתר (עיין מבוא).

<sup>18</sup> הביטויים האנתרופומורפים האלה אינם אלא סמלים לכוחות רוחניים: הספירות האלוהיות והכוחות התלויים בהן (עיין מבוא).

<sup>19</sup> האיברים הגשמיים שלנו דומים לאיברים העליונים רק בתורת 'סימנים' — סמלים הרומזים לכוחות הרוחניים המקבילים בעולם האלוהות;

חינו, ברא בגוף האדם כמה אברים נסתרים וגללים בדמיון סימן למעשה מרכבה.<sup>20</sup> ואילו יזכה אדם לטהר אבר מאבריו, יהיה אותו אבר כדמיון כיסא לאותו דבר עליו הפנימי הנקרא בשם זה.<sup>21</sup> אם עין עין, אם יד יד, וכן לכל השאר. כיצד? כגון שנוהר ונשמר אדם אחד במראה עיניו שלא יביט ולא יסתכל בדבר ערוה ולא בשאר כל דבר של גנאי אלא בכל דבר שהוא קדושה יי ועבודתו, או אותה עין נעשית כמו כיסא לאותו דבר הנקרא למעלה עין. וכן היד והרגל ושאר כל האברים. ועל זה אמרו חז"ל: האבות הם המרכבה.<sup>22</sup> ולא אמרו כל אחד מהאבות הוא המרכבה, אלא האבות. כיצד? אברהם אבינו עליו השלום לקח בטהרה צד ימין וירש ימין של מעלה, שהוא מידת החסד, ועל זה נאמר: ויסע אברהם הלך ונסוע הנגבה (בראשית יב, ז).<sup>23</sup> יצחק לקח בטהרה מידת צד שמאל, שהוא הפחד, ועל זה נאמר: וישבע יעקב בפחד אביו יצחק (שם לא, ג).<sup>24</sup> ויעקב לקח בטהרה צד קו האמצעי ועל זה נאמר: ויעקב איש תם יושב אהלים (שם כה, כז) — בין אהל אברהם ובין אהל יצחק.<sup>25</sup> נמצאו שלושת האבות כיסא למרכבה, ועל דרך זה הושב הדבר על כוריו ויוצר על מכוננו. ועתה יש לנו להאיר ענין ענין תלוי על זה. דע כי המידות הם תלויות באברים. כיצד? מידת העין היא הראות, מידת האוזן היא השמיע, מידת היד היא המישוש, מידת הרגל

ההבדל בין הסמל והמסומל הוא כהבדל בין האותיות הכתובות יראובן בן יעקב לבין האיש שוה שמו.

<sup>20</sup> מערכת הספירות

<sup>21</sup> האיבר הגשמי נעשה מצע לפעולת הכוחות האלוהיים. כך נוצר הקשר בין העולם העליון לעולמו באמצעות המצוות שמקימים באיברים הגשמיים.

<sup>22</sup> בראשית רבה מז, ח.

<sup>23</sup> אברהם נסע לצד ימין (דרום) ומסמל את ספירת חסד, שהיא בצד הימני של מערכת הספירות.

<sup>24</sup> יצחק מסמל את ספירת גבורה, שהיא מידת הדין (פחד), ונמצאת בצד השמאלי של מערכת הספירות.

<sup>25</sup> יעקב מסמל את ספירת תפארת (קו האמצעי), שהיא מידת הרחמים, המתחברת בין שתי הספירות הקודמות (חסד ודין).

היא ההליכה. והנה המידות נמשכות אחר האברים.<sup>26</sup> ולפי שהזכירו חז"ל כלפי מעלה לשון מידות, יש לנו לדון ענין המידות כמו שיש לך לדון ענין אוזן ויד ורגל שאמרנו. וכמו שאין ערך בינינו בענין האברים, כך אין ערך בינינו לענין המידות. ולפי שאנו צריכים להשתמש בתיבור זה בלשון המידות, הישמר לך ושומר בפשט מאוד פן תכשל ותאמר שיש ליי יתברך מידה מוגבלת או משוערה, שאין הדבר כך. אבל כמו שאין לענין עין ואוזן שיעור וגבול ודמיון, כך הוא הדין במידות. והנה רז"ל קראו לשמותיו הקדושים מידות, כדגרסינן פרק קמא דראש השנה: אמר רב יהודה ברית כרותה לשלש עשרה מידות שאינן תזוורות ריקם, שנאמר הנה אנכי כורת ברית (שמות לד) <sup>27</sup> ושלוש עשרה מידות הם יי אל רחום וחנן ארך אפים וגו'. והכלל שיש לך להאמין בזה שאין דמיון בין מידות יי יתברך ובין מידותינו, זולתי בדרך הזכרת סיי מן בשם לבד. ועל זה ארז"ל בכמה מקומות: בוא וראה שלא כמידת הקב"ה מידת בשר ודם.<sup>28</sup> ואחר שמסרנו בידך מפתח הקדמה זו, יש לנו להיכנס בביאור כל שם ושם משמות הקודש הכתובים בתורה ולהאיר ענין בכל מקום שתמצא כתוב שם אחד מהם, וכדי שתבין ותשכיל מקור מים חיים שהוא גובע מכל שמותיו יתברך. וכשתשיג דבר זה או תצליח את דרכיך ואז תשכיל.

<sup>26</sup> דרכי הפעולה השונות תלויות באיברים השונים.

<sup>27</sup> ראש השנה יז ע"ב.

<sup>28</sup> פסחים קיט ע"א, סוכה מז ע"א, בבא בתרא פח ע"ב.

# שער שישי

שליחות באלו הדברים וכיוצא בהן, נקרא השליח אלהים על-פי הכוח שמסרו בידו מאלו הדברים הנזכרים. ושמור זה העיקר הגדול בדרך, שעדיין חצטרך אותו לכמה מקומות. ועתה אם יש לך עיניים, פקח עיניך בכללים אלו הגדולים שמסרנו לך בשער הזה בענין שם אלהים ותוכל להבין שם אלהים בכל מקום שאתה מוצא בתורה. ותבין למה נקראו השרים העליונים אלהים אחרים, ותבין למה נקראו הדיינים כולם, אפילו בני-אדם, בשם אלהים. ותבין למה נקראו המלאכים בני האלהים. וכשתבין כל העניינים האלו, תבין גם כן שאר הכוחות והפעולות אשר הן כולן כלולין בשם אלהים. והשם יתברך יורנו הדרך לדעת אמיתת דרכו ולשמור מצותיו חוקיו ומשפטיו, וכן יהי רצון.

## שער שביעי

[הספירה הרביעית]

ואתה אדני אל רחום וחנון ארך אפים ורב חסד ואמת  
(תהלים פו, טו)

השם השביעי משמות הקודש הוא שם הנקרא א"ל, וצריכין  
אנו להודיעך סוד השם הזה על דרך העיקר, וכשתבין העיקר או  
תבין כל מקום שאתה מוצא בו לשון אל. כבר הודענוך בשע-  
רים הקודמים כי שם אל ממונה על החסד והרחמים, והוא סוד  
המידה אשר ירש אברהם אבינו עליו השלום, כאמרו: ויקרא  
שם בשם ה' אל עולם (בראשית כא, לג). ועתה צריך אתה לדעת  
כי בסנהדרי גדולה הנקראים אלהים יש ג' מאות ועשרה מח-  
נות של מידות הדין משוטטות בעולם, וכל מחנה ומחנה מהן  
גומר הדין בכל הדברים שהוא ממונה, בין לטוב בין לרע.  
ואלו המידות כולן שואבות ומושכות להן כל מיני העושר  
והטובה שמונעין עליהן הדין מן הרשעים, וכל אוצרותיהן  
מלאים כל טוב וכל מיני עושר ונכסים וכבוד, ונקראים כולן  
'יש'. וכל אלו האוצרות גנוזים ומוכנים לצדיקים לעתיד לבוא.  
ועל זה נאמר: להנחיל אוהבי י"ש ואוצרותיהם אמלא (משלי  
ת, כא). וכשאלו השלוש מאות ועשרה מחנות יוצאין מבית-דין  
הגדול ומשוטטות בעולם לגמור הדין בחוטאים, מהם שוללים  
מהם בוזים, מהם פוצעים מהם עוקרים, מהם מנגעים ומהם  
מביאים כמה מיני חלאים, כל מחנה ומחנה מהם גומר הדין  
שפסקו על כל בריה ובריה, והכול באמת ובאמונה ולא מוסיפין  
ולא גורעין על מה שנגזר בבית-דין הנקרא אלהים, שהוא  
'אלהים אמת'.

1 ודע כי למעלה מכל אלו המחנות, ולמעלה מבית-דין הגדול הנקרא אלהים, יושבת מידת הרחמים הגמורה שאין בה תעורר בת דין בעולם, אלא כולה רחמים וחסד וחמלה וחנינה, מבלי צד דין שבעולם. והמידה הזאת מרחמת, אף-על-פי שאין הבריות ראויות לרחמים, ונותנת מתנת חיים. ועל זה הדרך היו הצדיקים והחסידים יודעים דרך המידה הזאת, ובעת הצרה היו מתכוונים אליה והיו מצילין את העולם מכמה מיני צרות. ודע כי המידה הזאת העליונה שהיא רחמים גמורים נקראת א"ל, והוא המעשר של המחנות הנקראים י"ש<sup>2</sup>, וכשיצאו הג' מאות ועשרה מחנות להשחית את בני העולם על-פי הדין שדנו בבית-דין של מעלה, אם יש בעולם צדיק שיוכל להתכונן אל המידה הזאת הנקראת אל אז היא יוצאת מהיכלה ונגלית, וכשרואים אותה י"ש מחנות או כולם מתפזרים ובורחים ומס' תתרים מפני כבודה ואינם פועלים דבר מכל מיני משחית שהיה להם לפעול, לפי שמידת הרחמים הגדולים יצאה ונגלית עליהם, וכשהיא נגלית, יודעים כולם שאין להם כוח להשחית ולהשמיד ולא להזיק ולא להרע לשום בריה שבעולם, כי כבר הופיע המידה הנקראת אל. ועתה דע והבן כי בעת הצרות היו הקדושים והחסידים ממהרים להתפלל ולהתכוין למידת אל, וזהו שאנו אומרים: 'אל מלך יושב על כסא רחמים'. ונקראת גם כן אל עליון, והנה אברהם אבינו עליו השלום הש' חדל כל ימיו אחרי המידה הזאת שכולה חסד ורחמים וחנינה, וקיבל עליו כמה מיני יסורים וכמה מיני צער כדי שיהיה זוכה לה, וברוב השתדלותו ואהבתו אותה זכה שהיתה לו ידו שת עולם, וזהו סוד: ברוך אברהם לא"ל עליון ואמר: ויטע

<sup>1</sup> הספירה הרביעית היא מידת חסד (גדולה) והיא רחמים גמורים, בהשואה לתפארת שהיא רחמים המעורבים מחסד ומדין. אמנם הרחמים הגמורים ממש הם, כפי שנאמר כמה פעמים, רק בספירת חסד.

<sup>2</sup> 'אל' בגימטריא — עשירית של י"ש, בענין אוצרות י"ש לצדיקים — עיין עוקצין פרק ג, משנה יב; טהדרין ק ע"א.

<sup>3</sup> בסליחות לימים נוראים.

1 אשל בבאר שבע ויקרא שם בשם ה' אל עולם (שם כא, לג), והנה אברהם אבינו עליו השלום ירש המידה הזאת, ולפיכך נתברך בכול. שלא היה לו למעלה מקטרג ומערער, אלא היו מזומנין לתפצו, לפי שמידת אל היתה מתגלת עליו תמיד ואז היה כל בעלי דינים בורחין מפניו, וזהו סוד 'חסד לאברהם'. ולפי שמידת אל היא המזומנת לרחמים הגדולים, התקינו רז"ל לומר 'אל מלך יושב על כסא רחמים'. ועתה צריכין אנו לעורר על עיקר גדול, והוא כי ב"ג מידות של רחמים הוכיר 'ה' ה' אל רחום וחנון ארך אפים ורב חסד ואמת, ואף-על-פי שכבר פירשנו לך זה הפסוק בשער שעבר קודם לכן, צריכין אנו לפרש לך עדיין על יסוד מידת אל, שהרי דוד המלך עליו השלום לקח גם המידות האלו וכלל אותם בשם אל, ואמר: ואתה אדני אל רחום וחנון ארך אפים ורב חסד ואמת (תהלים פו, טו), ועתה שים לבך ושמע פירוש הפסוק הזה. אל הוא סוד מידה עליונה אשר כולה רחמים גמורים, ומפניה נכנעים כל מחנות הדין ואין אחד מהן עומד לפניו, ולפי שירש אברהם מידת אל ואהב אותה, זכה לנחול כל נחלות של ש"י מחנות הנקראים י"ש, וזהו סוד: להנחיל אוהבי יש (משלי ח, כא), ואומר: ורע אברהם אוהבי (ישעיהו מא, ח), והבן זה מאוד. ואומר אחריו 'רחום', וסוד רחום הוא מידת אל כשהיא רואה שיצא מן הדין בסנהדרי גדולה להשמיד או להחרים אדם או מקום, או שאר כיוצא בזה, שאם ישמד יבוא לעולם הפסד גדול, אז יוצאת המידה הנקראת אל כדי לרחם על הבריות שלא יישחת העולם ומרחמת על אותה הבריה שנגזר עליה הדין לכלותה, וכשיוצאת מידת אל, בורחים ומסתתרין כל מחנות הדין ואז ניצלת אותה הבריה מן הדין והעונש, וזהו סוד 'רחום' אשר במידת אל, ואומר אחריו 'חנון', וסוד חנון כי פעמים רבות כצאת מחנות המשחית להשחית בני העולם על-פי הדין, יוצאת מידת אל ומתגלגלת להצילם, ואף-על-פי שאינם הגונים ולא ראויים נותנת מתנת חיים כדי להציל את הבריות מן העונש הגדול, ואומר אחריו 'ארך אפים', דע שיש מן הבריות מי שאינו ראוי לא לרחום ולא לחנון, אלא ראוי להענש כפי הדין שנג-

שער שביעי

1 זר עליו מלמעלה. ואף-על-פי-כן מידת אל שכולה רחמים יוצאת ואומרת: המתנינו לפלוני ואל תענישוהו מיד, ואף-על-פי שאינו ראוי לא לרחום ולא לחנון המתנינו לו אולי יעשה תשובה. זהו סוד 'ארך אפים', כלומר שמאריכין לו הזמן אולי יעשה תשובה. 5 בה. ואף-על-פי שהאף תלוי עליו, מאריכין לו האף. וצריך אני להאיר עיניך בסוד הגדול הזה, מהו סוד ארך אפים. דע כי בית-דין של מעלה כשפוסקין דין אינן ממתנים לאדם, זולתי בשעות שיוצאים השלוחים מן האף, ומיד שיוצאים מן האף פוגעין באותן הראוין לעונש. והמידה הזאת 10 הנקראת אל, כשהיא רוצה לרחם על הבריות שאינם ראויים לא לריחום ולא לחינוך, מה היא עושה? מארכת התוסם שהוא האף אורך גדול. ואף-על-פי ששלוחי בית-דין הולכים לגמור הדין, אינן יכולים להעניש אותו הראוי להענש שהרי עדיין הם הולכים בחוטם שהוא האף, ובעוד שהם הולכים באף אינם יכולים להעניש לאותו הראוי לעונש, ואפשר כי בין כך ובין 15 כך יחזור בתשובה ויבצל, וזהו סוד 'ארך אפים', והבן זה מאוד. ומניין שהמידה הזאת מארכת אפים כדי שלא יכרת הראוי להיענש וכדי לרחם על הבריות? הרי הוא אומר: למען שמי אאריך אפי ותהלתי אחט"ם לך לבלתי הכריתך (ישעיהו 20 מת, ט). ואם כן שמור הכלל הגדול הזה, ואם תבין אותו תזכה לכמה עיקרים. ודע כי החכמים הקדושים, חכמי המשנה והתלמוד, היו מהם אנשים שהיה בהם כוח להאריך האף בכוח קדושתם ותפילתם, והיו מגיגים על ישראל בדורם ומונעים מהם כמה צרות, כמו רבן גמליאל שגלה ליבנה ובכוח קדושתו ותפילתו 25 לתו היה מאריך האף למעלה ולא היו מחנות המשחית יכו-לים לגמור שליחותן ולהניק את ישראל כפי הדין הגזר. ולפיכך היה רבן גמליאל נקרא בעל החוט"ם, בסוד שנאמר 'למען שמי אאריך אפי ותהלתי אחט"ם לך לבלתי הכריתך'. והיודע סוד ספירת בינה הנקראת תהלה ידע סוד ארך אפים, כי 30 הבינה היא המידה אחת משתי קדושות המידות הקשורות

4 עיין תענית כט ע"א.

הספירה הרביעית

1 ברחמים הגמורים. והנה ספירת בינה הנקראת תהלה היא הנותנת כוח בבית-דין של מעלה הנקרא אלהים, וכששופעת מידת הרחמים הגמורים על מידת בינה אוי הבינה משפעת הרחמים במידת הדין. וכל עוד שהיא משפעת הרחמים אוי 5 האף הולך ומאריך, וכל עוד שהאף מאריך אוי השלוחים מת-עכבים לצאת לגמור את הדין. ודע כי קוצר אפים — רוב העונש, וארך אפים הוא מיעוט העונש. ואם תבין סוד זה, תבין כי אפילו באדם קצר אפים יעשה אוולת (משלי יד), ואל תהרוס להשיב עלי בעניין אדם קצר אפים, כי עמוק הוא ובעזרת השם עדיין תשיג עוד העניין. 10 ואחר שהודענוך אלה העיקרים הגדולים במידת א"ל בעניין זה, צריכים אנו לחזור ולגמור הפסוק הזה. הרי פירשנו לך בסוד זה הפסוק של א"ל רחום וחנון ארך אפים (תהלים פו, טו), ונשאר לפרש לך מהו 'רב חסד' במקום זה. דע שיש מן הבריות מי שאינו ראוי לא לרחום, ולא לחנון, ולא לארך 15 אפים, אבל הוא ראוי ליענש מיד. מה עושה מידת א"ל שהיא מידת הרחמים? כששוקלים עונות של אותה הבריה כשהיא גידונת בבית-דין של מעלה, מסלקת עוון ראשון ושני ואינן נכנסין במניין; ואף-על-פי שאינן נמחקים אין מונים אלא מעוון שלישי שנאמר: הן כל אלה יפעל א"ל פעמים שלש עם גבר (איוב לג, כט). ואחר ששקלו עוונות וזכויות של אותה הבריה, 20 אם המאוננים עומדות בשווה מידת א"ל מכרעת כף מאוננים לכף זכות, שנאמר 'ורב חסד' — מטה כלפי חסד. ואם כן נמצאת מידת א"ל גומלת חסד ורחמים אל אותה הבריה העו-

5 כלומר, היא אחת משתי הספירות (חכמה ובינה) הסמוכות וקשורות לכתר.

6 כל הרמוזים על ארך-אפים וקצר-אפים, וכן סוד החוטם, כחותם לתורה המצויה בעיקר באידרות שבוהר. על הקשר בין תהילה לבין החוטם, על-פי הפסוק בישעיה המובא כאן, עיין למשל ח"ב קכב ע"ב. על אריך-אנפין כבעל החוטם, עיין למשל ח"ג קל ע"ב; על זעיר-אנפין (קצר-אפים) ח"ג קלו ע"ב ואילך. (ועיין לעיל שער ג-ד, הערה 61) ראה עוד להלן שער י, הערה 6.

7 ראש השנה יז ע"א.

שער שביעי

1 מדת בדין. ואף-על-פי שאינה ראויה, לא לרחום, ולא לחנון,  
ולא לארך אפים, אף-על-פי-כן עושה עמה חסד כששוקלים  
עוונות וחכיות. ואחר שידעת זה, דע כי מידת א"ל מוסיפה  
לעשות עוד כמה חסד וכמה רחמים עם הבריות, בסוד מה שגמר  
6 הפסוק הזה 'ואמ"ת'. ומהו 'ואמ"ת'? הרי ששקלו עוונותיו  
וחכיותיו של אדם זה, וכל כך גברו חטאיו שלא יכול להועיל  
במידת החסד אלא עוונותיו הכריעו את השקל לכף חובה, עדיין  
מידת א"ל, שהיא מידת החסד, גומלת חסד ורחמים עם אותה  
הבריה שנענשה, בשתי דרכים: דרך האמת — שאם אותה  
10 הבריה מחויבת להיות נכרתת ונאכזרת מתוך הדין שלה, מידת  
החסד מונה כל החכיות וכל הטובות שעשתה אותה בריה,  
ואפילו שיחה טובה שעשתה, ומקילין עונש אותה הבריה כדי  
שלא תצטער הרבה, והדרך השני — ואם אותה הבריה הנע-  
נשת אינה חייבת כרת ואכזר, בסוף העונש מידת הרחמים  
15 מדקדקת לה, ואפילו שיחה מועטת, לתת לה שכר טוב על  
מה שעשתה אחר שעברו ימי העונש. ואף-על-פי שמידת הדין  
הוא עושה גם הדבר הזה, שמדקדקת להיטיב כמו שדקדקה  
להעניש, ועל זה נקראת גם מידת הדין 'ואמ"ת'.  
ואחר שהודענוך אלה העיקרים הגדולים בפסוק זה במידת  
20 א"ל, יש לנו לחזור ולהודיעך כלל גדול, והוא כי בכל מקום  
שאתה מוצא בתורה כתוב א"ל יש לך לכלול בו כל אותן  
המידות של חסד ושל רחמים הכלולות בה. ועוד יש לך לדעת  
ולהתבונן כי בכל מקום מתערבות יחד אלו שתי המידות, מידת  
חסד ומידת רחמים כאחת<sup>9</sup>, וכן הכינויין של שתיהן מתערבים  
25 אלו עם אלו, ושמו עיקר זה לכל מקום ואל תשכחהו. וכבר  
הודענוך, בשער שבו ביארנו שם יהו"ה יתברך, הכינויין הסמוך  
כים לשם אלהים; אף-על-פי שזכרנו כל כינוייו מהם לאיזה  
שם הוא סמוך, הרבה פעמים מתערבים כינויי החסד עם כינויי  
הרחמים. ואחר שהודענוך זה צריכים אנו להיכנס בשאר העני-  
30 יינים הנכללים בשם אל, כמו שהודענוך בשאר השמות.

<sup>9</sup> גדולה ותמארת.

הספירה הרביעית

1 דע כי לפעמים הרבה נקראת מידת א"ל בתורה בלשון חסד,  
וצריך אתה לדעת כיצד. דע כי לשון חסד הוא כל העושה דבר  
שאינו מוכרח לעשותו מצד הדין אלא שעושה אותו בחפצו  
וברצונו מאין מכרית, ועושה אותו הדבר בטובתו — זה נקרא  
5 חס"ד, הוא היפך הדבר הנעשה בהכרח. ולפי שמידת א"ל קדמה  
לעולם, והשם יתברך ברא את העולם בחסד ולא מצד שהיה  
חסר כלום אלא ברא את העולם מצד החסד הגמור, להיטיב עם  
ברואיו ולתת להם חלק ונחלה כרוב רחמיו וחסדיו, ועל זה  
נאמר: אמרתי עולם חסד יבנה (תהלים פט, ג). ואף-על-גב  
10 שהפסוק הזה של 'עולם חסד יבנה' יש לו סודות נפלאים ועמור  
קים בענין סוד היבום<sup>9</sup> ובסוד הבנים הנולדים מצד החסד  
הידוע בברית בשר הנקרא חסד<sup>10</sup>, והוא סוד 'חסדי דוד'.  
וצריך אתה לדעת כי ב'חסד עליון' בברא העולם<sup>11</sup>; וסוד חסד  
עליון, וסוד חסד אברהם, וסוד חסדי דוד, כבר רמזנו בהם  
15 בשערים הקודמים. סוף דבר: ה' ברא את העולם מצד החסד,  
וסוד 'חסד עליון' בסוד ל"ב נתיבות שהסוד שלהם: כל ארצות  
י"י חסד (שם כה, י). וכשברא העולם במידת החסד, חזר וגמל  
עם היצורים שברא חסד: גמל חסד לאדם הראשון, גמל חסד  
למשה רבינו עליו השלום, כמו שמפורש סוף פרק קמא דסו-  
20 טה<sup>12</sup>. וכל אלו החסדים נכללים כולם בשם א"ל.  
וכשבא אברהם אבינו עליו השלום וצפה והביט וחקר והבין  
סוד ה' הגדול יתברך והיאך ברא העולם מצד החסד, עמד גם  
הוא ואחז המידה הזאת בידו. וראה כל בני העולם להוטים  
אחר עבודה זרה, וכל אחד ואחד גדבק בעבודה זרה מיוחדת  
לו. עמד אברהם אבינו עליו השלום והעמיד והכריז לכל באי  
25 עולם ואמר להם: כל אלהי העמים אלילים וה' שמים עשה

<sup>9</sup> סוד היבום קשור לתורת הגלגל: הבן הנולד מן היבום הוא-הוא  
האח המת. היתר זה לבוא על אשת האח כדי להביא לעולם את האח  
המת הוא מפעולות החסד האלוהי.

<sup>10</sup> היא ספירת יסוד המסומלת באיבר ההולדה.

<sup>11</sup> חסד עליון הוא החסד של ספירת כתר.

<sup>12</sup> עיין סוטה יד ע"א.

1 (שם צו ו) — דעו כל העמים כי יש בורא שברא העולמות כולן, והוא לבדו מושל על הכול, והוא ממית ומחיה, מוריד שאל ויעל, משפיל ומרים. עד שעמדו עליו וכו' כל נכסיו ואסרוהו בבית האסורין והשליכוהו בכבשן האש<sup>11</sup>, ואחר שני צול מכבשן האש נתגרש מארצו, ומטר ממונו ואשתו וקרוביו וכל אשר לו לעבודת ה' יתברך. ומידת החסד מכרזת על אברהם ואומרת מלמעלה: אני קדמתי לעולם במידת חסד והייתי יחי<sup>12</sup> דה בעולם, והנה אברהם יחיד בעולם ומקדים אותי במידת חסד, וראוי הוא לאברהם להחזיק בי ואני בו, ואז שב אברהם למידת החסד בנחלה ונתנה לו, והו שאמר הכתוב: נתן אמת ליעקב חסד לאברהם (מכה ז, כ), ופירוש הפסוק כך הוא: דע שאברהם אבינו עליו השלום עבד עבודת יי' יתברך מצד החסד, מבלי שלמד אותו רב או אב או תבוא אליו שליחות נביא מאת הבורא להוכיחו ולהזהירו, אלא הוא מעצמו צפה והביט וחקר והבין עד שנכנס לידיעת מלכותו של יי' ית<sup>13</sup> ברך, וכמו שהשם ברא העולם מצד החסד, כך אברהם הכיר את בוראו מצד החסד, אבל יעקב אבינו עליו השלום לא הכיר את הבורא מצד החסד, אלא הכיר אותו מצד האמת, אברהם הודיע מידת החסד — כיצד? בא אברהם תחילה והודיע לבריות רוב חסד ורחמיו על כל מעשיו, היאך הוא בראם ומפרנסם והכול מצד חסדו, ומצד הזה ראויין כל בני אדם לעבדו ולהתחנן לפי גיו ולקבל עול מלכותו, וכל זה חובה עלינו לעשות, אחר כך בא יצחק והוסיף להודיע מידת הפחד, שאם לא יעבדו אותו יענישוהו כעבד המורד באדוניו, והטיל אימה ופחד על הברור<sup>14</sup> אים, והכניסם תחת כנפי השכינה כשהודיע אותם פחד עונש המורדים בבורא יתברך, והו סוד 'פחד יצחק', כי יצחק ירש מידת הפחד, ולפיכך הזהיר את בני האדם והוכיחן שישמרו מביתדיין הגדול שהוא דן את הרשעים במידת הפחד הנקראת עונשי גיהנום, ואומר: פחדו בציון חטאים וגר' (ישעיהו לג, יד), אם כן נמצא אברהם מוכיח את הבריות מצד החסד ובמיי<sup>15</sup>

<sup>11</sup> עיין תנא דבי אליהו ו.

1 דת החסד, ונמצא יצחק מוכיח הבריות מצד הפחד, כל אחד הוכיח במידתו: זה במידת החסד והגמול, וזה במידת הפחד והעונש; זה במצוות עשה, וזה במצוות לא תעשה, וכשבא יעקב אבינו עליו השלום לא היתה לו מידה שלישית להחזיק בה אבל החזיק בשתי המידות של אברהם ושל יצחק, במידת החסד ובמידת הפחד, והודיע לכל באי העולם גודל אמיתתם, וגם הוא החזיק בשתיים באמת ובלב שלם ולא נטה ימין ושמאל, ולפיכך נקרא אברהם חסד לפי מידתו, ונקרא יצחק פחד לפי מידתו, ויעקב אמת לפי מידתו.  
10 והנני מאיר עיניך בסוד חתום וסתום, יעקב היה קו האמצעי והוא סוד התימות, והחזיק בין שתי מידות ונכנס באמצע, ולקח מידת אברהם שהיא מצוות עשה והיא חסד, ולקח מידת יצחק שהיא מצוות לא תעשה והיא פחד יצחק, והחזיק בשתי מידות בשווה, לא נטה ימין ושמאל, ונקרא על זה איש אמת לפי שהתנהג בשתי מידות אבותיו באמת, והסוד: ויעקב איש תם יושב אהלים (בראשית כה, כז) — לא אמר יושב אוהל אלא אהלים, והם סוד אוהל אברהם שהוא החסד, ואוהל יצחק שהוא הפחד, והו שאמר: לולי אלהי אבי אברהם ופחד יצחק היה לי (שם לא, י), שהחזיק בשתי המידות בשווה ולא נטה ימין ושמאל, נתנה לו מידת אמת: כמו לשון המשקל כשהוא עומד בין שתי המאזניים בשווה ואינו נוטה ימין ושמאל, כך יעקב עמד ואחז בידו מידת הפחד ומידת החסד בשווה והתנהג בשתייהן באמת, וכשראה יי' יתברך כך, נתן ליעקב חותמו שהוא אמת<sup>16</sup>, כמלך שמצא עבד נאמן ואמר לו: הרי חותמי מסור בידך, כך מסר יי' ליעקב חותמו שהוא אמת: כלומר, חותם החסד והפחד כאחד, ראיה לדבר מנין? שנאמר: ויי' אלהים אמת (ירמיהו י, י) — הרי הוכיח מידת אברהם שהוא יהוה<sup>17</sup>, ומידת יצחק שהיא אלהים, ומידת יעקב שהיא אמת, לכן אמר אחר-כך אמת, אם כן נמצא שיעקב אבינו ירש ירושת חותם יהוה אלהים שבו נברא העולם, ובו מתקיימים כל

<sup>14</sup> עיין שבת נה ע"א.

<sup>15</sup> מצד מידת החסד שבשם זה, בניגוד לשם אלהים.

1 היצורים, ובו נידונים כל בני העולם במשפט אמת. נמצא  
יעקב אבינו שאחז בידו שתי מידות הנקראות ימין ושמאל, ואחז  
בידו מידת החסד ומידת העונש, ואחז בידו מצוות עשה ומצוות  
לא תעשה — נמצאת למד שאחז בידו מידת ה' שהוא אמת,  
5 בסוד 'יהוה' אלהים אמת; חותם המשפט, דכתיב משפטי יי  
אמת (תהלים יט, ח); והתורה שהיא אמת, דכתיב תורת אמת  
היתה בפיהו (מלאכי ב, ו). שיעקב עומד במקום כל האבות  
והחזיק במידת שלושתן, ואף-על-פי-כן אינו דומה מי שהוציא  
והוליד את המידה תחילה למי שהחזיק בה אחרונה, ועם כל זה  
נמצא יעקב קושר כל המידות והוא קו האמצעי, וכמו ששם  
10 יהוה יתברך עומד באמצע כך יעקב אבינו עומד באמצע. ולפי  
שזכה יעקב להיות שם יהוה נקרא עליו, וזה לצאת ממנו  
י"ב שבטים צדיקים כנגד י"ב צירופים של שם יהוה יתברך.  
וזכמו שנקרא שם יהוה 'אמת' כך נקראו בני יעקב זרע אמת,  
15 כלומר זרע שיצאו משם אמת, ממי שנחצבו, והוא יעקב אבינו  
עליו השלום, ועל זה נאמר: ואנכי נטעתיך שורק כולו זרע  
אמת (ירמיהו ב, כא), ואם כן התבונן זה העיקר הגדול ותמצא  
כי שלושת האבות בכוונה שלימה באו לעולם יי, וכל אחד  
החזיק במידתו: אברהם במידת החסד, יצחק במידת הפחד,  
20 יעקב במידת אמת, ובדרשתן מקרא אחד דרשו: יהוה אלהינו  
יהוה אחד, זה החזיק בשלו וזה החזיק בשלו יי.  
ואחר שהודענוך אלו העיקרים הגדולים הכלולים בשלושת  
האבות, יש לנו לחזור ולהודיעך סוד חסד אברהם וסוד אמת  
יעקב הכתוב בפסוק תתן אמת ליעקב חסד לאברהם (מיכה  
25 ז, כ), והיאך יי יתברך מתנהג עם ישראל בשתי אלו המידות;  
לפעמים מתנהג עם ישראל בחסד אברהם, ולפעמים מתנהג  
עם אמת של יעקב, וצריך אתה לדעת כיצד, דעו כי לפעמים  
נמצאו ישראל חסרים ואינן ראויין לטובה ולא לרחמים, לפי  
שאינן עוסקים לא בתורה ולא במצוות, וכשהן נידונין בבית-

16 כדי לייצג בעולם את המידות האלוהיות.

17 אף-על-פי שכל אחד מן האבות מייצג בעיקר מידה אחת, הרי כולם  
ידעו את סוד הייחוד המאחד את הספירות השונות לאחזרת אחת.

1 דין של מעלה ויצא מן הדין שיהיו נענשים בכל מיני מכה,  
באותה שעה ממחרת מידת אברהם שהיא מידת החסד ועומדת  
בבית-דין ואומרת: מהו משפט בני? אומרים לה: מן הדין  
יצא שיהיו נענשים בכל מיני מכה. באותה שעה אומרת מידת  
5 החסד: אם אין מוצאים זכות לבני הרי אני ירושתך, שהרי  
אני אביהם והם יורשים אותי, ואם אינן ראויים להיטיב להם  
מצד הדין הטיבו להן מצד החסד, כי מצד החסד הוא להיטיב  
למי שאינו ראוי, וכמו שאברהם עבד ה' יתברך מצד החסד,  
כך ה' ראוי לגמול לבניו מצד חסד אביהן, ובדרך זה ניצולין  
10 ישראל מכמה פורענויות, ואם ישראל עוסקים בתורה ובמצוות,  
ממחרת מידת הדין של יעקב ואומרת לבית-דין: תנו לבני על  
פי הדין שהוא אמת כל צרכם, כי צדיקים הם וראויים להיטיב  
להם, וזהו סוד 'תתן אמת ליעקב חסד לאברהם', והבן זה  
מאור, ואחר שהודענוך זה, צריכים אנו להודיעך מה טעם הקדים  
15 בפסוק זה מידת יעקב, דע כי דרך העולם לקח לו בפסוק זה,  
כלומר, אם ישראל צדיקים ובעלי תורה ומצוות והרי הם ראויין  
להיטיב להם מצד הדין שהוא אמת של יעקב — מוטב; ואם  
לאו — יקבלו טובה בצד החסד של אברהם, אף-על-פי שאינן  
ראויין, וזהו סוד: תתן אמת ליעקב, ואחר-כך: חסד לאברהם  
20 (שם), ושמוך אלו העיקרים הגדולים שביארנו לך בשער זה.  
ונשאר לנו להודיעך מה טעם הזכיר בפסוק זה מידת יעקב  
שהיא אמת ומידת אברהם שהיא חסד, ולא הזכיר מידת יצחק  
שהיא פחד, דע שמידת אברהם שהיא החסד ומידת יעקב שהיא  
סוד הרחמים שהיא האמת, הוצרך להזכיר בפסוק זה; אבל  
25 מידת יצחק שהיא מידת הפחד לא הוצרך להזכירה מן הטעם  
שהזכרנו למעלה, ואם תקשה ותאמר: והכתיב וזכרתי את בריי  
תי יעקב ואף את בריתי יצחק ואף את בריתי אברהם אזכור  
(ויקרא כו, מב), הרי זכר בפסוק הזה שלושתן? דע כי בפסוק  
זה לא הזכיר מידותיהן, אלא הזכיר הברית שכרת עמהם  
30 להיטיב לבניהם, ראיה לדבר כמ"כ: זכור לאברהם ליצחק  
ולישראל עבדיך אשר נשבעת וגו' (שמות לב, יג), הלא תראה  
כי השבועה בפסוק זה לא באה על ג' אבות, אלא להטיב ליש-



1 ראל, כמו שנאמר: ותדבר אליהם ארבה את זרעכם (שם);  
וכן הדבר בפסוק 'וזכרתי את בריתי יעקב' וגו', כי הברית  
השבועה אחת היא. אבל כשהזכיר ברית יעקב וברית יצחק  
וברית אברהם, רצה לומר שראוי להיטיב לישראל בסיבת  
5 הברית והשבועה מצד הדין; כמי שיש לו פיקדון אצל חבירו  
ותובעו ממנו בדין, כן ברית אברהם יצחק ויעקב אנו מבק-  
שין אותו מלפני י"י יתברך מצד הדין. וזהו הסוד של שני  
ענינים האלו שרמו בפסוק אחד ואמר: אם אין ישראל ראויין  
ליתן להם מצד הדין, תן להן מצד החסד — וזהו 'תתן אמת  
10 ליעקב חסד לאברהם' — ואם אינן ראויין מצד החסד, תן להם  
מצד הדין ומצד השבועה שנשבעת לאברהם ליצחק ויעקב.  
ולפיכך אמר בסוף פסוק זה: אשר נשבעת לאבותינו מימי קדם.  
אבל כשהזכיר מידת אברהם ומידת יעקב בפסוק אחד, הטעם  
כדפירשנו לעיל. ה' יורנו דרכו הנכונה אמן.

[ הספירה השלישית ]

יהו"ה אדנ"י חילי וישם רגלי כאילות ועל במותי  
ידריכני למנצח בנגינותי (חבקוק ג. יט)

אמר המחבר: ראינו לבאר בשער זה סוד השם השמיני הנכתב  
בעניין אחד ונקרא בעניין אחר; נכתב יהו"ה ונקרא אלהים,  
וגם הוא נקוד בנגיוד אלהים, וזו היא הספירה הנקראת ב"ה.  
צריך אתה לדעת כי זהו השם הקושר כל הספירות בקשר  
חיבור האצילות וההמשכה. לפי שזהו השם השלישי מן השלוש  
שה שמות העליונים המתאחדים והאדוקים במידת הכתר י.  
ומן השם הזה ילך שפע האור והאצילות והברכה בכל הציור-  
רות, עד שיתברכו ו' ספירות של מטה מג' ספירות של מעלה.  
ומה שתצטרך לדעת, כי מה שנכתב באותיות יהו"ה ונקרא בשם  
אלהים הוא סוד היותו נאחז לכאן ולכאן, לפי שהוא מתאחז  
בעולם הרחמים הגמורים שהוא סוד הכתר, ובכתר נאחזים  
שני שמות — אחד לימין ואחד לשמאל: לימין — שם י"ה,  
ולשמאל — השם הנכתב יהו"ה ונקרא אלהים, והוא סוד הביניה.  
ומן השם הזה מתחלת מידת הדין להימשך בספירות; אבל  
אינה מידת הדין גמורה, שהוא נאחז בעולם הרחמים<sup>1</sup>. ולפיכך  
נכתב במכתב הרחמים ונקרא בקריאת הדין — נכתב יהו"ה  
ונקרא אלהים. וזהו סוד קשר מידת הדין במידת הרחמים,

<sup>1</sup> בינה מקשרת את שלוש הספירות העליונות — כתר, חכמה, בינה —  
עם שבע התחתונות, שהן הפועלות במידות שונות מכוח שלוש  
העליונות, כפי שמוסבר בהמשך.

<sup>2</sup> כי דין זה שרוי עדיין בעולם הרחמים של הספירות העליונות.