

The Emergence of Provençal Kabbalah:
Rabbi Isaac the Blind's *Commentary on Sefer Yeḥirah*
Translation and Annotation

A thesis presented by
Mark Brian Sendor
Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations
Harvard University
Cambridge, Massachusetts

May, 1994

Volume Two

Chapter 1

In thirty-two:¹ The letter *bet* is an allusion to² *Hokhmah* and *Haskef* and it alludes to all that the

¹ *Sefer Yeẓirah*, (henceforth *SY*) in "A Preliminary Critical Edition of *Sefer Yeẓirah*, ed. I. Gruenwald, *Israel and Oriental Studies*, vol. 1 (Tel Aviv, 1971), 1:1 (sec. 1) 140. References to *SY* from this work follow Gruenwald notational conventions. Bold type signifies direct quotations from *SY*. The order and general text of R. Isaac's quotations from *SY* follow what Gruenwald calls the "short recension." This is especially clear in his treatment of *SY* 1:5-8. Compare secs. 7, 8, 6, 5 of the long recension, respectively. See, too, G. Scholem's note, *Haḳ-Ḳabbalah be-Provence*, 16, n. 33, demonstrating that R. Isaac followed what Gruenwald came to call the short recension.

Of the short recensions brought by Gruenwald, the following match R. Isaac's citations frequently, but not in all respects: Parma De Rossi 1390, foll. 36b-38b; Leiden Warn. 24 (5) Cod. Or. 4762, foll. 140b-42a; British Museum 600 (1), foll. 2a-3b; British Museum, Gaster 415, foll. 29a-32a; Moscow Ginzburg collection 133, foll. 198a-99a. It should be noted that Gruenwald examined over one hundred manuscripts for his critical edition of *SY*, but selected only nineteen for publication in his apparatus, based on criteria he explains, 134-35. It is not surprising that the text R. Isaac followed is not precisely one of these. The pivotal text variants in R. Isaac's Commentary are found in lines 17, 40, 75, 136, 151-52, 163-64, 261 and 343. See the notes to those passages, below.

² Note the abbreviated construct, without use of *-l*. See M. Goshen-Gottstein, *Tahbirah u-Milonah sel hal-Lashon ha-^cIvrit*, (Jerusalem, 1951) 29-30, secs. 81.1,2, who considers this form a non-indigenous development through Arabic influence, citing a similar Maimonidean usage, *Yesodei hat-Torah*, 4:11. See, too, Gen. R. 12:1, one of the source-texts for this passage of the *Commentary*, cited below: **הַמַּקְהִין יוֹדְעִין רְמוּזוֹ וְהַגִּיּוֹנֵי**. R. Isaac may have had this passage in mind both explicitly and subliminally.

³ The *sefirah* Wisdom and semi-sefirotic hypostasis Intellection. See discussion, *supra*, ch. 8.3. Henceforth, the term *supra* signifies references to

apprehension of thought⁴ apprehends⁵ unto *Ein Sof*,⁶ and all the more so what is included within itself.⁷ From those

volume one of this work, the historical analysis. The terms "above" or "below" signify references to the present volume.

⁴ The reference is to human thought. R. Isaac's commentary has a decidedly psychological orientation. He regards the *sefirot* and letters not only as categories of divine activity, but as categories of human cognition. To be precise, they are those categories of divine activity which human thought is capable of discerning. See below, lines 47-60.

⁵ The term *השגה*, apprehension, is a philosophic standard, a favorite of Maimonides and the Tibbonites, e. g., *Yesodei hat-Torah*, 1:10; *Moreh Nevukhim* 1:4, 5, *et al.* The redundancy of this expression, *שהשגת המחשבה משגת*, using a genitive construct with a predicate echoing the construct itself, is a peculiar signature of R. Isaac's style.

⁶ The Infinite, God's ownmost essence. See G. Scholem, *Origins*, 265-72, *Ha-Kabbalah be-Provence*, 154-62, on the development of this term. R. Isaac's usage is transitional, shifting between the adverbial and the developing nominal form.

⁷ R. Isaac is interpreting the letter *bet*, prefixing the "thirty-two paths of wondrous wisdom," with which *SY* begins according to a number of long and short recensions. See I. Gruenwald, "A Preliminary Critical Edition of *Sefer Yeẓirah*, 140. According to R. Isaac, the graphic form as well as the semantic sense of the letter both signify "encompassing in," yet "opening out." For other traditional examples of such graphic interpretation, compare "Midrash *Ṣotiot de-Rabbi Akiva ha-Shalem*," recension B, in *Batei Midrasot*, ed. Wertheimer, vol. 2, 404: "...for *bet* resembles a house whose doors are open to all." See, too, *Sefer hab-Bahir*, secs. 14, 15, which emphasize the letter's enclosure on three sides. In the case at hand, R. Isaac adds a semantic dimension to the graphic: *bet* is open, and also includes that which is "in" it. See, too, R. Abraham Bar Ḥiyya, *Negillat ham-Negaleh*, 6: והוי יודע כי אות ה"ב ת נוספת על השמות ועל המלות על ענינים רבים והענינים ההם נחלקים לשני כללים גדולים... והשני להכניס דבר בדבר כדי להשלימו ולקיימו או להקיימו מכל צדדיו
That *Hokhmah* and *Haskel* and all that thought

wonders which cause wonder⁸ [come] the pathways [which] are

grasps are represented by the letter *bet*, signifying "encompassing in," alludes to the epistemological notion of R. Moses Ibn Ezra, drawn from R. Solomon Ibn Gabirol, that the mind "encompasses" its object. See M. Ibn Ezra, *'Arugat hab-Bosem*, 123: המדע הוא להיות שכל היודע שולט ומקיף על כל הידוע ואי אפשר לשכל להקיף ולשלוט היודע שולט ומקיף על כל הידוע ואי אפשר לשכל להקיף ולשלוט (!) מה שאין לו תכלית (knowledge means that the knowing intellect masters and encompasses all that is known, and it is impossible for the intellect to encompass and master that which has no limit). This is a paraphrase of Ibn Gabirol, *Mekor Hayyim*, trans. Blaustein, 5 (1:5). R. Isaac also alludes to this conception in his doctrine of the double *yod* that encompasses all things, lines 41-42 below. R. Isaac's point is that the proper function of *Hokhmah*, as wisdom, represented by the letter *bet*, is to circumscribe its object. It also, together with *Haskel*, has the further ability to reach upwards, towards the infinite. Compare lines 130-32, below.

⁸ R. Isaac defines the unusual term פליאות in *SY* 1:1 (sec. 1) as conveying a more active and intensive quality than נפלאות : they are wonder-inducing: המפליאות .

This phrase itself is syntactically difficult. It is possible it belongs to the previous sentence, that these wonders, the *sefirot* and letters in their most recondite aspect, are also included among the allusions included in the letter *bet*, and considered within the purview of thought that extends towards the Infinite. The phrase "all the more so what is included within itself" would then be parenthetical, the "wonders" referring directly back to the *bet*, not to the argument *a fortiori*. Scholem, however, punctuates this clause as initiating the following sentence. In this, he follows R. Isaac of Acre's paraphrase of R. Isaac the Blind's *Commentary, Kiryat Sefer*, 31 (1956) 381: ומאותן (And from those secrets hidden in *Hokhmah* come forth pathways). This is essentially the reading used in this translation: from the wonders come forth pathways.

A slightly different reading is found in other MSS, such as Montefiore 313, fol. 1a, and Leiden 24/25 (Cod. Or. 4762), fol. 1a, which drop the first mention of "pathways" altogether, and turn the "wonders which cause wonder" into the clear subject of the sentence: "Regarding those wonders which cause wonder, they are like strands of flame, which are the bodies of the flames, that are pathways to the embers." For the

like strands of flame that are pathways to embers:⁹ by the flames a person sees the ember as in the manner of a ball of thread, for by the strand a person walks to the place of the ball.¹⁰ So, too, with a tree, by the many leaves and twigs and branches and boughs and trunks a person finds the veins of the stock and the subtle existence of the root, which is not visible because of its great subtlety¹¹ and innerness.¹²

propriety of **וּמֵאוֹתָן** as an introductory prepositional phrase, see M. Goshen-Gottstein, *Tahbirah*, 96 (sec. 207.6.b), who considered such a usage to be influenced by Arabic syntax.

⁹ The flame-and-ember image comes from *SY*, 1:7 (sec. 6).

¹⁰ *Midrash Genesis Rabbah*, 12:1, applies this Ariadne-and-Theseus image from Greek mythology to approaching the difficulty of understanding the order of the cosmos: **מִשָּׁל לְפִלְמִין גְּדוּלָה שֶׁהָיוּ לָהּ פִתְחֵין הַרְבֵּה. שָׁכַל מִי שֶׁהָיָה נִכְנָס לְתוֹכָהּ הָיָה מוֹעֵה. מָה עָשָׂה פֶקַח אֶחָד. נָטַל פִּקְעָה שֶׁל גָּמִי וְקָשְׁרָה כּוֹנֵגַד הַפֶּתַח וְנִכְנָס דֶּרֶךְ הַפִּקְעָה וַיֵּצֵא דֶּרֶךְ הַפִּקְעָה. (It is compared to a large palace with many doors: whoever would enter it became lost. What did one clever fellow do? He took a ball of string and tying one end to the entrance, entered by way of the ball of string and left by way of the ball of string. Then everyone began to enter and leave by way of the ball of string.)**

¹¹ While **דָּק** in the sense of fine and refined is a good biblical term (Ex. 16:14; Is. 29:5), it is also used in Hebrew philosophical literature to convey refined spiritual existence. See Saadiah b. Joseph, *Sefer ha-ʿEmunot ve-ha-Deʿot*, trans. J. Ibn Tibbon, ed. J. Fischel, (New York, 1947 reprint of Leipzig, 1859) **כִּי כַאֲשֶׁר הֵאֱמַתָּ כִּי הַנֶּפֶשׁ בְּרוּאָה... וְשֶׁעֲצָמָה עֲצָם נָקִי 120: כְּנִקְיוֹת הַגְּלִגְלִים... אֲבָל עֲצָמָה יוֹתֵר דָּק מִן הַגְּלִגְלִים.**

¹² Compare G. B. Ladner, "Medieval and Modern Understanding of Symbolism: A Comparison," *Speculum*, 54, no. 2 (April 1979) 223-256, regarding the prevalent twelfth-century use of tree imagery. See Scholem, *Origins*, 345, 447 n. 194-5 (the Tree of Porphyry). See, also, *Sefer hab-Bahir*, secs. 118, 119/85, for the

Every word which has a *bet* at its beginning indicates both itself and what is within it.¹³ So, too, *bet* of in thirty-two, in which He engraved, meaning: that which thought does not apprehend.¹⁴ He engraved two letters,¹⁵ which are

association of tree imagery with the *Sefirot*. With these images of ball of thread and ramified tree, R. Isaac sets out his central epistemological vision: the possibility of a reliable continuity of inference from the concrete world of multiplicity to the progressively unified abstract world of the *Sefirot*, from the finite to the infinite. See *supra*, ch. 7.1.

For the term *פנימיות* in the sense of spiritual innerness, see Maimonides, *Moreh Nevukhim*, trans. J. Alharizi, intro., 16, in his rendering of the golden apple with silver filigree image. The golden apple is called *הפנימי*, and by extension: *וכן הם משלי הנביאים* and *ע"ה הצוניהם חכמה מועילה בדברים רבים האחד מהם תקון צורכי הבורות בני אדם... ופנימיותיהם חכמות בידיעת האמת על תכונתה* (Thus are the parables of the prophets: their external sense is wisdom beneficial in many ways, one of which is the rectification of the needs of human society...while their innerness is wisdom concerning the knowledge of truth according to its proper disposition). The term *פנימיות* and its permutations was also used extensively by Solomon Ibn Gabirol, e.g., *Keter Malkhut*, 52, sec. 25, line 4: *הצוניהם ופנימיות*. I. Twersky notes that Ibn Tibbon and Alharizi employed the term *peniml*, denoting "hidden" or "internal," to describe the "internal senses," and that R. Abraham b. Nathan ha-Yarhi of Lunel, one of R. Abraham b. David's students, was the first to use the term *peniml* to characterize the genre of esoteric literature as a whole. See I. Twersky, *Rabad*, 243, n. 16.

¹³ See note 7, above.

¹⁴ "That which thought does not comprehend" is not a description of the activity "engraved" or its object, but an identification of its implied subject. Compare R. Asher b. David, *Sefer ha-Yidhud, Kabbalat R. Asher b. David*, 58: *חַקֵּק לְשׁוֹן נִסְתָּר וְלֹא אָמַר מִי הַחֹקֵק, ר"ל*: *חַקֵּק הַנִּצְלָם* (it says "engraved" in third person, but does not say who is the engraver; which is to say, the Hidden One engraved). See R. Azriel, *PSY, Kitvei Ramban*, 453: *חַקֵּק וְכֹן כַּח עֵלָה הַעֲלֹת אֵין סוּף... חַקֵּק וְהַמְצִיא כַּח טֵבָה* (Engraved, etc.: the power of the Cause of causes, *Ein Sof*...engraved and brought forth a causal

thirty-two,¹⁶ which are divided into three divisions.¹⁷

power).

¹⁵ יו"ד ה"א . R. Isaac is reading the first line of *SY* 1:1 such that this divine Name is the object, not the subject, of "engraved." See Azriel of Gerona, *PSY*, 453: חקק והמציא כה טבה שנקראה יו"ד ה"א ; This reading is corroborated by Nahmanides, *PSY*, 403, lines 5-7, and Isaac of Acre, *PSY*, *KS* 31 (1956) 381, line 28. Nahmanides notes that these two letters designate the *sefirot Hokhmah* and *Binah*, and that according to this interpretation, the *sefirah Keter* is skipped. He explains that the engraving of which *SY* speaks is already too coarse a creative process relative to *Keter*, and that *Keter* itself is alluded to in the bringing forth of the thirty-two pathways, *in* which the two letters are engraved. This is consonant with R. Isaac the Blind's system.

On the cosmogonic function of the first two letters of the Tetragrammaton, compare Jerusalem Talmud, *Hagigah*, 2:1: ר' אבהו בשם ר' יוחנן בשתי אותיות נבראו שתי עולמות העולם הזה והעולם הבא א' בה"א וא' ביו"ד (R. Abahu in the name of R. Yoḥanan: with two letters two worlds were created: this world and the next world, one with *heh* and one with *yod*).

¹⁶ R. Azriel of Gerona, *PSY*, *Kitvei Ramban*, vol. 2, 453, offers a *gematria* to bridge the relationship between the two letters and the thirty-two paths: according to the verse Is. 26:4, God formed the world *בי-ה*, two plus the letters יו"ד ה"א added forwards and backwards, for a total of thirty-two. This particular verse was a favorite of the Heikhalot mystics: see *Seder Rabbah de-Beresit*, *Batei Midrašot*, vol. 1, 19. R. Isaac of Acre, *PSY*, 382, lines 3-4, offers a variant *gematria* to arrive at the sum thirty-two out of the two-letter divine Name: יו"ד ה"א equals fifteen, permuted twice equals thirty, plus the Name itself taken twice, read forwards and backwards, equals thirty-two. R. Isaac the Blind, however, may not have had such a formalistic approach in mind. Rather, the thirty-two units of creative signs, ten *sefirot* and twenty-two letters, are understood as unfolding by emanation out of the two-letter divine Name. Nahmanides is also satisfied to explain the relationship between the two letters of the divine Name and the thirty-two paths in this way, without resorting to extrinsic arithmetical methods (*PSY* 403, lines 5-6).

¹⁷ These are the three *sefarim* discussed in the

In three *sefarim*: these are three Names¹⁸ which are in three letters¹⁹ which receive from and are received by them.²⁰ The beginning²¹ of those essences²² that are given

passage immediately following. The MS Harvard Heb. 58/11 reads "He engraved in the letters, which are twenty-two, which are divided into three divisions." The point would then be that the process of engraving applies to the letters specifically, which are divided into three letter categories of *Sefer Yeḡirah*: matrices, doubled and simple letters. This is clearly a later attempt at reworking this obscure passage into a more readily coherent form by a scribe unacquainted with the kabbalistic interpretation under discussion.

¹⁸ According to R. Asher b. David, the three Names are those three listed in the first section of *Sefer Yeḡirah*, 1:1 (*Kabbalat R. Asher b. David*, 16, lines 32-35; 58). These are יה"ה, יהו"ה, צבאו"ה. Scholem notes that R. Isaac the Blind and R. Ezra of Gerona did not use those recensions of *Sefer Yeḡirah* that include a longer string of divine epithets (Nahmanides, *PSY*, 404, n. 1). Among the short recensions R. Isaac follows most closely, Moscow Ginzburg collection 133, foll. 198a-99a has just these three Names. Nahmanides also seems to endorse this interpretation of the three *sefarim*, associated with *Hokhmah*, *Binah*, and the lower seven *sefirot*, respectively (*PSY*, 405, lines 1-5; and compare 403, lines 5-12, 404, lines 1-2).

R. Isaac of Acre identifies the three corresponding Names with an overlapping sequence of letters: א-ה-י-ה-ו-ה. He correlates this sequence with the upper three *sefirot*, each successive pair of letters standing as a "Name" corresponding to *Keter*, *Hokhmah*, *Binah*, respectively (*PSY*, 382, lines 13-19).

¹⁹ These are the three constituent letters of the Tetragrammaton, יהוה. See Azriel of Gerona, *PSY*, 1:1: בטטר וטטר וטטר שלש אותיות של שם יהוה. See also Nahmanides, *PSY*, 403, lines 7-11 and 405, lines 1-3; Isaac of Acre, *PSY*, 382, lines 17-19.

²⁰ R. Isaac's usage of the reflexive מתקבל is varied throughout the *Commentary*. In some instances it is reflexively self-referential, in others it has a passive voice, both of which are frequent talmudic usages. See E. Ben Yehudah, *Millon ha-Lashon ha-Ivrit*, vi, (New York, 1930) 5692a,b for examples. Instances of

to think about are the wonders within *Hokhmah*,²³ for the

passive usage are: lines 37, 109, 133. Instances of reflexive usage are: lines 34, 95, 103, 132. In line 280, R. Isaac uses **והמתקבלים** in a passive, reciprocal sense, with the reciprocity made explicit through prepositions. Here, paired and contrasted with the *pi'el*, **והמתקבלות** is passive and reciprocal. **פהם** modifies **והמתקבלות**.

In R. Isaac's system, **מקבל** is the receiving of efflux by a lower ontological level from a higher level. By contrast, **מתקבל** is usually reception of or from the lower by the higher, or the preparation for such reception. The idea here is that the three constitutive letters of the divine Name represent the ontological sequence and mutual relationship of the *sefirot* themselves, which are signified by the three *sefarim* and their representative divine Names.

Generally speaking, in R. Isaac's system, the *sefirot* are conceived as *in* the letters. R. Isaac explains this concept of inclusion below, lines 264-65, saying "Each of the ten *sefirot* are in each and every letter." This corresponds to Nahmanides explanation that "even though we have said that the ten *sefirot* are included in the letters, they are not the letters themselves, but their innerness (*PSY* 401, lines 2-3)." In the present case, the three letters of the Tetragrammaton have a unique relationship to the *sefirot* they represent. According to R. Asher b. David, who appears to be expounding R. Isaac's position, these three letters reflect the three *sefarim* in their entirety, that is, the full set of *sefirot*, but as they appear engraved in the *sefirah Hokhmah* (*Kabbalat R. Asher b. David*, 14, lines 27-28).

²¹ The term "beginning" as R. Isaac uses it, while based on the passage in *Sefer Yezirah*, 1:7 (sec. 6) "their beginning is fixed in their end," is employed here specifically along lines developed by R. Judah b. Barzilai in his theory of prophecy, described in his *PSY*, 31. According to R. Judah, God "created light and great fire for glory, that is called holy spirit and is also called *sekhinah*, as the dwelling of His glory. Neither angel nor seraph nor prophet can gaze at all at the beginning of that great light... But from the end of that light the Creator, when He wishes, shows lights and sparks to His angels, seraphs and prophets. Sometimes from the end of the light there goes forth sparks and lights to his angels, seraphs and prophets; sometimes from the end of that light there is shown to them certain forms and visions and dreams or a visual

pathways are wonders within it.²⁴ About this it is said "God

image to whomever God wishes." In R. Judah's scheme, the inception of this light is too overwhelmingly powerful for any creature to behold. R. Isaac the Blind, in his emanation doctrine, plays off this notion of the incomprehensibility of the beginning of the emanative process, and its gradual attenuation, such that the "beginning," or first opportunity to grasp any aspect of this process is at the level of the "wonders within *Hokhmah*," as he goes on to explain. "The beginning of those essences that are given to think about..." implies the process begins earlier, but cannot be perceived. For conceptions of the prophetic process similar to R. Judah b. Barzilai's, see Judah Halevi, *Kuzari*, 4:3; R. Abraham Ibn Ezra, *Perusei hat-Torah*, short recension, 33:18, ed. A. Weiser, vol. 2, 342-43.

²² For the term *הויה* used in the plural, see Solomon Ibn Gabirol, *Tikkun Middot han-Nefes*, trans. J. Ibn Tibbon, (Jerusalem, 1883) 3: כל הגופות וההויות .

Scholem suggests that *הויות* derives from the Latin *essentiae*. The term was also in contemporaneous use among the *Hasidei Ashkenaz*, though Scholem detects a difference of nuance: for the *Hasidei Ashkenaz* it denotes presences or immanences; for R. Isaac, something closer to central, inner qualities of being. See J. Dan, *Torat has-Sod*, 94-103; M. Idel, *Has-Sefirot se-me-'al has-Sefirot*, 268, n. 153.

Scholem correlates R. Isaac's conception with that of the Gerona kabbalists, who held that "the essences were, but the emanation came into being (*Sefer Bialik*, 158; *Kiryat Sefer*, 9 (1932) 126)." See R. Meir b. Solomon Abusahulah, *Bey'ur le-Ferus ha-Ramban 'al hat-Torah*, Gen. 1:3, ed. J. Shapiro, (Warsaw, 1875, reprinted Jerusalem, 1973) 3: שמהויות היו והאצילות שחודש . According to Scholem, these "essences" are the inner root of the *sefirot* and letters, the very highest ontological degree of differentiation, yet he notes that on occasion, R. Isaac seems to use "essences" interchangeably with both *sefirot* and letters (*Hak-Kabbalah be-Provence*, 145-6; *Origins*, 279-281; "Te'udah Hadashah," *Kiryat Sefer*, 158, n. 6.) By contrast, R. Isaac of Acre defined these essences as the *sefirot* as manifest clothed in letters, an ontological level one step below the *sefirot* themselves (Isaac of Acre, *PSY*, 384). See Idel, "Ha-Sefirot she-me-'al ha-Sefirot," 241-2, n. 12, who also flags this discrepancy.

Ultimately, all these interpretations attempt to pin down the term as referring to a specific set of

understands its byway (Job 28:23)," understands the byways and pathways that are within it. By virtue of the permanent

entities on a specific ontological level. It seems, however, that R. Isaac the Blind uses this term as a generic designation for entities of ontological permanence, on whatever sefirotic level they may appear. It can refer to *sefirot*, to letters, to the pathways and to the inner principles from which all these originate. See lines 10-12, 15, 19, 23, 36-37, 64-66, 75-76, 79, 136, 218-20, 224-25, 233, 236, 267, 270-71, 289, 319. In the sentence under consideration, it is only those essences within the *sefirah Hokhmah* which are given over to contemplation, implying there are other essences which are not. This implication is explicit in lines 64-66, 79.

R. Isaac's definition of essences as entities of permanent being comes close to the regnant twelfth-century Latin use of the term *essentiae*, as Scholem suspected. See R. LeMay, *Abu Ma'ashar and Latin Aristotelianism in the Twelfth Century*, (Beirut, 1962) 198-217, for a discussion of the definition of *essentiae* as formulated by Hermann of Carinthia, in his *De Essentis*, written in 1147, through the influence of Al-Kindi and Abu Ma'ashar on the one hand, and Boethius on the other, as "those entities...which have a simple and unchanging nature and are therefore unable to receive any alteration" (Ibid, 199; Hermann de Carinthia, *De Essentiis*, ed. P. Manuel Alonso, (Santander, 1946), 25). According to LeMay, while there was no limit to the varieties of such *essentiae*, Hermann focussed his discussion on certain permanent *genera* whose role was to bring into existence entities of intermittent being (Ibid.). It is this definition of *essentiae* that is at the root of the maxim of R. Ezra and the Gerona kabbalists: "the essences were, but the emanation came into being." See *supra*, ch. 8.1.

²³ This restates the argument of line 1, that the thirty-two paths are contained in the *sefirah Hokhmah*, adding that these constitute the primary categories of comprehension that are first perceived as differentiated.

²⁴ This seemingly redundant identification may have been prompted by an understanding similar to Nahmanides' definition of מליאיות as "separate and distinct effects," based on Targum Onkelos, Dt. 17:8 (Nahmanides, *PSY*, 402).

See, too, R. Azriel of Gerona, *PSY*, in *Kitvei*

essences²⁵ engraved in him there is within him power to contemplate²⁶ the subtle permanent essences which have no limit.²⁷ The pathways are sources²⁸ of the byways: for a

Ramban, vol. 2, 457: ומה שנקרא בכח ראשון נתיבות נקרא (That which is called "pathways" in the first power is called *sefirot* in the second power, and in the third power "letters"). This means that at the highest sefirotic level, *Keter*, the principles are called pathways; at the second ontological level, *Hokhmah*, these principles are called *sefirot*, and at the third ontological level, *Binah*, they are called letters.

²⁵ The term קבוצות is found in *SY*, 1:13 (sec. 15), 2:3 (sec. 17), in the sense of "fixed" or "set." In this phrase, however, ההויות הקבוצות, "the permanent essences," appearing here and at the end of this sentence, the term "permanent" is intended to provide a definition, *qua* modifying synonym, of the nature of these essences themselves, as permanent entities. See above, note 22. Compare line 207, below.

²⁶ R. Isaac of Acre discusses the referent of the pronouns "him" in this sentence. He asserts that R. Isaac the Blind understood them to denote the kabbalistic adept, which he interpreted midrashically as the אלהים of the verse Job 28:23. Scholem questions how R. Isaac of Acre arrived at this reading (Isaac of Acre, *PSY*, 382, n. 12). R. Isaac of Acre himself, however, criticizes this interpretation and suggests that it is God who "understands its byway." Projecting his own opinion upon R. Isaac the Blind's words, he claims it is the *sefirah Binah* in which the fixed essences are engraved and that has within it the power to comprehend *Hokhmah* (*PSY*, 382, lines 22-29).

It seems, however, that the correct reading lies between these two poles. While the referent of "him" in both instances in the sentence is clearly God in the aspect of the *sefirah Binah*, consonant with the kabbalistic reading of Job 28:23, as R. Isaac of Acre suggests, the "power to comprehend" is a power conferred upon, or accessible to, the adept, who can participate in the activity of this *sefirah*. Thus, it is the term להתבונן, to comprehend or contemplate, that refers to the action of the human adept. To paraphrase: "By virtue of the permanent essences engraved in the *sefirah Binah*, there is power that enables man to contemplate the subtle, permanent essences that have no

pathway is the "source of a byway (Ez. 21:26)." The pathway is a generality and a principle, for the byways disperse and separate and spread out from there.²⁹ The pathways of the wonders are like veins within the stock of a tree, and *Hokhmah* is the root. They are inner and subtle essences, which no creature can contemplate except that which suckles from it,³⁰ a mode of contemplation by way of suckling, not

limit."

²⁷ This is a restatement of R. Isaac's basic epistemological argument, that the infinite can be grasped in stages and levels from the finite. See above, note 12, and *supra*, ch. 7.1.

²⁸ This is also an allusion to the term *אמנות*, matrices, as used by *SY* itself, chs. 2 and 3.

²⁹ R. Isaac the Blind interprets the term *נתיב* of *SY* 1:1 as the general principle, the main road, from which specifics radiate like byways. While this runs counter to usual Hebrew usage, it receives some support from Yonah Ibn Jannah, *Sefer Haš-Sorašim*, trans. Yehudah Ibn Tibbon, ed. W. Bacher, (Berlin, 1896), p. 327, entry *נתיב* : "One speaks of a pathway (*נתיב*) with regard to a byway (*דרך*) in the general sense, when you regard and speak of that which is customary, which is the clear path." Compare, too, Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, *Sehitah*, 14:16, who uses the term *נתיבות* in this general sense.

This definition of the term *נתיב* as general path is necessary in the conceptual context of R. Isaac's system, where the more ontologically superior principles are also the most general. Nahmanides, by contrast, preserves the usual Hebrew meaning of the term as "narrow trail," focussing on its obscure quality, consonant with the concept that the more ontologically superior principles are also the more recondite and difficult to perceive (*PSY*, 402, lines 2-7). This is one instance of Nahmanides' divergence and independence from R. Isaac the Blind's thought. See R. Isaac of Acre, *PSY*, 383, 3-5, who also noted this disparity.

³⁰ See Scholem, *Provence*, 221, who states "Of

by way of knowing.³¹

course, it is most probable that the entire commentary of R. Isaac the Blind does not refer at all to the creature in the sense of the contemplative man, but to the *sefirot* themselves...Therefore there is within them, in these *sefirot*, a contemplation, that their suckling is from their root, and not for the kabbalists below." With all due respect, R. Isaac refers here very plainly to contemplation by the creature, and though he is often ambiguous as to the subject of the mental processes he describes, here the intent is unmistakable. The ambiguity may be partly intentional: R. Isaac's mystical psychology is predicated on a continuum and parallelism between the divine and human mind.

³¹ R. Isaac's epistemology distinguishes between conceptual knowledge and an intuitive, continuous contemplative awareness which draws upon the already abiding relationship between the knower and the known. He contrasts these two modes through a play upon the double-entendre in the biblical usage of the term "knowing," in both the carnal and conceptual sense. "Knowing," between man and woman, connotes a less intimate relationship than "suckling" which refers to the totally engaged and dependent relation of a nursing child to its mother, which R. Isaac recruits to metaphorically evoke a more intimate, direct, continuous and intuitive form of awareness. See I. Tishbi, *Peruš ha-ʿAggadot le-R. Azriel*, 82, n. 5, 7. The image of drawing liquid standing for intuitive knowledge is used in the *Bahir*, secs. 87, as **שׁוּבָא**, drawing water; and in *Peruš Šir Haš-Širim le-R. Ezra*, 504, where **הַמְשַׁכָּה**, "drawing" is associated with the concept of emanation. "Suckling" is the epistemological counterpart of the ontological process and relationship of emanation. See Scholem, *Provence*, 220-22.

C. W. Bynum, *Jesus as Mother: Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages*, (Berkeley, 1982), notes that the image of suckling became extremely popular in the twelfth century among French Christian thinkers. For them, the paradigm of the nursing child was used variously to express the relation of the soul to God, the individual to the Church or to ecclesiastical authority, and of the world as child to God as mother (113-34). Bynum considers this an aspect of the feminization of Christian spirituality and symbolism and a sign of the higher social status of women in the twelfth century in general. (135-39) She

also suggests an anti-Catharist polemical component in the image of suckling in particular. Suckling conveys a positive sense of the body, the inherent goodness of Creation, and the continuity of the soul with Heaven, all concepts running counter to Catharist dualism and acosmism (134). It may well be that the image of suckling served similar purposes for R. Isaac, and was in part a reflection of its broad popularity in the general culture at-large. See, too, C. W. Bynum, *Holy Feast and Holy Fast: the Religious Significance of Food to Medieval Women*, (Berkeley, 1987) 269-73.

Sefer includes *ha-sefer* and *sefer* includes *ha-sippur*.³²

Three matrices³³ are sealed³⁴ with [the letter] *yod*, and

³² The reading of the three **ספריים** of *SY* 1:1 as **ספר וספור וסיפור**, that is, writing, counting and speaking, is already explicit in R. Saadiah Gaon's commentary, *Sefer Yezirah*, trans. J. Kafah, 35. How these three are associated with the *sefirot* is not stated outright in R. Isaac the Blind's *Commentary*. Nahmanides associates writing with *Hokhmah*, counting with *Binah*, and speaking with the lower *sefirot* (*PSY*, 405, lines 1-3). R. Isaac of Acre repeats this lineup, but also offers a more interior series: writing is *Keter*, counting is *Hokhmah*, speaking is *Binah* (*PSY*, 382, lines 17-19; 383, lines 9-11).

The statement that each term includes the following term refers to the notion that in the process of emanation, the higher includes the lower, which issues forth from it and is thus included in it. See below, line 268: "All that would in the future be hewn from them was in them, just as within a man are all his offspring." Compare Isaac of Acre, *PSY*, 383: **ואני אומר כי כל הקודם באצילות הוא הכולל מה שאחריו ודי למבין** (I say that all that comes first in emanation includes that which comes after it, and this is sufficient for the adept).

³³ *SY*, 1:2 (sec. 2). See I. Gruenwald, "A Preliminary Critical Edition of *Sefer Yezirah*," 140 n. 1, who observes that this reading, which mentions the three matrices in *SY* 1:2, appears only in the short recension versions and one of the long recensions (Firenze Mediceo-Laurentiana Pluteo II, codex V (8), fol. 227a).

R. Isaac's comment here is based on his reading of *SY* 1:13 (sec. 15), which is interpolated at this point. Compare *SY*, 2:1 (sec. 23), where the three matrices are identified with the letters **אמש**. R. Isaac associates them with the three *sefirot* *Binah*, *Hesed*, *Paḥad*, (line 152) and describes them as "things that emanate and are emanated and received each from each other (line 280)." See, too, R. Azriel *PSY*, 456. R. Isaac of Acre, while purporting to expound R. Isaac the Blind's *Commentary*, associates these letters with the *sefirot* *Binah*, *Tiferet* and the pair *Yesod-Malkhut* (*PSY*, 383, lines 14-15).

³⁴ "Sealing" is a metaphysical concept employed in

those that are sealed are sealed in the zenith with *yod*.³⁵

the cosmogony of the *Heikhalot* and related literature, as well as in *Sefer Yeḡirah* itself (1:13, sec. 15; 3:2, sec. 24; 3:5, sec. 31). See, e. g., *Seder Rabbah de-Berešit*, ed. Wertheimer, vol. 1, 21, notes 10, 11; 23-24, and *Oṭlot de-R. Akiva*, ed. Wertheimer, vol. 2, 363-6, where sealing by letters of the divine Name functions to secure and protect the created world from dissolution through contact with heavenly fire aroused through the letter contemplations of the mystic. Compare *Berayta de-Ma'aseh Berešit*, ed. N. Séd, *REJ*, 124 (1965) 28, 46, where it seems that only the mystic himself is endangered by the fire engendered in his meditations. See, too, *Sefer hab-Bahir*, secs. 107, 110.

R. Isaac the Blind in this passage is working off *SY*, 1:13 (sec. 15), see note 34, below. R. Asher b. David, *Sefer ha-Yihud, Kabbalat R. Asher b. David*, 57, explains this concept of sealing with the great Name as a setting of limits of a created being and sustaining that being in its form: **ג' אותיות אלו של שמו הגדול** **בונות שש קצוות שנתתם כל צד בהם ומתקיים כל צד במשך הברכה שבהם ועל זה אמ' אחתם כמי שמביא חותמו של מלך בידו ואין כל בריה יכולה ליגע בו כך כל קצב וקצב עומד ומתקיים בכה** **ג' אותיות אלו** (These three letters of His great Name build six extremities. For each side is sealed with them, and each side is sustained with the efflux of blessing in them. Regarding this it is said "I shall seal," like a person who carries the seal of the king in his hand, such that no one can harm him. So, too, each extremity stands and it sustained by the power of the blessing that is in these three letters). Here, as in the *Heikhalot* texts, sealing serves a preservative function.

Developing this idea systematically, R. Isaac of Acre explains the concept of sealing as analogous to the clothing of a higher level of emanation in the garment of a lower level (*PSY*, 383, lines 23-25). Sealing in this sense represents the final step in the creation of an entity or essence, granting limit, permanence and endurance. In the present case, as R. Isaac uses the concept with respect to the *sefirot*, sealing functions to stabilize a divine hypostasis at a permanent level in the process of descending emanation.

³⁵ This comment, precipitated by the introduction of the term "matrices" in the context of the imbedding of the emanated effect in the emanating cause, is based upon R. Isaac's reading of *SY* 1:13 (15), following the short recension versions found in Leiden Warn. 24 (5)

When they are sealed with *yod* they are placed in His great Name and compose a single structure, they within the Name and the Name within them, faces within faces,³⁶ essences

Cod. Or. 4762 and Moscow Ginzburg collection 133, foll. 198a-199a. See I. Gruenwald, "A Preliminary Critical Edition of *Sefer Yeẓirah*," 146. The text reads: -- חמש ממשותפות שלש אמות (Five -- the zenith sealed three matrices with [the letter] *yod*). But see below, notes to line 343, where it becomes clear that R. Isaac had before him a text corresponding specifically to Leiden Warn. 24 (5) Cod. Or. 4762. R. Isaac's comment at hand is rephrased more explicitly in lines 151-52 below, in his actual exposition of *SY* 1:13 (15). There, R. Isaac explains this passage from *Sefer Yeẓirah* as follows: "Zenith is like "holy," and zenith beyond zenith. Zenith sealed in *yod*, which is in *Hokhmah*. In it were sealed three matrices, which are *Binah*, *Ḥesed*, *Paḥad*." In other words: the *sefirah Keter*, the Zenith, delimited and sustained the three *sefirot Binah*, *Ḥesed*, *Paḥad* in the *sefirah Hokhmah* represented by the letter *yod* of the divine Name.

³⁶ Compare line 152 below, on *SY* 1:13 (15): וקבען בשמו הגדול (and He set them in His great Name). R. Isaac explains that the letters and *sefirot* first introduced in *SY* 1:2 (2) are not isolated and independent entities. In his thoroughly hierarchic system, letters represent a lower degree of being imbedded in the *sefirot*, which are organized according to the divine Names. The letters, *sefirot* and divine Names form one unified structure of multiple aspects, which he calls "faces within faces, essences from within essences. The structure is sustained by the action of "sealing," which effects the delimiting and nesting of one hierarchic set within another. In general terms, the entire program of R. Isaac's *Commentary* is precisely to combine the *sefirah* and letter system of *Sefer Yeẓirah* with the talmudic, midrashic and Heikhalot lore of divine Names.

The concept of "faces" as used here and expounded at greater length in lines 153-56, q. v., is derived from R. Saadiah Gaon, *PSY*, 72: לתי שהם עשויים פנים לכל: רוחות (because [the bolts of angelic lightning] are constituted as faces in all directions.) R. Saadiah Gaon goes on to explain that in the world of angels, one encounters only the faces of angelic entities, never the backs. The context of the discussion is a comparison of the recurring pattern of numbers in base

from within essences.³⁷ The *sefirot* are a foundation, and

ten to the nature of angelic entities. This was quoted and developed by R. Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 163: והם הם ([the numbers and the letters] are represented in faces from all directions and sides). R. Judah makes the similarity between angelic qualities and the numbers and letters of *Sefer Yeẓirah* more explicit, but does not entirely spell out the application to the numbers and letters of the concept of faces-only. R. Isaac develops and extends this concept of faces to the *sefirot*, saying "He made faces above, for a person finds them on all sides, for there is nothing above but faces, for *Hokhmah* surrounds from all sides (lines 153-54)." This is to say that the upper world is a realm composed entirely of multiple faces or aspects of the same set of principles, emanating and unfolding from multiple perspectives. See Scholem *Origins*, 282.

³⁷ R. Isaac uses this phrase pattern " x within y " frequently enough that it is one of the signatures of his style. See lines 105, 186, 190, 236-37, 247, 250-51, 344. As such, it is recognizable in citations by his students, such as R. Ezra, "Peruṣ le-Ṣir ha-Ṣirim," introduction, in *Kitvei Ramban*, ed. H. D. Chavel, vol. 2, 478: וקבל במעמד הקודש ההוא ידיעת ה' שיש בו ג' שמות מי"ב אותיות שהם פנים בתוך פנים והויות [כצ"ל] בתוך הויות (([Moses], at that holy convocation, received knowledge of God as comprised in three divine Names composed of twelve letters, which are faces within faces and essences within essences). This phrase pattern can be traced back directly to the grandiloquent style of *Heikhalot* literature. Compare, e. g., *Seder Rabbah de-Beresit*, *Batei Midraṣot*, vol. I, 57: זה לפנים מזה וזה לפנים מזה (This within that and this within that), and 60: עשרים פנים בתוך ארבע פנים...יש לה פנים בתוך ז' פנים ויש לה כנפים בתוך כנפים (Twenty faces within four faces...it has faces within seven faces and it has wings within wings) This demonstrates not only that R. Isaac has internalized an aspect of *Heikhalot* rhetorical style, but precisely that aspect and its underlying conception which corresponds to his central epistemological and ontological theory: the successive layers of being, one nested within the other, mutually influential and inferential. It would seem that R. Isaac recognized the similarity between the *Heikhalot* descriptions of multiple levels of heaven, and the Neoplatonic concept of a layered existence. The confluence of both conceptions, synthesized in his thought, represents the

they are an innerness.³⁸ The foundation of the structure³⁹ made by them are the letters,⁴⁰ like stones from the mountain.⁴¹ In a mountain there are numerous veins like

foundation of his entire theology.

At the risk of overinterpretation, the phrase "faces within faces, essences from within essences" may be understood: faces within faces, when viewed from the perspective of the adept contemplating upwards; essences from within essences from the perspective of the unfolding of creation downwards. In R. Isaac's Neo-Platonic epistemology, that which is more inner and spiritual is the basis for the more outer and material.

³⁸ In *SY* 1:2 (2), the letters are called a foundation. Here it is stated that the *sefirot* are also a foundation in the general sense, one that is more fundamental because, in R. Isaac's Neoplatonic conception of the hierarchic continuum of emanation, they are spiritually and ontologically more interior than the letters. R. Isaac of Acre explains that R. Isaac the Blind was prompted to make this comment because, while the letters are called a foundation, "this is not to say that the letters are a foundation for the ten *sefirot*, for this cannot be, for the *sefirot* are a cause and the letters are effects, and how can an effect be the foundation of a cause? Rather, according to that which was in the future to issue from them they are called a foundation (R. Isaac of Acre, *PSY*, 384, lines 12-14)." Compare R. Isaac the Blind, *PSY*, lines 26-27.

³⁹ See *supra*, ch. 8.3, on the term "*binyan*." See, too, Solomon Ibn Gabirol, *Keter Malkhut*, 2:1, ed. D. Yarden, 39: אַתָּה אֶחָד רִאשׁוֹן כָּל בְּנֵינִי, וְיִסוּד כָּל בְּנֵינִי (You are one, the first of all number, the foundation of all structure).

⁴⁰ *SY* 1:2 (2).

⁴¹ The letters are a foundation in the sense that stones comprise the foundation of a building. The stones themselves, however, are quarried from an even more fundamental source, the mountain to which the *sefirot* are likened. This comparison of letters to the foundation stones of a building comes from R. Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 69: אָדָם בּוֹנֵה בַיִת וְסַתְקֵן אֲבָנִים לְהִיוֹתָן יִסוּדוֹת (a man builds a house and arranges stones to be foundations). See, too, Abraham Bar Ḥiyya, *Hegyon han-*

tunnels in the earth, which is composed of tunnels upon tunnels,⁴² and therefore "the pit cannot be filled from its hollow,"⁴³ for in the filling of the hollow places, the once full places remain lacking dirt,⁴⁴ for deficiencies, by

Nefes, 37.

⁴² R. Issac's use of the term חוליה for מחלה is based on his interpretation of Berakhot 3b, 59a; see following note. For the general idea of cavities in the earth, compare *Ketubot* 111a, concerning how the dead roll their way to the Land of Israel through the underground tunnels: מחילות נעשות להם בקרקע (tunnels are made for them in the ground). R. Isaac here seems to have in mind a permanent geological feature of mountains and of the earth in general. See *supra*, ch. 7.2, concerning the image of subterranean passages to represent the recondite nature of truth as used by William of Conches in his unpublished commentary on Macrobius, cited in P. Dronke, *Fabula*, 48-49.

⁴³ Berakhot 3b, 59a.

⁴⁴ Most medieval commentators interpreted the term חוליה to refer not to the hollow of a pit, but to the earth dug from the pit: Rashi, Berakhot 3b, R. Isaac of Dampierre, Tosaphot Berakhot 3a, R. Nissim Gaon, Berakhot 4a, R. Hananel, Sanh. 16a, *Sefer he-Arukh*, entry חלי. It is this earth which the proverb says cannot refill the pit from which it was taken. Tosaphot Sanh. 16a also mentions another interpretation: the dirt taken from a pit and used to rim the pit as an entrenchment.

Ben Yehudah, *Milon*, II, p. 1465-6, note 2, cites Shab. 99 and Eruv. 83, where חוליה evidently refers to a perforated stone used to rim a well. He cites Arabic parallels, and associates this usage with חוליה as denoting the hollow spinal vertebrae. This is the definition R. Isaac seems to have in mind: a hollow space, from the Hebrew root חלל, which he takes as synonymous with מחלה, used above, line 14, and below, line 24. R. Isaac therefore explains the proverb differently: The pit cannot be filled from its hollow, or on account of its hollow. The explanation he gives, however, that in filling the hollow places the full places become hollow, is similar to that of Rashi and R. Isaac of Dampierre, Berakhot 3b.

their nature, cannot be filled.⁴⁵ Thus the essences are subtle, until a person reveals them and makes impressions in them and engraves engravings and hews hewings: then the cavity appears from whatever place it starts.⁴⁶

*Belimah*⁴⁷ they are all suspended.⁴⁸ The *lamed* is a letter in *Hokhmah*.⁴⁹ *Yod* is in all.⁵⁰ The *mem* and the *heb*

⁴⁵ The idea is that deficiency is to be understood as an abstract essence whose existence persists irrespective of the place it is shifted to.

⁴⁶ R. Isaac reads the talmudic dictum as a mining image. The persistence of a deficiency or hollow space as dirt is shifted from one location to another, serves as an image for the process of tracking and uncovering a subtle, abstract essence by following its traces in the phenomenal world to their source.

⁴⁷ *SY* 1:2 (2). בלימה is usually translated "insubstantial." R. Isaac here will expound the word according to the *notarikon* method, as an acrostic in which each letter stands for a *sefirah*, and the whole word expresses the process of emanation.

⁴⁸ Job 26:7: תולה ארץ על בלימה (He suspended the earth on nothing). This is to say that the *sefirot* are all suspended in a manner signified in the word בלימה. The letter *bet* is to be read here as a preposition, as well as a reference to the *sefirah Hokhmah*, "in" which all are comprised, as in lines 1-2, above. This sentence can be paraphrased: "in *lamed-yod-mem-heb* they are all suspended."

⁴⁹ According to this reading, the letter *lamed* signifies the *sefirah Binah*, which is in the *sefirah Hokhmah*, represented by the letter *bet*, according to line 1, above. *Lamed* is clearly associated with *Binah* in later kabbalistic works. Among R. Isaac's students, see Jacob b. Sheshet, *Nešiv Devarim Nekhošim*, ed. G. Vajda, (Jerusalem, 1969) 95 (ch. 5, line 76-77):
 הלם"ד... נקראת בלשון רבותינו מגדל הפורה באויר על כן אני אומר כי היא תורה על שוב הנבראים כלם אל היסוד הראשון (The *lamed*... is called in rabbinic terms "the castle floating in the air [Hag. 15b]. Therefore I say that it indicates the return of all creatures to the first principle). The return of Creation to its source is the

become spirit from which comes the governance of their offspring.⁵¹ Foundation: it does not say they are a foundation except with respect to what is to come from them in the future, and the cause is the beginning of the foundation.⁵² So too, the mountain is the beginning of all the structures that come from it, for it is the beginning of the impressions.⁵³ After the impressions He engraved the

special function of the *sefirah Binah*. See *supra*, ch. 8.4.1. See, too, *Sefer hat-Temunah*, (reprint of Lemberg, 1892) 17b; *Zohar*, II, 159a; Moses Cordovero, *Pardes Rimmonim*, ch. 27.15. What suggested this association to R. Isaac the Blind is not entirely clear. Possibly, the number value thirty for *lamed*, representing the third set of ten principles contained in *Binah*, contributed to the association. See M. Idel, "Has-Sefirot *še-me-ʿal* has-Sefirot," 245-46, regarding traditions ascribed by Ibn Shuib to R. Isaac the Blind, concerning the orthographic representation of the divine Name with three letters *yod* associated with three sets of ten principles: עשר ספירות, עשר מאמרות, עשר דברות .

⁵⁰ This is to say, it represents all ten *sefirot*, according to the numerical value of the letter. R. Isaac identifies the letter *yod* with the *sefirah Hokhmah*, lines 41-42 below.

⁵¹ According to R. Isaac of Acre, the letters *mem*, *heh* represent the Tetragrammaton as a whole (*PSY*, 384, lines 29-30), that is, the entire sefirotic structure which emanates from *Hokhmah* and *Binah*. The word בלימה is read as a *notarikon* representing the unfolding of the entire sefirotic process.

MSS Harvard Heb. 58/11 and Cambridge Or. 2116,8/9, read: "*Bellimah*: all whatness is included in *Hokhmah*, which is the letter *yod*, and *yod* is in all, and the *mem* and *heh* become a power from which issues the governance of their offspring."

⁵² See line 19 and note, above. The "cause" refers to the *sefirot*, which are the beginning of the foundation, here, the letters.

⁵³ See line 20, above.

engravings from which are the hewings from which is the structure.⁵⁴

Letters and signs are different, for signs sometimes have no image,⁵⁵ but only an appearance,⁵⁶ such as the appearance of white and of red and so forth. For a sign is the appearance of a change in something,⁵⁷ which has changed from its color and from its condition of being, as was said, "lie on your left side (Ez. 4:4)," and it is written, "it is

⁵⁴ R. Isaac here employs a series of terms taken from *Sefer Yeẓirah*, and treats them as precise technical terms representing successive levels of divine creative action through the image of successive depths of "carving." According to R. Isaac, "engrave," from *SY* itself, denotes the second most refined degree, while *רשם*, inscribe or impress, a term he himself adds, is the first degree, these being the first steps towards the sculpting of a complete material entity, as yet too subtle for the apprehension of human thought. "Inscribe" is used in sense of lightly marking before writing, as in Gen. R. 81 with reference to Dan. 10:21.

⁵⁵ For *דמיון* as image or shape, compare Maimonides, *Morēh Nevukhim*, 1:1,3.

⁵⁶ The term *מראה* as mere appearance or accident, in contradistinction to essence, is used by Judah Halevi, *Kuzari*, 4:3, trans. J. Ibn Tibbon: *כי החושים אינם משיגים מן המוחשים כי אם מקריהם. לא עצמיהם, ואינם משיגים מן המלך על הדמיון וולתי המראים והתבניות והשעורים* (For the senses do not grasp of the sensible anything but their accidents, not their essences. They do not grasp, for example, of a king anything but the appearances and forms and dimensions).

⁵⁷ Targum Ps.-Jonathan, Jer. 10:2: *ומאתון דמשתנין בשמיא לא התברון* (and of the signs which change in the Heavens do not be afraid). The idea is that a sign is something which has become distinctive by being out of the ordinary. This definition has a precedent in rabbinic legal thought, in the laws concerning lost objects, where anomalous change functions as a sign of ownership. See *Bava Meẓi'a*, 21a.

a sign to the house of Israel (Ez. 4:3)": a sign, without change of form or nature, for there is no form separate and changing from another, rather one thing that is turned into several matters. So, too, voice and appearance are signs. But letters are things which come from their cause, from the term *ba'ot*, for a letter is something which derives and is shaped and receives from the place from which it was hewn.⁵⁸

The number ten.⁵⁹ What was mentioned in the two aforementioned sections⁶⁰ were the pathways and letters from which essence is apprehended.⁶¹ Therefore it delayed until here to say the number ten, whose meaning is the apprehendable essences,⁶² that are received in their

⁵⁸ This passage is based upon Judah Halevi, *Kuzari*, 4:25, regarding the distinction between signs as used in human thought, speech and writing, and divine language. See *supra*, ch. 7.5, for an analysis of lines 29-35.

⁵⁹ *SY* 1:3 (sec. 3), 141.

⁶⁰ *Sefer Yezirah* 1:1 (1), 1:2 (2).

⁶¹ The pathways and letters, which constitute the divine Names, enable the apprehension of the essences, or *sefirot*.

⁶² *Sefer Yezirah* first introduced the modes of cognition by which the essential categories, the ten *sefirot*, may be grasped. Now it proceeds to focus discussion on those categories. R. Isaac's definition of *sefirot* as apprehendable essences combines ontological and cognitive dimensions. The *sefirot* are subsistent and permanent, that is, essences, whose number is determined by what the mind can properly grasp of them. See lines 47-60 for his key discussion of the cognitive conditions for recognizing and enumerating the *sefirot*.

elevation,⁶³ in the "lifting of their hands" upwards.⁶⁴ Five are *Nezah, Hod, Tiferet, Hesed, Hokhmah*, behold five.

⁶³ For R. Isaac, the process of reception and elevation is the means for the cognition of metaphysical principles. R. Isaac developed this theory as a Neoplatonic interpretation of a conception of R. Saadiah Gaon as presented by R. Judah b. Barzilai. According to R. Isaac, spiritual forms descend to be received by the human mind, after which they ascend to their origin, an ascent which the mind traces intellectually in order to grasp the true nature of the forms it has apprehended. The mind's tracing of the ascent represents the process of abstraction of the originally received intimation of the forms. This theory, rooted in Middle Platonic epistemology, also bears strong resemblance to the twelfth-century French theory of symbolic signification, comprising a *collatio* and *elevatio*. See *supra*, ch. 7.6 in detail.

⁶⁴ Neh. 8:6. This is an elegant poetic insertion of a verse. The section *Sefer Yeẓirah* 1:3 (sec. 3) under discussion compares the ten *sefirot* to the ten fingers, in what I. Gruenwald identifies as the first instance of macrocosm-microcosm theory in Jewish mysticism ("Critical Notes on the *Sefer Yeẓirah*, 486). R. Isaac takes the image of *sefirot* as fingers of the hand, plus his theory of the mode of apprehension or "grasp" of metaphysical principles through an elevation of thought parallel to the elevation of the principles themselves, and ties them together with the biblical image of a pious raising of hands in praise of God. The third person plural possessive of "hands" in the verse refers to the assembled congregation. In R. Isaac's insertion, "their hands" can refer both to the *sefirot* and to those who apprehend them, a microcosmic act parallel to a macrocosmic process, and very much an act of praise of the divine.

R. Asher b. David explains more explicitly: *Sefer ha-Yihud*, in *Kabbalat R. Asher b. David*, 59: וכשיש בישראל משכילים כשנוטאים כפיהם בתפלה נוטאים ידיהם לדיום השמים ורומזים בעשר אצבעותיהם להשפיע [שפע כצ"ל] מכל השמים (When there are adepts in Israel, when they raise their hands in prayer, they raise their hands to the heights of heaven and hint with their ten fingers that efflux should flow from the ten *sefirot*, to bestow blessing upon us).

‘*Atarah* with *Zaddik*, which are the power⁶⁵ of the dimension⁶⁶ of *Paḥad*, with *Paḥad* and with *Binah*; and *Hokhmah*⁶⁷ mediates all:⁶⁸ behold, five overagainst five.⁶⁹

⁶⁵ The term *חֵסֶד* here is used in the sense of effective power or force that derives from a higher source. See E. Ben Yehudah, vol. 3, 2316b-2317b for numerous examples. The idea is that ‘*Atarah* and *Zaddik* enforce the attribute of *Paḥad*.

⁶⁶ The term *מִדָּה* is one of a set of designations for *sefirah* R. Isaac employs in the *Commentary* (lines 75-76, 124, 353). See *supra*, ch. 8.4. As a standard term for divine "attribute" in Hebrew philosophic literature, it indicates R. Isaac's association of his *sefirah* theory with the philosophic doctrine of divine attributes (See E. Gottlieb, *Nehkharim*, 298). R. Isaac, however, following R. Judah b. Barzilai (*PSY*, 148), also stresses the etymological connection to the notion of measurement and number (lines 75-76). Accordingly, it is translated here and henceforth as "dimension," to convey measure as well as aspect, quality, attribute.

⁶⁷ See *supra*, ch. 8.3 for a discussion of the names for the *sefirot*.

⁶⁸ The term "mediate" comes from *Sefer Yeḥirah*, 2:1 (23); 3:3 (28); 3:4 (29, 30); 6:1 (25, 26), where it signifies the action of a middle, moderating principle between two extremes. Certain *sefirot* in R. Isaac's system, those associated with the "middle line," also function as such mediators. See H. Padaya, "Pegam we-Tikkun," 164 n. 30. *Hokhmah* has the distinction of mediating all the *sefirot*, as R. Isaac explains below, line 42.

⁶⁹ Several group configurations of the *sefirot* appear throughout the *Commentary*. Here, in a formulation whose main outline became highly influential in the history of Kabbalah, they are divided according to the concept of right and left hands. This is an extension of the fingers and hands image of *SY* 1:3 (3) and its correlation with the midrashic motif of the right hand of divine mercy and left hand of divine rigor (E. g., *Pirkei de-R. Eliezer*, ch. 48; *Tanḥuma*, Beshallah, 15, on Lam. 2:3, Ps. 118:16).

In R. Isaac's system, the five *sefirot* *Neḥaḥ*, *Hod*, *Tiferet*, *Hesed*, *Hokhmah* are implicitly associated

Regarding that which it says **and the covenant of one: the**
yod,⁷⁰ that was upright and became bent,⁷¹ **is aligned in the**

together here with the right hand of divine mercy, while *‘Atarah, Zaddik, Paḥad, Binah* and again *Ḥokhmah* are grouped together as left-handed rigor. Already R. Asher b. David, R. Isaac's nephew, reports that this grouping was not unanimously agreed upon in his time. Some authorities associated *Nezah* with the right side and *Hod* with the left, and some had the relationship reversed (*Peruṣ Sem ham-Meforaš*, in *Ḳabbalat R. Asher b. David*, 13, lines 9-16). Conspicuously absent from this list is the highest *sefirah*, *Keter* or *Maṣṣavah*, whose place in R. Isaac's enumeration of the ten *sefirot* is subtle and complex. See below, lines 47-60.

⁷⁰ According to R. Asher b. David, the letter *yod* represents the "full count of the letter *aleph*," or the number one (*Ḳabbalat R. Asher b. David*, 5, 27). This echoes A. Ibn Ezra, *Sefer ha-Zaḥut*, 27a, and especially *Sefer haṣ-Sem*, 4-6, where he associates the letters *aleph* and *yod* in terms of the relation between the numbers one and ten: שמון [!] כי האחד, שהוא כמו האחד, כי האחד [!] שמון [!] שמון אחד מדבר בעד נפשו, ג"כ היו"ד באחרונה סימן יחיד (For [*yod*] is like the number one, for [*aleph*] is set as a sign of one who speaks on behalf of himself, so too, the *yod* at the end (of a word) is a sign of oneness). That is, the letter *aleph* indicates first person singular in the future tense, while the letter *yod* indicates first person singular in past tense.

⁷¹ This passage is an interpretation of an aggadic and midrashic theme in light of R. Isaac's theory of divine Names. R. Asher b. David paraphrases R. Isaac's statement and sheds light on its constituent sources and meaning: אני אומר ששם של אהי"ה ושל ידוד הנקרא שם המפורש האמורים בפרשת ומשה היה רועה הכל שם אחד, פירוש היו"ד שלשם המפורש כנגד הא' שהיתה משלמת חשבון הא' כאשר פירשתי; וה' כנגד הא' והו' כנגד הי' שהיו"ד זקופה היתה ונכפפה להודיע מי שהוא כפוף בעולם הזה הוא זקוף לעולם הבא (I say that the Name *Ḥyh* and the Name *Yhwh*, which is called the Tetragrammaton, that are spoken of in [Ex. 3:1-22] are all one Name. This means that the *yod* of the Tetragrammaton corresponds to the *aleph*, for it completes the number of the *aleph*, as I have explained; and *heh* corresponds to the *aleph* (!, see Ḥasida's note, line 4: it should read *heh*) and the *vav* corresponds to the *yod*, for the *yod* was upright and became bent, to inform that he who is bent in this world will be upright in the world to come). See *Ḳabbalat R. Asher b.*

covenant (of circumcision),⁷³ and they are in the middle, this parallel to that, resembling the *yod* that is in [the shape of] the brain in the head, standing for the *Hokhmah* which is within,⁷⁴ and surrounds all.⁷⁵ So, too, the brain

divine Names *hyh* and *Yhwh* in terms of the letters *yod* and *naw*. In the higher divine Name, *hyh*, which corresponds to the world to come, from which all emanated and to which all returns, the *yod*, the third letter, is upright. This uprightness means that the letter *naw*, a vertical line signifying the principle of uprightness, remains implicit and hidden within this letter *yod*, apparent only when the letter is articulated. By contrast, the *yod* of the lower divine Name, *Yhwh*, corresponding to this world, is bent, and the *naw*, now the third letter, is precipitated out as a distinct letter of that Name, a hint of the *yod* of the higher divine Name.

⁷² According to R. Isaac of Acre, *PSY*, 386, this represents the *sefirah Binah*: ובינה הוא הלשון.

⁷³ According to R. Isaac of Acre, *PSY*, 386, this represents the *sefirah Yesod*: וכונגד המילה באדם היא: הספירה הנקראת יסוד.

The overall idea of these lines seems to be that the Tetragrammaton represents the lower *sefirot*, and is designated in terms of the letter *naw* and the *sefirah Yesod*, its lowest element. As such, the initial letter *yod* is "bent" and contained "in the covenant (of circumcision)." This is to say it is in a compressed and diminished form in the lower sefirotic realm, as compared with its full, upright stature in the upper sefirotic world, in the divine Name *hyh*. This diminished form is symbolized by circumcision, both graphically, and morally, signifying the curbing of the sexual appetite. Whether this "bent" condition is an aspect of cosmic catastrophe, similar to Padaya's interpretation of the relationship between the letters *naw* and *heh* of the Tetragrammaton (*Pegam ne-Tikkun*, 157-280), or whether this is just the essential deficiency in quality of being of a lower level of emanation as compared to a higher, is not entirely clear from this passage.

⁷⁴ While the term אמצע in *Sefer Yeẓirah* generally means the middle between extremes, R. Isaac also uses it in the sense of "within," that is, that which is

is in the middle of the head, and from there they receive, this way and that, and from every side and every corner there is from it a suckling for all.⁷⁶ Therefore it was necessary to say, after this section, **ten and not eleven**, for they are only ten, for the *Hokhmah* is counted with all of them, just as the Name whose beginning is *yh* is counted with all of them.⁷⁷ **Is aligned:** when you take two *yodin*,

both central and inner. This is similar to R. A. Ibn Ezra's usage in Ex. 8:18: **וְרוּחַ הָאָדָם בְּאִמְצַע הַגּוּף** (the spirit of man is within the body). See H. Padaya, "Pegam we-Tiqqun," 168 nn. 42, 43.

⁷⁵ See A. Ibn Ezra, *Sefer haS-Gen*, 6a, describing the letter *yod*: **וְצוּרָתוֹ כְּחִצֵּי גִלְגֹּל לְהוֹרֹת עַל כּוּלּוֹ וְהַמְעַט** (its shape is like a semicircle, to teach about its entire nature, which means that it encompasses all). Compare *Yesod Mor'a*, 19; *Sefer ha-Zahut* 27a.

The idea that the spiritually and ontologically superior entity is both within and surrounding that which is inferior is a Neoplatonic concept rooted in the nature of emanation. In the emanation continuum, the higher is both more interior and more general. This paradox is expressed by Ibn Gabirol in numerous formulations, especially with respect to the general intellect, which, in its oneness, as the origin of all entities, penetrates all entities, and encompasses all entities. See *Mekor Hayyim*, 2:8, 20; 3:15; 5:30. See J. Guttman, *Philosophies*, 99. See, also, *Sir ha-Yihud*, day 3, describing God: **סוֹבֵב הַכֹּל וּמֵלֵא אֵת כֹּל, וּבְהִיּוֹת הַכֹּל אֵתָהּ** . **בְּכֹל** . (Surrounding all and filling all, when all came into being, You are in all).

⁷⁶ The example of the brain that is both within the head and yet influences all parts of the body is meant to illustrate that which is both centered within and yet encompasses that in which it is centered, in the sense of influencing it. For the association of *Hokhmah* and the brain, see Abraham Ibn Ezra, Torah Commentary, Ex. 23:25: **כִּי הַנְּשֵׁמָה הִיא הַחִכְמָה, וּמוֹשְׁבָהּ בְּמוֹחַ** . **כִּי הַנְּשֵׁמָה הִיא הַחִכְמָה, וּמוֹשְׁבָהּ בְּמוֹחַ** (For the soul is wisdom, and its place in the brain of the head, and from it issues the power of all the senses and the movements of the will).

this facing that, they encompass all that is between them,⁷⁷ and all suckle from there.

⁷⁷ The Name *hyh* refers to *Keter* (Isaac of Acre, *PSY*, 383), which is hidden in *Hokhmah*, and implicit in all *sefirot*. In a similar way, *Hokhmah* is counted with all *sefirot*. R. Isaac states that this aspect of *Hokhmah* explains the thematic transition from *SY* 1:3 (sec. 3) to 1:4 (sec. 4): since *Hokhmah* and *Keter* are counted with all the *sefirot*, it is necessary to clarify which are counted as *sefirot* and what the total number of *sefirot* are. See lines 47-54, below.

⁷⁸ A. Ibn Ezra, *Sefer has-Šem*, 6b: the letter *yod*, graphically a semicircle with the value ten, is pronounced by use of the letters יו"ד, which add up to twenty (10+6+4=20), to indicate a full circle that encompasses all: **בצבור היותו מקיף, ובמבטא הוא כפול** להורות על עצמו.

R. Isaac applies this idea to his enumeration of the *sefirot*. According to R. Asher b. David: **יש שמונין החכמה לשתיים לפי שהיא טובבת הכל, וזהו מה שאמרו רז"ל כשם שיש שכינה למעלה כך יש שכינה למטה, שכן תמצא מחתימת שש קצוות שנחתמו בשמו הגדול, י' למעלה וי' למטה** (There are those who count *Hokhmah* as two, because it surrounds all, and this is what the Rabbis said, that just as there is a divine Presence above, so there is a divine Presence below, for so too, you find that regarding the six extremities that were sealed with the great Name, that *yod* is above and *yod* is below). R. Asher here clearly refers to R. Isaac, though as an anonymous opinion dissenting from the consensus, as counting the *sefirah Hokhmah* with both groups of *sefirot*, that is, with all, twice. As such, *Keter* is not counted separately and explicitly as one of the ten, but remains joined with *Hokhmah*, as in lines 48-51, below.

Ten and not nine:⁷⁹ even though *Hokhmah* is with all,⁸⁰ do not say "how can I say it is a *sefirah*?"⁸¹ And not eleven: and if you say that since *Hokhmah* is the beginning of the thought of speech,⁸² how can I not say eleven? Do not say so, and do not separate *Hokhmah*, [for *Hokhmah* is]⁸³ from *Keter*.⁸⁴ Another version: *Binah* is considered⁸⁵ the

⁷⁹ SY 1:4 (sec. 4), 141.

⁸⁰ See lines 44-45 above.

⁸¹ Even though *Hokhmah* is associated with all the *sefirot*, as stated above, lines 42-45, it is distinguished as a principle in itself, and as such qualifies to be enumerated as a *sefirah*.

⁸² The emanative order of the *sefirot* is correlated with the process of speech, divine and human. R. Isaac distinguishes the beginning of speech, the thought of speech, and the cause of the thought of speech, corresponding to *Binah*, *Hokhmah*, and *Keter*, respectively.

⁸³ MS Leiden 24/25 has this insertion as part of the text.

⁸⁴ Improper separation of *sefirot* is the cardinal sin of Kabbalah. See G. Scholem, *Reshit ha-Kabbalah*, 79, n. 2, quoting R. Abraham b. David concerning the crucial importance of the lack of separation between the divine attributes of judgment and mercy: וגם כן בפועל האמת שפעולתם אמת טעם הפרצופין מורה לשני ענינים הא' כי ידוע הוא שנאצלו שני הפכים האחד דין גמור וחבירו רחמים גמורים ואם לא נאצלו דו פרצופין ויהיה כל אחד פועל כפי מדתו יראה כשתי רשויות ויפעל כל אחד בלי חבור חבירו ובלי סיוע שלו אבל עתה שנבראו דו פרצופין כל פעולתם ביחד (So too, among the workers of truth whose work is true there are two reasons for [being double-faced]. The first is that it is known that two contrary principles were emanated: one that is entirely judgment and its partner that is entirely mercy. If they were not emanated as double-faced, each one would act according to its attribute, and they would appear as two independent divine powers, each one acting without connection to its partner and without its assistance. But now that they were created

beginning of speech.⁸⁶ Even though you cannot apprehend the

double-faced, all their actions are together, in equality and with complete unity, and there is no separation between them). This is the first recorded instance of kabbalistic concern for the impropriety of separating divine attributes in consideration of the danger of imputing divine dualism or polytheism. See *supra*, ch. 5.4, concerning R. Isaac's letter to Gerona, where he identifies Elisha b. Abuya's theological sin of "uprooting the plantings," (Ḥag. 15a) with the separation of *sefirot* from *Ein Sof* and from each other.

This issue should be located in context of philosophical discussions of the unity of God, such as Bahya Ibn Pakudah, *Hovot hal-Levavot*, trans. J. Ibn Tibbon, 1:7, concerning Euclid's definition of absolute one: והענין אשר אנחנו צריכין להעלות על דעתנו מן ולא האחדות, הוא יחידות גמורה ובדידות, שאין עמה חבור ולא דמיון בשום ענין, ולא רבוי ולא מספר בשום מנין, ולא התחבר והרבוי הנמצא במדות: (The matter of which we must be aware concerning unity is that it is complete oneness and aloneness, it has no connection or comparison to any matter, no multiplicity and no number in any aspect, it is not joined to anything nor separated from anything). See, too, 1:8, 9, and 10: הבורא יתעלה איננו מצד עצם כבודו, רק מצד קצור כה מליצה (the multiplicity that is found among the attributes of the Creator is not from the perspective of the essence of His Glory, rather from the perspective of the limited power of expression of a speaker to grasp its nature in one word that would indicate Him). The inseparability of divine attributes as understood by the Jewish philosophers becomes an essential aspect of the kabbalistic concept of the unity of the *sefirot* in the thought of R. Abraham b. David and his son, R. Isaac.

In the present instance, the issue of separation takes on a further significance, as part of what appears to have been an internal debate among kabbalists. R. Isaac's definition of *sefirah* on the basis of this passage is that divine principle which can be distinguished by thought and therefore counted. In this sense, the *sefirot*, while essentially unified, have distinctly discernable qualities. In lines 38-45, above, R. Isaac notes that *Hokhmah* is listed with two sets of *sefirot*, that it "mediates all," and that "it is central and it surrounds all." He says that on this basis, *SY* warns not to count eleven, but only ten *sefirot*: *Hokhmah* should not be counted twice, inner and outer, above and below. Here, lines 46-49, he notes that even though *Hokhmah* has two aspects, as "with" all

thought of the Scribe, the Author,⁸⁷ so as to reflect upon

the *sefirot* and yet also as the "beginning of the thought of speech," it should not be counted as two. By way of corroboration, R. Asher b. David (*Kabbalat R. Asher b. David*, 23) comments that "there are those who count *Hokhmah* twice because it surrounds all." R. Asher actually seems to justify this view with a statement from the *Bahir*, 171: כַּשֵּׁם שֵׁי שֵׁ שְׂכִינָה לְמַעְלָה כִּךְ יֵשׁ שְׂכִינָה לְמַתָּה (Just as the divine Presence is above, so the divine Presence is below), that is, there *Hokhmah* is both above and below the other *sefirot*. It should be noted that in context, the *Bahir* seems, in fact, to count *Hokhmah* as one *sefirah* surrounding all. R. Isaac interprets "ten and not eleven" as a refutation of the view of a double *Hokhmah*, one above and one below the other *sefirot*, a view that "separates" one aspect of *Hokhmah* from *Keter*. Instead, R. Isaac asserts that *Hokhmah* comes directly from *Keter* or *Maḥsavah*.

This, R. Isaac's first interpretation of ten and not nine... ten and not eleven is significantly different from those of R. Azriel and Nahmanides. His alternative version is similar to theirs, see below.

⁸⁵ This follows MS Harvard Heb. 58/11. Other MSS have: "*Binah* is the thought of..." redefining *Binah* in the terms used previously for *Hokhmah*.

⁸⁶ There are two major variants to lines 47-49, with minor differences within each group. The translation follows MSS Harvard Heb. 58/11, Cambridge Add. 671, Cambridge Or. 2116,8, Cincinnati 524/3, Montefiore 313.

The other main variant, beginning at line 47, is as follows: "even though it is with all, do not say 'how can one say it is a *Sefirah*?' And not eleven: and if you say that since *Hokhmah* is the beginning of [the thought of] speech, how can one not say eleven? Do not say so, and do not separate *Hokhmah* from *Keter*, which is the thought of the beginning of speech." That which is "with all" is clearly *Hokhmah*, as in the other variant, based on line 44, above. The argument ten and not eleven is not quite clear, however. Scholem suggests that the phrase "the thought of" is a mistaken insertion. *Hokhmah* is "the beginning of speech," and *Keter* is "the thought of the beginning of speech." The implication seems to be that *Hokhmah* and *Keter* should not be separated as distinct *sefirot*, a position that is difficult to maintain, since *Keter* is listed here and elsewhere as a *sefirah*.

and extend⁸⁸ to the cause of the thought of the beginning of speech, they are nought but ten.⁸⁹ And do not say nine, since there is no end to the cause of the thought of the

⁸⁷ These two epithets for God seem, in context, to refer to His role as enumerating *sefirot* and composing the letters of divine speech, respectively. The term סופר, writer or scribe, is related to counting, as one who counts letters, in Hagigah 15b, Kiddushin 30a. This is strictly a human professional title, however. Exodus Rabbah 28:3 alludes indirectly to God as סופר, but in the sense of a teacher of Torah. Abraham Ibn Ezra speaks of God as a מחבר defined as מחבר לשון הקודש (author of the [Hebrew] language) in *Sefer Zahut*, ed. G. H. Lipman (Florida, 1827, reprinted Jerusalem, 1970) 14.

⁸⁸ The term להתפשט seems to be used here as a kind of calque intended to convey the double entendre of the term s'étendre, as extension in space and in thought, such as s'étendre sur un sujet. It connotes the expansive reach and mastery of thought over an idea or object of thought. There is here a reflection of R. Isaac's theory of cognition, as the expansion of mind along a continuum of hierarchic relations, to the source of a given object or idea. The term להתפשט is later used in this sense by Yehiel Nissim da Pisa, *Minhat Kena'ot*, ed. D. Kaufman (Berlin, 1898) 25: אמר משה דרכי הכחות אני יודע אבל איני יודע האיך המתפשטת בהם מתפשטת בהם. Compare line 110 below.

⁸⁹ *Keter* is the cause of the thought, *Hokhmah*, of the beginning of speech, *Binah*. Even though *Keter* cannot be apprehended, it can still be inferred as the tenth *sefirah*.

This is similar to the interpretations of Nahmanides and R. Azriel. For Nahmanides, ten and not nine means that even though thought cannot grasp *Keter*, a person can perceive that it is a source, however hidden, and therefore fit to be counted as a *sefirah*. (PSY, in *Kiryat Sefer*, 6, (1930) 406, lines 13-17). Similarly, For R. Azriel, ten and not nine means not to exclude *Keter* from the *sefirot* when counting upwards. He adds that it also means not to exclude *Malkhut* when counting downwards. For both, ten and not eleven means do not include *Ein Sof* in the count of *sefirot* (PSY, *Ki tvei Ramban*, vol. 2, 454). Nahmanides' interpretation is similar.

beginning of speech, how can I deem it a *sefirah*?⁹⁰ Do not say they are eleven, nor nine. Even though speech is within *Ein Sof*, even so, there is a subtle cause or subtle essence which thought apprehends, through reflection upon a hint of it. Therefore it is a *sefirah* in thought, for it is a subtle essence by which there is ten.⁹¹ The things⁹² have dimensions and measure, but thought has no measure, so they⁹³ proceed ten by ten.⁹⁴ Therefore, from the subtle come

⁹⁰ This is a restatement of the previous argument.

⁹¹ R. Isaac here defines a *sefirah* at its abstract limit as that which can be distinguished, even indirectly, as an identifiable cause or essence by the faculty of thought. His position is based on the principle cited by Moses Ibn Ezra in the name of Hermes Trismegistus, in *Arugat hab-Bosem*, 123, 134, that the finite mind cannot grasp the infinite. Even though divine speech is rooted in the infinite, it has an essence or causal principle which can be discerned as distinct or discrete in its manifestation, and therefore grasped in an allusive way.

⁹² The "things" are the *sefirot*. The term is probably derived from Hagigah 12a, אמר רב בעשרה דברים, נברא העולם, evoking the sense of *rei*, expressing the substantiality of the *sefirot* as real attributes. Scholem translates דברים as *logoi*, *Origins*, 114-18. This reading receives support from Azriel of Gerona, *Perus ha-Aggadot*, 56b, lines 17-18: וּמִן הַרְצוֹן וְהַדְּבָרִים (From the Will and the Words come the sayings, which comprise the Will and the Speech that is completed in speech and action). Compare *ibid*, 41b, lines 5-6. R. Azriel uses the term דברים clearly in the sense of words, compared to "sayings" and generalized as דבור. Here, too, in R. Isaac's Commentary, דברים are contrasted with thought (line 54) and used in a sense parallel to דבור (lines 48-53). Nonetheless, the vagueness and ambiguity of the term may be intentional, to convey both meanings.

⁹³ The antecedent of the feminine plural here is the *sefirot*.

the inscribed, for ten come from ten, subtle ones from the innerness of the subtle ones.⁹⁵ We recognize, by the power of the intimation of thought, that which we apprehend and

⁹⁴ This is an interpretation of the end of the current mishnah, *SY* 1:4 (4): **וּמִידָתָן עֶשְׂרִים לֵאמֹר לֵהֶן סוּף** (Their measure is ten, for they have no limit). See next note.

⁹⁵ Prior to R. Isaac, the usual interpretation of the endless quality of the ten *sefirot*, understood as principles of number, is the progression of the base ten number system in sets of ten *ad infinitum*. See Saadiah b. Joseph, *Sefer Yezirah*, 54; Dunash Ibn Tamim, *Perus Sefer Yezirah*, (London, 1902), 26-27; Abraham Ibn Ezra, *Sefer ham-Nispar*, ed. M. Silberberg (Jerusalem, 1970) 3; Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 161. There is one distinctive interpretation, however, brought by Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 148, which takes a different approach, positing a set of ten existential categories which are, in themselves, infinite: **יֵשׁ סֵי שְׂמַעֲדָשׁ וְאוֹמֵר כִּי: דְּבָרִים אֶחָדִים בְּמִנִּין כְּנֹגֵד אֱלֹהֵי סְפִירוֹת וְאוֹתָן בְּרָא הַב"ה י' דְּבָרִים אֶחָדִים מִדָּתָן עֶשְׂרִים לֵאמֹר לֵהֶן סוּף וּמִידָתָן מִלְשׁוֹן מְדִידָה כְּלוּמֵר מִדָּתָן שֶׁל אֱלֹהֵי עֶשְׂרֵי דְּבָרִים אֵין לֵהֶן סוּף וְאֵלֹהֵי הֵן עוֹמֵק רֵאשִׁית וְעוֹמֵק אַחֲרִית וְכו' (There is someone who interprets saying that the Holy One, blessed be He, created ten unique things, numbered in correspondence to the ten *sefirot*, and the measure of these ten unique things has no limit. The meaning of "their measure" is from the term "measurement," which is to say that the measure of these ten things has no end, and these are "the depth of beginning and the depth of end.")** This interpretation has a proto-kabbalistic conception of *sefirah*-like entities which are created yet infinite; not *sefirot per se*, in the standard pre-kabbalistic sense, rather, entities of a transcendent nature.

R. Isaac puts the standard conception of the infinitude of the *sefirot*, in progressive sets of ten, in a hierarchic, Neoplatonic setting. Refined states of being emanate forth less refined states of being, or in the upward direction, refined, ontologically superior states of being can be inferred from less refined states, in progressive series. The interpretation of the *sefirot* brought by R. Judah b. Barzilai, with its conception of a set of ten unique, infinite principles parallel to the *sefirot*, may have contributed to shaping his conception. See, too, M. Idel, *Has-Sefirot se-me-'al has-Sefirot*, 241-46 regarding three sets of ten *sefirot* contained in the upper three *sefirot*

that which we should leave, because there is no apprehension by thought through intimation from there on.⁹⁶ For in a creature's apprehension through the innerness of the intimation of thought there is no power to apprehend *Ein Sof*, for all comprehension is within *Hokhmah* from *Haskel*, which⁹⁷ is the subtle intimation of His thought in *Ein Sof*. Therefore it says ten and not nine, for thought cannot apprehend so as to give measure above *Hokhmah*, nor even within *Hokhmah*, except through comprehension, as it says, comprehend in wisdom.⁹⁸ Comprehend could only be an

themselves.

⁹⁸ The term רמז, "intimation," is used here in a technical sense, following the discussion which opens Halevi's discourse on divine Names in *Kuzari*, 4:3. Commenting on the divine Name "Adonai," HaLevi states: הוא כרמז אל הדבר, ואם באמת הוא נעלה מן הרמז, כי הרמז הוא לצד מבלתי צד, כי יש שירמזו אל הדברים הנפעלים מאתו המשמשים לו שמוש ראשון, כאשר ירמזו אל השכל ויאמרו שהוא בלב או במוח, ויאמרו השכל הזה או השכל הלזה, ואין רמז באמת אל מה שאיננו נגבל במקום. (It is like an intimation of a thing which, in truth, is elevated beyond intimation. For intimation applies to that aspect which transcends specification, for there are [terms] which intimate matters which are influenced by Him, that serve Him directly, just as one intimates the intellect, saying it is in the heart or brain, or one intimates this or that intellect, even though in truth there is no intimation of that which is not bounded by place). The expression לצד מבלתי צד, in the sense of that which is excluded from, or transcends, a general category, is noted as a Judeo-Arabid idiom by M. H. Gottstein, *Tahbirah*, 78, sec. 179.3.4. Halevi here uses רמז, "intimation" in a manner similar to Moses Ibn Ezra's use of העברה, "metaphor": an indication in finite terms of that which is infinite or transcendent (*Arugat hab-Bosem*, 134-37. See *supra*, ch. 7.2). R. Isaac follows HaLevi's usage.

⁹⁷ *Hokhmah*.

infinitive, but if it is an imperative, it is only for the adepts.⁹⁹ It does not say "comprehend wisdom" or "know wisdom," but **comprehend in wisdom**, for wisdom comes through comprehension,¹⁰⁰ for comprehension is comprehending within wisdom and not comprehending of wisdom, rather to comprehend the comprehension there is in wisdom.¹⁰¹ And how is this

⁹⁸ The phrase "ten and not nine" is explained here as addressing the possibility that the *sefirot Keter* and *even Hokhmah* would not be discernable, that is, counted to yield a sum of ten, were an intimation of them not facilitated through *Binah*.

The various permutations of the term **בינה**, when used in the sense of mental activity rather than for the *sefirah* itself, are here translated as a form of the term "comprehension," rather than the usual term "understanding," to convey the function of the *sefirah Binah* as that which gathers and assesses multiple principles, as in line 74, below.

⁹⁹ As an infinitive, "to comprehend in wisdom" describes a paradigmatic cosmic process. As an imperative, an intellectual act at such an exalted level of mind could only be expected of an adept. The term **מטכילים** as denoting an intellectual and spiritual elite, especially one privy to an esoteric understanding of Torah, was used by R. Abraham Ibn Ezra, e. g. in his Torah commentary to Gen. 4:24. From R. Isaac the Blind on, it became the stock designation for kabbalistic adepts.

¹⁰⁰ Wisdom is filtered to the lower world, and the lower faculties, through comprehension. See next note.

¹⁰¹ R. Isaac's attention to the prepositional prefix *bet*, "in," echoes his comments above, lines 1, 6-7, as well as Bar Ḥiyya's discussion of nine modes of logical inclusion signified by the prefix *bet*, in *Megillat ham-Megalleh*, 6-8, especially his observation concerning the inclusion of species in the more particular individual, 8, lines 7-13: **והפרט או הדבר המיוחד אין צריך בצאתו לידי מעשה אל מינו ולא אל כללו ואין המין כולל את האחדים מדרך צאתם לידי מעשה ולא הם יוצאים לידי מעשה מדרך שהמין כולל אותם אבל הבינה והמדע מקיים את צורת המין ומלקט את סימני האחדים ועניניהם הנדמים זה לזה וכולל אותם בלב ומקיים את המין בדעת ואין**

comprehending? **Comprehend in wisdom and be wise in comprehension**, for they are hidden essences that have no inscription in them;¹⁰² there is no power to comprehend them, but rather [to comprehend] that thing which emanates from them. What is the comprehending for that thing, or for an adept who comprehends it?¹⁰³ From the inscribed essences there is a comprehending of those that are not inscribed, and from the inner apprehension of their thought there is a

האחדים צריכים אל המין בקיומן וביציאתם בעולם אבל המין
 individual does not need the species or the genus in
 its coming forth into actuality, and the species does
 not comprise the individuals in their coming forth into
 actuality, nor do they come forth into actuality by way
 of their inclusion in the species, rather,
 comprehension and knowledge establishes the form of the
 species and gathers the signs of the individuals and
 those of their aspects that resemble each other and
 comprises them in the heart and establishes the species
 in the mind. The individuals do not need the species
 for their existence or their going forth into the world
 but the species needs the individuals in order to be
 established in the heart). Bar Ḥiyya speaks here of the
 function of comprehension and knowledge in bringing the
 general into specific existence, a function similar to
 the relationship of *Binah* to the more generalized
 faculty of *Hokhmah*. R. Isaac may be reflecting this
 concept of the more general principle being brought
 into being through the more specific when he says:
 ענין ההבנה הוא להבין דבר מתוך דבר וכך אמר: (for wisdom comes through
 comprehension), line 62. Compare Nahmanides, *PSY*, 407,
 lines 2-4: בהכמה אין לך בה אלא הבנה שהבנת אותה מתוך דבר אחר והיא
 Comprehension is to comprehend
 one thing from another. Thus it says "in wisdom," for
 you have no access in it except by the comprehension by
 which you comprehend it from something else. This is
Binah, in which you gazed and became wise).

¹⁰² Both combinations of wisdom and comprehension, corresponding in R. Isaac's system to the *sefirot* *Hokhmah* and *Binah*, respectively, refer to processes in *Hokhmah*, beyond inscription.

comprehending of their cause in *'Ein Sof*.

Probe in them, probe the *Binah* in them, for the term probe only applies *in* something. A person does not say "I probed from it" but "in it", in the cause. Probing is by use of something else¹⁰⁴ that can probe the *Binah* in *Hokhmah*.¹⁰⁵ And inquire of them,¹⁰⁶ of merit and guilt¹⁰⁷ as it is written concerning them "there is no inquiring (Is. 40:28)." Therefore it did not say "inquire in them."¹⁰⁸ The explanation of "inquire of them" is build the frame¹⁰⁹ that is apprehended through perception, and evaluate¹¹⁰ it

¹⁰³ The contemplative process of the adept parallels that of divine mind itself.

¹⁰⁴ The "something else" is most likely "that thing which emanates from them" from line 65, above.

¹⁰⁵ The penetrating quality of the term "probe" is related to that which is "in" *par excellence*: *Binah* which is *in Hokhmah*.

¹⁰⁶ See I. Gruenwald, *SY*, 1:4 (4), 141, for the versions that read *מהן* as opposed to *בהן*, including Leiden Warn. 24 (5) Cod. Or. 4762.

¹⁰⁷ Or "innocence and guilt." The allusion seems to be to the *sefirot Hesed* and *Gevurah*, merit and guilt, respectively. Compare *Bahir*, 187. R. Isaac interprets the term "inquire" according to its halakhic connotation, as the process of inquiring into testimony concerning the innocence or guilt of a defendant, e. g. Mishnah Sanhedrin 4:1, 5:1.

¹⁰⁸ The full relevant phrase of the verse is *אין חקר לתבונתו*. In R. Isaac's reading this means that the process of "inquiry" does not assess *Binah* directly, but only that structure which derives from it, the *sefirot* emanating from it, "of it."

¹⁰⁹ See *supra*, ch. 8.2. The reference is to the lower *sefirot*.

according to the dimensions of the causes, which emanate from them and are constructed of them.¹¹¹ Each matter on its firm footing, its seat. The [Aramaic] translation of "its support" is "firm footing,"¹¹² from the expression "Your staff and Your support (Ps. 23:4)." This is the line aligned

¹¹⁰ The terms **הרגיש ושמע** are paired frequently by Judah Alharizi, in his translation of Maimonides' *Morhev Nevukhim*, 2:39 (compare S. Ibn Tibbon's version, 2:38). On their own, Alharizi translates **גב הרגיש** as "that which a person senses with the feeling of one of his limbs; **שיעור** as "correct thought" (translator's introduction). He uses them together in 2:39, however, when speaking of the prophet's clairvoyant ability, the power of mind to intuit the future: **ובחזק כח השיעור** ובהרגיש אשר בט יגידו מה שעתיד להיות ברגע אחד (the strength of the power of intuitive perception through which he tells, in an instant, what will be in the future).

Judah Ibn Tibbon uses **הרגיש** in the sense of feeling or sensation, e. g., in his translation of Judah Halevi's, *Kuzari*, 3:16. He translates the passage in 2:38 cited above (2:39 in Alharizi's version) with the term **כח המשער**, defined in his *Perus me-han-Milot Zarot*, entry **כח המשער**, as "the term for that power by which a person considers, without any knowledge, that things will be so."

In the present case, R. Issac uses these terms to convey the method of inductive thinking, beginning with the abstraction of perceptible phenomena and the evaluation of the results into categories according to the more general principles that stand behind them, a two-step intuitive process.

¹¹¹ That is, the dimensions that emanate from the causes, or *sefirot*, and are built of them. In so defining the term *hakor*, from *SY*, as the two-step process of comparing categories abstracted inductively from sense with ideal categories corresponding to the lower seven *sefirot* or "frame," R. Isaac may have had in mind the halakhic judicial procedure of *hakirah*, the examining of the empirical testimony of witnesses according to seven pre-established categories of inquiry, Mishnah *Sanhedrin* 5:1 and Talmud *Sanhedrin* 40a-42a. As a cognitive process, this is an elaboration of R. Isaac's theory that the sensible world can be abstracted into forms corresponding to the metaphysical

in the middle,¹¹³ which is *Yesod 'Olam*.¹¹⁴ And restore *Tiferet*, the Creator upon his dwelling-place, His dwelling-place is His *Nezah* and His *Hod*, which are below,¹¹⁵ to unite with *Binah*¹¹⁶ which gazes upon them.¹¹⁷

Their measure is ten.¹¹⁸ Every thing is a dimension¹¹⁹ and what is above it is its filling,¹²⁰ for dimension is a

structure from which it emanates.

¹¹² Targum Onkelos to Ex. 21:19.

¹¹³ I.e., "support" is established as synonymous with "staff" of Ps. 23:4, which evokes the "line aligned in the middle."

¹¹⁴ "Foundation of the world," Prv. 10:25. The reference is to the alignment of *Tiferet* and *Yesod*. See *SY* 1:3 (sec. 3), which describes a central line between the circumcised tongue and the circumcised male member, associated with these two *sefirot* respectively.

¹¹⁵ *Tiferet* is "the Creator" upon His throne of *Nezah* and *Hod*. See Scholem, *Origins*, 209-14 regarding the Provençal kabbalists' identification of *Yozer Beresit*, the divine epithet drawn from the mystical schools of the Merkavah and *Si'ur Komah*, with *Tiferet*, and the use of the term *Yozer Beresit* in the kabbalistic fragment cited in the name of R. Abraham b. David, Scholem, *Resit haq-Kabbalah*, 73, n. 2.

¹¹⁶ The process of unification with *Binah* is an interpretive reference to the phrase **שׁוּבָה**, restore or return, from *SY* 1:4 (sec. 4), cited line 73. Among the cognomena for *Binah* is the term *Tešuvah*. See *supra*, ch. 8.4.1.

¹¹⁷ Is. 18:4 speaks of God as gazing on His dwelling-place. **בָּחַן** is used frequently in Scripture for a spiritual gazing, e. g. Ps. 33:13, 102:20, et al.

¹¹⁸ *SY* 1:5 (sec. 7), 143.

¹¹⁹ This translation was chosen rather than the standard, abstract philosophical term "attribute," based on R. Isaac's emphasis here on the metrical aspect of the term.

power¹²¹ which is emanated from the dimension of the measurer,¹²² the essentiality of dimension and the emanation

¹²⁰ R. Isaac here gives a literal rendering of the biblical phrase "the earth and its fullness," Ps. 24:1, 50:12, 89:12, placing it in a multiple, relativistic, hierarchical Neoplatonic scheme in which "fullness" is any given ontologically distinct level of being causally prior to a lower level which contains it. See S. Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena*, 19, who notes that of the metaphors used by early Neoplatonists, "...the verb 'to fill' and its compounds, [are] the most common terms applied to the causal relationship. Each effect is literally filled by its cause..." See his note 26 for numerous examples from Proclus and Damascius. There may also be a hint here of talmudic usage of the term **מדה** as measuring vessel, as in Mishnah *Beḥah*, 3:8. See Scholem, *Origins*, 285. See *supra*, ch. 8.1.

¹²¹ Power, **כח**, is used here in the sense of property and agency, rather than to convey the formal Aristotelian concept of latent potentiality. For similar philosophic usage, compare, e. g., Abraham Ibn Ezra, Torah Commentary, Gen. 2:3, 31:19, Dt. 5:26.

Judah Alharizi, in his translation of Maimonides' *Moreh Nevukhim*, 1:53, relates the terms *koah* and *middah*, as in the following passages: **והנה התבאר כי הדרכים אשר בקש לדעת והודיעם אותם הם פעלים באים מכה הבורא יתברך והחכמים יקראו אותם מדות... וזה השם ירגילו** (It has been explained that the paths [Moses] sought to know, and of which he was informed, are the effects that come from the power of the Creator, blessed be He, which the sages call attributes... This term has customarily been applied to the powers and faculties of man). Similarly, *loc. cit.*: **והנה התבאר לך כי הדברים [! צ"ל הדרכים] והמדות ענין אחד והם המעולות הבאים מהבורא יתעלה בזה העולם וכל אשר ישיגו פעל מעולותיו יתארו הבורא במדה שיבא** (It has been explained that the [paths] and attributes are one and the same. They are the actions that comes from the Creator, exalted be He, in this world. They describe the Creator by whatever they grasp of the actions of His agency, by an attribute from whose power that action comes, according to the term defined by that action). R. Isaac apparently agrees with this characterization of *middah* as the agency resulting from a property, a *koah*.

of essence in *Ein Sof*.¹²³ *Depth* is the *Haskel*¹²⁴ unto *Ein Sof*. *Beginning* is the emanation of the power of the depth, which is *Hokhmah*, and the depth is from *Ein Sof*, and all is one. And since thought does not apprehend it, it says **ten and not eleven**.¹²⁵ The depth is the end of the apprehension of thought unto *Ein Sof*. End is *Binah*, which is a principle¹²⁶ called *heb*, like the end of the [divine]

¹²² Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 148: מדהן עשרה שאין מדהן מלשון מדידה (Their measure is ten without end. The meaning of "their measure," is from the term "measurement.")

¹²³ The term "*middah*," one of the terms used in Hebrew philosophical writing to denote divine attributes, applies to the aggregate lower six *sefirot*. See R. Asher b. David, *Sefer ha-Yihud*, in *Kabbalat R. Asher*, 59: ו' ספירות מעשר ספירות ונקרא מדותיו של הב"ה (Six of the ten *sefirot* are called the dimensions of the Holy One, blessed be He, by which all actions are effected that were prepared in potentiality from the six days of creation). The "measurer" refers to *Binah*, which presides over the lower, measured *sefirot*. The "essentiality of dimension" refers to *Hokhmah*, the interior essence of *Binah*. R. Azriel of Gerona associates the term *הויות*, essentiality, principally with the *sefirah Hokhmah*, in which the essences begin. See *Perush ha-Aggadot*, 170, lines 1-2. The "emanation of essence" refers to the action of *Maḥsavah*, the highest *sefirah*. To sum up, three hierarchic levels of being are described here, working upwards from dimensionality to essentiality to the initial stage of emanation, corresponding to three sefirotic levels, all part of one, unfolding emanative process.

¹²⁴ See *supra*, ch. 8.3, regarding this term. R. Isaac associates *Haskel* with the qualifying term "depth" in the list of *sefirot* in *SY* 1:5 (sec. 7). It is not a *sefirah*, but the extension of the *sefirot* towards *Ein Sof*.

¹²⁵ *Haskel* is not counted as a *sefirah*.

¹²⁶ See J. Klatzkin, *Thesaurus Philosophicus*, vol.

Name.¹²⁷ All the essences and pathways have no impression apprehensible in *Hokhmah*, for that which we mention are the headings of the dimensions,¹²⁸ the principle of the beginning of the causes of the separate entities. For those dimensions which have been mentioned are all in *Ein Sof*. In our language there are only the headings of the dimensions.¹²⁹ Their simplicity¹³⁰ is without separation,

1, 233, vol. 4, 190-91, for use of the term *תחלה* as *התחלה*, one of the Tibbonite terms of choice for rendering "principle."

¹²⁷ R. Isaac justifies the association of *Binah* with "end," through its correspondence with the letter *heh* at the "end" of the Tetragrammaton. While *Binah* actually corresponds to the *heh* that is the second letter of the Tetragrammaton, it is "like" the *heh* which is at the "end." R. Isaac may also be referring to the two-letter divine Name that ends in *heh*.

¹²⁸ The phrase *ראשי מדות* appears in *Heikhalot Rabbati*, ch. 3.3, in *Batei Midrashot*, ed. A. J. Wertheimer, 71, but its significance is not clear, and its context sheds little light on its meaning, or its utility for R. Isaac: *ראשי מדות שבראת הבושים* וכל מלאכי ראשי מדות שבראת הבושים . In *Hagigah* 13a the term *ראשי מדות* signifies an abbreviated outline or synopsis, the "chapter headings" of esoteric knowledge which the uninitiated are permitted to learn. R. Isaac adapts this connotation of preliminary, incomplete and superficial knowledge, combined with the standard talmudic expression for tip or initial extremity, such as *ראש המחילה*, "the tip of the wick (Mishnah Shabbath 2:4)," to arrive at a Neoplatonic conception: the appearance in this world of the tips, headings or initial aspects of the dimensions, which emanate from sources more deeply and unitively rooted in the sefirotic realm.

¹²⁹ Regarding earlier discussions of the limitations on predication of divine attributes as a function of the limitations inherent in human language, see Saadiah b. Joseph, *Ha-Emunot ve-had-De'ot*, ed. Landauer, 84.14-86.2), Bahya Ibn Pakudah, *Hovot hal-Levavot* 1:10 (142-45), Maimonides, *Moreh Nevukhim*,

for they are the principles of the causes of the separate

1:53. While the description of this limited power of predication as "headings," in the sense of rough "chapter headings," seems to be R. Isaac's own, it is based on a conception of a continuum in which divine attributes as they are expressed in human language really do connect with more properly and authentically abstract divine principles that have a more real and truthful existence. This conception, which grants a relative, graded value and relationship between the figurative expression of divine attributes and the reality upon which they are based, appears to derive specifically from the gradation implicit in a passage from *Hovot hal-Levavot*, 1:10 (145):

ואלו היו מספרים: אותו בענין שראוי לו מן המלות הרוחניות והענינים הרוחניים, לא היינו מבינים לא המלות ולא הענין, ולא היה אפשר שנעבד דבר שלא נדע, כי לא יתכן עבודת דבר שאינו נודע. על כן היה צריך שהיינה המלות והענינים כפי כח בינת השומע, כדי שיפול הענין על לבו על דרך הגשמות המובן מן המלות הגשמיות בתחלה, ואחר כך נתחכם לו ונדקדק להבינו ולהודיעו, שכל זה על דרך הקרבה ומליצת הספר, שהענין האמיתי הוא יותר דק ומעלה ומרום, ורחוק מאשר נוכל להבין אותו על תכונה דקוה ענינו. והמשכיל הנלבב ישתדל להתמשם קליפות המלות וגשמותם מעל הענין ויעלה במחשבתו ממדרגה אל מדרגה, עד שיגיע מאמתה הענין הנדרש אל מה שיש בכח יכלתו (If one would speak of Him in a manner befitting Him, in spiritual words and ideas, we would understand neither the words nor the ideas, and it would not be possible for us to worship that which we do not know, for that which is not known cannot be worshipped. Therefore it was necessary that the words and ideas be according to the power of understanding of the listener, in order that the matter be taken to heart in a corporeal way, as understood from the corporeal words at first. Afterwards, as we gain wisdom concerning Him, and are careful to understand Him and know Him, we realize that all this is in the manner of approximation and figurative language, and that the true matter is more refined and exalted and transcendent and far beyond what we can understand by virtue of the refined nature of the matter. The insightful, aroused person will attempt to abstract the shells and corporeality of the words from the matter and ascend in his thought from level to level, until he arrives at the truth of the matter at hand and what is within the power of his grasp). If this passage indeed underlies R. Isaac's thinking on the nature of attributes or dimensions, then in speaking of the "headings of the dimensions" he has accentuated R. Bahya's vision of the graded continuum of the reality of attributes and structured

entities.¹³¹ Zenith is that which supports all,¹³² therefore it is placed in the middle;¹³³ and also since he was obliged to discuss from the mediator¹³⁴ which is elevated, from

it in emanationist terms, in which the attributes or dimensions which appear in the phenomenal world are coarse indications of real attributes as they exist, unified, in the sefirotic realm, or ultimately, in the Infinite.

¹³⁰ Maimonides, *Moreh Nevukhim*, 1:58, describes God as *הַפְּשׁוּט בְּתַכְלִית הַפְּשׁוּטוֹת* (He is simple in the ultimate degree of simplicity). See S. Ibn Tibbon, *Peruṣ Ne-ham-milot Zarot*, entry *פְּשׁוּט*. See, too, *Hovot ha-Levavot*, 1:10 (157): *מִי שֶׁקָּצַר שִׁכְלוֹ לִהְיוֹן לְהַבִּין עֲנִיָּן*: *הַפְּשׁוּטוֹת - הַחֲזִיק בְּשִׁטּוֹת* (He whose intellect is too narrow to understand simplicity, should utilize the names).

¹³¹ The idea that all attributes are one in God's essence appears in Saadiah Gaon, *Ha-'Emunot we-had-De'ot*, ed. Landauer 84.14-86.2; Bahya Ibn Pakudah, *Hovot ha-Levavot*, 1:10 (142). On the development of R. Isaac's unique usage of *הַנּוֹפְרִידִים* as the "separate entities" and its relation to the Aristotelian term "separate intellects," see *supra*, ch. 5.2.

¹³² The identification of *קְרוֹם*, Zenith, as "that which supports all," summarizes R. Judah b. Barzilai's association of *קְרוֹם*, as representing the heavens, with the spirit which, despite being lighter and higher, supports the world, according to Onkelos' answer to Hadrian's question *הַצּוֹלָם עַל מָה הוּא עוֹמֵד*. (*PSY*, 159, with reference to Y. Hagigah, 2:1, fol. 7a). R. Isaac does not merely identify Zenith as the heavens, however. According to R. Asher b. David, *Peruṣ Sem ham-Meforaš*, in *Kabbalat R. Asher b. David*, 18, lines 25-26, and R. Isaac of Acre, *PSY*, 388-89, Zenith is the *sefirah Keter*, and this tallies well with R. Isaac's allusive reference to "that which supports all," and "is elevated with all in the Zenith unto *'Ein Sof* (lines 83-84)."

¹³³ Zenith, or *Keter*, does not appear at the beginning of *Sefer Yezi'rah's* list of *sefirot*, 1:5 (sec. 7), as might have been expected given its status as the first emanation. Rather, it appears in the midst of the list, in fifth place. R. Isaac justifies this with the argument that its central position conveys the notion

above to below and from below to above, for it is sealed and elevated with all¹³⁵ in the Zenith unto *Ein Sof*.

that it supports all emanations below it.

¹³⁴ The mediator is the *sefirah Hokhmah*, according to line 39 above. The point is that *Sefer Yeẓirah's* list of *sefirot*, which might have been expected to begin with *Keter*, the first emanation, begins with the principle which, in R. Isaac's system, signifies *Hokhmah*, the *sefirah* which mediates all other.

¹³⁵ The list of dimensions in *Sefer Yeẓirah* 1:5 (sec. 7) is clear and orderly enough when read simply as cardinal directions and dimensions, but oddly jumbled when read according to their associations with kabbalistic *sefirot* (see line 84). R. Isaac tries to explain why the list of *sefirot* begins with *Hokhmah*, not *Keter*, and why the list alternates back and forth between higher and lower *sefirot* when read kabbalistically. He suggests this conveys the special role of *Hokhmah*, which is "with all," and "surrounds all (line 42)," which mediates and controls the ascent and descent of divine efflux, "from above to below and from below to above," and which is sealed, that is, limited from below by each *sefirah*, and elevated to *Keter* and *Ein Sof*.

Nadir is *Zaddik*, east is *Tiferet*, west is *Nezah*, north is the fierceness of *Gevurah*,¹³⁶ south is *Hod*.¹³⁷ Regarding this comes the verse that says "To You, Lord, is the greatness and the power and the splendor and the eternal victory and the majesty, for all in heaven and earth is Yours, Lord, the kingdom and the exaltation as head above all (1 Chr. 29:11)." It does not follow the order of the directions,¹³⁸ rather the order of the powers, as they are

¹³⁶ One group of MSS has a variant reading: צפון גבורה ויש אומרים עוז בגבורה דרום הוד (*North is Gevurah*, and there are those who speak of fierceness for *Gevurah*, south is *Hod*. See Leiden 24/25 (Cod. Or. 4762), Jewish Theological Seminary 2325/10, Cambridge Or. 2116,8. MS Harvard has : ויש אומרים צפון בגבורה דרום הוד (There are those who say north is for *Gevurah*, south is *Hod*).

Compare line 340, below, where north is the *sefirah Malkhut*. See I. Tishby's note, Azriel of Gerona, *Perus ha-'Aggadot*, 142, n. 3, that 'oz stands for either *Gevurah* or *Malkhut*. Compare *ibid.*, 133 and n. 4.

¹³⁷ Rationales for the associations between certain directions and *sefirot* are offered in lines 93-98, below. These associations underwent numerous revisions throughout the history of Kabbalah, (see Moses Cordovero, *Pardes Rimmonim*, part 23, under the appropriate entries for the cardinal directions). R. Isaac's Commentary itself contains a number of apparent inconsistencies. West is associated with *Nezah*, lines 84, 340, yet is described in terms applicable to *Malkhut*, lines 87, 95, 338. North is associated with *Gevurah*, line 84, but with *Namlakhah*, line 340. In one group of MSS there is an indication that R. Isaac himself recognized the existence of other kabbalistic opinions supporting different positions. See previous note.

¹³⁸ This refers to the directions as listed in order in *SY*, 1:5 (sec. 7).

aligned¹³⁹ to pray towards the west.¹⁴⁰ The order of tefillin is from east to west. For the four-headed *sin* is *Hokhmah* and *Binah*, *Ḥesed* and *Paḥad*, this is by day; and the three-headed *sin*¹⁴¹ is to the right of the person who lays tefillin, which is east when he stands in the south, and the

¹³⁹ This version also appears in MSS Cincinnati 523/3, Cambridge Add. 671, Jewish Theological Seminary 1990, Halberstam 444. Other MSS, Harvard Heb. 58/11, Leiden 24/25 (Cod. Or. 4762), Jewish Theological Seminary 2325/10, Montefiore 313, Cincinnati 524/3, Cambridge Or. 2116,8 read: בַּתְּבוֹנִים (as they are contemplated...)

¹⁴⁰ Compare lines 340-41, below, where this verse is cited as listing the *sefirot* in the order of the cardinal directions as presented in *SY* 4:2 (sec. 38), recension א (158). Here, however, the order of directions in *SY* 1:5 (sec. 7), has north before south, and the order of directions is not parallel to the names of *sefirot* taken from the verse.

Regarding prayer towards the west, see Sanh. 91b, concerning the transit of the sun: א"ל פני מה שוקעת: כ"ל פני מה שוקעת. See, too, Solomon Ibn Gabirol, *Keter Malkhut*, ch. 16, line 147; ch. 23, lines 3-4.

Padaya suggests that "west," here, may refer not to the *sefirah Neḥah*, as in line 84 above, but to the talmudic dictum "the divine Presence is in the west (Baba Batra, 25a)," indicating *Malkhut*. See H. Padaya, *Pegam we-Tikkun*, 171 n. 50. If so, the gist of the sentence is that the designations of 1 Chr. 29:11 are not in order of the cardinal directions, but in descending order of emanating powers from upper to lower, all bestowing efflux, or praying, in the direction of the lowest *sefirah*, *Malkhut*. See below, line 95. See, too, *Sefer hab-Bahir*, 156, and Isaac of Acre, *PSY*, 389, both supporting this interpretation.

If west, here, were to indicate the *sefirah Neḥah*, as in line 84 above, then the westerly direction of the verse may refer to the east-to-west order represented by *Tiferet* followed by *Neḥah*, and the list of *sefirah* names in the verse would follow a top-to-bottom, east-to-west order.

¹⁴¹ Which represents *Tiferet*, *Neḥah*, *Hod*.

four-headed *sin* is in the west. By night, these four are to the south, namely *Nezah*, *Hod*, *Tiferet*, *Hesed*, and the three-headed *sin* to the north: *Zaddik*, *Atarah*, *Paḥad*.¹⁴² One who prays to the west has his left to the south and his right to the north, where the three-headed *sin* is. This is [what is alluded to in] "Your right hand" [repeated] twice (Ex. 15:6): the first is said regarding *Tešuvah* over *Tiferet*,¹⁴³ which is toward the right, like "the Menorah in the south,"¹⁴⁴ and the second is said regarding *Tiferet* over *Atarah*,¹⁴⁵ which is His right when one turns to the

¹⁴² At night there seems to be a general shift downward in terms of which *sefirot* are represented by the letters *sin*: all the left-handed *sefirot* of rigor are group together with the three-headed *sin* to the north; the seven "heads" of the two letters refer only to the lower seven *sefirot*.

The wearing of tefillin at night is cited in *Menahot* 36b as permissible according to the opinion of R. Ashi, but is classified as a precept which should not be divulged. This position was endorsed by R. Abraham b. Isaac of Narbonne, *Sefer ha-ʿEskol*, ed. S. Albeck, (Jerusalem, 1984) 229-30. See, too, *Tur*, O. H. 30, and commentaries.

The notion that the alignment of *sefirot* differs between day and night first appears with regard to prayer, in the position recorded in the name of R. Jacob ha-Nazir in the fragments of the debates between R. Abraham b. David and R. Jacob ha-Nazir, in G. Scholem, *Resit hak-Kabbalah*, 73 n. 2.

¹⁴³ This is tefillin by day, with the four-headed *sin* representing the grouping of *sefirot* centered around *Binah* or *Tešuvah*, and the three-headed *sin* centered on *Tiferet*.

¹⁴⁴ *Yuma* 21b. That is, by day, when the wearer of tefillin stands in the south, the three-headed *sin* with the *sefirah Tiferet* is to the right, in the east, as in lines 89-90 above.

¹⁴⁵ This is tefillin by night, with the four-

west.¹⁴⁶ The term *nizrah* (east) refers to that which receives light in order to shine, for it does not say *mazriah* but *nizrah*, a cause¹⁴⁷ of light which receives the

headed *sin* representing *sefirot* centered around *Tiferet*, and the three-headed *sin* representing *sefirot* grounded in *Atarah*.

¹⁴⁶ This exegesis grapples with certain kabbalistic anomalies in the verse Ex. 15:6, the full text of which is: "Your right hand, Lord, is glorified in power, Your right hand, Lord, shall crush the enemy." The problems with the verse are: first, that the right hand is portrayed with two different sets of attributes; and second, that the right hand, which for the midrashic and especially the kabbalistically-minded typically represents the agency of divine love, is here an agency of divine destruction, a left-handed function. R. Isaac solves both problems by interpreting the handedness of the verse as a reference to the differing positions of the three- and four-headed *sin* on the tefillin under two different circumstances: by day and by night. The glorification of the right hand refers to tefillin by day, where the right side, representing *Tiferet*, *Nezah*, *Hod*, is crowned or glorified by the superior four-headed *sin* representing the *sefirot* above it, collectively termed כח, power. See Azriel of Gerona, *Perush ha-ḥAggadot*, 9b. 10a, 42b, 55a, 60b, who generally associates this term with the upper *sefirot Hokhmah* or *Binah*. The destructive agency of the right hand is explained by the tefillin by night, in which the three-headed *sin* is to the right, yet represents the *sefirot* of divine destruction and judgment, *Yesod*, *Atarah*, *Paḥad*.

Regarding those *sefirot* associated with the right hand and those with the left, see Asher b. David, "Perush Shem ha-Meforash," *Kabbalat R. Asher b. David*, 13.

¹⁴⁷ "Cause," as that which serves as receptive capacity as well as agent, is used here in the standard Neoplatonic sense of "intermediate cause." See Judah Halevi, *Kuzari*, 1:1, and especially 5:20: והקדמה השנית ההודאה בטבות אמצעיות, אך אינם פועלות, אבל הם טבות על דרך החומר או על דרך הכלים (The second premise is the acknowledgment of intermediate causes, which are not active, but causes in the sense of the material cause or instruments). See, too, Maimonides, *Moreh Nevukhim*, 2:48.

shining of light,¹⁴⁸ Since its face is always towards the west, and it goes that way, west is called "that to which the sun comes (Dt. 11:30 et al)."¹⁴⁹ *Ne'arav* (West) is that which is received¹⁵⁰ in surety from those mixed things which have no impression.¹⁵¹ *Daron* (South) [from] *di-ron* (which elevates) *Tiferet*,¹⁵² which is received in prayer and activates that which was given to it in custody.¹⁵³ *Ḥafon*

¹⁴⁸ R. Isaac's etymology recognizes a passive, receptive quality to the *ni-* prefix, patterned after *zarak-mizrak*: a *mizrak*, bowl, is that which receives what is thrown or to be thrown. He does not cite any source, but Jonah Ibn Jannah, *Sefer ha-Rikmah*, trans. J. Ibn Tibbon, ed. M. Wilensky (Jerusalem, 1964) 72 (lines 8-13), suggests that the *ne-* prefix to nouns and adjectives often serves as the nominal equivalent of a verbal *nif'al*.

The conceptual point is that *mizrah* is an appropriate term for *Tiferet* as expressing its middle position in the hierarchy of *sefirot*, receiving from above and bestowing below. Compare *Bahir*, sec. 155.

¹⁴⁹ R. Isaac adduces further proof for the receptive connotation of the prefix *ni-* or *ne-* from the biblical expression *מִמַּזְרָח הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ* for west, the direction which *receives* the sun.

¹⁵⁰ *Nezah* is received, in the sense of *collatio*, by the contemplative mind. Compare the similar and obvious passive sense of *מִתְקַבֵּל* in the following sentence.

¹⁵¹ *Nezah* transmits efflux from the upper *sefirot*, "mixed" in unity.

¹⁵² *Hod*, which is below, elevates *Tiferet* above it.

¹⁵³ This refers to the activity of the *sefirah* *Hod*. The functions of the *sefirot* *Nezah* and *Hod* are the subject of ongoing debate and confusion among kabbalists of the thirteenth century. See Asher b. David, "Peruṣ Ṣem ham-Meforaš," *Kabbalaṯ R. Asher b. David*, 13, lines 9-17. In this lines 95-96, R. Isaac apparently regards both *Nezah* and *Hod* as more

(North) is that which is hidden from one who turns toward it; it is the dimension that has within it the hidden satisfaction of the will of those things which turn toward it.¹⁵⁴ The (shewbread) table was in the north, an allusion [to the fact] that from before God, be He blessed, there is given to each and every corporeal being sufficient for its need.¹⁵⁵ And the unique Lord rules... ever upwards over all.¹⁵⁶ Unique, in that He is unified with all and all is unified in Him.¹⁵⁷ Rules in all of them: this is the

accessible objects of contemplation and prayer, which reflect or transmit to the mind that which is deposited in them in "surety" and "custody" by the upper, more arcane, *sefirot*.

¹⁵⁴ The point is that North, *zafon*, derives etymologically from *zafun*, hidden, representing that principle of divine rigor and justice, which does not accede to the will of its petitioner in any apparent way, its beneficence present but remaining hidden.

Compare David Kimḥi, *Sefer has-Sorasim*, ed. J. H. R. Biesenthal and F. Lebrecht (Jerusalem, 1967, reprint of Berolini, 1847) 317, entry *zafan*: קרא טוב העולם הזה צפון כי לא השיגהו יד האדם לדצונו כי אם ברצון הבורא והנה צפון הטוב נסנו כמנו כאילו הוא צפון (He calls the good of this world "hidden" because man has not the ability to grasp it at will, but rather according to the Will of the Creator, and thus the good is withheld from him as if it is hidden). R. Isaac's and R. David's comments bear a conceptual similarity, and share references to hiddenness and the will of man. Whether they were mutually aware of each other's comments, or whether they had another common source, requires further investigation.

¹⁵⁵ Yuma 21b.

¹⁵⁶ *SY* 1:5 (sec. 7) reads: וארון יחיד מושל בכלן... ועד ועד עד (The unique Lord rules over all of them... for ever and ever). R. Isaac reads one of these redundant terms עד as a reference to spiritual direction, upwards, rather than as temporal duration.

rulership that is comprised of all the aforementioned dimensions in *Ein Sof*.¹⁵⁸ From His holy dwelling: these are the patrices.¹⁵⁹ For ever: support, standing, stability, uprightness, regarding something which still is, from the word *od*, which is to say, that it still stands.¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁷ R. Azriel identifies the "unique Lord" as a reference to *Ein Sof*, in *PSY*, 455.

¹⁵⁸ The phrase "all of them," from *SY* 1:5 (sec. 7), is interpreted as a reference to the *sefirah* *Atarah* or *Malkhut*, here called *Memshallah*, gathering and comprising all the sefirotic powers above it. R. Isaac's choice of the term *Memshallah* in this instance is apparently an intentional variation on מושל from *SY*, representing the feminine transformation of the rule of *Ein Sof* into the empowered rulership of the lowest *sefirah* which comprises all *sefirot* above it, in which and through which all rule. Here, again, as in lines 93-94 above, R. Isaac, in his choice of the term, may be employing an allusion to the receptive connotation of the *me-* nominal prefix.

¹⁵⁹ The MSS Angelica and Hebrew Union College Cincinnati 524/3 have הזכות. The אבות "patrices," referring to the *sefirot* *Hesed*, *Gevurah*, *Tiferet*, makes better sense. See Azriel of Gerona, *PSY*, 455: ממנון קדשו. נקרא גדולה גבורה תפארה, כמא דאחא אמרה ממנונה אלהי קדם (From His holy dwelling, which is called *Gedulah*, *Gevurah*, *Tiferet*, as you say, "the dwelling place of God from yore (Dt. 33:27).") See, however, Moses Cordovero, *Pardes Rimmonim*, 23:7, where he explains that the term זכות, "merit," can itself designate the *sefirot* *Hesed*, *Gevurah*, or *Tiferet*, citing the opinions of the *Zohar*, II, 251 (*Gevurah*); *Tikkunei Zohar*, 10 (*Hesed*); Joseph Gikatillia, *Sa'arei Or*, ed. J. Ben-Shelomo, vol. 2 (Jerusalem, 1981) 14-16 (implying *Gevurah*); Isaac of Acre, *Me'irat Einayim*, ed. C. Erlanger (Jerusalem, 1975) 69 (as *Tiferet*). In each of these sources, however, reference is to one or the other *sefirah*. R. Isaac here, however, speaks in the plural, referring to a group of *sefirot*.

¹⁶⁰ While the idiomatic meaning of עדי עד as forever is clear enough, R. Isaac seems concerned to preclude any interpretation of עד that might imply limitation. He therefore places the word etymologically

Their envisioning:¹⁶¹ Envisioning is contemplation of one thing from another,¹⁶² as it says "I will envision to see (Hab. 2:1)," for the divine word appeared to him.¹⁶³ Envisioning means that each and every cause receives from a cause higher than itself.¹⁶⁴ For a dimension draws from a dimension that is hewn, and the hewn from the engraved, and the engraved from the inscribed, and the inscribed from the

in an existential context, connoting "standing existence." See Abraham Ibn Ezra, *Torah Commentary to Ex. 3:15*, regarding the supernal world: וְכָל זֶה הַעוֹלָם וְכָל זֶה הַעוֹלָם (This entire world is glory, and it is entirely permanent).

¹⁶¹ *SY* 1:6 (sec. 8) 143.

¹⁶² Compare Abraham Bar Ḥiyya, *Hegyon han-Nefes*, 38: הִכָּח הַמְבִיֵּא לְהַבִּין דְּבַר מִתּוֹךְ דְּבַר (the power that enables one to understand one thing from another); also Maimonides, *Hilkhot Talmud Torah*, 1:11: וְיוֹצֵיא דְּבַר מִדְּבַר (and deduce one thing from another). This echoes the the talmudic expression for halakhic reasoning, Berakhot 19a, Yebamot 109b: מִדְּמָה מִלֵּיתָא לְמִלֵּיתָא.

¹⁶³ The full relevant phrase of the verse is: "I will envision to see what He will say to me." While רָאָה is generally defined in the Merkavah and Heikhalot literature in visual terms (e. g., Hagigah 15a, Berešit Rabbah 2:6, *Heikhalot Rabbati*, ed. A. J. Wertheimer, vol. 1, 67), the fact that it is followed here by "to see" renders that definition redundant. This, together with the fact that what is to be seen is not itself a visually-related object, but of a different sense-related realm, the divine word, makes this an excellent proof-text for R. Isaac's contention that רָאָה means not just envisioning or gazing as an act of spiritual sight, but another and very specific intellectual process. It refers to the contemplation or inference of one thing from another, in this case, an object of inner hearing grasped through an object of inner sight.

¹⁶⁴ This passage and its Neoplatonic character is discussed *supra*, ch. 6. R. Isaac's interpretation of "רָאָה," their envisioning," in the sense of

hidden.¹⁶⁵ Everything is this is within that, and this is from within that, and all are tied, this in that and this with that.¹⁶⁶ How do they receive? The manner of their receiving is of something subtle and an essence.¹⁶⁷ Like the appearance: contemplation that has no substance. Appearance is the radiance of the subtle purity¹⁶⁸ of the apprehension

"layering," follows Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 163.

¹⁶⁵ *Keter*. M. Idel examines the identity of the term *rešimah*, inscribed, according to the Provençal and Gerona kabbalists, and concludes that "the inscribed" is usually associated with the *sefirah Hokhmah*. See "Ha-Sefirot she-me-'al ha-Sefirot," 240, n. 9. Azriel of Gerona, *PSY*, 456, identifies "subtle inscription" with *Hokhmah*, "engraved" with *Binah*, and "hewn" with the letters within *Binah*, and this is in agreement with R. Isaac's hierarchy. This leaves "the hidden" as a reference to *Keter*.

See also *supra*, ch. 6.

¹⁶⁶ Compare line 19, above.

¹⁶⁷ The question of what, exactly, is transmitted in the process of emanation was examined by Maimonides at length in the *Moreh Nevukhim*, 2:4, 12. While R. Isaac here does not reflect the Tibbonite vocabulary of the discussion, his concern to get across the spiritual nature of the substance transmitted is consonant with Maimonides' position. See, too, Judah Halevi, *Kuzari*, 5:12: אַם כֵּן הָאֲצִילוֹת הַזֵּאת עֲצָם לְעִלֵּי בְלֵהִי מִתְגַּשֵּׁם עוֹמֵד (if so, this emanation is an intellectual essence, without corporeality, existing in its essentiality). See discussion *supra*, ch. 5.1.

¹⁶⁸ The term זְכוּת as applied to the purity of perception and apprehension appears in Samuel Ibn Tibbon's translation of Maimonides' introduction to *Avot*, "Shemonah Perakim," ch. 2: זְכוּת הַתְּבוּנָה וְטוֹב (purity of understanding and excellence of comprehension is to have a firm grasp of a matter and to understand it quickly, without taking much time).

The pairing of הַזְכוּת וְהַזוּהָר, purity and radiance, appears in one of the recensions of *Pirkei Heikhalot Rabbati* cited by Wertheimer (recension 'ט).

of that which is received,¹⁶⁹ concerning which was said "and they called one to another (Is. 6:3)" and the [Aramaic] Translation of Jonathan [ben Uziel] is "And they receive one from another."¹⁷⁰ Like the appearance of lightning: this is the subtle purity of the apprehension of that which is received. Their limit is not like their dimension.¹⁷¹ A dimension is something received by the separate things, for

called *Sefer Heikhalot*, in *Batei Midrashot*, vol. 1, 110, note 2). The language of this passage is an interesting mix of philosophic and Heikhalot diction.

¹⁶⁹ R. Isaac generalizes this phrase from *SY* to apply not just to the appearance of the *sefirot*, but to all modes of appearance and perception *per se*, in a formulation strikingly phenomenological in quality. In this he follows in the general direction of R. Saadiah Gaon in his *PSY*, 2:1, 70, quoted by Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 162, who explains "like the appearance of lightning" as the initial flash of illumination of any object to the mind: רמז כי תחלת כל דבר כי תראה לאדם בדעתו תבריק ככרך כמו להם החרב כן יראה הדבר אצלו בראשונה אחר כך יגלה לו הדבר ויתקן בעצם פעם עד שיהיה מוכן ומונח לפניו (it alludes to the fact that the beginning of every thing that appears to a person in his mind flashes like lightning, like the blade of a sword; thus it appears to him at first. Afterwards the thing is revealed to him and gradually established until it is ready and set before him). The comparison of fleeting comprehension to lightning and the "flashing blade of a sword," Gen. 3:24, was also used by Maimonides, *Noreh Nevukhim*, introduction. While R. Isaac does not use R. Saadiah Gaon's or R. Judah b. Barzilai's terms, his general notion of "appearance" as insubstantial, as the pure and subtle radiance of that which is grasped, is meant to convey this initial moment of perception or apprehension, as yet without substance, a mere flash.

See, too, Judah Halevi, *Kuzari*, 4:3, 213, lines 6-15; 214, lines 8-16. See *supra*, ch. 7.

¹⁷⁰ The proof-text shows that what is "received" in the heavenly realm is a "calling," something insubstantial.

¹⁷¹ *SY* 1:6 (sec. 8) describes the *sefirot* in terms

the prophets saw dimensions according to their apprehension,¹⁷² and by virtue of receiving their power they expanded their consciousness more than other human beings,¹⁷³ for they gained by this a breadth of soul to extend to¹⁷⁴ particulars within *Ein Sof*.¹⁷⁵ But their limit

of תכליתן , while *SY* 1:5 (sec. 7) describes them in terms of מידתן . R. Isaac draws attention to the distinction and explains it.

¹⁷² Judah Halevi, *Kuzari*, 4:3, 208, lines 1-3; 212, lines 15-18; 216, lines 1-6; 222, lines 2-8. Maimonides, *Yesodei hat-Torah*, 7:1,2; *Moreh Nevukhim*, 2:36, regarding the different ranks of the prophets according to the degree of their intellectual capacities.

¹⁷³ Regarding the effect of prophecy in expanding the mind of the prophet, see Maimonides, *Yesodei hat-Torah*, 7:7: הנביא אפשר שיהיה נבואתו לעצמו בלבד להרחיב לבו ולהוסיף דעתו עד שידע מה שלא היה יודע מאותן הדברים (It is possible that a prophet's prophecy be for himself alone, to expand his heart and increase his mind until he knows what he had not known of the great matters). See, too, *Moreh Nevukhim*, 2:37.

The concept of the reception of the emanation of multiple supernal powers by the mind of the prophet appears in *Sefer ha-'Azamim*, 12-13: האופן השני הוא אצילות כח שנאצל מעולם העליון ר"ל מהשכלים הנפרדים על הכה השכלי עד שיתעצם בעצמותם ויצמייר בצורתם ר"ל צורת השכל (The second way is the emanation of a power that emanates from the supernal world, that is, from the separate intellects, upon the intellectual capacity until it is strengthened with their strength and formed in their form, that is, the form of the intellect, and becomes intellectual to the highest degree that is within its power).

The comparison of the expanded intellectual powers of the prophets to the minds of other human beings also appears in *Sefer ha-'Azamim*, 12: וישלה בנפשו ענינים יתעורר ויבין בהם ענינים רבים מה שאין ביכולת אדם זולתו לדעתם ולא שיתבונן מהם מה שהוא יבין בשום פנים (And there will be transmitted to his soul matters through which he will be aroused to understand many matters not within the ability of people other than himself to know, of which they will not understand what he understands in any way). See, too, Maimonides, *Moreh*

is the limit of their investigation.¹⁷⁶ For every dimension has a limit and every finite thing has an end, like that which is written "for all finite things I have seen an end" but "Your commandment," even though its beginning has a limit, continually expands "exceedingly (Ps. 119:96)" unto *Ein Sof*.¹⁷⁷ While everything that perishes has a limit,

Nevukhim, 2:36,37,38.

¹⁷⁴ See line 50 and note, above.

¹⁷⁵ The theory of knowledge which has as its goal the clear and appropriate comprehension of particulars in their ultimate, general context derives from Abraham Ibn Ezra's Torah Commentary, Ex. 33:21: **כִּי הוּא לְבַדּוֹ יוֹדֵעַ הַפְּרָטִים וְחֻלְקֵיהֶם בְּדֶרֶךְ כָּלֵל** (for He alone knows the particulars and their parts in terms of the general). See, too, his commentary on Gen. 18:21. See Ibn Ezra, *Perusei hat-Torah le-Rabbenu Avraham Ibn Ezra*, ed. A. Weiser, (Jerusalem, 1976), introduction, 36-37. R. Isaac's formulation "to extend to particulars within *Ein Sof*," that is, setting particulars within their infinite context, is essentially a kabbalistic paraphrase of Ibn Ezra's "to know the particulars...in terms of the general."

The general definition of intellect and knowledge as the grasp of specificity or particularity can be traced back to Isaac Israeli, and to al-Kindi. See A. Altmann and S. M. Stern, *Isaac Israeli*, 37-39. See, too, Maimonides, *Moreh Nevukhim*, 1:58, who bases his discussion of divine attributes on the same epistemological goal of the knowledge of particulars.

¹⁷⁶ Investigation was defined by R. Isaac, lines 70-71 above, as the inductive process of extrapolating from the phenomenal to the noumenal. Thus **תְּכִלִּיתָן** refers to the *sefirot* from the perspective of an upward movement: the contemplation of the *sefirot* by the mind, which begins with a finite manifestation and extrapolates endlessly. By contrast, **מִיִּדְתָן** refers to the *sefirot* from the perspective of a downward movement: the limitation and measure placed upon the emanative descent of the influence of the *sefirot* in the creation and governance of the lower world of separation.

"Your commandment" cannot be apprehended by man to the utmost degree of apprehension, for a man grasps nothing but the headings of the dimensions.¹⁷⁸ His word: *Tiferet*, the

¹⁷⁷ With the qualification "even though," R. Isaac seems to acknowledge that this argument runs counter to the premise laid down by R. Bahya Ibn Pakudah, *Hovot ha-Levavot*, *Šar ha-Yihud*, ch. 5: כי אין התחלות מבלי (for there are no beginnings without a limit to their beginning).

R. Isaac may also have in mind R. Bahya's homiletic exposition of Ps. 119:96, loc. cit., ed. A. Zifroni, Introduction, 76. While R. Isaac does not pick up R. Bahya's definition of "commandment" *par excellence* as "duties of the heart," his description of "commandment" as endlessly branching and spreading out may be at work subliminally in R. Isaac's discussion here.

The term מאד , "exceedingly," is interpreted technically as *Hokhmah* by Asher b. David, "Ma'aseh Bereshit," *Kabbalat R. Asher b. David*, 55, and corrolates well with the expansive ascent of which R. Isaac speaks.

¹⁷⁸ This passage is alluded to and developed by Azriel of Gerona, *Perus ha-ʿAggadot*, 100-01 (fol. 16b): וכל המצות הם נקראות אמת שנ' וכל מצותיך אמת, ואצ"מ: (16b) שיש מצות קלות וחמורות כל המצות הם כבוד... כי כל המצות יש להם תכלית אחת ותכליתן אין להם קץ, וכל העוסק במצות צריך שתהא אמת המצוה עליו כאלו הוא מוכתר ומעומר בכבודה (All the commandments are called truth, as it says "all Your commandments are truth (Ps. 119:151).") Even though there are minor commandments and major ones, all commandments are glory... For all commandments have one end, and their goal is without limit. All who engage in the commandments must have the awe of the commandment upon him as if he were crowned and coronated with its glory). Tishby suggests that the statement "all the commandments are glory" means "their origin is from the *sefirot* (100, n. 13)." While "glory" could be interpreted to refer to specific *sefirot*, *Tiferet* and *Malkhut*, and the concept "commandment" was so interpreted by later kabbalists (Zohar, III, 82b; Moses Cordovero, *Pardes Rimmonim*, 'Erkhei ha-Kinuyim, ch. 13, entries מצוה, מצוה), Tishby's more general reading, as referring to the entire realm of the *sefirot*, is justified by the phrase מוכתר ומעומר בכבודה, an allusion to the full range of *sefirot* from *Keter* to

elevation of the word in all of them,¹⁷⁹ for it is almost as if the intent is that the word is elevated,¹⁸⁰ as it is

Malkhut. In a similar way, R. Isaac's treatment of "Your commandment," from context corresponding to the "ten *sefirot*...their limit has no end," from *SY* 1:6 (sec. 8), seems to mean the entire realm of the *sefirot*, as the entire realm of divine expression directed to man.

¹⁷⁹ This passage is at the root of the comments of Azriel of Gerona, *PSY*, on this mishnah in *SY*, 1:6, in *Kitvei Ramban*, vol. 2, 455: להסתכל בצמייתן להסתכל במורגש והמורגש במושכל והמושכל בנעלם. ובכל אחד ואחד מהם הקו האמצעי קרוי דברו שהוא אמצעי בהם. והוא מתעלה לקבל (the natural ascends in their vision to gaze at the sensible, and the sensible at the intelligible, and the intelligible at the hidden, and in each and every one of them the middle line is called "His word," which is central in them, and it ascends to receive the efflux of *Hesed*, the Will, with extreme rapidity, running forth and returning). R. Azriel, *Perus ha-Aggadot*, 100, lines 13-16, identifies the term דבר with the *sefirot Tiferet* and *Malkhut* (see I. Tishby, loc. cit., note 10). More specifically, in his *PSY* 1:4, דבר is identified with *Malkhut*, while in 1:6, quoted above, דברו is identified with *Tiferet*.

Putting all this together, R. Azriel's comments can help shed some light on R. Isaac's intent. R. Isaac here is interpreting דברו, with the third person singular suffix, as a reference to *Tiferet*, as + דבר 'ו, with *vav* representing the six directions unified in *Tiferet*. As such, דברו, *Tiferet*, is the ascent of דבר *Malkhut*, בהם, in all the *sefirot*.

¹⁸⁰ MSS Angelica and Hebrew Union College of Cincinnati 523/3 have כי כמעט רצון הדבר מתעלה, while the other MSS, Cambridge Add. 671, Harvard Heb. 58/11, Cambridge Or. 2116,8 Cincinnati 524/3, Montefiore 313, Milano-Ambrosiana 57, 32 read כי כמעט רצון הדבר המתעלה. In either case, the idea is that the phrase in *SY* 1:6 (sec. 8): דברו בהן ברצוא (It is as if His word runs in them) is to be kabbalistically decoded as "*Tiferet* runs, or is elevated, among *them*, the other, lower, *sefirot*."

This reading takes כמעט רצון as an idiomatic expression introducing an interpretive nuance. An entirely different reading could be: "the will of the word ascends." Compare Azriel of Gerona, *Perus ha-*

written, "God, praised in the great council of the holy ones (Ps. 89:8),"¹⁸¹ and so too, "and Your Name is awesome."¹⁸² In running forth: it did not say "running," because it is more interior than the Holy Beasts.¹⁸³ And according to His statement...they prostrate themselves: prostration is like

¹⁸¹*Aggadot*, 154: רצון המחשבה, which G. Scholem reads as "the Will hidden in Thought," and I. Tishby as "the Will which is the source of Thought, or the Will which acts in Thought," *loc. cit.*, 154, n. 15; 156, n. 2. See, too, *PSY*, 1:6 in *Kitvei Ramban*, 455, where רצון is called משך החסד, the efflux channelled through the *sefirah Hesed*. R. Isaac may mean that *Tiferet* ascends as the inner will of הדבר, *Malkhut*. If this is so, then in R. Isaac's thought is already found a rudimentary voluntarism that will become more fully developed in the thought of R. Azriel, in his association of *Keter* and divine Will. See G. Scholem, *Origins*, 343.

The previous reading, however, fits better with the proof-texts brought, none of which support the introduction of the term רצון in the highly-charged sense of "will," which would require considerable explication. See the notes following.

¹⁸¹ The verse continues: ונורא על כל טביביו (and awesome over all those around Him). R. Isaac's kabbalistic decoding of this verse is: the ten *sefirot*, called "the great council (or mystery) of the holy ones," is quintessentially "awesome," *Tiferet*, the median, mediating, unifying *sefirah*, which is "over all," the word elevated above all others. The pivotal words in this and the following citation are נורא על כל, signifying "the elevation of *Tiferet* over all the other lower *sefirot*." See the next note.

The association of נורא with *Tiferet*, third of the lower seven *sefirot* after *Gedulah* or *Hesed* and *Gevurah*, was probably based upon Dt. 10:17 and its popularization in the first benediction of the Amidah, when it is the third term of praise: הגדול הגבור והנורא.

¹⁸² This is part of a phrase from the *Amidah*, of *Rosh ha-Shanah* and *Yom ha-Kippurim*. The full relevant phrase here is ושמך נורא על כל מה שבראת (Your Name is awesome over all You created). R. Isaac's kabbalistic exegesis is: God's Name, which is comprised of all the

one who puts aside his [moral] qualities¹⁸⁴ and occupies himself with nothing but thought alone,¹⁸⁵ attaches to Thought,¹⁸⁶ and exalts thought and subdues the body to strengthen his soul.¹⁸⁷

sefirot, is epitomized in *Tiferet*, the awesome, which is "over," or elevated above all. See preceding note.

¹⁸³ "In running" conveys the higher interiority of sefirotic process, as opposed to the mere "running" of the Holy Beasts, (Ez. 1:14) on the angelic level. See R. Isaac's exegetical comments on the letter *bet*, lines 1-2, 6-7, above.

¹⁸⁴ Compare Yuma 23a, Ta'anit 25b: מעביר על; מידותיו ; Megillah 28a: ולה עמדתי על מדותי.

¹⁸⁵ The contrast between moral qualities, מדות, and thought or intellect, the former considered on a lower level than the latter, occurs in Maimonides, *Moreh Nevukhim*, 3:54. For R. Isaac, this contrast, on the human level, parallels a similar contrast between the lower *sefirot*, called *middot*, associated with moral qualities, such as love, rigor and mercy, and higher *sefirot*, associated with intellectual functions such as thought, wisdom and discernment.

¹⁸⁶ Thought, here, apparently refers to the highest *sefirah*; compare line 132, below. Regarding this usage of the term מחשבה for the highest *sefirah*, see I. Twersky *Rabad*, 274, and G. Scholem, *Origins*, 270-77, who cite Abraham Bar Ḥiyya's concept of המהורה (Pure Thought), as the likely source: *Hegyon han-Nefes ha-'Azuvah*, 39, 41. See, too, Azriel of Gerona, *Perus ha-'Aggadot*, 82.

The expression "attaches to Thought" is based on the Aristotelian concept of the adherence of the human intellect to the Active Intellect. See Judah Halevi, *Kuzari*, 5:12, who presents, then disputes the standard Aristotelian view. A similar notion of sustained focus of mind described as an attachment or adherence to a higher principle, employing the term דבק, appears in Abraham Ibn Ezra, Torah Commentary, Gen. 28:21, Ex. 33:21, Num. 20:8. R. Abraham Bar Ḥiyya, in other contexts, uses דבק and חבר interchangeably: e.g., *Hegyon han-Nefes ha-'Azuvah*, 39, 40, 41.

¹⁸⁷ The exegetically problematic nature of the

phrase in *SY* 1:6 (sec. 8), "ולפני כסאו הם משתחוים", with its anthropomorphic imagery applied to spiritual entities, was picked up by Judah B. Barzilai, who comments in *PSY* 163: כלום' הם שומעים לו ולצויו בהם כחפצו כן וכן המאמר בכל השתחוויה לא תצא ממשמעות ומפשוטה (which is to say, they obey Him, and His commands to them, whatever His will, so it is. This is the significance of all prostration, which does not depart from its meaning and plain sense). Compare Saadiah b. Joseph, *Sefer Yezirah*, 73; *Torat ha-Nefesh*, trans. Y. D. Brody (Paris 1896) 11. R. Judah, following R. Saadiah Gaon, shows that the social significance of prostration, as a sign of obedience, can be easily abstracted to refer to a spiritual action. While R. Isaac also sees the need to interpret the notion of prostration abstractly, he takes a different approach, depicting prostration as an image for intellectual contemplation and sefirotic ascent.

The ascetic orientation evident in this passage reflects earlier sources and contemporary parallels. See Moses Ibn Ezra, *'Arugat hab-Bosem*, 120-21, who cites Pythagoras, Aristotle and Ibn Gabirol; Judah Ha-Levi, *Kuzari*, 5:12 (end); Maimonides, *Morah Nevukhim*, 3:51: כי כל אשר יחלשו כחות הגוף ותכבה אש התאוות, יחזק השכל וירבה אורו ותוך השגתו וישמח במה שהשיג (the more the powers of the body are weakened and the fire of the lusts extinguished, the more the intellect is strengthened, its light is increased and its grasp purified, and it rejoices in what it grasps). For a strong contemporary parallel that combines the same ascetic notion with physical collapse, see Abraham Ibn Hasdai, *Ben ha-Melekh ve-ha-Nazir*, 207: ואחר שבארנו שהנפש איננה גוף ראוי הוא שנבאר שאין לה יגון ואנחה כי אם בהיותה בגוף וכשתפרד ממנו תהיה אז חזקה ויכולה במעשיה. והאות והמופת בזה כי אנחנו כשנרצה להבין דבר קשה וצמוק התקבץ הנפש אל עצמה ותשליך ממנה החושים הגופניים כולם עד אשר תשוב כאלו נפרדה מהם. ואז תבין ותשכיל ותוציא מהדברים הצמוקים הקשים כל מה שתרצה כמו הנביאים עליהם השלום כשתנוח עליהם הרוח היתה נפשם מתקבצת לעצמה והיתה משלכת ממנה כל החושים הגופניים ובורחת מהם עד שלא ישאר בהם כח (After we have explained that the soul is not a body, it is appropriate that we explain that it has no pain or suffering except for its being in the body, and when it separates from it, it becomes strong and capable in its activities. The sign and proof for this is that when we want to understand a difficult and deep matter, the soul gathers unto itself and throws off from itself all the physical senses

until it becomes as if separated from them. Then it is able to understand and conceive and elicit from the deep and difficult things whatever it desires, like the prophets, peace be upon them, when the spirit rested on them, their souls gathered unto themselves and threw off the physical senses and fled from them until they no longer retained the strength to stand, and they would fall down and tremble). Compare, too, Maimonides, *Yesodei hat-Torah*, 7:2. In prophecy as described by Maimonides and Ibn Ḥasdai the body collapses from the overwhelming force of the experience. R. Isaac's concern is different: to explain the intentional ritual action of prostration, understood symbolically as the expression of this falling-away of the physical, and to show how it is appropriately predicated of spiritual entities such as *sefirot*. R. Isaac's contemplative interpretation of prostration combined the exegetical concerns of R. Judah b. Barzilai and sources with the ascetic formulae of Maimonides and R. Moses Ibn Ezra.

Set:¹⁸⁸ things that are joined together, resting on their sides, and from above them they are raised, like something raised by something else, like a magnet above and a magnet below.¹⁸⁹ The [Aramaic] translation of "placed" is **set**,¹⁹⁰ something placed and resting on something else.¹⁹¹

¹⁸⁸ *SY* 1:7 (sec. 6) 142.

¹⁸⁹ From Plato on, the magnet was a favorite model for conveying the idea of a higher principle supporting, in the sense of lifting, a lower one. See Plato, *Ion*, 533d,e, in *Collected Dialogues*, trans. Lane Cooper, (Princeton, 1971) 219-20: "As I just now said, this gift you have of speaking well on Homer is not an art; it is a power divine, impelling you like the power of the stone Euripides called the magnet...This stone does not simply attract iron rings, just by themselves; it also imparts to the rings a force enabling them to do the same thing as the stone itself, that is, to attract another ring, so that sometimes a chain is formed, quite a long one, of iron rings, suspended from one another. For all of them, however, their power depends upon that loadstone (Jowett: that one stone)." See, too, Eriugena, *Periphyseon*, vol. 1, 520b; Adelard of Bath, *De Eodem et Diverso*, ed. H. Willner, (Münster, 1903) 33. Compare Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY* 246, who compares the magnet that lifts the heavy object to the Creator Who sustains the world; Asher b. Saul, *Sefer ha-Minhagot*, in *Sifran shel-Rishonim*, ed. S. Assaf, 144: הכבוד יהי' מבורך מן היכל הקודש שהוא באמצע והוא נוסא את הכל...ודיוגמתו אבן שואבת שמעמידין אותה למעלה ונושאה את הברזל מתחתיה (the Glory, be it blessed, is from the Holy Temple which is in the middle, and carries all...A model for this is a magnet which one places above, and carries the iron below it).

Unusual in R. Isaac's image is the two magnets, below as well as above, rather than one magnet lifting several pieces of iron. This may be meant to convey the equivalent power of each of the *sefirot*, represented by equally powerful magnets.

¹⁹⁰ Gen. 28:12, in Targum Onkelos.

¹⁹¹ This interpretation comes from Saadiah b. Joseph, *Sefer Yezirah*, 91-92, by way of Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 163-64.

Their end in their beginning: a spreading fountain:¹⁹²
 whatever spreads out is all from the source, and if the
 source ceases, everything ceases;¹⁹³ and since at all times
 they spread from the beginning,¹⁹⁴ it has no end.¹⁹⁵

¹⁹² The fountain or spring of water was a stock image for the process of emanation among Neoplatonic writers. See S. Gersh, *From Iamblichus to Eriugena*, 17-19, who cites its use by Iamblichus, Proclus, Damascius, Ps. Dionysius and Eriugena. See, also, his article "Platonism, Neoplatonism, Aristotelianism: a Twelfth-Century Metaphysical System," *Renaissance and Renewal in the Twelfth Century*, 518-19, n. 40, for its use by Calcidius. A description of God as the source and spring of Wisdom, pairing the terms **מְעִין** and **מְקוֹר**, occurs in the translation of Saadiah b. Joseph's *PSY* made by Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 275. Compare Saadiah b. Joseph, *PSY*, ed. J. Kafah, 37. Solomon Ibn Gabirol used the image of the flowing spring as the source of creation in *Keter Malkhut*, ch. 9, in *Sirei haq-Kodes*, ed. D. Yarden, (Jerusalem, 1971) vol. 1, 42-43; and in his *Mekor Hayyim*, trans. J. Blaustein, 5:41, (Jerusalem, 1926) 216. Judah Halevi used the image in his poem "מְעִין חַכְמָה: מֵעַל לֹהִים יוֹצֵא אֱמֶשֶׁלֶּכְחָה," **מְעִין חַכְמָה יוֹצֵא מֵעַל לֹהִים עֲלֵיהֶם יוֹצֵא** (A fountain of wisdom goes forth from them, and the source of life is found with them). See, especially, Maimonides, *Moreh Nevukhim*, 2:12, for his discussion of the propriety of the use of the fountain image to describe God and the prophetic process.

¹⁹³ The occasionalist notion of continuous divine involvement in continuous creation was endorsed by Abraham Ibn Ezra, Torah Commentary, Ex. 3:2. See, too, Judah Halevi, *Kuzari*, 4:26.

¹⁹⁴ Or spread anew. Compare *Mo'ed Katan* 2a: **מְעִין מֵעַל לֹהִים יוֹצֵא מֵעַל לֹהִים עֲלֵיהֶם יוֹצֵא** (whether from a spring that has flowed forth for the first time...).

¹⁹⁵ R. Isaac, for whom the *sefirot* are not merely numbers but metaphysical principles, omits the standard explanation of this passage offered by most commentators on *SY* up to his time: the characteristic of numbers in base ten to double back on themselves after every series of ten. Rather, he reads it Neoplatonically, as expressing the nature of emanation: the end, as placed or dependent upon the unceasing

Therefore it says **their end in their beginning**, for many strands are extended from the coal, which is one.¹⁹⁶ For the flame cannot stand by itself, but only by something else.¹⁹⁷ For all the things¹⁹⁸ and all the dimensions that appear to be separate have no separation in them,¹⁹⁹ for all is one, like the beginning that unifies all.²⁰⁰ The word "unique", for the unique Lord,²⁰¹ now alludes²⁰² to a dimension in *Ein Sof*,²⁰³ that has no end from any side.²⁰⁴ From

emanation from the beginning, obtains, itself, the quality of endlessness.

¹⁹⁶ See above, lines 3-4.

¹⁹⁷ This is a paraphrase of Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 164: **ואין שלהבה יכולה לעמוד בלא גחלת**.

¹⁹⁸ *Sefirot*. See line 54, above, and note.

¹⁹⁹ See *supra*, ch. 8.4.

²⁰⁰ That is, according to the image of the fountain, above.

²⁰¹ *SY* 1:7 (sec. 6).

²⁰² Now alludes, as opposed to earlier, *SY* 1:3 (sec. 3), where **יחיד** referred to the centralizing function of the lower *sefirah Yesod*.

²⁰³ That is, the *sefirah Keter* in *Ein Sof*.

²⁰⁴ This expression, its parallels (e. g. line 337, below), and its underlying conception, derive from the *Heikhalot* tradition, its doctrine of divine Names, and its treatment of the mysteries of the non-spatial quality of the spiritual and of divine omniscience, expressed in terms of omnidirectionality. See "Otiot de-R. 'Akiva'," *Batei Midrašot*, ed. A. J. Wertheimer, vol. 2, 364, regarding the sealing of the six cardinal directions with the letters of the divine Names: **וכאי זר צד נתחתמו בהן, ארבע ארבע לכל רוח ורוח** (and in what way are they sealed with them? Four by four letters in each and every direction). See, too, "Ma'aseh

pondering²⁰⁵ the things hidden from thought, lest it become confused.²⁰⁶ For from that which one apprehends one can recognize what one does not apprehend,²⁰⁷ and for this the

Merkavah," *ibid.*, vol. 1, 60, regarding the ministering angels: וכולם נבונים ופונים לכל צד וצד (all are discerning, and face each and every side).

Compare, too, Maimonides, *Yesodei hat-Torah*, 2:10: אחד מכל צד .

Azriel of Gerona deals at length and in great detail with the theme of divine unity expressed in the omnidirectionality of the divine Names in his monographs "Peruṣ hak-Ḳaddiṣ," and "Peruṣ Yihud ha-Šem," in G. Scholem, "Seridim Ḥadašim," 216-19. There, the palindrome of the divine Name 'hyh' is interpreted repeatedly and in a variety of formulations as expressing the notion of blessing, or equivalence of power, from all sides: שהוא מתרבה ומתברך ממהותו בכל צד (in that He is increased and blessed from His essence (Scholem, note 4: 'Ein Sof) on every side [217]). R. Isaac's formulation is the bridge between the *Heikhalot* concept and R. Azriel's more technical development. R. Isaac's own opaque statement below, line 337, q. v., may well be the source upon which R. Azriel expatiates.

²⁰⁵ *SY* 1:8 (sec. 5) 142.

²⁰⁶ For precedents for this cautionary advice against intellectual overreach, see the discussion of this passage, *supra*, ch. 7.2, with reference to Bahya Ibn Paḳudah and Moses Ibn Ezra. See, too, Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 66.

²⁰⁷ See *supra*, ch. 7.2, 191-209. See, especially, Bahya Ibn Paḳudah, *Hovot hal-Levavot*, 1:10: והמשכיל הנלכב ישתדל להפשיט קליפות המלות וגשמותם מעל הענין ויעלה במחשבתו ממדרגה אל מדרגה, עד שיגיע מאמתת הענין הנדרש אל מה שיש בכח יכלתו והשגתו (The understanding adept will attempt to abstract the shells of the words and their corporeality from the matter and ascend in his thought from level to level, until he arrives, by the truth of the matter that is sought, at what is within his power to grasp).

Compare the opposing epistemological view, taken by Azriel of Gerona, *PSY* 1:8 in *Kiṭvei Ramban*, vol. 2, 456, who cautions: ולבך מלהרהר. שלא לדמות הנסתר לגלוי (Your heart from ruminating. One should not compare the hidden to the revealed). He limits the incommensurability of the revealed to the hidden to one

dimensions were made. For language does not apprehend other than that which comes from it,²⁰⁸ for man does not apprehend the dimension of speech and letters, rather, its dimension is itself, and apart from the letters there is no

specific issue, however: while the phenomenal world is manifest as a plurality, the hidden world of the *sefirot*, is complete unity.

²⁰⁸ This analysis of the nature of language is, in part, an extrapolation from Bahya Ibn Paqudah's discussion of the ineluctable and isolated modality of the individual senses and of the intellect, each limited to its own sphere of receptivity, in *Hovot ha-Levavot*, 1:10: ולכל חוש מהם ענין מיוחד להשיגו ולא ישיג זולתו, כפראים והצורות, אשר לא נשיגם כי אם בחוש הראות בלבד, וכקולות והנגונים אשר לא נשיגם כי אם בחוש השמע בלבד...ואי אפשר להשיג מוחש מבלעדי חושו המוכן לו...וכן (Each sense has a unique subject to grasp, and cannot grasp anything else, such as appearances and forms, which can only be grasped by the sense of sight alone, and sounds and music, which can only be grasped by the sense of hearing alone...A sense object can only be grasped by the sense appropriate to it...So, too, we assert regarding the intellect, which grasps intelligible things).

One of the underlying principles also at work in R. Isaac's formulation is the Pythagorean dictum "similars are comprehended by similars," widely cited in the twelfth century. See Hugh of St. Victor, *Didascalicon*, trans. J. Taylor, (New York and London, 1961) 46-47; 180 n. 11 regarding citations by Chalcidius and William of Conches. See, too, A. Schneider, "Der Gedanke der Erkenntnis des Gleichen durch Gleiches in antiker und patristischer Zeit," *Abhandlungen zur Geschichte der Philosophie des Mittelalters*, BGPM, Supplementband II (Münster, 1923) 49-77.

R. Isaac extends these arguments, with profound insight, to the self-contained, even circular, nature of language, whose adequate correspondence to reality is based on the fact that Creation, according to the tradition of *Sefer Yeẓirah*, and the Torah itself, is a linguistic process.

Compare, too, line 81, above, and note.

dimension.²⁰⁹ All the awesome dimensions²¹⁰ are given to

²⁰⁹ R. Isaac's statements on the self-contained, self-referential nature of language, and the identity of the act of intellect with speech or letters as its object, use as their idea structure the speculations of Maimonides, *Moreh Nevukhim*, 1:68. Maimonides employed the Aristotelian concept of the active intellect *in actu* to take the philosophical doctrine of the identity of knower, knowing and known with respect to God and extend it to all intellectual activity in general, human as well as divine : כי אין השכל דבר זולת הדבר : המושכל, הנה כבר התבאר לך כי הדבר המושכל הוא צורת האילן המושפטה, והוא השכל ההוא בפעל, ואינו שני דברים השכל וצורת האילן המושכלת, כי אין השכל בפעל דבר זולת מה שהושכל, והדבר אשר בו הושכלה צורת האילן והופשטה, אשר הוא המשכיל, הוא השכל ההוא בפעל בלא ספק, כי כל שכל פעלו הוא עצמו... כי אמתה השכל ומהותו הוא ההשגה... ואם כן הדבר אשר בו הופשטה צורת זה האילן והושגה בו אשר הוא השכל הוא המשכיל, כי השכל ההוא בעצמו הוא אשר הפשט הצורה (For the intellect is not something other than the object of intellection. Behold, it has already been explained to you that the object of intellection is the abstract form of the tree, and this is the intellect itself *in actu*. They are not two things, the intellect and the form of the tree that is the object of intellection, for the intellect *in actu* is not something other than the object of intellection. That by which the form of the tree has been intellected and abstracted, which is the act of intellection, this is the realized intellect *in actu*, without a doubt. For regarding all intellect, its action is itself... For the truth of the intellect and its essence is apprehension... If so, that by which the form of the tree is abstracted and apprehended, which is the intellect, is the act of intellection, for the intellect itself is that which abstracted the form and apprehended it).

Maimonides' analysis is built upon the doctrine of essential divine Attributes as it appears in Saadiah b. Joseph, *Ha-'Emunot ve-had-De'ot*, trans. J. Ibn Tibbon, ed. Y. Fischel, ch. 2, 53. See, too, Maimonides, *Semonah Pera'kim*, ch. 8: שהשם יתברך אינו יודע במדע ולא : שהוא יתברך שמו חי בחיים עד שיהיה הוא והמדע שני דברים... שהוא יתברך שמו God, be He blessed, does not know with knowledge and does not live with life, such that He and knowledge are two things... He, blessed be His Name, is His attributes and His attributes are Him); נמצאת אתה אומר הוא היודע (It turns out that one asserts that He is the knower, He is the known, and

comprehend, for every dimension is from a dimension that is above it, and they are given to Israel to comprehend, from

He is the knowledge itself, all is one).

R. Isaac seems to have taken Maimonides' discussion of the identity of intellect, its activity and its object, and applied it formally to the activity of speech and letters, both in the human sphere and in the realm of divine attributes, dimensions or *sefirot*. R. Isaac's emphasis is different, however, and lies closer to the emphasis of the doctrine of the identity of divine attributes and essence: just as there is no divine attribute other than divine essence, there is no attribute or dimension apart from the letters or speech which establish dimensionality in the first place.

R. Isaac may also have used as a reference point the comments of Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 211: והשם הוא הגולה כי בלתי השם לא יתכנו בריות ובשם יהנכר כל דבר ובשם יכול אדם להבין משמו בלתי גולמו אבל הגולם בלתי השם לא נכר... נמצא כל היצור וכל הדיבור יוצא בשם אחד אין חפץ בלי שם וכנוי (the name is that which reveals, for without a name a creature's existence is not established, and with a name each thing can be recognized. By a name a person can understand, through the name even without the physical substance, but with the physical substance alone it is not recognized... It turns out that all Creation and all speech proceeds by one name, and there is no object without a name or signifier).

In context, the flow of R. Isaac's argument is that the precise referentiality of language to its object is the guarantee that one can accurately infer and extrapolate from the revealed to the hidden.

A variant reading of this passage is found in MSS Cambridge Or. 2116,8 and Harvard: "For from that which one apprehends one can recognize what one does not apprehend, but which comes from it. For a person does not apprehend the speech and the letters, rather the dimension itself; apart from the letters [is] the dimension." This reading, missing the linguistic comments and lacking syntactic and semantic coherence in general, seems to be corrupt.

²¹⁰ Judah Halevi, "Elohim ימי אלהים",
 וכמה פנים הנוראים, וכמה אחורים לאחורים הנראים
 (several faces to the awesome face, and several backs to the visible back): the term "awesome" stands for the most recondite aspect of the divine, in contradistinction to that which is revealed; so, too, for R. Isaac.

the dimension that appears in the heart, to comprehend unto *Ein Sof*.²¹¹ For there is no way to pray other than by the finite *things*²¹² a person receives and elevates in thought unto *Ein Sof*.²¹³ Thus it says **running forth and returning, it returns to the place:**²¹⁴ for the things, in their swiftness,²¹⁵ ascend in their mystery and return to their

²¹¹ *Supra*, ch. 7.2.

²¹² Or words. The reference may also include the *sefirot* as bounded or measured, as discussed by R. Isaac above, line 75, and expounded by Azriel of Gerona, *PSY*, 454, with reference to *SY* 1:5: במשנה זו הזכיר שהכל מאין סוף, נאצ"ם שבדברים יש להם שיצור ופדה והם עשר, אותה מדה שיש להם אין לה סוף, כי המוטבע מן המורגש והמורגש מן המושכל מרום הנעלם והנעלם אין לו סוף, אם כן אפילו המורגש והמושכל והמוטבע אין לו סוף, ולכך נעשו המדות ההם כדי להתבונן בהם באין סוף (In this *mishnah* it states that all is from *Ein Sof*. Even though the *things* [i. e., *sefirot*] have dimension and measure, and they are ten, that measure which they have is endless. For the natural is from the sensible and the sensible is from the intelligible, which is from the hidden zenith, and the hidden is infinite. If so, even the sensible and the intelligible and the natural are infinite. Therefore the dimensions were made, in order to contemplate through them unto *Ein Sof*).

²¹³ See *supra*, ch. 7.6 for an exposition of this passage.

²¹⁴ *SY* 1:8 (sec. 5).

²¹⁵ *Mehirut* in the sense of the swiftness and accuracy of divine causality is used to describe the action of divine Names in *Sefer ha-Azanim*, 12: ויהפעלו לרוב כח ה' ומהירות פעולתו וממשלתו בכל הכחות המבטים ואלו הם עניני השמות וכו' . See, too, Rashi's gloss, *Hagigah*, 12b: שכל מעשה ארץ מתוניים ומעשה שמיים במהירות (for all earthly actions are slow, while acts of heaven are done swiftly). The direct thematic source, however, is R. Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 161.

places after their reception.²¹⁶ **Cut:**²¹⁷ a thing apportioned and made a measure; and it is called a **covenant**, for all is created and clarified.²¹⁸

One²¹⁹ is the beginning of the essences. **One: the breath of the living God:** for from the breath is all.²²⁰ **Blessed and blessed be...for this is breath:** for the voice is by breath;²²¹ it is the tone of the drawing forth of the

²¹⁶ See *supra*, ch. 7.6, for an exposition of the entire passage, tracing the origins of this theory of the process of the cognition of metaphysical principles, developing concepts from R. Saadiah Gaon and Judah b. Barzilai, and with parallels to Middle Platonic, Hermetic and contemporary Victorine epistemology.

²¹⁷ *SY* 1:8 (sec. 5).

²¹⁸ R. Isaac connects the idiomatic expression כרת ברית as "establishing a covenant" with its literal, etymological root, כרת as "cut", and the term ברית associated with its etymological root family, ברא, ברא, created, clarified. His argument is that creation proceeds by a "cutting," that is, a measuring and apportioning of the infinite into the finite. He may be alluding, further, to this creation-by-limitation as a "covenant," as a guarantee that the measured phenomenal realm will adequately transmit commensurate impressions of the immeasurable noumenal to the contemplative adept. In keeping with the epistemological position R. Isaac has laid out in lines 127-33, such indirect apprehension is the only appropriate access to the noumenal; any more direct route would result in mental distress.

²¹⁹ *SY* 1:9 (sec. 10) 144.

²²⁰ Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 179: והלא כל הקולות מן הרוח הם (Indeed, all voices are from the breath).

²²¹ R. Isaac is commenting on the complete phrase cited from *SY* 1:9 (sec. 10): **blessed and blessed be His Name...voice, breath and speech, this is the [Holy] Spirit.** His version, זהו רוח, apparently corresponds to MSS 'ה, 'א cited by I. Gruenwald, *SY*, 144. Compare

breath.²²² By the voice is the hewing, for the drawing forth of the voice is interior. With **breath He engraved:**²²³ engraving is by voice and hewing is by breath by way of voice.²²⁴ Voice has substance and is nothing but a vessel.²²⁵ **And hewed in it:** by breath itself there is

line 1, note 1, above. This is to say that Name, breath, voice and speech, are all of a piece. What, exactly, their relationship is, R. Isaac goes on to discuss. See Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 179: כל הקולות מן הרוח הם (all the voices are from breath).

²²² Compare Abraham Ibn Ezra, Commentary on Psalms, Ps. 150:6: וישתנו הנעימות כפי אריכות הרוח וקוצר (The tones change according to the length of the breath, the shortness of the voice, its high or low pitch, or its quickness).

²²³ *SY* 1:10 (sec. 12) 144.

²²⁴ Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 208: וביציאת הקול מן הגרון הגיהור יוצא מפה ויחצב דמות אותיות (when the voice comes out of the throat, the vapor comes from the mouth and hews the shape of letters). This is based on Saadiah b. Joseph, *Sefer Yezirah*, 3:3, 111. According to this account of the process of speech, the voice, originating deeper in the throat, is more interior than the locus of the shaping of the the letters, which is the mouth. This served R. Isaac as his model for the relationship between the more interior engraving by voice and the more exterior hewing by breath, in divine as well as human speech. See, too, Abraham Ibn Ezra, Ex. 3:2, for a similar linguistic model of creation.

²²⁵ Compare Dunash Ibn Tamim *PSY*, ed. M. Grosberg (London, 1902), ch. 6, 48: הכ"ב אותיות מורות על כ"ב נעימות והנעימה הוא חומר לדבור והדבור יורה על ענינים אשר בנפש...שאלו הנעימות הוא רוח נחתך בכלי הדבור (the twenty-two letters indicate twenty-two sounds, sound is the material for speech, and speech indicates matters in the soul...these sound are breath articulated by the organs of speech). This notion of sound as material is similar to R. Isaac's description of voice as substance and vessel. Whether this or another translation of Ibn Tamim's Commentary was available to R. Isaac directly or indirectly, other than citations in Judah b. Barzilai's *PSY*, is not clear. R. Isaac's comments on

engraving and hewing: according to its subtlety is the subtlety of its hewing, and according to its coarseness is the coarseness of its carving. **And breath is one of them:**²²⁶ it is *Tešuvah*, in which twenty-two letters are inscribed.²²⁷ Not that the letters are something other than the breath, for from the breath itself they are hewn, and the letter is the thing itself;²²⁸ letters, from which issue the

the relationship of breath, voice and speech do have the general ring of Dunash Ibn Tamim's description of the process of speech, *PSY*, 19-20.

This designation of voice as a vessel falls in a middle position, between the concrete and the abstract use of the term כלי in medieval Hebrew. In Judah Halevi's *Kuzari*, trans. J. Ibn Tibbon, 5:12, "vessel" is used in a fully abstract sense, as the sustaining form of spiritual and psychological activities (279, line 18): וכליה הראשונים, הצורות הרוחניות המצמיירות; בכחה היצרי מאמצע המוח מהרוח הנפשית. (Its primary instruments are the spiritual forms shaped within the brain from the living spirit by the power of the imagination).

²²⁶ *SY* 1:10 (sec. 12).

²²⁷ Breath, that is, breath from breath, the second breath, designated רוח מרוח, corresponds to *Tešuvah*, the *sefirah Binah* in which the letters are engraved. The identification of Breath as *Binah*, the third *sefirah*, and as the quarry and storehouse of the engraved letters, appears in *Sefer hab-Bahir*, sec. 143. See Azriel of Gerona, *PSY*, in *Kitvei Ramban*, vol. 2, 456, who explains that the first "breath" mentioned in *SY* 1:9 (sec. 10), corresponds to the *sefirah Hokhmah*, the second, or "breath from breath," is *Binah*. According to Nahmanides, however, the first "breath" is *Keter*, the second *Hokhmah*; see *PSY*, in *KS*, 6, (1930) 409.

²²⁸ Saadiyah b. Joseph, *Sefer Yezirah*, 3:3, 111, Dunash Ibn Tamim, *PSY*, 45, and Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 208, all explain how letters are shaped in the breath itself. Compare Azriel of Gerona, *PSY* 1:10, in *Kitvei Ramban*, vol. 2, 457: כח כולם בכח בינה, ולא האמר שהם דבר; חלוק מן הבינה אלא הם בינה. ורוח אחת מהן. כשי"ן של

engravings.

Water²²⁹ is *Hesed*.²³⁰ **Mud** is lighter than **clay**: it is poured from vessel to vessel; for **clay** is thick.²³¹ **Furrow**: it compares water to a furrow consisting of wave-crest upon wave-crest. There is soil by itself, and there are stones, and there are veins of water that are from the viscous rocks,²³² for the earth has masculinity and femininity. There are veins that receive irrigation from here and from there *via* the cavities.²³³ The letters are engraved and erected and overhung: there is that letter which is engraved as a kind of furrow; there is that which is erected as a kind of wall; and there is that letter which overhangs as a

הפילין שהאות בולטת מן העור ואינה אלא עור (for the power of all of them is in the power of *Binah*. One should not say that they are something distinct from *Binah*, rather they are *Binah*. And breath is one of them. Like the letter *sin* of the tefillin, in which the letter protrudes from the leather, and it nothing but leather).

²²⁹ *SY* 1:11 (sec. 13) 145.

²³⁰ Water represents the *sefirah* which emanates after *Binah*.

²³¹ The list of materials in *SY* 1:11 (sec. 13) progresses from refined to coarse.

²³² *Hagigah*, 12a.

²³³ *SY* 1:11 begins a discussion that appropriates images from nature to explain the generation of the *sefirot*. Along these lines, R. Isaac takes the opportunity to observe that the geological structure of the natural world reflects sefirotic structure. Stones correspond to the letters (line 20, above) and veins of water correspond to the paths, essences and relations between the *sefirot* (lines 20-24).

kind of ceiling.²³⁴ Therefore, when David dug the pits, and the deep sought to inundate the world, Aḥitofel taught David the forty-two letter divine Name, and he wrote it on a clay shard and tossed it into the deep, so that it not inundate the world, such that the entire world dried up, and he had to say the fifteen "degrees" of the Psalms, corresponding to the fifteen inner degrees, and for every degree [the deep] ascended a degree, and the world was restored to its normal condition.²³⁵ **Fire from water:**²³⁶ *Paḥad* from *Ḥesed*: eight

²³⁴ R. Isaac interprets the furrow, wall and ceiling of *SY* 1:11 (sec. 13) as referring to the shapes of the letters, with horizontal strokes, furrows and ceilings, below and/or above, and vertical strokes erected left and/or right, a reading that is not at all obvious in context, but which he defends with the aggadah he cites in the following lines. Compare, e. g., Eleazar of Worms, *Sodei Razaya*, ed. S. Weiss (Jerusalem, 1992) 36, who reads the furrow, wall and ceiling as a reference to the mud and clay of *SY*.

²³⁵ Jerus. Sanh. 10:2; Sukkah 53a,b; Makkot 11a. See, especially, Eleazar of Worms, *Sodei Razaya*, ed. S. Weiss, (Jerusalem, 1991) 36, who also cites this aggadah in connection with an explication of *SY* 1:11, and refers specifically to the forty-two letter divine Name, rather than the Tetragrammaton implied in the talmudic version. R. Eleazar of Worms explains that the forty-two letter Name seals the deep and keeps the waters in their place: **הרי עשה את הארץ וברא את הצרור על** **ההוים וחקק עליו שם המפורש בארבעים ושתיים אותיות וקבע** **אותם על פני תהום כדי לעכב מימיה** (He made the earth and created the stone that is on the deep and engraved upon it the explicit divine Name of forty-two letters and affixed them upon the face of the deep in order to contain its waters). Eleazer of Worms also alludes to a passage from *Seder Rabbah de-Beresit*, 8, in *Batei Midrasot*, ed. A. J. Wertheimer, vol. 1, 24, which discusses the sealing power of the forty-three (!) letter divine Name. See note 34, *ibid*.

R. Isaac offers a variation on this theme: the forty-two letter divine Name, which comprises most of the letters of the alphabet, demonstrates the principle

times eight is sixty four, which constitutes the entire frame,²³⁷ and this is *h-s-d*.²³⁸ His habitation is the entire frame.²³⁹ Elevation,²⁴⁰ like sanctified and elevated, more elevated.²⁴¹ Elevation is sealed²⁴² in *yod*,²⁴³ for this is

that the structural forms of the letters enable them to influence the structure of the world: specifically, that the letters, shaped as furrows, walls and ceilings, are the basis of the power of this extended divine Name to contain the deep.

The pits referred to served as drainage conduits for the altar of the Temple. The "degrees" refer to Pss. 120-34, which begin with the phrase "A Song of Degrees."

²³⁶ *SY* 1:12 (sec. 14) 145.

²³⁷ See *supra*, ch. 8.3.

²³⁸ The reference is to the gematria value of the Hebrew letters of the *sefirah Hesed*, as reflecting the numerical value eight, 'ח and eight squared, ט"ז, which constitutes the numerical value of that subdivision of the *sefirot* termed בנין, the frame or structure, usually considered to comprise the seven lower *sefirot*, but in this case apparently including *Binah* as the eighth component. The notion of squaring the sum apparently refers to combining each of the eight *sefirot* with itself and all others, to express the concept of the unity of the dimensions. The idea is that all of the lower *sefirot* are contained in the *sefirah Hesed*, and like "fire from water," they unfold from *Hesed*.

²³⁹ The term מעון, as an underlying place, corresponds to the בנין.

²⁴⁰ *SY* 1:13 (sec. 15) 146.

²⁴¹ Isaac of Acre, *PSY*, 396, comments on *SY* 1:13 (sec. 15): והנה רום עתה בחולם כי ממנו יצא הכל כי רום (Elevation here is [vocalized] with a *holam*, for from it comes the totality, for elevation is *Keter*, but [vocalized] with a *suruk* it refers to *Tiferet*). This seems to be a reading of R. Isaac's phrase יותר מרים, that "elevation," רום, *Keter*, is "more," that is, higher, than "elevated," רום, *Tiferet*.

in *Hokhmah*,²⁴⁴ and sealed in it are three matrices,²⁴⁵ which are *Binah*, *Hesed*, *Paḥad*. And He set them in His great Name...and sealed in them six extremities, and faced above: He made faces above.²⁴⁶ For a person finds them on all sides, for above there is nothing but faces,²⁴⁷ for *Hokhmah*

This passage might be explained in a slightly different way, though with the same result. The phrase קדוש ורום, or קדוש ורום, in some MSS, may indicate that רום here means *Keter*, that is, the term "sanctified" is another epithet for *Keter*, which is יותר סרום, that is, more elevated, more than any other *sefirah*, and especially more than *Tiferet*. See Azriel of Gerona, *Peruṣ ha-Aggadot*, 49a and 97, note 1; *idem*, *PSY* 1:9, 456: שהקדוש הוא הכה של רום המודמן לקבל פאין סוף (The holy is the power of elevation, prepared to receive from *Ein Sof*). Compare *Sefer ha-Bahir*, 70/30. R. Azriel also explains that *Sefer Yeḥizrah*'s list characterizing the *sefirot* as breath, breath from breath, water and air, began from the second *sefirah*, *Hokhmah*, and only in the present *mishnah*, 1:13, is the first *sefirah*, *Keter*, mentioned. (*PSY*, 1:9, 456). Since the term רום is also used in conjunction with *Tiferet*, which would have been the next *sefirah* in order of descent, R. Isaac is making clear that here the term refers to *Keter*.

²⁴² R. Isaac reads *SY* 1:13 (sec. 15) חתם רום not as a list of verbs, but as "He sealed elevation."

²⁴³ R. Isaac has *SY* 1:13 versions ק, ט, ed. I Gruenwald, 146.

²⁴⁴ The lower *sefirah Hokhmah*, seals, sets an ontological limit, to the upper *sefirah Keter*. The letter *yod* corresponds to *Hokhmah*: see line 41 above.

²⁴⁵ *SY* 1:13 (sec. 15). R. Isaac here follows MS Leiden, Warn. 24 (5) Cod. Or. 4762, in ed. I. Gruenwald, 146.

²⁴⁶ R. Isaac translates ופנה, He turned, according to its literal root, to face.

²⁴⁷ The sourcetext here is Saadiah b. Joseph, *PSY*, 72, regarding the angels: לפי שהם עשויים פנים לכל רוחות (for they consist of faces in all directions). This

surrounds from all sides.²⁴⁸ But there are powers above²⁴⁹ more interior than the other receivers.²⁵⁰ But²⁵¹ the "back" is according to the paucity of reception one receives.²⁵² And that thing is a face for the receiver that is close,²⁵³

image was extended by Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 163, to the angelic lightning: והם בפנים מכל עבריהם וצדיהם (they consist of faces in all directions and on all sides). R. Isaac develops the notion to become a quality of the upper world, and the world of the *sefirot*, in general.

²⁴⁸ See lines 41-46. "Faces" is interpreted as the open flow of emanation from its source, *Hokhmah*, as viewed by its receivers, i. e., all the *sefirot* and beings below it.

²⁴⁹ MS Angelica: למעין.

²⁵⁰ While all is faces above, there is nonetheless a graded hierarchy of powers.

²⁵¹ The word אבל here and in the previous sentence may be intended to convey the sense "not only this, but..." in a Judeo-Arabic fashion. See M. Gottstein, *Tahbirah*, 59 (16:145a).

²⁵² In full reception, the source is characterized by "face," in diminished reception, by "back." R. Isaac places the distinction from Ex. 33:23 in an emanation context. While everything above is "faces," since these powers are arranged in graded hierarchy, it gives rise to degrees of receptivity, and the possibility of poor reception, or "back."

²⁵³ The distinction between proximity to, and distance from, an emanative source appears in Isaac Israeli, *The Book of Substances*, in Isaac Israeli, ed. and trans. A. Altmann and S. M. Stern, (Oxford, 1958), 88, 102; A. Ibn Ḥasdai, *Ben ham-Melekh we-han-Nazir*, ed. A. M. Habermann (Tel Aviv, 1950) 199: כי לפי קרוב כל עצם מהשרש ולפי רחקו ממנו יהיה זכותו ועביו. מפני שכל מה שיהיה מהעצמים יותר קרוב מהשרש והמקור והיכלת והרצון יהיה יותר בהיר וזך ויותר אמת ברוח הקודש מאשר יהיה הרחוק ממנו מן המקום ההוא. וכל מה שיוסיף מרחק הוא יותר חלוש וחשוך ויותר רחוק מרוח השכל וקרוב של הגשמות הגמור... ועל זה הדרך יש לנו לדון עצם השכלים הנפרדים. כי יש שם מלאכים יוסימו זכות ובהירות וזהר ונקיון ישכל שלם

to receive from its flow.²⁵⁴ North and South:²⁵⁵ North comes to South.²⁵⁶

על מלאכים אחרים ומעלה על מעלתם יותר מהאש על הארץ עד אשר יכלה אל האור השלם אשר אין אור עליו יתעלה ויתרמם (According to the nearness of a substance to, or distance from, the root, is its purity or coarseness. For the nearer a substance is to the root and source and power and will, the greater its radiance, its purity and its truth in Holy Spirit than that which is far from that place. The more the distance is increased, the weaker and darker it is, and the further it is from the spirit of intellect and the closer to complete corporeality...In this manner we can consider the substance of the separate intellects. There are angels which have more purity and radiance and splendor and cleanliness and completeness of intellect than other angels, which are exalted over their exaltation more than fire over the earth, until they are absorbed in the perfect light than which there is no greater, may He be praised).

R. Isaac adapts this scheme to explain the distinction between divine or angelic "face" and "back." "Face" refers to that which is close to its emanative source, "back" to that which is far. Maimonides interprets Ex. 33:23 in a similar way, *Moreh Nevukhim*, 1:37: פנים אל פנים, כלומר מציאות במציאות ("face to face," which is to say, existence to existence, without an intermediary)... ותחזה ית. בתראי, כלומר הנמצאות, אשר באלו אני נוסה מהם ומשליכם על דרך משל לרחקם ממציאותו יתעלה ("And you shall see My back, which is to say the beings from which I have turned away, which, in a manner of speaking, I have cast aside, due to their remoteness from His existence, may He be exalted).

²⁵⁴ Compare line 75, above. The term *משך*, emanative flow, is standard philosophic, especially poetic philosophic usage. See Solomon Ibn Gabirol, *Keter Malkhut, Sirei haq-Kodes*, D. Yarden, vol. 1, 43 lines 4-5: למשך משך היש מן האין (to draw forth the flow of existence from nothingness); Judah HaLevi, "E-lohim מושך נבואה משך ליודעיו, (the flow of prophecy He drew forth for those who know Him). Judah Alharizi, *Musrei Philosophim*, 1:10: ומשך השכל הרבני העליוני (the flow of the divine, supernal intellect).

²⁵⁵ SY 1:14 (sec. 16).

²⁵⁶ The order of directions in this mishnah, which summarizes the order laid out in the previous five sections, is also the order of hierarchic descent of divine efflux. This is also possibly an allusion to Cant. 4:16: עוֹרֵי צִפּוֹן וּבֹאֵי תֵימָן.

Chapter 2

Twenty-two letters:¹ it was not necessary to mention the ten *sefirot*, for it has already mentioned them; therefore it only came to mention the twenty-two letters. **Simple:** each one extends by itself and does not invert.² Even though we find that the counterpart of odor is odorlessness, and the counterpart of talk is muteness, and so with all the simple [letters],³ even so, they do not resemble the geminates. For muteness and odorlessness and those similar to them are only absence and lack, like darkness, which is the absence of light,⁴ but the geminates,

¹ *SY* 2:3 (sec. 17) 147.

² R. Isaac plays on the double meaning of **פשוט** as "simple" and "extended," to place the letters in the context of the process of emanation. See Judah Alharizi's definition of **התפשט** in his introduction to his translation of Maimonides' *Noreh Nevukhim*, (Vilna, 1912) 8: **התפשט, כשיפוז כח הדבר ויהיה מתרחב והולך** (when the power of a thing disperses and continues to expand). Inversion is a quality of the geminate letters. See below, lines 313-19.

³ The examples of contrary qualities come from the categories of biological functions listed in *SY* 5:1 (sec. 45) 162: **שתיים עשרה משובות... יסודן ראייה שמינה והריחה ושיחה ולגימה ותשמיש המטה והילוך רוגז ולחוק היריהור ושינה**. (Twelve simple letters...their foundation is sight, hearing, smell, speech, eating, sexuality, walking, anger and laughter, though and sleep).

⁴ Isaac Israeli, *The Book of Substances*, in *Isaac Israeli*, ed. and trans. A. Altman and S. M. Stern, (Oxford 1958) 87: "Firstly, because ignorance has no form or existence; it cannot be a thing's form and cannot be predicated of a thing, because it is

the weak and the emphatic, each one has a cause unto itself.⁵

And the tongue is a rule:⁶ *Tiferet* is called "rule," as it is written: "For it is a rule for Israel (Ps. 81:5)."⁷ But aleph is a rule,⁸ signifies the elevating of the rule and the exalting of its crown,⁹ but it does not mention it

privation, and privation has no existence or form; for instance blindness, which has no form or existence, because it is the privation of sight. Similarly, darkness has no form or existence, because it is the privation of light."

See, too, Abraham Bar Ḥiyya, *Negillat ham-Negaleh*, ed. A. Poznanski (Berlin, 1924) 5: וכן החשך הוא אסירת האור (So, too, darkness is the absence of light).

⁵ That is, each pair of geminates represents active, opposing qualities, rather than a quality and its absence. Compare lines 313-19 below.

⁶ See *SY* 2:3 (sec. 17) 147 note 1. Compare *SY* 2:1 (sec. 23) 151. *Ḥok* denotes statute, rule, line, boundary and portion, all of which share the sense of something straight, limiting and determined. Therefore the term "rule," in the sense of *regula*, with its legal as well as geometrical connotation, was chosen as the translation for all occurrences in this passage.

⁷ "Israel" is an epithet for *Tiferet*. See Tishbi's note, Azriel of Gerona, *Perus ha-Ḥaggadot*, fol. 2b, 68 note 2, to the effect that "Israel" was used most frequently by the Gerona kabbalists as an epithet for *Tiferet*, though on occasion it seems to have stood for *Keter* instead, particularly in the form ישראל סבא (Grandfather Israel). See *Sefer hab-Bahir*, 91/40.

⁸ *SY* 3:2 (sec. 26) 152.

⁹ This is an allusion to *Keter*. See line 273 below. R. Isaac compares *Tiferet* and *Keter*, both described as "rule," and both *sefirot* serving as mediators balancing between two extremes.

with reference to that elevation until chapter three,¹⁰ where it mentions the innerness of merit and demerit.¹¹ Since it mentioned here the twenty-two letters, it mentioned the three matrices, even though it was not necessary.¹²

He engraved them¹³ in *Tesuvah*.¹⁴ He made amorphous

¹⁰ This refers to chapter three as it appears in certain of the short recensions listed by I. Gruenwald, *SY*, 3:2 (sec. 26) 152: כַּעֲצוּר.

¹¹ "Merit" and "demerit" refer to *Hesed* and *Gevurah*: see Azriel of Gerona, *PSY*, 2:1, 458.

R. Isaac, here and below, line 273, is comparing *SY* sec. 23: שְׁלוֹשׁ אֲמוֹת... וְלִשׁוֹן חוֹק מְכַרֵּי־בִּינָתַיִם with *SY* sec. 26: שְׁלוֹשׁ אֲמוֹת... אֱלֹהֵי חוֹק מְכַרֵּי־בִּינָתַיִם. He explains the latter as the inner, ideal dynamic of the former condition, the ascent of *Tiferet* towards *Keter*.

On the meaning of elevation, see line 245-46, below, and note 11.

¹² The point is that chapter two of *SY* is devoted to discussing principles that apply to the twenty-two letters in general. A discussion of the three matrices in particular is out of place, and belongs in chapter three. R. Isaac here justifies what is essentially an editing problem in the recension he was using by deeming it a case of association. See *SY*, I. Gruenwald, 147, n. 1.

¹³ *SY* 2:2 (sec. 19).

¹⁴ Engraving is the degree of carving of form that occurs at the level of the *sefirah Binah*. The forms that are engraved are the letters. Compare *Sefer hab-Bahir*, 143/49: שְׁלִישִׁי, מַחֲצַב הַתּוֹרָה, אוֹצֵר הַחִכְמָה, מַחֲצַבָה רוּחַ א-לֵהִים, מִלְמַד שֶׁחֲצַב הַקַּב"ה כֹּל אוֹתוֹת הַתּוֹרָה וְחִקְקוּ בְרוּחַ, (Third, the quarry of the Torah, the storehouse of wisdom (*Hokhmah*), its quarry is the Holy Spirit, which teaches that the Holy One, blessed be He, hewed all the letters of the Torah and engraved them in spirit and made His forms). On the cognomen *Tesuvah* for *Binah*, see *supra*, 8.4.

matter.¹⁵ But he did not wish to speak of¹⁶ inscription, even though we find "inscribed in a true writ (Dan. 10:21)," because inscription is not yet a form until it is first in writing.¹⁷ And hewed them from the letters that were the

¹⁵ The word גולם for pure, amorphous or primal matter appears in Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 14: וְעוֹר שֵׁשׁ בִּיצוּרִים דְּבַר שְׁהוּא גוֹלָם וְגוֹף וַיֵּשׁ בּוֹ כַּח לְהַעֲמִיד עֲצָמוֹ וְהוּא הַנְּקִירָא בְּלִשׁוֹן עַרְבֵי גִוְהַר (There is also among creatures something that is amorphous matter and body, that has the power to be self-subsistent, and which is called "substance" (ג'וֹהַר) in Arabic). See, also, Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 211. It was the term of choice for Maimonides to represent primal matter throughout *Hilkhot Yesodei hat-Torah*: 2:3; 3:10; 4:6,7. R. Azriel continues use of this term for primal matter (*PSY*, 151, lines 15, 16).

Among the kabbalists, *Binah* is associated with the philosophical category of primal matter, *Hokhmah* with primal form. See Azriel of Gerona, *Perus ha-ʿAggadot*, 151, note 7, where Tishbi observes that for the Gerona Circle, based on the teachings of R. Isaac, *tohu* corresponds to *Hokhmah*, *bohu* corresponds to *Binah*. See below, lines 218-20. See Nahmanides, *Torah Commentary*, Gen. 1:1, Azriel of Gerona, *PSY* 1:11, 457; 2:6, 459, and especially R. Jacob ben Sheshet, *Mešiv Devarim Nekhošim*, ch. 9 (32a-33b, 120; 37b-38a, 129), who, as Tishbi notes, consciously cites Abraham bar Ḥiyya, *Hegyon han-Nefeš*, ed. G. Wigoder, (Jerusalem, 1971) 42, and n. 20, for the identification of *tohu* with primal matter and *bohu* with primal form.

In R. Isaac's scheme, according to the passage under discussion, *Tešuvah* or *Binah* is not itself identical with primal matter. It is the act of engraving letters within *Tešuvah* that creates primal matter *per se*.

¹⁶ Judeo-Arabic philosophic usage of the preposition ׀ן . See M. Gottstein, *Tahbirah*, 96, 6.a,b.

¹⁷ Inscription is the carving activity appropriate to the *Sefirah Hokhmah*. Even though the verse Dan. 10:21 seems to imply that the forms of the letters apply to *Hokhmah*, that is, they are inscribed, nonetheless they remain hidden until they are engraved in *Binah*.

R. Isaac is addressing the exegetical issue that *SY* begins its account of the process of creation *via*

prior foundation,¹⁸ engraved in *Teshuvah*, after the making of the boundaries¹⁹ by the engraving that followed the inscribing. He weighed them, this against that, in order to couple them to make fruits, for it is impossible that there emanate one thing from another without a plumbline.²⁰ And exchanged them: exchange is included in transformation,²¹ as

carving with the action of engraving, rather than the prior and more subtle action of inscribing. See *supra*, ch. 6.

¹⁸ See above, line 20; *SY* 1:2 (sec. 2).

¹⁹ See Azriel of Gerona, *Perush ha-ʿAggadot*, 89, lines 7-17, who explains that "boundary" is the first step and minimum degree of differentiation in the creation of form.

²⁰ Compare Abraham Bar Hiyya, *Hegyon han-Nefes*, ch. 1, 42-43, where the relationship between amorphous matter and form is compared to the plumbline-and-chaos, plumb bob-and-substance image of Is. 34:11.

Perhaps this passage should read "for it is impossible that there emanate one thing from another without weights (משקלות)." This would mean that the descending process of creation by emanation can only occur through a progressive weighing-down and materialization. That is, in a very literal sense, emanation, as progressive corporealization, involves an increase in the "weight" of the emanating entity with respect to its source. No MSS have this reading, however.

²¹ The term "transformation (הלווה)", does not appear in *SY* 2:2 (sec. 19). The digression which follows, comparing the term תפורה, exchange, with הלווה, transformation, apparently derives partly from their association in the biblical verse Lev. 27:10 and its explication in *Temurah* 9a, where these two terms are compared and contrasted.

While the sensibility to distinguish these two terms may be supported by the talmudic passage, R. Isaac does not adopt their actual talmudic definitions. Rather, in the ensuing passage, to line 180, the technical differences he defines among various Hebrew terms for "change" reflect, in part, conceptual

it is written: "the rain has transformed and gone (Cant.

distinctions used by Abraham Bar Ḥiyya. See *Megillat han-Megalleh*, 5-6, especially 5, lines 7-12 and following: וּמִן הַדֶּרֶךְ הַזֶּה תִּמְצָא כָּל הַחֲלוּמִים הַעוֹבְרִים עַל גּוֹמֵי הַיְצִירוֹת נַחֲלָקִים לְשֵׁלֶשֶׁת חֲלָקִים. יֵשׁ מֵהֶם עֲנִינִים שֵׁישׁ לֵהֶם חֲשָׂא וְצוּרָה בְּנִמְצָאוֹת. וְיֵשׁ מֵהֶם עֲנִינִים שֶׁהֵם אֲבִידַת הַמְקָרָה וְאִסִּיפַת הַצּוּרָה וְאִין לֵהֶם צוּרָה וְלֹא חֲשָׂא. וְיֵשׁ מֵהֶם דְּבַר שְׂאִין לוֹ צוּרָה וְאִין בּוֹ אִסִּיפַת צוּרָה אֲבָל תְּלוּי הוּא בְּנִמְצָאוֹת וּבִמְקָרִיהֶן וְהוּא נִמְטָךְ אֲלֵיהֶן וְנִמְצָא בְּדַעַת וּבְלֵב עַל גֵּרָא עִמָּהֶם וְאִין אֶחָד מִחוּשֵׁי נִמְטָךְ. הַגּוֹף מְגִיב אֲלָיו וְלֹא שׁוֹלֵם עָלָיו. (In this manner you find that all the changes that can affect corporeal creatures are divided into three categories. Some of them have aspects that have perceptible substance and form among existents. Some of them involve the loss of accidents and absenting of form, and have neither form nor perceptible substance. And some of them involve a thing that has no form nor the absence of form, but depends rather upon existents and their accidents, and is associated with them in the mind and the heart, while none of the perceptible aspect of corporeality reach or prevail over it). See, too, *Hegyon han-Nefes*, 46: הַצּוּרָה הַשְּׁלִישִׁית... מֵתַגְלַגְלַת וּמֵתַחֲלַפַת מִצּוּרָה אֶל צוּרָה עַל שְׁנֵי דְרָכִים. מֵהֵן מִפְּשִׁיטִין אֵת הַצּוּרָה וְלוֹבְשִׁים צוּרָה אַחֲרַת וְאִינֵם יְכוּלִים לְהִרְחִיב הַצּוּרָה וְלֹא לְהַגְדִּילָהּ. וּמֵהֵן מְרַחֲבִין אֵת הַצּוּרָה (The third kind of form...transmutes and transforms from form to form in two ways. Some divest a form and put on another form, and are unable to expand or enlarge their form. Others expand their form and enlarge it and do not divest it). See the entire discussion, in which he examines the subject of categories of change at great length, 38-50. In the course of his discussions, Bar Ḥiyya uses the terms תְּמוּדָה, חֲלוּף, but more or less interchangeably, not in the consist manner in which R. Isaac tries to define them. Compare, too, Joseph Ibn Ḥaddik, *Sefer 'Olam hak-Ḥatan*, ed. S. Horovitz (Breslau, 1903) 9-15 for a similar discussion.

While R. Isaac's own discussion does not follow Bar Ḥiyya's or Ibn Ḥaddik's in all respects, there is, nonetheless, a general commonality in their empirical interest in distinguishing various categories of the phenomenon of change. More specifically, R. Isaac puts to use Bar Ḥiyya's conceptual distinction between substantive change *versus* a change in accidental qualities, a distinction based, in turn, on straightforward Aristotelian doctrine, particularly Aristotle's differentiation between between changes of substance and changes of qualities, in *On Generation and Corruption*, 1.4, 319b-320a. Even the illustrative examples of change used by Ibn Ḥaddik, such as the rain

2:11)." For with respect to the rain, which is sent forth from its cause and returns, as it is written, "unless it has done what I please (Is. 55:11)," "transformed" is written, for it returns to its amorphous matter,²² and it is possible for it to perform its mission²³ another time by transformation: if a coarse rain is materialized, or a subtle rain.²⁴ But transformation is not included in exchange,²⁵ for transformation is a thing that changes from

cycle, which R. Isaac uses as well, come originally from Aristotle.

In sum, R. Isaac explains the term "exchange" in *SY* on the basis of its appearance in the biblical verse, as expounded in the Talmud in a halakhic context, and placed in an Aristotelian conceptual framework supplied by Bar Ḥiyya, and possibly other philosophical sources such as Ibn Ḥaddik. From Jewish traditional sources he gets the terminological distinctions. From philosophic sources he gets the matching conceptual differences which flesh out his definitions of the terms.

²² See above, note 15.

²³ The choice of the terms "sent forth," "returns" and "mission" in this sentence was also suggested by the verse Is. 55:11.

²⁴ The idea is that "transformation" involves a complete change in the subject. The rain that reappears after a period of formlessness may have an entirely different form than the original manifestation.

See Joseph Ibn Ḥaddik, *Sefer 'Olam hak-Katan*, ed. S. Horovitz (Breslau, 1903) 14, for a similar example of the change from form to formlessness and back to form, drawn from the example of the water and rain cycle. Whether R. Isaac was acquainted with this work is unclear. See the editor's introduction, xiii, n. 57, where Horovitz cited various suggestions as to the identity of the translator, including Naḥum ha-Ma'aravi, a later contemporary of R. Isaac's.

²⁵ Exchange is a more restrictive category within transformation. Compare Aristotelian logic, *Prior*

its root, as it is written, "like a garment You shall transform them, and they shall be transformed (Ps. 102:27)," "a transfer of clothes (Gen. 45:22)," "all transient ones (Prv. 31:8)," for they change from their root.²⁶ But change is the changing of a thing from dimension to dimension and from color to color²⁷ and from place to place.²⁸ Exchange is like a king who has arrived at the limit of his reign, and they remove him from his kingdom and another rules in his stead, better than him²⁹ or similar to him. For exchange goes from cause to cause and from generation to generation, like David, upon whom was bestowed the majesty of kingship, and that agency³⁰ operated until the completion of his

Analytics, 25a lines 23-25. See, too, R. Judah b. Barzilai *PSY*, 181: "All voice is not speech, but all speech is voice; and all voice is from breath, but all breath is not from voice."

²⁶ To evoke R. Isaac's flexible use of the term *תלן*, synonyms based on the prefix *trans-* have been used. All *trans-* words in this passage translate forms of the word *תלן*. The idea is that *תלן* connotes essential change in a single, persisting subject, the people of Ps. 102:27, the genus "clothing" of Gen. 45:22, and the mortals of Prv. 31:8. By contrast, the term *תמורה*, "exchange," refers to a change of subjects. Transformation is the more essential form of change, and therefore the more inclusive category.

²⁷ Change of color is one of the examples of inessential change offered by Abraham Bar Hiyya, *Megillat ham-Megalleh*, 5.

²⁸ Change of place as a form of change is discussed at length by Abraham Bar Hiyya, *Hegyon han-Nefes*, 46-48.

²⁹ 1 Sam. 15:28.

³⁰ Samuel Ibn Tibbon in his translation of

allotted destiny arrived. After that began the kingdom of Solomon, upon whom was bestowed the majesty of kingship that was given to his father, until the completion of his allotted destiny, and this one was exchanged for that one. So, too, is the matter of the fluctuating,³¹ extending³² letters, and therefore it says "exchanged them," and not "transformed them."³³

And He combined them: Thus far, it spoke of the upper world.³⁴ Now, it speaks of that place from which the separate entities are affected³⁵ by the extension³⁶ of the

Maimonides' *Moreh Nevukhim*, 2:12, uses the term מַנְעֵל in the sense of agent or cause, in the generic sense. So, too, does Jacob b. Reuven, *Nilhanot Haš-Šem*, 179 *et passim*.

³¹ See line 214, below.

³² See line 158 above.

³³ The letters themselves do not change or transform, rather, one letter replaces another to create different effects. Therefore *SY*'s use of the term "exchange" is appropriate and precise.

³⁴ See *supra*, ch. 5.3, regarding the sources for R. Isaac's concept of the upper world in his *Commentary on Sefer Yeẓirah*, as the world of sefirotic unity, in contrast to the world of the separate entities; and as compared with his tripartite system of worlds in his gloss on the first chapter of Genesis, in MS JTS 1887, fol. 29a-b.

³⁵ The term מַנְעֵל was used in this sense by Ibn Tibbon in his translation of Judah Halevi's *Kuzari*, 5:10, 20; and by Judah Alḥarizi, in Maimonides' *Moreh Nevukhim*, 1:51.

³⁶ See Baḥya Ibn Paḳudah, *Hovot haI-Levavot*, 8:4: וְנִשְׁטוּת הַכְדוּר (the extension of the sphere). See J. Klatzkin, *Thesaurus Philosophicus*, 221, entry 2. Compare Judah Alḥarizi's definition of הַתְּשׁוּת as "when

letters. **Combined them:** He coupled them³⁷ many times. It varied the terminology, saying **weighed them** and **combined them**, for both are an aspect of coupling, according to their innerness, as in the case of inscription, which is more interior than engraving, and engraving which is more interior than hewing. So, too, weighing is more interior than exchange, and exchange than combination. As in the case of flames, as long as they are separate, there is no ability to accomplish an act, until they are all joined with the coal. So too with a tree: each single branch has no strength, each one on its own, except by their joining this one with that one, and this one within that one. Combination itself, as mentioned, is applied to everything that has been mentioned,³⁸ for nothing is joined without combination. For he wanted to speak by degrees and in order of primacy. For first He made men and then women. First He made Jacob and Esau, with a woman on this side and a woman on that side, and He weighed who was fit to be the mate of this one and who the mate of that one,³⁹ and this is the weighing: after this shall be that, and after this shall be that. Thus, from

the power of a thing spreads and continually extends," in his introductory lexicon to Maimonides' *Moreh Nevukhim*.

³⁷ Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 215, speaks of the procedure of weighing, combining and exchanging of letters as a "coupling (אָפּוּר)."

³⁸ The examples given above, the flame needing to be joined to the coal for effectiveness, the parts of a tree needing to be joined together for strength, are

the first were created all the souls that would exist in the future,⁴⁰ and all the forms that would receive spirit in the future.⁴¹

all illustrations of the principle of combination.

³⁹ *Bava Batra*, 123a. *Sota*, 2a. *Midrash Gen. R.*, 68.

⁴⁰ R. Isaac is commenting on the passage from *SY* 2:2, 4 (sec. 19), which reads וַיִּצְרֶה אֱלֹהִים כָּל הַנְּשָׁמוֹת וְכָל הַצְּפוּרִים לְיוֹם אֶחָד (He formed in them the souls of all creatures and the souls of all that would be formed in the future). Thus he comments on both "souls" and "forms," reflecting the terms of the passage. He accentuates the Neoplatonic quality that is already apparent in the passage. Also underlying his language and formulation seems to be Rashi's gloss to *Avodah Zarah* 5a: "The descendant of David shall not come until all the souls of the body have been consumed." Rashi comments: אוֹצֵר יֵשׁ וְשֵׁמוֹ גּוֹף וּמִבְרָאִיּוֹת נּוֹצְרֵי כָּל הַנְּשָׁמוֹת (There is a storehouse, and its name is "body," and from the beginning were created all the souls that are to be born in the future, and they were placed there). Compare *Niddah* 13b. See Judah b. Barzilai's summary of commentaries on these talmudic dicta and related midrashic sources, *PSY*, 208. Compare Rashi, Gen. 1:14, based on Gen. R. 1:19, that all creatures were created on the first day, and put in place on their appropriate succeeding days.

R. Isaac's point is that *SY* depicts the divine activity of "combination" as part of the preparatory process of creation, operating with the souls and forms before they become fully manifest in creatures, a position supported by traditional and philosophic theories of cosmogony. See, e. g., Abraham Bar Hiyya, *Negillat ham-Negalleh*, 8-10; 17-19, and see following note.

⁴¹ This is a statement of the principle of creation as a process proceeding from potential to actual couched in philosophic terms picked up from *SY* 2:2,4 (sec. 19), and supported by mainstream Neoplatonic doctrine. Abraham Bar Hiyya, *Negillat ham-Negalleh*, 17-19 says specifically that it is the form of a thing that has prior existence *in potentia*, to be actualized at a later time; for example (17): כָּל דָּבָר וְדָבָר הַנִּמְצָא בְּכָל יוֹם וְיוֹם שֶׁצּוֹרֵתוֹ וְדָמוֹתוֹ הֵיחָד נִבְרָא בְּתַחֲלָה (regarding

And He formed in them.⁴² From the language of figure and form. In them, in the letters themselves He made a form, in order to form another form from it below.⁴³ So, too, each and every thing is cause from cause, until it arrives at the separate entities, which are below the ten *sefirot*, and the separate entities suck from them like fruits of the tree until the end of the completion of their ripening. With the completion of their ripening, they fall from the place of their sucking and in their place others are regenerated in their stead.⁴⁴ Sometimes those which fall, fall in a place such that they make great trees that issue forth their

each and every thing that exists in every generation, its form and image were created at first, the root of the species and its essence existed from before). See, too, *Hegyon han-Nefes*, ch. 1, 40-43. Bar Ḥiyya notes that this theory of cosmogony is both the prevailing gentile philosophic view, and a view consonant with, even based upon, Torah tradition (*Ibid.* 41, and note 19, where G. Wigoder notes the Neoplatonic provenance of this theory).

R. Isaac's formulation, picking up on the precise word-choice of the passage from *SY* and its double structure ("He formed the *souls* of creatures, and all that would be *formed* in the future") has the effect of highlighting the parallelism and agreement between a traditional Jewish conception of the pre-existence of souls, based on midrashic sources, cited by Rashi, and the mainstream Platonic, Neoplatonic and Aristotelian doctrine of the pre-existence of abstract forms.

⁴² *SY* 2:2,4 (sec. 19).

⁴³ While the preposition *בם* in *SY* itself should probably be translated "with them," "with" the letters, R. Isaac reads it in terms of his overall Neoplatonic conception of an imbedded hierarchy of ontological levels, one level nested *within* another, forms within letters within *sefirot*. See *supra*, ch. 5.

⁴⁴ For an analysis of this passage, see *supra*, ch.

fruit, and so too with their fruit and the fruit of their fruit forever: each one according to the level of the place of its sucking, which was its cause, by virtue of its importance and the importance of its fruit.⁴⁵ That are to be formed in the future: these are the spirits, which are subtle essences bound in one place.⁴⁶ All of them were made

5.1.

R. Isaac uses the image of fruit to represent the "separate entities": the falling of the fruit from the tree expresses the notion of separation from the source, as well as from each other.

⁴⁵ The notion that beings can be graded in their perfection according to the level or position of their attachment to the emanated hierarchy can be found in Isaac Israeli's "Book of Substances," *Isaac Israeli*, 93-95; and in Abraham Ibn Hasdai, *Ben ham-Melekh wehan-Nazir*, 200: מפני שכל מה שיהיה מהעצמים יותר קרוב מהשרש והמקור והיכלת והרצון יהיה יותר בהיר וזך ויותר אמת מרוח הקדש מאשר יהיה הרחוק ממנו מן המקום ההוא. וכל מה שיוסיף מרחק הוא יותר חלוש וחשוך ויותר רחוק מרוח השכל וקרוב אל הגשמות הגמור...ועל זה הדרך יש לנו לדון עצם. (Because the closer an essence is to the root, source, power and will, the brighter and purer and more true it is in Holy Spirit than that which is further from that place. The more something increases its distance, the weaker and more benighted it is, the further it is from the spirit of intellect and the closer it is to complete corporeality...In this manner we should compare the essence of the separate intellects).

⁴⁶ This is an allusion to 1 Sam. 25:29, based on the terms of *SY* 2:2 (sec. 19), וצר...היצור...לצור, defined not only as "to form" but "to tie, bind," צרר. The verse associates binding with the condition of the soul, and R. Isaac plays on this meaning. Behind this interpretation may lie the passage from the midrash Eccles. R. 8:11: א"ר חנינא כתיב [זכריה י"ב] ויוצר רוח [אדם בקרבנו, צר רוחו של אדם בגופו, שאילולא כן כיון שהיתה הצרה באה עליו היה נופלה ומשליכה מקרבנו] (R. Hanina says "it is written 'He forms the spirit of man within him,' [meaning] He tied the spirit of man to his body, for were it not so, when suffering comes upon him, he would take it and cast it from within him). R. Isaac's use of

from the beginning of creation,⁴⁷ though the life of the forms of the souls⁴⁸ were formed from an inner power, from something that the heart is not able to ponder.⁴⁹ So, too, the perceptible forms are from the power of the awesome causes, that can be apprehended through perception,⁵⁰ which are the vessels of the unique inner souls.⁵¹

the term רוחות, spirits, rather than souls, matches the midrashic text. If so, the "one place" to which R. Isaac says these spirits are bound would be the body, in the sense of individual bodies. On the other hand, this "one place" in which the spirits are bound, in the sense of gathered, may be that "body" to which Rashi refers, as the metaphysical storehouse of souls, *'Avodah Zarah*, 5a.

⁴⁷ See notes 40, 41 above.

⁴⁸ The identification of soul and spirit with form is an Aristotelian doctrine found in Maimonides, *Yesodei hat-Torah*, 4:8, 9; *Teshuvah*, 8:3; *Moreh Nevukhim* 1:41. Compare Aristotle, *De Anima*, 2:1-3 (412a-415a).

⁴⁹ This reference to the innermost origin of the soul may allude to to Gen. R. 14:11: חמשה שמות נקראו הנפש. רוח. נפש. יחידה. חיה. ([The soul] is called by five names...). The level of "unique" may be what R. Isaac refers to in line 198 as "bound in one place," and in line 201 as "unique." The "life" he speaks of in line 199 may also refer to this dictum. The innovative point is that the originary essence of human being itself is rooted in the most recondite dimensions of the divine. Compare Nahmanides, *Kitvei Ramban*, vol 1, 392: הראש מקדמי עולמים נמצאתי במכסניו החתומים / מאין המערכה המציאני... / שלשלת חיי מיסוד המערכה.

⁵⁰ See line 71 and not, above. It is the forms that can be apprehended through intuitive perception, and which, as R. Isaac goes on to say, are the vessels of the souls.

⁵¹ See Judah HaLevi's *Kuzari*, trans. J. Ibn Tibbon, 5:12, where mental forms are described as the vessels of the soul, and the term "vessel" is used in a fully abstract sense: (279, line 18): וכליה הראשונים, הצורות הרוחניות המצפיירות מאמצע המוח מהרוח הנפשית, בכח

power of *Teshuvah* they are hewn, and they are within *Teshuvah*.⁵⁵ The letters have a body and a soul.⁵⁶ Fixed in

⁵⁴ For the concept of a subtle voice that is not perceived, compare Gen. R. 6:12: ג' דברים קולן הולך מסוף העולם ועד סופו והבריות ביניהם ואינם מרגישים, היום (The voices of three things travel from one end of the world to the other, yet the people in between do not perceive them: the day, the rain, and the soul when it leaves the body). Similarly, *Pirkei de-R. Eliezer*, ch 34. ו' קולן (The voices of six things travel from one end of the world to the other, and their voices are not heard).

R. Saadiah Gaon, in his Commentary on *SY*, 2:2, 53, compares voice and speech: ובשלשת אלה אמר הכתוב אין אומר ואין דברים בלי נשמע קולם, והנה הקול הוא מה שאינו מובן, והדברים הם המלים הבודדות, והאמר הוא חבור שתי מלים (regarding these three the verse says "there is no speech, no words, their voice is not heard (Ps. 19:4), for behold, voice is that which is not understood, words are separate, speech is the composite of two or three words). Whether R. Isaac had R. Saadiah's comment in mind, or even available to him, is not clear. In any case, R. Isaac's conception of voice goes beyond R. Saadiah's notion of mere inarticulateness. For R. Isaac, it is not just physical sound, but the underlying agency or intention of expression. Compare Maimonides' exposition on the voices of the celestial spheres in praise of the Creator, based on his own exegesis of Ps. 19:4, in *Moreh Nevukhim*, 2:5, in which the non-verbal praise of the spheres is regarded as a higher level of intellectual activity than articulated speech.

Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 208, distinguishes between voice and speech, though not in the same manner as R. Isaac: ואין דומה הקול לדיבור כי הקול גרוע הוא ואין לך (voice is not like speech, for voice is inferior, and is not necessarily lingual, while speech is lingual). See, too, 216-17. Compare, too, *Theology of Aristotle*, 18.13-19 in *Plotini Opera*, vol. 2, ed. G. Lewis (Paris and Brussels, 1959) 39, regarding spiritual communication without words.

⁵⁵ See line 166, above, and notes.

⁵⁶ Compare Judah Halevi, *Kuzari* 4:3, trans. J. Ibn Tibbon, ed. A. Zifrinowitsch, 209 line 6, regarding the four vowel letters אהו"י that: והמה כרוחות ושאר האותיות כגופות (they are like spirits, and the rest of

the sinews of the head.⁵⁷ In the breath are all the letters,⁵⁸ and the breath is fixed in the mouth. For there is a distinction between the movements of the tongue and the movements of the mouth,⁵⁹ for the vessel of the breath is

the letters are like bodies). Compare Abraham Ibn Ezra, *Yesod Mor'a*, ch. 1, (Jerusalem, 1970) 1: **כי התיבות כנשמות** (for the words are like bodies and the cantillation signs like souls); Commentary to Ex. 20:1 in *Perusei hat-Torah*, ed. A. Weiser, 127: **כי הטהרות הם כנשמות**; *Sefer hab-Bahir* sec. 115/47 and note 2 (the "*Yerushalmi*" to which R. Shimon b. Zemah Duran refers, in *Magen Avot*, 74b, cited by Margoliot, may well be the *Zohar*, which was so called by R. Moses de Leon; see G. Scholem's article on the *Zohar*, *Encyclopedia Judaica*, vol 16, 1210).

⁵⁷ *SY*, 2:3 (sec. 17): **קבועות בפה בחמשה מקומות** (fixed in the mouth in five places). In the long recension, this section goes on to list the five places, along the length of the tongue. See "A Preliminary Critical Edition of *Sefer Yesirah*," 147, note 2.

See, too, Abraham Ibn Ezra, Torah Commentary, Ex. 3:15, ed. A. Weiser, vol. 2, 29: **ובעל לשון הקודש ראה כי חמש מקומות הם מוצאי האותיות** (The master of the Hebrew language observed that there are five places [in the head] which emit [the sounds of] the letters). He goes on to list the throat, the palate, the tongue, the teeth, the lips. Compare Dunash Ibn Tamim, *PSY*, 38-39: **כי דברי האדם מוגשמים בכלי הריאה וגרון וחיה ולשון ושנים** (for human speech is made physically manifest by the organs of the lungs, the throat, the palate, the tongue, the teeth and the mouth, and all these organs cut the breath that issues from the lungs) R. Judah b. Barzilai, *PSY*, 208 lists the five places as 1) the lungs with the throat, 2) the lips, 3) the palate, 4) the tip of the tongue against the teeth, and 5) the middle of the tongue. Compare line 139.

⁵⁸ This is not just a description of a physical reality, but also a parallel kabbalistic statement: breath, signifying the *sefirah Binah*, contains all the letters. Compare *Sefer hab-Bahir*, sec. 143/49. This intended parallelism between physical and sefirotic structure is true, explicitly or implicitly, of all R. Isaac's descriptions.

the movement of the organs of speech that move with them, and they have a fixed place, from which place it is impossible to move.

⁵⁹ R. Isaac accounts for the fact that *SY* specifies that the breath is fixed in the mouth, not the tongue, and possibly accounts as well for the distinction made between tongue and mouth, e. g., in a section such as *SY* 1:3 (sec. 3), i. e., between the covenant of the tongue and the covenant of the mouth. By rights, tongue and mouth should be one general locale, the locus of speech. R. Isaac explains the distinction in terms of their differing movements contributing to the process of speech.