

Hitbodedut as Concentration in Ecstatic Kabbalah

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Individual and Community in Jewish Spirituality

RABBINIC JUDAISM, more than as the religion of a people, took shape as the religion of Jewish communities.¹ From the time that the Temple cult ceased, those commandments applying to Israel as a nation ceased to have validity or contemporary force; the most significant religious-social framework that remained—and was even strengthened—following the destruction of the Temple was the community, whose focus was the synagogue. The common divine worship—prayer—was transformed into the center of religious life; it required the assembling of ten men as an essential precondition for the performance of many of its most important components. Halakhic thought made the gathering of the community a more and more essential part of the religious cult and rejected, directly or indirectly, tendencies toward individualistic separatism. Prayer, Torah study, circumcision, and marriage all became understood as events which the individual performs within society and in which he must participate. Solitude as a religious value or as a means of attaining religious ends was preserved as a part of sacred history: the solitude of Moses on Mount Sinai, that of Elijah in the desert, and that of the high priest in the Holy of Holies became ideals that were part of the heritage of the past. The individual was no longer able to achieve perfection by separation from the company of other men: he was now required to join them in order to achieve religious wholeness.

This tendency, the literary expressions of which appear in the Talmud and the Midrash, was inherited by the Kabbalah. The very fact that several of its leading thinkers—the RABaD (Rabbi Abraham ben David of Posquières, ca. 1125–1198), the RaMBaN (Rabbi Moses ben Nahman, 1194–1270),

and the RaShBA (Rabbi Solomon ben Abraham Adret, ca. 1235–ca. 1310)—were themselves halakhic authorities and simultaneously communal leaders is sufficient proof of the need for continuity. The Kabbalists accepted the framework of the *mizwot* as self-evident and fought for its strengthening and protection against challenges, both internal and external. The strikingly small number of original prayers composed by the Kabbalists, the exegetical nature of kabbalistic literature from its earliest inception, and, above all, the nonexistence of separate kabbalistic groups or societies who separated themselves from the organized framework of the people as a whole are all indirect evidence of a conscious and deliberate tendency to avoid turning the Kabbalah into a focus of controversy and division among the members of the community. We thus find here an interesting phenomenon, different from analogous processes in Christianity and Islam, regarding the organization of groups with mystical tendencies.

In the latter two religions, mysticism is associated with the formation of brotherhoods or monastic orders, and most of the mystical literature, whether Christian or Moslem, is written within their framework. It follows from this that the full realization of the life of the spirit is connected, in both religions, with the choice of a way of life markedly different from that of most of their coreligionists. This way of life is sometimes characterized by separation from the life of the “lay” society; at other times the monk or devotee may continue to be active within society but will observe special norms and practices. These organizational forms are based upon the voluntary acceptance of limitations and obligations over and above those normally accepted as religious norms on the part of their members, on the assumption that these rules of behavior constitute a framework that makes the development of the life of the spirit possible. Generally speaking, the establishment of organizations of this type is associated with the quest by these or other individuals for personal religious or spiritual attainments. The “mobile” and nomadic character of both Christian and Muslim religious orders also stems from this.

At the time of its inception as a historical phenomenon, the Kabbalah did not know of any special organizational system; there were no specific practices or customs designed especially for the Kabbalists. The spiritual life was generally strengthened by intensifying the spiritual effort invested in the fulfillment of the *mizwot*, which as such were obligatory upon the entire people, or by deepening the understanding of the reasons underlying the *mizwot*. At times, nonhalakhic means of attaining communion with God were set, but these were designed so as not to conflict even indirectly with the fulfillment of the *mizwot*. Moreover, the carrying out of these practices was, in any event, extremely limited in time and was not intended to

replace the halakhic framework. Nor did they demand for themselves authority comparable to that of the halakhah. In practice, Kabbalah may be defined as a sort of *regula* of the Jewish religion: because of the broad scope of the halakhic system, the fulfillment of the 613 commandments could be seen as a religious challenge which, despite its being normative, allowed for departure from the norm when the *mizwot* were performed with kabbalistic intentions. If the *regula* in Christianity was intended to add religious demands, expressed in both internal and external behavioral changes, the Kabbalah, generally speaking, was concerned with inner change and, at least in the beginning, did not tend to add or detract from the halakhic norm. The external difference in behavior between the Kabbalist, the philosopher, and the halakhist was far smaller than that between a monk and a lay Christian. It suffices to contrast the abstention from marriage as a decisive factor in the formation of monasticism or the special dress of both the monks and the Sufis with the total absence of anything of this kind among the Kabbalists. Put differently, the transformation of an ordinary Jew into a Kabbalist did not involve any discontinuity in his outward behavior, as opposed to what generally happened to one who joined a Sufi brotherhood or a monastic order.

Against the background of what we have said above, the appearance of the first discussions of the religious value of seclusion (*hitbodedut*) in medieval Jewish texts must be seen as indication of external influence. This is clearly the case in the discussions of the subject in the book *Hovot ha-Levavot (Duties of the Heart)* by Rabbi Bahya Ibn Paquda (second half of the eleventh century), in which the Sufi influence is clear; this phenomenon reappears in the circle of Pietists (*Hasidim*) associated with Rabbi Abraham Maimonides (1186–1237).

I wish to discuss here the specific meaning of the term *hitbodedut* within a particular kabbalistic school, namely, that of prophetic Kabbalah founded by Rabbi Abraham Abulafia (1240–ca. 1291), and the influence of that school upon the Kabbalah of Safed. I will analyze here the texts in which the term *hitbodedut* has the specific meaning of “concentrated thought,” as part of a clearly defined mystical technique. This meaning may have been influenced by the Sufi understanding of inner contemplation or spiritual meditation or by the Sufi terms *tagrid* or *tafrid*, whose meaning approximates that of *hitbodedut* in some texts of prophetic Kabbalah.

This meaning does not appear in any of the major Hebrew dictionaries. Nor have students of Jewish philosophy or of Kabbalah discussed this meaning of the term, but there is no doubt that this understanding will contribute to a more exact interpretation of several important philosophic texts that until now have been differently understood.²

The Sufi Background

The connection between pronouncing the name of God and *hitbodedut*, in the sense of seclusion in a special place, is already present in Sufism. The similarity of Rabbi Abraham Abulafia's approach to this subject to the Sufi system is well known, and one need not assume that this is mere chance. It is possible that he learned of this approach from his teacher, Rabbi Baruch Togarmi, who was apparently of Eastern background, to judge by the name. Sufism may also have influenced Abulafia directly, even though there is no evidence from his writings that he had any contact with Muslim mystics. The precise way in which certain Sufi elements entered Abulafia's thought must remain an open question; however, it is appropriate to discuss here, in relation to *hitbodedut*, a description of the Sufi practice of *dbiker*, which was likely to have been known to Jewish authors from the mid-thirteenth century on: I refer to a passage in Rabbi Abraham Ibn Hasdai's Hebrew translation of a work by the Persian Muslim theologian, jurist, and mystic Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali (1058-1111), known as *Mozney Zedeq*. The Sufi "path" is portrayed in the Hebrew version as follows:

I decided to follow this path, and I took counsel with an old teacher of the Sufi worship as to how I ought to behave regarding continual reading of the books of religion. And he answered me thus: Know that the path towards this matter is to cut off and cease completely all of those things by which one is attached to this world, until your heart will not think at all of wife, or children, or money or home or wisdom or rulership. But bring yourself to a place such that their presence or absence becomes a matter of indifference. Then seclude yourself in a corner and make do with the divine service of the commandments as ordered, and sit with a heart empty of all thoughts and worry, and let all your thoughts be only of the supreme God. And accustom your tongue to say the name of the living God, let it not cease to call upon the Lord continually, as in the saying of the prophet, "let them not depart from your mouth" (Isa 59:1). And all this in order to understand God and to apprehend Him, until you reach the stage that, were you to allow your tongue to move by itself, it would run quickly to say this, because of its habit to do this thing. And afterwards accustom yourself to another thing, that is, to meditate in your heart and soul, in your thoughts alone, without any movement of your tongue. And then become accustomed to another thing, that there remain in your heart only the meaning of the words, not the letters of the words or the form of speech, but only the subject itself, abstract, firmly fixed in your heart, as something obligatory and constant. The choice is in your hand only up to this limit. After that there is no choice; you can but constantly remove the sickness of destructive lusts—but after that your own [free] will ceases, and yours is only to hope for that which may appear, of the opening of the gates of mercy, what is seen of Him to those who cleave to the exalted Name, which is a small part of what was seen

by the prophets . . . but the level of those who cling to God cannot be told, nor their exalted qualities, and their imagination, and their [moral] virtues. These are the ways of the Sufis.³

The final goal of the Sufi path, as described in this Hebrew text, is to cling to God. The essence of this clinging is discussed immediately before the passage quoted above:

And to always hope and wait for God to open for him the gates of mercy, as these things were revealed to those who cling to Him and to the prophets, and their souls acquired that perfection of which man is capable—not through learning, but by separation from this world and *hitbodedut* and casting off all desires, and making his goal to receive God with all his heart and all his soul. And whoever shall be with God, God will be with him. (*Mozney Zedeq*, pp. 48-49)

According to the Hebrew version of Al-Ghazali, the Sufis had a fixed path by which they attained communion with God, which involved several clearly delimited stages: (1) separation from the world; (2) indifference or equanimity; (3) solitude (*hitbodedut*); (4) repetition of God's name; (5) communion with God. Despite the general similarity between certain of the various stations on the way toward *devequt* (clinging to God) in Al-Ghazali and parallel steps in Abulafia, the difference between the approaches of these two mystics is clear. First, equanimity is mentioned neither in any of Abulafia's own writings nor in the book *Sha'arey Zedeq*, which belongs to his circle. Second, in Al-Ghazali *hitbodedut* refers to physical solitude in a secluded room, whereas in Abulafia it is sometimes understood in this way but at other times, where it is a precondition for pronouncing the names of God, it is understood in the sense of concentration of one's mental activity. Third, the recitations in Al-Ghazali differ from those in Abulafia: Al-Ghazali proposes pronouncing the name with one's tongue, in one's heart, and fixing its meaning in one's thought; Abulafia proposes reading the name and combining its letters in writing, verbally, and in one's thought. From this, it follows that we cannot base his system upon that of Al-Ghazali, at least not directly and not in full.

Hitbodedut in the Writings of Abraham Abulafia

Most of the discussions of *hitbodedut* that were written prior to Abulafia saw it as an activity engaged in by Moses, the prophets, and the pious men of ancient times. The approach of both Jewish philosophers and Kabbalists was based on the assumption that prophecy was a phenomenon of the past. For this reason, their discussions of this subject must be seen primarily as

literary activity—exegesis of the Bible or of talmudic sayings—rather than as rules for actual practice.

This situation was radically changed in the writings of Rabbi Abraham Abulafia. As one who saw himself as a prophet and messiah, he believed that his particular form of Kabbalah paved the way for mystical experience for all who would follow his path. For this reason, the tone of his writing is clearly practical; his writings, from which we shall quote below, are intended as guides to “prophecy” for his contemporaries, and the autobiographical hints therein leave no doubt that he himself followed these techniques and enjoyed their fruits. These two facts are clear signs of the actualization of the discussion concerning *hitbodedut*, whose effects are also felt among later Kabbalists, under the direct or indirect influence of Abulafia’s writings.

In the commentary on his work *Sefer ha-‘Edut*, written on the occasion of his abortive attempt in 1280 to meet with Pope Nicholas III, Abulafia writes:

The Pope commanded all the guards of his house, when he was in Soriano . . . that should Raziel [thus Abulafia designates himself] come to speak with him in the name of the Jews, that they take him immediately, and that he not see him at all, but that he be taken outside of the city and burnt. . . . And this matter was made known to Raziel, but he paid no attention to the words of those who said this, but he practiced *hitbodedut* and saw visions and wrote them down, and thus came about this book.

The close connection between *hitbodedut* and revelation is better explained if we assume that Abulafia concentrated in order to receive an illumination which would guide him in this critical situation, when he was also pressed for time. From what we know, Abulafia arrived at the palace in Soriano right at the time he wrote these things, so that it is difficult to imagine that he found a house or room in which to seclude himself, as he advises in his other writings. It is clear that this is not a casual suggestion, nor a historical description of the prophets, but a firsthand account of the use of *hitbodedut* in order to attain revelation. *Hitbodedut* in the sense of concentration appears to have been part of a way of life, and not only a sporadic activity performed in times of trouble or danger. In an epistle known as *The Seven Paths of the Torah (Sheva‘ Netivot ha-Torah)*, Abulafia enumerates a long list of works which he learned, but which did not bring him to “prophecy”:

But none of this brought me to apprehension of the Active Intellect, to the point that I could take pride in prophecy, that I could fulfill the verse, “For in this shall the proud man take pride . . .” [Jer 9:23] until I received this

apprehension in actuality, and I placed my soul in my hands according to the way of the Kabbalists, in knowing the Name alone. Yet nevertheless there were strong obstacles against me because of my sins, and they held me back from the path of *hitbodedut*, until the Holy Spirit left me, as is the case today.⁴

Abulafia here states explicitly that it was only the actual practical use of the technique of combination of letters of the divine name which brought about these revelations. This technique is referred to as “the way of the Kabbalists,” and it constitutes the particular kabbalistic method advocated by him. The expression “the way of *hitbodedut*,” may also allude to this, for which reason it makes sense to assume here that *hitbodedut* refers not to isolation from society but to the use of a kabbalistic technique of combining letters, for which mental concentration is indispensable. An alternative interpretation of this incident, that Abulafia was unsuccessful in isolating himself from society, seems to me to be incorrect: we know that he attempted to disseminate his teachings in public and that he was persecuted by his opponents, who certainly would not have objected were the prophet-messiah to abandon his public activity and withdraw to some isolated place to engage in his own private, peculiar form of Kabbalah. It seems to me that Abulafia’s comments concerning “obstacles” are to be interpreted as referring to disturbances, whether internal or external, to his own powers of concentration.

Support for this understanding of Abulafia’s comments may be found elsewhere in his epistle *Sheva‘ Netivot ha-Torah*. In the description of the seven ways to interpret the Torah, he mentions, at the end of the fifth path:

This path is the beginning of the wisdom of letter-combination in general, and is only fitting to those who fear God and take heed of His name [Mal 3:16]. And the sixth path . . . is suitable to those who practice concentration (*hitbodedut*), who wish to approach God, in a closeness such that His activity—may He be blessed—will be known in them to themselves.

It also seems to me that one may discern here the connection between the “practitioners of *hitbodedut*” and the “science of letter-combination.” In this passage, as well, he speaks of closeness to God, but it is still only a stage preceding the seventh path, that appropriate to “prophets,” through which there comes about the “apprehension of the essence of the Ineffable Name.” It follows from this that the “path of *hitbodedut*” is an earlier stage in the process intended for the attainment of prophecy. It must be stressed that, despite the “objective” description of the practitioners of concentration, this is not only a theoretical discussion; the seven ways of reading or of interpreting the Torah do not refer to the distant past, but constitute a living option for the members of Abulafia’s own generation, he having been the

one to restore these older ways of reading. Abulafia saw himself as a prophet both to himself and to others—that is, as one who had undergone the final two stages along the path outlined in his epistle. For this reason, it seems that his words must be seen as an autobiographical testimony, from which point of view this text should be combined with the two previous quotations, whose autobiographical character is quite evident.

A close relationship between letter-combination and *hitbodedut* appears in the book *Hayyey ha-'Olam ha-Ba'*:

He must also be very expert in the secrets of the Torah and its wisdom, so that he may know what will occur to him in the circles [the concentric circles on which the letters to be combined are written] of the combination, and he will arouse himself to think of the image of the Divine prophetic Intellect. And when he begins to practice letter-combination in his *hitbodedut*, he will feel fear and trembling, and the hairs of his head will stand up and his limbs will tremble. (ms Oxford 1582, fols. 116-12a)

Here, *hitbodedut* designates the special concentration required by the Kabbalist in order to combine letters. This intense concentration involves physical side effects that would be difficult to explain were they caused only by withdrawal from society.

In conclusion, we should emphasize the innovation involved in Abulafia's understanding of *hitbodedut* as concentration. According to extant kabbalistic sources, he seems to have been the first Kabbalist to connect *hitbodedut* with a practical, detailed system to give the concept *hitbodedut* real content: essentially, the combination of letters and the vocalization associated with them. Later we shall see that the presence of an association between *hitbodedut* and letter-combination or the recitation of divine names is likely to be a conclusive sign of the direct or indirect influence of Abulafia's kabbalistic system.

Most of the texts to be discussed below were written in the Middle East, or by authors of Eastern origin. This striking fact is doubtless connected, first of all, with the relationship between Abulafia's system and Sufism, a relationship acknowledged by the Kabbalists themselves. Second, as Abulafia's Kabbalah was subject to intense attack by the RaShBA, its influence within Spain itself was limited, which created an imbalance between the spread of prophetic Kabbalah in the East and its curtailment in the West. On the other hand, there is considerable discussion of *hitbodedut* among Jewish philosophers in Provence and Spain during the thirteenth to fifteenth centuries, albeit lacking in Abulafia's practical tone, in which classical prophecy is interpreted as a phenomenon attained through the help of *hitbodedut*, whether this is understood as concentration or as withdrawal from society. These discussions are likewise associated with Arabic

philosophical texts, such as *Sefer Hanhagat ha-Mitboded* by Ibn Bajjah, or *Sefer Hay Ben Yoqtan* by Ibn Tufail, and they later influenced the development of Kabbalah during the sixteenth century. On the other hand, the Spanish Jewish thinkers contemporary with the Kabbalists were influenced neither by Abulafia's doctrine of *hitbodedut* or that of his disciples nor by the Jewish-Sufic approaches of the school of Abraham Maimonides (1186–1237).

In the Abulafian Tradition

Among those works closest to Abulafia's system, one must include the book *Sha'arey Zedeq*; this work, composed in Palestine in 1290 or 1295, clearly reflects knowledge of the Sufi approach. For our purposes, the anonymous author's comments concerning the influence of letter-combination and *hitbodedut* are of particular significance: "And I, through the power of combination and of *hitbodedut*, there happened to me what happened with the light that I saw going with me, as I have mentioned in the book *Sha'arey Zedeq*."⁵

The experience of the "light," which occurs as a result of letter-combination and *hitbodedut*, forms an interesting parallel to the Holy Spirit mentioned in the above quotations. Moreover, the author of *Sha'arey Zedeq* also experiences "speech" as a result of the combination of the letters of the Holy Name. This provides additional evidence of the practical use of *hitbodedut* in the sense of concentration. It seems to me that the term recurs in this sense in two additional passages in *Sha'arey Zedeq*. One of these passages speaks of the progress of the philosopher beyond natural wisdom to divine wisdom and of the possibility that on some rare occasions the following might occur:

He should greatly refine and draw downward the thought, and seek to concentrate on it, that no man should contaminate his thought . . . and he will see that he has great power in all the wisdoms, for such is its nature, and he will say that a given matter was revealed to him as if a prophecy, and he will not know the cause (ms Jerusalem 8°148, fol. 59b)

Hitbodedut is described here as a departure from the ordinary course of thought among the philosophers, which results in a revelation whose source no one can identify. In order to exemplify this path, the author relates a story pertaining to the Muslim philosopher Avicenna (980–1037):

I found in the words of one of the great philosophers of his generation, namely, ibn Sina, in which he said that he would concentrate while composing his great works, and when a certain subject or matter would be difficult

for him, he would contemplate its intermediate proposition and draw his thought to it. And if the matter was still difficult, he would continue to think about it and drink a cup of strong wine, so as to fall asleep . . . and the difficulty in that subject would be solved for him. (MS Jerusalem 8°148, fol. 60a-b)

It seems to me that the preceding story does not refer to the withdrawal of that Arab philosopher from other people for two reasons: first, that *hitbodedut* and “drawing down of thought” are mentioned together in the first quotation from *Sha'arey Zedeq*, which we quoted above; since *hitbodedut* is there connected with thought, it makes sense to assume that elsewhere too this anonymous Kabbalist would use this term in a similar or identical sense. Second, in another story parallel to the one quoted above, preserved in the writings of Rabbi Isaac of Acre, who was apparently a contemporary of the author of *Sha'arey Zedeq*, solitude is not mentioned at all.

The Evidence of Isaac of Acre

Traces of Abulafia's understanding of *hitbodedut*, together with other additions whose source is apparently in the Pietistic-Sufi environment within which he grew up, are found in the works of Rabbi Isaac ben Samuel of Acre (late thirteenth to mid-fourteenth century). In the book *Me'irat 'Eynayim*, he writes:

He who merits the secret of communion [with the divine] will merit the secret of equanimity (*bishtarwut*), and if he receives this secret, then he will also know the secret of *hitbodedut*, and once he has known the secret of *hitbodedut*, he will receive the Holy Spirit, and from that prophecy, until he shall prophesy and tell future things.⁶

Separation from or equanimity toward worldly things, which is called *bishtarwut* (“equanimity”), makes possible *hitbodedut*, which here clearly refers to concentration. According to Rabbi Isaac, a condition of *ataraxia* (“absence of passion,” a term used in the Cynic and Stoic tradition), is necessary for concentration, which leads, as in the case of Abulafia, to the Holy Spirit, and even to prophecy. One should note here the introduction into the context of kabbalistic thought of equanimity as a precondition of *hitbodedut*—an idea found neither in the writings of Abulafia nor in *Sha'arey Zedeq*. Its appearance in Rabbi Isaac of Acre is another important addition based on Sufi influence. Further on in the same passage, the author quotes another Kabbalist who has not yet been identified by scholars, referred to by the acronym ABNeR:

R. Abner said to me that a man who was a lover of wisdom came to one of the practitioners of concentration, and asked to be received as one of them. They replied: “My son, may you be blessed from heaven, for your intention is a good one. But please inform me, have you achieved equanimity (*bishtarwut*) or not.” He said to him: “Master, explain your words.” He said to him: “My son, if there are two people, one who honors you and one of whom despises you, are they the same in your eyes or not?” He replied: “By the life of my soul, master, I derive pleasure and satisfaction from the one who honors me, and pain from the one who despises me, but I do not take vengeance or bear a grudge.” He said to him: “My son, go in peace, for so long as you have not achieved equanimity, so that your soul feels the contempt done to you, you are not yet ready to link your thoughts on High, that you may come and concentrate. But go, and subdue your heart still more in truth, until you shall be equanimous, and then you may concentrate.” And the cause of his equanimity is the attachment of his thoughts to God, for cleaving and attachment of the thought to God cause man to feel neither the honor nor the contempt that people show him.

We have here two traditions concerning the interrelationship among cleaving and equanimity and concentration. Rabbi Isaac's opinion, which places attachment to God in one's thought before equanimity, appears in the first quotation, as well as at the end of the second passage, beginning with the words “and the cause”; this conclusion constitutes, in my opinion, Rabbi Isaac's statement of his own view, which differs from that of “R. ABNeR,” who claims that equanimity is the condition for attaining *devequt*, and that concentration (*hitbodedut*) is only possible thereafter. All this indicates that Rabbi Isaac had before him two traditions concerning this matter: one which he advocated and which was close to that of Abulafia, and the other that of the unknown Kabbalist “R. ABNeR.” The appearance of the discussion concerning the connection between equanimity and concentration in “R. ABNeR” indicates that Rabbi Isaac was in contact with Kabbalists who were influenced by Sufism. Since “R. ABNeR” is already quoted by Rabbi Isaac at the beginning of his book *Me'irat 'Eynayim*, it makes sense to assume that Rabbi Isaac was familiar with Sufi concepts even before he began writing this book, which is today considered his earliest work.

In his book *Ozar Hayyim*, Rabbi Isaac again discusses the question of *hitbodedut*:

I say that if a man does that which his soul [wishes] in the proper ways of *hitbodedut*, and his soul is immersed in this light, to look at it—then he will die like Ben Azzai who “looked and died.” And it is not proper to do this, for “precious in the eyes of the Lord is the death of His righteous ones” (Ps 116:15), for whoever attempts to break through and to go beyond the

Partition will be stricken, and a serpent shall bite him. (ms Moscow-Ginzburg 775, fol. 138a; ms Oxford 1911, fol. 149b)

The expression “the ways of *hitbodedut*” is deserving of particular attention, recalling as it does the phrase we found above in Abulafia, *derekh ha-hitbodedut* (the path of *hitbodedut*). We noted there the close connection between concentration and letter-combination. Despite the fact that the letter-combinations are not mentioned in the passage from *Ozar Hayyim*, it seems to me possible that “the paths of *hitbodedut*” are in fact associated with them. Elsewhere in the same work, the author writes:

And by letter-combinations, unifications, and reversals, he shall call up the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, righteous knowledge and lying imagination, angels of mercy and angels of destruction, witnesses of innocence and of guilt, prosecutors and defenders, and he will be in danger of the same death as ben Azzai (ms Sassoon 919, fol. 215)

It is difficult to avoid noticing the parallel between the danger of death connected with Ben Azzai in the two passages cited and “the ways of *hitbodedut*” and “letter-combinations and unifications” as possible sources of danger. It follows from this that, as in Abulafia, *hitbodedut* in *Ozar Hayyim* is connected with the concentration needed to combine letters. Confirmation of this understanding of *hitbodedut* is found in another discussion in the book mentioned:

He who has been granted by God the spirit to concentrate and to engage in wisdom and in combination of letters and all its prerequisites, to separate himself from the objects of sensation and from physical pleasures, all of which are transient, and to pursue the Intellect and speak of it and of spiritual pleasures, which are eternal life (ms Moscow-Ginzburg 775, fol. 170a)

Here *hitbodedut*, that is, the ability to concentrate, is a gift from God, with the help of which one may progress in a process whose final end is clinging to spirituality. This process is connected with the Intellective Soul overpowering the appetitive:

And live a life of suffering in your house of meditation lest your appetitive soul overpower your intellective soul, for by this you will merit to bring into your intellective soul the divine plenitude, and in the Torah, that is to say, in the wisdom of combination and its prerequisites. (ms Moscow-Ginzburg 775, fol. 170b)

The purpose of meditation and letter-combination is to bring the spiritual abundance into the intellective soul or the Intellect; we learn this also from another source: “The wise man, who comes to isolate himself and to concentrate and to bring down into his soul the divine spirit, through

miraculous and awesome deeds . . . that itself is the divine spirit to attain the intelligibles” (ms Sassoon 919, fol. 215).

Comparison of this passage with others quoted from *Ozar Hayyim* will aid us in establishing the meaning here of the verb *hitboded*. In all other passages, Rabbi Isaac used this verb, or a noun derived from it, to refer to spiritual activity, for which reason the verbs *poresh* and *hitboded* should be seen as referring to two distinct activities: separation from society or from the objects of sensation, and intellectual concentration. This distinction applies also to this pair of verbs in other passages from Rabbi Isaac: “It is right in my eyes that those hermits (*perushim*) who practice concentration, who have removed from their souls the sensuous things, of which the holy spiritual poet R. Eliezer the Babylonian said . . .” (ms Moscow-Ginzburg 775, fol. 136a). Again: “This is the secret of the modest, hermitlike practitioners of concentration who flee from the sensual things and cling to the intelligibles” (ms Moscow-Ginzburg 775, fol. 238b). The meaning of abandonment of the sensuous and clinging to the intelligibles, together with a quite detailed description of the process, appears in an extremely important passage attributed to Rabbi Isaac of Acre, quoted in the book *Reshit Hokhmah* by Rabbi Elijah de Vidas:

Thus we learn from one incident, recorded by R. Isaac of Acre, of blessed memory, who said that one day the princess came out of the bathhouse, and one of the idle people saw her and sighed a deep sigh and said: “Who would give me my wish, that I could do with her as I like!” And the princess answered and said: “That shall come to pass in the graveyard, but not here.” When he heard these words he rejoiced, for he thought that she meant for him to go to the graveyard to wait for her there, and that she would come and he would do with her as he wished. But she did not mean this, but wished to say that only there (i.e., in death) great and small, young and old, despised and honored—all are equal, but not here, so that it is not possible that one of the masses should approach a princess. So that man rose and went to the graveyard and sat there, and devoted all his thoughts to her, and always thought of her form. And because of his great longing for her, he removed his thoughts from everything sensual, but put them continually on the form of that woman and her beauty. Day and night he sat there in the graveyard, there he ate and drank, and there he slept, for he said to himself, “If she does not come today, she will come tomorrow.” This he did for many days, and because of his separation from the objects of sensation, and the exclusive attachment of his thought to one object and his concentration and his total longing, his soul was separated from the sensual things and attached itself only to the intelligibles, until it was separated from all sensual things, including that woman herself, and he communed with God. And after a short time he cast off all sensual things and he desired only the Divine Intellect, and he became a perfect servant and holy man of God, until his prayer was heard and his blessing was beneficial to all passers-by, so that all the

merchants and horsemen and foot-soldiers who passed by came to him to receive his blessing, until his fame spread far about. . . . Thus far is the quotation as far as it concerns us. And he went on at length concerning the high spiritual level of this ascetic, and R. Isaac of Acre wrote there in his account of the deeds of the ascetics, that he who does not desire a woman is like a donkey, or even less than one, the point being that from the objects of sensation one may apprehend the worship of God. (*Reshit Hokhmah, Ahavah 4*)

This story contains several of the concepts discussed above: communion in thought—"the attachment of the thought of his mind"—here precedes *hitbodedut*, that is, concentration, just as the secret of *devequt* precedes that of concentration in the *Me'irat 'Eynayim*. Moreover, the graveyard alludes, as we can see from the story itself, to a situation of equality of opposites, and from this point of view there is an interesting parallel to the secret of equanimity mentioned in *Me'irat 'Eynayim*. From a study of the story, one may assume that equanimity precedes communion and that the latter in turn precedes *hitbodedut*, so that we have here the order of the stages as presented by "R. ABNeR." For a deeper understanding of the significance of this parable, let us turn to another passage from the *Me'irat 'Eynayim*:

From the wise man R. Nathan, may he live long, I heard . . . that when man leaves the vain things of this world, and constantly attaches his thought and his soul above, his soul is called by the name of that supernal level which it attained, and to which it attached itself. How is this so? If the soul of the practitioner of *hitbodedut* was able to apprehend and to commune with the Passive Intellect, it is called "the Passive Intellect," as if it itself were the Passive Intellect; likewise, when it ascends further and apprehends the Acquired Intellect, it becomes the Acquired Intellect; and if it merited to apprehend to the level of the Active Intellect, it itself is the Active Intellect; but if it succeeds in clinging to the Divine Intellect, then happy is its lot, for it has returned to its foundation and its source, and it is literally called the Divine Intellect, and that man shall be called a man of God, that is, a divine man, creating worlds. (p. 222f.)

Here, as in the story of the princess, we read of a spiritual ascent, through which one becomes "a man of God." Both cases speak of *hitbodedut* and *devequt*, although in the latter case it is difficult to determine the exact relationship between the two concepts. Likewise, the supernatural qualities of the man of God are mentioned in both passages: here he is "a creator of worlds"; in the parable of the princess "his prayer is heard and his blessing is efficacious"; at the end of the first quotation from *Me'irat 'Eynayim* it speaks about prophecy which enables the prediction of the future.

Examination of all of the sources relating to *hitbodedut* that we have quoted from the writings of R. Isaac of Acre indicates that its purpose was to remove the thought process from objects of sensation and to lift it up

to the intelligibles or even to the highest levels of the world of Intellect. The final goal of this process of ascent is to commune with God Himself, as is clear from the parable of the princess. This is even true in the quotation from Rabbi Nathan, in which *devequt* to the Divine Intellect is mentioned.

One might well ask whether one can identify the exact nature of the princess in this story. She is portrayed there exclusively as an earthly substance, but this level of understanding seems insufficient. The conclusion, quoted from *Reshit Hokhmah* in the name of Rabbi Isaac, states that "from the sensual one must understand the nature of divine service," in the context of "lust for a woman." Concentration on this desire causes the meditator to leave the world of the senses, that is, the physical form of the princess, and to cling to intelligibles, and afterward to God Himself. In *Me'irat 'Eynayim* the author writes: "It is not like your thoughts in the objects of sensation, but it speaks of the intelligibilia, which are commanded by the 'atarah. The letter 'ayin is the initial of the word 'atarah [crown], which corresponds to the *sefirah* of *malkhut*, which is the *Shekhinah*." It follows from this that Rabbi Isaac identifies the intelligibilia with the *Shekhinah*. Furthermore, immediately following the passage quoted above he adds: "See the parable of the princess, etc., as explained in *Keter Shem Tov* [by Shem Tov Ibn Gaon]: 'the Torah [spoke here of] the unification of 'atarah.'" The identification of the crown as the princess—referring to the *sefirah* of *malkhut*, which is in turn identified with the intellect—suggests a withdrawal from the objects of sensation, a distancing from the physical form of the princess, while attachment to the Intellect is seen as cleaving to the supernal, ideal princess—the *Shekhinah*—and then to God Himself. This clinging may be what is referred to as "divine service" by Rabbi Isaac, and the practitioner of concentration who clings to God may be the "perfect servant." One may also go a step further and interpret the expression "man of God" (*ish ha-elohim*) in the parable of the princess in an erotic sense: the mediator is transformed into the likes of Moses, the husband (*ish*) of the *Shekhinah*, symbolized here by the word "God" (*ha-elohim*). This is a common idea in Kabbalah, and such a possible interpretation should not be rejected out of hand. In the context of this discussion, we should mention the spiritual pleasures which, according to Rabbi Isaac, accompany attachment to the Intelligibles.

As we stated above, there is a similarity between the parable of the princess and Diotima's statement in Plato's *Symposium*; however, in her speech Diotima does not at all mention solitude, either in the sense of seclusion from society or in that of mental concentration. But these two forms

of solitude are mentioned by the Muslim philosopher Averroes (1126–1198) in connection with Socrates' understanding of God:

And he who among them belongs to the unique individuals, like Socrates, who choose isolation and separation from other people and retreat into their souls always, until those of great heart believed that through this dedication and forced contemplation of the above-mentioned forms, one shall arrive at the first form that can be apprehended. . . . (ms Berlin 216 [Or. Qu. 681], p. 325)

Here, as in the parable of the princess, it is possible to go from the intelligibles, or the forms, to the apprehension of God Himself, by means of solitude and mental concentration. Is the attribution of the practice of solitude to Socrates connected with the fact that he was the one to quote Diotima's comment in Plato's dialogue? In any event, Averroes's comment seems to reflect an older tradition concerning Socrates as a recluse, which was also cited by Rabbi Judah Halevi (ca. 1075–1141).

We saw above that *hitbodedut* was part of a technique of concentration and attachment of the human soul to God. However, according to Rabbi Isaac of Acre, *hitbodedut* is able in addition to serve as a means of drawing the divine pleroma down into the human soul:

When man separates himself from the objects of sensation and concentrates and removes all the powers of his intellective soul from them, *but gives them a powerful elevation in order to perceive Divinity*, his thoughts shall draw down the abundance from above and it shall come to reside in his soul. And that which is written, "Once in each month" is to hint to the practitioner of *hitbodedut* that his withdrawal from all objects of sensation must not be absolute, but rather "half to God and half to yourselves," which is also the secret of the half-shekel, "the rich man should not add, nor the poor man subtract, from the half-a-shekel" (Exod 30:15), whose esoteric meaning is "half of one's soul," for *shekel* alludes to the soul.⁷

This evaluation of *hitbodedut* is already referred to in Abraham Ibn Ezra's commentary on Exod 3:14 (long version) and in Abulafia, but Rabbi Isaac of Acre seems to emphasize this approach more clearly and fostered its inclusion in later Kabbalah.

Shem Tov Ibn Gaon and His *Badday ha-Aron*

The approach of Rabbi Shem Tov ben Abraham Ibn Gaon (late thirteenth to fourteenth century) should be understood within the context of Abulafia and of Rabbi Isaac of Acre. His book *Baddey ha-Aron*, which was written at least partially in Safed, contains an interesting discussion of *hitbodedut*:

He should concentrate his mind until he hates this world and desires the world to come. And he should not be surprised that they [the Sages] said that one who is engaged in the secrets of the Chariot need not stand before a great man or an elder. . . . And he will see that there is no end to his intellect, and he shall delve deeply into the secrets of the Chariot and the structures of Creation, to the place where the mouth is unable to speak and the ear is unable to hear. Then he will see visions of God, as one who dreams and whose eyes are shut, as it is written, "I am asleep but my heart is awake, the voice of my beloved knocks . . ." (Song 5:2). And when he opens his eyes, and even more so if another person speaks to him, he will choose death over life, for it will seem to him that he has died, for he has forgotten what he saw. Then he will look into his mind as one looks at a book in which are written these great wonders. (ms Paris 840, fol. 45a)

By the power of his mental concentration, the Kabbalist turns to his inner self and discovers there amazing things, written as in a book; this situation of introspection is an extremely sensitive one, which may easily be disturbed by any outside stimulus. Note the use here of the expression "visions of God," which is indicative of a revelation that may be associated with the previous mention of the secrets of creation or the secrets of the chariot. According to Rabbi Shem Tov, this inner revelation is transformed into a source of the writing of this book:

When he has no friend with whom to practice concentration as he would wish, let him "sit by himself and be silent, for He has come upon him" (Lam 3:28). And he shall begin to write what he sees in his mind, as one who copies from a book that is written before him, black fire on white fire, in the true form of a sphere, like the sun, for the light has come upon him at that hour, and all the seas would not suffice for ink, nor all the rushes of the swamps for quills, as in the parable of the Sages, until the heavens be revealed to him as a book. (ms Paris 840, fols. 45b-46a)

Here, unlike in the first quotation, the Holy Spirit seems to move within the one meditating, and he must seek a companion with whom to practice concentration. It is also possible that these represent a series of different levels of events; the first passage speaks of one's attempts to reach the stage of mystical experience, from which it follows that *hitbodedut* also here means concentration; the second passage describes the experience itself, during which the meditator requires human company; this stage is described in some detail further on in Rabbi Shem Tov's description:

And they [i.e., the Kabbalists, "those who receive the truth in each generation"] did not have others with whom to practice concentration properly, for the spirit of their bellies disturbed them, and they secretly opened their mouths in wisdom, and they conversed with [their quills] of reed and marsh. (ms Paris 840, fols. 45b-46a)

We find here a unique understanding of the function of *hitbodedut*: companionship makes it possible for the meditator to relieve himself of the burden of his mystical experience; without him, the Kabbalist would have to write down his words and “speak with the reed,” something which may later bring about disaster: “and it is possible that it will afterwards come into the hands of unworthy people, and strangers will husband Him, which is not as the law.” Rabbi Shem Tov goes so far as to say that even the meditator himself is likely to become confused in his later understanding of the things revealed to him during the mystical experience.

[These contents] . . . do not help a man nor does he understand them, unless he received a tradition by word of mouth. Even those who themselves write it may at times not understand it well at that time, and when the revelation [i.e., the appearance of the Holy Spirit] passes, he will look at them and not understand them, and even when they are explained, he will be unable to conceptualize them. (ms Paris 840, fols. 45b–46a)

The passages quoted above appear between two discussions concerning letter-combination; the first discussion opens with this sentence:

And he shall arouse through his wisdom the thought, which is dormant in the sea of darkness, and say in his heart: “As I knew the form of the letters and they were inscribed on my heart, one next to its companion, I will examine each letter, in its combinations and its vocalizations, and its combination arising from the combination of letters, to levels without end, of levels of the letters, even though these also are without end.” (ms Paris 840, fol. 44a)

This indicates that the mental concentration (i.e., *hitbodedut*) mentioned in the first passage from the book *Baddey ha-Aron* begins with an arousal connected with letter combination; this approach approximates the prophetic Kabbalah of Abulafia and his school. After the discussions of *hitbodedut*, Rabbi Shem Tov again mentions the combination of letters, and adds the advice that one deal only with the combinations of vocalization marks. At the conclusion, he says:

But if he will understand the things which I have written concerning the thirty-two paths and the letters, one above the other, at once visible and invisible, and imagine them in his mind after receiving them verbally, and the light appears above him, or from fire, “for it is a spirit in man” [Job 32:8] that he shall know the hidden letters. (ms Paris 840, fol. 47a).

It is clear that Rabbi Shem Tov advises here a system of letter- and vocalization-combination in order to attain the experience of appearance of the light and of speech—“it is a spirit in man.” This experience is very similar to the descriptions connected with *hitbodedut*, as quoted above. But

these do not seem to be merely suggestions; the Kabbalist writes further: “I also saw hidden and sealed mysteries, worthy of concealment, but the spirit pointed them out, and I could not go by without a hint to those who pay heed to the language of the dotted letters” (ms Paris 840, fol. 47b).

It makes sense to assume that this is a description of an experience of Rabbi Shem Tov himself, who, as is known, dealt with the textual tradition of the Bible and, as a result of this particular involvement, almost certainly arrived at an experience of light and spirit that obligated him to write down some of the things which are in *Baddey ha-Aron*. This teaches us that the Kabbalah with which he was involved was not only a matter of theory, or confined to the distant past, but a current practice in fourteenth-century Safed. The fact that the book *Baddey ha-Aron* was written in the Galilee, where Rabbi Isaac of Acre was also educated and where the anonymous author of *Sha'arey Zedeq* also almost certainly stayed, teaches us that Rabbi Shem Tov might have continued an ecstatic kabbalistic tradition that already existed in the land of Israel. In any event, in his first kabbalistic work, *Keter Shem Tov*, there are no traces of the ecstatic Kabbalah, such as we find in his later work.

To conclude our discussion of the work *Baddey ha-Aron*, let us return to the opening of the first passage we cited from this book and quote it in its fuller context:

And do not be astounded by what the Sages said (*b. Sukk.* 28a) concerning Jonathan ben Uziel, namely, that when he was engaged in the study of the Torah any bird which flew overhead was immediately consumed by fire. And he should concentrate in his mind . . . and he should not be surprised that they [the Sages] said that one who is engaged in the secrets of the Chariot need not stand up either before an elder or a great man. And he should understand the words of R. Akiba to Ben Zoma, “From whence and to where” [*b. Hag.* 15a] and their answers to one another, in which the second word was written without the *yod*. (ms Paris 840, fol. 45a)

Involvement in Torah and involvement in the secrets of the chariot are understood here as stages advancing mental contemplation. The meaning of involvement in Torah is explained above as profound involvement in the combinations of letters and vowels. The nature of the involvement in the secrets of the chariot according to Rabbi Shem Tov is not clear. We already saw above, in the writings of Rabbi Isaac of Acre, that the practice of *hitbodedut* is compared to the path of Ben Azzai and Rabbi Akiba when they entered into *pardes*. It is possible—and this requires proof—that involvement in the secrets of the chariot refers also to the science of combining letters; support for this interpretation may be found in the approach of Rabbi Abraham Abulafia, who sees in the secret of the chariot the combination of

holy names. If this is so, *hitbodedut* depends upon involvement in the secrets of the chariot.

Sulam ha-'Aliyah of R. Judah Albotini

We read in another work that represents a loyal continuation of the path of prophetic Kabbalah, *Sulam ha-'Aliyah*, by R. Judah Albotini (d. 1519):

By this he shall ascend to the level of equanimity, as that sage [cf. *Hagigah* 1:2] said to his student who asked him: "Will you teach us the secret of the Chariot?" He answered: "Have you achieved equanimity?" And the student did not understand what he was saying to him, until he explained the matter to him, namely, that all attributes are equal to him. And this was what he said to him, "If a man insulted you, and took away that which was yours, would you be angry and strict with him over this? And if he did the opposite, namely, to honor you and to give you many gifts, would you rejoice over this and feel it? And would you be feel in your soul that you were affected by these two opposites?" Then his master said to him, "If so, then you have not yet acquired the quality of equanimity, that is, that it should be equal to you whether it be honor or its opposite. And since such is the case, how can you ascend to the level of *hitbodedut*, which comes after you have achieved equanimity?"⁸

The parallels between this story and that told by Rabbi Isaac of Acre in the name of "R. ABNeR" in his book *Me'irat 'Eynayim* are clear; nevertheless, one may not necessarily assume that this book is the direct source of Rabbi Judah's words here for several reasons: first, in Albotini equanimity (*hishtawut*) immediately precedes *hitbodedut*, as it does in Rabbi Isaac's view, whereas in "R. ABNeR" *hitdabbequt* (communion with the divine) comes between them. Second, despite the similarity in subject matter, this is not an exact quotation from the version in *Me'irat 'Eynayim*. Elsewhere in this book there are direct quotations from the writings of Abulafia and from the book *Sha'arey Zedeq*, but all of them are identified with appropriate references. Third, the attitude toward the activity of Ben Azzai differs in "R. ABNeR" and in Albotini: only the latter emphasizes this personality's high level. Fourth, *Sulam ha-'Aliyah* quotes the talmudic saying concerning the teaching of the secret of the chariot, which is absent from *Me'irat 'Eynayim*. The addition of the expression "secrets of the chariot" (*ma'aseh merkavah*) in the specific context of this story indicates that this subject was seen as related to *hitbodedut*. According to Rabbi Judah, or his unknown source, Rabbi Eleazar ben Arakh was referring to *hitbodedut* when he used the phrase "secret of the chariot." However, in place of the preconditions mentioned in the Talmud, which emphasize wisdom—that is, "a wise man, who understands by himself"—*Sulam ha-'Aliyah* stresses

the trait of *hishtawut*. This change, which is not accidental, relates to the tendency of the Sufis to diminish or even to negate completely the value of intellectual wisdom and learning. It is worthwhile to compare this approach to *hishtawut* with that of Rabbi Joseph Caro:

He should have concern for nothing in the world, except for those things which pertain to the service of God, but all the things of this world should be equal in his eyes, everything and its opposite. For this is the secret of the wise man, who was asked by one who wished to practice union: "Have you achieved equanimity?" For the truth is that one for whom the good things of this world and its ills are not equal cannot practice union in a complete manner. (*Maggid Mesharim*, be-shalah)

According to R. Werblowsky this is a quotation from Ibn Paquda's *Hovot ha-Levavot*.⁹ However, this passage seems even closer to Albotini: first, because both Caro and Albotini speak of a "sage" who answers the question, whereas Bahya refers to a *hasid* (pious man). Second, the use of the term *shaweh* (equanimous) is common to the two Kabbalists but is absent from Bahya. Third, the expression "from honor and from its opposite" is close to Caro's "a thing and its opposite." Despite this, we may not assume that Caro was influenced by the version in *Sulam ha-'Aliyah*, since he completely ignores the importance of *hitbodedut*. Moreover, as one can learn from their continuation, Caro's words were written outside of Palestine, and it seems unlikely that Albotini's work came there and was used without being cited by name. The similarity in the details between the two sources is indicative of a common source that was different from the version in *Hovot ha-Levavot*.

Let us now return to the book *Sulam ha-'Aliyah*. Rabbi Judah Albotini was apparently the first to state in an unambiguous way that *hitbodedut* differs from solitude:

For the welfare of the body, that is, solitude brings about purity of the potencies and cleanness of qualities. Equanimity brings one to concentration of the soul, and concentration brings about the Holy Spirit, which brings one to prophecy, which is the highest level. If so, one of the necessary prerequisites for your path in concentration is that you first have the quality of equanimity, that you not become excited by anything.¹⁰

We find here another case in which a talmudic saying is incorporated in the discussion of *hitbodedut*; this use gives the two spiritual levels—*hishtawut* and *hitbodedut*—a privileged place within the sequence of stages bringing about the Holy Spirit in the talmudic tradition, and it indicates that these Sufi concepts were understood as matching—or even explaining and interpreting—the ancient Jewish tradition. However, this harmonistic claim has

a harsh ring, from the standpoint of the talmudic tradition. Although *hishtawut* is claimed to fit a certain statement in the Talmud, at the same time it opposes certain central Jewish attitudes. The previous quotation continues:

On the contrary, he must have joyfulness of soul and be happy with his lot, and think in his heart that he alone is one and rules over this entire, low world, and that there is no person, near or far, who will concern himself over him, nor anyone who can do him any evil or damage or harm or trouble, nor any good, for all the good of this world and its wealth is in his hands, and he needs nothing. Of this, the Sages said: "Prophecy does not dwell save upon one who is wise, courageous and wealthy" (*b. Shab.* 92a). And "Who is wealthy? He who rejoices in his lot (*m. Abot* 5:1)."

"Joy in one's lot" is here given a far-reaching interpretation from a Jewish point of view: it is taken to mean a feeling of total independence and separation from one's human environment. This matches Rabbi Shem Tov Ibn Gaon's approach to the contemplative's relationship to the members of his family, but it is certainly a far-reaching step compared with what is stated in the book *Baddey ha-Aron*. For Rabbi Judah, separation from the world constitutes a psychological state preceding ecstasy, for which reason—one may assume—it is more fixed and continues for a longer period than the separation caused at the time of *devequt* itself, according to Rabbi Shem Tov. The state of *hitbodedut* is attained by letter-combinations, just as it was by the Kabbalists of the school of Abulafia:

... who was expert in the wisdom of *zeruf* and that of *dillug*. ... Afterwards, let him perform this means of *hitbodedut*, in combination with the verse that he wishes to use from the Torah, and he should repeat this many times, or for a month, more or less, as he wishes, until he sees that he is perfect in that path, and so he shall further persist in this *hitbodedut*. ...¹¹

The various systems of letter-combination are understood here as means of *hitbodedut*, or among its paths. We have here a system of intellectual exercises whose purpose, according to Albotini, is to prepare the soul to receive the Holy Spirit.

R. David Ibn Abi Zimra

One should note the influence of the interrelationship among *hitbodedut*, Holy Names, and the attainment of the Holy Spirit upon the approach of Rabbi David ben Solomon Ibn Abi Zimra (RaDBaZ, 1479–1573). This Kabbalist, who was acquainted with the system of Abulafia, writes in his book *Magen Dawid*: "I have already seen one who wrote that, through the

concentration on the Holy Names in holiness and in purity, one may reach the stage of the Holy Spirit, even in our times, and this is a matter with which the enlightened man will not be in doubt about the matter of the Holy Names" (fol. 49b).

The author goes on to develop this idea more fully elsewhere; but, as opposed to what is said in this passage, which sees the acquisition of the Holy Spirit as possible in the present, the RaDBaZ explains the phenomenon of the Urim and Thummim as reached by means of *hitbodedut*:

The matter of the Urim and Thummim . . . is that one of the Holy Names, known to the priest, was contained in the folds of the breastplate, and the priest would direct his attention and thought and intentions towards that Name and concentrate upon it, and be adorned with the Holy Spirit by that same name, and it would be pictured in his mind. (*Magen Dawid*, 18d–19a)

According to him, this phenomenon resembles prophecy: "For at times the prophet would direct his thoughts and contemplate, and with a slight arousal would understand the intentions of God, even in a mysterious metaphor or parable. And at times he would not be ready, and he would concentrate and see the vision and the parable" (*Magen Dawid*, fols. 18d–19a). The prophet was required to concentrate and to meditate in order to decipher for himself the contents of his vision: "For were the intention of your thoughts towards prophecy in great concentration, you would know by yourself and would not need to ask the meaning of the parable."

Hitbodedut in the Writings of R. Moses Cordovero

As we have seen, several motifs relating to *hitbodedut*, which originated in the circle of Rabbi Abraham Abulafia, reappeared at the beginning of the sixteenth century in the writings of two Kabbalists who were among the exiles from Spain and Portugal: Rabbi Judah Albotini and Rabbi David Ibn Zimra, both of whom lived and were active in Jerusalem. One must ask whether it is merely coincidence that interest in *hitbodedut* reemerged in sixteenth-century Palestine, after it was associated with Kabbalists active in the late thirteenth and the early fourteenth century who had a certain relationship to the land of Israel. This question becomes more serious in the light of the fact that the Spanish Kabbalists of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries almost completely ignored the teaching of Rabbi Abraham Abulafia, and even during the generation of the Expulsion he was still regarded as the "black sheep" of Kabbalah in the eyes of many Spanish Kabbalists. The renewed interest of Palestinian Kabbalists of Spanish origin in the

Kabbalah of Abulafia and its offshoots points toward their encounter with the Eastern kabbalistic heritage, which combined prophetic Kabbalah with Jewish-Sufi pietism. The presumption that such a kabbalistic tradition, whose traces were lost for a period of slightly less than two hundred years, did exist may also explain the interest of the Safed Kabbalists during the latter half of the sixteenth century in Abulafia and Rabbi Isaac of Acce's doctrine of *hitbodedut*. I would conjecture that we are speaking here not only of the preservation and study of Abulafia's writings but also of a living kabbalistic tradition—which may explain the origins of Albotini's *Sulam ha-'Aliyah* and the centrality of *hitbodedut* and letter-combination among the Kabbalists of Safed from the middle of the sixteenth century on. In contrast, Spanish Kabbalah on the eve of the Expulsion, such as the circle of the author of *Sefer ha-Meshiv*, was much involved with techniques of revelation, including incantations for dream questions and formulas for automatic writing—concerns that were continued in the Kabbalah of Safed. However, as opposed to Abulafia, they did not emphasize the relationship between *hitbodedut* and letter-combination. In the writings of Rabbi Moshe Cordovero, we hear for the first time of an integration of Abulafia's doctrines within an overall summary of Spanish Kabbalah—namely, in his book *Pardes Rimmonim*. As opposed to the comprehensive work of Rabbi Meir Ibn Gabbai, which is based almost entirely on Spanish Kabbalah, Cordovero includes themes and quotations from the writings of Abraham Abulafia, giving them a standing unknown among the Spanish exilic Kabbalists active outside the land of Israel. This incorporation is quite clear in the discussion of *hitbodedut*, and its implications for the development of Kabbalah will be treated later in our discussion. There is no doubt that the Safed Kabbalists had copies of several of the most important writings of Abulafia and his disciples. Thus, for example, we read in Rabbi Moshe Cordovero's commentary on the *Zohar* passage known as “the *Sabba* (grandfather) of *Mishpatim*”:

And as 'ADaM (man—i.e., the letters 'DM) follows alphabetical order, [its letters symbolizing] world [i.e., location], year [i.e., time], soul [i.e., personhood], until he attaches himself to the secret of *neshamah, ruah, nefesh* [i.e., the three levels of soul], that is *NRN*, the secret of 'ShN, in the secret of the letters which are transmuted in his mouth, and the secret of the vocalization signs, and the secret of the *hitbodedut* brought down to man by them, as is written in the book *Sha'arey Zedeq* by Rabbi Abraham Abulafia author of *Sefer Hayyey ha-'Olam ha-Ba*. (MS Cincinnati 586, fol. 45b)

This passage indicates that Cordovero had before him two of the principal works of prophetic Kabbalah; from them he learned, among other things, the secret of *hitbodedut*, which, as we have seen above, is connected

with the combinations of letters and of vowels. Through *hitbodedut*, the soul becomes attached to the supernal hypostases known as *neshamah, ruah, nefesh*. We have here a Neoplatonic formulation of the understanding of *devequt*, influenced not a little by the approach of the author of *Sha'arey Zedeq*. A closer examination of the meaning of the word *hitbodedut* in this text would be worthwhile. It is clear that the stage portrayed here is one reached by the practitioner of concentration after the process of *zeruf* and not before it, which differs from the texts discussed until now. Here, *hitbodedut* is transformed into the final stage before *devequt*. One should compare Cordovero's unique use of this term with that of his disciple, Rabbi Hayyim Vital, who writes in the book *Sha'arey Qedushah*, apparently in the name of his teacher:

“The sons of prophets, who had before them drum and pipe, etc.” [1 Sam 10:5] for by the sweetness of the sound of the music *hitbodedut* rests upon them, by the pleasantness of the sound, and they cast off their souls. And then the musician ceases his playing, but the prophetic disciples remain in the same supernal state of *devequt*, and they prophesy. (MS British Library 749, fol. 15b)

In this quotation from Vital, as in Cordovero, *hitbodedut* occurs as a result of the use of a certain technique, and in the wake of this concentration the soul attains the state of *devequt*. This intermediate situation may signify a kind of abnegation of the senses or isolation of the soul from objects of sensation, which enables it to attach itself to a higher level.

In *Pardes Rimmonim* (v. 2, fol. 97a), Cordovero paraphrases a very important passage from Rabbi Abraham Abulafia's book *Or ha-Sekhel*, defining *hitbodedut* as retirement to an isolated room and letter-combination. However, beyond these quotations one finds here an interesting discussion based upon the doctrines of Abulafia's school:

Several of the early ones explained that by the combination and transmutation of the seventy-two-letter holy name or the other names, after great *hitbodedut*, the righteous man, who is worthy and enlightened in such matters, will have a portion of the Divine Voice (*bat qol*) revealed to him, in the sense of, “The spirit of God spoke in me, and His word was on my lips” (2 Sam 23:2). For he combines together the potencies and unites them and arouses desire in them, each to its brother, as the *membrum virile* of man and his companion [i.e., the female], until there is poured upon him a spirit of abundance—on the condition that he be engaged in this thing, as a vessel prepared to and worthy of receiving the spirit, for if such is not the case, it will become cruel to be turned into “a degenerate wild vine” (cf. Jer 2:21). (*Pardes Rimmonim*, v. 2, fol. 69b)

Thus, *hitbodedut* in the sense of concentration advances the process of

letter-combination, whose purpose is the attainment of the holy spirit, in the spirit of Abulafia's Kabbalah. The conclusion of this quotation favors the approach of Rabbi Isaac of Acre, in which combination enables the soul to receive the abundance or the spirituality. This expression is interpreted elsewhere as well in connection with *hitbodedut*: "The prophets, of blessed memory, used to acquire, by means of those letters, through great concentration and by virtue of their pure soul, that spirit embodied in the letters" (*Pardes Rimmonim*, v. 2, fol. 69b). The letters combined by the Kabbalist are transformed here into a sort of talisman, which absorbs the supernal abundance. After the spirituality is absorbed by means of the letters, it becomes attached within the soul, which is prepared for this by concentration. *Hitbodedut* is described as a process by which the soul is transferred from the world of matter to the world of spirit, on the one hand, or as a technique of spiritual elevation, through contemplation of sensory data and its stripping away, in order to understand the spiritual element within it. The mystical aspect of *hitbodedut* is clearly expressed in another book by Cordovero, namely, *Shi'ur Qomah*:

The sons of the prophets, when they used to prepare themselves for prophecy, brought themselves [to a state of] happiness as in the verse, "Take me a musician, and when the musician plays . . ." (2 Kgs 3:15). And they would concentrate in accordance with their ability to do so, in attaining the wondrous levels and casting off the material, and strengthening the mind within the body, until they abandoned matter and did not perceive it at all, but their mind was entirely in the supernal orders and subjects. And they concentrate, and cast off the physical, and go away—and this matter is man's preparation on his own part.¹²

According to Cordovero, the "sons of the prophets," that is, the ancient Jewish mystics, had special methods of concentration: "according to their knowledge of concentration," which showed them how to cast off materiality and to prepare the dematerialized mind to apprehend the structure of the *sefirot*: "the sublime levels," "those supernal levels." We learn about the necessary transition between the physical and the spiritual from *Sefer Or Yaqar*:

If one wishes to take pleasure in the understanding of his Creator, let him concentrate according to the accepted premises which he has learned, and let him look at a particular physical form, so that he may learn from it that which is alluded to in the spiritual worlds, and he will see the detailed organs of it, and the varied matters, and its lights. And from there he will come to understand the innermost secrets of the spirituality of that form, and he shall attain *devequt*. Such was the way of Adam in the garden of Eden. Now, if the cherubim were physical-spiritual beings, he may gaze at them and come

to contemplate and to apprehend from what is pictured here, in terms of the visual, that which makes sense to the mind—[proceeding] from the physical to the spiritual. (v. 10, p. 7)

The Kabbalist is able to acquire "knowledge of his Creator" through contemplation of the form of his own physical organs, by means of *hitbodedut*. This statement reminds us of Rabbi Isaac of Acre's story of the princess, which was quoted in the work of Cordovero's pupil, Rabbi Elijah de Vidas. Furthermore, according to Rabbi Isaac, "from the sensory you shall understand the intelligibilia, for from your flesh shall you know God [after Job 19:26]." We have here a kabbalistic variant of the saying "Know yourself and know your God," according to which concentration plays a central role in the transition between one's self—that is, one's body—and the Divine. *Hitbodedut* is a means of uncovering the supernal source of material being; the cessation of *hitbodedut* is likely to bring about a distorted understanding of phenomenon. Thus, we hear of Moses that:

Because he turned his heart away from prophetic concentration, in fleeing from the Creator's mission, turning his head in thinking that it was Amram, his father, who was calling him at that moment. For had he concentrated at that time, he would have understood how that voice was descending from the [cosmic] world of Creation to that of Formation, and from that of Formation into that of Action. . . . And the same happened to Samuel, at the beginning of his prophecy, that he did not concentrate, to understand the way of the voice, even though he was worthy of prophecy. So he thought that that voice was a human voice, that is, that of Eli, until he finally said, "Speak, for your servant hears" (1 Sam 3:10)—that is, that he concentrated and apprehended the stages of prophecy, and understood the descent of the divine voice.¹³

Here, *hitbodedut* is understood as a combination of concentration and meditation at one and the same time; it is the means enabling the human intellect to restore the essence of things to their supernal source, by apprehension of their essence. This is the way by which one turns to the upper world:

There are two aspects of *hokhmah*: the supernal aspect is turned towards the divine crown (*keter*), which aspect does not face downwards. . . . The second, lower aspect turns downwards. . . . Likewise man has two aspects: the first is that of his concentration upon his Creator, to add and acquire wisdom, and the second that by which he teaches others. (*Tomer Devorah*, 3).

It seems important to me to dwell upon a certain change in the use of the term *hitbodedut* in Cordovero's thought: concentrated thought enables one to uncover the hidden essence of the object of contemplation, through which one comes to understand the supernal source and the way in which

the spiritual emanates down into the material world. According to Cordovero, the human intellect must cast off its physicality only in order to penetrate, by means of its concentration, beyond the physicality of other things, to uncover their spiritual nature and to arrive in the final analysis at God Himself. According to another text, Cordovero seems to state that there are certain subjects whose apprehension cannot be guaranteed even by *hitbodedut*:

For the Torah is the secret of the upper Being which has come into existence below, and is not separated from the *sefirot*, but it nevertheless is present for those who exist below, while connected to the spiritual existence of the *sefirot*. When man concentrates in order to understand this mystery, he shall be astonished and be silent to his mind and not find it, for the Torah is not a separate being below. (*Or Yaqar, Tiqqunim*, ms Modena fol. 196b)

We find here an interesting approach, reminiscent of Rabbi Isaac of Acre's opinion that the mystic is unable to penetrate the secrets of the Torah.

Safed and the Dissemination of *Hitbodedut*

The penetration of the concept of *hitbodedut*, in the sense of intellectual concentration, into the writings of Rabbi Moshe Cordovero, sometimes combined with a technique of letter-combination, bore important implications beyond the absorption of prophetic Kabbalah within the framework of theurgic Spanish Kabbalah. This fact facilitated the dissemination of a number of elements associated with the technique of letter-combination in Kabbalah generally; but no less important was the enhanced importance of *hitbodedut* in texts written by Cordovero's disciples. I refer particularly to the major works of kabbalistic *mussar* written during the last third of the sixteenth century. As we have already seen above, Rabbi Elijah de Vidas used Rabbi Isaac of Acre's parable of the princess in his book *Reshit Hokhmah*. Elsewhere in his book, parables mentioning *hitbodedut* in the sense of seclusion from society also reappear. But it seems to me that de Vidas knew more of *hitbodedut* from his teacher than what survived in his writings. In *Sha'arey Qedushah*, Rabbi Hayyim Vital tells us:

R. Elijah de Vidas, the author of the book *Reshit Hokhmah*, of blessed memory, told me in the name of his teacher, R. Moshe Cordovero, of blessed memory, the master of *Pardes* [esoteric-kabbalistic teaching], that whoever wishes to know whatever he wishes should accustom himself to holiness . . . and after he recites the *Shema'* on his bed he should concentrate in his mind somewhat. . . . (ms British Library 749, fol. 15b)

This indicates that traditions concerning the importance of *hitbodedut* were transmitted orally, and it is likely that Cordovero himself also had traditions

that he did not put down in writing. This assumption makes sense also on the basis of examination of the extensive material concerning *hitbodedut* in the unpublished portion of Vital's *Sha'arey Qedushah*. This section is filled with quotations from the writings of Abulafia and Rabbi Isaac of Acre, as well as from unidentified material dealing with *hitbodedut*.

The third work from Cordovero's circle, Rabbi Eleazar Azikri's (sometimes mispronounced Azkari, 1533–1600) *Sefer Haredim*, in which Rabbi Isaac of Acre is also mentioned, discusses the practical implication of *hitbodedut* at some length. For our purposes, it is worthwhile to examine two passages in which, in my opinion, there is noticeable Sufi influence. The first appears in Azikri's mystical journal:

It is written, "I have always placed God before me" (Ps 16:8). It is written in the book *Hovot ha-Levavot*, that it is inconceivable that a master and a slave, one being contemptible in the eyes of the other, or those who honor and those who despise him, should be equal in his eyes, as the *hasid* said to the man who wished to [mentally] concentrate, "You cannot do so unless you practice humility and, [receiving] insults, until you achieve equanimity." . . . And there are three conditions in this verse, *shiwiti* ("I placed"—literally, "I made equal"), that is, that I make everything equal before me, my praisers and my condemners, for I am a worm. (ms Jewish Theological Seminary, New York 809, fol. 210b)

It seems to me, despite the explicit mention of *Hovot ha-Levavot*, that one ought not to see in this work the direct source of Azikri for the following reasons. First, Bahya does not mention *hitbodedut* in connection with *hish-tawut*. Second, Bahya does not mention here any interpretation of the verse from Psalms. Third, the language of the two passages differs in many details. Thus, one may assume that Azikri had in front of him an additional source, possibly one of the writings of Rabbi Isaac of Acre written under Sufi influence. Elsewhere Azikri quotes Rabbi Isaac ben Solomon Luria (HARI, 1534–1572) as stating that *hitbodedut* "is helpful to the soul seven times more than study, and according to a man's strength and ability he should concentrate and meditate one day a week . . ." (*Haredim*, p. 256). This exaggerated valuation of *hitbodedut*, stated by Luria when he first started his own path as a contemplative, reflects the Sufi understanding of the supremacy of *hitbodedut* above study.

It should be noted that, despite the fact that in these texts the term *hitbodedut* does not appear in conjunction with the discussion of letter-combination or the uttering of divine names, one must assume that these constitute a technique used by Azikri when he practiced *hitbodedut*. In his mystical journal, he writes: "And at every moment he unites His names with joy and trembling, and he flees from society as much as is possible,

and is completely silent, in a brilliant flame, alone, fearful and trembling, and the light which is above your head, make always into your teacher, and acquire a companion.”¹⁴ An interesting parallel to this appears in *Sefer Haredim*, which was, as is known, a very popular and widely known book: “But be enlightened in your mind, in the enlightenment of these matters (i.e., the *sefirot*) and imagine the letters of the names, that this is left to you, but to imagine more than the letters is tantamount [to arriving] at a corporeal conception. And visualizing the letters in the mind . . .” (p. 43). We find here a technique that is not identical to that of letter-combination, but a *dimayon*—that is, visualization—of the letters of the Divine Name, and this already appears in Abulafia and in Rabbi Isaac of Acre, and one may assume that the influence of these Kabbalists in these matters is also reflected in Azikri.

The incorporation of the concept of *hitbodedut* in the ethical writings of Cordovero’s disciples constitutes the final stage in the process of penetration of *hitbodedut* into Jewish culture as a practical teaching. Abulafia’s writings constituted the beginning of the process of absorption of the Sufi outlook within Kabbalah; however, his books were intended only for special individuals, and even though his writings were circulated in manuscript form their influence was largely confined to kabbalistic circles. The incorporation of the concept of *hitbodedut* into Cordovero’s writings was an important step toward its dissemination among a far wider public, both because of the influence of the book *Pardes Rimmonim* and because of the incorporation of *hitbodedut* as a religious value in the Safed *mussar* works. However, although Cordovero still maintained the connection between *hitbodedut* and letter-combination, his disciples removed the instructions pertaining to the combination of letters. The fourth section of Vital’s *Sha’arey Qedushah*, containing detailed instructions for letter-combination, was never printed. Azikri doubtless knew of the use of Divine Names in connection with revelation and made use of it, but he speaks little of this matter, whereas the connection between *hitbodedut* and letter-combination is entirely absent from de Vidas. It is certain that the relatively popular character of these *mussar* works was the reason for the concealing of this part of Abulafia’s Kabbalah, but its other element—*hitbodedut*—continued, together with Rabbi Bahya ibn Paquda’s views on the subject, to constitute a source of inspiration for the guidance of Jewish mystics. The influence of the views sketched above may be traced through the writings of the Hasidic mystics and possibly even in the writings of Rabbi Moses Hayim Luzzato.

In conclusion, we should discuss the place of the texts quoted above within the general framework of Jewish mysticism. The drawing of a new and detailed path was not a purely theoretical matter; one may assume that most

of the Kabbalists quoted above underwent mystical experiences after taking the steps described above: mental concentration and letter-combination or the pronouncing of Divine Names. It should be mentioned that approaches which could be described as *unio mystica* appear in the writings of Rabbi Abraham Abulafia, Rabbi Isaac of Acre, Rabbi Judah Albotini, and de Vidas, or, as in the case of Azikri, coupled with ecstatic states. Therefore, the preceding discussion can serve as a kind of introduction to the more detailed analysis of one of the central subjects in the study of Jewish mysticism: the penetration of *unio mystica* into kabbalistic thought and practice.

Appendix: *Hitbodedut* and the Shutting of Eyes

One of the practical techniques advocated by the Kabbalists in order to attain a state of concentration—that is, *hitbodedut*—was the shutting of one’s eyes. This technique is well known to us from Sufism and in connection with achieving *kawwanah* (direction, concentration) in prayer and for purposes of contemplating colors which become revealed in one’s consciousness among the Kabbalists.

An anonymous Kabbalist saw “the essence of *hitbodedut*” in the act of closing one’s eyes:

And what is the essence of *hitbodedut*? By closing the eyes for a long time, and in accordance with the length of time, so shall be the greatness of the apprehension. Therefore, let his eyes always be shut until he attains apprehension of the Divine, and together with shutting his eyes negate every thought and every sound that he hears. (ms Paris, Alliance, 167 VI.B)

The connection between shutting one’s eyes and *hitbodedut* here is in the shutting off of the person from the senses. This enhances concentration and facilitates the possibility of apprehension: the meditator enjoys Divine providence in accordance with the degree or level of comprehension. This connection between apprehension and providence indicates a possible influence of Maimonides’s approach (*Guide* 3:51) to the relationship between them. At the beginning of the sixteenth century, Rabbi Judah Albotini wrote in his book *Sulam ha-‘Aliyah*:

That those who practice concentration, when they concentrate upon some subject or some profound interpretation, close their eyes, and nearly obliterate their own powers, in order to remove their hidden mind from potential into actualization, and to make that interpretation firm and to hew it out and impress it upon their souls.¹⁵

Here, as in the anonymous quotation, the shutting of the eyes is associated

with those who practice concentration, on the one hand, and the capability of apprehension, on the other. Elsewhere Albotini adds the following sentence to the material copied from Rabbi Abraham Abulafia's *Hayyey ha-'Olam ha-Ba'*: "Then, in that situation, he shall strongly shut his eyes and close them tightly, and all his body shall shake, with trembling and fear, and his knees. . . ."16

The practice of preceding the concentration necessary for apprehension by closing one's eyes found its way into one of the most famous works of Rabbi Hayyim Vital, namely, *Sha'arey Qedushah*. According to the author, the fourth and final stage of the process of purification, whose ultimate purpose is the attainment of prophecy, includes seclusion in a special house:

And he should shut his eyes, and remove his thoughts from all matters of this world, as though his soul had departed from him, like a dead person who feels nothing. . . . And he should imagine that his soul has departed and ascended, and he should envision the upper worlds, as though he stands in them. And if he performed some unification—he should think about it, to bring down by this, light and abundance into all the worlds, and he should intend to receive also his portion at the end. And he should concentrate in his thought, as though the spirit had rested upon him, until he awakens somewhat. . . . And after a few days he should return to meditate in the same manner, until he merits that the spirit rest upon him. (3:8)¹⁷

We find here a bold step, compared with its predecessors: the purpose of closing one's eyes in *hitbodedut* is now to merit the Holy Spirit, and no longer merely the realization of the intellect. Vital again suggests this practice for the purpose of *yihud* along the lines of Lurianic Kabbalah: "At the beginning you must shut and seal your eyes and concentrate for one hour, and then concentrate upon this—namely, the name MeTeTRoN—and divide it into three portions, each portion consisting of two letters, thus, MeT TeR 'ON."¹⁸ Again, in a magical formula in the possession of Rabbi Hayyim Vital, or written in his hand, we read: "To ask [a question] while awake: Enwrap yourself in *tallit* and *tefillin* and shut your eyes in concentration and recite: blessed memory" (. . . from a manuscript of our master, R. Hayyim Vital, quoted in *Sefer Meqor ha-Shemot* of M. Zaccuto, ms Laniado fol. 682).

One may clearly argue on the basis of these quotations that the suggestion of closing one's eyes to enable one to concentrate was adopted for various and peculiar reasons, which characterize systems of thoughts remote from one another. It is possible, by its means, to augment the intellect, to receive the Holy Spirit, or to ask waking questions or to perform mystical unifications.

In contrast to the understanding of *hitbodedut* as concentration and the

shutting of the eyes as an earlier stage, which repeats itself in Rabbi Hayyim Vital, one finds also the opposite outlook in this Kabbalist. He advises:

Meditate in a secluded house as above, and wrap yourself in a *tallit*, and sit and close your eyes and remove yourself from the material world, as if your soul had left your body, and ascended into the heavens. And after this casting off, read one *mishnah*, whichever one you wish, many times, time after time, and intend that your soul commune with the soul of the *tanna* mentioned in that *mishnah*. (ms British Library 749, fol. 162)

In another formula, which appears immediately thereafter, Vital advises:

Meditate in a secluded house, and close your eyes, and if you wrap yourself in a *tallit* and wear *tefillin* this shall be better, and after you turn your thoughts completely and purify them, then do combinations in your thoughts, using any word that you wish in all its combinations. For we are not strict as to which word you combine, but in whichever one you wish, for example: 'RZ, 'ZR, R'Z, RZ', Z'R, ZR' . . .

These descriptions of *hitbodedut* fit in many details the technique suggested by Rabbi Abraham Abulafia: that is, concentration in a secluded place, the wearing of *tallit* and *tefillin*, shutting one's eyes, and letter-combination. However, there is no doubt that to these details were added later approaches, including the attachment of the soul of the meditator to the soul of the *tanna* connected with the *mishnah* which is recited, or the ascent to the heavens. Despite this, we can state that Vital's descriptions give evidence of a continuation, with some changes, of the prophetic Kabbalah of the school of Abulafia. As this statement also holds true of other suggestions, which precede shutting one's eyes to concentrate, one may conclude that, with regard to *hitbodedut*, Rabbi Hayyim Vital was influenced by the various different versions of prophetic Kabbalah. His discussions of this subject, together with the material we have described above found in Rabbi Moshe Cordovero, indicate an impressive penetration of prophetic Kabbalah into theurgic Spanish Kabbalah, which had come to Safed without having been previously markedly influenced by Abulafia's teachings.

Notes

1. Full documentation and extended discussion of themes discussed in this article will be found in the author's forthcoming monograph on *hitbodedut* (in Hebrew). Space did not permit the full annotation of this article.

2. I shall deal here neither with this problem nor with the new understanding of kabbalistic texts written in Gerona or of other kabbalistic works unconnected with ecstatic Kabbalah. This subject will be discussed separately in a monograph now in preparation, which will include a detailed discussion of *hitbodedut* in the sense of isolation or removal from society.

3. Ed. J. Goldenthal (Leipzig, 1839) 49–51.
4. A. Jellinek, *Philosophie und Kabbala* (Leipzig, 1854) 1:21.
5. *Sefer Shoshan Sodot* (Korzek, 1784) fol. 60b.
6. *Me'irat 'Eynayim*, ed. A. Goldreich (diss., Hebrew University, 1981) 2:218.
7. *Revue des études juives* 115 n.s. 15 (1956) 66.
8. G. Scholem, *Kitvey Yad ba-Kabbalah* (Jerusalem, 1930) 226.
9. R. J. Z. Werblowsky, *Joseph Karo: Lawyer and Mystic* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962) 161.
10. G. Scholem, *Kitvey Yad ba-Kabbalah*, 226.
11. *Ibid.*, 228–29.
12. Warsaw, 1885, 30d.
13. In R. Margalio, *Mal'akhey 'Elyon*, Appendix, p. 21.
14. See *Mehqerey Yerushalayim be-Mahashevet Yisra'el* 1:3 (1982) 88.
15. See *Qiryat Sefer* 22 (1945) 163.
16. See Scholem, *Kitvey Yad ba-Kabbalah*, 227.
17. Beney Beraq, 1973, 115.
18. *Sha'ar Ruah ha-Qodesh* (Jerusalem, 1912) 7, 52.

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Various matters with which this essay deals have also been touched upon in other writings of this author, mostly in Hebrew. In English, see Idel, "Unio Mystica." On the connection of music with matters discussed here, see Idel, "Music." This author's book on Abraham Abulafia and his teachings is due to appear in the series *Judaism: Mysticism, Hermeneutics, and Religion*, published by the State University of New York (SUNY Press). For an English summary of Abulafia's teachings see Scholem (pp. 119ff.). An important survey of the problem of mystical union in the Safed center of Kabbalah is Pachter.

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