

Visualization of Colors, I: David ben Yehudah he-Ḥasid's Kabbalistic Diagram

Moshe Idel

Introduction

Distinct contributions to the history of Kabbalah have been made by the discussions, variegated in many manuscripts, that deal with the visualization of colors as part of the “intention” during prayer, the *kavvanah*, some of which have been discussed in my previous publications.¹ Less attention is paid to the contents and function of the schematic images embedded in these texts. One of them is found on folio 4r in the kabbalistic manuscript in the Ambrosiana library in Milan, Ms. 62 S 13 Sup. 62 (fig. 1a). On several occasions I have noted in my studies that this

is an anonymous diagram of the ten *sefirot*, which in my opinion should be attributed to one identified as R. David ben Yehudah he-Ḥasid (13th–14th century).² Since this proposed identification of the author in 1983, I have been unable to detect an additional manuscript that contains this diagram and, as promised then, I now publish the form and content of the diagram, together with an analysis of the Hebrew texts inscribed in it.

R. David ben Yehudah he-Ḥasid is one of the Kabbalists whose writings have been identified by modern scholarship and rescued from oblivion.³ In the course of time, by an

Thanks are due to the Ambrosiana Library in Milan for permission to reproduce the diagram and to Elisabetta Zevi of the Adelphi Publishing House in Milan for obtaining the reproduction of the diagram and permission for its publication. The core of the present study was delivered as a lecture entitled “A Kabbalistic Mandala: From David ben Yehudah he-Ḥasid to Luria,” at the conference, “Text and Image in Religious Cosmography: Reading Ilanot and Parallel Artifacts,” Haifa University, July 2011. Some additional texts found in manuscripts, briefly referred to in what follows, will be analyzed and published separately. The current discussion will be continued in my “Visualization of Colors, 2: Implications of David ben Yehudah he-Ḥasid's Diagram for the History of Kabbalah” forthcoming in *AJ* 12.

Garb, *Hofa'otav shel ha-ko'ah ba-mistikah ha-yehudit mi-sifrut Ḥazal ad kabbalat Zefat* (Manifestations of Power from Rabbinic Literature to Safedian Kabbalah) (Jerusalem, 2004), 187–200 (Hebrew); id., “Kabbalato shel Rabbi Yosef ibn Zayyah ke-makor la-Havanat kabbalat Zefat” (The Kabbalah of Rabbi Joseph ibn Sayyah as a Source for the Understanding of Safedian Kabbalah), *Kabbalah* 4 (1999): 255–314 (Hebrew); Sachi Ogimoto, “The Concept of the Ascent of Prayer by Sixteenth-century Jerusalem Kabbalist, R. Joseph ibn Zayyah” (PhD diss., Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2011); Maurizio Mottolose, “The Intensification of Ritual by the Medieval Kabbalah: Mystical Approaches to Bodily Cultic Practices” (PhD diss., La Sapienza, Roma, 2014), 233–34.

1 See Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (New Haven, 1988), 103–11; id., “Kabbalistic Prayer and Colors,” in *Approaches to Judaism in Medieval Times*, ed. David R. Blumenthal, 3 vols. (Atlanta, 1984–1988), 3:17–27; id., “Kavvanah u-zeva'im: teshuvah kabbalit nishkaḥat” (*Kavvanah and Colors: A Neglected Kabbalistic Responsum*), in *Minḥah le-Sarah: meḥkarim be-filosofyah yehudit u-ve-kabbalah mugashim li-professor Sarah O. Heller Vilenski* (Tribute to Sara: Studies in Jewish Philosophy and Kabbalah Presented to Professor Sara O. Heller Wilensky), eds. Moshe Idel, Devorah Dimant, and Shalom Rosenberg (Jerusalem, 1994), 1–14 (Hebrew); id., “An Anonymous Kabbalistic Commentary on *Shir ha-Yihud*,” in *Mysticism, Magic, and Kabbalah in Ashkenazi Judaism*, eds. Karl Erich Grözinger and Joseph Dan (Berlin, 1995), 147–48. See also id., *Golem: Jewish Magical and Mystical Traditions on the Artificial Anthropoid* (Albany, 1990), 119–26; and id., *Enchanted Chains: Techniques and Rituals in Jewish Mysticism* (Los Angeles, 2005), 228–32. See also Yoni

2 See Idel, “Homer kabbali mi-beit midrasho shel Rabbi David ben Yehudah he-Ḥasid” (Kabbalistic Materials from the School of R. David ben Yehuda he-Ḥasid), *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 2, no. 2 (1983): 194 n. 123 (Hebrew); id., *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, 107–10. For a description of this manuscript see Carlo Bernheimer, *Codices Hebraici Bybliothae Ambrosianae* (Florence, 1933), 75–80, 85–86; Gershom Scholem, [Review of Bernheimer, *Codices Hebraici*], *Kiryat Sefer* 11 (1934/1935): 188–89 (Hebrew); Giulio Busi, *Qabbalah Visiva* (Torino, 2005), 445–46. This is a fifteenth-century manuscript that was in the possession of the early-sixteenth-century Italian Kabbalist and grammarian R. Abraham de Balmes. Interestingly enough, another piece belonging to the school of R. David is also found in an Italian manuscript; see Oxford, Bodleiana, Ms. 1663, fols. 128v–129r.

3 See Arthur Marmorstein, “David ben Judah Hasid,” *Monatsschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 71 (1927): 39–48; Gershom

analysis of the Kabbalistic terminology and concepts it is possible to determine the affinities between this Kabbalist and the works of some others, especially R. Joseph ben Shalom Ashkenazi (early fourteenth century),⁴ and other unidentified Kabbalists whose writings are still in need of analysis.⁵ Some of R. David ben Yehudah he-Ḥasid's writings have been published for the first time in our

days.⁶ Below I shall take into consideration studies that have appeared since my first publications in this specific field as well as some new material that I have since found in assorted manuscripts. Like in many other cases in scholarship, passages belonging to R. Joseph ben Shalom Ashkenazi will be used to clarify aspects of R. David's Kabbalistic thought.

Scholem, "Rabbi David ben Yehudah he-Ḥasid nekhed ha-Ramban" (R. David ben Yehuda he-Ḥasid Grandson of the Ramban), in id., *Mehkerei kabbalah* (Studies in Kabbalah), eds. Joseph Ben Shlomo and Moshe Idel, vol. 1 (Tel Aviv, 1998), 137–70. (Hebrew); Efraim Gottlieb, *Mehkarim be-sifrut ha-kabbalah* (Studies in Kabbalah Literature), ed. Joseph Hacker (Tel Aviv, 1976), 249–50, (Hebrew); Amos Goldreich, "Sefer ha-gevu' le-Rabbi David ben Yehudah he-Ḥasid" (*Sefer ha-Gevul* by R. David ben Yehudah he-Ḥasid), MA thesis, Tel Aviv University, 1972 (Hebrew); Yehuda Liebes, *Studies in the Zohar* (Albany, 1993), 126–134; Moshe Idel, "Targumo shel Rabbi David ben Yehudah he-Ḥasid le-Sefer ha-Zohar u-ferushav la-alfa beta" (R. David ben Yehudah he-Ḥasid's Translation of the Zohar and His Commentaries on the Alphabet), *'Alef Sefer* 8 (1980): 60–73, 9 (1981): 84–98, 10 (1982): 25–35 (Hebrew); id., "'Ta'amei ha-'ofot ha-teme'im le-Rabbi David ben Yehudah he-Ḥasid u-mashma'utam" (*'Ta'amei Ha-'Ofot Ha-Teme'im* of R. David ben Yehuda he-Ḥasid), in *Alei shefer: mehkarim be-sifrut he-hagut mugashim li-khvod ha-rav doktor Alexander Shafran* (*'Alef Shefer: Studies in the Literature of Jewish Thought Presented to Rabbi Dr. Alexander Safran*), ed. Moshe Hallamish (Ramat Gan, 1990), 11–27 (Hebrew); id., "Homer kabbali," 169–207; id., "Od al Rabbi David ben Yehudah he-Ḥasid ve-ha-Ari" (More on R. David ben Yehudah he-Ḥasid and R. Isaac Luria), *Da'at* 7 (1981): 69–71 (Hebrew); id., "The Image of Man above the *Sefirot*: R. David ben Yehuda he-Ḥasid's Theosophy of Ten Supernal *sahsahot* and Its Reverberations," *Kabbalah* 20 (2009): 181–212. See also below, nn. 4 and 5.

4 See in particular Gershom Scholem's groundbreaking study, "Hameḥabber ha-amitti shel perush Sefer yeẓirah ha-meyuḥas le-ha-Rabad u-sfarav" (The Real Author of the *Commentary on Sefer Yeẓirah* Attributed to R. Abraham ben David and His Works), in id., *Mehkerei kabbalah* (Studies in Kabbalah), eds. Yosef Ben Shlomo and Moshe Idel, vol. 1 (Tel Aviv 1998), 112–36 (Hebrew); Georges Vajda, "Un Chapitre de l'Histoire du Conflit entre la Kabbale et la Philosophie: la Polemique anti-intellectualiste de Joseph b. Shalom Ashkenazi," *Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du Moyen Age* 33 (1956): 45–127 and the text Vajda has published that deals with Ashkenazi's critique of philosophy, id., "Tish'im ve-arba hakdamot shel ha-filosofim ha-muva'ot al yedei Rabbi Yosef ben Shalom Ashkenazi" (Ninety-Four Principles of

the Philosophers Cited by R. Joseph Ashkenazi), *Tarbiz* 27 (1958): 290–300 (Hebrew). See also Moshe Hallamish's introduction to his edition of *Perush kabbali li-Vreshit Rabbah le-Rabbi Yosef ben Shalom Ashkenazi* (Commentary on Genesis Rabbah: Kabbalistic Commentary of R. Yosef ben Shalom Ashkenazi on Genesis Rabbah (Jerusalem, 1984), 11–27 (Hebrew); id., "Seridim mi-perushei Tehilim le-Rabbi Yosef ben Shalom Ashkenazi" (Remnants from the Commentary on Psalms by R. Joseph ben Shalom Ashkenazi), *Da'at* 10 (1983): 57–70 (Hebrew); Liebes, *Studies in the Zohar*, 93–95; Haviva Pedaya, "Shabbat Shabbtai u-mi'ut ha-yare'ah – ha-ḥibbur ha-kadosh: ot u-temunah" (Sabbath, Sabbatai, and the Diminution of Moon – The Holy Conjunction, Sign and Image), *Eshel Beer-Sheva* 4 (1996): 143–91 (Hebrew); Harvey J. Hames, *The Art of Conversion: Christianity and Kabbalah in the Thirteenth Century* (Leiden, 2000), 139–40; Amador Vega, *Ramon Llull and the Secret of Life*, tr. James W. Heisig (New York, 2003), 81–82; Moshe Idel, "Ashkenazi Esotericism and Kabbalah in Barcelona," *Hispania Judaica Bulletin* 5 (2007): 100–104; Elliot R. Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being: Kabbalistic Hermeneutics and Poetic Imagination* (New York, 2005), 64, 178–79.

5 Idel, "Homer kabbali," 169–207; id., "An Anonymous Kabbalistic Commentary on *Shir ha-Yiḥud*," 139–54.

6 See Daniel Ch. Matt, *The Book of Mirrors: Sefer Mar'ot ha-Zove'ot by R. David ben Yehuda he-Ḥasid: Text and Study* (New York and Toronto, 1983); *Or Zaru'a*, by Rabbi David Ben Yehuda He-Ḥasid, ed. Bentsion Ben Levi Hacohen (Jerusalem and New York, 2009). The diagrams from *Sefer ha-Gevul* as found in Paris, BnF, Ms. 876 have been printed in Busi, *Qabbalah Visiva*, 197–335, and the brief Hebrew texts accompanying them have been translated into Italian. It should be mentioned that when checking other manuscripts of *Sefer ha-Gevul*, one may find many substantial variants in comparison to the manuscript in Paris. See, e.g., Moshe Idel, "Rabbi Neḥemyah ben Shelomoh ha-navi al magen David ve-ha-shem Taftafya: mi-magyah yehudit le-kabbalah ma'asit u-le-kabbalah iyyunit" (On Magen David and the Name Taftafiah: from Jewish Magic to Practical and Theoretical Kabbalah), in *Ta-Shema: mehkarim be-mada'ei ha-yahadut le-zikhro shel Yisrael M. Ta-Shema* (Ta-Shema: Studies in Judaica in Memory of Israel M. Ta-Shema), eds. Avraham Reiner et al., 2 vols. (Alon Shvut, 2011), 1:28–32 (Hebrew).

The Diagram

The principal inscriptions within the diagram (fig. 1a) read as follows:

a At the top of the page:

כתר עליון הגדול היחוד האמיתי⁷ המיוחד בכל שמותיו לבן כשלג
יהיה

The Supernal Great *Keter* (Crown), the true Unity that is united in all its names, white like snow, YHWH

b In the first circle (from the outside), starting at the top, counterclockwise:

שכל מופלא נתיב א'. שכל מזהיר נתיב ב'. שכל מקודש נתיב ג'.
שכל קבוע נתיב ד'. שכל נשרש נתיב ה'. שכל נבדל נתיב ו'. שכל
נסתר נתיב ז'. שכל שלם נתיב ח'. שכל טהור נתיב ט'. שכל מתנוצץ
נתיב י'. שכל מצוחצח נתיב י"א. שכל בהיר נתיב י"ב. שכל מנהיג
נתיב י"ג. שכל מאיר נתיב י"ד. שכל מעמיד נתיב ט"ו. שכל נצחי
נתיב י"ו. שכל ההרגש נתיב י"ז. שכל בית השפע נתיב י"ח. שכל סוד
הפעולות נתיב י"ט. שכל תכונת כל היצורים נתיב כ'. שכל החפץ
נתיב כ"א. שכל נאמן נתיב כ"ב. שכל קיים נתיב כ"ג. שכל דמיוני
נתיב כ"ד. שכל נסיוני נתיב כ"ה. שכל מחודש נתיב כו. שכל מורגש
נתיב כז. שכל מוטבע נתיב כח. שכל מוגשם נתיב כט. שכל כללי
נתיב ל. שכל מתמיד נתיב לא. שכל נעבד נתיב לב.

Path 1: wondrous intellect; Path 2: resplendent intellect; Path 3: sacred intellect; Path 4: constant intellect; Path 5: rooted intellect; Path 6: separated intellect; Path 7: hidden intellect; Path 8: complete intellect; Path 9: pure intellect; Path 10: sparkling intellect; Path 11: polished intellect; Path 12: clear intellect; Path 13: leading intellect; Path 14: illuminating intellect; Path 15: establishing

intellect; Path 16: eternal intellect; Path 17: sensual intellect; Path 18: plentiful intellect; Path 19, intellect of the attributes of all the creatures; Path 20: pathseeker's intellect; Path 21: desirous intellect; Path 22: faithful intellect; Path 23: standing intellect; Path 24: imagining intellect; Path 25: experimental intellect; Path 26: renovated intellect; Path 27: perceived intellect; Path 28: innate intellect; Path 29: materialized intellect; Path 30: general intellect; Path 31: persistent intellect; Path 32: worshipful intellect.

This is a list of thirty-two paths of wisdom, mentioned in *Sefer Yeẓirah* and described here as thirty-two intellects, which has been fleshed out in detail in several Kabbalistic lists, especially in the preface to R. Joseph ben Shalom Ashkenazi's commentary on *Sefer Yeẓirah*.⁸

c In the second circle, starting at the top, counter-clockwise:

[A] בגד כפרת והווח⁹ טי לנ סע צק אאאא¹⁰ עד כו' בבבב עד כו' וכן אלפה ביתה כולה, [B] ואחר כך התורה כולה כתובה בה מבראשית ברא אלהים גו' עד לעיני כל ישראל, עד שיסובב כל העיגול, [C] ואחר כך י"ב הויות יהוה יהוה יהוה וכן כלם.¹¹ [D] ואחר כך י"ב מזלות ואחר כך י"ב חדשים ואח"כ י"ב שבטים אח"כ י"ב אבנים, ואח"כ כ"ד אדנים שהם אדני¹² וכו'. [E] וכן תבנית כל כללי הנמצאות וכלליהם ופרטי פרטיהם, וכן כל עשב ועשב והצומח וחיות ועופות ובהמות ושרצים ורמשים ודגי הים ומלאכים וגלגלים וככבים, והימים והנהרות ואדם הראשון וכל זרעו.

“[A] BGD KPRTh, WHWWH, TY LN S'ZK, until etc., BBBB until etc., and so the entire Alphabet [B] And afterwards the entire Torah is written in it from 'Bereshit Bara' 'Elohim' etc., until 'Le-'einei kol Yisra'el', until the entire circle will be moved [C]

7 The phrase היחוד האמיתי in the context of the first *sefirah* occurs twice in the short text found in Oxford, Bodleiana, Ms. 1663, fol. 128v. This phrase betrays some form of polemic tone, as if there are other persons whose understanding of unity is not the true one.

8 See fols. 10a–11a, with some small changes, especially in the matter of location of the same descriptions of the intellects, though the order is basically the same in most of the cases.

9 The correct form should be אהוחח. It is obvious that the copyist did not have a good version of the text in the diagram before him.

10 I do not understand why those letters appear while the final two, רש, are missing.

11 The categories mentioned in A, B, and C are linguistic par excellence, while the two others, D and E, refer to the cosmos and living beings. Categories A, B, and C represent a case of linguistic order that is projected on the metaphysical level. See Moshe Idel, “On some Forms of Order in Kabbalah,” *Da'at* 50–52 (2003): xxxi–lviii.

12 Compare R. Joseph Ashkenazi's *Commentary on Sefer Yeẓirah*, fol. 6b: צריך להיות כ"ד אדנים בעגול תוך ספירת מלכות כנגד אדני המשכן והם שם אדני

and afterwards twelve Hawayyot, YHWH YWHH YHHW, and so all [D] and afterwards the twelve signs of the zodiac, and afterwards twelve months, twelve tribes, twelve stones, and afterwards twenty-four [times] Ad[o]nim, that are Adonai etc., [E] And the entire structure of the principles of the existences, and their principles and the details of

their details, and so to each and every grass, and the vegetable and the animal and the birds and the domestic animals, and reptiles and insects and the fishes of the sea, and angels and spheres and stars, and the seas and the rivers and the first man and all his offspring.”

d In the strip descending from the second to the tenth circle:

חכמה תכלית השמים זעיר אנפין

Hokhmah, the blue of heaven, *Ze'yir 'Anppin* (divine configuration).

Binah, green as the rainbow, YHWH, Z[e'yir] 'A[nppin]. א"א בינה ירוק כקשת יהוה ז"א

Gedulah, refined silver, YHWH, Z. 'A. א"א גדולה כסף צרוף יהוה ז"א

Gevurah, red as fire, YHWH, Z. 'A. א"א גבורה אדום כאש יהוה ז"א

Tiferet, white that tends to red, YHWH, Z. 'A. א"א תפארת לבן נוטה לאדום יהוה ז"א

Nezah, white that tends to blue, YHWH, Z. 'A. א"א נצח לבן נוטה לתכלית יהוה ז"א

Hod, green that tends to red, YHWH, Z. 'A. א"א הוד ירוק נוטה לאדום יהוה ז"א

Yesod, blue that tends to black, YHWH, Z. 'A. א"א יסוד תכלית נוטה לשחור יהוה ז"א

Malkhut, black hue, YHWH, Z. 'A. א"א מלכות גוון שחור יהוה ז"א

e To the right of the strip, intersecting the circles:

כל אלו ט' ספירות נקראים זעיר אנפין

All those nine *sefirot* are called *Ze'yir 'Anppin*

f At the top of the page:

כלותי בו נתיב מן לב נתיבות חכמה יש בו י"ח צינורות למעלה במה שיקבל ויש בו י"ח צינורות למטה במה ישפיע / כל אלו הרמזים צריכין קבלה מפה אל פה

I finished by it the path of thirty-two paths of wisdom; there is in it eighteen pipes above¹³ and it will receive by them, and there eighteen pipes below from which it emanates. / All those hints must be transmitted from mouth to mouth.

It is noteworthy that in this diagram there is no representation of the Infinity at all, and even the *sefirah* of *Keter* is described as transcending the structure of the ten *sefirot*. It goes without saying that the translation of the

names of the colors here and below is, to a certain extent, arbitrary, since the same term for a certain color has been understood differently by different Kabbalists, particularly in the case of *tekhelet* (blue).

¹³ I did not find a parallel to the theme of 18 or 36 pipes or channels.

R. David ben Yehudah he-Ḥasid's Authorship of the Diagram

The diagram on fol. 4r of the Ambrosiana Ms. S 13 Sup. (fig. 1a) is anonymous. However, as mentioned above, I believe that it is possible to identify its author. On fol. 3b of the same manuscript there is the Kabbalistic response of a certain R. David about *du-parzufin* (two-faced), which fits the views of R. David ben Yehudah he-Ḥasid, and which I have published and analyzed in detail.¹⁴ Moreover, on folios 2a–3a, there are circles that indubitably belong to some version of R. David's *Sefer ha-Gevul*. An equally decisive proof for the affinity between the diagram and R. David is the fact that immediately after the response on *du-parzufin* in his name, found on fol. 3b, there is a short paragraph that alludes to a diagram that is similar to that reproduced above, which opens with the following sentences:

“Happy is the man that fears YHWH, he desires very much his commandments.”¹⁵ This is he that constrained the constellations,¹⁶ a circle within the circle of the supernal *sefirot*, encompassing everything and emanate from their emanation upon all the separated [entities] in a general manner.¹⁷ And¹⁸ from the emanation of the *Teshuvah* (repentance) six powers and from the emanation of the sixth, one called Keroziel.¹⁹

14 Idel, “Ḥomer kabbali,” 193–97; see also Liebes, *Studies in the Zohar*, 126–34.

15 Ps. 122:1.

16 This phrase is found already in R. Abraham ibn Ezra, in connection with the ability of God to overcome the astrological order. Here, however, it is applied to the human order. The meaning of such a phrase in this instance is the magical power of the Kabbalist. This is an interesting piece of evidence as to the astronomical or astrological backgrounds of the diagrams of ten *sefirot*. For astrology and R. Joseph Ashkenazi, see Moshe Idel, *Saturn's Jews: On the Witches' Sabbat and Sabbateanism* (London and New York, 2011), 17–22.

17 The phrase *דרך כלל* occurs several times in this school. See, e.g., Idel, “Kavvanah u-zeva'im,” 4–5, in the passage reproduced below, and repeated multiple times in Ashkenazi's *Commentary on Sefer Yeẓirah* and in ibn Ḥayyim, *Sefer Ḥeror ha-ḥayyim*, London, BL, Ms. Montefiore 318, fol. 28v.

18 The following statement and the entire paragraph that follows it in the manuscript that I did not reproduce is a paraphrase of R. Isaac ben

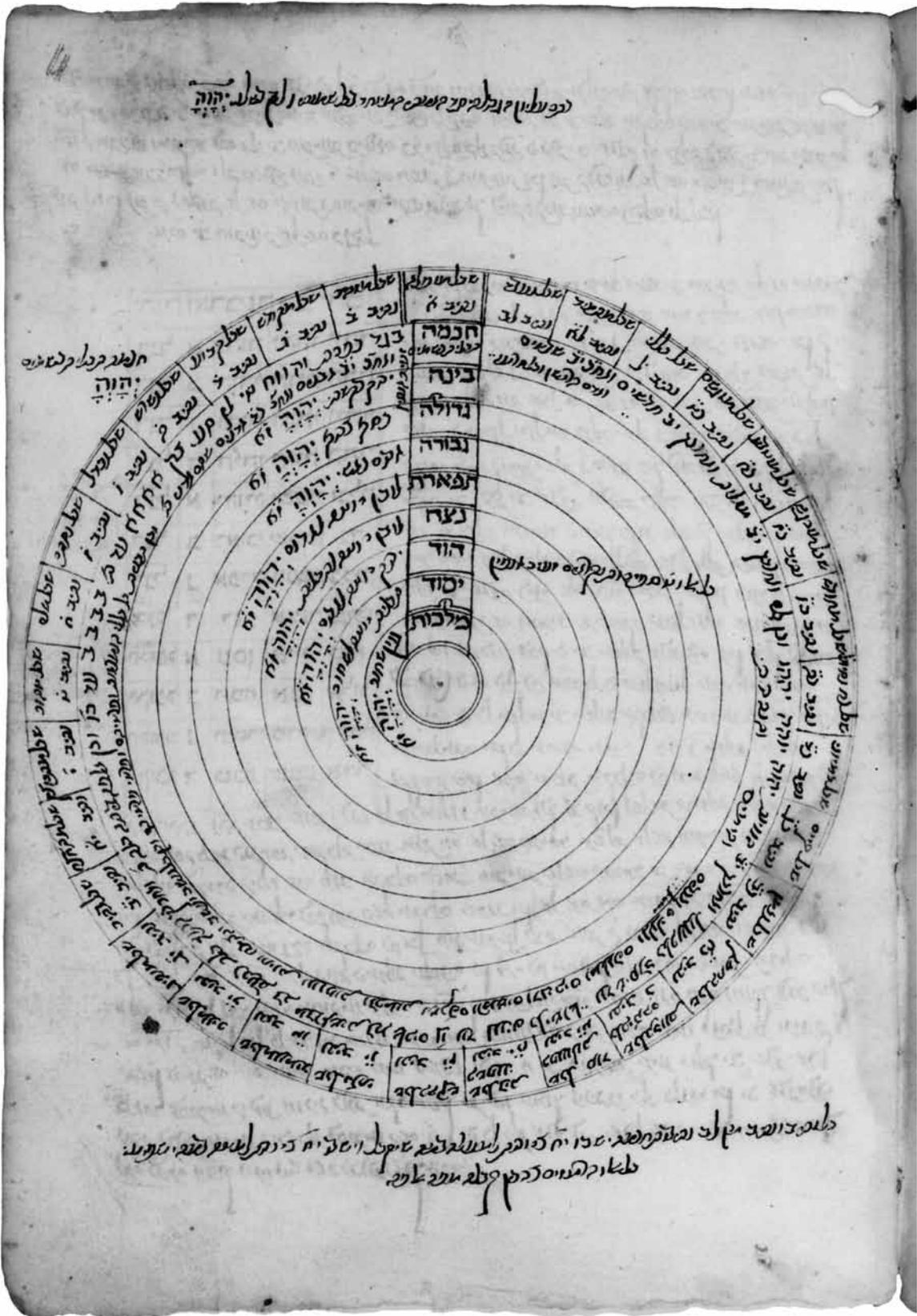
The first three lines describe concentric circles including the phrase *Iggul ha-sefirot*, the “circle of the sefirot” that will be dealt with in the second part of this study. It is hard to avoid the significance of such a statement, found between a responsum authored by R. David and the diagram that appears on the next page. However, even more compelling is the almost total parallelism between the names of the colors and their corresponding *sefirot*, and what is recorded in a commentary written by R. David on *Ma'aseh Merkavah*. Following the list of ten colors found in R. Joseph Ashkenazi's *Commentary on Genesis Rabbah*, 133, R. David adopts a list parallel to the one found in the diagram in one of his shorter commentaries:

[...] the spheres of *Ḥokhmah* [wisdom] all its sons [sic] are clothed [in] blue with 377 lights kinds of splendors that are found in them. And the spheres of *Binah* [understanding] where there are the holy beasts are all clothed in the likeness of green like of the rainbow, and the spheres of *Gedulah* [greatness] are all clothed in whiteness of silver and like the white waters. *Gevurah* [strength] are all clothed in the likeness of fire. And the spheres of *Tiferet* [splendor] are all clothed [in] white and red.²⁰

Jacob ha-Kohen's *Ma'amar ha-Azilat ha-Semalit*, published in Gershom Scholem, “Kabbalot Rabbi Ya'akov ve-Rabbi Yizhak bnei Ya'akov ha-Kohen” (The Kabbalah of R. Jacob and R. Isaac, the sons of R. Jacob ha-Kohen), *Madda'ei ha-Yahadut* 2 (1927): 249–50 (Hebrew).

19 Milan, Ambrosiana, Ms. 62, fol. 3v: ‘אֲשֶׁר־אֵיֶשׁ יָבֵא אֶת־יְהוָה וְחָפֵץ מֵאֵד בְּמִצְוֹתָי׃ זֶהוּ שֵׁדֵד כָּל־הַמְעַרְכוֹת עֵגוּל בְּתוֹךְ עֵגוּל הַסְּפִירוֹת עֲלִיוֹנוֹת עַל־הַכֹּל מְקִיפּוֹת וּמְשַׁפְּיֵעוֹת מֵאֲצִילוֹתַם עַל־כָּל־הַנְּבִדְלִים דֶּרֶךְ כָּל־ל. וּמֵאֲצִילוֹת הַתְּשׁוּבָה שֶׁשָׁה כַּחוֹת וּמֵאֲצִילוֹת הַשְּׁשִׁי הַנִּקְרָא כְּרוּזִיָּאֵל

20 Jerusalem, NLI, Ms. 4° 80, fol. 81r: גִּ' גִּלְגָּלִי הַחֲכָמָה כָּל־בְּנָיו לְבוּשֵׁי תְכֵלֶת עִם־ג' מֵאֹרֹת מִיְיָ וְזוֹהָרִים שְׁבָהֵם. בֵּינָה אֲשֶׁר שָׁם חַיּוֹת הַקֹּדֶשׁ כָּל־לְבוּשֵׁי כַדְמוּ יֵרוּק שְׁבַקְשָׁת וּגְלָגְלִי גְדוּלָה כּוֹלֵם לְבוּשֵׁי כְלוּבֹן הַכֶּסֶף וְכַמִּים לְבָנִים וּגְלָגְלִי גְבוּרָה כָּל־לְבוּשֵׁי כַדְמוּת אֵשׁ וּגְלָגְלִי תְּפָאֵרֶת כּוֹלֵם לְבוּשֵׁי לָבָן וְאֹדֶם. For David's authorship of this treatise, see Scholem, “Rabbi David ben Yehudah he-Ḥasid nekhed ha-Rambam,” 146. The number 377 is the *gematria* of *Malbush* and *Ḥashmal* = 378, as a number of supernal lights, seen already in the late antiquity treatise *Ma'aseh Merkavah*, which is commented upon by R. David. For these issues, see also below, n. 26. Compare also *Sefer Toledot 'Adam* by R. Joseph of Hamadan, published in *Sefer ha-Malkhut*,



< Fig. 1 (a)

Fig. 1. (a) Kabbalistic diagram; (b) Twelve divine names, twelve seals, and twelve tribes in R. David ben Yehudah he-Ḥasid (?), *Kabbalistic treatise*, 13th or 14th century. Milan, Ambrosiana Library, Ms. 62 S 13 Sup. 62, fol. 4r-4v

In addition, the term “the great supernal *Keter*” that appears at the top of the diagram is found in a treatise belonging to the school of R. David.²¹ The ambiance of secrecy, as seen in the last statement at the bottom of the diagram, is characteristic of some of R. David ben Yehudah he-Ḥasid’s treatises, as well as those of R. Joseph Ashkenazi.²² Moreover, the topic of imagining colors, as related to Kabbalistic prayer, is found in a text which appears at the end of R. David ben Yehudah he-Ḥasid’s *Sefer ’Or Zaru’a*, and was authored by him.²³

However, those topics carry only circumstantial weight, and more is needed in order to strengthen the identification of the author of the diagram. Indeed, in a short discussion about prayer found in Cambridge, Ms.Add. 505, fol. 8r, we read:

R. David said: We are not allowed to visualize the ten *sefirot*, except in accordance with the chapter

ed. J. Toledano (Casablanca, 1930), fol. 103d, where the discussion on *Ḥashmal* and the number of lights appears in relation to the color white and the first *sefirah*. On Joseph of Hamandan’s authorship of this book see Gottlieb, *Meḥkarim be-sifrut ha-kabbalah*, 251–56. See also the other *Commentary on Ten Sefirot* by the same author, Paris, BnF, Ms. 853, fol. 80r but in both cases a *Malbush* is not mentioned. See also below n. 68. For a similar list of colors and the corresponding *sefirot*, see R. Joseph Ashkenazi’s *Commentary on Genesis Rabbah*, 133, and for his resort to the term *zoharim* in a similar context, see *ibid.*, 228. Inspired as R. David was by Ashkenazi’s list of colors, he did not exploit the references to colors in the Zoharic literature.

21 Idel, “Homer kabbali,” 179 n. 45.

22 See Idel, “An Anonymous Kabbalistic Commentary on *Shir ha-Yihud*,” 146–49, 151 and in the forthcoming part of this study in *AJ* 12.

23 See London, BL, Ms. 771, fol. 102b, discussed in Idel, “Kavvanah u-zeva’im,” 9–10. As to the authorship of this material, see Goldreich, “*Sefer ha-gevul*,” 88. This material, which constitutes the clue for the secret meaning of the book, was not included in Hakohen’s edition of *’Or Zaru’a*, which systematically avoided dealing with this dimension of R. David’s understanding of prayer.

24 The beginning of one of the 18 blessings of the ‘Amidah prayer.

25 The beginning of another of the 18 blessings of the ‘Amidah prayer.

26 *Ḥashmal* = *malbush* = 378. The earliest known source for this identification seems to be R. Joseph Ashkenazi’s *Commentary on Sefer Yeḥirah*, fols. 13a, 13d. On the *malbush* of the *sefirot* see also in the design from *Sefer ha-Gevul*, reproduced in Busi, *Qabbalah Visiva*, 260, where there are eight occurrences of the term *malbush* around a circle. About the *Ḥashmal* as the garment, see the text found in Ms. Sassoon 290, now in the Bibliothèque de Genève, Montana, the Segre Amar collection 145, p. 195, which in my opinion belongs to R. David: חשמל הוא הלבוש. See also the anonymous incantation, which I

believe belongs to the school of *Sefer ha-Meshiv*, found in Ms. Sassoon 290, p. 562, where the colors are described as “clothed” מלובשים to the divinity, as well as the text referred in n. 20 above. Immediately after the passage quoted there, R. David wrote: ודע כי אומרי לבוש אל תבין ממני כי הוא לבוש גשמי ח’ אלא ר”ל חשמל ורקיע וכל אשר בם הוא בצבע ההוא אע”פ שכל שאר המאורות יתלוו אליהם

Here there is a name, R. David, at the beginning of the passage, and the formula about oral transmission that we see at the bottom of the diagram. The connection between this R. David and R. David ben Yehudah he-Ḥasid is evident, since the preceding and subsequent material includes unidentified citations from R. David’s *’Or Zaru’a*.²⁸ However, what is more important is the mention of the colors that should be visualized, which is a prominent topic in some forms of Kabbalistic literature.

The connection between *Ḥashmal* and *Malbush* has been elaborated upon several times in the writings of the sixteenth-century Jerusalemite Kabbalist R. Joseph ibn Zayyah. See, e.g., *Even ha-Shoham*, Jerusalem, NLI, Ms. 8° 416, fol. 32r, *Sefer Zeror ha-Ḥayyim*, London, BL, Ms. Montefiore 318, fols. 23v, 27v–28r, 60r, 73r, and Garb, “Kabbalato shel Rabbi Yosef ibn Zayyah,” 275–76 nn. 118, 119. Sometimes the *Malbush* is mentioned without the *Ḥashmal*. See *Sefer Zeror ha-Ḥayyim*, fols. 65r, 66r, or Joseph ibn Zayyah’s *She’erit Yosef*, Warsaw, Ms. 229, fol. 58r. This type of garment should not be confused with another garment, found in ibn Zayyah’s writings which, though stemming from a variety of sources that deal with the combinations of letters that constitute a pre-sefirotic structure, is a view that influenced Luria’s student R. Israel Sarug. See Moshe Idel, “Bein kabbalat Yerushalayim le-kabbalat Rabbi Yisrael Saruk” (The Relationship of the Jerusalem Kabbalists and Israel Sarug of Safed), *Shalem* 6 (1992): 165–73 (Hebrew). As I noted there, another student of Luria, R. Ḥayyim Vital, was also acquainted with views of ibn Zayyah. For more on these issues, see the second part of this study, *AJ* 12.

אמ”ר דה: אין לנו רשות לצייר ה’ ספירות אלא בראשי פרקים הבאים לידך כגון מגן אברהם לחסד וכגון חונו הדעת לתפ’ לכן תצייר לעולם באותו צבע של ראש הפרקים שהוא החשמל של הספירה כי החשמל הוא מלובש הספירה בעצמה סביב וסביב ואח”כ תמשוך השפע בציוור מעומק הנהר אל העולמות עד אלינו וזהו הנכון המקובל מפה אל הפה. See Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, 104–5. For additional texts related to R. David found in this manuscript see Idel, “Targumo shel Rabbi David ben Yehudah he-Ḥasid le-sefer ha-Zohar,” 87–91.

28 *Ibid.*, 87–88.

This means that the Kabbalist has had access to the external aspect of the *sefirot*, the garment, namely their covering, but not to the *sefirot* themselves. Thus, it is not just the occurrence of the diagram together with a response of R. David in the Milanese Ambrosiana manuscript that points to the possible author, but also a conceptual similarity between some details in it and a passage ascribed to a Kabbalist called R. David. However, while in the diagram we have a detailed and precise list of colors and their corresponding *sefirot*, in the short passage from the Cambridge manuscript colors are mentioned in general terms without any indication of the precise colors and the corresponding *sefirot*. Nevertheless, it is obvious that something is missing in this passage, namely the specific names of the colors that are connected to each of the *sefirot* and to the specific parts of the prayer. Let me point out that unlike other instances, in the last quote it is the *sefirot* that are mentioned, not the “spheres of the *sefirot*” as is recorded in the diagram and in the quote adduced in n. 20 from the *Commentary on Ma'aseh Merkavah*. It may be that the very term *sefirah* was understood as a sphere.

However, despite those affinities there is a discrepancy that I would like to address in some detail. As seen in the diagram, each of the last nine *sefirot* has been explicitly described as related to or constituting the configuration of *Ze'yir 'Anppin*. This means that according to the diagram the nine *sefirot* together comprise the lower configuration, and implicitly we may assume that the *sefirah* of *Keter* was understood as *'Arikh 'Anppin*. This last identification conforms to what we find in late-thirteenth-century Kabbalah, including that of R. David himself. However, insofar as the sefirotic identity of Small Face or Configuration is concerned, there are a variety of interpretations. In one of R. David's epistles, he identified

it not with nine *sefirot* but with the last, feminine one alone: “Now the Long-Face refers to the highest crown [*Keter 'Elyon*] of the ten [supernal *sefirot*] whereas the Small-Face refers to the lowest crown [*'Atarah*] within it.”²⁹ This understanding of the Small-Face as identical to the last, feminine *sefirah*, is quite rare in Kabbalah, but it is found in R. Joseph of Hamadan, probably an older contemporary of R. David, and in a Zoharic text.³⁰ Thus, we have here a clear conflict of interpretation regarding the meaning of a key concept found in a text explicitly attributed to R. David and what we have seen in the anonymous diagram.

However, a perusal of R. David's *Sefer ha-Gevul* shows his unparalleled propensity toward diagrams, more than any other Kabbalist, as the 96 circles and the forms inserted in them abundantly testify.³¹ In those circles the two divine configurations, *'Arikh 'Anppin* and *Ze'yir 'Anppin*, recur constantly. Indeed, as he articulated it in this book, “All the designs that I have designed to you from the beginning until now of the worlds, are in the world of *'Arikh 'Anppin* and *Ze'yir 'Anppin*.”³² Thus, we have a clear testimony that his designs, or diagrams, contain references to the two configurations. In some cases a few colors are mentioned within the circles as well.³³ Moreover, in one manuscript of this book we have a complete list of ten colors related to a diagram of ten *sefirot* that represents the “eye of *'Arikh 'Anppin*.”³⁴ The list of the colors, though not totally identical with what is found in the diagram, is nevertheless very similar to it. In one case in this manuscript the name *Ze'yir 'Anppin* is described as related to the *sefirah* of *Tiferet*,³⁵ which shows that the linkage between this term and the last, female, *sefirah* is not exclusive in R. David's writings. Additionally, we find here a clear statement as to the identity of *Ze'yir 'Anppin* as the nine lower *sefirot*.³⁶

29 Idel, “The Image of Man,” 186.

30 See also the designs reproduced from *Sefer ha-Gevul*, Paris, BnF, Ms. 876, fols. 95v and 98v, in Busi, *Qabbalah Visiva*, 279, 289; Idel, “The Image of Man,” 195 n. 48; id., *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, 134–35; Liebes, *Studies in the Zohar*, 105–7, 211–12 n. 178; and R. Moshe Cordovero, *Pardes Rimmonim* (Jerusalem, 1962), XXIII:7, vol. 2, fols. 15d–16a (Hebrew).

31 On these circles, or diagrams, see Goldreich, “Sefer ha-gevul,” 79–89;

Busi, *Qabbalah Visiva*, 197–335.

32 See *Sefer ha-Gevul*, Jerusalem, NLI, Ms. 3921 8°, fol. 64v, and Jerusalem, NLI, Ms. 80 4°, fol. 94v. For the entire context see the passage I published in Idel, “Ta'amei ha-'ofot ha-teme'im,” 23–24.

33 Busi, *Qabbalah Visiva*, 203, 205, 264.

34 Warsaw, Ms. 1193, fol. 13r.

35 Busi, *Qabbalah Visiva*, 273.

36 See Oxford, Bodleiana, Ms. 1911, fol. 194r.

Moreover, in a commentary on a tradition regarding the Kabbalistic intention in prayer that stems from R. Isaac the Blind and was transmitted by R. Azriel of Gerona, an anonymous Kabbalist interprets the a section of the prayer as intended to the *Binah* of *Ze'yir 'Anppin*, and concerning another part of prayer to the *Hokhmah* of *Ze'yir 'Anppin* or to *Hesed* of *Ze'yir 'Anppin*, but later on he speaks about *Keter* of *'Arikkh 'Anppin*.³⁷ This text occurs immediately before the texts adduced in the name of R. David quoted above. It fits the general tendency of R. David to interpret in a theosophical manner earlier Kabbalistic texts with which he was acquainted, including the book of the *Zohar*, by hinting at the sefirotic valences by terms written above the interpreted words.³⁸

Thus, we have a rather precise parallel to the diagram, but in this case it is obvious that the situation of prayer is related to the two configurations. On the basis of this text the *Ze'yir 'Anppin* is constituted, like in the diagram, of the nine last *sefirot*, or to put it differently, the *Ze'yir 'Anppin* possesses nine *sefirot*.³⁹ R. David – like R. Joseph Ashkenazi – applies here, as in some other cases, the theory of *sefirot* within *sefirot*, which means that in a certain configuration, or even within a certain *sefirah*, there are also other divine powers, ten or multiples of ten that increase to the infinite, according to a statement of R. Joseph Ashkenazi.⁴⁰

Thus, though constituting a certain problem, the discrepancy related to the meaning of *Ze'yir 'Anppin* is not insurmountable, especially in the writings of

a Kabbalist who is as eclectic as was R. David: The common denominators are nevertheless greater than the divergence, and it is quite plausible in my opinion to identify the diagram as a text of R. David ben Yehudah he-Ḥasid.

A question that cannot be dealt with in detail here is the possible affinity between the circular diagram reproduced above and a table that is accompanied by a discussion of its content found on fol. 4v (fig. 1b), where there are discussions of issues found in the second circle that deal with non-theosophical issues like the twelve signs of the zodiac, the twelve *hawayyot* of the divine names, the twelve seals, the twelve tribes, and the relationships between them.⁴¹ I believe that this short treatise also belongs to R. David, and is possibly an explication of the macrocosmic aspects of the diagram. In any case, the topic of colors or visualization is not discussed there.

Visualization of Colors

Let me now analyze a major aspect of the content of the diagram. As is evident, the core of the diagram relies mainly on a series of correspondences between several categories of sets of ten: ten concentric circles, ten *sefirot*, ten colors, and ten Tetragrammata. It is only in the case of the Tetragrammata that there are no changes from one of the ten occurrences to another, which means that according to this tradition there is only one kind of vocalization.⁴² What is missing in the diagram is an

37 See Cambridge, Ms. Add. 505.3, fol. 7v. The original Hebrew text of the earlier Kabbalistic tradition that was interpreted by R. David, but did not contain the anthropomorphic terminology, is found in Ms. Sassoon 290, p. 233, which is a manuscript in which many traditions related to R. David have been preserved. I have published R. David's interpretation in Moshe Idel, "Al kavvanat shmoneh esreh ezel Rabbi Yizhak Sagi-Nehor" (On the *Kavvanah* of *Shmoneh 'Esreh* in R. Isaac Sagi Nehor), in *Massu'ot: mehkarim be-sifrut ha-kabbalah u-ve-mahshevet Yisrael mukdashim le-zikhro shel prof. Efrayim Gotlib* (Massu'ot: Studies in Kabbalistic Literature and Jewish Philosophy in Memory of Prof. Ephraim Gottlieb), eds. Michal Oron and Amos Goldreich (Jerusalem, 1994), 44 and n. 117 (Hebrew), where I suggested R. David's authorship. See also *ibid.*, 27 and n. 6. For more on this issue, see the forthcoming part of this publication, AJ 12.

38 See, e.g., Goldreich, "Sefer ha-ge'ul," 74–76; the introduction to Matt,

The Book of Mirrors, 26 and n. 102; Idel, "Targumo shel Rabbi David ben Yehudah he-Ḥasid le-sefer ha-Zohar," 64–66.

39 The importance of this configuration in R. David contrasts the marginality of this configuration in the thought of another Zohar-oriented contemporary Kabbalist, who authored *Tikkunei Zohar*. See Biti Roi, "Mitos ha-Shekhinah be-sifrut tikkunei ha-Zohar: hebetim po'etiyim, parshaniyyim u-mistiyim" (The Myth of the Shekhina in Tikkunei ha-Zohar: Poetic, Hermeneutic and Mystical Aspects) (PhD diss., Bar-Ilan University, Ramat Gan, 2012), 290 (Hebrew).

40 *Commentary on Sefer Ye'zirah*, fols. 18b, 25a, 37a.

41 A somewhat similar discussion is found in *ibid.*, fol. 20d.

42 Unlike the other tradition that also is related to visualization of colors, found in the later anonymous response published in Idel, "Kavvanah u-zeva'im," where each Tetragrammatron is vocalized in a different manner.

explicit statement as to its purpose. Moreover, the final statement of the diagram makes it clear that there are additional aspects related to the content which have not been written down, and they meant to be transmitted orally. In fact, the different details related to the meaning of the different vocalizations of the Tetragrammata, and the occurrence of names of colors, comprise more detailed information about the significance of those variants.

Evidence that helps flesh out the possible use that a Kabbalist can make of the diagram is found in a short sentence attributed to another Kabbalist, a certain R. Tanḥum, who is otherwise unknown. He recommends that:

When you vocalize *devarekha*,⁴³ you shall visualize in your thought the letters of the Tetragrammaton before your eyes, in a circle⁴⁴ with a color red as the fire and your thought is performing many things. From the mouth of the Rabbi Tanḥum.⁴⁵

R. Tanḥum, or more precisely the disciple who orally received the tradition from him, describes a circle that includes a visualized Tetragrammaton, vocalized with the vowels of the word *devarekha* and the color “red as fire.” Indeed, the above diagram, or at least one very similar to that described by R. Tanḥum, includes next to the *sefirah Gevurah* the phrase “red as the fire,” and a vocalization of the Tetragrammaton identical with that of *devarekha*. Indeed, this vocalization is found in all the Tetragrammata in the diagram and it is part of the paramount role played by concentration on the Tetragrammaton in the history

of Kabbalistic intention during prayer.⁴⁶ On the basis of this correspondence we may, therefore, assume that the list of colors and the vocalization of the Tetragrammaton in the concentric circles constitute detailed instructions for visualizing the Tetragrammaton in various colors corresponding to the *sefirot*. We may furthermore also assume that this list is at least a part of the chapter headings mentioned by R. David when he wrote, “you shall always visualize according to that color which is [attributed to] the *sefirah* [according to] the chapter headings.”⁴⁷

Do the details in the diagram constitute the unspecified “chapter headings”? In the Kabbalistic material accompanying the diagram there are no instructions regarding the role it may fulfill nor of the meaning of the various details inscribed within the circles. However, the manner in which R. Tanḥum refers to the circle opens the possibility that we may envision not only the details as instructions for visualization, but also the circle itself, as part of this process. R. Tanḥum states that “you shall visualize the letter of the Tetragrammaton before your eyes in a circle in your thought,” etc.⁴⁸ I see no reasonable argument against interpreting his words as a recommendation for visualizing the Divine Name along with the color as found in a certain circle, in which there are references to several cosmic aspects.

The verb translated as “to visualize” is *le-zayyer*. Its precise meaning is of decisive importance for understanding the role played by the diagram, and this is the reason why it will be important to expatiate upon it. It is only in R. Tanḥum's text that this is a certain kind of mental operation mentioned in an explicit context of a circle and

43 The vocalization of the word דברך in Ps. 119:89 *shewa, kammaz, shewa', kammaz*, was sometimes seen as one of the ways in which the Tetragrammaton was pronounced; see, e.g., an early Kabbalistic fragment preserved in Oxford, Bodleiana, Ms. 2240, fol. 248b. This pronunciation differs from that with which I am acquainted in both the Ashkenazi and the Sefardi material known in Barcelona at the end of the thirteenth century; see Idel, “Ashkenazi Esotericism,” 74–91.

44 *Galgal*, which can also be translated as sphere.

45 Paris, Rabbinical Seminary, Ms. 108, fol. 95r: ה' בנקוד דברך, תציר במחשבתך אדום כאש ומחשבתך פועלת הרבה מפי רב אותיות ידיד המיוחד לפני עיניך בגלגל בצבע אדום כמשבתך פועלת הרבה מפי רב תנחום. See also Moshe Idel, *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia*, tr. Jonathan Chipman (Albany, 1987), 32–34. For an interesting parallel to this passage, without however mentioning the sphere and

colors, see the anonymous short passage printed in *Sefer Raziel ha-Malakh* (Amsterdam, 1701), fol. 33b (Hebrew).

46 See Idel, “Al kavvanat shmoneh esreh,” 31–36; id., “Ha-kabbalah bitfillat Provence” (Kabbalistic Prayer in Provence), *Tarbiz* 62 (1993): 278–80 (Hebrew), and in more general terms in the early theosophical Kabbalah, Haviva Pedaya, *Ha-shem ve-ha-mikdash be-mishnat Rabbi Yizhak Sagi-Nehor* (Name and Sanctuary in the Teaching of R. Isaac the Blind) (Jerusalem, 2001), 73–102 (Hebrew); Elliot R. Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines: Vision and Imagination in Medieval Jewish Mysticism* (Princeton, 1994), 238–44.

47 Cambridge, Ms. Add. 505, fol. 8r.

48 *Ibid.*, as discussed above.

the details found in it. Let me attempt to elaborate on this verb in the context of the school of R. Joseph Ashkenazi and R. David ben Yehudah he-Ḥasid. In Rabbinic Hebrew, the verb *Ṣ-Y-R* means to draw a diagram, namely a concrete, objective form, a picture done by the painter's hand. In some cases God was designated in Rabbinic literature as a painter or perhaps a sculptor.⁴⁹ In medieval Hebrew, under the influence of Arabic philosophical terminology, it means to conceptualize, to form a mental concept.⁵⁰ This is, however, not a matter of images shaped within the human imagination, but a mental construct. However, at least in one philosophical text, written sometime in the mid-thirteenth century, the anonymous *Ruah Ḥen*, it is written: "And it is known that imagination will sometime err and *Yeṣayyer* [will draw] things that do not exist at all."⁵¹ It is difficult to miss the negative connotation related to an act of imagination, which is prone to invent nonexistent things, in the vein of medieval Neo-Aristotelianism. Without mentioning the noun "imagination," the reflective form of this verb, *niṢtaYyeR*, is used in R. Yehudah ibn Tibbon's Hebrew translation of R. Baḥya ibn Pakudah's *Ḥovot ha-Levavot*, where things are described as "imagined in your heart"⁵² without a strong negative implication as in *Ruah Ḥen*, but nevertheless not defined as a positive type of action. A negative attitude towards imagination is found

also in R. Abraham Abulafia's writings, one that is equal to the imperative to "kill" it.⁵³

However, in the Kabbalistic texts we deal with here, the negative overtones have been removed and the instructions to visualize make no mention of the negative results that may be generated by imagination. This positive turn toward imagination is noteworthy for the history of Jewish mysticism. R. Joseph Ashkenazi resorts many times to the verb *Ṣ-Y-R* but always in theogonic and cosmological contexts, which are not related to a human mental act.⁵⁴ This is also the case with R. Ezra of Gerona,⁵⁵ and under his influence also with another Ashkenazi Kabbalist, R. Abraham Axelrad of Cologne.⁵⁶ Much more performative is the understanding of the operations related to the verb *Ṣ-Y-R*, understood as part of a discussion where imagination, *dimyon*, is mentioned. This is the case in R. Jacob ben Sheshet's *Sefer ha-'Emunah ve-ha-Bitaḥon*,⁵⁷ and the later so-called *Holy Letter*, whose author is not known.⁵⁸

Let me turn to the school of the Kabbalists discussed here. According to the unidentifiable R. Tanḥum quoted above, one should generate something in his own *maḥa-shavah*, a term quite flexible in the Middle Ages, where it may stand for thought but sometimes also for another form of cogitation, though in a few cases it may also

49 See *Genesis Rabbah*, 1:9.

50 See Harry A. Wolfson, "The Terms *Tasawwur* and *Tasdiq* in Arabic Philosophy and Their Greek, Latin and Hebrew Equivalents," *Moslem World*, April 1943: 1–15. See also Fabrizio Lelli, "Osservazioni sull'uso del termine *siyyur* in alcuni trattati cabbalistici dell'Italia rinascimentale," *Materia giudaica* 15/16 (2010/11): 331–38.

51 *Ruah Ḥen* (Warsaw, 1865), 16, chap. 5: וידוע שהדמיון לפעמים ישגה ויציר דברים שאינם נמצאים כלל

52 Baḥya ibn Pakudah, *Ḥovot ha-Levavot*, ed. A. Zifroni, Gate VIII, ch. 2 (Tel Aviv, [1949]), 503: נצטייר בלבך. Whether the heart is related to the faculty of imagination is a matter of additional inquiry. Compare the proposed identification between the two in another instance in Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being*, 125.

53 See his *Gan Na'ul*, ed. Amnon Gross (Jerusalem, 2000), 58–59 (Hebrew); Moshe Idel, "Abraham Abulafia: A Kabbalist 'Son of God' on Jesus and Christianity," in *Jesus among the Jews: Representation and Thought*, ed. Neta Stahl (London and New York, 2012), 81–82.

54 See, e.g., several times in the preface to his *Commentary on Sefer Yeṣirah*, e.g., fols. 2c, 3a, and in his *Commentary on Genesis Rabbah*, ed. Hallamish, 36, 77, 174, 180. See also the anonymous materials from Ms. Sassoon 290, p. 196, that include works of R. Joseph and R.

David. Compare also with the view found in the anonymous Ashkenazi *Commentary on Shir ha-Yiḥud*, Vatican, Ms. 274, fol. 173r, where the divine *ṣiyyur* is understood as tantamount to decrees.

55 Pseudo-Nahmanides, "Commentary on the Song of Songs," in *Kitvei ha-Ramban* (Writings of Nahmanides), ed. Chaim D. Chavel, 2 vols. (Jerusalem, 1964–64), 2:483 (Hebrew).

56 Abraham Axelrad, "Keter Shem Tov," in *Ginzei Ḥokhmat ha-Kabbalah* (Selections from Kabbalah Literature), ed. Adolf Jellinek (Leipzig, 1853), 47–48 (Hebrew).

57 Ch. 15, see Nahmanides, *Kitvei ha-Ramban*, 2:395. See also ch. 5, *ibid.*, 2:369, where R. Jacob quotes R. Ezra of Gerona, as to the need to direct his heart – יכון לבו למדת דרום – to the attribute of the south, described as the brilliant light, האור הבהיר. However, the intention is to a light which is not visualized but believed to exist objectively. See also the material on this verb in the context of the divine acts of mental creation in Moshe Idel, "Ha-sefirot she-me-al ha-sefirot" (Sefirot above Sefirot), *Tarbiz* 51 (1982): 244 nn. 31, 32; 266 (Hebrew). On the concepts of ציר and ציורי דברים in Nahmanides, see Haviva Pedaya, *Ha-Ramban: hit'allut – zman maḥzori ve-text kadosh* (Nahmanides: Cyclical Time and the Holy Text) (Tel Aviv, 2000), in the index, p. 496 (Hebrew).

58 Ch. 5, Nahmanides, *Kitvei ha-Ramban*, 331–32.

stand for imagination. However, in another text R. David mentions the visualization of the Tetragrammaton and the color that one should do בשכלו, namely in his mind, an interesting parallel to R. Tanḥum's *maḥashavah*.⁵⁹ Thus, our modern propensity to understand visualization as related to the faculty of imagination should not be automatically projected upon the medieval texts, at least not as if it is self-evident.

The context of these acts is related to two different components: the letters of the Divine Name, and the specific color, in our case the color red. The tradition of R. Tanḥum does not specify the corresponding *sefirah* but refers to the “circle,” thus concealing an essential aspect of the practice, which at least implicitly, is conceived to be esoteric. In the short text the ritual purpose of the imaginative act is not specified, but the empowering aspect of the deed is mentioned: “performing many things.” Indeed, such a magical understanding of the visualization is not alien to R. David's worldview. The following is written in a short passage found immediately after the responsum about the ten hyper-*sefirot*:

The language of ‘*omek*, hints at the thought,⁶⁰ at the rank I mentioned “from depths [*mima‘amakim*]

59 See Hamburg, Ms. Levi 78, fol. 257r. See also below R. Ḥayyim Vital's passage referred to in the second part of this publication, *AJ* 12, and the passage from R. Eleazar Azikri's *Sefer Ḥaredim*, translated in Moshe Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah* (Albany, 1988), 133. See also the anonymous Ashkenazi *Commentary on Shir ha-Yiḥud*, Vatican, Ms. 274, fol. 174r, where the visualization of colors is discussed as related to הדמיון המחשבה, namely thought, imagination, and intellect. However, in this treatise no specific colors are mentioned, as part of the esoteric trend of the anonymous Kabbalist. For the resort to the term *maḥashavah* as closer to imagination, see in R. Jacob ben Sheshet's text referred to in n. 57 above.

60 *Maḥashavah*, namely at the first *sefirah*. The name *Taftafiah* was considered in some texts as the magical “name of the thought.” See Idel, “Rabbi Neḥemyah ben Shlomoh ha-Navi al Magen David,” 38–39.

61 Compare to what was written a few pages beforehand, in a collection of material belonging to R. David, Ms. Sassoon 290, p. 193: “The prayer should direct his thought and his perfect intention to the root of the [divine] will, that is the tittle of the yod that is the depth of the [divine] thought and about it it is said “From the depths I called Thou, the Lord.” המתפלל צריך לכון במחשבתו ובכוונתו השלימה למקור החפץ שהוא קוצו של” “יד שהוא עומק המחשבה ועל זה נאמר: ממעמקים קראתיך יי” thought the view is that of R. Joseph Gikatilla. Compare also with Hamburg, Ms. Levi

I have called YHWH” (Ps. 130:1)⁶¹ means: out of the thought of each and every one. If⁶² you have seen bandits you should recite *Taftafayah*⁶³ three times and you will be saved from them. And this is the attribute of *Malkhut* in the hue of blue, you should visualize *Agla*⁶⁴ in a red color, [good] for any trouble that you will have.⁶⁵

Here there is an interpretation of a view of R. Joseph Gikatilla, in accordance to that of R. David, which takes the former's view in a markedly magical direction.⁶⁶ Such an interpretation is characteristic of R. Joseph ibn Zayyah's Kabbalah, as pointed out by Jonathan Garb,⁶⁷ and here there is an independent stance, possibly indicating that such a tendency precedes ibn Zayyah's much more elaborated approach. We have here names other than the Tetragrammaton that are connected to colors and sometimes to visualization, but the technique is quite similar to what we have seen above. This is also the case in a collection of magical traditions where it is said that whoever wants to implore the mercy of *Keter* should resort to the *trisagion* and “*Yezayyer* the name of the Tetragrammaton that hints at the Supernal *Keter*, in the color of white as snow.”⁶⁸

78, fol. 257v, which also includes traditions of R. David. See also Idel, “Kabbalistic Prayer and Color,” 21.

62 This seems to be the beginning of another topic, also connected to R. David.

63 This is the vocalization in the Hebrew original. On this name in R. David and its source, see Idel, “Rabbi Neḥemyah ben Shlomoh ha-Navi al Magen David,” 27–32, 38–39.

64 This is a well-known acronym of the words of a verse from the 'Amidah prayer.

65 Ms. Sassoon 290, p. 197: לשון עמק רומז אל המחשבה על מדרגה שהזכרתי: ממעמקים קראתי יה פי ממחשבת של כל א' וא'. אם ראית ליסטים תזכור טפטפיה ג"פ ותנצל מהם והוא מדת המלכות בגון תכלת תצייר אגלא בצבע אדום, לכל צרה שלא שיהי לך. The first part of the quote is found in the instruction of visualization of colors found in the name of R. David in Cambridge, Ms. Add. 505, fol. 8r.

66 See also Idel, “Kavvanah u-zeva'im,” 7, n. 35.

67 Garb, *Hofa'otav shel ha-ko'ah ba-mistikah ha-yehudit*, 88.

68 Jerusalem, NLI, Ms. 5° 266, fol. 77v. For the description of the first *sefirah* as white as snow, see the *Commentary on Ten Sefirot* found in Paris, BnF, Ms. 853, fol. 80v, that I identify as written by R. Joseph of Hamadan, an older contemporary of R. David. The other colors or hues mentioned in the commentary do not, however, correspond to the list

Another instance of resorting to the verb Z-Y-R is found in the passage in the name of R. David, quoted above from the Cambridge manuscript. The phrase “We are not allowed to visualize the ten *sefirot*, except etc.” includes negation of the visualization of the *sefirot*, on the one hand, but contains implicit instructions to visualize colors, on the other hand, though the specific content of the act of visualization is not mentioned. Like R. Tanḥum’s tradition, this one, too, is conceived of as transmitted orally. However, what is new here is the association of the act of visualization with a specific ritual, the most important Jewish prayer. The verb Z-Y-R also recurs in an anonymous commentary on the *Shema*’ *Yisrael* blessing, found in two versions that, in my opinion, belong to R. David or to his school, and will be addressed in the next paragraph.⁶⁹ In one of them it is written in relation to the act that accompanies the pronunciation of the word *Yisra’el* that refers to *Tiferet*: “He should visualize before his eyes the name YHWH,⁷⁰ in a visualization of red that tends to white.”⁷¹ This recommendation to visualize the letters of the Divine Name between “his eyes” is reminiscent of the donning of the head phylacteries, and it also recurs much later in similar contexts, like in the writings of R. Abraham ben Eliezer ha-Levi.

There is a fourth significant instance in which this verb occurs in a similar context to that of R. David: in the anonymous Kabbalistic response, probably written toward the end of the fourteenth century, where the interdiction to visualize the *sefirot*, conceived of as divine attributes, is mentioned. However, by visualizing these letters in certain colors, one is capable of elevating the imagined letters or sounds to the corresponding *sefirah*,

found in the diagram. This is also the case with the discussions about colors and *sefirot* in the other writings of R. Joseph of Hamadan, printed anonymously in *Sefer ha-Malkhut*, ed. J. Toledano (Casablanca, 1930), fols. 53c, 56d, 57ab, 58b, 61b, 104ab, etc. There is no visualization of colors in his writings. See also above, n. 20.

69 See New York, JTS, Ms. 2430, fol. 81r. For another version, found in several manuscripts, see, e.g., Oxford, Bodleiana, Ms. 1663, fols. 128v–129r, and Ms. Sassoon 290, pp. 300–301. I hope to publish a comparison of the two versions in a separate study.

70 The vocalization is *sheva*’, *kammaz*, *sheva*’, *kammaz*, like in the diagram, though the description of the color differs somewhat from that in the diagram.

and so of acting on it, without, however, seeing it. The context is quite obviously the Kabbalistic intention during prayer, and again this is conceived as being quite an esoteric issue.⁷² As to the resort to the verb we read in the responsum about the letters:

[. . .] and when he intends to them, namely to the letters, he intends to the hues and colors, as for example in the moment when he says YHWH, he intends generally to *Yod* and to its title, to *Keter* and to *Hokhmah*,⁷³ and he should visualize the *Yod* with the title, that is white like snow.⁷⁴

In this passage there are two verbs related to operations concerning letters and colors. The manner in which they appear requires a distinction between the two. The first is the root *K-W-N*, from which the noun *Kavvanah* is derived, which means to direct one’s attention on a certain topic, or some form of mental concentration,⁷⁵ while *ZaYyeR* refers here to the act of visualization, which includes a specific shape of letters and a specific color. Here the visualization is again a matter of a combination of letters and colors. Also in this case, as well as in many of the instructions found in the continuation of this quote, there is a resort to the verb Z-Y-R and to names of the colors that correspond to what we have seen above in the diagram, though a circle is not mentioned in the rather lengthy discussion. Thus, we may assume that in some cases circles were not intended to become an object of meditation.

Let me also mention the existence of instructions to resort to colors and divine names in prayer, in a rather

71 Oxford, Bodleiana, Ms. 1663, fol. 128r; Oxford, Bodleiana, Ms. 1784, fol. 260r; Ms. Sassoon 290, p. 301: אל נטוה אדום בציור יהוה בציור אדום נטוה אל הלבן

72 Idel, “Kavvanah u-zeva’im,” 2–4.

73 This is a widespread type of symbolism in Kabbalah.

74 Published in Idel, “Kavvanah u-zeva’im,” 4–5: וכשמכוין בהם ר”ל באותיות ומראיו כגון בשעה שאמ’ יהוה שהוא דרך כלל מכוין ביד ובקוצה לכתר ולחכמה ויציר היוד גם קוצה לבן כשלג

75 See Idel, “Al kavvanat shmoneh esreh,” 31–36. This meaning continues the earlier Rabbinic understanding of this verb, BT Berakhot, 13b; BT Megillah, 20a, though adding a new level, the details of the sefirotic one that is to be kept in mind while praying.

lengthy interpretation of verses related to prayer without, however, mentioning visualization and the *sefirot*. This text, which appears in a collection of material from R. David ben Yehudah he-Ḥasid's traditions, ends with the statement: "A transmission from mouth to mouth is needed."⁷⁶ If we bring together those two traditions, about letters of the divine name and colors, a correlation which is not necessarily obvious, we may gain some insight into the content of visualization.⁷⁷

On the basis of the rhetorics and the details supplied in the aforementioned material, I consider the existence of some traditions dealing with visualization of colors, as well as their actual practice, to be an established fact. I should like to dwell upon the significance of the circle. Interestingly enough, this diagram draws a distinction between the first *sefirah*, *Keter*, regularly identified as 'Ariḳh 'Anppin, or as R. ben Yehudah prefers in the Hebrew form, 'Oreḳh 'Anppin, and the other nine, designated as Ze'yir 'Anppin, i.e., the lower divine configuration according to Zoharic symbolism. The latter is an obvious anthropomorphic symbol, which in the *Zohar* refers to the second and lower divine head, consisting of the *sefirah* of *Tiferet* alone or of the *sefirot* between *Hokhmah* and *Yesod*, while in the works of R. David it includes ten *sefirot*,⁷⁸ or, as in the diagram, nine *sefirot*. In other contexts of R. David's thought, this configuration is manifestly anthropomorphic; the fact that the concept appearing in the diagram differs from that of the *Zohar* does not obliterate its anthropomorphic character. If the understanding proposed above is correct, then the process of visualization includes not only divine names, colors, or circles, but also an anthropomorphic configuration of color that symbolizes an aspect of the divine realm.⁷⁹

76 Ms. Sassoon 290, p. 194; צריך קבלה מפה אל פה. I hope to publish this text together with many others in my forthcoming monograph on *Visualization and Prayer*.

77 For such a nexus between letter and colors, without, however, mentioning visualization, see R. Joseph Ashkenazi's *Commentary on Genesis Rabbah*, 143. For a nexus between *sefirot* and colors, see *Commentary on Sefer Yeḳirah*, fols. 18d, 20b, 27a, 30d.

78 See Idel, "Od al Rabbi David ben Yehudah he-Ḥasid," 69–71. The conception of Ze'yir 'Anppin as an entity encompassing the *sefirot* from

The Diagram: A Cosmogram or a Mandala?

In the outer circle there is the well-known list of thirty-two mystical paths – identified as intellects – by means of which the world was created, while the second circle contains the names of all the realms of reality, e.g., the alphabet, stones, signs of the Zodiac, planets, spheres, angels and various kinds of living creatures such as fish of the sea, animals, and man. It is obvious that the Kabbalist intended to express the idea of the macrocosmos, which is envisioned as having been included within the divine macroanthropos. Such a macrocosmic approach is also hinted at in another tradition related to R. David.⁸⁰ However, this is not just a cosmogram, a diagram that was intended to offer in a succinct manner the structure of the cosmos, since it is also intended to enhance a ritual performance – prayer – that is accompanied by the visualization of colors and shapes of letters of divine names that are related to divine powers: the *sefirot*. It is quite obvious that this is not just another cosmogram, since the occurrence of the colors and the references to the "Small Face" are not relevant for such a purpose. In general, the sefirotic diagrams, including the other ones by R. David, basically deal with representations of divine powers, without a cosmological dimension.

Thus, it is not a matter of contemplation of a static scheme that is assumed in the traditions as discussed above, but an energetic operation of visualization that generates a certain shape in colors which changes from one blessing to another during prayer. Though intended toward an objective divine world, the main type of operation generates effects that stem from human imaginative powers. This dynamic aspect is quintessential for understanding Kabbalah in general, and has little to do with what is called contemplation.⁸¹

Hokhmah downward was embraced by R. Moshe Cordovero; see, e.g., 'Or *Yakar*, vol. 7 (Jerusalem 1975), 17, 77 (Hebrew).

79 See also Garb, "Kabbalato shel Rabbi Yosef ibn Zayyah," 279–80.

80 Cambridge, Ms. Add. 505, fol. 8v. Compare also to Milan, Ambrosiana, Ms. 62, fol. 4v, in the table occurring immediately after the diagram, where a more cosmic propensity can be discerned, as mentioned above.

81 See Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, 229–33. For Scholem's strong proclivity to depict early Kabbalistic prayer as contemplative, see, e.g., his *Origins of the Kabbalah*, trans. Allan Arkush, ed. R.J. Zwi

The phenomenological affinities between this diagram and the Hindu mandala are indeed interesting.⁸² The two practices share the processes of visualization and of imaginary representation of divine forces and of colors and in both cases the circle has also a macrocosmic aspect.⁸³ Moreover, while the mandala may also be a psychogram, which is at the same time also a cosmogram, it is possible to discern some hints of the theory of the existence of the tree of the *sefirot* within an anthropomorphic configuration in R. Joseph Ashkenazi and in a probably later Ashkenazi text.⁸⁴ However, there are also clear differences: the Kabbalistic diagram is graphically different from

those forms of mandala which I could see; their details are conspicuously unrelated. While the construction of a mandala in the objective world is accompanied by a special liturgy, the visualization of the content of the Kabbalistic diagram in someone's mind accompanies Jewish ritualistic prayer serially. These differences notwithstanding, one cannot underrate the possibility that Hindu traditions infiltrated into Kabbalah, perhaps via the intermediacy of Sufi material. R. David lived for a certain period of time in Acre, a fact which may be a clue to the penetration of an alien mystical technique into a Jewish milieu.⁸⁵ In addition, R. Joseph was acquainted

Werblowsky (Philadelphia and Princeton, NJ, 1987), 243–45, and compare also to Wolfson's essentialistic concept of Kabbalah as dealing with contemplation in his *Language, Eros, Being*, 3–4. However, the connection between *Kavvanah* and divine names, and the concept of *hamshakhah* in that period, scarcely confirms such a contemplative reading. See Idel, "Al kavvanat shmoneh esreh," 31–42. See also Adam Afterman, *Kavvanat ha-mevarekh li-mkom ha-ma'aseh: issyunim be-ferush kabbali li-tfillot me-ha-me'ah ha-yud gimel* (The Intention of Prayers in Early Ecstatic Kabbalah) (Los Angeles, 2004), 98–104 (Hebrew). What is called the contemplative and the unitive elements should be understood as part of a broader structure, be it connected to theurgy or to magic, as the second phase of a wider model that modifies the nature of the act described by scholars as contemplation in the connection of prayer. See also the second part of this article, *AJ* 12.

82 For the reference to the term mandala in the case of the circles found in the treatises of R. Joseph ibn Zayyah, see Garb, "Kabbalato shel Rabbi Yosef ibn Zayyah," 296 n. 259. For techniques of visualization in modern Jewish mysticism, see Daniel Reiser, *Ha-mar'ah ke-mar'ah: tekhnikat ha-dimyon ba-mistikah ha-yehudit ba-me'ah ha-'asirit* (Vision as a Mirror: Imagery Techniques in the Twentieth Century Jewish Mysticism) (Los Angeles, 2014) (Hebrew); Ron Wacks, *Lahevet esh kodesh: she'arim le-torato shel ha-Admor mi-Piachena* (The Flame of the Holy Fire: Perspectives on the Teachings of Rabbi Kalonymus Kalmish Shapiro of Piachena) (Alon Shevut, 2010) (Hebrew); and Jonathan Garb, *Mekubbal be-lev ha-se'arah: Rabbi Moshe Hayyim Luzzatto* (Kabbalist in the Heart of Storm: R. Moshe Hayyim Luzzatto) (Tel Aviv, 2014), 112–13 (Hebrew).

83 For these characteristics of the mandala, see Giuseppe Tucci, *The Theory and Practice of the Mandala* (London, 1961), vii; Mircea Eliade, *Yoga, Immortality and Freedom* (Princeton, 1958), 219–27. See also Heinrich Zimmer, *Artistic Form and Yoga in the Sacred Images of India*, translated and edited by Gerald Chapple and James B. Lawson (Princeton, 1984), 65–180; Ioan P. Couliano, "Le mandala et l'histoire des religions," *Cahiers internationaux de symbolisme*, no. 48–49 (1984): 53–62. It should be mentioned that in some mandalas there are also signs of the zodiac and categories of ten, like in the diagram reproduced above. For a Persian Sufi discussion of seeing colors and circles as part of the

dikhr by a contemporary of R. David, see Hermann Landolt, *Nuruddin Isfarayini, Le reveleateur des mysteres: Traité de soufisme* (Lagrasse, 1986), 60–67, 107–8 n. 159, but there is no reference there to a visualization initiated by the mystic. Neither is the discussion of the liturgical colors by Michel Pastoureau related to our topic, since he speaks about the changing colors of the garments of priests during various feasts in the Latin Middle Ages. See Michel Pastoureau, *Une histoire symbolique du Moyen Âge occidental* (Paris, 2004), 147–71.

84 See Idel, "An Anonymous Kabbalistic Commentary on *Shir ha-Yihud*," 151–52 and n. 84.

85 See Abraham Zacut, *Sefer ha-Yuhasin ha-Shalem*, ed. Zvi Filipowski (London and Edinburgh, 1857), 88; Scholem, "Rabbi David ben Yehudah he-Hasid nekhed ha-Rambam," 141. It should be pointed out that another visitor to Acre in the thirteenth century, R. Abraham Abulafia, designed a macrocosmic diagram, as part of a revelation, twenty years after the visit there in 1260; see Idel, *The Mystical Experience*, 109–16. Moreover, in my opinion, Abulafia had been influenced by some type of threefold breathing theory found in Yoga practices; *ibid.*, 24–26. Patanjali's *Yoga-Sutra* was already translated into Arabic by the famous eleventh-century author al-Biruni; see Shlomo Pines and Tuvia Gelblum, "Al-Biruni's Arabic Version of Patañjali's 'Yogasūtra'," *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 29 (1966): 302–25; 40 (1977): 522–49; 46 (1983): 258–304; 52 (1989): 265–305. Though the technique of the mandalas differs from one school to another, and it is hard to bring specific examples for the affinity of the diagram, it is interesting that two Kabbalists who visited Acre reflect some form of influence of techniques stemming from the Indian territories. Also interestingly enough, Abulafia resorted to circles in his handbooks, where techniques to reach ecstatic experiences are described, especially in his *Hayyei ha-'Olam ha-Ba'*. Another interesting coincidence, or perhaps much more, is the possibility that both Abulafia and R. Joseph Ashkenazi were in Barcelona, possibly at the same time around 1270, and that they knew each other. According to a certain manuscript, Abulafia is reported to have had a teacher named R. Joseph who wrote a commentary on *Sefer Yeẓirah*. See Moshe Idel, "Sefer Yeẓirah' u-ferushav be-khitvei Rabbi Avraham Abul'afya u-sridei perusho shel Rabbi Yiẓhak mi-Bedresh ve-hashpa'atam" (*Sefer Yeẓirah* and Its Commentaries in

with Arabic culture, as he mentions Arabic words and Arabian customs.⁸⁶ Thus, the migration to Europe of an Eastern tradition close to the Hinduism and Tibetan practices is not impossible. In any case, some views that are characteristic of R. Joseph Ashkenazi may stem from Ismaili circles.⁸⁷ In my opinion, the visualization of colors, too, reflects an impact of a Sufi view of Hindu origin on R. David or his source. It should be mentioned that the need to resort to sources that were found outside of Judaism insofar as the experiential aspects of the visualization of colors, is also motivated by the claim of R. Joseph Ashkenazi as to the origin of his discussion of colors and prophecy among “the wise men of the philosophers.”⁸⁸

However, attractive as such a hypothesis may be, it is complicated by the presence of theories related to visualization of colors in no later than mid-fourteenth-century central Europe, briefly mentioned in an anonymous *Commentary on Shir ha-Yiḥud*, and the possibility that both R. Joseph Ashkenazi and R. David ben Yehudah he-Ḥasid had explicit connections to Ashkenaz and to Ashkenazi material in this commentary, and were probably somewhere in that region.⁸⁹ However, since I did not find in the Ashkenazi material resort to visualization of colors by using a circle, the hypothesis of a Hindu or Sufi influence is still valuable. It should be mentioned that the material found in the Ashkenazi commentary may refer, in my opinion, to a quite early

phase of the school of Kabbalists under scrutiny here, an issue that calls for further research. Several times in this commentary reference is made to a student who is already acquainted with some of the secrets, perhaps pointing to the possibility of the existence of a circle of Kabbalists.

The previous assumption that the diagram contained the “chapter headings” mentioned in R. David’s text can be substantiated by comparing the details about *sefirot* and colors with a short anonymous commentary on the prayer *Shema’ Yisrael*. This highly interesting document is based upon the visualization of the divine names included in this prayer in various colors, most of which correspond to the list of colors and *sefirot* in the diagram. Since the similarity between the colors and *sefirot* in the diagram and the commentary on the prayer is astonishing, including the peculiar ways used to denote the colors, the conclusion that the diagram-list was intended to supply instructions for visualization of divine names in prayer is inescapable. I shall adduce here only two examples in order to exemplify this conclusion:

Don’t pronounce the word *Yisra’el* until one will visualize the Divine Name, which is YHWH, with its vowels and its color, and one will visualize it as if the last letter of the [Divine] Name, namely H, surrounds the entire world, from above and below.⁹⁰

the Writings of R. Abraham Abulafia, and the Remnants of R. Isaac Bedershi’s Commentary and Their Impact), *Tarbiz* 79 (2011): 525–27 (Hebrew). See also Scholem, “Ha-meḥabber ha-amitti shel perush Sefer yeḥirah,” 125 n. 25.

86 See his *Commentary on Genesis Rabbah*, ed. Hallamish, 249–50. A parallel discussion to it is found in the anonymous *Commentary on Shir ha-Yiḥud*, Frankfurt am Main, Ms. 121, fol. 12v–13r. On an aspect of the Muslim practice R. Joseph mentions there, see the earlier Jewish treatments discussed in Bernard Septimus, “Petrus Alfonsi on the Cult of Mecca,” *Speculum* 56 (1981): 134–36. See also in the *Commentary on Genesis Rabbah*, ed. Hallamish, 157, 159, 229.

87 See Shlomo Pines, “Shi’ite Terms and Conceptions in the *Kuzari*,” *Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam* 2 (1980): 245–47, which exemplifies the affinities using later Kabbalistic texts that were actually influenced by R. Joseph Ashkenazi.

88 See *Commentary on Genesis Rabbah*, ed. Hallamish, 223; Idel, “Kabbalistic Prayer and Colors,” 23; id., *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, 107–8, 111.

89 See Scholem, “Ha-meḥabber ha-amitti shel perush Sefer yeḥirah,” 119–20; id., “Rabbi David ben Yehudah he-Ḥasid nekhed ha-Rambam,” 140; Ashkenazi’s *Commentary on Genesis Rabbah*, ed. Hallamish, 226, 229, 247, 259 and his *Commentary on Sefer Yeḥirah*, fol. 30d; and Idel, “An Anonymous Kabbalistic Commentary on *Shir ha-Yiḥud*.” The type of Kabbalah found in the commentary that I described complicates the picture of R. David’s Kabbalah as presented by Scholem, “Rabbi David ben Yehudah he-Ḥasid nekhed ha-Rambam,” 140, about the solely Spanish nature of his Kabbalah. All the three early authors dealing with colors and visualization, R. Joseph Ashkenazi, R. David, and the anonymous commentator on *Shir ha-Yiḥud*, were not just connected formally to Ashkenaz but in their works there are themes related to Ashkenazi culture, and this is also evident in the *Commentary on the Prayer-Book* of R. Joseph ibn Zayyah. Thus the synthesis is not just between Spanish Kabbalah and a technique of visualization, but a more complex combination.

90 New York, JTS, Ms. 2430, fol. 81r. The secret of encompassing and encompassed in connection to letters occurs several times in the

The visualization of the letters and colors is accompanied by the vision of the letters as circles that bear explicit macrocosmic overtones. The vision of the letters as circles is probably not identical with the diagram; this difference notwithstanding, the existence of this image is irreversible evidence that, during prayer, not only have colors been visualized, but also letters as circles. Our previous understanding of the diagram as a mandala, namely a circular diagram that should be visualized, is thus partially confirmed by an anonymous commentary on the *Shema' Yisrael*, which should be attributed in my opinion to R. David. The pronunciation of the first Tetragrammaton in this prayer ought to be directed “to *Binah* in the color of green, like the color of the rainbow, the entire [Divine] Name.”⁹¹ This recommendation should be compared to what is written in the diagram where the third *sefirah* corresponds to the color “green as the rainbow.”

Finally, I shall adduce a passage from a later Kabbalistic response dealing with prayer, in order to elucidate the purpose of visualization as perceived by the Kabbalists themselves:

When you shall think upon something which points to the *Keter* and pronounce it with your mouth, you shall direct [your thought] to and visualize the name YHWH between your eyes with this vocalization, which is the *kammaz* under all the consonants, its visualization being white as snow. And he (!) will direct [your thought] so that the letters will move and fly in the air, and the whole secret is hinted at in the verse⁹² “I have set the Divine Name always before me.”⁹³

literature related to the school of R. Joseph and R. David, as well as that of R. Isaac of Acre, and is deserving of separate inquiry. This is especially interesting in a school that deals with concentric circles or spheres that refer to *sefirot*.

91 Ibid., fol. 81r.

92 Ps. 16:8. This verse has had an extensive record in the history of Jewish mysticism, especially because it was understood to recommend the visualization of the divine name.

93 New York, JTS, Ms. 255, fol. 60r. The Hebrew text has been published in Idel, “Kavvanah u-zeva'im,” 5. On this collection of Kabbalistic responses see Gershom Scholem, “Teshuvot ha-meyuhasot le-Rabbi Yosef Gikatila” (The Responsa Attributed to R. Joseph Gikatilla), in

The vocalization of the Tetragrammaton with the vowels of *kammaz* is not found in our diagram in connection to *Keter*, where all the Tetragrammata have been vocalized in the same manner. However, the designation of the color does correspond. It is obvious that there was more than one tradition related to vocalizations, as there are also differences between the various identifications in manuscripts of specific colors and *sefirot*. According to this passage, the visualized colored letters are meant to ascend;⁹⁴ thus, human mental activity is conceived to be ontologically creative, its products being able to ascend to the supernal Merkavah, namely to the sefirotic realm.⁹⁵ This peculiar ascent may elucidate the allusion of R. Tanhum that, by means of visualized divine names, “your thought is performing many things.” This performance is accomplished by drawing the influx downward into the lower worlds and finally into our world, as stated at the end of R. David's short passage and in several other cases. Thus, colors are not only the covering of the *sefirot*, but when initiated during a liturgical performance they are part of a human operation, intended to obtain some results. Unlike the apparitions of colors and lights in the Middle Ages on the one hand, and cosmograms that represent as many ranges of reality as possible on the other, the above diagram is a shorthand of a technical esoteric practice enacted during liturgy.

The two different results of visualization of colored divine names may be summarized as follows: according to R. Joseph Ashkenazi, it induces a paranormal state of consciousness, and hence this technique may be appropriately regarded as a mystical practice;⁹⁶ the

Emet le-Ya'akov: sefer yovel li-mlot shiv'im shanah le-Ya'akov Fraiman (Jacob Freimann Festschrift) (Berlin, 1937), 163–70 (Hebrew).

94 See also New York, JTS, Ms. 255, fol. 59v, published in Idel, “Kavvanah u-zeva'im,” 3.

95 For a longer discussion of this issue, see *ibid.*

96 See Idel, *Enchanted Chains*, 228–32. This passage's emphasis on the power of imagination, influenced by Maimonides' description of prophecy, should be compared to what is written in the *Commentary on Sefer ha-Bahir*, entitled 'Or ha-Ganuz, published together with *Tikkunei Zohar*, in *Sefer ha-Bahir*, ed. Reuven Margoliot (Jerusalem, 1978), 18 (Hebrew), attributed by Scholem, correctly in my opinion, to R. Joseph Ashkenazi; see Scholem, “Ha-meḥabber ha-amitti shel perush

second result, found in material related to R. David, is a theurgical one,⁹⁷ while in a passage translated above from Ms. Sassoon 290, p. 197, we have seen a magical use of the practice of visualization of colors and names. If my reconstruction of the process of causing the letters to ascend on high and to enable the descent of the divine influx is correct, according to this Kabbalistic school human mental activity, that a modern scholar may be inclined to describe as related to imagination, is fraught with theurgical and magical powers, though an ecstatic experience can also be achieved by its means. In any case the upward movement and its possible subsequent impact downward, which depend on attaining the supernal realm, represent one of the earliest examples of what I call the mystical-magical model.⁹⁸

This Kabbalistic technique has passed unnoticed by modern scholarship. One of the major reasons for this is the fact that none of the texts dealing with the details of visualization are readily at hand, but are only available in manuscripts which, for the time being, are generally ignored by modern scholars. This situation is not a matter of mere chance, but is a result of this technique's highly esoteric nature, and I should like to adduce only a few of the statements which demonstrate its esotericism.

The text underneath the diagram reads: "All these allusions must be transmitted mouth to mouth" – a wording virtually identical with that found at the end of the aforementioned passage of R. David, in some few instances in R. Joseph Ashkenazi, and also in the Kabbalistic material written in central Europe, where colors play an important role, though details are not provided.⁹⁹ Even more impressive are the statements of the anonymous author of the Kabbalistic responsum; I shall quote here only part of his elaborations on the esoteric nature of visualization:

Sefer yeẓirah," 128–31. For another correspondence between this commentary and R. Joseph Ashkenazi, one that concerns us here, see the description of the color *Tekhelet* related to *Ḥokhmah* in *Sefer ha-Bahir* 39.

97 See the passage quoted above from the Cambridge manuscript, attributed to R. David.

98 On this model, see Moshe Idel, *Hasidism: Between Ecstasy and Magic* (Albany, 1995), 103–45.

99 See Idel, "An Anonymous Kabbalistic Commentary on *Shir ha-Yiḥud*," 151, and also 146–47.

Know that this is a Kabbalistic tradition which was handed down to you, and we are writing it down, [but] it is forbidden to disclose it or to pass it down to everyone, but [only] to those¹⁰⁰ who fear the Divine Name and took heed of His name, blessed be He, who¹⁰¹ tremble at His word.¹⁰²

Due to this atmosphere of secrecy and the truncated manner of transmission, the details of the technique of visualization remained hidden away in fragments of various anonymous manuscripts; nevertheless, this technique was hardly neglected by Kabbalists. R. David ben Yehudah he-Ḥasid's extensive commentary on prayer, *'Or Zaru'a*, was composed as an exoteric Kabbalistic commentary, though grounded in the theosophical-theurgical type of Kabbalah, even though it esoterically alludes to the performance of prayer with the help of a visualization technique.¹⁰³ On the basis of several fragments elaborating on prayer and visualization, I would conjecture that its practice was cultivated before R. David, as seems plausible from a discussion found in the anonymous *Commentary on Shir ha-Yiḥud*, and then in the Kabbalistic school of R. David ben Yehudah he-Ḥasid, which are characterized by the transmission of additional esoteric issues.¹⁰⁴ These visualization techniques continued to be done until the sixteenth century, as shall be shown below.

Let me emphasize that though some symbolic interpretations of the ten *sefirot* in terms of colors may be found in Kabbalah before R. Joseph and R. David, in my opinion the use of the visualization of those colors as part of an elaborated technique should be related to their school, sometime in the last decades of the thirteenth century, and then by their followers.¹⁰⁵

100 Mal. 3:16.

101 Isa. 66:2.

102 New York, JTS, Ms. 255, fol. 60r; Idel, "Kavvanah u-zeva'im," 4.

103 Idel, "Kabbalistic Prayer and Colors," 18–19.

104 See Idel, "Ḥomer kabbali," 169, 201–6; id., "An Anonymous Kabbalistic Commentary on *Shir ha-Yiḥud*," 151.

105 See, especially, Gershom Scholem, "Colours and Their Symbolism in Jewish Tradition and Mysticism," *Diogenes* 108 (1979): 84–111; 109 (1980): 64–77; Nicholas Sed, "Le Mystere des Couleurs de J. Gikatilla,"

R. David's Diagram, R. Joseph Ashkenazi and Lurianic Kabbalah

R. David's diagram (fig. 1a) is constituted of two main visual components: ten concentric circles, and a *vertical* shape as a diameter, where the names of the *sefirot* are found. Those two graphical components are quite visible and are unparalleled, as far as I know, by any of the dozens of diagrams of ten *sefirot* before the sixteenth century. However, it seems that this combination was already discussed in R. Joseph ben Shalom Ashkenazi's *Commentary on Sefer Yeẓirah* (fig. 2), though I did not find a graphical representation in his diagrams:

And the word *kefullot* [double]¹⁰⁶ is “who can come within his double bridle?”¹⁰⁷ since it is double from male and female, and from speech and opposite. And since there are ten *sefirot* that are circles and spheres, like a wheel,¹⁰⁸ and some of them are like branches that expand from the root. And the example of it is the encompassing sphere of the spheres, and the example of it the tree that has branches and branches of branches, and branches of branches of branches of branches.¹⁰⁹

Chrysopaia 1 (1987): 2–30. My statement here is based on a different dating of the short passage, entitled in a few of its manuscripts as “Sha'ar ha-Kavvanah la-Mekubbalim ha-Rishonim,” that was dated by Scholem to the early thirteenth century; see Gershom Scholem, “The Concept of Kavvanah in Early Kabbalah,” in *Studies in Jewish Thought: An Anthology of German Jewish Thought*, ed. Alfred Jospé (Detroit, 1981), 162–80. In this treatise visualization – not of colors but of lights – is connected to prayer. However, as I hope to show elsewhere, this is a much later composition. See, e.g., Idel, “Kavvanah u-ẓeva'im,” 9 n. 46; id., “Kabbalistic Prayer and Colors,” 27 n. 44; Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines*, 301–3.

106 The concept of seven double consonants recurs in several chapters of *Sefer Yeẓirah*.

107 Job 41:5. Interestingly enough, this verse, as well as the entire chapter, has been addressed by R. Joseph in his *Commentary on Genesis Rabbah*, ed. Hallamish, 96, without, however, referring to two types of *sefirot* or explicitly to male and female. However, see on p. 40 the assumption that *temurot*, namely opposite powers, have been emanated together with the positive *sefirot*. Is this duality related to the text under discussion here?

108 Compare the view of the ten *sefirot* as the ten “spheres of the *sefirot*” in the *Commentary on Sefer Yeẓirah*, fol. 22a. See also *ibid.*, fols. 22c, 35a, 40a, and Hallamish's preface to his edition of *Commentary on Genesis*

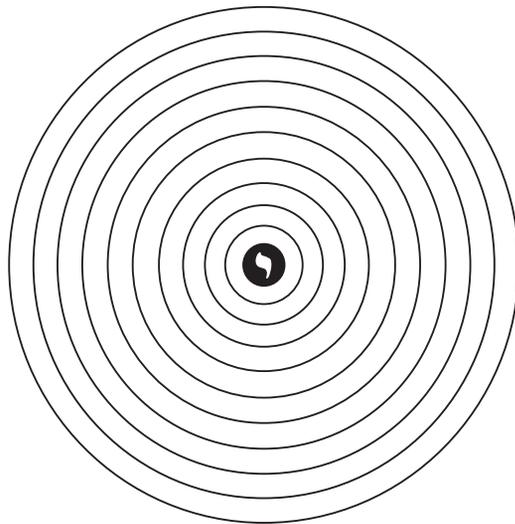


Fig. 2. Kabbalistic diagram from R. Joseph ben Shalom Ashkenazi's *Commentary on Sefer Yeẓirah*

Here there is a combination of the geometrical image of the ten concentric spheres as referring to one set of *sefirot*, probably influenced by both *Sefer Yeẓirah* and by astronomical diagrams, with that of the tree of *sefirot*, found since the very beginning of Kabbalah. The double

Rabbah, 24–27. Compare also to Ashkenazi's distinction between the ten simple *sefirot* and the ten composite ones, the latter described as the “spheres of the *sefirot*” in his *Commentary on Sefer Yeẓirah*, fol. 21d. A question that cannot be dealt with here is whether the spheres of the *sefirot*, which obviously refer to the *sefirot* as circles, should be coupled with the concept of “the intellect of the *sefirot*” as parallel to the *sefirot* as branches. See *Commentary on Genesis Rabbah*, 178–79. To a certain extent the distinctions between two types of *sefirot* adumbrate the later development in R. Moshe Cordovero's bringing together *sefirot* as vessels and *sefirot* as divine essence. This issue requires an additional inquiry.

109 Fol. 37a: ומלת כפולות מלשון 'בכפל רסנו מי יבא' כי הוא כפול מזכר ונקבה, ומדבור ולפי שיש מן הי"ס אשר הם עגולים וכדורים כעין גלגל ויש מהם כענפים ומתמורה. ולפי שיש בזה גלגל ההיקף בגלגלים ויש מהם ענפים לענפים המשל המתפשטים מהשרש. והמשל בזה גלגל ההיקף בגלגלים ויש מהם ענפים לענפים לענפים. בזה האילן שיש לו ענפים וענפים לענפים וענפי ענפי ענפים לענפים. Let me point out that the concept of branches also occurs in the writings of the above-mentioned R. Joseph of Hamadan. See, e.g., *Toledot 'Adam*, published in *Sefer ha-Malkhut*, ed. J. Toledano (Casablanca, 1930), fols. 53c, 67c, 94a, 103d, and his *Commentary on Ten Sefirot*, Ms. Paris, BnF 853, fol. 83v. For the branches of the *sefirot* that may multiply infinitely, see a text that I identify as written by R. David ben Yehudah he-Ḥasid, Cambridge, Ms. Add. 505, fol. 8r-v. See also the passage from his *Sefer ha-Gevul*, in Idel, “Ta'amei ha-'ofot ha-teme'im,” 23–24 and n. 88.

nature of the *sefirot* is quite obvious, as it is a commentary on the term “double,” and the different nature of the two sets is highlighted by the couple of “male and female,” which is part of what I call “dual ontology,”¹¹⁰ or by the couple of “speech and opposite.” It should be mentioned that in one case in the same book the two words *'llanot*, namely trees, and *'iggulim* occur together though the relation between them is not clear.¹¹¹ I would say that R. Joseph, who was quite influenced by *Sefer ha-Bahir*, adopted the tree image for one set of the *sefirot*, while R. David, who was fond of the Zoharic theosophy, employed the anthropomorphic imagery instead.¹¹²

However, the way in which the two sets of ten *sefirot* are related to each other is not specified in the last quotations, graphically or otherwise, and we may conceive of more than one type of relationship between them. This is why the diagram of R. David contributes something specific to the more general assumption of two sets of decades of *sefirot*. Though the tree is certainly not a simple straight line, it nevertheless has some vertical nature, and I assume that we have here the image of the inverted tree with its roots on high and branches that expand downward. When combined with the geometrical concentric wheels or spheres, this Kabbalistic perception of the *sefirot* that is more organic, a more complex image emerges, as seen above. In any case, a comparison of our diagram with an image found in R. Joseph Ashkenazi's work shows that they share a common denominator: in both cases there are ten concentric circles and the letter *Yod* is found at the center, representing earth.¹¹³

Thus, we may speak of the diagram of R. David (fig. 1a) as combining the graphical aspects of R. Joseph's scheme (fig. 2) with the content of the verbal description

of R. Joseph we have adduced above. That is why I would not be surprised if such a diagram will be discovered in a manuscript belonging to R. Joseph.

The combination of a circle and its diameter as related to a step of theosophical creation is also found in R. Joseph ibn Ṣayyah, as analyzed briefly by Jonathan Garb, who already suggested the possibility that Luria had been influenced by the Jerusalemite Kabbalist.¹¹⁴ However, to the best of my knowledge, R. Joseph ibn Ṣayyah does not deal with two sets of *sefirot*, which is a major element in the discussions related to the diagrams I discuss here.

Since the emergence of Lurianic Kabbalah, such a complex graphical scheme that deals with two sets of *sefirot* has become the standard depiction in the Lurianic corpus and its numerous reverberations. The concentric circles have been designated as *'iggulim*, circles, while the diametrical line has been described as *yosher*, the straight line, each of the two shapes referring to two different depictions of the ten *sefirot*.¹¹⁵ Let me quote the manner in which these two types of *sefirot* have been described by R. Ḥayyim Vital:

here are two aspects in the manner of the ten *sefirot*: First they are circles, drawn as ten circles one within another. And they have another aspect in that they are ten *sefirot* arranged in three straight lines in the image of a man with head, arms, thighs, body and feet all of which, with God's help, I shall set in writing clearly below.¹¹⁶

However, despite this depiction that speaks about the three lines that organize the ten *sefirot*, found within the second set in the sefirotic realm – a theme that was not reflected in R. David's diagram reproduced above, in his

110 See Idel, “Male and Female”: *Equality, Female's Theurgy, and Eros*: R. Moshe Cordovero's *Dual Ontology* (in preparation).

111 *Commentary on Sefer Yeẓirah*, fol. 18b: אילנות עגולים כי ספירותיהם עגולים. בדורים ולא שטוחות. Though the text is not very clear, the fact that three terms: trees, circles, and *sefirot*, occur together in one sentence is quite reminiscent of the passage quoted earlier.

112 For Ashkenazi's acquaintance with this book, see Moshe Hallamish, “Le-verur hashpa'at Sefer ha-bahir al ha-mekubbal Rabbi Yosef ben Shalom Ashkenazi” (Investigations on the Influence of the *Book Bahir*

on the Kabbalist R. Joseph ben Shalom Ashkenazi), *Bar-Ilan* 7–8 (1980): 211–14 (Hebrew).

113 See *Commentary on Sefer Yeẓirah*, fol. 18a. For the description of the *Yod* as the sphere of the earth, namely the globe, see *ibid.*, fols. 33a, 39a.

114 Garb, “Kabbalato shel Rabbi Yosef ibn Ṣayyah,” 281 n. 162.

115 Mordechai Pachter, *Roots of Faith and Devequt: Studies in the History of Kabbalistic Ideas* (Los Angeles, 2004), 131–84.

116 Ḥayyim Vital, *Sefer 'Ez Ḥayyim*, 1:2 (Warsaw, 1891), 22, as translated in Pachter, *Roots of Faith and Devequt*, 131.



Fig. 3. Kabbalistic diagram in Hayyim Vital. *Sefer 'Ez Hayyim*. Mantua, the Library of the Jewish Community, Ms. 50, fols. 20v–21r

own book Vital represents these two aspects of the *sefirot* in a manner much closer to R. David's diagram.

Vital's representation of the two types of *sefirot* (fig. 3) is of paramount importance for the well-known Lurianic theogenesis, since the concentric circles are related to the first divine act, the withdrawal or the *Zimzum*, namely the retreat of the divine light from the circular space that will serve the place of creation, called *tehiru*. The straight line, or the "thread of 'Ein Sof," represents the second stage, the entrance of the divine light within the space, under

the form of the supernal Anthropos or 'Adam Kadmon,¹¹⁷ a theosophical structure constituted of ten *sefirot*.¹¹⁸ Thus, the strong anthropomorphic propensity found in R. David's approach, which is quite obvious both in his *Sefer ha-Gevul* and in his responsum dealing with the supernal *sefirot* mentioned above – though much less so in his two other books, *Mar'ot ha-Zove'ot* and 'Or Zaru'a – found its way to the core graphical representation of Lurianic Kabbalah.

In modern scholarship, this combination of the two aspects of the *sefirot*, as well as of the two primordial divine acts, has been conceived of as a Lurianic innovation.¹¹⁹ However, the above diagram tells us a different story. It was already in the late thirteenth century or early fourteenth century that Zoharic anthropomorphic imagery was introduced in the most geometrical representation of the ten *sefirot* by R. David, creating thereby the blueprint

117 For R. David's impact on this topic, see Idel, "The Image of Man."
 118 Pachter, *Roots of Faith and Devekut*, 131–34, 138, 141–42.
 119 See, e.g., *ibid.*, 131. Compare also to Gershom Scholem, *Kabbalah* (Jerusalem, 1974), 109, who took into account only R. Joseph's circular representation of the *sefirot*.

for the later elaborations, especially those found in the writings of R. Moshe Cordovero and R. Isaac Luria. Whether R. David had more to say about the special structure of a diagram, as part of his secret doctrine or not, is hard to ascertain at this stage of research. In any case, his *Sefer ha-Gevul*, a commentary on the 'Idra' Rabba', is a commentary on the anthropomorphic theosophy of the Zoharic treatise that uses a variety of images, predominantly circles.¹²⁰ Such an interpretation is certainly not a retrieval of the secrets of the Zoharic 'Idra but constitutes the application of a propensity to use circles, and geometrical images in general, that is already evident in the abovementioned writings of R. Joseph ben Shalom Ashkenazi.¹²¹ However, let me point out that Ashkenazi's writings were much less concerned with anthropomorphic imagery than were the books of R. David ben Yehudah he-Ḥasid, and all of them fully absorbed the Zoharic imagery, which is less evident in the pre-Zoharic forms of Kabbalah.¹²²

In order to foster the assumption that Luria's theogony is related to the school of R. Joseph ben Shalom Ashkenazi, let me compare one more statement of the latter: "And since the Cause of the causes¹²³ does not come close [to] or distance itself from the things, but it is equal in all the ten *sefirot*, and this is why it is said:¹²⁴ 'ten that have no end'."¹²⁵ In my opinion, this statement has to do with the spherical shape of the *sefirot*, as we learn from another discussion in the same book:

[. . .] the equal union¹²⁶ that is a circle, since in no circle can someone imagine a point that from it the beginning of the circle will be appropriate to start, neither its end, and likewise no point can be imagined in it that will be appropriate to [be considered] the end neither the beginning.¹²⁷

This explanation, which assumes that the circumference of the circle has no privileged point, namely some perfect form, should be compared to R. Ḥayyim Vital's answer to the quandary created by the existence of diverging views found in the writings of earlier Kabbalists as to the existence of two types of visual representations of the *sefirot*: in the form of concentric spheres and as three lines, as mentioned above:

Since the 'Ein Sof is equal from all the aspects of absolute equality, [categories of] up and down, face and back are not adequate, since all these cognomens refer to limit and boundary, and domain, and size within the light of the supernal 'Ein Sof, God forbid, and it is known that the light of 'Ein Sof penetrates and passes the depth of each and every *sefirah*, from within each and every *sefirah* and around them from outside of each and every *sefirah* [. . .]. Since all the ten *sefirot* are equally close to 'Ein Sof, and all receive light from it, therefore what is the difference between this and that, and by what would one *sefirah* have priority on the other, since the ranks of all of them are equal.¹²⁸

120 About R. David's book, see Scholem, "Rabbi David ben Yehudah he-Ḥasid nekhed ha-Rambam," 142–45; Goldreich, "Sefer ha-gevul"; Neta Sobol, "Ḥativat ha-Idrot be-sefer ha-Zohar" (The Idrot Section in the Zohar) (Ph.D. diss., Tel Aviv University, 2011), passim (Hebrew); Busi, *Qabbalah Visiva*, 197–335.

121 See, e.g., *Commentary on Sefer Yeẓirah*, fol. 18a and *Commentary on Genesis Rabbah*, ed. Hallamish, 79, 82, all published in Busi, *Qabbalah Visiva*, 174–96. See also Goldreich, "Sefer ha-gevul," 79–84.

122 See, however, for example, the passage from the 'Iyyun circle, discussed in Moshe Idel, *Olam ha-Mal'akhim: bein hitggallut le-hit'allut* (The World of Angels: Apotheosis and Theophany) (Tel Aviv, 2008), 37–45 (Hebrew).

123 This is a regular reference to the highest divine realm, prevalent in this school more than the term 'Ein Sof.

124 *Sefer Yeẓirah* 1:4.

125 *Commentary on Sefer Yeẓirah*, fol. 25a: ולפי שעילת העילות לא יקרב ולא ירחק לדבר מן הדברים אך הוא שוה בכל י"ס ולפיכך אמר עשר שאין להם סוף

126 'Aḥdut shavvah. R. Joseph was very fond of this phrase; see, e.g., *Commentary on Sefer Yeẓirah*, fol. 11a; Idel, "Kavvanah u-zeva'im," 196.

127 *Commentary on Sefer Yeẓirah*, fol. 35a: באחדות השוה הוא העגול כי כל עיגול לא יצוייר בו נקודה ממנו שתהא ראויה לראשיתו של העיגול ולא לאחריתו וכן לא יצוייר לא יצוייר בו נקודה ממנו שתהא ראויה לאחריתו ולא לראשיתו. For a similar discussion, see also *ibid.*, fol. 25d, as well as his *Commentary on Genesis Rabbah*, ed. Hallamish, 180.

128 *Sefer 'Ez Ḥayyim*, 1:2, 22. מאחר שהא"ס שוה בכל בחי' השוואה גמורה לא יצדק בו מעלה ומטה פנים ואחור כי כל הכינונים האלו מורים הם היות קצבה וגבול ותחום ומדה באור א"ס העליון ח'ו וכן נודע שאור א"ס נוקב ועובר בעובי כל ספי' וספי' ומלאגא כל ספי' וספי' ואסחר לון מלבר לכל ספי' וספי'... וא"כ מאחר שכל הי"ס קרובות בהשוואה אל הא"ס וכולם מקבלים ממנו אור בעצמו א"כ מה הפרש בין זה לזה ובמה תתעלה כל ספי' מחברתה כיון שמדרגת כולם שוים כנ"ל

This passage comes immediately before the discussion of the spherical shape of the space from which the divine light withdrew, where he also mentions the ten concentric spheres and the line that descends within these spheres, designated as the “thread of *'Ein Sof*.”¹²⁹ It should be noted that perhaps also the view of R. Joseph as to the male and female aspects of the ten sets of *sefirot*, found an echo in Luria.¹³⁰

Moreover, as is the case insofar as other issues are concerned in the fabric of Lurianic thought, in this case, too, it is hard to ignore the existence of sources that nourished Lurianic theosophy, which earlier were part of an esoteric tradition and became central in Lurianism, or that were marginal and became then more pivotal. This is the case of the concept of divine withdrawal as a first act in the theogony process,¹³¹ the concept of *'Adam Kadmon* as constituted by ten supernal luminosities, which is related to an epistle of R. David ben Yehudah he-Ḥasid, extant in a unique manuscript, Ms. Sassoon 290¹³² or the concept of the breaking of the vessels.¹³³ As I have shown, it is plausible that a view of R. David that deals with the term *parzuf*, as referring to a full-fledged anthropomorphic stature, unlike the Zoharic view that regards the term as

referring to the form of the face alone, is found in Luria's theory of the divine configurations.¹³⁴

Another important Lurianic view that deals with the appearance of evil powers before divine ones as the very first act of emanation in Lurianic Kabbalah, is also found in the writings of R. David, though this theory is not restricted only to these earlier Kabbalistic sources.¹³⁵ This is just a preliminary list that shows that what has been considered by scholars to be Luria's innovations were already present in much earlier schools of Kabbalah.¹³⁶

Moreover, as Gershom Scholem has duly pointed out, Luria was acquainted with R. David's book *Mar'ot ha-Zove'ot*.¹³⁷ Thus, it stands to reason that also in the case of the special type of diagram found in the Ambrosiana we have an additional example for such an impact on Lurianic Kabbalah. The implication of such an impact is that a diagram that was influenced, at least in part, by an Eastern mystical tradition found its way into the last major development in the history of Kabbalah. Let me emphasize that this does not mean that Luria or Vital had necessarily been acquainted with the diagram found in the Ambrosiana manuscript (fig. 1), but that they probably had access to a similar one.

129 Ibid., טו. See also Garb, “Kabbalato shel Rabbi Yosef ibn Ṣayyah,” 281 n. 162, 306, who refers to the possible impact of ibn Ṣayyah on Luria, in relation to the topic under scrutiny here. However, in the Jerusalemite Kabbalist's writings there are not two decades of *sefirot*. Moreover, it seems that at least in this case, the impact of R. Joseph on Luria is more plausible, taking into account the wide dissemination of the *Commentary on Sefer Yezi'rah* in manuscripts and the fact that it was already found in print in 1562.

130 See Rachel Elijor, “Ha-zika ha-metaforit bein ha-el la-adam u-rzifutah shel ha-mammashut ha-ḥezyonit be-kabbalat ha-Ari” (The Metaphorical Relation between God and Man and the Significance of the Visionary Reality in Lurianic Kabbalah) in *Kabbalat ha-Ari* (Lurianic Kabbalah), eds. Rachel Elijor and Yehuda Liebes (Jerusalem, 1992), 54 (Hebrew).

131 Bracha Sack, *Be-sha'arei ha-kabbalah shel Rabbi Mosheh Kordovero* (The Kabbalah of Rabbi Moshe Cordovero) (Beer Sheva, 1995), 57–82 (Hebrew); Boaz Huss, “Tefisat 'genizat ha-or' ba-sefer Ketem paz le-Rabbi Shim'on Lavi be-hashva'ah le-torot ha-ḥimzum ha-luryaniyyot” (*Genizat Ha-Or* in Simeon Lavi's *Ketem Paz* and the Lurianic Doctrine of *Ḥimzum*), in *Kabbalat ha-Ari* (Lurianic Kabbalah), eds. Rachel Elijor and Yehuda Liebes (Jerusalem, 1992), 341–62 (Hebrew); Moshe Idel, “Al toledot mussag ha-ḥimzum ba-kabbalah u-va-mehkar” (On the

Concept of *Ḥimzum* in Kabbalah and Its Research), in *ibid.*, 59–112 (Hebrew); Garb, “Kabbalato shel Rabbi Yosef ibn Ṣayyah,” 267–78.

132 Idel, “The Image of Man.”

133 Liebes, *Studies in the Zohar*, 125, *id.*, *Studies in Jewish Myth and Jewish Messianism* (Albany, 1993), 85–86; Idel, “An Anonymous Kabbalistic Commentary on *Shir ha-Yiḥud*,” 151–54; Ronit Meroz, “Rabbi Yosef Angelet u-khtavav 'ha-zohariyyim'” (R. Joseph Angelet and his “Zoharic Writings”), in *Hiddushei Zohar* (New Developments in Zohar Studies), Te'udah, vol. 21–22, ed. Ronit Meroz (Tel Aviv, 2007), 336–38 (Hebrew). See also R. Moshe Cordovero's commentary on the *Zohar*, *'Or Yakar* (Jerusalem, 1989), 16:199 (Hebrew).

134 See Idel, “Od al Rabbi David ben Yehudah he-Ḥasid”; Liebes, *Studies in the Zohar*, 223–24 n. 293.

135 See Idel, “Ḥomer kabbali,” 183 n. 68; Garb, “Kabbalato shel Rabbi Yosef ibn Ṣayyah,” 283–89. See also Idel, *Primeval Evil, Totality, Perfection and Perfectibility in Jewish Mysticism*.

136 For the present, see also Idel, “Ta'amei ha-'ofot ha-teme'im,” 26–27; and Garb, “Kabbalato shel Rabbi Yosef ibn Ṣayyah,” 268–69, 275 n. 117, 290.

137 See Gershom Scholem, *Kabbalat ha-Ari: osef ma'amarim* (Lurianic Kabbalah: Collected Studies), ed. Daniel Abrams (Los Angeles, 2008), 250 n. 30, 296 n. 2; Idel, “Kabbalistic Prayer and Colors,” 19.