

## **Trans-Temporal Collaboration: How a Thirteenth-century Cabalistic Exercise by Abraham Abulafia Inspired a Contemporary Piece of Meditative Music**

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### **Abstract:**

This paper traces the historical, mystical, and Cabalistic background of the inspiration for my choral composition, *HaShem*, which is an approach to an interpretation/transcription of a Cabalistic exercise proposed by the Sephardi mystic Abraham Abulafia in the thirteenth century. The basis of Abulafia's exercise is the recitation of all the possible vowel combinations in the Tetragrammaton, or secret name of God, which is traditionally written as only four consonants. The purpose of the exercise is to exhaust all possible consonant-vowel combinations and thus "hit the nail on the head" by uttering, among the many combinations, the true and original form of the Lost Name of God, which in Cabalistic mysticism is the key to Creation and enlightenment. As a composer, I have interpreted Abulafia's textual instructions as sound, and have transcribed my interpretation of his exercise into musical notation. This paper comments on the background and rationale of such interpretation/transcription.

### **La collaboration trans-temporelle : comment un exercice cabalistique du treizième siècle par Abraham Abulafia a inspiré une pièce de musique contemporaine et méditative**

#### **Résumé:**

Cet article retrace le contexte historique, mystique et cabalistique qui inspira ma pièce de choral intitulée "*HaShem*", et qui est une approche pour l'interprétation/transcription de l'exercice cabalistique proposé par le mystique Sephardi Abraham Abulafia au treizième siècle. Le fondement de l'exercice d'Abulafia est la récitation de toutes les combinaisons possibles de voyelles dans le Tétragramme, ou le nom secret de Dieu, qui traditionnellement n'est écrit qu'avec quatre consonnes. Le but de l'exercice est d'épuiser toutes les combinaisons possibles de consonne-voyelle et donc de "frapper dans le mille" en prononçant parmi plusieurs combinaisons, la forme véritable et originelle du Nom Perdu de Dieu, qui, dans le mysticisme cabalistique, est la clé de la Création et de l'éclairement. En tant que compositeur, j'ai interprété les instructions textuelles d'Abulafia comme son, et j'ai transcrit mon interprétation de son exercice en notation musicale. Cet article commente sur le fond et la justification d'une telle interprétation/transcription.

### **Colaboración a través del tiempo: cómo un ejercicio cabalístico del siglo XIII por Abraham Abulafia inspiró una contemporánea pieza de música meditativa**

#### **Resumen:**

El artículo traza el fondo histórico, místico y cabalístico que inspiró mi pieza coral “HaShem”, que es mi propuesta para interpretar/transcribir un ejercicio cabalístico sugerido en el siglo XIII por el místico sefardita Abraham Abulafia. El ejercicio se basa en la recitación de todas las posibles combinaciones vocales en el Tetragrámaton, o sea el nombre secreto de Dios, que tradicionalmente se escribe solamente con cuatro consonantes. El objeto del ejercicio es el de usar todas las posibles combinaciones de consonantes con vocales y así “darle al clavo en la cabeza” al pronunciar, entre las múltiples combinaciones, la verdadera y original forma del Nombre Perdido de Dios, el cual, en el misticismo cabalístico, es la llave de la Creación y de la iluminación. Como compositor, he interpretado como sonidos las instrucciones textuales de Abulafia, y he escrito anotado en notas musicales mi interpretación de este ejercicio. El artículo comenta sobre las razones en las que me he fundado para dicha interpretación/transcripción.

### **Colaboração trans-temporal: como um exercício cabalístico do décimo terceiro século por Abraham Abulafia inspirou uma peça contemporária de música de meditação**

#### **Sumário:**

Este artigo segue o fundo histórico, místico e cabalístico da inspiração da minha peça de coral "HaShem", que é um acesso a interpretação/transcrição de um exercício cabalístico proposto pelo místico Abraham Abulafia no décimo terceiro século. A base do exercício de Abulafia é de recitar todas as combinações possíveis das vogais no Tetragramaton, ou nome secreto de Deus, que é tradicionalmente escrito com somente quatro consoantes. A finalidade do exercício é de aplicar todas as combinações possíveis da consoante-vogal expressando assim, entre muitas combinações, a forma verdadeira e original do Nome Perdido de Deus, que no misticismo cabalístico é a chave da Criação e da iluminação. Como um compositor, eu interpretei as instruções textuais de Abulafia como som, e transcrevi minha interpretação de seu exercício em notas musicais. Este artigo comenta sobre o fundamento e a razão de tal interpretação/transcrição.

### **Transtemporale Kollaboration: Wie eine Kabbalistische Uebung des dreizehnten Jahrhunderts von Abraham Abdulafia ein zeitgenoessisches Stueck meditativer Musik inspiriert hat.**

#### **Zusammenfassung:**

Dieser Artikel fuehrt auf den historischen, mystischen und kabbalistischen Hintergrund der Inspiration fuer mein Choralstueck, “HaShem” zurueck das ein Ansatz zu einer Interpretation/Transkription einer kabbalistischen Uebung ist die im dreizehnten Jahrhundert von dem Sephardi Mystiker Abraham Abdulafia vorgeschlagen wurde. Die Basis von Abdulafias Uebung ist die Rezitation aller moeglichen Vokalkombinationen des Tetragrammatons, oder des Geheimen Namen Gottes, der traditionell nur in vier Konsonanten geschrieben ist. Der Sinn dieser Uebung ist alle nur moeglichen Konsonant-Vokalkombinationen zu erschöpfen und damit “den Nagel auf den Kopf zu schlagen” durch das Aussprechen, unter den vielen anderen Kombinationen, der wahren und urspruenglichen Form des verlorenen Namen Gottes, der in der Kabbalistischen Mystik den Schluessel zu Schoepfung und Erleuchtung bildet. Als Komponist

habe ich Abdulafias Text in Klang vesetzt und habe meine Interpretation dieser Uebung in Notation wiedergegeben. Der Artikel ist ein Kommentar zum Hintergrund und der Begrueudung einer solchen Interpretation/Transkription.

## **Trans-Temporal Collaboration: How a Thirteenth-century Cabalistic Exercise by Abraham Abulafia Inspired a Contemporary Piece of Meditative Music**

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### **Introduction**

As a composer working in a doctoral project that aims at reviewing how different esoteric and mystical systems have filtered into music theory at several stages in history—and later using these findings to compose symbolically and theoretically “correct” “esoteric music”<sup>1</sup>—I have come across many approaches and systems during the past four years, derived from several philosophical, mystical and esoteric tendencies, schools, and backgrounds. Something that surprised me during this research is how very few of the theorists who propose systems of correlating esoteric and musical concepts actually conducted any musical experiments with their theories that might have resulted in musical pieces, that is, in sounding examples of all of these mystical and Pythagorean speculations. Perhaps because of that, this branch of music theory is called “*speculative music*.”<sup>2</sup> Nothing tangible (or should I say *audible*) usually comes out of it; it is usually a purely theoretical endeavour. Indeed, one has the impression that the efforts of speculative music theorists are a form of Pythagorean (and neo-Pythagorean) mystical meditation, a form of achieving enlightenment through mental stretches of the mind. To think and theorize about the musical structure of the universe is, for these authors, a spiritual value in itself, and no sounding music that the physical hearing might perceive seems to be needed in order to achieve this goal. Much more so, considering that both the hearing apparatus and the cultural conditioning into the appreciation of a certain musical language are “mundane” manifestations—one of human culture, the other of the base physical body—whereas the exclusive use of the speculative faculty is a mental endeavour, therefore more consistent with the Platonic idealism that pervades much of Western mysticism and esotericism, and by virtue of being closer to the All or Source (to the World of Ideas), and therefore less subject to the flaws and weaknesses of matter.

In this context, the existence of documents or evidence that point to the possibility that some of these speculative music theorists actually performed or wrote pieces of “esoteric music” is all the more precious, being, as it is, such a scarce and unusual occurrence.

So, whenever I came across one of these instances, I jumped to the possibility of researching it more deeply. This is the case with Abraham Abulafia’s permutation exercise, which is designed to be chanted aloud during meditation, and thus produce a sounding phenomenon or instance of performance, which as I have mentioned is curiously not that common in speculative music. While researching Abulafia’s method of meditative chanting, I was inspired as a composer to write out what I thought could be one of the versions of the exercise as best as I could, using modern musical notation, since Abulafia describes the exercise in words, but never used any type

of musical notation to write it down—nor did, to my knowledge, any of his disciples.

This is the origin of my choral piece, *HaShem*, for any number of singers and a number of resounding instruments which provide a base note—or pedal—throughout the piece. And this paper is the description of the research that led to its composition.

### Issues Concerning Spelling and Transliteration of the Hebrew Term קבלה

I will begin by clarifying a matter that has raised some concern. Throughout my writings I usually use the spelling *cabala* to transliterate the Hebrew term קבלה, whereas most authors—especially those who are themselves Israeli or Jewish—consistently use *Qabalah* or *Kabbala*, and besides these two spellings, there are a multitude of others. Just as there are reasons for me to adhere to my spelling, there are reasons for other authors to employ theirs. And before I continue, I would like to briefly address the issue of spelling—or rather, transliteration—of a foreign word originally written in another alphabetical system—.

David Godwin tells us in his *Cabalistic Encyclopedia* that “‘Cabala’ is spelled any number of ways: beginning with *c*, *k* or *q*, with and without the *b* doubled; with and without the *l* doubled; and with and without a final *h*.”<sup>3</sup> According to all these permutation possibilities, there would be twenty-four different ways of spelling the word.

The strictest way of interpreting, linguistically, the Hebrew characters קבלה which make up the word *is*, as Crowley noted, *Qabalah*.<sup>4</sup> Yet, diverse respected authorities of the esoteric world have used different spellings in their writings:

Mathers and Waite use *Kabalah*. C. C. Zain used *Kabala*, and, on the theory that *Q* must always be followed by *u* (notwithstanding that, in this case, it is meant to designate a hard *k*), Franz Bardon, among others, spelled it *Quabalah*.<sup>5</sup>

Among the more modern authors, the Ciceros<sup>6</sup> use *Qabalah*, Tyson uses *Kabbalah*, Whitcomb and Dening and Phillips<sup>7</sup> use *Qabalah*, while Farell<sup>8</sup> uses *Cabbalah*. On the other hand contemporary Jewish authors, such as Halevi or Glazerson, tend to prefer the spelling *Kabbalah* when writing in English, though in one of his books Halevi—or his publisher—uses *Cabala*.<sup>9</sup>

But Godwin prefers the simplest Cabala, for the reason that “[it is] the spelling that is to be found in most dictionaries of the English language,”<sup>10</sup> and therefore can be legitimately considered to be the Standard English transliteration of the word. Whereas I personally agree with Crowley that *Qabalah* is the most linguistically correct way of transliterating the Hebrew characters קבלה, the fact that Cabala is the most commonly and widespread spelling—even among non-esotericists—makes me side with Godwin on this issue, and it is for this reason that I will use this spelling throughout this paper.

## The Lost Name, and Why It Is Lost

*HaShem* in Hebrew means “The Name,” and as a title it is used to refer indirectly to God, whose name in the Hebrew Bible יהוה (YHVH) is ineffable both in the sense that it is forbidden to pronounce it (as a strict interpretation of the law in Exodus 20:7 “Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain”) and also in the linguistic sense, since the original or “correct” pronunciation of the word was lost to oral tradition, precisely because of the religious prohibition of speaking the name aloud. This is why the *Tetragrammaton* (Greek for “four-lettered-name”), YHVH, is also referred to in some Masonic traditions as “The Lost Name” or “The lost name of God.”

The story of how this name “became lost” is an interesting one, worthy of being mentioned here. Between the seventh and the tenth centuries CE, groups of Jewish scholars and copyists known as the *Masoretes* (hence the term “Masoretic text” for their final contribution), seeking to standardize the text of the *Tanakh* (Hebrew Bible),<sup>11</sup> inserted numeration, punctuation, pronunciation aids, cantillation reminders, and editorial and theological commentaries to previously-existing manuscripts of the Jewish canonical scriptural writings. During this process, they introduced a series of marks below the letters (mostly, but not exclusively, points) which indicate the vowels that should join each of the original letters of the text, all of them consonants or semi-consonants (like *Y*, *W*, the glottal stop, and several forms of aspiration). In doing so they referred to the aural experience (oral tradition in reading aloud the scriptures) of their own dialect, which was not historical Biblical Hebrew, but partly Hebrew and partly Aramaic.

The Tetragrammaton was traditionally never pronounced, but rather substituted in pronunciation, when encountered, with the word *Adonai* (literally “Lords,” from which comes the Christian rendering of “The Lord” for the Tetragrammaton in Medieval and Renaissance translations, both into Latin and vernacular languages). So the Masoretes either had never heard the actual pronunciation of the Tetragrammaton, and therefore could not write the vowel aids to its pronunciation, or more probably, resorted to the transcriptional convention of *Q’re Perpetuum*, a device by which editorial interventions or annotations on inconsistencies were pointed out as footnotes in the Masoretic text.

Medieval and renaissance Christian scholars who read Hebrew, but who were not aware of the subtleties of substitution and encoded editorial commentary through the procedures of the *Q’re* (Aramaic for “to be read...”), simply transcribed the Tetragrammaton, with its seven different combination of vowel points as the name(s) of God, which can still be read in some Christian Bibles as either Jahveh, Jehovah, or Jehova. Nineteenth-century scholarship, which did not run the grave risk of being considered dangerously heretical and attracting the attention of the inquisition for being interested in consulting Jewish sources and practices directly and without the intermediation of the Catholic Church, was able to debunk this time-honoured procedure and thus discover this transcription *faux-pas*. Yet, the erroneous spelling-out of the Tetragrammaton has not only been kept in most Christian Bibles, it has moreover become *raison d’être* and a principal article of faith of some sects, most notably the Watchtower Society (better known as *Jehovah’s Witnesses*). The reason for this is an interpretation of Romans 10:13, in which Paul writes “...Everyone who calls on the name of The Lord will be saved.” Yet, a name comprised only of consonants is indeed difficult to call out.<sup>12</sup>

But calling out the original name of YHVH has not only been a preoccupation of some twentieth-century Christians, based on their interpretations of the New Testament; it is also one of the keys to enlightenment and union with God in some forms of cabala, especially the ones known in Jewish lore as *kabbalah ma'asiut*, or theurgic cabala. Through these permutations the practitioner tries to find out the “original” name of God by exploring the permutations of the Tetragrammaton, and this endeavour is one of the favourite operations of *temurah*, the technique of literal cabala which deals with permutation of Hebrew names.<sup>13</sup>

### **Medieval Cabala and Rediscovering the Lost Name**

An important figure in the history of medieval cabala, who proposed the combination of techniques of *temurah* with ritual chanting, was Abraham Abulafia of Zaragosa (1240-1291). Pitting himself against the usual Jewish prohibition of speaking the Tetragrammaton out loud, Abulafia taught prayer and spoken-meditation techniques that were comparable to our current understanding of the intonation of mantras.<sup>14</sup> He actually wrote a book, *The Divorce of Names (Get HaShemot)*,<sup>15</sup> in which he explicitly divorced himself from the use of all of God's names other than the Tetragrammaton.<sup>16</sup>

The cabala scholar Aryeh Kaplan tells us that “the use of Divine Names plays a very important role in Abulafia's system. This is one tradition that he clearly saw as being derived from the patriarchs and prophets.”<sup>17</sup> Abulafia, for example, rejected the usual interpretation of Genesis 12:8, “...and he [Abraham] called upon the name of the YHVH,” which was usually taken as an indication that Abraham either prayed or called upon God's greatness. “Together with a number of other Kabbalists, Abulafia takes this passage literally, stating that Abraham actually pronounced God's Name, and through this practice was able to attain the highest mystical levels.”<sup>18</sup>

Abulafia also noticed that in Genesis all of creation takes place through utterances of God, and that “at each stage in the creation of the universe, the Bible introduces the account by stating ‘And God said.’ Creation therefore took place through words.”<sup>19</sup> Since words are made up of letters, and the sayings of God in Genesis were uttered in Hebrew, “therefore the letters of the Hebrew alphabet are the most basic building blocks of creation.”<sup>20</sup> A magical deduction easily follows: “if an individual knows how to correctly manipulate the letters of the alphabet, he is able to make use of the same spiritual forces that originally brought the universe into being.”<sup>21</sup> Since the letters (or more precisely the sounds they represent) are the very essence of creation, by exploring the combinations of these letters, and vibrating them aloud, one can “channel these forces into his spiritual being.”<sup>22</sup> This was the aim, a magical aim, of Abulafia's exercises in Hebrew word-chanting. As Kaplan observes, “Here we see an entirely new method of meditation,”<sup>23</sup> the core of which is a “mobile” or “changing” mantra, rather than the repetition of a single word: “Instead of chanting a word over and over, as in mantra meditation, one writes a word, permuting and cycling the letters in every possible manner. As the initiate progresses to higher and higher states, he or she no longer needs to actually write the letters, but can permute them verbally or mentally. All this is an initiation into the higher levels, which actually involve the Divine Names.” Both Abulafia and his disciples wrote several books detailing the procedures for this innovative form of meditative chanting.<sup>24</sup>



Rabbi Moshe Cordovero, (1522-1570), dean of the reputed Safed school of cabala,<sup>25</sup> considered Abulafia to be an authority in the pronunciation of Divine Names.<sup>26</sup> Around a generation later, Rabbi Chaim Vital (1543-1620) further cites Abulafia's methods as being techniques for meditation.<sup>27</sup>

We do know that Abulafia practised meditation: In the dedication of his *Sheva Netivot HaTorah* to his Sicilian disciple Abraham ben Shalom Comti, he clearly states that he wrote the book after he had meditated.<sup>28</sup> He also used meditation for purposes other than “inspiration” in writing his books: in his *Sefer HeEdot* (Book of Testimonies), written in Rome in 1281,<sup>29</sup> Abulafia tells us, writing under the pseudonym *Raziel* (in cabalistic lore, an angel which personifies Divine Wisdom),<sup>30</sup> that while waiting in Rome for Pope Nicholas III (1220-1280) to return from Saronno to convert him to Judaism (!), his informants had told him that the Pope was aware of his intentions, and had ordered him to be burned at the stake for his insolence. Abulafia sat down and calmly “meditated [in the original Hebrew *hitboded*] and saw wonders...” Incidentally, the Pope died that very night at Saronno, and so his verbal command to arrest the insolent cabalist was not carried out, and thus was Abulafia's life spared.<sup>31</sup>

Also, it seems that Abulafia was the first cabalist to tackle cabalistic meditation openly in his writings, which was not always well received among his fellow cabalists.<sup>32</sup> According to Kaplan, “while this tradition was known to other masters of that period, none wrote down more than the barest hints regarding the explicit practices of the Kabbalah.”<sup>33</sup> In his *VZot LeYehudah*—a reply to his polemicist Judah ben Shimon Duran of Barcelona, 1400-1467—Abulafia states that “no other Kabbalist before me wrote explicit books on this subject.”<sup>34</sup> It is true that earlier authors did write about meditation and cabala, but only in the most obscure and concealed ways.<sup>35</sup> “But I have made it the main point and root of all what I have ever written,” he insists once again in his *Imrey Shefer* (“Words of Beauty”) of 1291.<sup>36</sup>

In his *Sefer HaCheshek* (Book of Passion)<sup>37</sup> Abulafia recollects a vision in which he was commanded by Elijah and Enoch to reveal the secrets of cabalistic meditation.<sup>38</sup> His own cabalistic calculations indicated to him that prophecy was destined to return to the world around the year 1285, and “his books were intended to teach the methods of attaining this level for those who were worthy of it” when the time came.<sup>39</sup> In other words, Abulafia thought that it was through the methods of cabalistic meditation that a state of prophecy could be reached, and saw his work as fundamental in paving the way for the return of prophecy to the world. Since his writings also show that he believed that the mysteries involving the letters were revealed to the prophets before the prophets revealed them to Israel, this was a logical conclusion to him.<sup>40</sup> The etymology of the actual word *Kabbalah* was an additional hint: whereas the traditional interpretation is that the word derives from the verb *Kabal*, “to receive,” referring to the oral transmission of the most important teachings, Abulafia was of the opinion that it came from *Kibel*, “received,” because the tradition had been *received* from the prophets or from those who had received it from them. He further assumed that he had been able to rediscover the methods that the prophets used to attain high mystical experience.<sup>41</sup>

In Abulafia's meditation system, writing plays as important a role as chanting does in other systems, especially due to the complexities of *temurah* (letter permutation), of which it is

difficult to keep track entirely in the mind, without any written aids. “Abulafia’s main method involved the permutation of letters, and, on a higher level, pronouncing the letters of the Divine Names. Such pronunciation was to be accompanied by specific head motions, as well as particular breathing exercises.”<sup>42</sup> This permutation took several forms and styles, but “an especially effective technique [of meditation] was to take a word and permute its letters in every possible way. From this, the initiate would proceed to manipulate the word in other ways, making use of various ciphers and numerical values of the letters.”<sup>43</sup>

One of the most important historical books on cabala, the *Sepher Yetzirah*,<sup>44</sup> deals extensively with permutation methods, one of which, known as *galgal* (cycling), consists of systematically going through all of the mathematically possible permutations of a word (a three-lettered word has six possible ways of writing it, a four-lettered word has twenty-four, and so on). Kaplan believes that “writing in this manner is a type of meditation” in the sense that “one makes use of both the path of the body and that of the intellect,”<sup>45</sup> thus uniting the contraries of rational or mental and intuitive or bodily understanding, attaining a different level of consciousness that is not available to either one of these faculties alone.<sup>46</sup>

### **Cabalistic Origins of My Musical Piece for Singers, *HaShem***

My piece is based on a meditative exercise mentioned in Abulafia’s *Or HaSekhel* (“The Light of the Intellect”),<sup>47</sup> written in Sicily in 1285 for his two disciples in Messina—Abraham Comti and Nathan Charar.<sup>48</sup> It is in this book where Abulafia discusses his meditation techniques most comprehensively, in comparison to the contents of the rest of all the thirty-two books attributed to him, even though several of the other books do have some mention of his meditative techniques as well.

The transmission and reception of this exercise by later cabalists is also quite exceptional: Rabbi Moshe Cordevero (1522-1570) of the influential cabalistic school of Safed (in Galilee, Palestine), reprinted the entire section of Abulafia’s *Or HaSekhel* dealing with this exercise in his *Pardes Rimoni* (Orchard of Pomegranates), called “one of the most important of all Kabbalah classics,”<sup>49</sup> which constitutes “a systematic summary of the *kabbalah* up to his own time,”<sup>50</sup> and thus ensured the perpetuation of this particular form of meditative chanting in the most esoteric branches of the theurgic tradition of *kabbalah ma’asiut*. It is unfortunate, however, that Cordevero did not attribute this method to Abulafia in his compilation, but rather to an obscure *Sefer HaNikud* (“Book of Dots”), which actually exists, but does not mention any of the methods Abulafia speaks of in his *Or HaSekhel*.<sup>51</sup> Cordevero does recognize, however, that “this is either a direct tradition, given over from mouth to mouth, or else it was revealed by a Maggid” [Angelic Spokesman, or Holy Man].<sup>52</sup>

Abulafia’s exercise consists of combining each of the four letters of the Tetragramaton יהוה (YHVH), with the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, the letter Aleph, א, with both letters taking a vowel. Since the letter Aleph corresponds to what in linguistics is called a “glottal stop,” it can take any vowel, and so Abulafia suggests cycling through the five basic vowels in Hebrew. Thus the method produces fifty new words for each of the letters of the Tetragramaton, for a total of two hundred new words derived from the original four-letter name. The full text of this exercise



Apart from chanting the words, one must move one's head in a motion resembling the actual shape of the vowel, so as to include the body as well as the intellect in the exercise. There are also certain rules regarding how many breaths are allowed between each of the lines and syllables of the exercise, as well as how long the pauses between the breaths can be. All of these I have coded in the score.

There is, however, another dimension besides the textual and somatic one that is susceptible to permutation, and which Abulafia does not mention in his original exercise; namely, the sonic dimension. Indeed, in no part of his instructions does he specify *how* the Names should be vibrated, apart from clearly suggesting that they should be intoned aloud (see the beginning of the text included in the appendix). I have sought in my musical rendition of his exercise to approach the sonic dimension, which he leaves undetermined in his instructions.

Just as Abulafia permutes different vowel sounds and combines them with the fixed consonants הוה and א to explore the different textual possible results, so I have approached the possibilities of "sonic permutation" by taking the fundamental or basic sound of an accompanying idiophone (which can be a bell, a gong, a singing bowl, or any other metallic resonating object) as the starting point for all of the pitches in the piece. Depending on the number of people available to participate in the performance/meditation, they will sing in simple or composite unisons (octaves), fifths or major thirds with this basic pitch. Furthermore, to add to the possibilities of "sonic permutation," each singer must also explore their own possibilities in projecting and possibly isolating certain harmonics or vocal overtones in *each and every one of the attacks* while performing the piece/exercise. The precise harmonics will of course vary depending on the types of voices, vowels sung, and even the physical configuration of each singer's individual vocal apparatus. The precise pitches of these harmonics or overtones have thus been left unassigned, in order to not add an extra difficulty to performance, in addition to the precise face movements and the constantly changing pronunciation which Abulafia requires, and which have been scored in the piece.

It has been my intention in this piece to transcribe my musical interpretation of Abulafia's exercise into modern musical notation, since I understand it as a sounding event and therefore susceptible to musical transcription and performance. The intention in scoring his exercise is twofold: on the one hand, it is to respect and follow Abulafia's suggestions, but also to make it easier for those trained in chanting in our culture (namely, singers), to follow his instructions while deciphering them from a familiar form of symbolic language, namely, a musical score.

Of course, certain variations had to be introduced in the standard musical notation to express certain nuances unusual in vocal music, and these have been explained in the performance notes which preface the score. They basically consist of: 1) the indication of constantly sweeping harmonics over a fundamental by changing the *embouchure* and adapting the diverse positions of the mouth, tongue, palate, and throat in order to produce them; and, 2) the indications of how and in what direction is the head to be moved at the utterance of every syllable, which is of

fundamental importance for the theological reasons Abulafia explains in his text, which is included in full in the appendix.

**Appendix 1: The Complete Text of the Exercise of Permuting the Letters of the Tetragrammaton, As Described in Abraham Abulafia's *OrHaShekhal* ("The Light of the Intellect")<sup>53</sup>**

Excerpted from *Meditation and Kabbalah*, © 1982 by Aryeh Kaplan, and reprinted with permission of Red Wheel/Weiser (formerly Samuel Weiser). <http://www.redwheelweiser.com>. 1-800-423-7087.

It is known that the [consonant] letters do not have any sound by themselves. God therefore gave the mouth the power to express the letters, pronouncing them as they are found in a book. For this purpose, he provided vowel points for the letters, indicating the sound with which they must be expressed when they are translated from a book to the mouth. These vowels are what allow the letters to be sounded, and they can also be written as letters in a book.

The vibrations of these sounds must also be associated with space. No vibration can occur except in a definite time and place.

The elements of space are the dimensions and distances. The elements of time are the cycles, through which it is measured. This includes such divisions as years, months and days.

One must therefore know how to draw out the sound of each letter as it is related to these dimensions.

This is the mystery of how to pronounce the Glorious Name:

Make yourself right. Meditate [*hitboded*] in a special place, where your voice cannot be heard by others. Cleanse your heart and soul of all other thoughts in the world. Imagine that at this time, your soul is separating itself from your body, and that you are leaving the physical world behind, so that you enter the Future World, which is the source of all life distributed to the living.

[The Future World] is the intellect, which is the source of all Wisdom, Understanding and Knowledge, emanating from the King of Kings, the Blessed Holy One. All creatures fear Him with a great awe. This is the fear of one who actually perceives, and it is double the fear of one who merely has experienced love or awe.

Your mind must then come to join His Mind, which gives you the power to think. Your mind must divest itself of all other thoughts other than His Thought. This becomes like a partner, joining you to Him through His glorious, awesome Name.

You must therefore know precisely how to pronounce the Name. Its form [is given in the tables].

This is the technique. When you begin to pronounce the Alef (א) with any vowel, it is

Draw out this breath as long as you extend a single breath. At the same time, chant the *Alef*, or whatever other letter you are pronouncing, while depicting the form of the vowel point.

The first vowel is the *Cholem* (o, ם) above the letter. When you begin to pronounce it, direct your face toward the east, not looking up or down. You should be sitting, wearing clean, pure white robes over all your clothing, or else, wearing your prayer shawl (*Tallit*) over your head and crowned with your *Tefillin*. You must face east, since it is from that direction that light emanates to the world. With each of the twenty-five letter pairs, you must move your head properly.

When you pronounce the *Cholem* (o), begin facing directly east, purify your thoughts, and as you exhale, raise your head, little by little, until when you finish, your head is facing upward. After you finish, prostrate yourself on the ground.

Do not interrupt between the breath associated with the *Alef* and the breath associated with the other letter in the pair. You may, however, take a single breath, and it may be long or short.

Between each pair of letters, you may take two breaths without taking a sound, but not more than two. If you wish to take less than two breaths, you may do so.

After you finish each row, you may take five breaths, but no more, you wish to take less, you may do so.

If you change anything or make any mistake in the order in any row, go back to the beginning of the row. Continue until you pronounce it correctly.

Just like you face upward when pronouncing the *Cholem*, face downward when you pronounce the *Chirek* (i, ם). In this manner, you draw down the supernal power and bind it to yourself.

When you pronounce the *Shurek* (u, ם, or ם), do not move your head upward or

When you pronounce the *Tzere* (i, ם), move your head from left to right.

When you pronounce the *Kametz* (a, ם), move it from right to left.

In any case, if you see any image before you, prostrate yourself before it immediately.

If you hear a voice, loud or soft, and wish to understand what it is saying, immediately respond and say, “Speak my Lord, for Your servant is listening” (1 Samuel 3:9). Do not speak at all, but incline your ear to hear what is being said to you.

If you feel great terror and cannot bear it, prostrate yourself immediately, even in the middle of pronouncing a letter.

If you do not see or hear anything, do not use this technique again all that week.

It is good to pronounce this once each week, in a form that “runs and returns.” For regarding this, a covenant has been made.

What can I add? What I have written is clear, and if you are wise, you will understand the entire technique.

If you feel that your mind is unstable, that your knowledge of Kabbalah is insufficient, or that your thoughts are bound to the vanities of the time, do not dare to pronounce the Name, lest you sin all the more.

Between the tablet of the Yod and that of the Heh, you can take twenty-five breaths, but not more. But you must not make any interruption at this time, not with speech and not with thought.

The same is true between the Heh and the Vav, and between the Vav and the final Heh. But if you wish to take less than twenty-five breaths, you may do so.

**Appendix 2: Pronunciation Charts**<sup>54</sup>

Excerpted from *Meditation and Kabbalah*, © 1982 by Aryeh Kaplan, and reprinted with permission of Red Wheel/Weiser (formerly Samuel Weiser). <http://www.redwheelweiser.com>. 1-800-423-7087.

Pronunciation with the Yod (י)

AoYo	AoYa	AoYe	AoYi	AoYu	אוי	אוי	אוי	אוי	אוי
AaYo	AaYa	AaYe	AaYi	AaYu	אוי	אוי	אוי	אוי	אוי
AeYo	AeYa	AeYe	AeYi	AeYu	אוי	אוי	אוי	אוי	אוי
AiYo	AiYa	AiYe	AiYi	AiYu	אוי	אוי	אוי	אוי	אוי
AuYo	AuHa	AuYe	AuYi	AuYu	אוי	אוי	אוי	אוי	אוי
YoAo	YoAa	YoAe	YoAi	YoAu	אוי	אוי	אוי	אוי	אוי
YaAo	YaAa	YaAe	YaAi	YaAu	אוי	אוי	אוי	אוי	אוי
YeAo	YeAa	YeAe	YeAi	YeAu	אוי	אוי	אוי	אוי	אוי
YiAo	YiAa	YiAe	YiAi	YiAu	אוי	אוי	אוי	אוי	אוי
YuAo	YuAa	YuAe	YuAi	YuAu	אוי	אוי	אוי	אוי	אוי



## Pronunciation with the Heh (ה)

AoHo	AoHa	AoHe	AoHi	AoHu	אֹה	אָה	אֶה	אֵה	אִה
AaHo	AaHa	AaHe	AaHi	AaHu	אָה	אָה	אָה	אָה	אָה
AeHo	AeHa	AeHe	AeHi	AeHu	אֶה	אֶה	אֶה	אֶה	אֶה
AiHo	AiHa	AiHe	AiHi	AiHu	אִה	אִה	אִה	אִה	אִה
AuHo	AuHa	AuHe	AuHi	AuHu	אֹה	אֹה	אֹה	אֹה	אֹה
HoAo	HoAa	HoAe	HoAi	HoAu	הֹא	הָא	הֶא	הֵא	הִא
HaAo	HaAa	HaAe	HaAi	HaAu	הָא	הָא	הָא	הָא	הָא
HeAo	HeAa	HeAe	HeAi	HeAu	הֶא	הֶא	הֶא	הֶא	הֶא
HiAo	HiAa	HiAe	HiAi	HiAu	הִא	הִא	הִא	הִא	הִא
HuAo	HuAa	HuAe	HuAi	HuAu	הֹא	הָא	הֶא	הֵא	הִא

## Pronunciation with the Vav (ו)

AoVo	AoVa	AoVe	AoVi	AoVu	אֹוּ	אֹוָּ	אֹוֶּ	אֹוִּ	אֹוֹּ
AaVo	AaVa	AaVe	AaVi	AaVu	אָאֹוּ	אָאֹוָּ	אָאֹוֶּ	אָאֹוִּ	אָאֹוֹּ
AeVo	AeVa	AeVe	AeVi	AeVu	אֶאֹוּ	אֶאֹוָּ	אֶאֹוֶּ	אֶאֹוִּ	אֶאֹוֹּ
AiVo	AiVa	AiVe	AiVi	AiVu	אִאֹוּ	אִאֹוָּ	אִאֹוֶּ	אִאֹוִּ	אִאֹוֹּ
AuVo	AuVa	AuVe	AuVi	AuVu	אֹּאֹוּ	אֹּאֹוָּ	אֹּאֹוֶּ	אֹּאֹוִּ	אֹּאֹוֹּ
VoAo	VoAa	VoAe	VoAi	VoAu	וֹאֹ	וֹאָ	וֹאֶ	וֹאִ	וֹאֹ
VaAo	VaAa	VaAe	VaAi	VaAu	וָאֹ	וָאָ	וָאֶ	וָאִ	וָאֹ
VeAo	VeAa	VeAe	VeAi	VeAu	וֶאֹ	וֶאָ	וֶאֶ	וֶאִ	וֶאֹ
ViAo	ViAa	ViAe	ViAi	ViAu	וִאֹ	וִאָ	וִאֶ	וִאִ	וִאֹ
VuAo	VuAa	VuAe	VuAi	VuAu	וֹּאֹ	וֹּאָ	וֹּאֶ	וֹּאִ	וֹּאֹ

## Pronunciation with the Final Heh (ה)

AoHo	AoHa	AoHe	AoHi	AoHu	אֹה	אָה	אֹה	אָה	אֹה
AaHo	AaHa	AaHe	AaHi	AaHu	אַה	אָה	אַה	אָה	אַה
AeHo	AeHa	AeHe	AeHi	AeHu	אֵה	אָה	אֵה	אָה	אֵה
AiHo	AiHa	AiHe	AiHi	AiHu	אִה	אָה	אִה	אָה	אִה
AuHo	AuHa	AuHe	AuHi	AuHu	אֹה	אָה	אֹה	אָה	אֹה
HoAo	HoAa	HoAe	HoAi	HoAu	הֹא	הָא	הֹא	הָא	הֹא
HaAo	HaAa	HaAe	HaAi	HaAu	הָא	הָא	הָא	הָא	הָא
HeAo	HeAa	HeAe	HeAi	HeAu	הֵא	הָא	הֵא	הָא	הֵא
HiAo	HiAa	HiAe	HiAi	HiAu	הִא	הָא	הִא	הָא	הִא
HuAo	HuAa	HuAe	HuAi	HuAu	הֹא	הָא	הֹא	הָא	הֹא

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<sup>1</sup> At the time of publication I am in the process of preparing my doctoral thesis in musical composition and musicology combined, precisely around this subject. The proposed title of my doctoral thesis is “Towards Hermeticist Grammars of Music: the development of a system of composition based on the principles of the Hermetic Tradition, with musical demonstrations.” My piece, *HaShem*, of which this paper is the theoretical and historical background, is one of such *demonstrations*.

<sup>2</sup> Joscelyn Godwin, “Speculative Music: The Numbers Behind the Notes,” in Paynter, Howell, Orton, and Seymour, eds., *Companion to Contemporary Musical Thought* (London: Routledge, 1992), 256-271.

<sup>3</sup> David Godwin, *Godwin's Cabalistic Encyclopedia: A Complete Guide to Cabalistic Magick* (St. Paul, MN: Llewellyn Publications, 1994), 63.

<sup>4</sup> Godwin, *Cabalistic Encyclopedia*, 63.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Chic and Sandra Tabatha Cicero, who always sign their books together, are described by their publisher, Llewellyn, as “Senior Adepts of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn.” They operate a Golden Dawn temple in Florida, which was legitimized by a consecration ceremony performed by Israel Regardie, the last important survivor of the original Stella Matutina and work incessantly for the dissemination and understanding of traditional Golden Dawn material. At the time of writing, they had published fourteen books and are continuously planning, drafting, or writing new volumes (personal communication, Saturday October 9, 2004, Theosophical Hall, Nottingham, UK).

<sup>7</sup> Melita Denning and Osborne Phillips also tended to sign their books together, and as heads of the magical order of the Aurum Solis, also known as the Order of the Sacred Word, O.:S.:V.:., “a practical school of ceremonial

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magick [sic] rooted in the Western esoteric tradition,” and founded in 1897. They perform a similar function of keepers of this tradition as do the Ciceros for the Golden Dawn. On the Ogdoadic tradition and the Aurum Solis/O.:S.:V.:., see “Aurum Solis” in 2005 <http://www.geocities.com/athens/atrium/6331/as.htm> (accessed February 11 2005), and “Official website of the Aurum Solis” in 2005, <http://www.aurumsolis.net/> (accessed February 11 2005).

<sup>8</sup> Another follower of the Golden Dawn Tradition, British citizen Nick Farell, heads a Golden Dawn Temple in Nottingham, U.K., which is one of the very few Golden Dawn Temples currently operating in the United Kingdom. (Personal communication, Saturday, October 9, 2004, Theosophical Hall, Nottingham, U.K.).

<sup>9</sup> Halevi, Z'Ev Ben Shimon, *Introduction to the Cabala* (York Beach, ME: Weiser Books, 1972, 1991).

<sup>10</sup> Godwin, *Cabalistic Encyclopedia* 63.

<sup>11</sup> Even the name of the Hebrew Bible uses the procedure of *Notarikon* so dear to literal cabala: *Tanakh* is a *notarikon* or acronym of the letters **ת**, *tav* (T), for *Torah* (the five books of Moses), **נ** *nun* (N), for *Nevi'im* (the books of the prophets) and **כ** *kaph* (K) for *Ketuvim* (the other writings, or *hagiographia*).

<sup>12</sup> The Greek version of this passage does not use the Tetragrammaton, but τὸ ὄνομα κυρίου, “on the name of Lord.” Due to the time-honoured Jewish and proto-Christian practice of translating YHVH as Adonai or κύριος it is possible that the word originally used in this passage was the Tetragrammaton; but it is not the Tetragrammaton which has been transmitted in this passage.

<sup>13</sup> S. L. MacGregor Mathers, *The Kabbalah Unveiled* (York Beach, ME: Samuel Weiser, 1888), 9. Ed. Note: While some non-Jewish (magical) sources use *temurah* in this broader way to refer to several types of letter manipulation, *temurah* literally means “substitution,” and it technically refers specifically to letter substitution codes (cyphers). The most widely known example is the *atbash* cypher, where the first letter of the alphabet (alef) is replaced by the last letter (tav), the second letter (bet) is replaced by the second from the last (shin), etc., (hence the name atbash). The specific term for the practice of letter permutation (altering the order of the letters in a word) is *tzeruf*.

<sup>14</sup> Brian Crowley and Esther Crowley, *Words of Power: Sacred Sounds of East & West* (St. Paul: Llewellyn Publications, 1991).

<sup>15</sup> Bodleian Library, Oxford. Ms. 1658.

<sup>16</sup> Aryeh Kaplan, *Meditation and Kabbalah* (York Beach, ME: Samuel Weiser, 1982), 73.

<sup>17</sup> Kaplan, *Meditation & Kabbalah*, 76

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Kaplan, *Meditation & Kabbalah*, 77.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> Kaplan, *Meditation & Kabbalah*, 77

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 77.

<sup>24</sup> For example, the *Sefer HaTzeruf*, the *Shaarey Tzedek* and the *Sulam HaAliyah*.

<sup>25</sup> For further information on this, see Kaplan, *Meditation & Kabbalah*, chapter five, 169-198.

<sup>26</sup> Kaplan, *Meditation & Kabbalah*, 59

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> Kaplan, *Meditation & Kabbalah*, 73.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

<sup>30</sup> Gustav Davidson, *A Dictionary of Angels* (New York: The Free Press, 1967, 1971), 42-24.3

<sup>31</sup> The incident is reported in Kaplan, *Meditation & Kabbalah*, 69.

<sup>32</sup> Kaplan, *Meditation & Kabbalah*, 72.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>34</sup> Cited in Kaplan, *Meditation & Kabbalah*, 72.

<sup>35</sup> Kaplan, *Meditation & Kabbalah*, 72.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>37</sup> Jewish Theological Seminary of America, New York, Ms. 1801.

<sup>38</sup> Kaplan, *Meditation & Kabbalah*, 72.

<sup>39</sup> Kaplan, *Meditation & Kabbalah*, 72 Here Kaplan cites three of Abulafia’s books as proof of this conclusion.

<sup>40</sup> Kaplan, *Meditation & Kabbalah*, 72.

<sup>41</sup> Kaplan, *Meditation & Kabbalah*, 76.

<sup>42</sup> Kaplan, *Meditation & Kabbalah*, 79.

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<sup>43</sup> Kaplan, *Meditation & Kabbalah* , 83.

<sup>44</sup> For a modern edition of this book, see Ben Joseph Akiba, *The Book of Formation or Sepher Yetzirah* (Hays, 2004).

<sup>45</sup> Kaplan, *Meditation & Kabbalah* , 83.

<sup>46</sup> On magical consciousness, see Susan Greenwood, *The Nature of Magic: An Anthropology of Consciousness* (Oxford: Berg, 2005).

<sup>47</sup> Manuscripts of this book can be found in the special collections of the Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana (ms. 233), Bayerische Staatsbibliothek (ms. 92), and Hebrew University Library, Jerusalem (ms. 8<sup>o</sup> 3009). The sections used for my piece are reproduced by Kaplan in his work, *Meditation and Kabbalah*, 87-92.

<sup>48</sup> Kaplan, *Meditation & Kabbalah* , 74.

<sup>49</sup> Kaplan, *Meditation & Kabbalah* , 87.

<sup>50</sup> Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *Kabbalah & Jewish Mysticism: An Introductory Anthology*. 2nd rev. ed. (Oxford: Oneworld, 2006), 95. First published in 1995. Page citation is to the 1995 edition.

<sup>51</sup> Kaplan, *Meditation & Kabbalah* , 87.

<sup>52</sup> Moses Cordevero, *Pardes Rimonim* 21:1. Quoted in Kaplan, *Meditation & Kabbalah* , 324.

<sup>53</sup> Kaplan, *Meditation and Kabbalah*, 88-92. Excerpted from *Meditation and Kabbalah*, © 1982 by Aryeh Kaplan, with permission of Red Wheel Weiser (formerly Samuel Weiser). <http://www.redwheelweiser.com>. 1-800-423-7087. Ed note: The corrected spelling for Abulafia's book is *Or HaSekhel*, as elsewhere in the paper, and also in Kaplan's work.

<sup>54</sup> What follows is taken from Kaplan, *Meditation and Kabbalah*, but it must be noted that there is an error of both the Hebrew and the transcription in the fifth line of the pronunciation with the Yod: Where it says “*AuYo, AuHa, AuYe, AuYi, AuYu,*” it should read “*AuYo, AuYa, AuYe, AuYi, AuYu.*” Charts excerpted from *Meditation and Kabbalah* , © 1982 by Aryeh Kaplan, with permission of Red Wheel Weiser (formerly Samuel Weiser). <http://www.redwheelweiser.com>. 1-800-423-7087.