The Participation of God and the Torah in Early Kabbalah

Adam Afterman and Ayal Hayut-man

Abstract: All Abrahamic religions have developed hypostatic and semi-divine perceptions of scripture. This article presents an integrated picture of a rich tradition developed in early kabbalah (twelfth–thirteenth century) that viewed the Torah as participating and identifying with the Godhead. Such presentation could serve scholars of religion as a valuable tool for future comparisons between the various perceptions of scripture and divine revelation. The participation of God and Torah can be divided into several axes: the identification of Torah with the Sefirot, the divine gradations or emanations according to kabbalah; Torah as the name of God; Torah as the icon and body of God; and the commandments as the substance of the Godhead. The article concludes by examining the mystical implications of this participation, particularly the notion of interpretation as eros in its broad sense, both as the “penetration” of a female Torah and as taking part in the creation of the world and of God, and the notion of unification with Torah and, through it, with the Godhead.

Keywords: Kabbalah; Godhead; Torah; scripture; Jewish mysticism; participation in the Godhead

1. Introduction

The centrality of the Word of God, as consolidated in scripture, is a central theme in all monotheistic religions. In all of these religions, strands of thought have developed that has imbued this type of revelation with hypostatic and even divine characteristics. While some studies have attempted to compare these perceptions of scripture and the revelation of God through them as self-revelation, either on phenomenological grounds or in terms of direct historical influence, much work remains to be done in this regard.

Kabbalah—a strand of Jewish esoteric thought that emerged in the late twelfth-century—articulated rich, complex theories regarding the participation, and at times even the identification, of God and the Torah. A comparison of kabbalistic perceptions regarding the divine status of Torah with those developed in Christianity and Islam could therefore be particularly fruitful.

In a classical study on “The Meaning of the Torah in Jewish Mysticism”, Gershom Scholem stressed the “utmost importance” of “questions concerning the nature of such [divine] revelation as set forth in the sacred books” (Scholem 1965, p. 32). This assessment regarding the unique kabbalistic perception of the Torah and its significance has only been strengthened by research conducted since. But while significant advances in our understanding of the Torah’s participation in the Godhead in kabbalistic thought have been made since the publication of Scholem’s classic study, there is so far no systematic presentation of this key idea in early kabbalah, which brings together the various insights that have been gathered and presents them in a comprehensive and systematic manner. Such analysis, intended for the community of scholars of religion and other related fields, could be a valuable tool with the potential to enable further study, especially in comparative and phenomenological studies of religion.

In the following essay, we examine the various ways in which some early kabbalists (thirteenth-century) viewed the Torah as participating with God through five different axes: Torah as the Sefirot; Torah as the divine name; Torah as the body and icon of God;
the commandments as identified with God; and the mystical implications of this participation in several key sources in early kabbalah. Given the breadth of primary sources on this topic in early kabbalah, a full presentation and analysis of all sources and statements would be beyond the scope of this article; we therefore limited ourselves to several key discussions in some central sources of the early theosophic-theurgic kabbalah. The primary sources discussed are presented in translation from Hebrew and Aramaic into English; translations are sometimes based on those prepared by other scholars and cited accordingly in footnotes.

The kabbalistic theosophical understanding of the Torah is to be understood against the backdrop of earlier sources. Various hypostatic views of Torah are evident at least since second temple Judaism, resulting from the identification of Torah with the divine wisdom, as depicted in the sapiential literature. In rabbincic literature, the Torah is conceived of as a pre-existent entity, which not only preceded the creation of the world but also served as the paradigm for its creation. Another rabbincic tradition implicitly equated the Torah with the name of God. Many Rabbincic sayings describe the indwelling of God (שכינה) as residing with those who study the Torah. The act of study and interpretation is sometimes likened to the revelation at Mount Sinai, or to prophetic experience previously signifying a direct connection with God. The Torah was considered as including all supernal and mundane knowledge, and as embodying the will of God. In addition, the Torah was regarded in some rabbincic texts as the “daughter” of God. In its pre-existent state, the Torah was envisioned as written on the body of God, “black fire on white fire”. Heikhalot and Jewish magical literatures saw the Torah as relating to the measurements of the divine body, and as relating to divine names that have a magical use. Some medieval Jewish philosophers of the Andalusian tradition identified the Torah either with the Platonic Nous or with the Neo-Aristotelian active intellect. Finally, the German Pietists (12th–13th century) saw the Torah as a series of divine names, or as identical with the name of God in its entirety. They further equated Torah with the glory of God (Kavod) or his indwelling (Shekhinah), and with the throne of glory.

2. Torah and the Godhead in Early Kabbalah

Early kabbalah marked the shift from hypostatical to theosophical perceptions of the Torah. The former, hypostatical perceptions were used as cornerstones in a very rich reinterpretation of the pre-medieval materials as a theosophical myth, and contributed to a new understanding of both the Torah and divinity. From the earliest articulations of the kabbalistic Godhead, Torah was understood as a key theosophical component that was used as a signifier of the inner dynamics of emanation, overflow or articulation of the divine and of its covenant with the Jewish people. While all of these ideas have roots and sources in pre-kabbalistic literature, it is in early kabbalah that they were woven into a systematic understanding of the Torah as the source, medium, and articulation of the Godhead. In these perceptions of God, what was new was not the terminology (most of which was biblical and rabbincical), and not even many of the structures, but rather the novel synthesis of past terminology with a new understanding of a Godhead as an abstract and spiritual dynamic being, organism, or mechanism that expands and incorporates all of the elements that were previously considered close to God or part of His majesty. All these entities or semi-divine beings, and in particular the Torah, were now perceived as key elements in the divine (Afterman 2020).

One of the most explicit statements of the identification between God and Torah is found in the writings of a famous fourteenth-century kabbalist, R. Menahem Recanati (1250–1310), who summarized what the “sages of the kabbalah” of the thirteenth-century articulated before him: “For the Torah is not something outside Him and He is not outside the Torah, therefore the sages of the kabbalah said that the Holy One, blessed be he, is the Torah.” In a similar vein, a famous kabbalistic phrase identifies God, Israel and the
Torah: “God, His Torah, and Israel are one.” We now turn to examine the various forms that this identification assumed in early kabbalah.

2.1. Torah as the Sefirot

Among the ideas most associated with classic kabbalah is the doctrine of the Sefirot, sometimes also referred to as Midot. These Sefirot—usually ten in number—represent the divine potencies as well as the process of emanation from God as the Tremendum Mysterium, the complete otherness/nothingness to which no attributes can be applied and no relation upheld, to the manifest God of creation and revelation. Not merely a channel to the divine, the Sefirot themselves are seen as one with the essence of God, and maintain a complex dynamic of contrast and interdependence among themselves, often referred to through erotic or sexual symbolism. (Gikatilla 1970, pp. 15–23).

In many of the theosophies articulated in early kabbalah, the Torah was identified with several different Sefirot, according to its different states of manifestation and, at the same time, with its inner dynamics of emanation and overflow. Already in one of the earliest sources of kabbalah, the Bahir, one finds an elaborate theosophy of the Torah, associated with both the divine wisdom (the Sefira of Hokhma), the divine feminine power of Malkhut, and several intermediary powers of the Godhead. This clearly demonstrates how elaborate and developed the theosophical symbolism of the Torah was in the earliest stages of the kabbalah. In line with the general ambiguity of the discourse in the Bahir, the exact character of this participation and its implications are not entirely clear (Idel 2002, pp. 117–18). In the Bahir, we find the primordial Torah identified as the divine Sophia, the oral Torah identified with the feminine Shekhinah/Malkhut (indwelling/kingdom) (Wolfson 1989, pp. 285–89), and then two other aspects of the Torah: the written Torah and the Torah of Emet (truth), broadly understood to correspond to what later kabbalah designated as the Sefira of Tiferet (beauty). The Torah is characterized in the Bahir as the source of the “water” (divine overflow) that flows from the fountain to the “garden” or “field”—the Sefira of Malkhut—and waters the “plants”, or the “lower” sefirot, in its course (Scholem 1987, pp. 132–33). The primordial Torah, the Sophia, waters the potencies of the Godhead and the theosophical tree (Wolfson 1994a, pp. 56–57, 68–69). It seems possible that the Torah is also associated in the Bahir with the “tree” itself, which is the concentration of the powers of the Godhead and the source that emanates the human souls. The oral Torah is also described as the “daughter” of the king, given as a “bride” and a “jewel” to Israel (Scholem 1987, pp. 167–73). The Torah is the king’s daughter from whom God, the “father”, is not wholly separate; she is an extension of the primordial Torah, the oral Torah “by means of which the Written Torah is deciphered and rendered applicable” (Scholem 1987, pp. 93, 171). The oral Torah as a “jewel” also ascends to the crown of her father (Scholem 1987, pp. 174–75). Additionally, in the Bahir, we find a link between the Torah and the crown of God (Scholem 1987, pp. 145–46). Just as the crown is a dynamic symbol that “rests” on or in different “places” in the Godhead or the divine body, so too does the Torah, all according to the behavior of Israel (Idel 2002, pp. 118–19).

In much of the early kabbalah, influenced by Jewish Neoplatonism and through a certain reading of Maimonides, the Torah was seen as the source of the Godhead and the cosmos, and at the same time as containing its principal elements (Idel 1992a, pp. 319–21, 327–328). Kabbalistic interpretations further stipulated that divine wisdom—identified with the primordial Torah—not only includes all, but is the source of all. Divine wisdom emanates first the Godhead and then the cosmos—a process that was understood in terms of the shift between the various layers or levels of the Torah, from the Torah in its existence in God’s thought, through to its articulation into the written Torah given to Moses, and even more so into the oral Torah, embodied in the “Assembly of Israel” who practice and study it. The movement from the “mind” of God in the primordial Torah, identified with divine Wisdom, to His “mouth” in the oral Torah, marks the ongoing articulation (as a form of emanation) of the Godhead from thought to speech and the linguovert forms of mysticism it implies. Such theories were developed as early as Asher ben David and...
fully articulated in Moshe de Leon’s (1240–1305) Shoshan Edut. In the Zohar, the emanation of the highest levels of the Godhead is sometimes described as an act of writing, in which Ein Sof (eternity) or Keter (crown) inscribes the Sefirot in a similar manner to the inscription of Torah; or, to put the matter differently, God is described as authoring Himself (Wolfson 1995, pp. 60–61).

Divine emanation of and inside the Godhead—one of the key elements in the kabbalistic understanding of the Godhead—was expressed through a process of emanation inside the Torah, from its most hidden, pre-existent state to the externalized written Torah and finally to the more fully articulated and external oral Torah. This emanation of Torah mirrors, or is identified with, the emanation of the Sefirot. This was also a linguistic emanation, with the Torah emanating from its source in divine thought to its inner articulation as a text, to a voice, and finally into an action. These three levels of articulation (thought, voice, and speech) were at times identified with the three “books” referred to in the opening section of Sefer Yetzirah.

Sefer Yetzirah (namely, The Book of Creation) described the way in which the cosmos was created with and through Wisdom by combinations of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet and the ten Sefirot. While Torah is not mentioned explicitly in Sefer Yetzirah, the early kabbalistic interpretations of the enigmatic source, as by Azriel of Gerona (1160–238), for example, viewed the investigation into the working of the divine wisdom in Sefer Yetzirah and its linguistic components as an investigation into the working of the primordial and theosophical Torah and its dynamics of creation. The first chapter of Sefer Yetzirah, describing the creation of the ten Sefirot, was viewed by some of the early thirteenth-century kabbalists as describing at first the emanation of the Godhead itself. The combination of letters, identified with Torah, was thus seen as creating God, in the sense that it was the source from which all ten Sefirot, or aspects of God, stem. Thus, the Torah was not only identified with the Godhead, but was also seen as the fountain and source of the Godhead and its various manifestations.

One of the earliest articulations of the notion of the Torah’s emanation from Hokhma to Malkhut appears in the kabbalah of Provençal kabbalist Asher ben David. There, the Godhead is described as unfolding from the most interior dimension of divine breath to the most exterior form of articulated speech in God’s voice, through which the Torah was given to Israel (Fishbane 2008, pp. 492–93). According to this understanding, Torah emanates at the level of “pure thought” in the Godhead; its further articulation leads to its revelation in the form of the written Torah, often associated with the Sefira of Tiferet. On this level, the Torah is viewed as a divine voice, but one that is not yet fully articulated, and thus still hidden—a voice lacking speech. It is only with the next step of revelation or externalization, the oral Torah—identified with the last Sefira of the Godhead, Malkhut—that Torah becomes fully articulated and revealed (Idel 1994, p. 155). This is a shift from thought to speech; from abstract principle to concrete detail, and from the hidden to the revealed.

Geronese kabbalists in the first half of the thirteenth century elaborated further upon the understanding of the Torah as the fountain of the Godhead. The Midrash described the primordial Torah as the blueprint that served God in the act of the creation (presumably ex nihilo), several medieval philosophical (Neoplatonic) interpretations viewed Wisdom as the divine Nous; that is, a noetic substance that includes all of the principles or essences of the cosmos, and emanates the rest of existence. Geronese kabbalists, and in particular R. Azriel of Gerona and R. Jacob Ben Sheshet (mid thirteenth-century), combined these two notions into the view of Torah as the nous or the source of emanation, first of the Godhead, and then of the cosmos.

R. Jacob Ben Sheshet, adducing the earlier views of Rabbi Isaac the Blind, equated the Torah with the Platonic essences, the ideal forms which God contemplated when creating the world. The Midrashic theme of God contemplating the Torah before the creation of the cosmos was interpreted as God contemplating His wisdom, in which all ideas are contained (Scholem 1987, p. 281). For Ben Sheshet, then, “The Torah is equated with the essences comprised in the divine Wisdom where the sefirotic potencies emanate; to be even
more precise, the emanations can be viewed as the disclosure of hidden wisdom that is the primordial Torah.” (Wolfson 2004a, p. 225) Ben Sheshet further equated Torah with the primordial light of creation, from which all else emanated (Ben Sheshet 1969, p. 78). A similar view, equating the Torah with God’s thought, was expressed by R. Azriel of Gerona (Idel 2002, p. 120), as part of a complex theosophy of the Torah and its theosophical emanation (Azriel of Gerona 1989, pp. 81–85). Azriel’s perception of the Torah incorporated the philosophers’ view, and described the Torah as including the sum of the sciences and human knowledge—the Book of God identified with the Book of Nature. Within such a conception, the Torah was no longer a book apart from God, but internalized in His mind and thought.  

Azriel linked the imagery of the Torah as light with its identification as divine overflow. He argued that, while the philosophers (referring to Neoplatonists) described how the different faculties of the human soul emanate from the noetic light, the esoteric Jewish tradition refers to the emanating overflow of divine light through and in the Godhead as the Torah. The Torah is the radiating light which is the emanation of God: “and they named the light and splendor that emanates itself—Torah—as the Torah is light that illuminates the path of man as written in Prov 6:23 ‘and the Torah is light’.” (Azriel of Gerona 1989, p. 84). While the Midrash correlates the five times the light is mentioned in Genesis in the creation of the world with the five books of the Pentateuch (Genesis Raba, 3:5), Azriel identified the five books of the Pentateuch with the five theosophical lights identified with different sefirot (Azriel of Gerona 1989, p. 111). He also identified these five books with the five theosophical principles of the divine emanation of the Godhead, following his interpretation of Sefer Yetzirah (Azriel of Gerona 1989, p. 112). Here, the emanation of the Torah is the emanation of the five books of the Pentateuch from each other by their order; parallel to these five books are the five lights and five divine elements, that are included in the ten Sefirot (Azriel of Gerona 1989, p. 87).

The participation of the Torah with the sefirot and their dynamics was accompanied by a more dynamic understanding of the Torah itself. No longer a fixed revelation and set of commandments, the Torah instead came to be seen as a reflection of the inner life of God and of His covenantal relationship with the “assembly of Israel”. The Torah is a part of God’s being that was externalized and given to Israel; thus, it was considered by many of the early kabbalists as existing both with God and with Israel simultaneously, and serving as a mediating entity between them.

This dynamic feature of the Torah raised possible questions regarding the stability and eternity of the Torah and its commandments. If the revealed Torah reflects a specific configuration of the Godhead, would it change in the messianic future, when the divine itself or its manifestation would also shift? Certain thirteenth-century kabbalists seemed to think so: Moses Nahmanides (1194–1270), for instance, hinted to the idea that “the time of Torah” will reach its end in messianic times, with the annulment of free will.  

This idea is more clearly elaborated in the writings of R. Bahya Ben Asher (1255–1340). Some scholars have attributed a similar approach to the Tiqqunei Zohar, and it is definitely present in a much more radical way in the fourteenth-century Byzantine composition Sefer ha-Temuna.

2.2. Torah as Divine Name

The idea of Torah as the divine name, which has its roots in Heikhalot literature and in the writings of Hasidei Ashkenaz, was developed extensively in early kabbalah. Within the kabbalistic tradition, the name of God is identical with His essence—and therefore, the identification of Torah with the divine name is in fact its identification with God.

The identification of the entire Torah with God’s name can be traced to Geronese kabbalah, and is reflected in the Zohar as well. R. Josef Gikatilla (1248–1305) described the entire Torah as “weaved” from the divine name, and as interpreting and explaining that name. According to R. Jacob Ben Sheshet, the eight mentions of the name YHWH in the ten commandments comprise the 32 wondrous paths mentioned in Sefer Yetzirah as the building blocks of the Godhead and of all creation, and contain within them the entire
Torah. Elsewhere, Ben Sheshet equated the written Torah with the letter ה and the oral Torah with the letter ו, and ties the name to all three levels of the Torah.

Through the participation of the Torah with the divine name, the Godhead was understood as emanating through a process of permutation of its linguistic components. From an unfathomable, unreadable name, the Torah flows into concrete semantic units, words that compose the narrative of the Torah and its legal discourse; The Torah is the medium and the substance through which the divine, qua the tetragrammaton and other divine names, unfolds into an organism that is manifested in the “mouth” of God, in His voice, which is also the oral Torah.

Nahmanides, in his famous introduction to his commentary on the Torah, traced two distinct traditions:

one that describes Torah as containing fifty “gates”, which represent the sum of all human knowledge; and a second that views Torah as an extremely long sequence of divine names, which together form an articulation of the Godhead (Idel 2002, pp. 321–26):

“We further possess a true tradition that the entire Torah consists of names of the Holy One, such that the words can be divided into names with another meaning. [...] It appears that the Torah was written through Black Fire on White Fire, in the manner that we have mentioned, namely, continuous writing without any break between words. It could be read according to the names or according to our reading about the Torah and the Law (lit. commandments). It was given to our master Moses according to the division [that yields] the reading of the commandments, and the reading of the names was orally transmitted to him”.

The Torah is described here as a divine name, a sequence of letters emanating from the divine wisdom, the primordial Torah. The semantic meaning of the Torah, its narratives, and its laws are but one specific, and therefore narrow, combination out of the infinite sequence of permutations of the divine name that make up the Torah. The three levels of Torah discussed above are retained here: a primordial Torah that was not revealed, which was written without spaces between its letters, implying an infinite potential of different readings; a hidden reading “by way of names”, a sequence of divine names which was given to Moses; and a reading “by way of commandments”, which appears in the actual and revealed Torah, referring to the semantical layers of the Torah and, in particular, to its nomian aspect. Paradoxically, the written Torah is equated with an oral tradition, while the oral Torah is the one which was given in writing to the people of Israel.

A very interesting matter arises here, which was not explicitly addressed by Nahmanides: the normative Torah is rooted in the “lower” dimensions of the Godhead. Therefore, in some circumstances, the mystic might transcend the metaphysical roots of the commandments to a higher, trans-, or hyper-nomian plane of the Torah within the Godhead. The mystical path could therefore move beyond and above the normative Torah at some stage in the process of reintegration into the divine (Halbertal 2020, pp. 103–36). Such an idea was expressed by Nahmanides when discussing the matter of vows, which are able to “override” the commandments, since they are linked to a higher level of the Godhead than the (revealed) Torah—in this case, to the Sefira of בינה (understanding) (Yisraeli 2020). While not breaking the prohibitions of Torah, Nahmanides’ view here opens the possibility for a hyper-nomian mode of religiosity, based on Torah’s identification with the Godhead. As Moshe Halbertal noted, the idea of the Torah as a series of names “deeply undermines the text’s stability and is fraught with antinomian potential, because the biblical text becomes dynamic, showing a different face each time, the sequence is parsed in a different manner” (Halbertal 2020, p. 49). The fact that the core of the Torah is neither semantic nor nomian might have ramifications for the status of the revealed Torah and its relevance in the advanced stages of mystical integration into the Godhead. The approach to the Torah as a sequence of divine names implies that revelation is not only a moment of linguistic communication between God and man, it is a self-disclosure of God’s essence,
which is His name, and of His voice, both considered as manifestations in and through the Torah.  

2.3. Torah as the Icon and Body of God

A third approach, intimately related to the view of Torah as the name of God outlined above, described the graphic form of the Torah itself as the image or icon of God. This approach employed as its proof text, among others, the severe rabbinic warnings against mistaking even a single letter or shape in a Torah scroll and the Midrashic description of the white fire as representing the body of God, upon which the Torah was written (Idel 2002, pp. 57–58).

A relatively early current in Jewish thought, epitomized in Sefer Yetzirah, viewed the letters of the Hebrew alphabet as the underlying, essential matter of all things (Weiss 2014, pp. 146–84). In thirteenth-century kabbalah, the name of God was seen as the “root” from which the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew alphabet stem, and thus as constituting the entire world — and also, in some kabbalistic interpretations of Sefer Yetzirah, as constituting and creating God himself. God’s name was also viewed by some kabbalists as an anthropos, a human or man-like form, on the basis of a numerical equivalence between the letters of the tetragrammaton when written out in full and the word Adam (man) (Wolfson 2005b, p. 490). Since the Torah was seen as identical with the name of God in its essence, it too came to be viewed as identical with this textual body of God, as well as with the human body — “body” here indicating not a physical being per se, but a corporeal, lived presence (Wolfson 2005a, pp. 208–9). A further element of this approach was the perception, in Geronese Kabbalah and later in the Zohar, of the Torah as a living organism, with various parts of the text serving as its “organs”. Similarly, in thirteenth-century Kabbalah, we find speculations on the “white fire” of the Torah, characterized as the spaces between and inside the letters, which represent the form or “body” of the hidden God.

In the Tiqqunei Zohar, the stone tablets on which the Torah was given are described as the breasts or hymen of the Shekhinah, the feminine aspect of the divine, and the Torah in its entirety is described as Her body. In late thirteenth-century Kabbalah, an iconic understanding of Torah emerged, in which the Torah in its entirety was described as the picture of God, including, in some cases, a full anthropomorphic representation, linking specific parts of the text to the divine limbs, for instance by describing the five books of the Pentateuch as relating to the five fingers of God’s right hand, and the Psalms to the left. The graphic image of the Torah scroll, presented before the congregation, was seen as displaying and teaching the divine form, and the requirement for each Jewish male to write a Torah scroll for himself was understood as the requirement to make God for himself. According to this approach, the form of the human body serves as a link between man, Torah, and God. This is not only a relation of correspondence, but also of dependence, as further elaborated in the next section.

This view is somewhat similar to the equation between Torah and the Sefirot, as the latter is also conceived in an anthropomorphic manner, though it is much more extensive. Whereas the Sefirot are sometimes depicted in the form of a human head, torso, arms, legs, or reproductive organs, the iconic representation discussed here refers to much smaller units such as finger joints, teeth, etc., and also connects them in a specific manner to well-defined parts of the Torah. A further extrapolation of this theory equated the “organs” of the Torah with the composition of the People of Israel, reinforcing, in a new way, the three-way identification between Israel, Torah and God.

2.4. God as the Commandments

A further implication of the identification of the Torah and the Godhead is the apotheosis of the commandments, since the Godhead is viewed as incorporating the commandments in their spiritual or theosophical form. Like the Torah, the commandments and rituals exist and operate at various levels of the Godhead. The concrete commandment exists as a vocalized word or sentence in the oral Torah, as a written word or commandment
in the written Torah, and as an idea in the Torah that is divine wisdom. The performance of the concrete rituals or commandments is followed by a linguistic component in the blessing on the ritual or commandment, as well as by a mental element of kavanah (intention), which involves mental concentration on the divine name parallel to the theosophical Torah. The physical, linguistic, and mental dimensions of the performance of each commandment are parallel to their “roots” in the different levels of the Torah in the divine. The early kabbalists interpreted the Midrashic homilies that describe God performing some of the commandments as indicating that the commandments are part of God or the substance of the Godhead, in a similar manner as the Torah. Concomitantly, commandments and rituals were not only the fulfillment of a divine decree, but rather were themselves seen as the essence or substance of the divine.

This perception of the commandments as the substance of the Godhead suggests that they were the primary manner through which one may reach, cleave, impact and affect the Godhead. This idea was expressed by Menahem Recanati: “whoever performs one commandment causes that power to descend upon the same commandment above, out of the ‘Annihilation of Thought’, and he is considered as if he literally maintained one part of the Holy One, blessed be He.” At the same time, the concrete performance of a commandment draws down the divine overflow in the form of light or holy spirit (identified as a dynamic form of the Torah) from the higher parallel vessel in the Godhead, which is the root of that particular commandment in the higher forms of the Torah (Idel 1993, pp. 111–30). The commandments and rituals are a type of vessel in which the overflow of the Torah, the light, or the spirit, dwells. The commandments were also seen as relating to the body of God: by performing a commandment with one of his limbs, the kabbalist affects the parallel theosophical limb. The divine body is vitalized through the parallel performance below.

At the same time, the commandments were traditionally referred to as the “bodies of Torah”, and the iconic perception discussed above equated Torah with the divine body and organs. This opened the way for a complex three-way identification between Torah, the commandments, and God. To this should be added the notion, present already in rabbinic homilies, that the number of commandments corresponds to the number of human limbs and sinews. According to Wolfson, some sources in early kabbalah alluded that the performance of commandments not only affects the divine limbs but in fact transforms the divine from text to body, and simultaneously transforms the human body into text: “As the incorporeal assumes the bodily contours of the scriptural text, the body of one who observes the commandments is transformed into a body composed of the very same letters.” Through the correct ritual performance, God and man are equally subsumed and absorbed in the text of the Torah.

2.5. Erotic and Creative Dimensions of the Torah

A major contribution of the Zohar to the discourse regarding Torah and the Godhead was its focus on the erotic dimension of Torah (possibly reflecting elements that were implicit in earlier sources). The erotic dimension was expressed both in attributing to the interpretation of the Torah an erotic charge vis-à-vis the divine; and in the view of interpretation as a creative force, leading to an overflow of meanings that shapes and influences divine realities. The creative, erotic interpretation of Torah allows the mystic to conjoin with the divine and to partake in creation. As discussed above, the oral and written dimensions of Torah were associated in some strands of kabbalistic thought with the Sefirot of Tiferet and Malkhut, with Tiferet representing a higher, esoteric dimension of Torah. These two sefirot were also described as a divine “couple”, whose “sexual” conjoining bestows the divine plenty upon the world. One of the key implications of this identification is that, while the written Torah can only be perceived through the oral Torah, one should strive to unite the two through a practice of mystical interpretation, perceived theurgically, in which the study of the Torah’s secrets unites the oral Torah with the written one, repairing the rapture between the masculine and feminine potencies of the divine—a rapture that was seen as a catastrophe within the Godhead. The revelation of the esoteric meaning
of the text therefore had, especially in the Zohar, both an erotic and a salvific dimension. In the anonymously written, late thirteenth-century Sefer ha-Yihud, the act of studying the written and oral Torah together was described as bringing about their unification, which is also an erotic unification of all the Sefirot, as well as the entire cosmos. The erotic element was also present at an earlier stage of the emanation of Torah, as the very act of engraving and writing the primordial Torah by the Sefira of Hokhma was perceived as an erotic act (Wolfson 1995, pp. 49–78).

The identification of the Torah with the Godhead also led to a perception of Torah as containing infinite meanings, mirroring the infinity of the divine. The Zohar celebrated this infinity of hidden meanings, related to the written Torah and to the higher aspects of the Godhead (Liebes 1994, p. 85). The act of interpretation was seen in the Zohar as an act of revealing and observing the Godhead—the same type of experience, in fact, that facilitated the revelation of the Torah to Moses in the first place. This revelation, in turn, enables further interpretation and the unlocking of divine secrets hidden in the scripture. Interpretation was considered “erotic” in the sense that the mystic was conceptualized as “penetrating” the Torah—identified with the feminine Malkhut—and mystically conjoining with her. This dynamic is perhaps best attested in the famous Zoharic parable of the beautiful maiden without eyes. In this parable, the Torah is described as a beautiful maiden hidden in a tower, who reveals herself to her lover by degrees, which relate to the different levels of textual interpretation, until finally she fully reveals herself and her secret before him. At the final stage of courtship, the lover understands that all parts of Torah are entirely indispensable, including those that seem the most mundane. All hidden meanings of Torah are described as contained within its plain sense. This plain sense is also the oral Torah, conceived as Malkhut, which is the gateway to all other forms of revelation or interpretation (Wolfson 1993b, pp. 170–73).

The creative aspect of interpretation in the Zohar is far-reaching. According to Zohar I, 4b-5a, every new interpretation of the Torah represents a new act of creation, bringing forth a new earth and a new sky. Similar to God, who created heaven and earth by contemplating the Torah, the enlightened who interpret the Torah take part, through it, in the act of creation. At the same time, their acts of Torah study and interpretation also strengthen the divine realm itself, the new interpretations transform into theosophical beings that cleave and adorn to the Sefirot, in particular the Shekhinah. In a stronger phrasing of this principle, kabbalistic homilies on the Torah were described as creating God himself (Liebes 1994, pp. 70–73). The motif of Torah interpretation as directly influencing the divine through their ontological participation reaches its most dramatic climax in the Idra Rabba section of the Zohar. There, R. Shimon Bar Yochai and his mystical companionship set out to repair the Godhead, beginning with its highest, most hidden manifestation, envisaged as Atika Kadisha (the “holy ancient one”) or Arikh Anpin (the “long Countenance”). Both the “problem” that they set out to fix and the means of its solution are expressed in terms of Torah. R. Shimon begins the Idra by quoting from Psalms 119, v. 126: “It is time for the Lord to act, for your law [Torah] has been broken”. The “breaking” of Torah implies the disconnect between its upper aspect of mercy, expressed in the form of Atika, and the lower aspect of judgement, expressed in the form of Zeir Anpin (the small countenance) (Liebes 1993, 43–48). The means of repairing this rift is similarly the Torah: through their homilies and interpretations, the mystics repair the countenance of Atika and reconnect its secrets—seen as the “soul” of Torah—to the lower manifestation of Zeir Anpin, thus allowing divine mercy to flow through the Torah and God, and then be revealed below to the mystics. The act of reparation is achieved by tying specific passages of the written Torah to various aspects of the divine face, which further relates to the iconic view of the Torah discussed above.
2.6. Union with the Torah

We conclude with the mystical implications of the identification of the Torah with God and, in particular, the notion of mystical union with the Torah (Afterman 2016, pp. 135–43, 153, 159). Unitive mysticism developed in thirteenth-century kabbalah in various schools and circles, particularly in light of theories regarding the divinity of the soul (Idel 2000). Torah study and the performance of the commandments and rituals were considered a powerful tool for achieving an ongoing mystical integration, devequt, with and into the Godhead.

Additionally, as we have seen above, theories regarding the participation of the Torah and the Godhead were translated into a perception that characterized the study of Torah as a visionary experience, akin to a direct meeting with God, and also as an erotic union with the divine. Ideas regarding the possibility of mystical union with the Torah were therefore already present, at least implicitly, in early kabbalah.

A more explicit notion of such union can be found in the ecstatic kabbalah of Abraham Abulafia (1240–291), where the highest form of interpretation of the Torah was creating new combinations of letters, aimed at revealing the divine names and turning the entire text of scripture into such a name. At the same time, this is also a process in which the individual becomes one with the Torah, because, through this process, the interpreter actualizes his intellect and unites it with the active intellect, identified in Abulafia’s writings with Torah. This, in turn, leads to a state of prophecy, in which the interpreter becomes a participant in the Torah through the creation of new letter combinations (Idel 1988b, pp. 79–81, 101–3).

In sixteenth-century kabbalah, theories of union with Torah were made more explicit, and phrased in much stronger terms. No longer solely the medium for mystical communion with God, the Torah increasingly came to be seen as the object and the focal point of such communion and union. This identification included the essential human component—the soul, identified with the Godhead and the Torah. The Torah and the human soul were viewed as one being and one substance (Alkabetz 2000, p. 58). Mystical union with God is mediated by the Torah that is identified with God and His Wisdom: “While we cleave to the Torah we are actually cleaving with the creator as he and his Wisdom are one.” (Alkabetz 2000, p. 185). All three—the Torah, the Godhead, and the soul—were considered as one in substance and in essence.

This strong unity was the foundation of an elaborate, individual mystical path, expressing a premodern conception that placed much greater emphasis on individuality and personal experience. Each individual has his own path into the Torah and the divine; studying the Torah is a process of self-discovery and gradual assimilation into the Godhead and the true self. Studying the secrets of the Torah is an act of love that unites the kabbalist with the root of his self and, at the same time, with the divine, which is the Torah. Implementing the a priori identity of the Torah with God and the human soul, the Torah was to become a locus of “devequt” mystical fusion, leading at its most advanced stages to the union of three: God, man’s soul, and the Torah.

3. Conclusions

From the earliest stages of kabbalah, mystical ideas centered around the Torah and its participation with the Godhead have formed a key part of the thought of kabbalists. In this article, we proposed a typology of various strands of Torah mysticism within early kabbalah: the identification of the Torah with the Sefirot, with the name of God, with the body of God, the identification of the commandments with God, and the erotic and unific dimensions of Torah.

The identification of the Torah with the Sefirot generally tended to associate different aspects or levels within the Torah—the primordial, written, and oral Torah—with different Sefirot at various stages of manifestation of the Godhead. These Sefirot and parts of Torah were further associated with pure thought, voice, and speech, as part of a mysticism of language. The Torah was seen as mirroring or facilitating the process of divine emana-
tion, sometimes acting at the very source of the Godhead in the form of divine wisdom or thought. Through this identification, the Torah became a dynamic reflection of the inner life of God and His relation to Israel—a shift that raised questions regarding the stability of its nomic content.

The name of God was seen as identical both with God’s essence, the essential matter of the world, and the Torah. The Torah and the world were both seen as woven from the divine name, a long sequence of letters whose permutations reflects the process of divine emanation. Again, such theories destabilized the nomian aspect of Torah and opened the way for an infinite number of possible readings of its text.

The Torah was further associated with the body and icon of God: the name of God, with which the Torah was identified, was understood as a human form, and the Torah was therefore understood as a body in the sense of a corporeal, lived presence with various organs. The physical shape of the letters upon the Torah scroll gradually came to be seen as mirroring and displaying the divine form.

The Torah’s commandments were also seen as part of the Godhead, incorporating in their performance the three levels of action, speech, and thought. The human body was seen as a bridge between man, Torah, and God: commandments performed by the human limbs were seen as affecting the corresponding divine limbs, corporealizing the divine and textualizing man.

The erotic perception of Torah saw not the commandments, but the very act of Torah study as facilitating contact with the divine. Esoteric interpretation was seen as an erotic “penetration” of the Torah that is a part of God, and the fruit of this “conjugal” act was a form of prophetic experience that further enhanced Torah study and produced a multitude of meanings—a process that itself strengthened the world and God.

Finally, theories of devequt and union with God in early kabbalah often involved Torah study and practice in various ways. This connection was made more explicit in ecstatic kabbalah and later in sixteenth-century kabbalah, where a three-way identification between God, the Torah, and the human soul led to the perception of Torah study as an individual path of self-discovery and reintegration of the soul into the divine.

While some of these types of Torah mysticism developed independently of each other, they became organically connected at a relatively early stage in their development, complementing and reinforcing one another. For many later kabbalists, they became almost indistinguishable, forming together the complex picture of the relation between God, Torah and Israel. In the thought of the early kabbalists, the Torah became an all-encompassing entity that was connected to God both as the fountain of the Sefirot, and as a name, as a body and, importantly, as a focus of mystical transformation. Kabbalistic speculations about the Torah did not stop at the level of theory, but translated the theory into a comprehensive interpretation of the concrete action of Torah study and the ritual performance of the commandments, now seen in a new light as facilitating direct contact with the Godhead, influencing it and maintaining both the world and the Godhead itself.

Author Contributions: Writing—original draft preparation: A.A. and A.H.-m.; Writing—review and editing: A.A. and A.H.-m. All authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Conflicts of Interest: The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Notes

1 On possible historical connections between Muslim and Jewish perceptions of scripture as possessing enormous dimensions and as a body with various organs see Moshe Idel (1981, pp. 46–47); on Christian and Jewish concepts of scriptural embodiment see Wolfson (2005b, especially pp. 480–82); on phenomenological similarities between Jewish and Sufi notions of embodied text see Wolfson (2013a, pp. 837–52). Of course, this is not an exhaustive list, but rather one that is designed to demonstrate the potential of such comparisons.
The precise origins of the kabbalah are much debated. Scholem (1987, pp. 199–364) traced its beginning to certain provençal circles, notably that of the Rabad and R. Isaac the Blind. Pedaya (2001) conducted a broader review of kabbalistic ideas that originated in Provence. Bar-Asher (2019) has challenged many of the assumptions about writings attributed to Provençal kabbalists. Cf. (Weiss 2021).

See, among others, Scholem (1972, pp. 79–80, 178–80, 193–94); Tishbi and Lachower (Tishbi and Lachower 1989, pp. 1079–82); Idel (2002, pp. 69–74, 119–24, 298–99, 459–60); Wolfson (2005a, 26, 41, 124–25, 137–38, 239–40, 243–46, 248–49, 255–58); Idel (2010, pp. 177–82); Ogren (2016, pp. 100–5).

On the distinction between theosophic-theurgic and other types of kabbalah see Scholem (1995, p. 124); Idel (1988a, xi–xx). For a criticism of this distinction Wolfson (2000, pp. 94–134).

For a general overview of this process and its implications, see Sanders (2001, pp. 121–36), and studies collected in Schipper and Teeter (2013).

See the detailed discussion by Idel (2002, pp. 31–37).

Regarding the rabbinic perception of Torah as feminine, and as the “daughter of God” Wolfson (1989, pp. 271–76).

Weiser (1976, p. 140); Idel (1988b, pp. 30–31).

See Wolfson (1993a, pp. 47–78); Idel (1981, pp. 47–49).

For a full articulation and discussion of this process see Liebes (1992, pp. 1–64).

Recanati (1962, 2b). Scholem (1965, p. 44).

On this phrase, see Tishby (2008, pp. 454–85).

On the sefirot and kabbalistic theosophies in general see Scholem (1995, pp. 205–43); Scholem (1974, pp. 105–16); Scholem (1991, pp. 15–55); Tishbi and Lachower (1989, pp. 229–443); Green (2003, pp. 28–59, 101–8); Hallamish (1999, pp. 121–65); Ginsburg (1989, pp. 24–58); Afterman (2020, pp. 160–64).

Scholem (1987, pp. 144–45); Abrams (1994, pp. 179–81). Wolfson (1989, p. 89), identifies Emet with Mahshava—the highest Sefira—as it resides within the Sefira of Tiferet. The fundamental association of written Torah with Tiferet and oral Torah with Malkhut was accepted by Geronese kabbalah and came to dominate much of thirteenth-century as well as later kabbalah. Scholem (1965, pp. 47–50); Idel (2002, p. 121). In some kabbalistic systems, the primordial Torah was identified with either the first sefira, Keter (“crown”), or the third, Bina (“understanding”). See also an anonymous kabbalistic commentary, dated by Idel to the late thirteenth-early fourteenth century, in which the written and oral Torah are described as the white and black fire, respectively: Idel (2002, pp. 54–55).

See, among others, Wolfson (2004a, pp. 224–25).

Fishbane (2008, pp. 485–521); Idel (1994, pp. 145–66).

Scholem (1987, pp. 285–89), attributed a similar theory already to R. Isaac the Blind (1160–1235), but studies conducted since have cast doubts on the attribution to R. Isaac of many of the texts referenced by Scholem. See most recently, and most comprehensively, Bar-Asher (2019, pp. 269–384).

Gross (2019, pp. 335–36). See the discussion by Idel (1994, pp. 154–55).

The date of composition of Sefer Yetzirah is the subject of much debate, with scholarly estimates ranging from the first to the ninth century AD. On the different contexts of this enigmatic source see Weiss (2018).

See for example the commentary by Moses Nahmanides in which the first chapter of the book describes the emanation of the Godhead. Cf. Hayman (2004, p. 74); Segol (2012, pp. 65–87). For a 10th-century reading of Sefer Yetzirah that interprets the Sefirot as part of God, and relates them both to the name of God, the Hebrew alphabet, and Torah, see Wolfson (1992, pp. 294–300); Cf. the three interpretations analyzed by Weiss (2013a, pp. 26–46).

In Abraham Abulafia’s thought, heavily influenced by neo-Aristotelianism, the Torah was at times identified with the separate intellects and at times with the active intellect, which contains the foundations of language and all intelligible forms. In Abulafia’s system, this identification opened the possibility for mystical conjunction with the Torah, and thereby with the divine realm, through the act of intellection, by which the personal intellect is actualized into the general, active intellect. Abulafia also associated the Torah as active intellect with the Angel Metatron, as well as with the people of Israel. See the detailed discussion by Idel (1988b, pp. 34–41).

Chavel (1964, p. 409); Idel (1992a, pp. 319–21, 327–28).

A similar conception of the Torah as including the sum of all the sciences appears in Nahmanides as well. Nahmanides, however, insists on this type of wisdom being the Pesilat (plain sense) of Torah, associated in his system with the Sefira of Malkhut. Ben Nahman (2006, pp. 63–71). Cf. Funkenstein (1986, p. 215).

Moshe ben Nahman, Commentary on the Torah, Deuteronomy 30, v. 6. See Halbertal (2020, pp. 48–50); Yisraeli (2020, pp. 121–50).

Chavel (Chavel 1966–1968, Exodus 23, v. 18); Deuteronomy 31, v. 21. Cf. Gottlieb (1976, p. 547).
The Zoharic homily intentionally plays here with the Hebrew words for plain meaning of text (Peshat, פשט) and undressing (Pashat, פשט); Wolfson (2005b, pp. 80–92). Cf. (Wolfson 2004b, pp. 10–11).

This is one of the most studied and discussed sections in the Zohar, and discussing its full implications is beyond the scope of the present article. For a recent review of scholarship on this issue see Bennaroch (2018, p. 4 no. 13). See also the summary by Abrams (2003, LXI no. 5) and Weiss (2013b, pp. 60–76).

The Zoharic homily intentionally plays here with the Hebrew words for plain meaning of text (Peshat, פשט) and undressing (Pashat, פשט); Wolfson (2013b, pp. 321–43).

References

Abrams, Daniel. 1994. The Book Bahir: An Edition Based on the Earliest Manuscripts. Los Angeles: Cherub Press.

Abrams, Daniel. 2003. Knowing the Maiden Without Eyes: Reading the Sexual Reconstruction of the Jewish Mystic in a Zoharic Parable. Da’at 50–51: LIX–LXXXIII.
Afterman, Adam. 2004. *The Intention of Prayers in Early Ecstatic Kabbalah: A Study and Critical Edition of an Anonymous Commentary to the Prayers*. Los Angeles: Cherub Press. (In Hebrew)

Afterman, Adam. 2011. *Devequt Mystical Intimacy in Medieval Jewish Thought*. Los Angeles: Cherub Press. (In Hebrew)

Afterman, Adam. 2016. “‘And They Shall Be One Flesh’: On the Language of Mystical Union in Judaism.” Leiden and Boston: Brill.

Afterman, Adam. 2020. *The Mystical Theology of Kabbalah: From God to Godhead*. In *The Cambridge Companion to Jewish Theology* Edited by Steven Kepnes. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 149–82.

Alkabetz, Shlomo Halevy. 2000. *Ayelot Ahavim: Commentary on the Song of Songs*. New Revised Edition with Notes and References. Jerusalem: Ofer Ha’ayalim.

Azriel of Gerona. 1989. *Commentary on the Talmudic Aggadot*. Edited by Isaiah Tishby. Jerusalem: Magnes Press.

Bar-Asher, Avishai. 2019. Illusion versus Reality in the Study of Early Kabbalah: The Commentary on Sefer Yesira Attributed to Isaac the Blind and Its History in Kabbalah Scholarship. *Tarbiz* 86: 269–384. (In Hebrew).

Ben Nahman, Moshe. 2006. *Torat Hashem Temima Ha’shelema*. Full Annotated Edition Based on Five Manuscripts by Yehuda M. Devir. Jerusalem: Y. M. Devir.

Ben-Sasson, Hillel. 2019. *Understanding YHWH: The Name of God in Biblical, Rabbinic, and Medieval Jewish Thought*. London: Palgrave Macmillan.

Ben Sheshet, Jacob. 1969. *Sefer Meshiv Derarim Nechokhim*. Edited by Yehuda A. Vida. With Introduction by Yehuda A. Vida and Efraim Gotlieb. Jerusalem: Israel Academy of Science. (In Hebrew)

Chavel, Charles Ber. 1964. *Kitvei ha-Ramban*. Jerusalem: Mossad Ha-Rav Kook. (In Hebrew)

Chavel, Charles Ber. 1966–1968. *Rabenu Bahya: Commentary on the Torah*. 3 Volumes. Jerusalem: Mossad Ha-Rav Kook. (In Hebrew)

Chavel, Charles Ber. 1964. *Kitvei ha-Ramban*. Jerusalem: Mossad Ha-Rav Kook. (In Hebrew)

Chavel, Charles Ber. 1966–1968. *Rabenu Bahya: Commentary on the Torah*. 3 Volumes. Jerusalem: Mossad Ha-Rav Kook. (In Hebrew)

Azriel of Gerona. n.d. *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, MS Leiden, Werner 32.

Fishbane, Eitan. 2008. The Speech of Being, the Voice of God: Phonetic Mysticism in the Kabbalah of Asher ben David and His Contemporaries. *JQR* 98: 485–521.

Funkenstein, Amos. 1986. *Theology and the Scientific Imagination from the Middle Ages to the Seventeenth Century*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Ginatilla, Joseph. 1970. *Shaare Orah*. Edited, with Introduction and Notes by Joseph Ben Shlomo. Jerusalem: Bialik Institute.

Ginatilla, Joseph. 1994a. *Gates of Light*. Translated with an introduction by Avi Weinstein. London: Harper Collins Publishers.

Ginatilla, Joseph. 1994b. *Sefer ha-Niqqud*. Jerusalem: Yerid ha-Sefarim.

Ginsburg, Elliot K. 1989. *The Sabbath in the Classic Kabbalah*. Albany: SUNY Press.

Gottlieb, Efraim. 1976. *Studies in Kabbala Literature*. Tel Aviv: Haim Rosenberg School of Jewish Studies, Tel Aviv University.

Green, Arthur. 2003. *A Guide to the Zohar*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Gross, Amnon. 2019. *The Writings of Rabbi Moshe De Leon son of Rabbi Shem Tov*. Edited by Amnon Gross. 2 Volumes. Tel Aviv: Amnon Gross.

Ha-Cohen, Isaac Ben Yaakov. 1927. *The Rationales of the Letters*. Edited by Gershom Scholem and Madda’ei ha-Yahadut. Jerusalem: Defus Hamadpis. (In Hebrew)

Halbertal, Moshe. 2020. *Naḥmanides: Law and Mysticism*. New Haven & London: Yale University Press.

Hallamish, Moshe. 1999. *An Introduction to the Kabbalah*. Translated by Ruth Bar-Ilan, and Ora Wiskind-Elper. Albany: SUNY Press.

Hayman, A. Peter. 2004. *Sefer Yeṣira: Edition, Translation and Text-Critical Commentary*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.

Helner-Eshed, Melilia. 2017. *Seekers of the Face—From the Secrets of the Idra Rabba in the Zohar*. Rishon LeZion: Bait. (In Hebrew)

Idel, Moshe. 1981. Perception of the Torah in the Heikhalot Literature and its Reverberations in the Kabbalah. *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 1: 23–83. (In Hebrew).

Idel, Moshe. 1988a. *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.
Idel, Moshe. 1988b. *Language, Torah and Hermeneutics in Abraham Abulafia*. New York: SUNY Press.

Idel, Moshe. 1992a. Jewish Kabbalah and Platonism in the Middle Ages and Renaissance. In *Neoplatonism and Jewish Thought*. Edited by Lenn E. Goodman. New York: State University of New York Press, pp. 319–52.

Idel, Moshe. 1992b. Reification of Language in Jewish Mysticism. In *Mysticism and Language*. Edited by Steven T. Katz. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 42–79.

Idel, Moshe. 1993. Some Remarks on Ritual and Mysticism in Geronese Kabbalah. *Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 3: 111–30. [CrossRef]

Idel, Moshe. 1994. The Voiced Text of the Torah. *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte* 68: 145–66. [CrossRef]

Idel, Moshe. 2000. *Nishmat Eloha: Elohiut ha‑neshamah etzel ha‑ramban veha‑eskolah shelo*. In *ha‑Hayyim ke‑Midrash*. Edited by Shahar Arzy, Michal Fachler and Baruch Kahana. Tel Aviv: Yediot Aharonot, pp. 338–80.

Idel, Moshe. 2002. *Absorbing Perfections: Kabbalah and Interpretation*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

Idel, Moshe. 2005a. *Enchanted Chains: Techniques and Rituals in Jewish Mysticism*. Los Angeles: Cherub Press.

Idel, Moshe. 2005b. *Kabbalah and Eros*. New Haven and London: Yale University Press.

Idel, Moshe. 2010. *Old Worlds, New Mirrors: On Jewish Mysticism and Twentieth‑Century Thought*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Idel, Moshe. 2011. *Kabbalah in Italy 1280–1510: A Survey*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Idel, Moshe. 2017. Kabbalah in Byzantium. In *The Cambridge Intellectual History of Byzantium*. Edited by Anthony Caldellis and Niketas Siniossoglou. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 524–41.

Liebes, Yehuda. 1992. *Studies in Jewish Myth and Jewish Messianism*. Translated by Batya Stein. New York: SUNY Press.

Liebes, Yehuda. 1993. *Studies in the Zohar*. Translated by Arnold Schwartz, Stephanie Nakache, and Penina Peli. New York: SUNY Press.

Liebes, Yehuda. 1994. *Studies in the Zohar*. Translated by Arnold Schwartz, Stephanie Nakache, and Penina Peli. New York: SUNY Press.

Meier, M. 1974. A Critical Edition of the *Sefer Ta’amey ha‑Mitzwoth* (“Book of Reasons of the Commandments”) Attributed to Isaac Ibn Farhi/Section I‑Positive Commandments/With Introduction and Notes. Ph.D. thesis, Brandeis University, Waltham, MA, USA.

Morlok, Elke. 2011. *Rabbi Joseph Gikatilla’s Hermeneutics*. Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck.

Ogren, Brian. 2016. ‘Kabbalah’, *The Cambridge Handbook of Western Mysticism and Esotericism*. Edited by Glenn Alexander Magee. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, pp. 95–106.

Pachter, Mordechai. 1984. The Concept of Devekut in the Homiletical Ethical Writings of 16th Century Safed. In *Studies in Medieval Jewish History and Literature*. Edited by Isadore Twersky. Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, vol. II, pp. 171–93.

Pachter, Mordechai. 2004. *Roots of Faith and Devequt: Studies in the History of Kabbalistic Ideas*. Los Angeles: Cherub Press.

Pedaya, Haviva. 2001. *Name and Sanctuary in the Teaching of R. Isaac the Blind: A Comparative Study in the Writings of the Earliest Kabbalists*. Jerusalem: Magnes Press.

Pedaya, Haviva. 2003. *Nahmanides: Ascension: Cyclical Time and Holy Text*. Tel Aviv: Am Oved. (In Hebrew)

Recanati, Menahem. 1962. *Sefer Tz’amei ha‑Misgav ha‑Shalem*. Edited by Shaul H. Liebermann. London: Mahon Osar Hohmah.

Roi, Biti. 2017. *Love of the Shekhinah: Mysticism and Poetic in Tiqqunei ha‑Zohar*. Ramat Gan: Bar Ilan University Press. (In Hebrew)

Sack, Bracha. 2008. *Solomon Had a Vineyard: God, the Torah and Israel in R. Shlomo Halevi Alkabetz’s Writings*. Beer Sheva: Ben Gurion University Press. (In Hebrew)

Sanders, Jack T. 2001. When Sacred Canopies Collide: The Reception of the Torah of Moses in the Wisdom Literature of the Second‑Temple Period. *Journal for the Study of Judaism in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Period* 32: 121–36. [CrossRef]

Schipper, Bernd, and D. Andrew Teeter, eds. 2013. *Wisdom and Torah: The Reception of ‘Torah’ in the Wisdom Literature of the Second Temple Period*. Leiden and Boston: Brill.
Scholem, Gershom. 1965. The Meaning of the Torah in Jewish Mysticism. In On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism. Edited by Gershom Scholem. Translated by Ralph Manheim. New York: Schocken Books, pp. 32–86.

Scholem, Gershom. 1970. The Kabbalah in Provence. Edited by Rivka Schatz. Jerusalem: Akkademon. (In Hebrew)

Scholem, Gershom. 1972. The Name of God and the Linguistic Theory of the Kabbala. Dingenes 79: 59–80. [CrossRef]

Scholem, Gershom. 1974. Kabbalah. Jerusalem: Keter.

Scholem, Gershom. 1978. Origins of the Kabbalah. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Scholem, Gershom. 1991. On the Mystical Shape of the Godhead: Basic Concepts in the Kabbalah. Edited by Jonathan Chipman. Translated by Joachim Neugroschel. New York: Schocken Books.

Scholem, Gershom. 1995. Major Trend In Jewish Mysticism, 4th ed. New York: Shocken Books.

Segol, Marla. 2012. Word and Image in Medieval Kabbalah: The Text, Commentaries, and Diagrams of the Sefer Yetsirah. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Sobol, Neta. 2018. Transgression of the Torah and the Rectification of God: The Theosophy of Idra Rabba in the Zohar and Its Unique Status in Thirteenth-Century Spanish Kabbalah. Los Angeles: Cherub Press. (In Hebrew)

Tishbi, Isaiah, and Fischel Lachower. 1989. The Wisdom of the Zohar: An Anthology of Texts Systematically Arranged and Rendered into Hebrew by Fischel Lachower and Isaiah Tishby, with Extensive Introductions and Explanations by Isatia Tishby. Translated by D. Goldstein III. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Tishby, Isaiah. 2008. Messianic Mysticism: Moses Hayim Luzzatto and the Padua School. Translated by Morris Hoffman. Oxford: The Littman Library of Jewish Civilization.

Urbach, Efraim E. 1975. The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs. Jerusalem: Magnes Press.

Weiser, Asher. 1976. Abraham Ibn Ezra's Interpretations of the Torah According to Manuscripts and First Prints, Complete with an Introduction, Explanations, References and Citations. Jerusalem: Harav Kook Institute.

Weiss, Tzahi. 2013a. The Reception of Sefer Yetsirah and Jewish Mysticism in the Middle Ages. JQR 103: 26–46. [CrossRef]

Weiss, Tzahi. 2013b. Who is a Beautiful Maiden without Eyes? The Metamorphosis of a Zohar Midrashic Image from a Christian Allegory to a Kabbalistic Metaphor. The Journal of Religion 93: 60–76. [CrossRef]

Weiss, Tzahi. 2014. Letters by which Heaven and Earth were Created: The Origins and the Meanings of the Perceptions of Alphabetic Letters as Independent Units in Jewish Sources of Late Antiquity. Jerusalem: Bialik Press. (In Hebrew)

Weiss, Tzahi. 2018. Sefer Yetsirah and its Contexts: Other Jewish Voices. Philadelphia: Penn Press—The University of Pennsylvania.

Wolfson, Elliot R. 1992. The Theosophy of Shabbetai Donnolo, with Special Emphasis on the Doctrine of the Sefirot in His Sefer Ḥakhmoni. Jewish History 6: 281–316. [CrossRef]

Wolfson, Elliot R. 1993a. The Mystical Significance of Torah Study in German Pietism. JQR 84: 43–78. [CrossRef]

Wolfson, Elliot R. 1993b. Beautiful Maiden Without Eyes: Peshat and Sod in Zoharic Hermeneutics. In The Midrashic Imagination: Jewish Exegesis, Thought, and History. Edited by Michael Fishbane. New York: SUNY Press.

Wolfson, Elliot R. 1994a. The Tree That is All: Jewish-Christian Roots of a Kabbalistic Symbol in Sefer ha-Bahir. Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy 3: 31–76. [CrossRef]

Wolfson, Elliot R. 1994b. Through a Speculum That Shines: Vision and Imagination in Medieval Jewish Mysticism. New Haven: Princeton University Press.

Wolfson, Elliot R. 1995. Circle In the Square: Studies in the Use of Gender in Kabbalistic Symbolism. New York: SUNY Press.

Wolfson, Elliot R. 2000. Abraham Abulafia—Kabbalist and Prophet: Hermeneutics, Theosophy, and Theurgy. Los Angeles: Cherub Press.
Wolfson, Elliot R. 2004a. Beneath the Wings of the Great Eagle: Maimonides and Thirteenth-Century Kabbalah. In Moses Maimonides (1138–1204); His Religious, Scientific, and Philosophical “Wirkungsgeschichte” in Different Cultural Contexts. Edited by Görg K. Has-selhoff and Otfried Fräisse. Wurzburg: Ergon, pp. 209–37.

Wolfson, Elliot R. 2004b. Iconicity of the Text: Reification of the Torah and the Idolatrous Impulse of Zoharic Kabbalah. JQR 11: 1–28. [CrossRef]

Wolfson, Elliot R. 2005a. Language, Eros, Being: Kabbalistic Hermeneutics and Poetic Imagination. New York: Fordham University Press.

Wolfson, Elliot R. 2005b. The Body in the Text: A Kabbalistic Theory of Embodiment. The Jewish Quarterly Review 95: 479–500. [Cross-Ref]

Wolfson, Elliot R. 2006. Venturing Beyond: Law and Morality in Kabbalistic Mysticism. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Wolfson, Elliot R. 2013a. Embodied Letter: Sufi and Kabbalistic Hermeneutics. In A History of Jewish Muslim Relations: From the Origins to the Present Day. Edited by Abdelwahab Meddeb and Benjamin Stora. Princeton: Princeton University Press, pp. 837–52.

Wolfson, Elliot R. 2013b. Zoharic Literature and Midrashic Temporality. In Midrash Unbound: Transformations and Innovations. Edited by Michael Fishbane and Joanna Weinberg. Oxford and Portland: Littman Library of Jewish Civilization, pp. 321–43.

Wolfson, Elliot R. 2020. Heeding the Law beyond the Law: Transgendering alterity and the Hypernomian Perimeter of the Ethical. European Journal of Jewish Studies 14: 215–63. [CrossRef]

Yisraeli, Oded. 2020. “Taking Precedence over the Torah”: Vows and Oaths, Abstinence and Celibacy in Nahmanides’s Oeuvre. Journal of Jewish Thought & Philosophy 28: 121–50.