CHAPTER FOUR

ABULAFIA AND JESUS: METATRON AND SANDALFON

We have touched upon the importance, for Abulafia, of the doctrine that the mystic must face the task of reconstituting his own essential being in order to render himself fully whole and perfected, a replication of God’s own being and of the hypostatic model of the sefirot. Devequt resulted, in Abulafia’s conception, from success in this project, which represented the reconciliation of opposites within the mystic. We have noted this theme with reference to man’s male (that is, pious) and female (that is, idolatrous) features, as well as to his intellect and imagination and his good and evil inclinations. The principle of mystical reconstitution of the opposites within the self recurs in multiform guises in Abulafia’s writings, in motifs which intertwine to form an overarching network of impressive intricacy. The theme’s prevalence in Abulafia’s writing, apparent in a complex edifice of hermeneutical elaboration built upon it, serves to demonstrate the centrality of the mystical obligation, in Abulafia’s estimation, to reconcile the opposites within the self. We will explore some of these themes in this chapter, with an eye toward their impact upon Abulafia’s relationship to Christianity.

One sustained discussion from Ḫosar ʾEden Ganuz presents a cluster of motifs, each of which is pivotal in Abulafia’s wider corpus to this theme of mystical reconstitution. As is frequently the case in Abulafia’s discourse, these motifs intersect, with the result that an extended

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1 Wolfson notes a recurring theme in the Zohar: “…one must incorporate evil, even the demonic side, into one’s spiritual path.” “Light through Darkness: The Ideal of Human Perfection in the Zohar,” p. 76. This principle manifests in two ways in the Zohar. One is through a process of “purification and refinement” and the other is through “containment and unification.” We have already taken note of Abulafia’s interest in the issue of “refinement.” The zoharic authorship, as Wolfson perceives them, sought a state “in which evil and good are contained together as one and not one in which evil and good are separated.” Ibid., p. 88.
analysis of this passage will be helpful at the outset of our effort. We may pick up the thread of Abulafia’s thought in the aftermath of some mathematical elaboration upon the numbers one through ten, tied to his conceptions of the sefirot, as we have seen. Abulafia writes,

...And this for us is the secret of “forbidden and permitted,” because it “binds the seed,” “and releases the ten words [or “things,” devarim].” And revealed from it is the “knot of the arm” of the left that is called the knot of tefillin, which are strings called “threads of the sins” and they are created from “food” of wheat, and it is “thread and blood” and their secret is “raw matter, Hokhmah [the second highest sefira, Wisdom] and Binah [the third highest sefira, Understanding],” “raw matter, sun and moon,” and from there “the mind and the heart and the blood” and the liver and all the limbs, one in the other; and this was revealed before in the matter of the cycle (‘ibbur). And know that if you wish to release the order (erekh) that is made straight (nehlaf ‘el ha-yashar), you decrease the first number (rosh misparo) from the second, and remaining in your hand will be three, which are equivalent, or configured upon one root, which is near to equivalent [here follow mathematical operations based on the numbers one, two and three]...And so all the configurations, when you release the knots and their exchange, return to the straight configuration. And from here the sages said that this hints to man in the knots of the world, year and soul, because he is connected to them by nature, and if he will release their knots from him he will cleave in him who is above them, with the preservation of his soul...[Those who accomplish this] are called scattered singular ones, sequestered (mitbodedim) to know God, blessed be His name, and they subdue themselves from pursuing

2 In differing contexts and for divergent purposes, a number of these motifs have been observed by Scholem, Idel and Wolfson, as will be noted as we proceed. Idel, The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia, p. 135, translates a portion of this passage.
3 See above, pp. 85–87.
5 “Forbidden and permitted” shares the same numerical value as “binds the seed,” eight hundred and eighty-eight. “And releases the ten words” has a numerical value of one thousand eight hundred and eighty-seven; however, Abulafia will frequently take the value of the number one thousand and transpose it, adding it to the single digit position, which in this case would yield the value of “forbidden and permitted,” eight hundred and eighty-eight. For another example of this practice, see above, p. 103 n. 207.
6 Having as well a numerical value of eight hundred and eighty-eight.
7 The numerical values of “threads,” “the sins,” “food of wheat,” “thread and blood,” “raw matter,” “Hokhmah” and “and Binah” are all seventy-three.
8 The numerical values of “sun and moon” and “the mind and the heart and the blood” are one hundred and forty-six and one hundred and fifty-one, respectively. The difference could be the result of a scribal error, where a definite article, whose numerical value is five, may have been added to the second phrase.