Liat Sivek

YOM ṬOV LIPMANN'S STAIRWAY TO HEAVEN: COSMOLOGY AND KABBALAH IN LATE MEDIEVAL JEWISH CUSTOM

MA Thesis in Medieval Studies

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YOM ṬOV LIPMANN'S STAIRWAY TO HEAVEN: COSMOLOGY

AND KABBALAH IN LATE MEDIEVAL JEWISH CUSTOM

by

Liat Sivek

(Israel)

Thesis submitted to the Department of Medieval Studies,
Central European University, Budapest, in partial fulfillment of the requirements
of the Master of Arts degree in Medieval Studies.

Accepted in conformance with the standards of the CEU.

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Abstract

Jewish intellectual activity in Ashkenaz saw significant changes in the late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. One of the leading intellectuals of these times was Rabbi Yom Ṭov Lipmann Mühlhausen, whose famous polemic treatise, *Sefer Nitsaḥon*, has been the focus of many studies. However, his other works have received less scholarly interest though they offer myriad examples of Lipmann's unique approach to interpreting Jewish custom by integrating philosophy and Kabbalah.

In this study, I offer a comprehensive examination of Lipmann's less studied works in order to sketch a broader picture of his thought and interpretation of Jewish custom. This study is based on the cosmological framework Lipmann established in *Sefer ha-Eshkol* [Book of the cluster], which served as a theoretical guidebook for his later compilations. Lipmann's framework is based on Aristotelian physics and on Kabbalistic emanation theory. The author offers using both as the means for achieving *kawwanah* (proper intent), which must be present in Jewish customs in order to successfully fulfill them.

Through a close reading of Lipmann's texts and by highlighting cross-reference points within them, we can reach a fuller understanding of the author's approach to Jewish customs, specifically prayer and Hebrew writing. By interpreting both customs within a cosmological framework, Lipmann offers a way in which one can turn the act of reciting Jewish prayers and writing the Hebrew alphabet into a journey through the heavens.

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I would first like to express my gratitude to my supervisor, Carsten Wilke, for his expert advice and encouragement. Closely reading and attentive to every word, yet always with the bigger picture in mind, his guidance helped me shape a jumble of ideas into a coherent study. I also thank Zsuzsa Reed, who worked tirelessly to rid my paper of any mistakes and give it its final touch. I thank Thomas Rooney of the CEU Center for Academic Writing, whose valuable comments helped make this study more reader-friendly. A special thank-you goes to Annabella Pal of the Medieval Studies Department, for her sensitivity, support and help in accommodating my every need concerning my academic life at CEU.

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Finally, I must thank my dearest friends, who made this year unforgettable. Last, I thank Oded – without his understanding, advice, and above all, his support, this study (and my life) would not be complete.

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List of Abbreviations

HJP   Frank, Daniel H. and Leaman, Oliver, ed. *History of Jewish Philosophy*. NY: Routledge, 1997.

JSD   *Jahrbuch des Simon-Dubnow-Instituts / Simon Dubnow Institute Yearbook,* vol. 8. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht 2009.

SAB   *Sefer Alpha Beta*. In Samson ben Eliezer. *Barukh she-ʾamar*, , 20a-28b, Warsaw: Baumritter Press, 1877.

ShE   Kaufmann, Yehuda. *Rabbi Yom Ṭov Lipman Milhoyzn: baʿal ha-nitsaḥon, ha-ḥoker we-ha-mequbal we-sefaraw ha-ʾeshkol we-kawwanat ha-tefillah* [Rabbi Yom-Ṭov Lipmann Mühlhausen: the apologete, kabbalist and philosophical writer and his books the cluster and the intention of prayer]. NY: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1927, 127-75.

SKhT Kaufmann, Yehuda. *Rabbi Yom Ṭov Lipman Milhoyzn: baʿal ha-nitsaḥon, ha-ḥoker we-ha-mequbal we-sefaraw ha-ʾeshkol we-kawwanat ha-tefillah* [Rabbi Yom-Ṭov Lipmann Mühlhausen: the apologete, kabbalist and philosophical writer and his books the cluster and the intention of prayer]. NY: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1927, 181-90.

Introduction[*]

> "So the L{ORD} God sent [Adam] from the Garden of Eden to work the ground [Gen. 3:23]," for He first placed him in the Garden to "work it and take care of it." This means he was first placed in the highest level to work and take care of the intellectual, and now he is sent to work the earthly.[1]
>
> (*Sefer ha-Eshkol*)

The origin and order of the universe have mystified humanity for millennia. Theories on the topic have been subject to ongoing developments in the realms of astronomy, physics, theology, mystics, and many more disciplines. Humans seek to understand the workings of the heavens also in the hope of finding answers about how best we can lead life down on earth. Fifteenth-century Rabbi Yom-Ṭov Lipmann Mühlhausen, one of the most prolific Jewish writers of his time, not only gives an outstanding example of philosophical and, in particular, cosmological concerns in medieval Ashkenaz, but also develops a unique approach to the understanding and even the practice of Jewish religious commandments.[2]

Balancing and finding the way to "take care" of both the "intellectual" and the "earthly," or rather the philosophical and the practical aspects of Jewish religious life, seems to be Lipmann's main mission. *Sefer ha-Eshkol* [The book of the cluster] quoted above is but

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[1] וישלחהו ה' מגן עדן לעבוד את האדמה, כי תחילה הניחו בגן לעבדה ולשמרה, ר"ל תחילה הניחו במדרגה העליונה לעבוד ולשמור השכליות כפי', ועתה שולח לעבוד הארציות. *Sefer ha-Eshkol*, JTS 2269, fol.16r. All translations of Lipmann's texts throughout this study are mine, unless otherwise noted.

[2] The term "Ashkenaz" was used to designate the area of Jewish settlement in north-western Europe, initially on the banks of the Rhine, and became identified with German Jews ("Ashkenazim"), as well as their descendants in other countries. Sources from the fourteenth century have used the term to identify a distinct cultural entity, including the communities of northern France and the Slavonic countries previously known as *Erets Kenaʿan*. See *Encyclopaedia Judaica Online* 2nd edition, s.v. "Ashkenaz," http://go.galegroup.com/ps/i.do?id=GALE%7CCX2587501462&v=2.1&u=imcpl1111&it=r&p=GVRL&sw=w&asid=790858e9566cdd8f0fa215f1d856f7cb (accessed April 2015).

one example from Lipmann's literary corpus in which he offers a unique approach to understanding and, more importantly, practicing Judaism.

Having authored seventeen surviving works and eight additional texts attributed to him, Lipmann's works touch on biblical commentary, Jewish liturgy, *responsa* literature, and most prominently, philosophy and Jewish mystics.[3] Despite this vast and diverse body of work, most scholars mention Lipmann only when discussing his one polemic treatise *Sefer Nitsaḥon* (Book of contention or Book of victory), considered "the most widely known polemical work among Jews and Christians in the Middle Ages and early modern period."[4] Thus, Lipmann's significance is reduced to the confines of Jewish medieval polemics, and though the same scholars state how unique he was in his attitude towards philosophy and Kabbalah, they support those statements by quoting examples mainly from Lipmann's polemic treatise.

The common idea that Lipmann's importance "lies in his apologia of Judaism"[5] has diminished scholarly interest in Lipmann's other surviving works, which could offer a more encompassing perspective of his thought. This study asks how Lipmann "takes care" of the practical and ritual aspect of medieval Judaism within philosophical and Kabbalistic theoretical frameworks, and what type of relationship he believed should exist between the three. In other words – what is the nature of the relationship between philosophy, Kabbalah, and custom, and how do these three serve each other?

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[3] The full list is offered by Yehuda Kaufman, *Rabbi Yom Ṭov Lipman Milhoyzn: baʿal ha-nitsaḥon, ha-ḥoker we-ha-mequbal we-sefaraw ha-ʾeshkol we-kawwanat ha-tefillah* [Rabbi Yom-Ṭov Lipmann Mühlhausen: the apologete, kabbalist and philosophical writer and his books the cluster and the intention of prayer] (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1927), 50-86.

[4] Indeed, *Sefer Nitsaḥon* survived in forty-four manuscripts, the largest number of a Jewish Ashkenazic work to survive, and was also a target of Christian criticism and counter argumentation. Its importance for modern scholarship is therefore understandable. For further research on this issue, see Ora Limor and Israel J. Yuval, "Skepticism and Conversion: Jews, Christians and Doubters in Sefer ha-Nizzahon," in *Hebraica Veritas? Christian Hebraists and the Study of Judaism in Early Modern Europe*, ed. Allison P. Coudert and Jeffery S. Shoulson (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), esp. 160-165.

[5] Vladimír Sadek, "Yom Tov Lipman Mühlhuasen and his Rationalistic Way of Thinking," *Judaica Bohemia* 24 (1988): 98.

In order to answer these questions, this study conducts a thematic inquiry into Lipmann's works and offers an account of Lipmann's cosmology, which runs as a connecting thread between them. Using his account of the order of the universe, Lipmann discusses and interprets Jewish rituals, focusing on liturgy and the production of sacred artifacts. He addresses both using a two-leveled cosmological language – philosophical and Kabbalistic. By doing so, I argue, Lipmann intentionally designed his texts to be read not only by a select elite, but by anyone wishing to fulfill their everyday religious obligations in the best possible way – with the fullest and truest conviction and intent.

Since Lipmann's texts demonstrate an integration of philosophy and Kabbalah, the first chapter offers a brief overview of these two fields, and locates his work within a circle of Prague rabbis who took an exceptional interest in both. It then introduces Lipmann's *Sefer ha-Eshkol*, in which this integration is most prominent. *Sefer ha-Eshkol*, completed after *Sefer Nitsaḥon*, is also the main text that systematically outlines Lipmann's cosmology.[6] The text consists of two parts in which Lipmann explains the order of the physical and the metaphysical world, as well as the thresholds between both.

Chapter two will explore this text and its practical implications as expressed in a later composition on the required state of mind one should be in while engaged in prayer (*Sefer Kawwanat ha-Tefillah*, The book on the intent of prayer). It will present additional links between *Sefer ha-Eshkol* and later works of Lipmann in order to stress the significance of cosmological understanding and its relevance to Ashkenazic medieval custom.

Other than prayer and various liturgical practices, Lipmann also wrote a text dedicated entirely to the correct method one should use when writing in Hebrew, titled *Sefer Alpha Beta*, which is the main focus of chapter three. Though saturated with both

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[6] In *Sefer Nitsaḥon* Lipmann refers to events that took place in the year 1400 and mentions the year 1410 in his calculations of the "end of days." Thus, he had to have completed the treatise between these years. See *Sefer Nitsaḥon* [The book of victory], ed. Theodor Hackspan, Altdorf near Nuremberg, 1644, Facsimile reprint, (Jerusalem, 1984) §335. See also Limor and Yuval, "Skepticism and Conversion," 161.

philosophical and Kabbalistic themes and explanations, Lipmann explicitly devoted *Sefer Alpha Beta* to the work of a scribe (*sofer*) of Torah scrolls, *tefillin* (phylacteries) and *mezuzot*. Each letter receives a separate section with a detailed and precise description of its shape and the reasons behind it. I shall go further in this chapter and offer an analysis of the text within the anthropological theoretical framework of sacred spaces.[7] I suggest that this text is designed to demonstrate how the practice of Hebrew writing is the equivalent of creating a sacred space, both physical and metaphysical.

My intertextual approach to Lipmann's works follows the author's own method. Lipmann himself links the texts by embedding references within them, constantly referring the reader to his previous compilations, "forcing" them to familiarize themselves with more than just one text. Thus, the author points to a consistent line of thought that can be traced by following these references. As such, this study follows Lipmann's lead, and offers a comprehensive approach to his works, placing them (and him) in their wider yet unique context of Jewish intellectual activity in fifteenth-century Ashkenaz.

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[7] For example, Anna Lipphardt, Julia Brauch, and Alexandra Nocke, "Exploring Jewish Space: An Approach," in *Jewish Topographies: Visions of Space, Traditions of Place*, ed. Anna Lipphardt, Julia Brauch, and Alexandra Nocke (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008).

Chapter One – The Roots of Lipmann's Cosmology

At the opening of his *Sefer Nitsaḥon* Yom Tov Lipmann Mühlhausen (d. before 1421)[8] explains that he has gathered its arguments in 354 passages, "following the number of [days in] the lunar year, which [the people of] Israel go by, so to say that on each day of the year one should be vigilant about their faith." Furthermore, these 354 passages are divided into seven parts, "one for every day of Creation."[9] From the very start of his polemic treatise, Lipmann comments on the basic fact that the Jewish calendar goes by the lunar cycle, distinguishing it from Christian organization of time.[10] In a later section, discussing the attributes of a prophet and the nature of "seeing," Lipmann explains how natural philosophy and the understanding of the spheres and intellects are actually at the root of Jewish religion, and can bring one closer to God.[11]

Lipmann does not justify – and indeed sees no need to defend – his employment of philosophy within a Jewish polemic treatise, though it was a highly uncommon position in his time. This is but one example of the author's unique integration of philosophy into his religious writings. To understand the context of Lipmann's work, which stood out against earlier Ashkenazic authors, this chapter traces the spread of philosophical and scientific thought in medieval Ashkenaz, as well as that of Kabbalistic traditions which also became central in Lipmann's texts. It addresses the circumstances that prompted Jewish rabbinic figures, presumably occupied with education and Halakhah (Jewish legal scholarship), to turn to alternative Jewish and non-Jewish texts containing philosophical and scientific material.

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[8] For this dating, see Israel J. Yuval, *Ḥakhamim be-doram: ha-manhigut ha-ruḥanit shel yehudei germaniyah be-shilhei yemei ha-beinayim* [Scholars in their time: the religious leadership of German Jews in the Late Middle Ages] (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1988), 106. Cf. Kaufman, *Rabbi Yom Ṭov*, 26 (note 99).

[9] *Sefer Nitsaḥon*, Introduction.

[10] On the implications following a different calendar from that of the dominant religion, see Elisheva Carlebach, *Palaces of Time: Jewish Calendar and Culture in Early Modern Europe* (Cambridge, MA.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011), esp. chapter 2.

[11] *Sefer Nitsaḥon* §136.

Standing in the center of this discussion are the members of a unique intellectual group that formed in Prague in the early fifteenth century. It was in the context of this group that Lipmann wrote his philosophical-Kabbalistic works. Within the discussion on philosophy, this chapter will focus particularly on cosmology, the central theme of this paper.

Philosophy, Kabbalah and the Prague Circle

The topic of Ashkenazic philosophy seems to have been overlooked by most scholarly overviews of medieval Jewish philosophy. This absence is evident in the works of Julius (Isaac) Guttmann and Colette Sirat, who offered a comprehensive overview of Jewish philosophy from the early Middle Ages.[12] Maintaining this approach, even studies that focused only on specific centuries did not find a place to mention Ashkenaz. One example is Charles Manekin's "Hebrew Philosophy in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries: an Overview." The author surveys the differences between Jewish philosophers of the early fourteenth century and the late fourteenth to fifteenth centuries. Opening with Moses ben-Maimon (Maimonides, 1135/8-1204) and the Hebrew translation of his *Guide of the Perplexed*, which marked the beginning of the "Golden age of Hebrew philosophy," Manekin succinctly describes the process through which philosophical texts spread throughout southern France, Italy and later Spain.[13]

According to Manekin, "[m]ost Hebrew philosophy of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries is extant only in manuscript or poorly edited printed editions."[14] Despite this scarcity, Manekin puts together quite an impressive list of texts, none of which originated

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[12] Julius Guttmann, *Philosophies of Judaism: The History of Jewish Philosophy from Biblical Times to Franz Rosenzweig* (New York: Shocken Books, 1964); Colette Sirat, *A History of Jewish Philosophy in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993 [1985]).

[13] Charles H. Manekin, "Hebrew Philosophy in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries: An Overview," in *History of Jewish Philosophy*, ed. Daniel H. Frank and Oliver Leaman (NY: Routledge, 1997), 350-78.

[14] Manekin, "Hebrew Philosophy," 351. See also the table comparing the number of surviving Jewish manuscripts containing science in various regions between 1101-1500, provided by Malachi Beit-Arié, in Gad Freudenthal, "Introduction," in *Jahrbuch des Simon-Dubnow-Instituts / Simon Dubnow Institute Yearbook,* vol. 8 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009), 21.

outside of northern Spain and Provence. The very term "Ashkenaz" does not appear once in the article, and makes a single appearance in the entire anthology in an article devoted to Jewish mysticism.[15]

In 1972 Ephraim Kupfer published a study attempting to demonstrate the existence of Ashkenazic philosophical and rationalistic thought between the end of the fourteenth century and the fifteenth century.[16] However, a closer look at the examples given by Kupfer reveals this interest in philosophy occurred in the margins of Ashkenaz – Poland, north Italy, and Prague.[17] It is in the latter that a circle of rabbis was identified, who produced texts involving both philosophy and mysticism. Were these examples an exception, and indeed did no other Ashkenazic scholars engage in philosophy, creating a sheer contrast to the situation in Spain and Provence?

Tamás Visi explains that whereas in Ashkenaz "natural sciences did not form a systematic curriculum of studies grounding new religious ideals based on the intellect rather than tradition," Jewish philosophers of the Mediterranean basin had no reservation to incorporate "a rationalistic interpretation of the fundamental doctrines and practices of Judaism."[18] As Talya Fishman has demonstrated, it was the Talmud that still stood firmly as

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[15] Elliot R. Wolfson, "Jewish Mysticism: A Philosophical Overview," in *HJP*, 461.

[16] Ephraim Kupfer, "Li-demutah ha-tarbutit shel yahadut Ashkenaz we-ḥakhmeiha ba-meʾot ha-14-15" [Concerning the cultural image of German Jewry and its rabbis in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries], *Tarbits* 42 (1973): 113-47.

[17] For the question of Moravian and Bohemian Jewry being part of "Ashkenaz,", see Tamás Visi, *On the Peripheries of Ashkenaz: Medieval Jewish Philosophers in Normandy and in the Czech Lands from the Twelfth to the Fifteenth Century* (Olomouc: Kurt and Ursula Schubert Center for Jewish Studies, Palacky University, 2011), 118-24, https://www.academia.edu/2045530/On_the_Peripheries_of_Ashkenaz_Medieval_Jewish_Philosophes_in_Normandy_and_in_the_Czech_Lands_from_the_Twelfth_to_the_Fifteenth_Centuries (accessed January 2015).

[18] Tamás Visi, "Plague, Persecution, and Philosophy: Avigdor Kara and the Consequences of the Black Death," in *Intricate Interfaith Networks: Quotidian Jewish-Christian Contacts in the Middle Ages*, ed. Gerhard Jaritz and Ephraim Shoham-Steiner (Turnhout: Brepols, forthcoming). My thanks to Dr. Shoham-Steiner for allowing me access to the material of the forthcoming publication. See also Y. Tzvi Langermann, "Was There Science in Ashkenaz ? The Ashkenazic Reception of Some Early-Medieval Hebrew Scientific Texts," in *JSD*, 1–26.

the exclusive source of knowledge in the Ashkenazic context for both arenas of education and adjudication, through which the guidelines for living a Jewish life came to be construed.[19]

Indeed, as both Joseph Davis and Visi have pointed out, until the fourteenth century there is a distinct lack of Ashkenazic philosophical writing. However, this was not a result of ignorance or social differences that made access to and interest in philosophy rare in Ashkenaz, but rather a result of a deliberate choice not to incorporate philosophy in Jewish religious texts. Jewish scholars of thirteenth and early fourteenth-century Ashkenaz often did engage with philosophy, but kept it to themselves. This set them apart from their counterparts in the Mediterranean basin, better known as the Sephardim, who had no such reservations.[20]

The Prague circle, to which Lipmann belonged, marks a break from this Ashkenazic trend. Like the differently unique circle of Ḥasidei Ashkenaz (the Pious of Ashkenaz), questions about the Prague circle's extent and influence have been addressed in previous research.[21] Whatever the scope of the circle's influence, it is agreed that its rabbis *were* engaged in philosophical studies for different purposes than their predecessors.[22] What was the background of these rabbis and what circumstances brought each to be identified with the Prague circle?

Though there is no evidence of Lipmann's date or place of birth, there is no dispute over the significance of the period of time he spent in Prague, with which he was identified in

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[19] Talya Fishman, *Becoming the People of the Talmud: Oral Torah as Written Tradition in Medieval Jewish Cultures* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011). For a description of the process that brought the Talmud to center stage in medieval Ashkenaz (focused on the thirteenth-century tosafists), see chapter 4.

[20] Joseph M. Davis, "Philosophy, Dogma, and Exegesis in Medieval Ashkenazic Judaism: The Evidence of Sefer Hadrat Qodesh," *AJS Review* 18, no.2 (1993): 195-6; Tamás Visi, "The Emergence of Philosophy in Ashkenazic Contexts: The Case of Czech Lands in the Early Fifteenth Century," in *JSD*, 220. For an overview of the differences between Ashkenazic Jews and the Spanish originated Jewry, see Hirsch J. Zimmels, *Ashkenazim and Sephardim: Their Relations, Differences and Problems as Reflected in the Rabbinical Responsa* (Hoboken, NJ: Ktav Publishing House, 1996).

[21] Such questions fall into the wider and earlier debate over the acceptance of philosophy in medieval Ashkenaz, traced in Davis, "Philosophy, Dogma, and Exegesis," 195-202. On the question regarding the Pious of Ashkenaz see Ivan G. Marcus, "The Historical Meaning of *Hasidei Ashkenaz*: Fact, Fiction or Cultural Self-Image?" in *Gershom Scholem's Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism 50 Years After*: *Proceedings of the Sixth International Conference on the History of Jewish Mysticism*, ed. Peter Schäfer and Joseph Dan (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1993), 103-14.

[22] On the possibility of the circle's ongoing influence in the late fifteenth century, see Visi, *On the Peripheries*, chapter 12.

several contemporary Jewish texts that referred to him as "Rabbi Lipmann of Prague."[23] As for his education, in his *Sefer Alpha Beta*, Lipmann mentions one of his sources as Samson ben Eliezer, the author of *Barukh she-ʾamar* (Blessed He who spoke), who resided in Prague from an early age, as stated in the introduction to his own treatise.[24] Around the year 1415 Lipmann left Prague, spending his last years in Erfurt, where he also presided over a rabbinic synod, and died in 1421.[25]

While in Prague, Lipmann was part of the Prague Jewish tribunal along with two rabbis who also belonged to the same philosophical circle, Avigdor Kara (c.1345-1439) and Menahem ben Yaakov Shalem.[26] Both were engaged with philosophical works, but Kara showed a greater inclination towards Kabbalah, as demonstrated by a Kabbalistic commentary he wrote on Psalm 150 which he dedicated to his friend Shalem. Kara is also known for an elegy he wrote after the 1389 Prague riots against the Jewish community under the title *ʾet kol ha-telaʾah* (All the afflictions), which was incorporated into the Prague prayer rite for the Day of Atonement.[27]

Unlike Kara and Lipmann, Shalem is described by Visi as a "full-fledged post-Maimonidean philosopher," who opposed the combination of philosophy with Kabbalah. He

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[23] For example, see Shalom of Neustadt, *Hilkhot u-minhagei rabenu Shalom me-Neustadt* [The rules and customs of our rabbi Shalom of Neustadt], ed. Shlomo Spitzer (Jerusalem: Mekhon Yerushalaim, 1977) §164. For a summary of scholarly attempts to identify Lipmann's origins and the reasons for linking him to the city of Mühlhuasen in Thuringia, see Kaufman, *Rabbi Yom Ṭov*, 13-19. For further information on Lipmann's life, see: Frank Talmage, "Mavoʾ" [Introduction], in Yom Ṭov Lipmann Mühlhausen, *Sefer Nitsaḥon* [The book of victory], ed. Theodor Hackspan, Altdorf near Nuremberg, 1644, Facsimile reprint (Jerusalem: Merkaz Dinur, 1983), 12-15; Yuval, *Ḥakhamim be-doram*, 152-55.

[24] *Barukh she-ʾamar* (Warsaw: Baumritter Press, 1877), 1. Lipmann's *Sefer Alpha Beta* will be addressed in the third chapter. On *Barukh she-ʾamar,* see Israel M. Ta-Shma, *Halakhah, minhag u-metsiʾut be-Ashkenaz: 1100-1350* ["Halakhah," custom, and reality in Ashkenaz: 1100-1350] (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1996), 106-10.

[25] Arye Maimon, Mordechai Breuer, and Yacov Guggenheim, ed., *Germania Judaica,* vol.3: 1350-1519, pt.2 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1995), 1134; Yuval, *Ḥakhamim be-doram*, 106.

[26] The evidence of this is discussed by Kaufman, *Rabbi Yom Ṭov*, 15-16, and by Frank Talmage, "Mavoʾ," 13. For a discussion on Kara's date of birth, see Visi, *On the Peripheries*, 162-63. No such information has been uncovered regarding Shalem. On the identification of Shalem as Menahem Agler, see Kupfer, "Li-demutah ha-tarbutit," 114-17.

[27] The historical account of these riots are described by: Barbara Newman, "The Passion of the Jews of Prague: The Pogrom of 1389 and the Lessons of a Medieval Parody," *Church History* 81, no. 1 (March 2012): 1–11; Thomas A. Fudge, *Jan Hus: Religious Reform and Social Revolution in Bohemia* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010), 21.

produced commentaries on Maimonides and a philosophical compilation on achieving intellectual perfection and earning individual providence. Though all three rabbis are referred to in later texts, Visi notes that they probably did not pass on their philosophical tradition. Thus, no "second generation" of the Prague circle can be identified to have emerged. He dates its disappearance to the 1430s and 1440s, with the death of Kara (1439).[28]

As mentioned above, most Ashkenazic philosophical and scientific texts from the early fifteenth century can be traced back to the members of the Prague circle. What brought on this concentration of philosophical engagement in Prague's rabbinate? Several explanations have been offered for the rising interest in philosophy in late fourteenth-century Prague. Ora Limor and Israel Yuval focus on the activity of Prague University, established in 1348.[29] Visi has further elaborated on this line, suggesting that at the end of the fourteenth century the Black Death had brought science (specifically medicine) to the forefront of scholarly activities, crossing the borders of the university and creating a "de-professionalization of science."[30] To these Visi adds the construction of the astronomical clock in Prague, described by the local Town Council as an instrument "in which the sun carries out its real movement along the Zodiac […] just as [it does] in the heavens."[31] The astronomical clock represented human achievement of imitating the natural order of the heavens – a feat also pursued by the rabbis of the Prague circle, who turned to the fields of astronomy, astrology, and Aristotelian natural philosophy as legitimate avenues to search for explanations for human life and the lower realm in their upper counterpart, the world of the spheres and divine intellects.

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[28] Visi, *On the Peripheries*, 160-61. For the research regarding both rabbis, see: Kupfer, "Li-demutah ha-tarbutit," 114-25; Frank Talmage, "Mi-kitvei rabbi Avigdor Qara' we-rabbi Menaḥem Shalem [From the writings of Rabbi Avigdor Kara and Rabbi Menachem Shalem]," in *Hagut u-maʿase: sefer zikaron le-Shimʿon Rabidovitch be-mlʾot ʿesrim we-ḥamesh shanim le-moto*, ed. Abraham Greenbaum and Abraham Ivri, (Tel Aviv: Cheriqover, 1983), 43-52, and "Angels, Anthems, and Anathemas: Aspects of Popular Religion in Fourteenth-Century Bohemian Judaism," *Jewish History* 6 (1992): 13-20.

[29] Limor and Yuval, "Skepticism and Conversion," 173-74.

[30] Visi, "Plague, Persecution, and Philosophy" and "The Emergence of Philosophy," 219.

[31] Visi, "The Emergence of Philosophy," 215.

Visi points out that the fact that certain Jewish scholars engaged with philosophical texts is not as exceptional as the fact that these particular figures took on prominent roles within the Jewish community of Prague.[32] In this study, I take this observation even further towards the conclusion that the texts written by these rabbis were not meant solely for private study of some privileged elite, but for setting the tone for the general practice of the community.

Labeling Lipmann: Philosopher, Kabbalist or Halakhist?

Medieval Jewish thought can be roughly divided into three basic categories: Talmudic, philosophic, and Kabbalistic. Such a division is by no means a modern scholarly invention, but was already introduced in a Sephardic medieval text written by Rabbi Isaac ben Moses ha-Levi (known as Profiat Duran, d. c. 1414).[33] The plainest difference between the Talmudic and philosophic categories is the absence of any favorable mention of pagan philosophers in the former, as well as any motivation to study their writings. The development of a Jewish philosophic discipline required the introduction of unique terminology and rhetorical conventions. This process was mostly based on the works of Saadia Gaon (882-942) and Moses Maimonides.[34]

The Book of Doctrines and Opinions (*Sefer ha-ʾemunot we-ha-deʿot*), written by Saadia Gaon in the tenth century, was translated from Arabic into Hebrew in the eleventh century, and introduced the basic elements of what would be termed medieval Jewish philosophy. These included the use of rational argumentation in support of Jewish belief, as well as in search for perfecting one's intellect and spirit (and thus one's faith) while making

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[32] Visi "The Emergence of Philosophy," 213-43.
[33] Isaac ben Moses ha-Levi [Profiat Duran], *Sefer Maʿaseh ʾefod*, ed. Yom Tov Friedlander (Vienna: Holzwarth Press, 1865), 4-9.
[34] Visi, *On the Peripheries*, 22-23.

use of any "outside" sources, even if written by non-Jews.[35] With the same intentions, Aristotelian physics and metaphysics were introduced by Maimonides' *Guide of the Perplexed* and *Mishneh Torah*. The effect of these works can also be detected in medieval Ashkenaz, including Lipmann's texts.

Both authors are mentioned by Lipmann throughout his works, but these references are especially emphasized in his *Sefer Nitsaḥon*. Daniel Lasker interpreted this as a mark of change and increase in philosophical interest on the part of Jewish polemicists in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries. Lipmann was "familiar with the kind of philosophical polemics which were common in Spain at that time," but did not widely employ such argumentation in non-polemic contexts. By philosophical polemics "common in Spain," Lasker refers to arguing against Christianity by means of reason and rationalistic philosophy.[36]

Lipmann, in sum, used philosophical thought for religious purposes, but this does not disqualify him as a Jewish philosopher. The notion of "Jewish philosophy" has been challenged in recent research. Alexander Broadie asks "how Jewish can a philosophy be if it is Aristotelian?"[37] Conversely, Steven Wasserstrom claims that Judah ha-Levi's (c.1075-1141) *Kuzari* was actually an "*anti*-philosophical text," and a work of piety.[38] As for Maimonides, while the *Guide of the Perplexed* is labeled "the greatest of Jewish philosophical works" and the "ultimate piece of medieval Jewish philosophy,"[39] Manekin

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[35] Visi, *On the Peripheries*, 30.

[36] Daniel J. Lasker, "Jewish Philosophical Polemics in Ashkenaz," in *Contra Iudaeos: Ancient and Medieval Polemics between Christians and Jews*, ed. Ora Limor and Guy Stroumsa (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996), 195-97; 210. See also the definition of rationalistic philosophy given by David Berger, "Polemic, Exegesis, Philosophy, and Science: On the Tenacity of Ashkenazic Modes of Thought," in *JSD*, 27-28.

[37] Alexander Broadie, "The Nature of Medieval Jewish Philosophy," in *HJP*, 88.

[38] Steven M. Wasserstrom, "The Islamic Social and Cultural Context," in *HJP*, 102.

[39] Shalom Carmy and David Shatz,"The Bible as a Source for Philosophical Reflection," in *HJP*, 15; Broadie, "The Nature," 90.

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points out the fact that other than one unnamed work on logic, "Maimonides himself never wrote a treatise or commentary on a purely philosophical topic."[40]

Though an "artificial construct" of the nineteenth century, the term "Jewish philosophy" will be used here, but has to be distinguished in the Ashkenazic context from "science."[41] David Berger explains that unlike in the Sephardic arena, where philosophy and natural science went hand in hand, the two were quite separate disciplines in Ashkenaz. On the one hand, much opposition had risen in Ashkenaz towards a type of thought which encouraged inquiry into the plain and rationalistic meaning of biblical texts and placed philosophy as a tool for understanding the Torah. On the other hand, this separation of religious thought from philosophy actually played in favor of the easier infiltration of science, which became accessible to those who sought to study the natural world.[42]

Lipmann and his works have been subject to various definitions and labels. The few scholars who have dealt extensively with his texts seem to apply every category possible to the author – philosopher, kabbalist, polemicist, halakhist – as well as to his works, which have been tagged as philosophical, esoteric, polemic, and even popular.[43] Whichever label one chooses, it is essential to understand the intellectual culture in which Lipmann wrote. To this end it is important to mention how heavily Lipmann drew upon Maimonides and his *Guide*, and ultimately upon Aristotelian natural philosophy. However, unlike Maimonides, who stressed that his philosophical writings were intended for a select elite, Lipmann shaped his works in a way accessible to any literate Jew, emphasizing the importance of studying philosophy as a complementary discipline.[44]

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[40] Manekin, "Hebrew Philosophy," 351.
[41] Daniel H. Frank, "What is Jewish Philosophy?," in *HJP*, 8.
[42] Berger, "Polemic, Exegesis, Philosophy," 39. This could also be connected to the earlier discussion on the lack of interest in philosophy in medieval Ashkenazic texts.
[43] See, for example, Talmage, "Mavoʾ," 17-18.
[44] Such a tendency has also been detected in the writings of Levi ben Gershom (Gersonides). See Marc Saperstein, "The Social and Cultural Context: Thirteenth to Fifteenth Centuries," in *HJP*, 295.

The third and last category of Jewish medieval thought listed was Kabbalah. While a clear distinction between philosophy and Kabbalah would be true for the Sephardic realm, where the two were "polar opposites," when it comes to Ashkenaz they are described as historically intertwined and "almost indistinguishable."[45] Rather than separating the two disciplines, one could review both philosophy and Kabbalah within two esoteric textual traditions in which they are combined, *maʿaseh bereshit* (Account of Creation) and *maʿaseh merkavah* (Account of the Chariot). These two rabbinic notions also serve as the basis of Lipmann's cosmology.

The terms *maʿaseh bereshit* and *maʿaseh merkavah* are introduced in a Mishnah (*Ḥagigah* 2:1), as two forms of esoteric knowledge with several restrictions regarding their study. While the Account of Creation consists of the full understanding of the first chapter of Genesis, the Account of the Chariot refers to the first chapter of Ezekiel and his vision of the heavenly chariot and throne. The earliest example of a literary description of *maʿaseh merkavah* is found in the Book of Enoch (chapter 14), which set a pattern for early forms of Jewish mysticism. People studying the Account of the Chariot and the ascent to it did not aspire to an understanding of the true nature of God, but to perceive the heavenly world itself, which also led to practices striving to imitate the heavenly ascension and vision. At the same time, other esoteric traditions began to crystallize round the first chapter of Genesis and the story of creation, which was called the Account of Creation.[46]

Despite the restrictions of the Mishnah, the Account of the Chariot was in fact studied by the ancient rabbis, as evident from the textual genre named the *Hekhalot* (chambers) literature. This genre was formulated as early as the Talmudic period through the third to eighth centuries, and tells the story of a rabbi's ascent (usually Rabbi Ishmael or Rabbi

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[45] Davis, "Philosophy, Dogma, and Exegesis," 221. See also Wolfson, "Jewish Mysticism," 453. A clear and sharp distinction between the two is also demonstrated by Gershom Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and its Symbolism*, trans. Ralph Manheim (NY: Schocken, 1969), 119.

[46] Gershom Scholem, *Kabbalah* (New York: Dorset Press, 1987), 11-20.

Akivah) through the heavenly chambers to the divine chariot-throne. Michael Swartz discusses the practical aspect of these texts, and the rituals one had to undergo in order to ready oneself for the vision of the chariot-throne, which included fasting, various abstentions, and ablutions. Swartz stresses how such rituals pointed to an attempt of bringing esoteric-magical practice into agreement with halakhic guidelines. The ultimate aim of these texts and rituals was also the one "most valued by the rabbinic estate – the study of Torah."[47]

Maimonides identified the two "Accounts" with Aristotelian physics and metaphysics. In Lipmann's case, as will be described in the next chapter, the Account of the Chariot was likewise incorporated into his cosmological view as a form of metaphysical thought. While a detailed outline of his cosmological view will be the focus of chapter two, the following is an overview of the ideas that form the basis for the discussion of Lipmann's particular approach.

The Cosmological Foundations of *Sefer ha-Eshkol*

A discussion of Jewish cosmology must start from "the beginning," that is the first two chapters of the Book of Genesis in which the creation of the world is outlined. This description offers the basic material for commentators and philosophers dealing with questions regarding the order in which the universe was created and the elements from which it was formed, which together determine the movements and motions that enable the world to exist. Amongst many medieval Jewish writers we detect an effort to harmonize the scriptural account with Greek philosophy, which was considered a legitimate source of study in order to better comprehend the universe in which we live, and thus come closer to understanding the sacred texts.[48]

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[47] Michael D. Swartz, "'Like the Ministering Angels': Ritual and Purity in Early Jewish Mysticism and Magic," *AJS Review* 19, no. 2 (1994): 166.

[48] See, for example: Talmage, "Angels, Anthems, and Anathemas," 13-20.

When laying down the theoretical basis, we find Jewish rabbinic texts demonstrating an approach very close to that of Plato's *Timaeus*, in which former worlds existed before this one came into existence as we know it, and of which we have no trace and evidence.[49] When discussing Judgment Day (Dan. 7:10) and how "a thousand thousands ministered unto Him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him," the sages ask who these thousands refer to, and one replies that "these are the 974 generations who pressed themselves forward to be created before the world was created, but were not created."[50]

Besides the questions of the world's creation, Jewish philosophy also addresses the nature of the relationship between heaven and earth. While Maimonides claims that no inference can be drawn from understanding the nature of the terrestrial realm to that of the celestial, the Southern French astronomer and philosopher Levi ben Gershon (Gersonides, 1288-1344) claims that since both contain material elements, the science of astronomy falls under human sciences. Treating astronomy as part of physics, which can be rationally demonstrated, Gersonides concludes that by studying the orbs and stars, we are led ineluctably to a fuller knowledge and appreciation of God.[51]

Gersonides also follows the Midrashic notion that denotes some existence prior to the biblical account of creation in Genesis. In agreement with such a notion (as well as Platonic cosmology), is the belief in the existence of some primordial matter or substance from which

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[49] Plato, *Timaeus and Critias*, trans. Desmond Lee (London: Penguin Books, 1977), 35-38. The identical idea is presented in Midrash, *Genesis Rabbah* 9:2. All quotations from rabbinic texts throughout this paper are my translations based on the editions included in *The Responsa Project, Bar Ilan University*, CD-ROM Edition Version 17, Copyright © 1972-2009.

[50] Babylonian Talmud, *Ḥagigah* (13b-14a). Unlike Plato's former idyllic world, the case of the Midrash talks of previous generations who were *not* worthy of creating the universe as known to the current generations.

[51] Tamar M. Rudavsky, "Philosophical Cosmology in Judaism," *Early Science and Medicine* 2, no. 2 (1997): 168-73. On the Cosmology of Maimonides in his *Guide to the Perplexed* and *Mishneh Torah*, see Menachem Kellner, "On the Status of the Astronomy and Physics in Maimonides' Mishneh Torah and Guide of the Perplexed: A Chapter in the History of Science," *British Journal for the History of Science* 24 (1991): 453-63 and "Maimonides on the Science of the Mishneh Torah: Provisional or Permanent?,"*AJS Review* 18, no.2 (1993): 169-94.

creation started.[52] This is identified by Gersonides as the biblical *tohu* (void), *tehom* (abyss) and *mayim* (water, see Gen. 1:2), being the "primeval waters." These three constitute what he terms as *geshem* (matter) that is totally devoid of form, from which the universe was created. He goes on to distinguish this from another type of primordial matter identified by the *ḥoshekh* (darkness), which represents matter that has the potential of receiving form but has none of its own.

The alternative medieval approach to the question of the origin of the world is founded on the Neoplatonic theoretical framework of "emanation," which developed into the Kabbalistic *sefirot* cosmological system. The *sefirot* (Heb.: "numbers") refer to the agencies, or divine intelligible forces, that act as intermediaries between the transcendent God and the material realm, and through which God manifested His existence in the creation of the universe.[53] This theory led to a belief that Jewish religious customs, and especially prayer, should be performed in such a way that fits into the particular scheme of the *sefirot*. In this way both one's intent and physical performance play a role in perfecting the ritual act with the power of raising the worshipper to higher intellectual levels, culminating in the ultimate ascension vision exemplified in the Book of Ezekiel.

With this basis at hand, we can now turn back to the Prague circle and ask whether and how Lipmann and his colleagues used and implemented such philosophical and mystical ideas in their work. It is possible to detect the *Sefer Yetsirah* (Book of creation) as the most influential textual intermediary on the first of the two "Accounts," since Lipmann compiled a commentary devoted to this text.[54] The *Sefer Yetsirah*, dated to between the third and the

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[52] For another example from rabbinic literature, see Babylonian Talmud, *Nedarim* 39b, telling that "seven things were created before the world, viz. the Torah, repentance, the Garden of Eden, Gehenna, the Throne of Glory, the Temple, and the name of the Messiah." Translation appears in Tamar M. Rudavsky, *Time Matters: Time, Creation and Cosmology in Medieval Jewish Philosophy* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 5.

[53] For a broader explanation of this idea in other Jewish medieval texts, see Lenn E. Goodman, "Judah Halevi," in *HJP*, 213-21. For the Rabbinic foundations of emanation theory, see Rudavsky, *Time Matters*, 7.

[54] Israel Weinstok, "Perush Sefer Yetsirah le-rabbi Yom Ṭov Lipman Milhoyzen [The commentary on sefer yetsitra by Rabbi Yom Ṭov Lipmann Mühlhausen]," *Ṭemirin: meqorot u-meḥkarim be-kabbalah u-ve-ḥasidut* 2

ninth centuries, and constructed by various redactions, is concerned with cosmology and cosmogony (the origin of the universe). Describing how divine creativity is gained by means of the ten *sefirot* and the twenty-two Hebrew letters, this is the core text of the *maʿaseh bereshit* literature.[55] As such, it offers much material for Lipmann's account, both from a theoretical aspect and for the practical rules of sacred writing, which are the focus of his *Sefer Alpha Beta*. Lipmann was also occupied with the second esoteric tradition of the *maʿaseh merkavah*. Probably transmitted through Italy, this tradition was preserved in the writings of Ḥasidei Ashkenaz.[56] Both traditions were addressed by Lipmann in one text – *Sefer ha-Eshkol* (hereafter *ShE*).

In his monumental research enterprise on the origins and development of Jewish Kabbalah and mysticism, Gershom Scholem stated that "the Kabbalah is far removed from the rational and intellectual approach to religion."[57] In *ShE*, likely completed circa 1413,[58] Lipmann attempts to harmonize natural philosophy and Kabbalah – no longer two opposing disciplines – so that it seems necessary to ask which of the two approaches, that seem so contradictory in Scholem's view, has the upper hand. In his edition of *ShE*, Judah Kaufman stresses how Lipmann presents Kabbalah in a philosophical framework, setting the former on higher grounds as the ultimate goal. This point, claims Kaufman, sets Lipmann aside from

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(1983): 93-121. This edition was put together from the ten folios mixed together with Lipmann's commentary on the book of Job and other texts to be discussed later in this paper (Budapest, MTA Kaufman, Ms A259/21, fols. 213-14, 217-18, 223-8, 233-4, 235-6). References to the text are taken from Weinstok's edition after consulting with the manuscript for any variations.

[55] Wolfson, "Jewish Mysticism," 463-64.

[56] For a comprehensive survey of the history and texts attributed to this circle, see: Ivan G. Marcus, *Piety and Society: The Jewish Pietists of Medieval Germany* (Leiden: Brill, 1981); Joseph Dan, "Sifrut ha-yiḥud shel Ḥasidei Ashkenaz [The "yiḥud" literature of the Ashkenazic Pietists]," *Kiryat Sefer* 41 (1965-1966): 533-44.

[57] Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 3.

[58] This is based on Kaufman's assumption that the date recorded by the scribe refers to the completion of the original text by Lipmann, not the copy. See Yehuda Kaufman, *Rabbi Yom Ṭov*, 121. Kaufman's critical edition is based on a single fifteenth-century Ashkenazi manuscript containing the text: New York, Jewish Theological Seminary, MS 2269, fols 13r-28v. The preceding 12 folios include a commentary on Maimonides' *Sefer ha-Madaʿ* (*The Book of Knowledge*), which Kaufman did not consider to also be a work of Lipmann's. For his reasons, see idem, 118-119. Cf. Solomon Gottesman, "Perush le-dalet peraqim ha-rishonim shel *sefer ha-Madaʿ* le-rabbi Yom Ṭov Lipman Milhoyzen [A commentary on the first four chapters of *The Book of Knowledge* by R. Yom Tov Lipmann Mühlhausen]," *Yeshurun* 23 (2010): 70-98.

other Jewish kabbalists, as one who believed all should study and strive to ascent to the (physical and metaphorical) higher levels of understanding.[59]

Visi and Ofer Elior, on the other hand, search for and emphasize the philosophical and scientific features of Lipmann's writings, placing the Kabbalistic aspect as secondary in their discussion.[60] Looking at *ShE* and Lipmann's *Sefer Kawwanat ha-Tefillah*, Visi states both "can be safely identified as 'philosophical'" according to a list of elements he offers, including the "usage of non-Jewish sources […], Maimonides as a major authority, the Account of the Beginning and the Account of the Chariot as natural philosophy and metaphysics […], and the idea of Judaism as a philosophical religion […]."[61] Visi also notes that *ShE* is structured in such a way that separates its philosophical and Kabbalistic parts, so that "they form an independent discourse which can be understood in itself."[62]

It is possible to find a third approach for reviewing Lipmann's intellectual enterprise by reading his work from a practical point of view, specifically through his cosmological account as depicted in *ShE*. Lipmann created a synthesized cosmology using the two disciplines, identifying the Aristotelian spheres and intellects within the emanation theory and the world of the *sefirot*.

ShE is not the first place in which Lipmann outlined his cosmology; the latter can be found in his treatise *Sefer Nitsaḥon*, completed approximately a decade earlier. The format of *Sefer Nitsaḥon* is a biblical commentary, following the order of the Hebrew Bible.[63] *ShE*, however, is a structured depiction of the order of the universe with obvious references to the first chapters of the book of Genesis. Furthermore, while *Sefer Nitsaḥon* aims to equip its

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[59] Kaufman, *Rabbi Yom Ṭov*, 126. This is explicitly stated in Lipmann's polemic treatise, *Sefer Nitsaḥon*, 15-17.
[60] Visi, *On the Peripheries*, 55-56 and 211-13; Ofer Elior, "R' Yom Ṭov Lipman Milhoyzen ḥoker ʾet kolot ha-galgalim [Rabbi Yom Ṭov Lipmann Mühlhausen's account of the celestial sounds]," *Madaʿei ha-yahadut* 49 (2013): 131-55; idem, "'The Conclusion Whose Demonstration is Correct is Believed': Maimonides on the Possibility of Celestial Sounds According to Three Medieval Interpreters," *Revue des Études Juives* 172, no. 3-4 (2013): 283–303.
[61] Visi, *On the Peripheries*, 56.
[62] Visi, *On the Peripheries*, 55.
[63] I use this term throughout my paper to refer to the Hebrew Masoretic text (the equivalent of the Hebrew *Tanakh/Miḳraʾ*).

readers with tools for defending the true understanding of the Bible and refuting any heretical, especially Christian, interpretations, *ShE*'s purpose is properly cosmological, and as such is devoid of any apologetics.

ShE is simply divided into two main sections: (A) The Account of Creation (*maʿaseh bereshit*); and (B) The Account of the Chariot (*maʿaseh merkavah*). In both, Lipmann offers a threefold commentary: the literal (*lefi melitsat peshuṭo*), the philosophic (*lefi ḥokhmat ha-ʿiyun*), and the "hidden" Kabbalistic (*lefi ha-ḥidah*).[64]

(A) The Account of Creation (*maʿaseh bereshit*)

In the first account Lipmann depicts a cosmology based on the biblical description of Genesis 1-4, following a philosophical reinterpretation of the creation in the line of Aristotelian physics. It explains various philosophical ideas, such as the matter and form of creation; the hierarchy of the four elements (fire, wind, water and earth); the question of primordial matter; and the creation of Time.

As Kaufman notes, the bulk of the philosophical commentary on the Account of Creation is taken from *The Guide of the Perplexed* (2:30), and only a select number of verses are probably Lipmann's own additions.[65] The Kabbalistic interpretation in the third part is based mostly on *Sefer ha-Bahir* and on Rabbi Moses ben-Naḥman's (Nachmanides, 1194-c.1270) biblical commentary.[66]

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[64] The first part of Lipmann's commentary (*peshuṭo*) is missing from the manuscript, and what is left is the end of the literal interpretation of the Tree of Life and Tree of Knowledge, as well as the location of the Garden of Eden and its four rivers (*ShE*, 118; 122).

[65] Lipmann refers to Maimonides constantly as "the Guide" (*ha-moreh*), in allusion to his major philosophical work. For a full list of both Jewish and non-Jewish texts Lipmann drew his works from, see Kaufman, *Rabbi Yom Ṭov*, 31-35. For an overview of Maimonides' cosmological accounts, see Gad Freudenthal, "Cosmology: the Heavenly Bodies," in *The Cambridge History of Jewish Philosophy*, ed. Steven Nadler and Tamar M. Rudavsky (NY: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 338-47.

[66] *Sefer ha-Bahir* (Book of the bright) is considered the earliest work of Kabbalistic literature. It appeared in southern France at the end of the twelfth century, but its actual date of compilation is not clear. A chapter summarizing its main ideas and influence is included in Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 312-16.

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As a link between the Accounts of Creation and the Chariot, and in accordance with Lipmann's syncretistic approach, the author emphasizes the significance of studying both accounts in light of all three commentary aspects, since "just as the Chariot is alluded to in Genesis, so is the Account of Creation alluded to in the Chariot chapter; for the lower world alludes to the upper, and the upper to the lower."[67] Lipmann follows the understanding of a direct link between the two realms, which share similar parallel attributes and features, and so must be studied and understood as part of each other. Using the same toolkit to analyze both is a way to further sustain that link.

(B) The Account of the Chariot (*maʿaseh merkavah*)

The author swiftly moves from the book of Genesis forward into the first chapter of the book of Ezekiel, which is the classic biblical reference for the developments on the Account of the Chariot. The chapter offers one of the accounts of ascension to the Divine Throne on its Chariot, and plays a major part in numerous Jewish mystic traditions. These traditions sought ways in which one could ascend to heaven in spirit and have a vision of the Divine.[68] Lipmann does not explicitly express such an intention, but nevertheless seeks to demonstrate how the three aspects of study and understanding that are applied to the Account of Creation also apply in this case. Indeed, as will be demonstrated, I believe the author held a further goal in sketching out both accounts in such detail.

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Scholem claimed that for kabbalists, "Judaism in all its aspects was a system of mystical symbols reflecting the mystery of God and the universe, and the kabbalists' aim was to

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[67] כשם שפי' שהמרכבה נרמזת בפרשת בראשית, כן נרמז מעשה בראשית בפרשת המרכבה, כי עולם תחתון רמז על העליון, והעליון על התחתון. *ShE*, 143. To avoid confusion, references to the texts of *Sefer ha-Eshkol* and *Sefer Kawwanat ha-Tefillah* will be listed under their own abbreviated title (*ShE* and *SKhT*), though the two appear together in Kaufman's printed edition. The page numbers refer to Kaufman's edition. When referring to Kaufman's introduction or own notes, the main title will be used (Kaufman, *Rabbi Yom Ṭov*).

[68] Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 20.

discover and invent keys to the understanding of this symbolism."[69] Though obviously using the same symbols and mystical language, the aim of *ShE* is not only to understand this symbolism, or to merely demonstrate Lipmann's cosmology; it is also aimed at offering a method for understanding the meaning behind certain Jewish everyday practices.

The next chapter will connect *ShE* to two more of Lipmann's texts, which, while sharing the same philosophical-Kabbalistic foundations, make their ultimate purpose explicit – to interpret Jewish customs in a way that will endorse their spiritual meaning, thus bringing them to perfect fulfillment as ascribed by Halakhah (*latsʾet yedei ḥovah*).

Scholarship on Jewish religious customs in the Middle Ages has undergone an important expansion in the past decades. Greater emphasis has been given to popular religious culture, and to revealing what a common day looked like for the average medieval Jew (men, women, and children). As Elisheva Baumgarten has asserted, "modes of observance are far more accessible to us than their convictions," and thus she chooses, along with many other scholars, to focus on the "wider sweep of Jewish community members, rather than few who authored medieval compositions."[70] Baumgarten reverses the process of most research on Jewish communities which had followed Halakhah available in written form, created by (and for) a privileged elite. Using the same textual sources, the author focuses on practice, from which she draws conclusions on beliefs and ideas of the people practicing. These did not always fit into the ascribed rabbinic formulas.[71]

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[69] Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 5-6.

[70] Elisheva Baumgarten, *Practicing Piety in Medieval Ashkenaz: Men, Women, and Everyday Religious Observance* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2014), 2. For similar research, see the list of relevant literature the author provides on page 9.

[71] On the problems of historically distinguishing Minhagim (Jewish customs) from Halakhah (rabbinic law), see: Berachyahu Lifshitz, "Minhag u-mekomo be-midrag ha-normot shel torah sh-be-al-peh" [Custom and its place on the scale of the norms of the oral law], *Annual of the Institute for Research in Jewish Law* 24 (2006/7): 123-264. On the cultural transmission of Ashkenazic customs, see Lucia Raspe, "How Italian are the Yiddish Minhagim of 1589?: A Reassesment," (lecture, *Akadem: le Campus Numérique Juif*, May 14, 2012), http://www.akadem.org/sommaire/colloques/minhagim-custom-and-practice-in-jewish-life/the-creation-and-dissemination-of-the-minhag-18-10-2012-47118_4451.php (accessed April 2015).

The case of Lipmann and the Prague circle favors such an analytic procedure, as the texts they produced do not prescribe but interpret Jewish customs, and as such can offer even more information regarding their actual practice. I do not, however, claim to reconstruct Jewish custom through the works of Lipmann, but rather analyze his texts in order to understand his interpretation of certain daily practices. Such understanding could perhaps point to the concerns and goals individuals intended to achieve through customs.

Unlike Baumgarten, who seeks fragments within larger compilations, I examine the overarching position of one author: a deep analysis of one mind, but one that likely influenced others and certainly reflected certain contemporary trends of his time. This goal also stands at the base of his subsequent works, the first of which is concerned with the daily prayers. The next chapter demonstrates how *ShE* played a crucial part in the understanding of Lipmann's commentary on Jewish prayer in *Sefer Kawwanat ha-Tefillah*. Lipmann chooses to interpret prayer within a cosmological framework, drawing heavily from both esoteric and philosophical traditions. The end result, in my opinion, is a guidebook for reaching spiritual elevation and perfection.

23

Chapter Two – Grounding Prayers in Heaven

One should be precise about one's prayer, and be careful not to skip even one letter, so that his sacrifice will not be missing even one limb.[72]

(*Sefer Kawwanat ha-Tefillah*)

The integration made by the German Pietists of the *merkavah* texts, the philosophy of Saadia Gaon, and Jewish Neoplatonism, was of great importance, as it produced more than just a theoretical doctrine of the divine glory, relating it to the practice of human prayer. As Wolfson explains, "it is not an exaggeration to say that the primary issue that occupied the Pietistic authors was the problem of visualizing an incorporeal deity, an act that in some sense traditional prayer demands."[73] A similar issue preoccupied Lipmann, as he addresses the act of prayer and the means by which one can achieve the proper intent when reciting the daily prayers.

This chapter presents Lipmann's synthesized cosmology as the theoretical backdrop for his later compilations, focusing on *Sefer Kawwanat ha-Tefillah* (hereafter *SKhT*). After offering a brief overview on Jewish prayer, I present a close reading of Lipmann's commentary on prayer, through the cosmological approach of *ShE*. I shall highlight links between the texts, demonstrating the intertwined relationship between philosophy, Kabbalah and custom, and Lipmann's reliance on the principals first laid out in *ShE*. Finally, I shall summarize the common cosmological features depicted in the texts in the form of three sets of motions between three realms Lipmann recognizes: emanation from God to the world, ascension from the world to God, and movement between the cardinal points of east and west.

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[72] ‏וידקדק בתפילתו שלא ידלג אות אחת, שלא ידמה כאילו קרבנו מחוסר איבר‎. *SKhT*, 181.
[73] Wolfson, "Jewish Mysticism," 466.

Prayer in Ashkenaz

The study of Jewish liturgy does not only involve tracing the textual development of prayers, but also has to extend to the rituals that framed the act of praying, e.g., the appropriate places and time of prayers, differences between public and private prayer, praying from a liturgical text (*siddur*) or reciting by heart, the physical movements while praying, and more.[74] Beyond these textual and ritual aspects stands the mental or emotional aspect of prayer – the *kawwanah* (intent or state of mind) of the person reciting it. It is this aspect which was crucial to the Kabbalistic claim to a transformative power of prayer.

Tracing the historical origins of Jewish prayer and its many variants is no simple task, as its earliest patterns were probably established prior to the destruction of the Second Temple (70 CE). In the most ancient core of daily prayers stand several biblical passages, which encompass the essence of rabbinic Judaism. These passages (Deut. 6:4-10, 11:13-22; Num. 15:37-41), known as the *shemaʿ* ("hear!"), are framed by benedictions which served as statements of praise to God as creator of the universe.

Partly as a result of considering *kawwanah* an integral part of the act of praying, many medieval Ashkenazic writers composed prayer commentaries. They also made considerable efforts editing and correcting rites of prayer in pursuit of the secrets hidden within the words themselves. This was a result of the belief that by meticulously understanding each and every word recited, one could wholeheartedly fulfil the obligatory act of praying (*latseʾt yedei ḥovah*). Such work was undertaken by the members of Ḥasidei Ashkenaz, who studied the numerical value (*gematriya*) of prayers, counting their words and characters in different

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[74] On the history of Jewish prayer, its canonization and formalization, see Israel M. Ta-Shma, *Ha-tefillah ha-ʾashkenazit ha-kedumah: peraqim be-ʾofyah u-ve-toldoteha* [The early Ashkenazic prayer: Its features and origins] (Jerusalem: Magnes, 2003); Ismar Elbogen, *Jewish Liturgy: A Comprehensive History*, trans. Raymond P. Scheindlin (Philadelphia: The Jewish Publication Society and New York: The Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1993); Samuel Krouss, *Qorot batei ha-tefillah be-Israel* [Houses of Prayer in Israel] (NY: Hotsaʾat ʿogen ʿal yad ha-histadrut ha-ʿivrit be-ʾamerikah, 1955); Ruth Langer, *Jewish Liturgy: A Guide to Research* (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2015).

ways, reaching mystical understandings that "unlocked" the true meaning of the passage and revealed its proper *kawwanah*.[75]

Such efforts of uncovering hidden meanings were also a means of overcoming the rigidity of prayer recitation, and the danger of turning the spiritual act into mere "lip service." This sentiment was iterated already in the Babylonian Talmud:

> Rabbi Eliezer says: If a man makes his prayers a fixed task, it is not a [genuine] supplication. What is meant by a fixed task? – Rabbi Jacob ben Idi said in the name of Rabbi Oshaiah: Anyone whose prayer is like a heavy burden on him ["as the fulfilment of a duty" (Rashi)…] Rabbah and Rabbi Joseph say: Whoever is not able to insert something fresh in it. Rabbi Zera said: 'I can insert something fresh, but I am afraid to do so for fear I should become confused.'[76]

The danger of prayer becoming a routine and an empty act was enhanced by the fact that "most, if not all people in the synagogue, including the cantors, did not have written prayer books in front of them." In light of such a situation, *Sefer Ḥasidim* [The book of the Pious] demands a person to have a prayer book before them in order to achieve the proper intention, thus suggesting that a written text assists in leading one's intentions during prayer in the right direction. However, as Kanarfogel explains, the ideal pious person would have no need for the written text, and would pray by heart with the utmost concentration facilitated by the aforementioned techniques of counting the Hebrew letters, which would prepare one for praying.[77]

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[75] Ta-Shma, *Ha-tefillah*, 40-51. The most notable text would be Eleazar ben Judah of Worms (known as Eleazar Roekaḥ, d.c.1230), *Peirushei siddur ha-tefillah la-rokeaḥ* [The "Rokeaḥ's" commentaries on the prayer book], ed. Moshe Hershler (Jerusalem: Mekhon ha-rav Hershler, 1994).

[76] Babylonian Talmud, *Berakhot* 29b. The translation (including the brackets) is taken from David Hartman, "Prayer and Religious Consciousness: An Analysis of Jewish Prayer in the Works of Joseph B. Soloveitchik, Yeshayahu Leibowitz, and Abraham Joshua Heschel," *Modern Judaism* 23, no. 2 (2003): 106.

[77] Ephraim Kanarfogel, "Prayer, Literacy, and Literary Memory in the Jewish Communities of Medieval Europe," in *Jewish Studies at the Crossroads of Anthropology and History: Authority, Diaspora, Tradition*, ed. Raʿanan S. Boustan, Oren Kosansky, and Marina Rustow (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 256-57. On the knowledge of prayers by heart in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, see also Ta-Shma, *Ha-tefillah*, 27-32.

As to the integration of theological speculation into the prayer's *kawwanah*, we have a revealing statement by the late fourteenth-century halakhist Jacob ben Moses ha-Levi Mulin (known as Maharil, d.1427), who warned that this sort of *kawwanah* actually took on too prominent a place in Jewish prayer. While complaining about the spread of liturgical poems (*piyyutim*) in the vernacular, Maharil wished that the authors would

> desist from composing the verses and poems in the Ashkenazic tongue [i.e. Yiddish] that they [write] about the One and the thirteen [Maimonidean] principles, since most common people believe that these are equivalent to all commandments, and are reluctant to perform several commandments such as *tsitsit* [fringes] and *tefillin* [phylacteries] and the study of Torah. They believe that by reciting those poems with intention (*kawwanah*) they have fulfilled their obligation.[78]

Maharil complains that as a result of emphasizing reflection during prayer, the customs themselves had been neglected.

The reality Maharil reveals, of allowing philosophy to subvert the liturgical sphere, certainly did not escape the members of the Prague circle. Their unique position as both rabbis and philosophers permitted them to find a way to insist jointly on the traditional prayer customs and on philosophy, thus compromising between the growing popular interest in philosophy and science, and the challenge it posed to the rabbinic elite.[79]

As has been uncovered by Visi, Rabbi Avigdor Kara based his religious thought upon the emanation of divine powers from the upper to the lower world. Such supernal protection could be ensured by harnessing both Kabbalah and philosophy for new religious customs. Kara's explanation for the custom of the priestly blessing (*birkat kohanim*) drew jointly from

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[78] Jacob ben Moses ha-Levi Mulin, *Sefer ha-minhagim (Maharil)* [Book of Customs, known as the Book of Maharil], ed. Shlomo Yehuda Spitzer (Jerusalem: Mekhon Yerushalayim, 1989), *Likkutim* §59. A discussion of this passage is found in Talmage, "Angels, Anthems, and Anathemas," 16-17.

[79] Visi, "The Emergence of Philosophy," 223.

the emanation theory and the scheme of the ten *sefirot,* signified by the priests' ten fingers spread towards the congregation.[80]

Kara's and Lipmann's fellow rabbi, Menahem Shalem, produced an extensive gloss on Narboni's commentary of *The Guide*. In one of his comments (on *The Guide* 2:19), Shalem applies cosmological theories on the movement of the sun to Jewish prayer rites. By explaining the order of one's movements during prayer, as though imitating the movement of the heavenly spheres, Shalem shows how "[t]he movement of the spheres was a cosmological archetype of Jewish prayer," and that as the heavens pray to God, so should human prayer imitate them.[81]

The idea of drawing parallels between the celestial and terrestrial realms of liturgy can be found as early as in the Talmudic discussion of the correct time for reciting the *shemaʿ* (Babylonian Talmud, *Berakhot* 3a). The discussion leads to a dispute over the proper division of the night into "watches" (*mishmarot*). Regardless of the correct number, the Talmudic discourse makes a point of the sage's hidden agenda of wanting "to teach us that there are watches in heaven as well as on earth." Similar to the Aristotelian notion that what "can occur in a small world […] could also occur in a great one,"[82] the sage wishes to convey that by observing the changes in the skies we can draw conclusions as to the motions in the upper heavens. This connection was taken a step further by Shalem's comment which adds the motions of humans during prayer to the equation.

As for Lipmann, Visi claims that his *SKhT* was an "announced but unrealized project to interpret Ashkenazic *minhagim* [customs] in a philosophical manner."[83] I would argue that Lipmann did in fact manage to produce a practice-oriented text accompanied by cosmological explanations. Similar to the wishes of the Ḥasidei Ashkenaz, these explanations were meant

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[80] Visi, *On the Peripheries*, 165.
[81] Visi, "The Emergence of Philosophy," 239-40.
[82] Aristotle, *Physics,* Bk 8, trans. Daniel W. Graham (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), chapter 2, 252b25.
[83] Visi, "The Emergence of Philosophy," 238.

to enable total immersion in prayer by envisioning the earthly phenomenon parallel to the heavenly in such a way as to attain the appropriate *kawwanah* to fulfill the act of prayer.

Going through the Cosmological Motions of *Sefer Kawwanat ha-Tefillah*

Lipmann's *SKhT* was likely completed between the time *ShE* was written (c.1413) and 1416.[84] The book opens with a statement of the importance of clearly enunciating every word of the prayers, but also of adopting the "intent" that goes along with the physical act of saying the prayer. Lipmann goes through the main parts of the daily Jewish prayer, pointing out the various images one should have in mind while reciting the passages and blessings. The first part of the book is devoted to the many anthropomorphic terms used in prayers; a fact Lipmann does not agree with, but which he reluctantly accepts as part of the traditional liturgical custom. Although he acknowledges that the wording of the prayers is fixed and may not be changed, in his eyes, it is legitimate and necessary to set rules and explanations that will ensure the intent of the worshipper pronouncing them is correct and worthy.[85]

1. Downward motion of prayer: creation and emanation

Before breaking the prayer down to its components, Lipmann makes sure his reader understands that

> the existence of the entire universe – the mineral and the vegetable, animal and the speaking, and the elements and the spheres and the intellects – none of these could stand for one moment were it not for the Blessed One's divine presence He emanates unto them,

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[84] Kaufman, *Rabbi Yom Ṭov*, 179. Together with *Sefer ha-Eshkol*, Kaufman added an introduction and critical edition of *Kawwanat ha-Tefillah* (Kaufman, *Rabbi Yom Ṭov*, 179-190). The edition is of a single seventeenth- or eighteenth-century manuscript, copied together with *Sefer Nitsaḥon*, Oxford, Bodleian Library, Opp. 529, fols.16v-20v.

[85] והנה קדמונינו האחרונים הרבו בתפילתם גשמות ותארים, ובסיכלות דורנו הפרוץ במלואו נתפשטו ברוב הגולה [...] על כן אכתוב כללות [...] ואף אם המילה אינה כתיקונה, הכוונה תהיה נכונה. *SKhT*, 182. On anthropomorphism and the medieval Jewish philosopher, see Visi, *On the Peripheries*, 6-7. Lipmann's attitude towards such expressions can also be found in *Sefer Nitsaḥon*. See Sadek,"Yom Tov Lipman," 109-110.

as I demonstrated in *Sefer ha-Eshkol* […]. When saying 'Blessed are You,' one must intend that He, blessed be His name – is the source of all blessings.[86]

In this passage Lipmann clarifies that above all, without the proper intent the act of prayer would not be complete, and he specifies the way to achieve this state of mind. The clear reference to *ShE* should not be overlooked, as it is the source of Lipmann's cosmological scheme and guidelines, only briefly summarized in the *SKhT* passage quoted above.

One can easily find these guidelines explained in the second part of the Account of Creation in *ShE*, in which the author offers his philosophical interpretation:

from Him, may He be blessed, emanates the good onto the spheres (*galgalim*) via the intellects (*ha-sekhalim*), until the spheres move – and in the Account of the Chariot I shall explain more with the help of God […] – and from the movement of the spheres the four elements mix together, until the mixture (*mezeg*) is ready for receiving the forms of living creatures from the creator of forms […] and so every day many things are renewed of the same causes, and He, may He be blessed, is the cause of all causes (*mesovev ha-sibbot*).[87]

In this passage from *ShE* Lipmann offers a paraphrase of the *Guide's* description (2:4, 2:12) of the relationship between God, "the cause of all causes" (or "mover of all movers"), through the intellects and the spheres, and down to all living things, as well as their daily renewal and movement.

We next find that integration of speculation and ritual is not unique to *SKhT*, but that Lipmann chose to integrate in *ShE* itself comments of a more practical nature, forming a direct link to prayer and of similar nature to those of *SKhT*:

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[86] אך תחילה יש לך להשכיל ולהבין, שקיום כל העולם בכללו – הדומם והצומח והחי והמדבר והיסודות והגלגלים והשכלים – כולם לא יוכלו לעמוד רגע אחד בלי שהב"ה משפיע משכינתו עליהם, כאשר הוכחתי בספר האשכול [...]. וזהו כוונת כל הברכות: כשיאמר ברוך אתה, יכוון שהוא ית' שמו – מקור הברכות. *SKhT*, 186.

[87] ואילו הם סדרי בראשית, שהטוב שופע ממנו ית' על הגלגלים באמצעות השכלים עד שיתנועעו הגלגלים – ובמעשה מרכבה אפשר בעז' ה' ית' יותר – ומתנועת הגלגלי' יתערבו הד' יסודות זה בזה, עד שהוכן המזג לקבל צורת בע"ח מנותן הצורות [...] עד שיתחדשו בכל יום תמיד דברים רבים ע"י אותן הסיבות, והוא ית' מסבב כל הסבות. *ShE*, 132.

And that is why our sages, may their memory be blessed, established the daily prayer saying "the one who always renews every day the account of the genesis," and not the *creation* or *formation*, since He does not create a new [world] every day, but from Him, may He be blessed, emanates the good via a mediator, as I have explained, so that the matters (*ha-ʿinyanim*) are always renewed.[88]

Not relying in this instance on Maimonides, Lipmann uses the philosophical explanation as a reason for the specific choice of words in a blessing recited before the *shemaʿ* portion of the daily Morning Prayer (known as *yotser ʾor,* "creator of light"). In the very structure of this passage, opening and closing with the emanation of good from God, the author emphasizes the cyclical and continuous nature of the world explained in the previous passage from *ShE.*

As for the nature of this emanation of "good" and its manifestation, *ShE* follows a Midrash describing God's garment, from which light was initially created.[89] Taking Maimonides' stance (*Guide*, 2:26), Lipmann understands this light to be a metaphor for the intellects, from which the spheres that compose the heavens were created. The earth was made from the one substance under the Divine Throne, which is the primordial matter. From this, the four elements derived, as well as the entire terrestrial realm.[90]

After establishing the proper intent for reciting the prayers preceding the *shemaʿ*, we arrive at the *shemaʿ* itself back in *SKhT*. Using distinctly Kabbalistic terminology, Lipmann gives this prayer's intent its due, as it is a focal point of the daily prayer. The author explains that every person is obligated to accept and declare the belief in the oneness of God as "the Infinite (ʾ*ein sof*) of the ten *sefirot* mentioned in *Sefer Yetsirah*."[91]

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[88] וזה שתקנו רז"ל לומר בתפילתנו המחדש בכל יום תמיד מעשה בראשית, יצירה או בריאה לא אמ', כי אינו בורא בכל יום חדש, אך ממנו ית' שופע הטוב ע"י אמצעי, כדפי', עד שיתחדשו העניינים תמיד. *ShE*, 132 (my emphasis). By "matters" in my translation I refer to the simple meaning, as in "everyday matters" of the world.
[89] *Pirkey de-R. Eliezer*, chapter 3. The Midrash is also discussed in Rudavsky, *Time Matters*, 7.
[90] *ShE*, 128.
[91] ליחדו ייחוד גמור מאין סוף בעשר ספירות האמורות בספר יצירה. *SKhT*, 187.

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This is the only instance throughout *SKhT* where Lipmann uses the language of the *sefirot* and refers to *Sefer Yetsirah*, to which he also wrote a commentary.[92] Included in this commentary is also the issue of the placement of the Divine within the *sefirot* scheme relevant to the quotation from *SKhT*. According to Lipmann

the ten *sefirot* are [the manifestation of] His presence and emanation, as I explained in *Sefer ha-Eshkol* […]. And here is the proof that the cause of causes (*ʿillat ha-ʿillot*) is not included in the ten [*sefirot*], and it is not true as those who explained "spirit of God" [Gen.1:2] as close to the cause of causes, and wanting to say that *maḥshavah* [thought] is the cause of causes, and it is not so.[93]

Lipmann makes it clear that God is not to be identified with what is considered as the first *sefirah* (*maḥshavah*). Now tying three of his texts together, Lipmann relies again on the *sefirot* model that he had already explained in *ShE*, this time shifting to the final part of the Account of Creation dealing with its Kabbalistic aspect. Throughout this part Lipmann applies Nachmanides' commentary, situating it within the pattern of the ten *sefirot* which constitute the active forces of the universe. As in the philosophical scheme, the same emanation theory applies when looking at the relationship between the different *sefirot*.[94]

Following the biblical verses from Genesis, to which Lipmann also refers in his aforementioned commentary to *Sefer Yetsirah*, the author starts from the first verse "*be-reshit bara ʾelohim*" ("In the beginning God created"). It is through the explanation of this verse that Lipmann offers that "proof" mentioned in his commentary to *Sefer Yetsirah*. A common thirteenth-century Kabbalistic exegesis of this verse identifies the first three *sefirot* symbolized in its words: (1) *Keter Elyon* (supreme crown) or *Maḥshavah* (thought); (2)

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[92] Weinstok, "Perush Sefer Yetsirah."

[93] וי"ס שכינתו וגילוי אצילותו כדפי' בספר האשכול [...]. ומהנה הוכחה שעילת העילות אינה במספר העשרה, ולא כאותן שפירשו רוח אלהי' בסמוך על עילת העילות, ור"ל שמחשבה עילת העילות, וזה אינו. Weinstok, "*Perush Sefer Yeẓirah*," 108-9.

[94] For a succinct overview of the *sefirot* and their functions in Kabbalistic thought, see Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 99-109; Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah*: *New Perspectives* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 136-53.

Ḥokhmah (wisdom); and (3) *Binah* (intelligence). As articulated by Scholem, "through the medium (the prefix *be*) of *Ḥokhmah* (called *reshit*), the first *sefirah* – the force hidden within the third personal singular of the word *baraʾ* – produced by an act of emanation the third *sefirah* (*Binah*), which is also called *Elohim*."[95]

Lipmann indeed follows this interpretation but also adds a small yet important note, varying from the common approach, which recognized God, the *ʾein sof* ("infinite"), behind the first *sefirah* in the prefix *be*. Lipmann, however, refers to the physical appearance of the first letter (*bet)* and breaks it down into two: the main part indeed symbolizes *Ḥokhmah*, but the "stipe (*ʿokets*) on the *bet* alludes to the cause of causes (*ʿillat ha-ʿillot*)."[96] Using the same term from his commentary to *Sefer Yetsirah*, one can now better grasp Lipmann's understanding of the separation between the first *sefirah* and God himself, which should not be perceived in any dual way, as might be suggested if part of the first *sefirah*.

Furthermore, and similar to the previous example of the prayer preceding the *shemaʿ*, Lipmann saw fit to insert a comment of more practical nature in order to make clear the direct connection between the letter's Kabbalistic function and its actual shape. This comment would be understood clearly only when one writes or at least envisions the letter, since it could also be written without that small stipe.[97]

After establishing the first three *sefirot* within the first verse of Genesis, Lipmann offers a scheme, as seen in Figure 1, in which the first three days of creation correspond to certain further *sefirot*. For example, the second day includes the creation of the "firmament in the midst of the waters" (Gen. 1:6). This firmament (later named "heaven") is equivalent to (6) *Tifʾeret*, which comes between the waters, (4) *Ḥesed* and (7) *Netsaḥ*.[98] On the third day

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[95] Scholem, *Kabbalah*, 110. The first *Sefirah* is concealed in the verb *baraʾ*, referring to God ("He created").
[96] *ShE*, 140. והעוקץ על הב' רמז לעילת העילות.
[97] This issue will be elaborated further in the following chapter.
[98] *ShE*, 142. יהי רקיע בתוך המים, תהי תפארת בין החסד ובין הנצח, הרי הבדל בין העליונים ובין התחתונים

God has "the waters under the heaven gathered together unto one place" (Gen. 1:9). Lipmann ties this "one place" to (9) *Yesod*, thus creating the seas,

> drawing the middle line that sucks from the source of (2) *Ḥokhmah* on to the (6) *Tifʾeret*, and from there to the pool which has 100 springs [...]."And a river went out of Eden" [Gen. 2:10] the *Tifʾeret*, "to water the garden" of Eden; "and from thence it was parted, and became into four heads," these are the angles, the four camps of *Shekhinah* [divine presence, identified by the kabbalists with the tenth *sefirah*].[99]

Figure 1: The Account of Creation within the Kabbalistic system
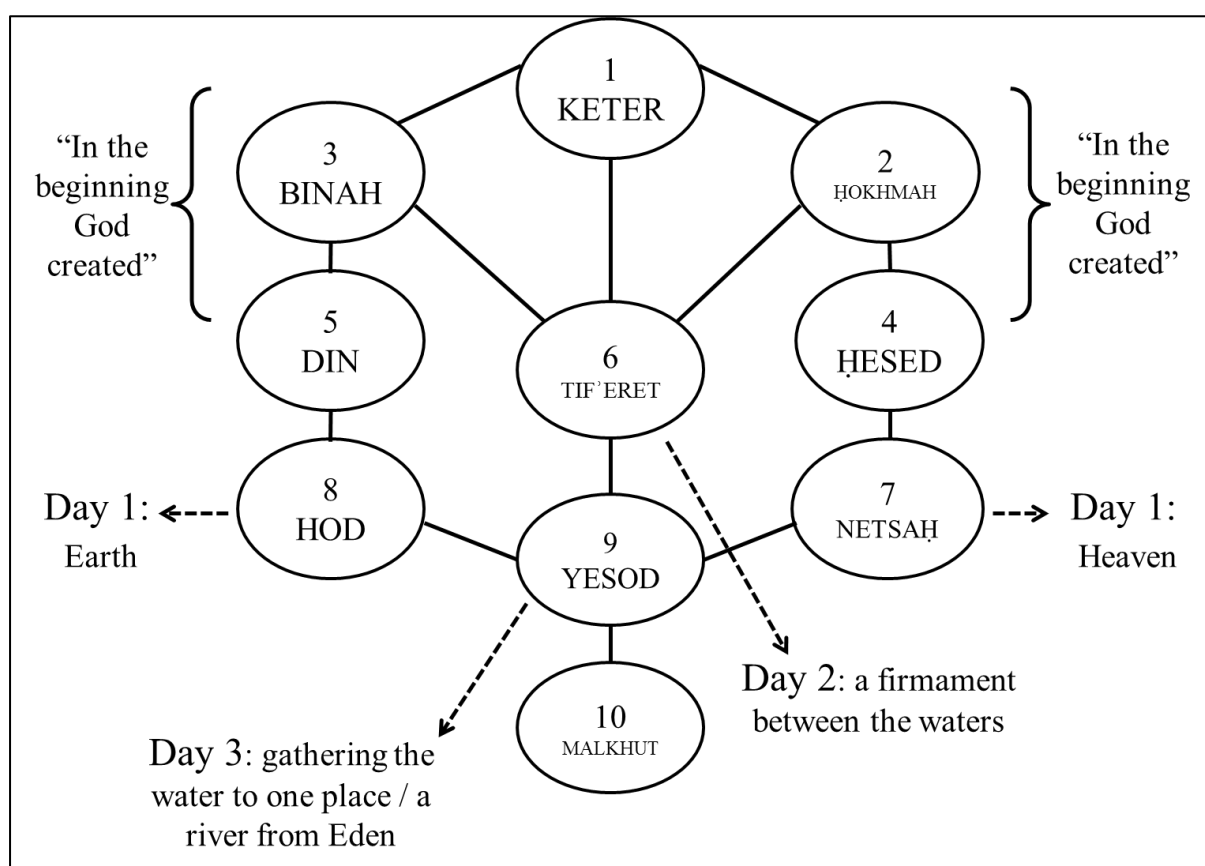
We return to the *shemaʿ* prayer in *SKhT* and to the six Hebrew words of its central formula that actually express the ideas discussed so far, "Hear, Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One" (Deut. 6:4, Heb.: שמע ישראל ה' אלהינו ה' אחד). Lipmann stresses that one

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[99] ולמקווה המים קרא ימים, המשיך קו האמצעי היונק ממקור החכמה אל התפארת, ומשם אל הבריכה אשר לה ק' מעיינות [...] ונהר יוצא מעדן התפארת להשקות הג״ע, ומשף יפרד והיה לארבעה ראשים, אילו המלאכים, ארבע מחנות השכינה. *ShE*, 142.

should understand that "the Lord mentioned is one at six ends, that is: the four directions, up and down, infinitely."[100] Summing up Lipmann's comments regarding the two adjacent prayers, *yotser ʾor* and the *shemaʿ*, and tying together three of his texts, we receive a complete cosmological picture from both the philosophical and Kabbalistic aspects: not only is God the source and cause of all creation and the power of its temporal cycles, He is also present in every corner of that world. Time and space are brought together under the principle of the unity of the Divine, which is also articulated and distinguished within the mystical scheme. Counting on the reader's familiarity with the main principles of the cosmological scheme established in *ShE*, Lipmann expects the same principles to be implemented in prayer, and does not hesitate to go back and forth from the philosophical or Kabbalistic terminology to the practical in both *ShE* and *SKhT*.

Following the *shemaʿ*, the *SKhT* proceeds to explain another core part of the daily prayer, the *Qedushah*, in which one repeats three times the word *qadosh* (holy, sacred or sanctified). This solemn formula (from Isaiah 6:3) should be understood and intended to refer to the three realms in which God's sacredness or holiness is manifested: the lower world and its creation, the middle heaven where His Divine Presence (*shekhinato*) lies, and the upper world where His presence is infinite and unchanging.[101]

In the first half of *ShE*, devoted to the Account of Creation, Lipmann includes a detailed description of the physical aspect of creation and specifically of the boundaries between these three realms of the universe. Following the biblical verses of Genesis, Lipmann offers a cosmological interpretation of the "Garden in the center of Eden" (*ha-gan be-ʾemtsa ha-ʿeden*). Lipmann locates "Eden" in the upper world, "by means of which the

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[100] *SKh*T, 187. ה' אחד, יכוון שהשם שהזכיר אחד בשש קצוות, ר''ל ד' רוחות, מעלה ומטה לאין סוף.
[101] *SKh*T, 188.

lower world [i.e. "the Garden"] was made."[102] His cosmology follows the commentary of

Moses ben Joshua of Narbonne (Narboni, d.c.1362), who dedicated his writings to

Maimonidean terminology and commentaries on Averroes' various texts. Narboni's

commentary on the garden designates Eden and the upper world as the active intellect, thus

clarifying Lipmann's interpretation and use of the verb "made."[103] Lipmann adds that this is a

two-way connection, as not only does the upper world create the lower, but by placing both

the Tree of Knowledge (representing the upper) and the Tree of Life (representing the lower)

in the Garden, "the upper world can be perceived (*yusag ha-ʿelyon*)" by man.[104]

Accordingly, when commenting on the happenings in the garden after eating from the

tree, Lipmann highlights God's question to Adam: "where art thou – meaning the active

intellect is ready to emanate, and there exists a lacking of some sort only on part of the

receiving end."[105] By eating the forbidden fruit Adam severed the connection between the

two worlds, and could no longer enjoy the direct emanation of the active intellect by

remaining in the garden.

However, a link did in fact remain between the realms in the form of the Tree of Life.

Borrowing from anthropological theories on the spatial aspects of the sacred, the garden in its

cosmological interpretation can be perceived as a type of liminal space, located in the sub-

lunar world but containing a means of connecting to the celestial world and the highest

intellect. Those means are embedded in the Tree of Life, its body spanning from the garden

and "up to the height of Eden," as a sort of *axis mundi*.[106]

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[102] *ShE*, 132. ויטע ה' גן בעדן. הגן באמצע העדן, גם כבר אמרתי שבאמצעות עולם העליון נעשה עולם התחתון. Lipmann may be using a play on words with the two phonetically simialr Hebrew terms for "middle" (ʾemtsa) and "by means of which" (be-ʾemtsaʿut).

[103] Kaufman, *Rabbi Yom Ṭov* 132, n.15.

[104] *ShE*, 132. ויטע ה' בגן כמה אילנות טובים, ועץ החיים בתוך הגן, כי בעולם התחתון יושג העליון.

[105] *ShE*, 136. איכה – ר"ל השכל הפועל מזומן להשפיע, והחסרון רק מצד המקבל.

[106] *ShE*, 137. הנה העץ גובה שיעור הגן, וגופו עולה למעלה כפי גובהו של עדן. These theories are based on the works of Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: the Nature of Religion*, trans. Willard R. Trask (NY: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1959); and Victor Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1977).

Once again, by patching together the content of both *ShE* and *SKhT*, one may understand that by envisioning this detailed image of the tree while repeating one short word three times (*"qadosh qadosh qadosh"*), one could accordingly get closer to perceiving the three realms in which the Divine is manifested, thus perfecting the act of prayer.

2. *Upward motion of prayer: the Chariot and emanation*

As in the opening to *SKhT*, the last section of the text discusses the intent of prayers in general while borrowing philosophical terms, this time explaining how prayers could indeed replace the Temple sacrifices. Lipmann explains how through the burning of sacrifices in the Temple one would "separate the four elements, each element returning to its source."[107] Whilst making the sacrifice, one focuses one's intention on God and the return of the sacrifice's elements to their respective source. In a similar fashion, the sacrificer's intellect will also cling to the ultimate source, God, "obtaining from Him, may He be blessed, an abundance of blessings, via the intellects and the spheres, [which spread over to] the elements of the sacrifice."[108]

By understanding the physical makeup (and breaking down) of the sacrifice, Lipmann explains the correct intent one should achieve when offering a sacrifice. The images described should be in one's mind when praying, so that by the same token, the words uttered by our breath spread towards the different spheres of creation and draw the blessings from the upper realms.[109] Just as the sacrifices have the power to draw the heavenly good emanating through the spheres and intellects, so does prayer.

Though focused on prayers, the last part of *SKhT* goes on to enumerate other rituals, still performed after the destruction of the Temple, which imitate various stages of the sacrificial offerings, thus preserving their original intent and goals. For example, the waving

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[107] ‏כאשר יקריב המקריב בעלי חיים להעלותם באש ויפריד משם הד' יסודות, [יחזור] כל יסוד אל יסודו‎. *SKhT*, 189.

[108] ‏וכאשר ישים המקריב מגמתו במעשה הקרבן להש"י, ידביק שכלו אליו וימשיך ממנו ית' שפע הברכה, באמצעות השכלים והגלגלים,‎ ‏על היסודות של הקרבן‎. *SKhT*, 189.

[109] *SKhT*, 189-190.

of the offering that was intended to stop any evil spirits is replicated in the waving of the *lulav* (the palm frond) during the holiday of *Sukkot* (Tabernacles), as well as in the custom of "dancing before the moon" at the closing of the first Sabbath in each month.[110]

Once more, defying the apparent separation between philosophy, mystics and custom, we find the very same ritual mentioned in *ShE* in the midst of the Account of the Chariot. Following the aforementioned philosophical summary, Lipmann describes the four characters included in Ezekiel's vision, each bearing a different face: a human, a lion, an ox, and an eagle (Ez. 1:10). Each represents a different category of living species, but also human attributes, since "in appearance their form was human" (Ez. 1:5). Lipmann stresses the unique status of the human, who not only includes all features of the lower world, but also encompasses "the middle world and the upper world […] for they all have soul and intellect like the human."[111] While in the former account it was the Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden acting as a link, it is now the human who acts as a point of connection between the upper and lower worlds.[112]

Lipmann goes on to explain the directions towards which the creatures are looking: "and the face of a lion, on the right side: and they four had the face of an ox on the left side" (Ez. 1:10). Lipmann clarifies that right refers to the south and left to the north, and though not specified in the biblical text, "it is known that the main face, that of man, turns to the east, and so the face of the eagle turns to the west."[113] The issue of directions is significant, according to another comment that the author inserts in the midst of this seemingly heavenly discussion: "and [Ezekiel] saw the face of an eagle turned to the west, as it is understood in [the rules of] the Sanctification of the Month, that one should look to the west for its

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[110] ותנופת הקרבן הוא כפי פשוטו עד"ז – לדמיון עצור הרוחות רעות [...] וגם זהו טעם נענוע הלולב, ואשר נוהגין לרקוד כנגד הלבנה. *SKhT*, 189.

[111] נמצא מבואר שאדם כולל עולם התחתון. גם עולם האמצעי וגם עולם העליון דומין שניהם לעצם צורת האדם, שהרי כולם בעלי נפש ושכל כמו האדם. *ShE*, 148.

[112] This too follows Maimonides' approach. See Howard Kreisel, "Moses Maimonides," in *HJP*, 268-9.

[113] ואמ' פני אריה אל הימים ר"ל דרום, ופני שור מהשמאל, ר"ל צפון, מעתה ידוע שהעיקר פנים שהם פני אדם מזרחה, נמצא פני נשר למערב. *ShE*, 148-149 (and note 20 on the source for this understanding).

sanctification."[114] As in the case of the *shemaʿ* prayer, we find Lipmann adding notes of practical relevance to the philosophical-mystical discussion in *ShE*, which also form links to passages in other texts.

As with the Account of Creation, Lipmann applies the structural pattern of the *sefirot* to the Account of the Chariot. Tying together all three aspects of understanding the biblical vision – philosophy, Kabbalah, and ritual – Lipmann starts with the last element described, the throne. This element is identified in philosophical terminology with the sphere of the intellect, and in the Kabbalistic system with the tenth *sefirah*, *Malkhut* (majesty). He stresses how "every sphere is assigned a specific intellect, and every intellect is assigned a specific *sefirah.* […] And thus nine spheres and one prime matter complete ten."[115] Figure 2 offers a visual interpretation of Lipmann's account, as he maps the Chariot within the framework of both the philosophical and Kabbalistic aspects.

*Figure **2** : The Account of the Chariot within the philosophical and Kabbalistic systems*

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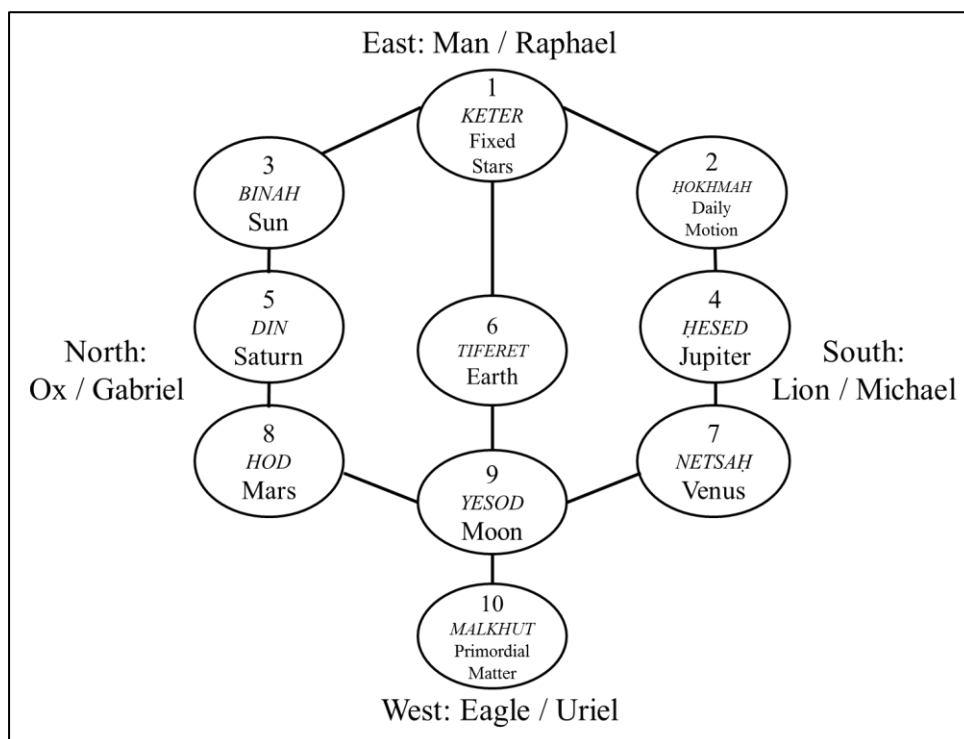
[114] ‏וראה פני נשר לצד מערב, כאשר מבואר בקידוש החודש שהראיה שהראיה למערב לקדשה‎ *ShE*, 150. For the full details of this point, see Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, "hilkhot kidush ha-ḥodesh" 19:12-14 (the *Responsa Project* version).

[115] *ShE*, 168. ‏כל גלגל מיוחד לשכל אחד, וכן כל שכל אחד מיוחד לספירה אחת […] ותשע' גלגלים וחומר ראשון אחד משלים לעשר'‎

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It is no longer through the sacrifices that one can connect to the higher intellect, but through the ritual of prayer when undergone in a similar state of mind. Likewise, the elements comprising the monthly ritual of sanctifying the new moon, the physical act of dancing before the moon, and the direction to which one should face while performing the ritual, all contain the same attributes of the sacrifices. Whether connecting the ritual to the philosophical separation of the elements or to the vision of Ezekiel, the goal is the same: perfecting the performance of the ritual through the appropriate mental disposition. Lipmann maintains that the same cosmological setting should be in mind, turning prayer into a journey through the worlds, believing the correct intent can take one through the different ascending levels of understanding creation and the Creator, both philosophically and mystically.

Throughout *ShE* Lipmann repeats the same hierarchy he finds in the different aspects of the universe in the form of three realms – the lower, middle and higher, which correspond to the terrestrial, celestial, and supernal respectively. In dealing with an earlier cosmological text, Y. Tzvi Langermann explains that this division was widely accepted by medieval Jewish thinkers, who searched at the same time for points of contact between the three realms. The text he analyses offers two unique points: the "sphere of the intellect" (*galgal ha-sekhel*) between the supernal and celestial, and Jerusalem between the celestial and terrestrial. The sphere of the intellect means the tenth celestial sphere, surrounding the ninth and fulfilling no particular astronomical function. Deriving directly from God's power, "it is directed both from and towards God," only to radiate God's light for the formation of souls.[116]

In *ShE* Lipmann also places the sphere of intellect as a mediating point between the supernal and celestial, but does not specify a unique threshold separating the celestial from the terrestrial. Rather, in each account he designates a different feature to hold this role. So far two have been mentioned: the first is the Tree of Life in the Account of Creation, and the

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[116] Y. Tzvi Langermann, "Cosmology and Cosmogony in 'Doresh Reshumoth,' a Thirteenth-Century Commentary on the Torah," *Harvard Theological Review* 97, no. 2 (2004): 201-2; 208-209.

second is humanity itself, introduced in the philosophical aspect of the Account of the Chariot. Humanity assumes the central part of containing both the upper and lower worlds' attributes.

While describing the Account of the Chariot in *ShE,* Lipmann offers a third option in the description of the chariot while explaining the discrepancy within the biblical verse, which mentions first a single "wheel on the ground beside each creature," but then describes the "structure of the wheels" (Ez. 1:15-16). He clarifies that the "wheel on the ground beside each creature" teaches us that "part of [the wheel] is with the animals and part of it on the ground." This later becomes the plural wheels since "they are one substance that received the four forms."[117] Fitting the actual construction of the wheels into the context of matter and form, Lipmann also stresses their unique physical place in the greater cosmological scheme. Similar to the principle of the Tree of Life, the wheel(s) have a place and point of contact both in the upper world and on earth.

The result of all three options offers an interesting model: the Tree of Life standing still with its base in the lower world and its head in the upper world; either the singular or plural wheel of the chariot moving to the rhythm of the animals' motion; and a human in between.[118] The last contains the attributes of the first two, and aspires to reach the top of all three and enjoy its intellectual fruit, thus obtaining the final stage of the vision: "and [Ezekiel] said 'above the firmament that was over their heads […] the likeness of the throne,' the sphere of the intellect [*galgal ha-sekhel*]."[119] This high level of understanding the Account of the Chariot is difficult – but not impossible – for an individual to obtain. It can be achieved by ensuring the proper intent in performing the daily rituals and prayers.

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[117] והנה אופן אחד בארץ אצל החיות, ר"ל שקצתו אצל החיות וקצתו בארץ, ונעתק אחרי כן לומר בלשון רבים, כמו שאמר ומראה האופנים, כי הם חומר אחד שקיבל הארבע צורות. *ShE*, 151.

[118] ובלכת החיות ילכו האופנים [...] ובהנשא החיות מעל הארץ ינשאו האופנים [...] והאופנים ינשאו לעומתם [...] כי רוח החיה באופנים [...] שהרי הם מנהיגיה [...] ובעמדם יעמדו. *ShE*, 152 (based on Ez. 1:19-21).

[119] ואמר ממעל לרקיע אשר על ראשם [...] הוא [...] גלגל השכל. *ShE*, 159.

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3. Horizontal motion: writing from east to west

Looking at both texts *ShE* and *SKhT*, we can distinguish three types of motion within the universe highlighted by the author: from God to the world (the Account of Creation); from the world to God (the Account of the Chariot), and from east to west (or vice versa). The last is especially significant, as it ties the other two together, offering the ritual link between them. A crucial part of properly performing the various rituals is the physical positioning of the believer, the direction he faces, and the direction of the motion included in the ritual (like in the sanctifying of the moon or swaying the *lulav*).

The question of the natural and proper motion from east to west or west to east can be found within the context of medieval philosophical treatises on the motion of the spheres. The question was rooted in the Aristotelian and Ptolemaic cosmological systems and in the contradiction introduced by tenth-century Arab astronomer al-Bitruji (known as Alpetragius) over the possibility of the celestial orbs moving in different, and even opposing, directions. According to the system offered in his treatise *On the Motions of the Heavens* (*De motibus celorum*), the celestial motion, controlled by the ninth sphere, is from east to west only.[120]

East and west appear at the very opening of *ShE* in describing the layout of the world and the Garden of Eden. As previously discussed, the directions are mentioned again in the Account of the Chariot in the description of the directions which each animal is facing. However, the question of their proper motion is brought up only in the final part of *ShE* which contains the Kabbalistic aspect of the Account of the Chariot. Once again veering off to a liturgical discussion, Lipmann ties the issue to the physical act of prostration and to the fact that "the entrance to the Temple is to the east and bowing down is to the west."[121]

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[120] Edward Grant, "Celestial Motions in the Late Middle Ages," *Early Science and Medicine* 2, no.2 (1997): 133-4. On the medieval understanding of the west-to-east motion of the planets, see Y. Tzvi Langermann, "Arabic Cosmology," *Early Science and Medicine* 2, no. 2, (1997): 201; Barbara Obrist, "Wind Diagrams and Medieval Cosmology," *Speculum* 72, no. 1, (1997): 33-84.

[121] וידוע שפתח ההיכל במזרח והשתחויה למערב. *ShE*, 169. This indeed follows Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah*, "hilkhot beit ha-beḥirah" 7:9.

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Accordingly, the Temple is situated with the tenth *sefirah* (*Malkhut*) in the west, and bowing is done towards it from the sixth *sefirah* (*Tifʾeret*) in the east.

The same ritual appears in Lipmann's earlier polemic treatise, *Sefer Nitsaḥon*. In the context of the verse "and the heavenly hosts bow down before you" (Neh. 9:6), Lipmann proves the Christians wrong for understanding the movement of the sun and other celestial bodies as revolving from east to west. The author explains that only to us on Earth does it seem that the sun revolves from east to west, when in fact the sun turns facing God, not us, and so its motion is actually from west to east.[122]

This very same explanation is quoted in another, later polemic treatise by Rabbi Yitsḥaq Isaac Ṭirna (d. before 1449).[123] Placed in the final section of his treatise, Ṭirna is faced with a question he was asked by a gentile, as to "why is it that we [Jews] write from right to left, opposite to the course of the sun […]."[124] The question seems to suggest that Hebrew scripture goes against the world's natural order. Relying on the explanation found in Lipmann's treatise as to the true nature of the movement of the cosmic realms, Ṭirna shows the gentile that in fact it is *he* who has it backwards. Thus, it would follow for Ṭirna that Hebrew is the one language which *does* mimic the course of the sun.

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[122] *Sefer Nitsaḥon* §339. For explanations on the option of contrary movement of the spheres, see Grant, "Celestial Motions."

[123] Ṭirna likely compiled his polemic treatise while residing in the city of Brno, Moravia, in the early 1420s. The autographic version of his treatise did not survive, only a copy, also dated to the same time period. The manuscript kept by Jews' College London (hereafter: Montefiore 226) was sold in 2006 to a private buyer. A copy remains in the Institute of Microfilmed Hebrew Manuscripts in Jerusalem (F-5194, fols. 72r-103v). The following quotations are from my own transcribing of the manuscript. A critical edition is underway by Avraham David. For a recent article dealing with this text and further details of the author's biography, see: Avraham David, "Rabbi Yitsḥaq ʾayzaq Ṭirna we-ḥiburo ha-pulmusi *teshuvat ha-minim* – berurim rishonim" [Rabbi Isaac Ṭirna and his polemic treatise *Response to the Heretics* – preliminary findings], in *Taʾ Shmaʾ - meḥqarim be-madʿei ha-yahadut*, vol. 1, ed. Avraham (Rami) Reiner and others, (Alon Shevut: Tevunot, 2011), 257-80; Isaac Ṭirna, *Sefer ha-minhagim* [Book of customs], ed. Shlomo J. Spitzer (Jerusalem: Mekhon Yerushalayim, 2000). For a comparison of Ṭirna's and Lipmann's polemic texts see my research: "Mah shayakh neḥamah ʿaleyhem we-haloʾ loʾ hayah lahem galut:' bilbulam shel ha-notsrim be-teshuvat ha-minim le-rabbi Yitsḥaq ʾayziq Ṭirna" ['Wherefore should they share in the prophecies of consolation, they who have never known exile': The misguided Christians and Rabbi Isaac Tyrna's response], Master's Thesis, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, 2013.

[124] Montefiore 226, fol. ‏שאלני גוי אחד למה אנו כותבי"[ם] מימין לשמאל להיפך מהילוך החמה שהולכת ממזרח למערב לדרום ולמערב‎ 103r.

Ṭirna does not stop here, but continues to demonstrate how in other various Jewish customs that involve rotation or movement the case is the same: "with the Hanukkah candles […], one starts lighting from the left and finishes at the right, and so in the priestly blessing […] as all the priests turn to the right, and so they open the ark in Bruna [Brno] and a few other communities from left to right."[125] The common feature of these customs is their placement in the public realm: during Hanukkah one places the candles on the windowsill, so they can be seen from the street – meaning the lighting should be conducted facing outward, just like the sun faces God. The same goes for the priestly blessing: the priests are blessing the congregation and so need to turn facing them.

The same description of these motions is found in at least two contemporary books of customs,[126] supported by a rule of thumb (Babylonian Talmud, *Yoma* 15b): "All turns you make in the Temple must be to the right."[127] Although all the mentioned motions can be derived from this rule, as they indeed are in other texts (including Ṭirna's own *Book of Customs*),[128] in the polemic context Ṭirna chooses to tie them to their cosmological aspect. In the same way in which Lipmann demonstrates the intrinsic connections between the upper, middle and lower worlds, and their parallel features, so Ṭirna understands it to apply down to the very basic movements performed in Jewish customs.

<p style="text-align:center">***</p>

This chapter has highlighted the way in which *ShE* provides speculative explanations for Lipmann's more practice-oriented text, *SKhT*. The "diversions" into liturgical issues scattered throughout *ShE* seem to me a constant reminder that the author indeed intended this text to be a basis for understanding the meaning behind certain rituals and customs of everyday Jewish life, and not necessarily for the sake of pure intellectual exercise or meditation. Thus, after

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[125] חנוכה כתו'[ב] [...] שמתחיל להדליק מצא מצד שמאל ומ[ס]יים בימין, וכן בברכת כהנים [...] כל מה שפונין הכהנים הכל לצד ימין, וכן פותחין הפרוכת בברונ'א ובמקצת שאר הקהילות משמאל לימין .Montefiore 226, fol.103v.
[126] See: *Leket Yosher*, "'oraḥ ḥayim" 148:3; *Sefer Maharil*, "hilkhot ḥanukah" 2.
[127] כל פינות שאתה פונה - לא יהו אלא דרך ימין.
[128] Ṭirna, *Sefer ha-minhagim*, 134-5.

devising a synthesis of philosophical and Kabbalistic thought, Lipmann applies a similar procedure to the speculative and liturgical dimensions of religion.

Most of the parallels between cosmology and liturgy seem to belong primarily to the context of prayer, whether the content of various passages or the physical stance one takes when praying. This is also present in Lipmann's second so-called philosophical text, *SKhT*. In addition, *ShE* also includes several instances of particular insistence on the cosmological speculations regarding the shape of the Hebrew alphabet's letters. These examples later resurface in Lipmann's *Sefer Alpha Beta*, dedicated to the proper technique of physically writing the Hebrew letters for the purpose of making Torah, *tefillin* (phylacteries), and *mezuzah* scrolls.

The art of writing was also the main subject in Ṭirna's aforementioned passage regarding the direction of the sun. The direction of Hebrew writing that stood out so distinctly in a Christian environment was the initial movement that prompted the entire discussion. Within this particular polemic context, Ṭirna's decision to seal his treatise using this particular type of explanation (based on Lipmann's words) cannot be coincidental. By proving that the act of Hebrew writing mimics the movements of the heavenly bodies, he also places Hebrew script in the heavenly realms. Following this rationale, no other language could be used to write and read (and understand) the word of God. It would seem Ṭirna found the ultimate argument to prove that Jews alone held the true understanding of the Holy Scriptures, for who could deny the physical evidence of nature itself?

Similar to the structure of this chapter, the following one will take on Lipmann's own cosmological reckoning of the Hebrew script as demonstrated in *Sefer Alpha Beta*, and the ways in which the act of writing for religious purposes can also be used as a means of creating a sacred space, imitating both the natural and mystical components of the world, as presented in *Sefer ha-Eshkol*.

45

Chapter Three – Cosmological Script

After positioning *Sefer ha-Eshkol* (*ShE*) as a point of reference for Lipmann's later text *Sefer Kawwanat ha-Tefillah* (*SKhT*), linking cosmology to prayer, this chapter presents such a connection between *ShE* and *Sefer Alpha Beta* (*SAB*), linking cosmology to the practice of writing. As with the act of prayer in *SKhT*, cosmological explanations are used in *SAB* to offer an interpretation of the act of writing and to educate scribes of sacred Jewish texts.

Maimonides states it is the duty of every person to write their own Torah scroll. If one cannot take on such a project, others can do so for them.[129] Such a task would be done by a professional scribe – a *sofer STaM* – the Hebrew initials for *sefer Torah, tefillin,* and *mezuzah*; three artifacts that contain either the entire Torah or segments of it, so the same rules of sacred writing apply to them all.[130] I argue that the cosmological aspect of the alphabet was not only a didactic means to train scribes in the correct form of the Hebrew letters, but also a tool for creating a sacred space upon parchment.

Sefer Alpha Beta, written after *Sefer ha-Eshkol*, belongs to a genre of guidebooks for scribes describing the proper form of the Hebrew alphabet and the layout of Torah, *tefillin* and *mezuzah* scrolls. Such guidebooks included *Shimushaʾ Rabbaʾ*, a Geonic compilation on *tefillin*; *Kitre ʾotiyot Tefillin* by Judah ben Samuel ha-Ḥassid (d. 1217); *Tikkun Tefillin* by Abraham Sontheim (thirteenth century), and *Sefer Barukh she-ʾamar* by Rabbi Samson ben-Eliezer (fourteenth century), which includes commentary on the previous *Tikkun Tefillin*.[131] In most manuscripts and printed editions, *SAB* appears as an addition to *Sefer Barukh she-ʾamar*, which also serves as a guide for preparing the parchment for a Torah scroll,

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[129] *Mishneh Torah, hilkhot tefillin, u-mezuzah we-sefer Torah* 7:1.
[130] For a fuller explanation of this title, see *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, s.v "scribes."
[131] All four texts can be found in Menachem M. Meshi-Zahav, *Qovets sifrei STaM* (Jerusalem: Mekhon ha-talmud ha-yisreʾeli ha-shalem, 1981). *Sefer Barukh she-ʾamar* was introduced in chapter 1.

phylacteries and *mezuzot*.[132] While the main text offers instructions for all steps in the production of the three sacred artifacts, Lipmann's *SAB* focuses only on the writing of the alphabet.

Lipmann clearly describes the reality which led him to produce such a compilation. Witnessing the state of forgetfulness and neglect even on the part of professional scribes when it comes to the shaping of the letters, Lipmann states:

> since I know that not even one in a thousand Torah scrolls is correct, I had a mind to make one [scroll] as instructed, and [please] God I should complete it and read from it; and so I made a great effort in composing the *Alpha Beta* […], finding many disputes in some matters. However, explaining all these would be out of place, [so I present] only their practical application (*halakha le-maʿaseh*).[133]

Whether or not Lipmann ever fulfilled his wish of writing his own Torah scroll, it is clear that he intended *SAB* to act as a means of overcoming an actual problem in his days. Continuing to copy *SAB* along with *Sefer Barukh she-ʾamar* during the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries reinforces its practical relevance.[134] However, certain parts of *SAB* were also copied along with Kabbalistic texts between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries, thus attributing it as an esoteric text, and not necessarily one used for practical purposes.[135]

The Talmud and *Masekhet Soferim* include many instructions that ensure the scribe does not violate the scroll's sacredness. These address the materials used for the production

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[132] In this study I use the Baumritter Press edition (Warsaw, 1877). Since the pagination uses both Hebrew letters and numbers, I have marked the folios as 1a/b (1a referring to the Hebrew letter "א" and 1b to the number 1). At the end of the text, Lipmann added a short prayer and his name, which would seem to conclude the text. However, Kaufman notes that the printed editions of the *Alpha Beta* include an additional text also attributed to Lipmann. The addition is mostly a repeat of the *Alpha Beta*, and so will not be referred to in the scope of this paper. For its details see Kaufman, *Rabbi Yom Tov*, 73-74.

[133] ויען שידעתי שס"ת אחת מיני אלף לא תמצא כתיקנו עלה בלבי לעשות אחת כמצותי וה' יזכני לגומרה לקרא בה אותי, ע"כ הרביתי לטרוח לחבר אלפא ביתא […] ויגעתי ומצאתי מחלוקת בדבר […] ולפרש הכל אין ראוי לי אלא הנראה הלכה למעשה. *SAB*, 20a. Other than this text, Lipmann also wrote a halakhic text containing guidelines for scribes to follow when writing a Torah scroll (a scribe's *tikkun*). The text has been edited by David S. Löwinger and Ephraim Kupfer, "Tikkun sefer torah shel rabbi Yom Ṭov Lipman Milhoyzen" [Rabbi Yom Ṭov Lipmann Mühlhausen's Torah "tikkun"], *Sinai* 60 (1966/7): 237-68.

[134] For example: Bar Ilan 844; Ox. Opp. 110; NY JTS 6372; Warsaw 183; NY JTS 6373.

[135] For example: Ox. Opp. 563; Mos. 162; Ox. Opp. 520; Ox. Opp. 529; Ox. Opp. 403.

of a scroll, as well as rules of conduct when handling or being in the presence of one. Such issues were reiterated in the writings of Ḥasidei Ashkenaz, who vigorously promoted the principle of *kevod Sefer Torah* (respect or reverence for the Torah scroll).[136] The same principle is used for stressing the precision required by a scribe when writing the letters of a Torah scroll. Any mistake would render the scroll flawed and invalid for use. This would explain Lipmann's efforts to collect different traditions and compile them into a single coherent guide for the use of scribes.

What connects *SAB* to *SKhT* is the halakhic demand for a particular level of devotion for the task of writing the letters of Scripture, specifically for the purpose of producing Torah, *tefillin* and *mezuzah* scrolls. Just as *SKhT* addresses the importance of intent while reciting the words of prayer and Scripture, *kawwanah* should also accompany the physical act of writing. It is thus for good reasons that *SAB* could accompany both guidebooks for scribes as well as esoteric texts; its content touches upon both the physical work of the scribe, as well as the spiritual aspect of *kawwanah*, which is part-and-parcel of writing a sacred artifact such as a Torah scroll.

The importance of the scribe's intent is articulated in Lipmann's introduction to the text, where he states that "[committing] a sin with [good] intentions is better than [following] a commandment (*mitsvah*) with none."[137] Lipmann uses this formula to rationalize the fact he has opened the gates of forbidden secrets, referring to the esoteric nature of the commentary to follow.[138] As with *ShE*, the author makes Kabbalistic commentary, once restricted to a specific elite, accessible to anyone. Stressing the importance and power of *kawwanah* fits into the overall purpose of this text – to explain how one can achieve proper intent when engaged

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[136] On the Ashkenazic Pietists' efforts to include Oral texts under the same principle of *kevod Sefer Torah*, see Fishman, *Becoming the People*, 198-203.

[137] גדולה עבירה לשמה ממצווה שלא לשמה. *SAB*, 20a. The origin of this rule can be found in the Babylonian Talmud (*Horayot* 10b; *Nazir* 23b).

[138] על כן אפתח שערי הסוד אשר לא כדת. *SAB*, 20a.

in writing Hebrew, the need of which stems from the fact that the three types of scrolls are considered sacred artifacts.

Numbers vs. Letters

In her article on the medieval change of attitude towards Plato's *Timaeus*, Anna Somfai methodically demonstrates how the transmission of Calcidius' commentary of *Timaeus* during the eleventh and twelfth centuries had brought mathematics to the forefront of philosophical studies. Numbers – previously underplayed in favor of the metaphysical approach – were now put to use for the understanding of Creation and its harmonious nature.[139] The Pythagorean idea of numbers as the core of the cosmos introduced a common language by which cosmological study could be undertaken.

Such an idea was already being implemented in Jewish texts. As previously discussed, numeric systems were applied to the Hebrew alphabet (*gematriya*) in search for the underlying meanings of Scripture and prayer. In his *SAB*, Lipmann adds a cosmological layer to the mathematical one, based on the same principles described in *ShE*. The cosmological attributes of the alphabet are found in the physical shape of each Hebrew letter. This layer complements the halakhic aspect of *kawwanah*, adding a cognitive aspect to the production of the alphabet.

In the introduction to *SAB* Lipmann lists four levels of the cognitive *kawwanah*, according to which he also structured the text. Each level is specified for its intended readership, forming together four sets of commentary on the entire Hebrew alphabet (twenty-two letters plus the five final forms – *sofiyot*). The levels go through the simple form of the letter, adding to it the moral explanation for that particular form, then its numeral meaning,

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[139] Anna Somfai, "The Eleventh-Century Shift in the Reception of Plato's Timaeus and Calcidius's Commentary," *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 65 (2002): 1–21.

and finally its Kabbalistic understanding, placing it within the *sefirot* framework (as with the Accounts of Creation and the Chariot in *ShE*).

The first level offers only the technical instructions for shaping each letter with no extra commentary, so that "every person who speaks the sacred language should know the truth."[140] This section offers a plain, almost step-by-step, description for writing every letter, including its length and width, as well as any additional features (such as a stipe). The second level includes an interpretation of each letter for the wise (*ḥakhamim*), including a deeper explanation of the specific features detailed in the first section. For example, the latter instructs writing the letter *aleph* with a small stipe at the top bending upwards (Fig. 3). Its parallel paragraph in the second section explains the reason for this is that the letter "looks towards God, announcing his oneness."[141]

Figure 3 : The letter aleph, Warsaw 183, fol. 41v (detail).

However, there is yet a deeper, "secret" third level of understanding for this act, reserved for the more perceptive (*nevonim*). For these Lipmann adds information from *Sefer ha-Temunah* (Book of the form) that explains the letter's shape using its numeric value.[142] In the case of the first letter, the oneness of God denoted by the letter's structure is parallel to its value, which equals one. Furthermore, if broken down to its graphic components, the *aleph* actually includes two *yud* (each equal to ten), and one *waw* (which equals six). Using *gematriya* again, the numbers are calculated back to the letters which correspond to the total sum of twenty-six, *kaf-waw* (כ"ו). These are the two letters which open and close the verse that describes our relationship to God: "Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your

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[140] SAB, 20a. ואבאר בראשונה תואר צורתם לבד בלי טעם וראיה למען ידע כל אדם מבין לשון הקודש ללמוד האמת

[141] SAB, 21b. מה שכתבתי למעלה שעוקץ של הא' קצת הפוך כלפי מעלה מפני שצופה להקב"ה ומעידה שהוא אחד

[142] *Sefer ha-Temunah* was written around 1250 (either by a Kabbalist of the Gerona or Provencal circle). It includes an interpretation of the divine image through the forms of the Hebrew alphabet. Interestingly, in several of the manuscripts that include *SAB* only the third part of it was copied (that which explains the content of *Sefer ha-Temunah*). Those manuscripts included texts on magic, commentary on the *Zohar*, and other compilations by Lipmann.

strength (Deut. 6:5)." This verse appears in both the phylacteries and the *mezuzah* scrolls, and is part of the *shemaʿ* prayer.[143] From the very first letter and its link to the very basic principle of the love of God, the demand for the scribe's devotion and commitment is clear.

After developing the numeric value of the letter as well as its scriptural association, Lipmann continues to explain the physical placement of the *yud* and *waw* that create the *aleph* in cosmological terms. Thus, each *yud* that stands at the top and bottom of the letter symbolizes

> the two spheres in the north and south, while the *waw* [between them] alludes to the middle line that crosses between the axes from east to west, and twenty-six is the number of weeks it takes the sun to rotate from the middle point to the one axis, as well as to the second axis.[144]

We find that at the third level of understanding, the meaning of the letter's structure places its components in the cosmos, representing certain celestial movements. Furthermore, the total numeric value already explained (twenty-six) also parallels the passage of time during the sun's rotation between the poles. All that is left is the fourth level of interpretation, reserved for those who possess a higher level of intelligence (*maskilim*), placing the letters within the Kabbalistic system of the *sefirot*.

At the start of every new level, Lipmann repeats and elaborates the previous explanations. Thus, if at first the stipe on top of the *aleph* alluded to God above the world, now it is alluding to "the infinite (*ʾein sof*), and its body, which is the line running diagonally from right to left, means its head should be on the right above *Gevurah* [or *Din*, the fifth

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[143] יו"ד למעלה ויו"ד למטה וי"ו באמצע ויעלה מספר כ"ו [...] וע"כ רומזת לשמו ית' וכן פסוק ואהבת את ה' וכו' מתחיל בוי"ו ומסיים בכף הרי כ"ו. *SAB*, 24a.

[144] השני יודין רומזין על שני צידי הגלגלים בצפון ובדרום והו"ו רומזת על קו האמצעי ההולך באמצע הצירים ממזרח למערב וכאשר מספרים כ"ו כן כ"ו שבועות נוטה החמה מקו השוה אל הציר האחד וכ"ו שבועות נוטה החמה מקו השוה אל הציר השני. *SAB*, 24a.

sefirah], and its end under *Netsaḥ* [seventh]."[145] As in *ShE*, here too Lipmann fits the *sefirot* within a cosmological scheme. Tying together the four levels of interpretation, one understands the letter *aleph* is shaped in this particular way for reasons of cosmological and mystical nature – and should thus not to be tampered with by a careless scribe (Fig. 4).

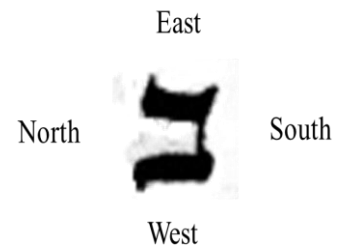Figure **4** : *The letter aleph within the cosmological and Kabbalistic systems*
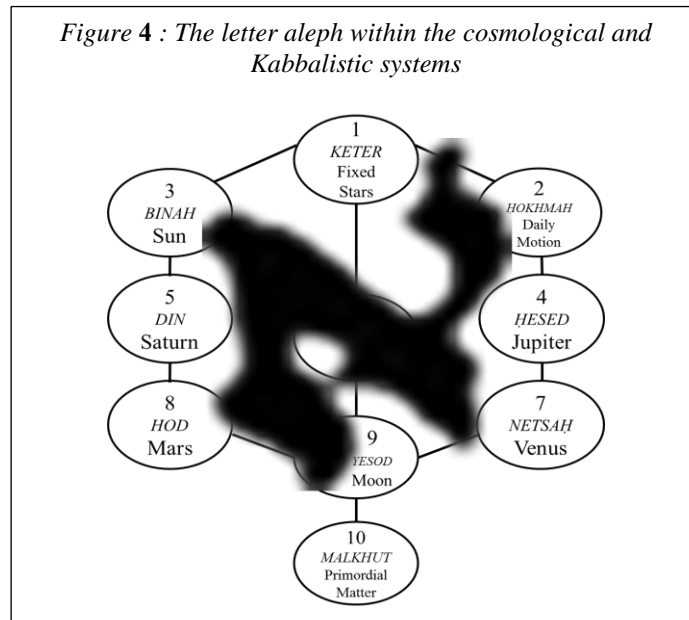
The Alphabet and Creation

The previous section highlighted the reliance of *SAB* on the general cosmological framework introduced in *ShE*. In addition, specific cross-textual references link the two texts: *ShE* is referenced to in *SAB* ten times. However, I am interested in the instances in which comments mentioned in *ShE* are left unclear until encountered again in *SAB*. Such an approach reinforces the need to comprehensively read Lipmann's works and find their connections. Thus, this section goes back to *ShE* and extracts three references to the Hebrew alphabet that remain unexplained, but are elaborated on in *SAB*. All three examples appear in the section of *ShE* devoted to the Account of Creation.

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[145] ותג למעלה על הנקודה רומזת לאין סוף וגופה שהיא הקו העובר באלכסון מימין לשמאל הכוונה שיהי' ראשו מימין מעל הגבור"ה ולמטה סופה מתחת נצ"ח. *SAB*, 26a.

The first example refers to the letter *bet* – the second letter in the Hebrew alphabet – with which the biblical text of Genesis opens. The letter is discussed in a way similar to the description of the *aleph* in *SAB*. Like the *aleph*, *bet* should also have a stipe on top. The explanation given for this was to stress the distinction of God, alluded to by this stipe, from the ten *sefirot*.[146] A certain confusion arises in light of the similar interpretations Lipmann gives for two different letters, but a closer review of the more detailed interpretation of the letter *bet* in *SAB* makes the matter clearer: while *ShE* did not elaborate on the stipe at the top of the *bet, SAB* instructs the scribe to make a "small stipe above veering right, leaning towards the *aleph*" (Fig. 5).[147] The second level of interpretation resolves the issue, explaining that the stipe on the *bet* indeed refers to God, who is represented by the preceding *aleph*. Thus, even when written separately from the *aleph*, the stipe remains as a reminder of the first letter pointing to God. Thus, the second letter relies upon the first.

Figure 5: The letter bet within the cosmological system, Warsaw 183, fol. 15r (detail).

East

North   South

West

When moving into the fourth and highest Kabbalistic level of interpretation of the letter's shape, Lipmann takes the reader back to the Account of Creation and the explanation in *ShE*, adding that

> the *bet* is square since it alludes to the creation [...] but open to the north, and this is the secret of [Job 26:7,] "He stretches out the north over the empty space (*tohu*)," and the sages said [Babylonian Talmud, *Bava Batra* 25b,] "this world is like an *exedra*" (i.e. closed on three sides and open on the fourth), so there is no divide there [...] as I explained in my commentary on *Sefer Yetsirah*.[148]

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[146] *ShE*, 140.

[147] *SAB*, 21b. ועוקץ קטן למעלה נוטה לצד ימין נוטה לצד אל"ף.

[148] ומפני שהב' רומזת לבריאה היא מרובעת [...] אך היא פתוחה לצד צפון והוא סוד נוטה צפון על תוהו וארז"ל העולם דומה לאכסדרה שאין שם מחיצה [...] כדפי' בפי' שכתבתי על ספר יצירה. *SAB*, 26b. Lipmann follows the biblical disposition of the cardinal directions, in which east points to the front and north therefore points to the left. This is based on the layout description of the tribes of Israel during their journey through the desert (see for example Num. 35:5).

Lipmann refers to his commentary on *Sefer Yetsirah*, where he explains the third *sefirah* of

Binah (intelligence) as being placed in the north (just like the opening of the letter *bet*).[149]

Following the *aleph* that represents God, the first and prime mover, the shape of the *bet*

represents the link to the next step – creation.

Two other letters were noted in *ShE* as taking a central part in the creation of the

world – *zayin* and *nun*. In the context of the Account of Creation within the *sefirot*, heaven

and earth are described as an "allusion to [the Hebrew letters] *zayin* and *nun*."[150] This

comment is left unexplained and unreferenced in *ShE*, and as Kaufman also did not attribute

this sentence to a specific source, it indeed appears

to be one of those rare instances in which Lipmann

formulated independent thoughts. Turning to *SAB*

we find an elaboration of the idea that these letters

represent part of creation:

Figure 6: The letter zayin, Warsaw 183, fol. 19r (detail).

TIME
6 days of creation

PLACE
6 edges of the universe

> [The letter] *zayin* is not a compound [of other letters], and includes only its own
> numeric value, which equals seven. [This represents] *ha-makom* [Heb.: the place, also a
> term used for God], who is seventh after the six edges [of the universe] alluded to by
> *waw* (i.e. the previous letter that equals six) […] and the head of the *zayin* turns this
> way and that way [see Fig. 6]: one facing the six edges and one facing the six days of
> creation […], and it stands floating on one leg, as the sages said [Babylonian Talmud,
> *Hagigah* 12b]: "the world stands on one leg: this is the righteous person [*tsaddik*], for it
> is written [Prov. 10:25] 'the righteous is the foundation of the world.'"[151]

This paragraph is a natural continuance of the idea briefly expressed in *ShE* – that the two

letters represent the creation of the first day. From the passage quoted here *zayin* is described

as a stand-alone letter, which is not built from the combination of other letters (unlike the

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[149] Weinstok, "*Perush Sefer Yeẓirah*, 110.

[150] *ShE*, 140. והשמים והארץ רמז לז' ולנ'.

[151] וזיין אין לו מורכבי' כלל רק מניינה שבעה שהוא לשש הקצוות שביעי כי המקום שרמז הוי"ו [...] ראש הזיין פנים לכאן ולכאן אחד לשש קצוות ואחד לששת ימי המעשה [...] ועומד באויר על רגל אחד כמאמר חז"ל העולם עומד על רגל אחד וצדיק שמו שנאמר וצדיק יסוד עולם. *SAB*, 24b. The word "world" (ʿolam) in the context of the verse from Proverbs could be understood temporally, meaning "everlasting." In this case, the word is understood literally as the world itself.

aleph). Rather, it stands on its single leg in place of the world itself, linking space (six edges of the universe) and time (six days of creation). Indeed, the numeric value of the letter, seven, is a prime number that cannot be divided into positive numbers.

The notion that the world stands on a single foundation was also addressed by Lipmann in his commentary on "Shir ha-yiḥud" (The hymn of divine unity), a twelfth-century poem attributed to Rabbi Judah ha-Ḥassid.[152] The section to be recited on Fridays includes the words "with the will of your spirit you suspended everything / everything is carried by the everlasting arms."[153] Lipmann comments on the fact that one should be aware of the foundations on which the world stands, and provides several options for the number of elements that comprise these foundations.

Eventually, he comes to the conclusion that "the whole world hangs on the arm of God, like a shield on a hero's hand." God's "everlasting arms" (Deut. 33:27) are explained to be the means by which "every heavy thing returns to the earth, and every light thing returns to its lightness […] and the powers given by God ensure that none of them may fall, and the world itself cannot fall, for there is no place outside the world for anything to fall."[154] Lipmann introduces the Aristotelian theory of the natural motion of heavy and light things which determine where they are naturally drawn to. Furthermore, he denies the existence of a void outside the world, asserting that it, and everything within it, could never fall.[155]

While Lipmann's interpretation for the letter *zayin* emphasized the oneness of the world's foundation, its partnering letter *nun* (as per *ShE*) adds the physical placement of this foundation. The author brings the explanation of *Sefer ha-Temunah*, which instructs the *nun*

[152] Yom Ṭov Lipmann Mühlhausen. *Shir ha-Yiḥud ʿim perush ʿal-derekh ha-kabbalah le-rabbi Yom Ṭov Lipmann Milhoyzen* [The hymn of divine unity, with the Kabbalistic commentary of Rabbi Yom Ṭov Lipmann Mühlhausen], ed. Joseph Dan (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1981), vii-ix. See also Kaufman, *Rabbi Yom Tov*, 80-81.
[153] ברצון רוחך כל תלית / זרועות עולם את כל נושאות. *Shir ha-Yiḥud*, 30.
[154] ונמצא כל העולם תלויין בזרוע של הקב"ה כמגן על יד גיבור [...] זרועות עולם פי' כי כל דבר תולה על בלימה [...] כל דבר כבד חוזר לארץ וכל דבר קל חוזר לקלותו [...] ומכח הכוחות שנתן הש"י להם אי אפשר שיפול מהם שום דבר וגם העולם בכללו אי אפשר שיפול שמה. Lipmann, *Shir ha-Yiḥud*, 32.
[155] On the movement of heavy and light things, see Aristotle, *Physics*, BK 8, chapter 4, 255b9-266a3. On the existence of a void outside the world, see *Physics*, BK 4, chapter 6, 213a11-29.

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to be "a compound of *zayin* and *waw*, making its value thirteen, which is the number of the One." In *gematriya* the sum of letters forming the Hebrew word for "one" (*ʾeḥad*) equals thirteen – the number of letters leading to the position of the letter *nun*, placed exactly midway between the first thirteen and the last thirteen (including the five final forms).[156] Whichever way one looks at *nun* – either its numeric value or its place within the Hebrew alphabet – this letter symbolizes the centrality of God not only as the single foundation of the world, but also as its core.

As for the letter *nun*'s shape, the *sofer* is instructed to make it "shaped like the *zayin* […] and its arc [is meant to represent] its loyalty. Thus, it slightly bends towards the north [forming] a partition (Fig. 7)."[157] Based on the warning given to Jeremiah (1:14) – "out of the north the evil shall break forth" – the north represents the source of trouble and evil in the biblical symbolic geography. This principle is repeated many times in *ShE* in relation to the snake in the Garden of Eden, as well as to the Babylonian exile.[158] Like the *bet* that opens towards the north, but has three other sides that form a divide, the *nun* also functions as a sort of buffer, protecting from the danger coming from the north.

Figure 7: The letter nun within the cosmological system, Warsaw 183, fol. 28r (detail).
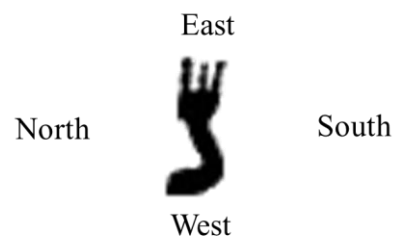
Concluding with *nun sofit* (the final form of *nun*), Lipmann explains that it simply goes "straight down, hinting to the middle axis through which the [divine] emanation influences *Malkhut* (Fig. 8)."[159] Thus, the *nun* functions also as a part of the emanation

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[156] נון – כתב בספר התמונה שמורכב מן זיין ומן וי"ו ויעלה מספרה י"ג [...] ומודיע שהוא אחד כי מן הא' עד המ' י"ג אותיות כמנין אחד ומן המ' ועד תי"ו י"ג אותיות כמנין אחד. *SAB*, 25a.

[157] נון כמו שפרשתי שצורתה כמו זיין [...] שפירושה נאמן ע"כ יריכה משוך למטה לצד צפון [...] כי זכות הנאמן חוצץ לפני מדת צפון. *SAB*, 27b.

[158] *ShE*, 142; 169.

[159] והנון פשוטה יורדת למטה לרמוז שדרך קו האמצעי מן הנו"ן יורד השפע למטה אל המלכות. *SAB*, 27b.

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system, a vessel for the transference downwards to the tenth and bottom *sefirah*, *Malkhut* (kingdom).

Figure 8: The letter nun sofit within the Kabbalistic system, Warsaw 183, fol.28r (detail).
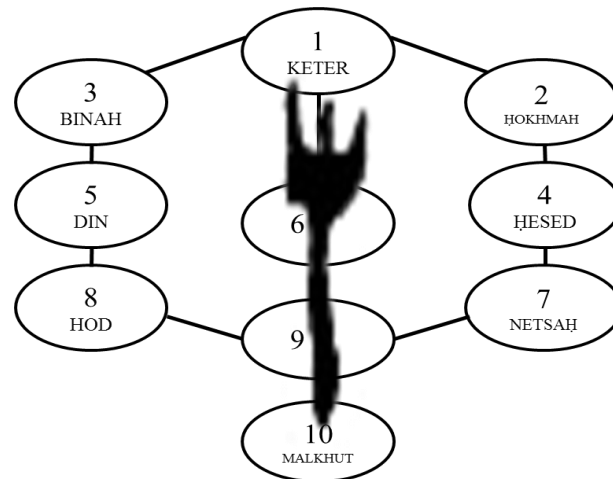
Writing Sacred Spaces

So far, we have seen how Lipmann connected cosmological attributes to the shaping of the Hebrew alphabet, and how these attributes represent the letters' function in both the physical and metaphysical realms, as described in *ShE*. How are these functions supposed to be applied when taking on the precise and lengthy task of writing a Torah scroll, and how could the text of *SAB* actually be used?

In her research on memorization methods used in the Middle Ages, Mary Carruthers speaks of the importance of organizing the material to be memorized. She speaks of *memoria* as "an art of composition," in which the material must be put into "new patterns and forms […] using *division and composition*." In order to avoid errors, the small segments of information are put in a "sequential order," which would be organized in a particular scheme.

Such a scheme could be a familiar image (usually from Scriptures), a garden, ladder or world map. The information could then be "gathered" by invoking the particular image.[160]

In the case of *SAB*, a similar scheme is present: the alphabet (a sequence in itself) is fitted within a numeric sequence, a cosmological sequence of the cardinal points and the movements of the planets between them, and a Kabbalistic sequence of the order of the *sefirot*. The material meant for memorization is not textual but rather visual, as it comprises of the meaning behind the physical shape of each letter. The presentation of each letter in small segments along the four levels of understanding also follows the system Carruthers speaks of, making the task of the scribe simpler. Thus, the act of remembering or envisioning the cosmological setting in which each letter is to be placed helps the scribe to accurately form the letter. At the same time it also places the scribe in the appropriate state of mind, or *kawwanah*.

The cognitive process of envisioning the cosmos in order to write the Hebrew letters is similar to that described in the previous chapter regarding Jewish prayers. The same journey through the heavens is taken on in the act of writing Hebrew, the sacred language of the sacred Torah. I suggest the process of writing a Torah scroll under these circumstances is parallel to the generation of a sacred space on two levels: on the cognitive level, the scribe envisions a sacred order of the created universe; on the material level, the scroll itself and the letters on it form their own symbolic "cosmos" of holiness. This gives a particular importance to the direction of writing, as following the "natural motion" from right to left, as discussed in the previous chapter.

Any discussion of sacred spaces must start with Mircea Eliade, who sets out to understand the religious as a relationship between the two spheres, "sacred" and "profane."

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[160] Mary Carruthers and Jan M. Ziolkowski, ed., *The Medieval Craft of Memory: An Anthology of Texts and Pictures* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 4-6 (emphasis in the original). See also Mary Carruthers, *The Craft of Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

Reflecting conceptions from Rudolf Otto's *Das Heilige* (1917),[161] Eliade examines the notion of the sacred in its entirety, including its ritual aspects, and not only at the (rational or irrational) ideas on the divine. He seeks to follow the *homo religiosus* ("religious man") and his experiences of the sacred throughout his life, taking into consideration that any account would represent the individual's own perception of the sacred. These experiences would include some manifestation of the sacred (hierophany) in a certain space and/or time.[162]

The Hebrew term for sacred is *qadosh*, the root of which indicates something that is set apart. The term can refer to people, places, animals, and as introduced in this chapter, objects.[163] Following, a sacred space is one that is set apart from other spaces. Sacred spaces "can be entered physically […], imaginatively […], or visually, [and are sacred] because they perform a religious function, not because they have peculiar physical or aesthetic qualities."[164]

In discussing sacred spaces, a central question is where one finds the borderlines, or thresholds, at which one moves from the sacred into the profane and vice versa. The first distinction Eliade makes is between "cosmos" and "chaos," the inhabited territory and whatever lies outside it, or earth and the underworld.[165] Lipmann does not venture into the underworld, but rather offers the Hebrew language as a means for crossing the thresholds between the physical and the metaphysical; between earth and heaven; between letters and *sefirot*. In *SKhT* it is through the words of the Hebrew language in prayers, while in *SAB* it is the Hebrew alphabet written by a *sofer STaM*.

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[161] Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine and its Relation to the Rational*, trans. John W. Harvey (London: Oxford University Press, 1923).
[162] Eliade, *The Sacred*, 20-24.
[163] See Carsten Colpe, "The Sacred and the Profane," in *The Encyclopedia of Religion,* ed. Mircea Eliade (NY: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 11:515.
[164] Joel P. Brereton, "Sacred Space," in *The Encyclopedia of Religion,* ed. Mircea Eliade (NY: Simon & Schuster, 1995), 11:526.
[165] Eliade, *The Sacred*, 29-32.

Furthermore, Lipmann's *SAB* demonstrates how it is exactly the physical quality of a Hebrew letter that enables it to acquire sacredness and then be part of a sacred object. Not only do the words make a Torah scroll sacred, but the actual individual letters from which they are created. The space created then "becomes the place of the presence of divinity. Through its use of simple geometric forms, proportionality, and light, for example, the Gothic cathedral was imagined as the image of the heavenly city."[166] The geometric forms described in *SAB* are in fact the letters, through which the scribe forms an image of the cosmos on parchment. To achieve this does not require knowledge of astronomy or scientific training, but only that the scribe follows *SAB*'s instructions to reestablish the forgotten practice of Hebrew script.

Unlike prayer rituals, which parallel the long lost sacrificial work of the Temple, the writing of a Torah scroll (though its material demands the slaughtering of an animal) should be inspired by the image of the entire cosmos and its creation.[167] The Talmud (*Nedarim* 39b) lists the Torah as one of the seven things created before the world, and *Sefer Yetsirah* describes how the letters are in fact the first elements of creation. Such a primordial state of existence would explain how creation itself could be recreated within a Torah scroll. Thus, the human activity of repeatedly producing the letters imitates a process of creation. Following the rules set out by Lipmann would provide the scribe with the physical and spiritual tools to capture the essence of Hebrew script and unlock its hidden meaning.

Though Lipmann's rules are directed to the individual task of a scribe, we cannot overlook the collective importance of the Torah scroll, which differed from that of the *tefillin* and the *mezuzah*. I close with the data gathered by Elisheva Baumgarten regarding the donations registered in the *Nürnburg Memorbuch* between the late thirteenth and end of the

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[166] Brereton, "Sacred Space," 532.
[167] Invoking the image of the Temple within a sacred space using rituals has been demonstrated by Tamar El-Or, "A Temple in Your Kitchen: *Hafrashat Ḥallah* – The Rebirth of a Forgotten Ritual as a Public Ceremony," in *Jewish Studies at the Crossroads of Anthropology and History: Authority, Diaspora, Tradition*, ed. Raʿanan S. Boustan, Oren Kosansky, and Marina Rustow (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 271-93.

fourteenth century. In the category where donations of objects to the synagogue are specified, most contributions included either books or Torah scrolls.[168] A donation of any written religious artifact would finance the work of a scribe, who would be expected to produce a kosher scroll then to be used by the community; it would be read out loud in turn by the male members of the assembly and heard by the congregation. Perhaps this was an added purpose of Lipmann's: communicating the sacredness of the written words to the public sphere, adding to the shared religious experience of the weekly reading of the Torah. Thus, the reading of the Torah becomes a communal journey between heaven and earth, coming full circle every year.

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[168] Baumgarten, *Practicing Piety*, 118-120.

Conclusion – Sacred Space in Place and Time

Previous scholarly research studying Rabbi Yom Ṭov Lipmann Mühlhausen's works has been preoccupied with labeling them as either 'philosophic,' 'scientific,' 'esoteric,' or 'halakhic.' In contrast, I argue that Lipmann's works demonstrate a use of all these systems, as complementary interpretations for fulfilling religious obligations. The question of the relations between the three approaches discussed in this study – philosophy, Kabbalah, and custom – thus becomes a matter not of hierarchy, but one of balance. A particular discipline does not necessarily serve the other, but rather all three come together in various meeting points. To demonstrate this, it would be insufficient to use only one of Lipmann's texts.

This study has discussed how Lipmann enlisted both philosophy and Kabbalah in order to describe the natural order of the universe and its constellations, and how he used both in order to interpret Jewish customs. Through a comprehensive approach to include Lipmann's lesser known works, instances in which the author steered the discussion to more practical avenues could be highlighted. This emphasized the importance of cosmology as a tool of commentary, justifying Lipmann's place within the philosophical context of the Prague circle's community leaders.

Though surviving in a single manuscript, *Sefer ha-Eshkol* was mentioned and referred to numerous times in Lipmann's later, predominantly practice-oriented texts. I argued that the cosmological foundations laid in *Sefer ha-Eshkol* were meant to serve as a theoretical background for his later works. I demonstrated how, in both *Sefer ha-Eshkol* and *Sefer Kawwanat ha-Tefillah,* Lipmann had intended his texts to serve not only the act of contemplation, but also regular Jewish praxis, relevant to any literate Jew. Like the popularization of philosophy in fifteenth-century Ashkenaz and the need to use it for interpreting Jewish customs and liturgy, elevating the acts performed on a daily basis may

have been a response to an increase in their popularity. Such popularity may have diminished the importance and observance of *kawwanah* – the element in every ritual that ensures its fulfillment.

With the use of cosmology, Lipmann interpreted the various customs within a spatial context: *Sefer Alpha Beta* demonstrates the physical space produced by the Hebrew alphabet on parchment; *Sefer Kawwanat ha-Tefillah* describes Jewish daily prayers within an imagined space, and *Sefer ha-Eshkol* offers the basis for understanding the cosmic space both through Creation theology and Kabbalistic emanation theory.

In their study of Jewish topographies, Lipphardt, Brauch, and Nocke define Jewish places as "spatial environments […] where Jewish activities are performed, and which in turn are shaped and defined by those Jewish activities."[169] As the fluidity of "Jewish space" would allow any location to become such a space, it is constituted not only by its specific location; the symbolic activity – ritual, speech, or writing – through which such spaces are created, also bears significance.

Among the activities addressed by Lipmann, the most immediately physical sacred space is the one generated while writing Hebrew. The individual work of a scribe produces three religious artifacts that differ in their time and place of individual usage, as well as their collective ones. First is the Torah scroll, which is read in public services on particular days. Second are the *tefillin*, which are used by an individual person either in the synagogue or alone, but only during daytime, in order to serve as a reminder of the commandments. Apparently, this custom became popularized during the thirteenth century, and wearing phylacteries in public became a common expression of Jewish identity.[170] Finally, the

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[169] Lipphardt, Brauch, and Nocke, "Exploring Jewish Space," 4. For further discussion on "space" and "place," see Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), esp. chapter 9.

[170] Baumgarten, *Practicing Piety*, 151-55. Another spatial aspect of the phylacteries is where one ties them on one's body, both around the arm and on the head. These too are cosmologically significant, indicating both the

mezuzah – a stationary object, affixed to the doorpost in any building in which Jews dwell. It should usually be put up as soon as the move into the new space is completed, and is thus also connected to a certain place and time. We find that all three sacred objects containing the Hebrew alphabet play different roles in accordance with the place in which they are used, whether the communal or domestic spheres, or on the thresholds between them.

Already in his earlier *Sefer Nitsaḥon*, Lipmann states clearly how important the study of philosophy is to religious life, an idea which he then reiterates in *Sefer ha-Eshkol*. The later *Sefer Alpha Beta* can be seen as the culmination of his belief, as it provides concrete instructions for applying the author's belief. Lipmann demonstrates how the Hebrew letters, provided they are drawn properly, can help their scribe to mentally encompass the cosmos and indeed take him on a journey through creation. Moreover, in the act of writing the scribe becomes a creator himself, tracing the order of the universe within the small confines of each letter.

In his works on prayer, Lipmann insists on the spatial aspects of Jewish daily life by looking at its motions. The same words that describe creation and God as the creator and prime mover, are then recited repeatedly by the praying Jew. In turn, the praying person, seeking to fulfill the obligation of the prayer with the proper *kawwanah*, recites the words while imagining the same journey as the scribe, on the basis of the same physical cosmological imagery. The religious semantics of all spaces discussed – writing space, domestic/communal space, cosmic space – are interrelated. The sacrality of human activity performed in each space depends on an imaginary link to the cosmic order. Thus, Aristotelian cosmology also becomes part of the sacred, as Lipmann places it as a foundation for understanding and fulfilling the everyday practices of Jewish life.

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heaven above and God's arm, on which the world is suspended. While tying the phylacteries, one suspends the words of God on one's arm.

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