

“Spirit to Spirit”: The Imagery of the Kiss in the *Zohar* and its Possible Sources*

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■ Abstract

The study explores the character and meaning of the imagery of the kiss in the *Zohar* as an expression of dynamic union. In order to demonstrate the formation of a specific structure of ideas and their dynamics within Kabbalistic theosophy, the *Zoharic* imagery found in the pericope *Terumah* has been situated here within the context of numerous sources, from which the *Zohar*, through direct or indirect transmission, could have drawn its key elements. The metaphor of the kiss, which allows the *Zoharic* homily to embrace several central Kabbalistic concepts of love, presents love as a universal power, being comprised of two Neoplatonic notions, the hypostatic relation and the principle of “being contained in each other.” The analysis of the various sources across ancient Greek, medieval Islamic, and Christian traditions amounts to a different characterization of the meaning adduced thus far in scholarship regarding eros in Jewish mysticism and suggests a more plausible trajectory of influence of Greek sources in the early Kabbalah.

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■ Introduction

A remarkable Zoharic image of dynamic union is presented in the interpretation of the opening verse of the *Song of Songs* found in the pericope of *Terumah*: “*O that he would kiss me with the kisses of his mouth.*”¹ The kiss here is chosen to describe the union between the upper and the lower worlds. The elaboration on the nature of the kiss and its link to spiritual union are central to this depiction, creating the frame for the display of the classical Neoplatonic concept of the turning of lower hypostases toward a higher spiritual realm. The description of the union and interaction between the female and male divine potencies, the sefirot *Malkhut* and *Tiferet*, reflected by the mutual flow of their spirits, transitions into a focus on the higher aspects of the sefirotic realm, which is the origin of all union and oneness. Indeed, the homily extends the metaphor of the kiss to express simultaneously several central concepts of love that are characteristic of the *Zohar*. The imagery is usually traced back to the rabbinic notion of “death by a kiss” (*mitat nešiqah*).² Yet, the Zoharic text presents a complex and nuanced elaboration, aspects of which are absent in the rabbinic account. Due to their dominant role in the Zoharic imagery of the kiss, these elements and their possible sources deserve closer investigation. The following inquiry will outline some of the representative sources forming the context of ideas in which the Zoharic depiction has been developed. To illustrate the complexity of the formation of Zoharic imagery, an effort will be undertaken to

¹ *Zohar* 2:146a. One of the most debated issues in Kabbalah research is the authorship and the composition of this mystical work. For an overview of the history and state of research, see Daniel Abrams, *Kabbalistic Manuscripts and Textual Theory* (second revised edition; Jerusalem: Magnes; Los Angeles: Cherub Press, 2013) 265–371. Although the *Zohar* is a collection of various writings printed under a number of titles, this study will discuss “the *Zohar*” as a commentary to the Torah commonly referred to as the “Body of the *Zohar*.” Aramaic passages are cited according to *Sefer ha-Zohar* (ed. Reuven Margoliot; Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1978). The translations follow generally Daniel Matt’s translation, which I have modified slightly. See Daniel Matt, *The Zohar: Pritzker Edition* (trans. and commentary Daniel C. Matt; vol. 5; Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press 2009).

² The rabbinic notion of the death of the righteous through a kiss by God and its further development in Jewish thought has been discussed in Michael Fishbane, *The Kiss of God: Spiritual and Mystical Death in Judaism* (Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 1994). See also: Yehuda Liebes, “The Love of God and His Jealousy,” *Dimui* 7 (1993) 30–36, 35 [Hebrew]. For the Neoplatonic background of the concept of the cleaving of the soul to its source and the Kabbalistic use of the kiss as a metaphor for *devequt*, see Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988) 43–45. For the metaphorical reading of the “death by a kiss” as mystical experience in Abraham Abulafia, see Moshe Idel, *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 1988) 180–84. For the Zoharic imagery of the kiss, see Georges Vajda, *L’amour de Dieu dans la théologie juive du Moyen Age* (Paris: Vrin, 1957) 220; Fishbane, *The Kiss of God*, 38, 39; Melila Hellner-Eshed, *A River Issues Forth from Eden: On the Language of Mystical Experience in the Zohar* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2009) 299, 300; Elliot R. Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being: Kabbalistic Hermeneutics and Poetic Imagination* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005) 351–56; Joel Hecker, “Kissing Kabbalists: Hierarchy, Reciprocity and Equality,” in *Love—Ideal and Real—in the Jewish Tradition from the Hebrew Bible to Modern Times* (ed. Leonard J. Greenspoon, et al.; Omaha: Creighton University Press, 2008) 171–208.

trace the trajectory of influence of ancient Greek concepts across medieval Islamic and Christian, Jewish philosophical, and early Kabbalistic sources.³

The Zoharic imagery of the kiss aligns itself within a broad tradition of commentaries on the *Song of Songs* and draws from Neoplatonic theories of eros. Detailed elaborations on the process of kissing, which display a striking similarity to the Zoharic exposition, can be found in a number of Arabic sources, among the most prominent of which are the *Epistle on the Essence of Love* of the Brethren of Purity (Ikhwān al-Ṣafāʾ) and Ibn Sīnā's *Epistle on Love*, probably influenced by the Brethren. The Arabic tradition as reflected inter alia in these texts was obviously accessible to Moses ibn Tibbon who integrated it into his commentary on the *Song of Songs*. In his philosophical interpretation of the opening verse of the *Song of Songs*, Moses ibn Tibbon offers a very similar description of the process of kissing as does the *Epistle* of the Brethren, exposing the subtle transition from the cleaving of the breaths to the cleaving of the hearts. His allegorical reading of the kiss as the cleaving of the soul to the separate intellect adopts the classical Neoplatonic concept of the fascination of the soul with the beauty of the intellect. This interpretative path is implemented by other Jewish commentaries on the *Song of Songs*, earlier philosophical commentaries, such as Ibn 'Aknin's, as well as Kabbalistic ones, such as those of Rabbi Ezra of Gerona and Isaac ibn Sahula, which explicitly refer to the tradition that interprets the kiss as the turning of the soul in loving devotion towards her Creator.

The *Zohar* projects the detailed portrayal of the process of kissing onto the sefirotic realm and applies it to one of the central principles in the Zoharic conception of union: the mutual permeation and implication of the entities. The parallel text in Hebrew in Moses de León's *Sod 'Eser Sefirot Belimah* explicitly compares the imagery of the kiss to the mutual containment of the sefirot. This notion, highly present also in earlier Kabbalistic sources, finds its roots in the concept of *κοινωνία* (*koinōnía*), as developed by Plotinus and Proclus, whose philosophical works were transmitted into the Jewish tradition through Arabic translations. Likewise, the Neoplatonic concept of the intellect as a mediator through which the soul can cleave to the One is reflected in the interpretative investigation of the use of personal pronouns, which leads to the conclusion of the simultaneous turning of *Shekhinah*

³ The influence of Neoplatonism on Jewish mysticism has been discussed by Gershom Scholem in *Origins of the Kabbalah* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987) as well as in numerous essays. For example, see Gershom Scholem, "Traces of Gabirol in the Kabbalah," *Me'assef Sofrey 'Ereṣ Yisra'el* (1940) 160–78 [Hebrew]. See also Moshe Idel, "Jewish Kabbalah and Platonism in the Middle Ages and Renaissance," in *Neoplatonism in Jewish Thought* (ed. L. Goodman; Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992) 319–351. For the concept of mystical union in philosophy and Kabbalah, see Adam Afterman, *And They Shall Be One Flesh: On the Language of Mystical Union in Judaism* (Boston: Brill 2016). For the role of philosophy in the development of the early Kabbalistic thought, see also Mark Brian Sendor, "The Emergence of Provençal Kabbalah: Rabbi Isaac the Blind's *Commentary on Sefer Yeẓirah*" (PhD diss., Harvard University, 1994), especially 89–108; Jonathan Dauber, *Knowledge of God and the Development of Early Kabbalah* (Boston: Brill, 2012).

towards *Tiferet* and the higher sefirotic realm. The Christian tradition, which adopts the same Neoplatonic scheme and sees Christ as the mediator between the human and the divine, probably also forwarded the consolidation of the imagery. Beyond the classical interpretation of the *Song of Songs*'s opening kiss as the relationship between the Church or the individual soul and Christ, Christian medieval exegetes, such as Bernard of Clairvaux, offer a hypostatic reading of the kiss as Christ himself, as well as a Trinitarian reading, rendering the kiss as the Holy Spirit.

■ Merging of Breaths

The *Zohar* utilizes the introductory verse of the *Song of Songs* to construct a symbol, by means of which an ensemble of concepts of love can be portrayed at once. Opening the *Song of Songs*, the epitome of the praise of love, one can reasonably assume the kiss should express the essence of love.⁴ In fact, the starting point of a long homily on the verse found in the pericope *Terumah* of the *Zohar* proceeds from the question, why the *Song of Songs*—which describes the love between the upper and the lower worlds—starts with a kiss:

"ישקני מנשיקות פיהו". מאי קא חמא שלמה מלכא דאיהו אעיל מלי דרחימו בין עלמא עלאה לעלמא תתאה ושירותא דתושבתתא דרחימו דאעיל ביניהו ישקני איהו. אלא הא אוקמוה הכי איהו דלית רחימו דביקות דרוחא ברוחא בר נשיקה. ונשיקה בפומא דאיהי מבועא דרוחא ומפקנו דיליה. וכד נשקין דא לדא מתדבקן רוחין אלין באלין והוו חד וכוין איהו רחימו חד.

"*O that he would kiss me with the kisses of his mouth!*" What did King Solomon see when he conveyed words of love between the upper world and the lower world, so that the beginning of the praise of love which he conveyed between them was *O that he would kiss me*? Well, they have already established this, and so it is: There is no love which is a cleaving of spirit to spirit except by a kiss, and a kiss by the mouth, which is the spring of the spirit and its outlet. When they kiss one another, the spirits cling to each other, becoming one; thus, there is one love.⁵

The focus of the exposition is union as the basis for love and its essential element. It seems that the *Zoharic* passage identifies love with the cleaving of spirits.⁶ Issuing from their mouths, the spirits of the lovers meet and mingle. In this cleaving, they

⁴ Compare with *Zohar* 2:124b.

⁵ *Zohar* 2:146b. For parallels, see *Midraš Hanne'elam* on *Šir Hašširim* (*Zohar* Ḥadaš 60c), *Zohar* on *Šir Hašširim* (*Zohar* Ḥadaš 63a), *Zohar* 2:124b, 253b–254a (Heikhalot), 256b (Heikhalot). For discussions, see Shifra Asulin, "The Mystical Commentary of the *Song of Songs* in the *Zohar* and its Background" (PhD diss., The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2006) 57, 58 [Hebrew]; Elliot R. Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being*, 351–56; Daniel Matt's notes in *The Zohar*: vol. 5, 331–35; Hecker, "Kissing Kabbalists: Hierarchy, Reciprocity and Equality," 171–208.

⁶ The Aramaic wording "דלית רחימו דביקות דרוחא ברוחא בר נשיקה" is ambiguous. The text does not display significant variations in editions and manuscripts. Yet, a similar passage can be found in Moses de León's *Sod 'Eser Sefrot Belimah* (see pp. 599, 600 of this essay). The passage states explicitly what seems to be hinted at by the *Zoharic* homily. Love is presented there generally as gaining its true subsistence by a kiss, which assures the cleaving of the spirits.

comprise “one love,” the emergence of which is thus conditioned by the merging of the essences of the lovers.

The anthropomorphic portrayal of the spiritual world requires suitable images for the display of union and oneness. Precisely the kiss lends itself to a description of unification. The ambiguity of the word *ruah* (“spirit”) permits the facile transition between the corporeal and spiritual level. Furthermore, due to this ambiguity, an ensemble of concepts can be expressed simultaneously. For instance, in the *Guide of the Perplexed*, Maimonides lists possible meanings of the word *ruah*. It can simply be understood as air as well as wind. Additional meanings are “life-spirit” (*ruah hiyyunit, ruah hayyim*), soul, and the emanative flow of the divine intellect (*haššepha’ haššikli ha’elohi*), as well as will or intention.⁷ The multiplicity of meanings of the word *ruah* allows several interpretative levels of the *Song of Songs*.⁸ Beyond the literal reading, the breath of the kiss can be considered as the emanative flow, so that the kiss would articulate the dynamism within the realm of the sefirot, or the bestowing of the divine abundance on the soul, which is yearning for ascent and revelation. Earlier Kabbalistic commentaries on the *Song of Songs* already employed these aspects of the symbolism of the kiss. Yet the fullest utilization of this imagery takes place only in Castilian Kabbalah. This is probably due to the influence of texts presenting elaborate kiss imagery and the integration of the Neoplatonic principle of “being contained in each other” upon the Kabbalistic notions of love.

Elaborate kiss imagery is extant in several Arabic texts, probably deriving from the same tradition. A portrayal of the kiss as the conjunction of the souls through the mediation of the breaths appears already in a text by Aḥmad b. al-Ṭayyib al-Sarakhsī, al-Kindī’s pupil.⁹ An extensive description of the process of kissing as inducing spiritual union can be found in the *Epistle on the Essence of Love* of the Brethren of Purity (a syncretic, mostly Neoplatonic movement in Baṣrah in the tenth

⁷ Moses Maimonides, *The Guide of the Perplexed* I, 40.

⁸ Another interpretative link between the kiss and spiritual union has a long tradition: *Song of Songs Rabbah* reads the opening verse of the Song in the context of the revelation of the divine “Word,” *diḅbur*, at Sinai. See *Song of Songs Rabbah* 1:2. See also Admiel Kosman, “Breath, Kiss and Speech as the Source of the Animation of Life: Ancient Foundations of Rabbinic Homilies on the Giving of the Torah as the Kiss of God” in *Self, Soul and Body in Religious Experience* (ed. A. I. Baumgarten, J. Assmann, et al.; Leiden: Brill, 1998) 96–124. Although this aspect is also elaborated on in the Zoharic text and the interpretation preceding our homily is an adaptation of exactly this rabbinic tradition, the depiction presenting the imagery of *ruḥa’ beruḥa’* does not refer to this concept explicitly.

Christian writers, such as Origen, develop in the frame of their allegorical exegesis the concept of union between the Church or individual soul and Christ as *logos*, the Word of God. See Origen, *The Song of Songs, Commentary and Homilies* (Westminster, CT: Newman Press 1957) 58–62. See also Bernard McGinn, *The Foundations of Mysticism* (The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism 1; New York: Crossroads, 1992) 108–30, esp. 118–26.

⁹ See Franz Rosenthal, “From Arabic Books and Manuscripts VIII, As-Sarakhsī on Love,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 81 (1961) 222–24. A later reverberation of the tradition can be found in Ibn ‘Arabī, *Traité de l’amour* (Paris: Albin Michel, 1986) 106.

century). According to the concept introduced in the treatise, the breath as the spirit of life necessarily has an influence on the body and the soul of a human. Thus, the seemingly corporeal union of the breaths in a kiss merges into a spiritual union.

The *Epistle* outlines the Platonic concept of eros, as can be found in the dialogues *Symposium* and *Phaedrus*, in a Neoplatonic garb. Eros, which in Arabic thought is denoted by the term 'išq, is defined here as the longing for union through which the whole universe is held together. As a treasure chest for the transmission of the Platonic concept of eros, the treatise discusses natural love and pedagogical eros, being reasoned as ontological love between the cause and the effect and the yearning to guarantee being and to avoid perishing. It presents the ladder of ascension, starting with natural love and proceeding to love of wisdom and performing good deeds. The longing for union can reach its true fulfillment only in love toward God. One of the central accounts in the treatise is the soul's awakening from material perception to spiritual life. The discussion culminates in the exposition of the passion of the universal soul and of all beings toward God.

According to the Brethren of Purity, the true union, to which eros is directed, can be achieved only by spiritual entities. Yet, in the material world only proximity, mingling, and touch are possible. The mingling as the surrogate of union in the corporeal realm is demonstrated in the frame of the discussion of the emergence and growth of love. Starting with the presentation of the concept of the spirit of life, which is the basis for the life of the body, the *Epistle* proceeds to a detailed description of the merging of the essences of the lovers in a kiss. First, the exchange of the saliva and its absorption in each person's body is described. A depiction of the mutual permeation of the breaths follows:

وهكذا أيضا اذا تنفس كل واحد منهما في وجه صاحبه، خرج من تلك الأنفاس شيء من نسيم روح كل واحد منهما، واختلط بأجزاء الهواء. فاذا استنشقا من ذلك الهواء، دخلت الى خياشيمهما أجزاء ذلك النسيم مع الهواء المستنشق، ووصل بعضه الى مقدم الدماغ، وسرى فيه كسريان النور في جرم البلور، واستلذ كل واحد منهما ذلك التنسم. ووصل أيضا من أجزاء ذلك الهواء المستنشق بعض إلى جرم الرئة في الحلقوم، ومن الرئة الى جرم القلب مع النبض في العروق الضواريب الى جميع أجزاء الجسد، واختلط هناك بالدم واللحم، وما شاكل ذلك من أجزاء الجسد، وانعقد في بدن هذا ما تحلل من جسد هذا، وفي بدن هذا ما تحلل من جسد ذلك، فيكون من ذلك ضروب من المزاجات ومن تلك الامزجة ضروب الأخلاط، ومن تلك الأخلاط ضروب الأخلاق. كل ذلك بحسب أمزجة أبدانها. ومن شأن النفس أن تتبع مزاج البدن في إظهار أفعالها وأخلاقها، لأن مزاج الجسد، وأعضاء البدن، ومفاصله للنفس بمنزلة الآت وأدوات للسان الحكيم يظهر بها ومنها أفعاله. فلهذه الأسباب والعلل التي ذكرناها يتولد العشق والمحبة، على ممر الأيام بين المتحابين، وينشأ وينمو.¹⁰

In the same way, also when each one of them breathes in the face of the other, something of the breath of the spirit of each one of them goes out from those breathings and mingles with the particles of the air. And when they inhale this air, particles of this breath enter their nostrils together with the inhaled air and a part of it reaches the brain and penetrates it like the light penetrates

¹⁰ *Rasā' il Ikhwān al-Ṣafā'* (Beirut, 1957) 3:274, 275; occasionally, I followed the variants suggested by Susanne Diwald, *Arabische Philosophie und Wissenschaft in der Enzyklopädie* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1975) 271, 272.

the beryl and every one of them rejoices in this breathing. Some of the particles of the inhaled air come also to the lungs in the breast, and from the lungs to the heart, and with the pulse in the throbbing arteria to all parts of the body and mingle there with the blood, flesh and similar body parts. And so, there intertwines with the body of the one what detached from the body of the other, and with the body of this what detached from the body of that. From this emerge various kinds of mixtures and from these mixtures kinds of temperaments; and from these temperaments kinds of characters. All this stands in relation to the temperaments of their bodies. It is characteristic of the soul to follow the temperament of the body in the display of its actions and characters, because the temperament of the body, the limbs and joints are for the soul like instruments and tools for the wise artisan by which and through which he displays his actions. Due to these causes and reasons which we have mentioned, passion and love are engendered between the lovers in the course of time, and grow and increase.

The mingling of the breaths in a kiss leads to a mingling of the corporeal and spiritual faculties of the lovers. The inhaled air is the base substance for the spirit of life. In a kiss, the lover inhales together with the air the breath of the beloved, his spirit of life. It is absorbed by the body of the lover and turns into his own flesh and blood, and, thus, becomes the basis for his own life. The mingling of the spirits of life of the lovers leads thus to a mingling of their corporeal faculties, which, in turn, influence their souls and harmonize them. The equalizing of their essences nurtures the love between them.

Another source presenting the kiss as an expression of closeness and union between two humans is Ibn Sīnā's *Epistle on Love*. Following the structure exposed in the *Epistle* of the Brethren of Purity, Ibn Sīnā outlines three stages of the yearning for the beloved, the desire to embrace, the desire to kiss, and the desire for conjugal union.¹¹ While the desire for conjugal union is designated as specific to the animal soul, embracing and kissing are principally derived from the longing of the inner being of the human for closeness and union with the very essence of the beloved:

وذلك لأن النفس تود أن تنال معشوقها بحسبها للمسى ونيلها له بحسبها البصري فتستأنق إلى معانقته وتنتزع إلى أن يختلط نسيم مبدأ فاعلية نفسانية وهو القلب بنسيم مثلها في المعشوق فتشتاق إلى تقبيله.¹²

This is so because the soul desires to reach her beloved with her senses of touch and sight, and thus delights in embracing him, and she wishes that the breath of the soul's activity, which originates in the heart, would mingle with the breath in the beloved, and thus she desires to kiss him.¹³

The passage displays striking similarities with the description of the nature of the kiss in the *Epistle* of the Brethren. The soul of the lover strives to unite with

¹¹ Ibn Sīnā, *Risālah fī'l-'iṣq* in *Traitées Mystiques d'Abou Ali al-Hosain b. Abdallah b. Sina ou d'Avicenne* (ed. M. A. F. Mehren; Leiden: Brill, 1899) 16.

¹² Ibn Sīnā, *Risālah fī'l-'iṣq*, 17.

¹³ See also Emil L. Fackenheim, "A Treatise on Love by Ibn Sina," *Mediaeval Studies* 79 (1945) 208–28.

the soul of the beloved through the mingling of the breath, which results from the soul's activity.

Investigating ancient Greek sources, a portrayal of the mutual flow of substances initiating love can be found in Plato's *Phaedrus*. The emergence of love in the soul is pictured there as sprouting of feathers. The effluence of beauty, issuing from the beloved, flows through the eyes into the soul of the lover, moistens there the germ of the feathers all over the soul, and lets them grow.¹⁴ Having filled the soul of the lover, the stream of beauty flows back to the beloved, and, entering through the eyes, fills also his soul with love:

τότ' ἤδη ἡ τοῦ ρεύματος ἐκείνου πηγῆ, ὃν ἕμερον Ζεὺς Γανυμήδους ἐρῶν ὠνόμασε, πολλῆ φερομένη πρὸς τὸν ἐραστήν, ἡ μὲν εἰς αὐτὸν ἔδω, ἡ δ' ἀπομεστουμένου ἕξω ἀπορρεῖ· καὶ οἷον πνεῦμα ἢ τις ἡχώ ἀπὸ λείων τε καὶ στερεῶν ἀλλομένη πάλιν ὅθεν ὠρμήθη φέρεται, οὕτω τὸ τοῦ κάλλους ρεῦμα πάλιν εἰς τὸν καλὸν διὰ τῶν ὀμμάτων ἰόν, ἢ πέφυκεν ἐπὶ τὴν ψυχὴν ἰέναι ἀφικόμενον καὶ ἀναπτεῶσαν, τὰς διόδους τῶν περῶν ἄρδει τε καὶ ὠρμησε περφορεῖν τε καὶ τὴν τοῦ ἐρωμένου αὖ ψυχὴν ἔρωτος ἐνέπλησεν.¹⁵

Then the fountain of that stream which Zeus, when he was in love with Ganymede, called "desire" flows copiously upon the lover; and some of it flows into him, and some, when he is filled, overflows outside; and just as the wind or an echo rebounds from smooth, hard surfaces and returns whence it came, so the stream of beauty passes back into the beautiful one through the eyes, the natural inlet to the soul, where it reanimates the passages of the feathers, waters them and makes the feathers begin to grow, filling the soul of the loved one with love.¹⁶

Though the metaphor of sprouting feathers portrays a process taking place in the soul, its language is highly corporeal. The origin of love is pictured to be in sight, yet the depiction employs a visual theory, by means of which visual sensation turns out to be accomplished through actual contact with the effluence from the object of perception.¹⁷ The vividness of the language drawn from the realm of corporeal experience intends to exhibit that the true erotic encounter is experienced by the soul. Only subsequently, the subject of actual body contact is raised, describing the beloved, who now also yearns to see, to touch, to kiss, and to lie by the lover (ὄρᾶν, ἄπτεσθαι, φιλεῖν, συγκατακεῖσθαι).¹⁸

As we have seen, the Brethren of Purity, outlining the same stages in the development of love (sight, embrace, kiss, and conjugal union), offer a portrayal of the mutual flow and intermingling of substances in corporeal interaction. Yet,

¹⁴ *Phaedrus*, 251b–d.

¹⁵ *Phaedrus*, 255c–d; *Platonis Opera* (ed. John Burnet; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1901).

¹⁶ Plato, *Phaedrus* 255c–d (trans. Harold North Fowler; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1914).

¹⁷ For the theory of vision in Plato, see David C. Lindberg, *Theories of Vision from Al-Kindi to Kepler* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976) 3–6.

¹⁸ *Phaedrus*, 255e.

the focus remains the same: the establishment of love and the strengthening of the initial kinship between the lover and the beloved through a mutual exchange of their essences. The physiological portrayal in the *Epistle* of the Brethren seems to be a transformation of the Platonic model in which visual experience is central. The transition from the flow of particles in the stream of beauty between the lover and the beloved to the mutual flow of breaths appears plausible against the background of the theory of optical *pneuma*, which issues from the eye and transforms the air, the medium between the eye and the visible object. This Galenic theory, which Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq transmitted into Arabic thought, was very common in Islamic ophthalmology.¹⁹ Applied to the effluence of beauty in the description of the emergence of love in the Platonic *Phaedrus*, the concept of the visual spirit could have facilitated the transition to the account of the exchange of breaths. Investigating the mingling as the substitute for union on the corporeal level, the *Epistle* generally utilizes medical concepts and terminology of the time, one of the major sources of which was Galen. The detailed elaboration on the corporeal interaction in the passage is based on the concept of *pneuma*, the theory of temperaments, and on the idea that the constitution of the body has an influence on the soul, notions which are pervasive in Galen's writings.²⁰

The nature of the kiss as in-between corporeal and spiritual union facilitates its application in an allegorical interpretation. The focus on the breath opens an additional connection between the kiss and spirituality.²¹ The application of the elaborate kiss imagery to the cleaving of the soul to the divine can be found in the *Commentary on the Song of Songs* by Moses ibn Tibbon, who probably drew his imagery from the *Brethren*, making the metaphor of the clinging spirits accessible in Hebrew.

¹⁹ On optical *pneuma* in Galen, see Lindberg, *Theories of Vision from Al-Kindi to Kepler*, 9, 10. On the Galenic concept and its transmission into Arabic thought, see Lindberg, *Theories of Vision from Al-Kindi to Kepler*, 33–42. See also *The Book of the Ten Treatises on the Eye Ascribed to Hunain ibn Ishāq* (ed. Max Meyerhof; Cairo: Government Press 1928) 98–111 [Arabic text], 27–39 [English translation].

²⁰ For Galen's concept of *pneuma*, see Galen, *Method of Medicine* (ed. and trans. Ian Johnston and G. H. R. Horsley; 3 vols.; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press: 2011) 839–840 K, Vol. 3: 266–269. For the influence of the body on the soul, see: Hans Hinrich Biesterfeldt, *Galens Traktat 'Dass die Kräfte der Seele den Mischungen des Körpers folgen' in arabischer Übersetzung* (Mainz: Deutsche Morgenländische Gesellschaft, 1973). See also Galen, *Selected Works* (trans. P. N. Singer; Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

²¹ See also Nicolas James Perella, *The Kiss Sacred and Profane: An Interpretative History of Kiss Symbolism and Related Religio-Erotic Themes* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1969) 6–27.

■ The Kiss: Devotional and Intradivine Imagery

The roots of the conception of the kiss as intradivine dynamics go back to the Neoplatonic account of the basic relation of the hypostases. The soul, proceeding from the intellect, turns back toward its origin. In this return, eros is generated as the loving sight of the soul toward the intellect. Thus, Plotinus conceptualizes eros as a hypostatic relation, as the fulfillment of the referentiality of the soul to the intellect.²² He derives the term “eros” (ἔρως) from “looking” (ὄρασις).²³ This philosophical etymology supports the designation of contemplation as the inherent activity of the soul.

The Plotinian concept of the relation between soul and intellect finds its transmission through the so-called *Theology of Aristotle*, where also an elaboration on the union and distinctness between them is found. The soul, while dwelling in the world of the intellect, is in union with it, because there is nothing mediating between them. At the same time, the essence of the soul is kept and becomes purer: “because she and the intellect are then one thing, or two like two species” (لأنها هي) (والعقل يكونان شيئاً واحداً، أو اثنين كنوع ونوع كأنها هي وهو شيء) (“it is as if she and he were one”) (واحد).²⁴

Early Jewish philosophical commentaries on the *Song of Songs* read the opening verse in a classical Neoplatonic way, as the turning of the fascinated individual soul towards the intellect. R. Joseph ben Judah ben Jacob ibn ‘Aknin in his *Inkišāf al-asrār wa-ḏuhūr al-anwār* interprets the verse as the words of the intellectual soul turning towards the active intellect. The kisses of the mouth designate the lights which she receives from the intellect.²⁵ Much more elaborate imagery can be found in Moses ibn Tibbon’s commentary. For him, the *Song of Songs* is “an allegory for the perfection of the human intellect and its cleaving to the separate intellect.”²⁶ In the introduction to his commentary, he mentions that there is an ancient tradition to speak of the one who receives form as female and the one who gives form as male. As a consequence, the relation between matter and soul, soul and intellect, human intellect and separate intellect, being the one acted upon and

²² Achim Wurm, *Platonicus amor: Lesarten der Liebe bei Platon, Plotin und Ficino* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008) 127.

²³ Plotinus, *Ennead* III, 5, 3.

²⁴ *Theology of Aristotle*, II, 36–37; Arabic text quoted from: Abdurrahman Badawi, *Plotinus apud Arabes, Theologia Aristotelis et fragmenta quae supersunt* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Nahda al-Misriyya, 1955) 35. The English translation is that of Geoffrey Lewis, cited slightly modified from *Plotiniana Arabica in Plotini Opera* (ed. Paul Henry and Hans-Rudolf Schwyzer; Vol. II, *Enneades* IV–V; Paris: l’Édition universelle, 1959) 69.

²⁵ A. S. Halkin, *Joseph ben Judah ben Jakob ibn ‘Aknin, Hitgallut ha-sodot ve-hofa’at ha-me’orot* (Jerusalem: Mekitze Nirdamim, 1964) 24–27.

²⁶ Moses ibn Tibbon, *Commentary on the Song of Songs*, in Otfried Fraisse, *Moses ibn Tibbons Kommentar zum Hohelied und sein poetologisch-philosophisches Programm* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2004) 135.

the other which is active, can all be expressed as the relationship between woman and man.²⁷ Consequently, Ibn Tibbon himself interprets the kiss in the opening verse of the *Song of Songs* as an image for the communion between the separate intellect and the human soul:

ישקני בא לרמוז על כי דבקות (נפש) האדם עם השכל הנפרד הוא אפשרי כי לא יתאוה אדם ולא יתאר דבר נמנע. ולקח לשון נשיקה חשקו להכניס אהובו בלבו ובקרבו ובדבוק שפתים לא בנשיכה ובחתוך בשר. גם טבע הנושק לקבץ ולאסוף שפתיו למשוך נשימתו כמי ששואף בפיו רוח או מים מתוך כלי ולהיות הלשון והפה סעיפי הלב וכלים לדבר אשר בו יבדל האדם משאר בעלי חיים כאשר ישק איש את רעהו הנה הוא כאלו דבקו לבם גם בדבקות נשימתם ורוחם והמשך לבכם אחרי רוחם והכנסו איש באחיו.²⁸

“*O that he would kiss me*” indicates that the cleaving of the human soul to the separate intellect is possible, because a human would not desire and describe something which cannot come about. He employed the expression of a kiss out of his longing to let his beloved enter his heart and his inner being, and this through the attachment of the lips, not through a bite and cut of the flesh. Also, the nature of a kissing person is to bring together his lips in order to draw his breath as someone who draws air with his mouth, or water from a vessel, and because the tongue and the mouth are branches of the heart and tools for speaking, which distinguishes the human from the rest of living beings, when humans kiss each other, it is as if also their hearts would cleave in the cleaving of their breaths and spirits, and their hearts would be drawn after their breaths and they would enter each other.

Moses ibn Tibbon illustrates, at first, why the kiss is an adequate image to describe the conjunction between the human soul and the separate intellect. He draws a parallel between the nature of the kiss and the spiritual union. The description follows the portrayal of the Brethren of Purity and uses the same terminology. The intermingling of the “breath of the spirit” of the lovers (نسيم روح) (כל واحد منهما) in the *Epistle* of the Brethren probably inspired the clinging of “their breaths and spirits” (נשימתם ורוחם) in Ibn Tibbon’s commentary. The mouth being the outlet of speech that designates the human as such, permits a cleaving which initiates the cleaving of the soul, the intellect, and the heart. The intermingling of the breaths causes the mutual permeation of the essences of the lovers.

Thereupon the author proceeds to the discussion of the actual union of the soul with the intellect, and explains that it is a completely different kind of union, a purely spiritual one:

ודבקות האדם עם השכל הנפרד הוא בשכל לבד כי כאשר ישכילהו יידבק בו ומציאות הצורות הוא בשכל לבד כי אינם חמר שידבקו זה עם זה בגוף אל גוף. . . והתחילה דבריה כאשר תשוקתה אל אישה מבקשת זוהר וליושר טבעה ונועם מדותיה וטוב שכלה התעוררה מעצמה אל האהבה ונכספה לקבל השפע ולצאת מן הכח אל הפועל.²⁹

²⁷ Ibid., 147.

²⁸ Ibid., 197, 199.

²⁹ Ibid., 199.

The cleaving of the human with the separate intellect is only through the intellect, because he cleaves to it when he contemplates it and the presence of the forms is solely in the intellect, because they are not matter, so that they would be joined with each other corporeally. . .

She started her speech like a woman whose desire is towards her husband who seeks out her beloved. With the honesty of her nature, the pleasantness of her virtues and the goodness of her intellect she awakes on her own towards love, longing to receive the flow and to pass from potentiality into actuality.

Thus, the introductory verse of the *Song of Songs* is attributed to the soul, represented by a woman longing for her beloved, which awakens in her spiritual being and strives to receive the flow issuing from the separate intellect.

Earlier Kabbalistic commentaries on the *Song of Songs* employ the Neoplatonic account of the cleaving of the individual soul to a higher spiritual realm while explicitly referring to the philosophic interpretation.³⁰ Simultaneously, they adapt the concept of the passion of the soul hypostasis toward union with the first cause to their theosophic imagery. Thus, Rabbi Ezra of Gerona in the preface to his *Commentary on the Song of Songs* refers to a contemporary scholar, probably Samuel ibn Tibbon, who employs the same interpretative path, reading the kiss as the cleaving of the soul (*devequt hannešamah*).³¹ Rabbi Ezra himself offers two levels of interpretation to the verse. It can be understood as the expression of passion within the realm of the sefirot and as the longing of the soul towards the union with the upper source:

ישקני מנשיקות דברי הכבוד המתאוה כמשתוקק להתעלות, להדבק לאור באור העליון אשר אין לו דמיון, ועולה במחשבה ורעיון, ולכך מדבר דרך נסתר. והנשיקה משל לתענוג דביקות הנשמה במקור החיים ותוספת רוח הקודש, ולכך אמר "מנשיקות", כי כל סיבה וסיבה מקבלת המחשבה ותוספת מן האור המתוק והזהר הצה ההוא, וכשהוא מדבר עם הכבוד שהוא שער לדברים מדבר דרך נסתר.³²

O that he would kiss me: the words of the Glory, which is yearning, full of desire, to ascend, to cleave to the light of the supernal luminescence which nothing resembles. It ascends in thought and idea and thus speaks in a concealed way.³³ The kiss symbolizes the pleasure of the soul in its cleaving to the source of life and the additional infusion of the holy spirit. Therefore, he says: "from the kisses." For each sefirotic power receives consciousness and an additional infusion from that sweet light and pure splendour. When he

³⁰ On the preservation of the philosophical concept of the relationship between the soul and the active intellect in thirteenth-century Kabbalistic commentaries on the *Song of Songs*, see also Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being*, 345–51.

³¹ Ezra of Gerona, *Peruš Šir ha-Širim* in *Kitvey Ramban* (ed. Charles Chavel; 2 vols.; Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1988) 2:480; Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, 377, 378; Georges Vajda, *Le Commentaire d'Ezra de Géronne sur le cantique des cantiques* (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1969) 145.

³² Ezra of Gerona, *Peruš Šir ha-Širim*, 485.

³³ The Hebrew expression can also be rendered as "in the third person."

speaks with the Glory, the gateway to the entities, he speaks in a concealed way.³⁴

The two possibilities, the rejoicing of the soul in cleaving to the “source of life,” as well as the desire of the “Glory,” here obviously denoting *Shekhinah*, to ascend and to cleave to the supreme light, are based on the general longing of the hypostases to receive the emanative flow.³⁵ In both cases, the third person denotes the remoteness of the sefirotic level, to which the longing is directed. *Shekhinah* desires to cleave to the supreme light, to which nothing can be compared, which designates its ineffability and concealment. The soul’s request is directed towards the “gateway to the entities,” *Shekhinah*, but it desires to cleave to the “source of life,” a higher spiritual realm.

Isaac ibn Sahula also gives a twofold interpretation of the verse. His commentary on the *Song of Songs* (which is an early contemporary of the *Zohar*) employs a reading on the revealed and the hidden levels. Ibn Sahula’s obscure esoteric interpretation investigates the kiss as intradivine dynamics between *Malkhut* and *Tiferet*.³⁶ As the revealed interpretative path, he presents the concept of the passionate longing of the human to ascend to the level on which he can cleave to his Creator. According to this reading, the introductory kiss motif denotes the request of the perfected human for divine support to be able to cleave to God as lovers cleave to each other. In this interpretation, an explicit comparison of spiritual cleaving to loving clinging between humans, as found in the philosophical commentary of Ibn Tibbon, is still present:

ופתרון הפסוק כאלו הוא בקשת האדם השלם להיותו זוכה למע-
לה זה החמודה . . . ומלת ישקני ר"ל שיתן לו עזר וסיוע להדבק בו במשל
החושקים אשר מרוב חיבתם דבקים איש באחיהו. ומנשק זה את זה מנשיקות פיהו.³⁷

The meaning of the verse is as if it would be the quest of the perfected human to attain this precious level . . . And the expression “O that he would kiss me” means that He should give him help and support to cleave to Him, as lovers cleave to one another out of the abundance of their love, and kiss one another with the kisses of their mouths.

³⁴ Substantive changes have been made to the translation of Brody. Compare with Seth Brody, *Commentary on the Song of Songs, Ezra ben Solomon of Gerona, and Other Kabbalistic Commentaries* (Kalamazoo, MI: Medieval Institute Publications, 1999) 39, 40.

³⁵ For the interpretation of this passage, see also Arthur Green, “The Song of Songs in Early Jewish Mysticism,” *Orim* 2 (1987) 49–63, 56, 57; Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being*, 349; Haviva Pedaya, “‘Possessed by Speech’: Towards an Understanding of the Prophetic-Ecstatic Pattern among Early Kabbalists,” *Tarbiz* 65 (1996) 565–636, esp. 594–95 [Hebrew].

³⁶ Compare Arthur Green, “The Song of Songs in Early Jewish Mysticism,” 49–63, 57–59; Green, “Rabbi Isaac Ibn Sahula’s Commentary on the Song of Songs,” in *The Beginnings of Jewish Mysticism in Medieval Europe* (ed. J. Dan; *Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Thought* 6; Jerusalem: The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1987) 395–97, 409–10.

³⁷ Green, “Rabbi Isaac Ibn Sahula’s Commentary on the Song of Songs,” 410.

Both Kabbalistic commentaries introduce also the motif of the “spirit” (*ruah*). Ibn Sahula renders the “upper kiss” as “the emanation of the spirit from its origin” (ודמיון נשיקה עליונה זו אצילות הרוח ממקום מוצאו). R. Ezra explains that in the cleaving of the soul to the “source of life” an “additional infusion of the holy spirit” (רוח הקודש תוספת) is bestowed on her. Thus, the motif of the spirit in these kiss imageries explicitly denotes the emanative flow.

As these two commentaries show, earlier Kabbalistic sources combine the cleaving of the soul to the upper source in their interpretation of the kiss with the intradivine yearning. By doing so, they continue the Neoplatonic tradition of the concept of the universal and individual soul as fascinated by the beauty of the intellect.

■ Intermingling of Spirits

Alongside the hypostatic relation, the mutual permeation of the entities is one of the central elements of the metaphysics portrayed by the Zoharic imagery of the kiss. The mingling of the spirits is emphasized repeatedly:

ד' רוחין אינן בנשיקה כל חד וחד כליל בהבריה. וכד האי רוחא כליל באחרא וההוא אחרא כליל בהא: אתעבידו תרין רוחין כחדא. וכי דין מתחברן בדביקו חד אינן ארבע בשלימו. ונבעין דא בדא. ואתכלילו דא בדא.

There are four spirits in a kiss, each being contained in its companion; and when one spirit is contained in the other, and the other is contained in the first, two spirits become as one. As they join in one cleaving, those four are complete, flowing into one another, being contained in one another.³⁸

The two initial spirits intermingle in a kiss, permeating each other, so that each of them is now also contained in the other. This mutual permeation causes each of them to reflect the structure of the other, and thus they become one essence. These four breaths unite in one cleaving forming a completed wholeness.

The significance of the kiss metaphor for the portrayal of the principle of the intertwining of entities can be demonstrated with the aid of the passage from Moses de León's *Sod 'Eser Sefirot Belimah*, which is an obvious Hebrew parallel to the Zoharic passage. The imagery of the kiss is introduced here explicitly with the purpose to illustrate the feature of the sefirot being contained in each other:

עוד תוכל לדעת מה שהודיעו הקדמונים ז"ל מפני מה נשיקה בפה יותר ממקום אחר אלא כל אהבה וחיבה שצריכה קיום אינה אלא בנשיקת הפה כי הפה הוא מוצא ומקור הרוח וכשהנשיקה בפה ידבק רוח ברוח. ובדבקות רוח ברוח אזי נכלל רוח זה ברוח זה ונכללים הרוחות יחד ונמצא שני הרוחות ארבע וזהו סוד ארבע. ואם בזה כל שכן הרוחות הפנימיות שהן עיקר הכל אל תתמה בהיותן כלולות זו בזו להיותן בחיבה ותשוקה גמורה.³⁹

³⁸ *Zohar* 2:146b.

³⁹ Gershom Scholem, “Moses de León, ‘Sod 'Eser Sefirot Belimah,’” *Qoveṣ al Yad*, n.s., 8 (1976) 371–82, at 372.

Moreover, you can know what the ancients taught concerning the reason for which the kiss is by the mouth, rather than by any other part of the body: All love and affection which require subsistence are only created by a kiss of the mouth, because the mouth is the origin and the source of the spirit. And when there is a kiss by the mouth spirit cleaves to spirit. In the cleaving of spirit to spirit, one spirit is contained in the other spirit, thus the spirits are contained one within the other. The two spirits become four and this is the secret of “four.” If it is true for these, all the more so for the inner spirits which are the essence of all. Do not be astounded that they are contained one in another, because they are in complete affection and passion.

In partly identical wording in Hebrew, Moses de León explains what we encounter in the Zoharic homily. Love is necessarily grounded in the kiss of the mouth, which being “the origin and the source of the spirit” (מוצא ומקור הרוח), as in the Zoharic passage (מבועא דרוחא ומפקנו דלייה), ensures the “conjunction of spirit to spirit” (דבקות רוח ברוח). The ancient tradition to which Moses de León refers is likely the commentary of Moses ibn Tibbon. Ibn Tibbon’s commentary also emphasizes that the mouth as the tool of the heart enables the conjunction of the inner essences of the lovers in the clinging of their spirits. Seemingly echoing Ibn Tibbon’s transition from the human kiss to the communion of the soul with the separate intellect, De León applies this scheme to the mutual permeation of the sefirot. As the “inner spirits” and essences of all, they subsist in complete love and passion and are thus contained in one another.

This intertwining of the sefirot can be traced back to the Neoplatonic concept of *κοινωνία*—the communion and mutual participation of entities.⁴⁰ A central source for the concept of “being contained in each other” is Plotinus’s *Ennead V 8, On the Intellectual Beauty*.⁴¹ Transparency, mutual containing, and reciprocal knowledge of the entities are described there as general characteristics of the intelligible world. Every idea reflects the structure of the whole intelligible cosmos. The passage is also transmitted by the *Theology of Aristotle*:

والأشياء التي في العالم الأعلى كلها ضياء لأنها في الضوء الأعلى، وكذلك كل واحد منها يرى الأشياء في ذات صاحبه فصار لذلك كلها في كلها وصار الكل في الكل والكل في الواحد، والواحد منها هو الكل، ونور الذي يسبح عليها لا نهاية له.⁴²

The things which are in the upper world are radiance because they are in the upper brilliance. Thus each one of them sees the things in its own being and in the being of its neighbour, and therefore they are all of them inside all of them, and the whole is in the whole and the one is in the whole and the whole

⁴⁰ See E. R. Dodds, Proclus, *The Elements of Theology* (a revised text with translation, introduction, and commentary by E. R. Dodds; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963) 254, 291; Werner Beierwaltes, *Proklos: Grundzüge seiner Metaphysik* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 1979) 42–48.

⁴¹ Plotinus, *Ennead V 8, 4, 4*; For the mutual permeation of the ideas in Plotinus, see also Jens Halfwassen, *Plotin und der Neuplatonismus* (München: Beck, 2004) 74–77.

⁴² Abdurrahman Badawi, *Plotinus apud Arabes*, 154.

is in the one and the one of them is the whole and the light which falls on them is infinite.⁴³

An intense development of the concept of mutual containing of entities can be found in the thought of Proclus. Among others, his work *Elements of Theology*, which was accessible to Arab and Jewish thinkers through a paraphrased translation known as *Liber de causis*, contains an elaboration on the concept according to which “all things are in all things” (Πάντα ἐν πᾶσι).⁴⁴ For Proclus, the intertwining of the forms is one of the main characteristics of the immaterial existence. This union, however, does not lead to a confusion between the entities:⁴⁵

Πάντα τὰ νοερά εἶδη καὶ ἐν ἀλλήλοις εἰσι καὶ καθ’ αὐτὸ ἕκαστον. εἰ γὰρ ἀμέριστος πᾶς νοῦς καὶ ἠνωμένον διὰ τὴν νοερὰν ἀμέρειαν καὶ τὸ ἐν αὐτῷ πλήθος, ἐν ἐνὶ πάντα ὄντα καὶ ἀμερεῖ ἦνωται ἀλλήλοις, καὶ φοιτᾷ πάντα διὰ πάντων· εἰ δὲ ἀύλως ἔστι πάντα καὶ ἀσωμάτως, ἀσύγχυτά ἐστι πρὸς ἀλλήλα, καὶ χωρὶς ἕκαστον φυλάττον τὴν ἑαυτοῦ καθαρότητα μένει ὃ ἐστι.

All the intellectual Forms are both implicit each in the other and severally existent. For if every intelligence is indivisible, and through this intellectual indivisibility its manifold content is also unified, then all the Forms, being contained in a single intelligence devoid of parts, are united with one another, and all interpenetrate all; but if all exist immaterially and without bodies, there is no confusion among them, but each remains itself, keeping its pure distinctness uncontaminated.⁴⁶

The elements contain each other reciprocally. Everything is unique, at the same time participating in the other and sharing its nature with the other.⁴⁷ Thus, in the intelligible world, everything exists in communion with one another⁴⁸ while keeping its distinctness. The relative unity of the intelligibles, which participate in each other’s essence, can be identified with eros and *philia*. Eros appears as a mediator in this simultaneous separation and union of being.⁴⁹ The simultaneity of unity and distinctness as the peculiar feature of the ideas intensifies both their union with one another and their distinctness from each other.⁵⁰

⁴³ *Theology of Aristotle* X, 137; Eng. trans. Lewis, *Plotiniana Arabica*, 385.

⁴⁴ Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*, Prop. 102, 93. Compare with *Liber de causis* §11.

⁴⁵ See Beierwaltes, *Proklos: Grundzüge seiner Metaphysik*, 32.

⁴⁶ Proclus, *The Elements of Theology*, Prop. 176, 154, 155. Compare with Proclus, *Commentary on Plato’s Parmenides* 755, 9; For Greek text, see *Procli in Platonis Parmenidem Commentaria* (ed. Carlos Steel; Oxford: Clarendon, 2007). For English translation, see Proclus, *Commentary on Plato’s Parmenides* (trans. Glenn R. Morrow and John M. Dillon; New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1987).

⁴⁷ See Beierwaltes, *Proklos: Grundzüge seiner Metaphysik*, 35.

⁴⁸ Proclus, *Commentary on Plato’s Parmenides* 754, 26.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 755, 1; Beierwaltes, *Proklos: Grundzüge seiner Metaphysik*, 35, 36.

⁵⁰ See also Proclus, *Commentary on Plato’s Parmenides* 757, 5. Compare with Otto Bardenhewer, *Die pseudo-aristotelische Schrift, Ueber das reine Gute, bekannt unter dem Namen, Liber de causis,* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1882) §4. Scholem notes that an early translation of *Liber de causis* was probably accessible to the Kabbalists (*Origins*, 423, n. 138).

The principle of *κοινωνία* takes root already in early Kabbalah.⁵¹ The ontological concept of the Torah lets early Kabbalists conceptualize the letters of the Hebrew alphabet in the likeness of Platonic ideas. Not only does the Torah correspond to the Neoplatonic intelligible cosmos, but also the relation between its letters follows the principle of *κοινωνία*. This notion is expressed explicitly in the works of central personalities in early Kabbalah, both Provençal and Geronese. In his *Commentary on Sefer Yešira*, Isaac the Blind explains that every letter, though having its own essence, contains all the other letters as well as all of the ten sefirot:

ובכל אחת מן האותיות כל האותיות אבל כל אחת יש לה עיקר בפני עצמה. וכל עשר ספירות בכל אות ואות.⁵²

All letters are in every letter, though every letter has its own essence. And all the ten sefirot are in every letter.

Elaborating on the relation between God's unity and the plurality of his attributes (*middot*), Asher ben David presents in his *Sepher Hayyihud* the mutual containment of the divine attributes as the basic principle assuring Gods unity:

שאין מדותיו חלוקות ונפרדות ואף לא מחוברות אלא כלן אחת וכל אחת מהן כלולה בחברתה והוא ית' פועל בכלן כאחת או באחת וכולל בה את כולן אע"פ שכל אחת מהן ראש למדתה כמו כלו בזו לפי שהכל דבר אחד.⁵³

That his attributes are neither divided or separated, nor joined together, but they are all one and every one of them is contained in the other. He, blessed be He, is acting through all of them as one, or through one, containing all of them in it. Though every one of them is the principle of its own (specific) attribute, all His power is in it, because everything is one.

The concept of “being contained in each other,” by which the union becomes a dynamic union, is fully employed by the Kabbalists. It is precisely the realm of the sefirot in which the oppositions can be bridged without being destroyed. In Kabbalistic sources, the entities in the spiritual realm penetrate one another keeping their distinctness, through which the union is intensified. The Zoharic exposition is a striking example of this kind of intensification. The mingling of the breaths, which reflects the intertwining and the mutual permeation of the entities, is a remarkable aspect of union between *Tiferet* and *Malkhut* and appears as a dominant characteristic of the union which takes place on a higher sefirotic level. Moreover, it is true also concerning the union of the sefirotic realm as a whole. The spirit issuing from above designates the emanative flow. The spirit ascending designates the return of the lower hypostasis or the soul to its origin, restoring the initial

⁵¹ See also Idel, “Jewish Kabbalah and Platonism in the Middle Ages and Renaissance,” 330, 331.

⁵² Isaac Sagi Nahor, “Commentary on Sefer Yešira,” in *Gerschom Scholem: Kabbalah in Provence* (ed. Rivka Schatz; Jerusalem: Akademon, 1963) appendix, 1–18, 12 [Hebrew].

⁵³ Daniel Abrams, *R. Asher ben David, His Complete Works and Studies in his Kabbalistic Thought* (Los Angeles, CA: Cherub Press, 1996) 61. See also Ben Sheshet, *Sefer ha-'Emuna ve-ha-Bitahon*, in *Kitvey Ramban* (ed. Charles Chavel; 2 vols.; Jerusalem: Mosad ha-Rav Kook, 1988) 2:387.

oneness. The mutual permeation of these motions is the very core of the union of the spiritual realm. The merging of oneness and separateness can thus be viewed as an essential feature of the spiritual world, both for Neoplatonists and Kabbalists.

Explicitly focusing on the mutual permeation of the entities, the Zoharic exposition seems to foreground the horizontal axis, and, thus, reciprocity in its concept of union. Therefore, the emphasis on the hierarchical principle in the concept of the hypostatic relation fades into the background.⁵⁴

■ Portrayal of a Universal Principle

The far-reaching ontological validity of the imagery of the kiss is expressed by the identification of the four spirits with the four letters of the word “love” (אָהֶבָה). The following passage intends to show that the imagery of the kiss reflects all the aspects of love as a universal ontological power:

בספרא דרב המנונא סבא קדמאה הוה אמר על האי קרא נשיקה דרחימו אתפשט לד' רוחין וד' רוחין מתדבקן כחדא ואינן גו רזא דמהימנותא. וסלקין בד' אתון ואינן אתון דשמא קדישא תלי בהו ועלאין ותתאין תליין בהו. ותושבחתא דשיר השירים תלי בהו. ומאן איהו אהב"ה. ואינן רתיכא עלאה. ואינן חברותא ודבקותא ושלימו דכלא אלין אתון.

In the Book of Rav Hamnuna Sava the First, he said concerning this verse: A kiss of love expands in four spirits, and four spirits cleave as one, and they are within the mystery of faith. They ascend in four letters—letters upon which the Holy Name depends, upon which those above and below depend, upon which the praise of Song of Songs depends. Who is that? אָהֶבָה—Love. They are the supernal chariot; they are companionship, cleaving and wholeness of all.⁵⁵

The four breaths of the kiss unite within the relation between the male and the female aspects of the divine realm,⁵⁶ forming the name, and with it the essence of love. According to this description, it is the mutual permeation of the hypostases from which the essence of love is issuing. This concept is reminiscent of the Plotinian notion that eros is born from the fascinated sight of the soul towards the intellect. Being generated from the relation of hypostases, it becomes a principle which holds together the whole being. This is the further Zoharic development. The passage seems to contain all the basic elements of Platonic eros.⁵⁷ Not only

⁵⁴ The principles of reciprocity and equality in Kabbalistic texts have been discussed in: Moshe Idel, “Eros: Paths of Unity and Polarity in Kabbalah,” *Eranos-Jahrbuch* 70 (2009–11), 296–322; See also Charles Mopsik, *Sex of the Soul: The Vicissitudes of Sexual Difference in Kabbalah* (Los Angeles, CA: Cherub Press, 2005); Hecker, “Kissing Kabbalists.”

⁵⁵ *Zohar* 2:146b.

⁵⁶ For various meanings of the term “mystery of faith” in the *Zohar*, see Jonathan Garb, “Secrets of Faith in the Book of the *Zohar*,” in *On Faith: Studies in the Concept of Faith and its History in the Jewish Tradition* (ed. Moshe Halbertal, David Kurzweil, and Avi Sagi; Jerusalem: Keter, 2005) 294–311 [Hebrew].

⁵⁷ Parallels between Platonic eros and Zoharic concepts of love have been discussed by Yehuda Liebes in “*Zohar* and Eros,” *Alpayyim* 9 (1994) 67–115 [Hebrew]. For the interpretation of the

do the four letters of the Hebrew word for “love” correspond to the letters of the Tetragrammaton, but the holy name itself is said to be dependent on them. Constituting the structure of the sefirotic realm as a whole, this name of God, according to the present interpretation, is reliant upon the principle of love. As the basis for the upper and lower being, love is a universal ontological principle. Holding everything together through an initial companionship, it assures the unity of the whole. Furthermore, the epistemological element finds its expression in the praise of the *Song of Songs*, which in its broad sense encompasses any loving devotion of a lower entity towards a higher one. The immediate development introduces also the theurgical aspect, describing the ascent of the fruit engendered from the union of the four spirits, which initiates kisses and union above.⁵⁸

Establishing the imagery of the kiss as portraying a universal principle, the homily in *Zohar Terumah* can also reconcile different interpretative paths in reading the verse. The use of the third person singular in “O that he would kiss me” requires an explanation, as we have already seen in the *Commentary on the Song of Songs* by R. Ezra of Gerona. The Zoharic homily takes this opportunity to interpret the verse as *Malkhut’s* request towards *Tiferet*, while reading it as addressing a higher level in the sefirotic realm, *Hokhmah* or *Keter*.⁵⁹

מאן ישקני ההוא דסתים גו סתימו עלאה. ואי תימא. סתימא דכל סתימין ביה תליין נשיקין ונשיק לתתא. ת"ה סתימא דכל סתימין לית מאן דידע ליה ואיהו גלי מניה נהירו חד דקיק סתים דלא אתגלי בר בחד שביל דקיק דאתפשט מגויה ואיהו נהירו דנהיר לכלא. ודא אתערו דכל רזין עלאין. ואיהו סתים. לזמנין סתים ולזמנין אתגליא. ואף על גב דלא אתגליא כלל ואתערו דסליקו דנשיקין ביה תליין. ומגו דאיהו סתים, שירותא דתושבחתא בארה סתים איהו. ואי ביה תליין מה בעי יעקב (סבא) הכא דהא ביה תליין נשיקין אלא ודאי הכי הוא. ישקני ההוא דסתים לעילא. ובמה בההוא רתיכא עלאה דכל גוונין תליין ומתחברן ביה. והאי איהו יעקב כמה דאמרינן דביקתא לאתדבקא במלכא בברא דיליה הוא. וע"ד כתיב מנשיקות פיהו.

Who is he? The concealed one in supernal concealment. Now, you might say, “Concealed of All Concealed: kisses depend upon Him—and He kisses below?” Come and see: Concealed of All Concealed—there is no one who knows Him, and He reveals from Himself a tenuous radiance, sealed, not revealed except by one slender path extending from Him. This is a radiance illumining all, arousal of all supernal mysteries. It is concealed—sometimes concealed and sometimes revealed, and even though it is not revealed at all, the arousal of the ascent of the kisses depends upon Him. Because it is concealed, praise begins in a concealed way.

If they depend upon Him, what is Jacob seeking here, since kisses depend on Him? Well, certainly so! *O that he would kiss me*—the one concealed above.

present Zoharic homily, see 79. For Platonic eros in Jewish Mysticism, see also Idel, “Metamorphoses of a Platonic Theme in Jewish Mysticism,” *Jewish Studies at the Central European University* 3 (2002–2003) 67–86.

⁵⁸ See also Asulin, “The Mystical Commentary of the *Song of Songs* in the *Zohar* and its Background,” 58, 59.

⁵⁹ For a detailed discussion of the reconciliation between these two interpretations of the verse, see Asulin, 55–61.

By what? By that supernal chariot, on which all colors depend and converge. This is Jacob—as one says: Cleaving to the King comes through the cleaving to His Son. Therefore, it is written: with the kisses of his mouth.⁶⁰

The synthesis between the two interpretative paths leads to a classical Neoplatonic account: the emanative flow of the higher sefirotic realm, rendered as “kiss,” is mediated to *Malkhut* through *Tiferet*. The oneness and unity in the upper world enable union at the lower levels. According to the Zoharic explanation, this is the reason that the *Song of Songs* starts with a request in the third person, which is directed toward the concealed, supreme cause.⁶¹ The Zoharic account stays consistent in its Neoplatonically inspired depiction of the desire of the supernal female. The actual longing of *Malkhut* is directed towards a higher sefirotic realm, *Tiferet* being only a mediator. Paralleling *Malkhut* and the soul, it can be shown that Neoplatonic sources display the same principle: the actual desire of the soul is directed towards the first cause, the supreme Good, though she is united with it only through the mediation of the intellect. This classical Neoplatonic concept can be found also in the *Theology of Aristotle*:

إِنَّ النفس إذا كانت في العالم الأعلى اشتاقت إلى الخير المحض الأول فإنها تأتيه بتوسط العقل بل هو المدير، وذلك أَنَّ الخير المحض الأول لا يحيط به شيء ولا يحجبه شيء ولا يمنعه مانع من أن يسلك حيث شاء. وإذا أرادته النفس أتاها.⁶²

When the soul is in the upper world, and longs for the absolute first good, she comes to it through the medium of the intellect; or rather, it comes to her, for nothing encompasses or veils the absolute first good from anything it wants, nor does anything prevent it from going where it will. If the soul desires it, it comes to her.⁶³

The concluding remark of the Zoharic passage, “cleaving to the King comes through the cleaving to His Son,” displays certain Christian overtones.⁶⁴ Indeed, a similar adaptation of this Neoplatonic scheme to the kiss symbolism can be found in the *Sermons on the Song of Songs* of Bernard of Clairvaux. The interpretation which Bernard gives to the kiss is basically threefold. First, it designates the relationship between the soul and Christ, but, secondly, it can also be identified with Christ himself as mediator between the soul and God the Father. Additionally,

⁶⁰ Zohar 2:146b, 147a.

⁶¹ See also Asulin, “The Mystical Commentary of the *Song of Songs* in the *Zohar* and its Background,” 60, 61.

⁶² Badawi, *Plotinus apud Arabes*, 36, following the reading of Ms. ص.

⁶³ *Theology of Aristotle II*, 43–44; Eng. trans. Lewis, *Plotiniana Arabica*, 71.

⁶⁴ For Christian influences on the *Zohar* see: Yehuda Liebes, *Studies in the Zohar* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993) 139–152; For the concept of “sonship” in the *Zohar*, see Moshe Idel, *Ben: Sonship and Jewish Mysticism* (New York: Continuum, 2007) 403–10; See also Jonathan M. Benarroch, “‘The Mystery of Unity’: Poetics and Mystical Aspects of a Unique Zoharic Shema Mystery,” *AJS Review* 37 (2013) 231–56.

the kiss can denote the Holy Spirit, which is generated by the union of Father and Son and bestowed on the soul.⁶⁵

Sit os osculans, Verbum assumens; osculatum, caro quae assumitur; osculum vero, quod pariter ab osculante et osculato conficitur, persona ipsa ex utroque compacta, *mediator Dei et hominum, homo Christus Iesus*. Hac ergo ratione sanctorum nemo dicere praesumebat: “Osculetur me ore suo”, sed tantum: *Osculo oris sui*, ipsi sane servantes praerogativam istam, cui singulariter semelque os Verbi impressum tunc est, cum ei se *corporaliter plenitudo omnis Divinitatis* indulsit. Felix osculum, ac stupenda dignatione mirabile, in quo non os ori imprimitur, sed Deus homini unitur. Et ibi quidem contactus labiorum complexum significat animorum, hic autem confoederatio naturarum divinis humana componit, *quae in terra sunt et quae in caelis pacificans. Ipse enim est pax nostra, qui fecit utraque unum*.⁶⁶

The mouth that kisses signifies the Word who assumes human nature; the nature assumed receives the kiss; the kiss however, that takes its being both from the giver and the receiver, is a person that is formed by both, none other than “the one mediator between God and mankind, himself a man, Christ Jesus.” It is for this reason that none of the saints dared say: “let him kiss me with his mouth,” but rather, “with the kiss of his mouth.” In this way, they paid tribute to that prerogative of Christ, on whom uniquely and in one sole instance the mouth of the Word was pressed, that moment when the fullness of the divinity yielded itself to him as the life of his body. A fertile kiss therefore, a marvel of stupendous self-abasement that is not a mere pressing of mouth upon mouth; it is the uniting of God with man. Normally the touch of lip on lip is the sign of the loving embrace of hearts, but this conjoining of natures brings together the human and the divine, shows God “reconciling to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven.” “For he is the peace between us, and has made the two into one.”⁶⁷

The sermon renders the kiss as the mediation between the human and the divine. This mediation is fulfilled through Jesus Christ, who himself is identified with the kiss. In the Zoharic imagery, the role of the kiss is also that of mediation: the Zoharic account opens with the notion of the kiss as uniting between the upper and the lower worlds. The consequence of this mediation is the merging of the two into one, as repeatedly stated in the Zoharic exposition. Similarly, in Bernard’s interpretation the mediating kiss makes the human and the divine into one.

Bernard distinguishes between “the kiss of the mouth” and “the kiss of the kiss.” The kiss of the mouth gives expression to the union between the Father and

⁶⁵ See also Bernard McGinn, *The Growth of Mysticism* (The Presence of God: A History of Western Christian Mysticism 2; New York: Crossroads, 1994) 158–224, esp. 165–66. For the kiss imagery in Christian sources, see further Perella, *The Kiss, Sacred and Profane*.

⁶⁶ Bernard de Clairvaux, *Sermons sur le Cantique* (4 vols.; Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1996) 1: Sermon II, 3, 84.

⁶⁷ Bernard of Clairvaux, *On the Song of Songs* (trans. Kilian Walsh; 4 vols.; Kalamazoo, MI: Cistercian Publications, 1979) 1: Sermon II, 9, 10.

the Son. The kiss of the kiss is the Holy Spirit which is bestowed on the soul by Christ and God the Father equally:

Tamquam vere osculum quod osculanti osculatoque commune est. Itaque sufficit sponsae, si osculetur ab osculo sponsi, etiamsi non osculetur ab ore. Nec enim exiguum quid aut vile putat osculari ab osculo, quod non est aliud, nisi infundi Spiritu Sancto. Nempe si recte Pater osculans, Filius osculatus accipitur, non erit ab re osculum Spiritum Sanctum intelligi, utpote qui Patris Filiique imperturbabilis pax sit, gluten firmum, individuus amor, indivisibilis unitas.⁶⁸

Truly the kiss that is common both to him who kisses and to him who is kissed. Hence the bride is satisfied to receive the kiss of the Bridegroom, though she be not kissed with his mouth. For her it is no mean or contemptible thing to be kissed by the kiss, because it is nothing less than the gift of the Holy Spirit. If, as is properly understood, the Father is he who kisses, the Son he who is kissed, then it cannot be wrong to see in the kiss the Holy Spirit, for he is the imperturbable peace of the Father and the Son, their unshakable bond, their undivided love, their indivisible unity.⁶⁹

Bernard explains that the bride-soul cannot be kissed directly by the mouth of God the Father, because this kiss is solely accessible by the Son. The kiss, which is the expression of the unity between Father and Son, is the Holy Spirit. The description of the Holy Spirit as “the imperturbable peace of the Father and the Son, their unshakable bond, their undivided love, their indivisible unity” seems to be very close to *Zohar*’s “companionship, cleaving, wholeness of all” designating the four spirits which are identical with the four letters of the word “love”: “imperturbabilis pax” could easily correspond to שלִימוֹ דְכֵלָא, with regard to the interchangeability of חֵרוּם and שְׁלוֹמֹת in mystical texts; “gluten firmum” seems to correspond to חֲבִירוּתָא foregrounding the meaning of joining; “individuus amor” parallels the “one love” to which the spirits in the Zoharic homily unite, “indivisibilis unitas” the clinging union דְבִקוּתָא.

The affinity between the Zoharic imagery of the kiss and an ensemble of aspects in Bernard’s exegesis of the opening verse of the *Song of Songs* is so great that it is reasonable to assume the influence of this Christian source on the Zoharic text, even though the particular conduit of Bernard’s sermons cannot be demonstrated. The Zoharic statement that the cleaving to the King is to be accomplished through the Son seems to echo the Christian idea and terminology, all the more so when we find this concept at the very heart of Bernard’s kiss symbolism. Bernard’s identification of the kiss with the Holy Spirit is reminiscent of the link between “spirit” and the kiss already in earlier Kabbalistic commentaries. As we have seen, R. Ezra identifies the kiss with the bestowing of the holy spirit on the soul. Ibn Sahula renders the supreme kiss as the “emanation of the spirit from its origin.”

⁶⁸ Bernard de Clairvaux, *Sermons sur le Cantique*, Sermon VIII, 2, 176.

⁶⁹ Bernard of Clairvaux, *On the Song of Songs* 1, Sermon VIII, 46.

■ Conclusion

The adaptation of philosophical concepts and terminology was an essential element in the consolidation of early Kabbalistic systems and continued to take place in the following generations of Kabbalists. In order to demonstrate the formation of a specific structure of ideas and their dynamics within Kabbalistic theosophy, the Zoharic imagery of the kiss has been situated here within the context of numerous sources from which the *Zohar* has probably drawn its key elements.

The homily on the opening verse of the *Song of Songs* found in the pericope *Terumah* can be viewed as a portrayal of the metaphysics of love. Investigating the correlation of the philosophical sources and the Zoharic text, two general aspects could be found as crucial for the formation of the Kabbalistic imagery. Basic Neoplatonic notions as the hypostatic relation which Plotinus and Proclus conceptualize as eros, and the principle of *κοινωνία*, have been transmitted to the Jewish tradition through Arabic translations and philosophical works. Arabic philosophical treatises, as already Plato's dialogues, often bear demonstrations of the uniting power of eros on the material level. One of several such examples extant in Arabic sources is the description of the kiss as mingling of breaths which leads to the cleaving of human souls, as it appears *inter alia* in the *Epistle* of the Brethren of Purity. The image is employed by Moses ibn Tibbon in his allegorical interpretation of the *Song of Songs*'s opening kiss motif as the cleaving of the soul to the active intellect and finally applied in Moses de León's *Sod 'Eser Sefirot Belimah* and in the Zoharic text to intradivine dynamics.

Aligning itself with the Neoplatonic tradition, which conceptualizes eros as the turning of the soul toward the intellect, the starting point of the Zoharic homily exhibits the metaphor of the kiss as expressing the union between *Tiferet* and *Malkhut*, thus as a hypostatic relation. The elaboration on the nature of the kiss exposes the principle of unity-in-distinction as essential for union in the spiritual realm. This Neoplatonic concept is adopted already by the early Kabbalists and also becomes one of the central notions in the Zoharic concept of union. The detailed description of the kiss is fused with the concept of *κοινωνία* in this Zoharic myth. In the Zoharic account, the mutual permeation of the spirits therefore goes far beyond a mere mingling. It is the condition for the realization of dynamic oneness. Both Neoplatonic notions, the hypostatic relation and *κοινωνία*, appear to comprise the principle of love as universal power.

Finally, the principles of unification are stated as deriving from the concealed cause, which is the source of all union and oneness. The Neoplatonic concept of the universal and individual soul being fascinated by the intellect, but initially longing for the first cause, is reflected also in Jewish philosophical and Kabbalistic texts. The same Neoplatonic notion has been adopted by Christian *Song of Songs* commentators, so that the kiss could describe the relationship between the Church or the soul and Christ but also could be identified with Christ as mediator between the human and the divine and with the Holy Spirit, issuing from both Father and

Son. As shown, the Zoharic synthesis of the lowest *sefirah* turning simultaneously towards *Tiferet* and to a higher spiritual realm could have been consolidated on the basis of several strands of traditions.

Portraying the metaphysics of love as basically comprised by the hypostatic relation and mutual permeation of entities, the Zoharic imagery of the kiss foregrounds the principle of *κοινωνία* in its depiction of love as being engendered from the mingling of the spirits. Giving prevalence to the notion of mutual containing of entities, the horizontal principle in the concept of love and union is put at the heart of the homily. As opposed to the concept of hypostatic relation, which is based on the hierarchical understanding of the emanation process, the concept of union-in-distinction conveys the reciprocal containing of entities, neutralizing the hierarchy between them. An argument has thus been offered showing that not only the concept of hypostatic relation in Kabbalah has clear roots in ancient Greek sources but also that the important notion of reciprocity, which can be found in various Kabbalistic concepts of love and union, can be traced back to the Neoplatonic tradition.