

# **MYSTIC AUTOBIOGRAPHY: A CASE STUDY IN COMPARATIVE LITERARY ANALYSIS**

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## **I. INTRODUCTION:**

### **A. Methodology:**

This study is a textual analysis comparing the autobiographical accounts of two ecstatic masters—Abraham Abulafia, a Jew born in Saragossa, Spain, at the end of the 13th century, and Swami Muktananda, a Kashmir Shaivite who lived and taught in mid-20th century India.

The question must be raised: why compare two such disparate mystics, from such widely separated cultural and temporal milieus, and from religious traditions differing so radically in theology—what can be gained from such an analysis?

Phenomenological criticism, which evolved from the philosophy articulated by the German Edmund Husserl, suggests that the most chronologically disparate, thematically different texts may be compared for their unity and universality.<sup>1</sup> Phenomenological analysis confirms that the objective of Abulafia's ecstatic Kabbalah is highly anthropocentric; the mystical experience of unity with the divine is the ultimate goal.<sup>2</sup> Muktananda's goal is also mystical union with the divine.<sup>3</sup> This common goal of the mystical path is the first basis for a comparison.

Phenomenology is based upon the experiential, presuming that subjective experience reveals the deep structures of mind itself. Phenomenological criticism rests upon the belief that these deep structures are reflected in the artifact of text.<sup>4</sup> Both masters wrote autobiographical accounts of their progress on the ecstatic path in order to instruct and encourage their disciples. These common objectives and literary genres are a second basis for comparison. Both mystics describe their subjective experience as they progress upon the mystical paths they have chosen. These descriptions are a third basis for comparison.

Phenomenological analysis is historical and subjective.<sup>5</sup> Considered phenomenologically, the 'world' of any literary work is not an objective reality. The texts under examination are presumed to constitute an organic whole, each reflecting the author's expressed experience of time or space, the perception of material objects, or the relationship between the self and others.<sup>6</sup> The literary critical methods of reader response and reception theory grow out of the philosophy of phenomenology and are heavily influenced by



its subjective premises.<sup>7</sup> As a reader who brings texts of such disparate origins together, I do so first in my own mind, and only secondarily on paper to be read by others. This study will reflect these methodological considerations.

## **B. Mystic Autobiography:**

The mystic's experience of the divine has always been received with ambivalence by established religion.<sup>8</sup> As a subjective phenomenon, ecstatic accounts are suspect: where does God end and madness begin?<sup>9</sup> Ecstatic insight into the nature of the divine also implies unmediated access by individuals to the divine source, thereby bypassing established cultic channels. Mystical experiences threaten the foundations of religions based on ancient revelation even as they offer the potential of infusing savory spiritual juices into desiccated ritual and *dogma*.<sup>10</sup>

Aside from threatening contemporary institutions founded upon ancient revelation, the ecstatic experience also threatens the uniqueness of any particular religious philosophy. If anyone can achieve a glimpse of the divine by means of specific techniques, then why practice the exoteric prescriptions and proscriptions of any particular religion? If all people experience the ecstatic similarly, progressing through similar stages and achieving levels commensurate with their innate capacity for the mystical rather than with their relative devotion to a creed, then why bother with a creed at all?

Thus, personal accounts of ecstatic experiences, and explicit descriptions of powerful techniques for attaining such experiences, are rare in every culture, surrounded by taboo, consigned to an esoteric in-group, or whispered privately from master to disciple.<sup>11</sup> Examination of even a single such account may reveal much about the process of spiritual development, the evolution of philosophical ideas, and the use of symbolic images.

This paper proposes to compare two schools of mystical practice, representing widely differing cultural backgrounds, religious philosophies, and temporal milieus. The first is the ecstatic Kabbalistic school of Abraham Abulafia, and the second is the Kashmir Shaivite practice of Swami Muktananda. Abulafia's school is represented by Abulafia's own works, and by the autobiographical account of an anonymous disciple, in Hebrew. Muktananda is represented by his own works as translated from Hindi into English by his disciples, primarily by Swami Chidvilasananda, who succeeded him.

My approach is a text-based literary analysis of these writings, exploring the similarities and differences in their accounts of their respective religious backgrounds and life journeys. I focus especially on their reports of their personal ecstatic experiences of the divine. Such an examination may cast some light upon the nature of the human experience of the divine and upon the stages of mystical development that are independent of *dogma* and creed.



## II. BACKGROUND AND OVERVIEW:

Abraham Abulafia, who was born in Spain and died sometime after 1291, is among the most prolific of Jewish Ecstatic Kabbalists. His work, some of which was translated into Latin and Italian, was a major influence upon Christian Kabbalah.<sup>12</sup> As he wandered across Europe and the Levant, he wrote numerous manuals of mystical technique which serve as instructions for achieving ecstatic mystical experiences, guiding his students upward through the various levels. Many of these works still exist today, and although most of these are in manuscript form, Gershom Scholem and Moshe Idel, among others, have published many lengthy segments that are available for study.<sup>13</sup> One of the most important of these guides is *Ozar Eden Ganuz*, written in Hebrew by Abulafia in 1285.<sup>14</sup> Ten years later, in 1295, one of Abulafia's disciples, known to us only by his personal name, Sa'adia, wrote an account of his ecstatic experiences as he followed Abulafia's guidance in a manuscript entitled *Sha'are Zedeq*.<sup>15</sup> These two accounts are especially compelling because they represent the mystical experiences and philosophical development of both teacher and student.

Writing almost seven hundred years later, and continents removed from Abulafia and his disciple, an Indic yogi also handed down a written legacy for the mystical development of his disciples. Swami Muktananda Paramahansa was a yogi in the *Siddha* tradition<sup>16</sup> who claims to have achieved God-realization in 1956 at the hands of his Guru, Bhagavan Nityananda,<sup>17</sup> and who died in 1982 after he had established an international following. He left behind him a significant number of written works describing his own spiritual evolution, his mystical experiences, and his instructions to his students, as well as explications of his theological and cosmogonic philosophies. These have been translated into English by his disciples and published by the foundation that he established.

In spite of vast cultural, philosophical, and temporal gulfs, the stages of the medieval Kabbalists' ecstatic development and experiences of mystical union are remarkably analogous to accounts we have of the contemporary yogic master's. These similarities are paralleled in the broad outlines of their respective lives.

Abraham Abulafia was born in 1240 C.E. in Saragossa, Spain, and studied Torah and Gemara with his father until the elder's death when his son was eighteen.<sup>18</sup> Two years later he left home to begin his temporal wanderings and spiritual search, which are documented in his autobiography. This work, *Ozar Eden Ganuz*, was composed for edifying and instructing one of his disciples.<sup>19</sup>

Abulafia's seeking took him from the study of the sciences and mathematics, through philosophy, to Maimonides' *Guide to the Perplexed*, which was to be one of the central pillars of his spiritual life. The second pillar was the mystical work *Sefer Yetzirah*, which he studied, wrote commentaries upon, and taught, along with Maimonides' *Guide*, during the remainder of his life. At about the



time of his introduction to the *Sefer Yetzirah* Abulafia experienced a major ecstatic vision which was the beginning of his development as a master of Kabbalah. Among his students were R. Joseph Gikatilla and R. Moses b. Simeon of Burgos, leading Spanish Kabbalists in the late 13th century.<sup>20</sup>

Swami Muktananda was born in 1908 in Mangalore, India. At the age of fifteen he left home to practice the spiritual discipline of the wandering mendicant, seeking wisdom from holy men and saints throughout his native land, and studying *Vedanta* and other systems of Indian philosophy, yoga, *Ayurvedic* medicine, horticulture, music, and the martial arts.<sup>21</sup>

Muktananda received initiation, or shaktipat, from his master in 1947. This resulted in a protracted period of ecstatic experiences, including nine years of intense meditation.<sup>22</sup> He describes these experiences in his autobiography, *Play of Consciousness*. Muktananda toured the world three times, teaching *Siddha* meditation and initiating disciples. Before his death, he passed the power of the *Siddha* lineage on to his disciple Swami Chidvilasananda who continues as a Guru in her own right.<sup>23</sup>

### III. LITERARY GOALS, STRUCTURE AND STYLE:

From a stylistic point of view, each account is autobiographical within the context of illustrating for the reader a model of spiritual evolution, a sampling of the kinds of experiences produced by specific mystical techniques, and a warning of potential dangers.

#### A. Goals:

Abulafia begins: "My intention was, in all that I wrote until here in this book, to come to what I will reveal to you in it here."<sup>24</sup> The anonymous disciple similarly presents as his objective to share the findings of his spiritual search: "I, John Doe, very unworthy,<sup>25</sup> and searching in the chambers of my heart to find desirable ways of expansion, found three kinds of expansion."<sup>26</sup> Later in the work he, too, specifies his reasons: "And God knows that on my part I intended this for the sake of heaven,...and I couldn't tolerate not pouring out to others what God poured out for me."<sup>27</sup>

Muktananda's intention is analogous. In the introduction to his book *Play of Consciousness*, Muktananda's amanuensis describes the process by which he came to dictate the book, and its purpose: "When our compassionate Gurudev<sup>28</sup> saw the young school and college boys and girls who had accompanied us to Mahableshtar meditating so earnestly, he was moved to write this work on *Siddha Vidya*, the Science of the Perfected Ones. His purpose was to encourage and help them to progress and feel satisfied with their *sadhana*<sup>29</sup> and to promote their true happiness and welfare. This book is chiefly meant for all those seekers, young and old, who follow the *Siddha* path...It is for the guidance of such *Siddha* students that *Chitshakti Vilas* has been written."<sup>30</sup> Each author intends to use his own personal experiences as didactic tools in instructing others who will read their words.



## B. Structure:

Abulafia proceeds to describe his peripatetic education from the time of his birth. Less concerned with chronological development, Abulafia seems to structure his account by topic. He begins with the subject of his education, proceeding from his first Torah study under the tutelage of his father, to study of Mishnah and Talmud which he apparently continued to learn from his father until the elder Abulafia's death. From then on, his wanderings and his education are bound together, a survey of his own studies and teachers giving way to a catalog of his students in each milieu. Once he has cited the external facts "for the record," Abulafia is then free to describe his inner development as an example for students and readers, and as a "teacher's guide" for the use of his pupil Sa'adia in instructing his companions. To do this, he returns to his earlier initial mystical experience at the age of thirty-one, and describes its impact upon him during the same period he has just surveyed.<sup>31</sup>

Sa'adia is equally unconcerned with sketching a complete picture of his life. The task at hand is a description of a spiritual and intellectual process, not an autobiographical exercise. He precedes his autobiographical information with a brief survey of the three spiritual paths he has identified in his introductory remarks: Sufism, philosophy and Kabbalah. That these paths represent the student's own spiritual development becomes clear in the next section of his account in which he, too, surveys his travels and his education. Unlike Abulafia, however, the disciple describes verbatim his dialogues with his teacher, his practice of specific meditative techniques, and his mystical experiences. He closes this excerpt with a lengthy summary of Abulafian concepts and practices, and justifies his attempt to disclose these secret matters in such explicit detail.<sup>32</sup>

The structure of Muktananda's work is also topical rather than chronological. It begins in Part 1 with the importance of God-Realization, the significance of meditation and basics of practice, and goes on in Part 2 to describe the author's initiation into mystical experience and his subsequent progress from confusion to realization, including his physical, visual and emotional symptoms. The book concludes with a summary of the teachings of the *Siddhas* and testimonials from his students.

## C. Autobiographical Parallels:

Both Abulafia and Sa'adia proceed through similar stages of intellectual and spiritual development. Both start with the study of Torah; Abulafia with his father whom he clearly recalls with fondness. The disciple also studies Torah at home, but he must leave his beloved parents in order to begin his Talmud studies. Not surprisingly, the disciple proceeds through his studies in a sequence similar to his teacher's.<sup>33</sup> It is probably worth noting that neither Abulafia nor his student describes an intensive grounding in *Halacha* (law) and traditional sources.



Muktananda also leaves home as a teenager. He dedicates *Play of Consciousness* to his mother, remembering the grief his departure caused her: "My mother loved me very much, for I was her only son...But I could not give any happiness to my mother, nor could I make her contented. Instead, I left home when I was young and so caused her a lot of pain. She wasted away in grief for her lost son and finally died, remembering me all the time."<sup>34</sup>

The initial uprooting from the natal home is a significant turning point for each master. It is as though the willingness to explore new climes is an externalization of the willingness in each case to explore new intellectual and spiritual terrain.<sup>35</sup> They each express the significance of this initial departure, as Abulafia, Sa'adia, and Muktananda each apprehend the work of a divine plan in their initial moves away from home.

Abulafia writes of this first transition: "I remained in the land of my birth for two years after my father passed away. At the age of twenty, God's spirit moved me, and I left, heading straight for the land of Israel by sea and by land."<sup>36</sup> Sa'adia hints that his ties to his home initially keep him from finding an appropriate teacher, but finally he breaks away: "I found no one to guide me in the study of the Talmud, not so much because of the lack of teachers, but rather because of my longing for my home, and my love for father and mother. At last, however, God gave me strength to search for the Torah. I went out and sought and found, and for several years I stayed abroad studying Talmud."<sup>37</sup>

Muktananda similarly attributes his abandonment of his natal home to destiny: "I was slightly over fifteen when one day I left the love of my mother and father far behind. I should not have done such a thing. But what could I do? I was destined to behave so callously. It was supposed to happen, so it did."<sup>38</sup>

## IV. PHILOSOPHY AND APPROACH:

### A. Philosophical Background:

Abraham Abulafia and his disciple stand in the tradition of the Merkava mystics whose roots are based in the visions of Ezekiel,<sup>39</sup> and were profoundly influenced by the Ashkenazic Hasidim of the twelfth century.<sup>40</sup> Abulafia's ecstatic approach differs significantly from that of the better-known *Sefirotic* or *Lurianic* Kabbalah, which he studied and commented upon.<sup>41</sup> Moshe Idel distinguishes between these two Kabbalistic streams, terming the *Sefirotic* Kabbalah and its concern with the redemptive effect of properly-performed mitzvot as "theosophical-theurgical." The "ecstatic" Kabbalah, on the other hand, focuses exclusively on the individual's mystical experience of the divine, and concerns itself with techniques for achieving ecstatic experience.<sup>42</sup>

The author of *Sha'are Zedeq* exhibits strong Sufi influence in his thought and experience, an influence which is not explicitly present in his teacher's work.<sup>43</sup> He refers, initially, to the "Ishmaelite" practices as the first and lowest of the three paths with which he has come into contact, and he



describes their practices briefly. Significantly, he remarks on their use of the name of God, "In the Ishmaelite language, 'Allah'," which they repeat in order to empty their minds, and which induces an altered state of consciousness.<sup>44</sup> He implicitly acknowledges some similarity between this practice and Abulafia's method when he criticizes their practice as not being associated with a Kabbalah and states that thus the practitioners "do not understand what they experience."<sup>45</sup>

## B. Mystical Union:

The goal of Abulafia's "Path of Names" is a prophetic encounter with the divine. As Idel writes, "...the ecstatic Kabbalah of Abraham Abulafia regarded the attainment of ecstatic experiences as the *summum bonum* of human spirituality and at times described these experiences in unitive terms."<sup>46</sup>

Muktananda also expresses the goal of his practice, *Siddha Yoga*, in similar terms: "*Siddha Yoga* is a broad stream through the forest of the world. This stream leads to the realm of oneness, where the individual soul and the Absolute merge."<sup>47</sup>

Muktananda professes the philosophy of *Kashmir Shaivism*.<sup>48</sup> Briefly, this philosophy teaches that everything in the universe is the play of the Supreme Power, and an embodiment of the Supreme Deity, or Shiva. The main duty of a seeker who pursues the Truth is to recognize the Supreme Principle, which is the source of everything. It is not possible to recognize this Supreme Principle through the senses, but only through purified willpower.

## C. Mystical Techniques:

The process of purifying one's willpower and realizing this Supreme Principle is facilitated by one's Guru, or master, and takes the form of meditation, or inwardly contemplating the *Siddha's* (seeker's) identity with the Supreme Principle. Meditation is facilitated by the repetition of the *mantra*, which consists of the name of God and/or a verse from scripture. This repetition is thought to purify the mind. Hand movements, body postures, and breathing exercises are part of Muktananda's technique.<sup>49</sup>

Abulafia's technique employs oral and written combinations of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet and of God's name to achieve mystical states. He also prescribes hand movements, head movements, breathing techniques, and chanting techniques reminiscent of various practices in Eastern yoga.<sup>50</sup>

Scholem and Idel differ on the psychological and physiological effects of Abulafia's elaborate methods of letter combinations and permutations of the name of God, and whether this practice is analogous or in contrast to the yogic recitation of the *mantra*. According to Scholem, "By immersing himself in various combinations of letters and names, the Kabbalist emptied his mind of all natural forms that might prevent his concentrating on divine matters. In this way he freed his soul of its natural restraints and opened it to



the divine influx with whose aid he might even attain prophecy.”<sup>51</sup> Idel agrees that *mantra* repetition achieves this emptying of the mind:

Ongoing recitations of letters and divine names are well-known techniques for the attainment of paranormal states of consciousness; they are used alike by Christian, Muslim, Hindu, and Japanese mystics. Most, if not all, of these techniques seem to operate upon the consciousness of the mystic by enabling him to focus his attention upon a short phrase or sentence—“There is no God but Allah,” “Jesus Christ,” “*Namou Amida Boutso*”—or even a few letters, as in the Hindu *Aum*. This relatively simple device is comparable to fixing one’s vision upon a point; the mystic must escape the impact of external factors, and in this respect his activity is similar to that of someone undergoing sensory deprivation.<sup>52</sup>

However, Idel makes a sharp distinction between these repetitions of short phrases and the complexities of the elaborate technique espoused by Abulafia:

Instead of the simple formulas of non-Jewish techniques, the Jewish texts evince elaborate combinations of letters with hundreds of components. Moreover...according to Jewish practice the mystic had not only to pronounce them according to strict, fixed patterns but had also actively to construct these combinations as part of the mystical practice...(The mystic) thus achieved not a calmness or stillness of the mind but rather a high excitation of the mental processes, triggered by the unceasing need to combine letters, their vocalizations, and various bodily acts—movements of the head or hands or respiratory devices.<sup>53</sup>

Both Scholem and Idel agree, however, that the breathing techniques and body movements are reminiscent of Eastern yogic practices.<sup>54</sup>

## **V. PARALLELS OF PRACTICE:**

### **A. Techniques:**

Among the major elements of Muktananda’s spiritual practice are meditation, mantra, and discipleship expressed as devotion to the Guru. Central to Abulafia’s spiritual practice are isolation, combination and permutation of letters, and the importance of the master or teacher.

Abulafia cites a few simple preparations:<sup>55</sup>



...Cleanse the body and choose a lonely house where none shall hear thy voice...It is best if thou completes it during the night...Be careful to abstract all thy thought from the vanities of this world. Cover thyself with thy prayer shawl and put *Tefillin* on thy head and hands...if possible, let all thy garments be white. If it be night, kindle many lights...Then take ink, pen and a table to thy hand...Now begin to combine a few or many letters, to permute and to combine them until thy heart be warm.<sup>56</sup>

Muktananda also prescribes meditative practices to his disciples, and also prefers a time of darkness:

One-pointed meditation on your favorite object is a very important aspect of *Siddha Yoga*. The Guru has awakened the inner *Shakti* [that is, meditative energy awakened at initiation], given a *mantra*, and taught you a meditation posture. Get up before sunrise, bathe, and sit quietly for meditation. Face east, or any direction, understanding the direction to be God, become quiet, and sit in the posture...Remember your mantra and synchronize it with the incoming and outgoing breath. Let the *mantra* fill the mind. If the mind starts to wander, bring it back and concentrate.<sup>57</sup>

## **B. Primary Importance of Master/Disciple Relationship:**

Muktananda cites the importance of focusing one's attention on the Guru:

"To fix your mind on your beloved Guru in meditation is the life-breath of *Siddha Yoga*." Why? Because "a man becomes like the object on which he meditates. He becomes permeated by whatever object he holds in his heart with love...When we set someone in our heart with love, we cannot remove him, even if we try...This is the fruit of meditation united with love."<sup>58</sup> The Guru, as a God-realized being, is an appropriate object for meditation, for the disciple can hope to become God-realized like the Guru.

The need for a master's guidance, and the importance of master/disciple relationships, in fact the whole concept of a master's obligation to disseminate to disciples what has been divinely received, is central to both accounts.

Scholem summarizes Abulafia's manifesto for the obligations of master and disciple.<sup>59</sup> Briefly, the teacher's responsibility to the student, if he is worthy, is to teach him everything the teacher knows, holding back nothing.



The master must repeat the material to his disciple once orally, once in outline, and once with full explication. The student must be tested. The teacher's will ought to be to help the student truly until he understands, with a minimum of anger, much tolerance and compassion on all human beings, even on one's enemies if they are not enemies of God. The evil impulse must be conquered. After the student has been tested substantively, the teacher must also examine his *kavanah*, to make sure that his intention is for the sake of heaven.<sup>60</sup> Abulafia is critical of teachers whose goal is domination of students.

It is clear both from Abulafia's survey of his own teachers and students, and from his disciple's description of his relationship with his master, that Abulafia takes his own principles very much to heart: "When accepting disciples to his Kabbalah he is extremely fastidious in his requirements as to a high morality and steadiness of character and it may be concluded from his writings even in their ecstatic parts that he himself possessed many of the qualities he asked for in others."<sup>61</sup> He is careful to educate his disciple at a pace consistent with the disciple's will and understanding.

These principles are similar to those described by Muktananda:

*Siddha Yoga* is not a guru cult. But in every field, one needs a guide. On the spiritual path, too, a Guru is necessary. At certain times in one's life, healers, psychologists, psychics, and professors may all be necessary. In the same way, in spiritual life, one needs a guide who is wise and compassionate, who observes good conduct, who has studied the scriptures and spiritual philosophies, and who has understood the Truth.

On the *Siddha* Path, one needs a Guru who has been chosen by another *Siddha* of the true lineage of *Siddhas*. He must have complete knowledge and be proficient at transmitting energy and removing all obstacles. He should always be pure, simple, and straightforward, capable of bestowing wisdom and making love flow. He must know that true Principle just as it is. He must have become one with that. He should be content with whatever comes to him and free of addictions. He must also be a master of diplomacy. One needs a Guru who can point out the path to attain the Self, but in addition one has to put forth self-effort:

...O friend! A person may claim to be a great being, a *Siddha*, or a leader. He may be a performer of miracles. He may claim to hold the degree of God. But if he does not behave properly, he will lead people astray. The behavior of a great being is the greatest example for others, and they follow it.<sup>62</sup>



### C. Secondary Importance of Sacred Texts:

Both Muktananda and Abulafia refer to sacred texts but the study of these is supportive of, and helpful in, rather than central to, spiritual practice. Abulafia begins with the study of *Torah*, *Mishnah* and *Talmud* with his father, but Abulafia does not describe intensive grounding in either *Halacha* or traditional sources once he has left home. He focuses instead on Maimonides whose works he discovers in the course of his travels:

It was here that I found a distinguished man, wise, understanding, a philosopher and expert physician by the name of Rabbi Hillel, of blessed memory. I joined him in study, and it was from him that I learned a little of the wisdom of philosophy, which seemed sweet to me from the start. I worked hard to learn this discipline with all my strength and with all my might. I kept at it day and night, and didn't take my mind off it until I had gone through the entire *Guide to the Perplexed* many times...<sup>63</sup>

Abulafia's student follows a similar path:

"I returned to my native land and God brought me together with a Jewish philosopher with whom I studied some of Maimonides' *Guide to the Perplexed* and this only added to my desire. I acquired a little of the science of logic and a little of natural science, and this was very sweet to me for, as you know, 'nature attracts nature.'<sup>64</sup>"

Muktananda wanders for many years across India, seeking the wise men and saints to learn what he can. He stresses repeatedly that the teachings of a living master are the most significant teaching there is.<sup>65</sup> His knowledge of the scriptures is informal, and he does his reading on his own with little guidance.<sup>66</sup> Natural sciences and Western philosophy find no place in Muktananda's development.

For Abulafia and his disciple, study of the sciences tries the faith of both. Contact with the natural sciences and philosophy sorely tries the disciple's commitment to observance of the commandments, and signals another transitional crisis, but his strong faith prevails: "And God is my witness: If I had not previously acquired strength of faith by what little I had learned of the *Torah* and the *Talmud*, the impulse to keep many of the religious commands would have left me although the fire of pure intention was ablaze in my heart."<sup>67</sup> Abulafia, too, suffers a crisis of faith as a result of his development, although his occurs not when he is introduced to natural philosophy but after his initial mystical experience at the age of thirty-one.



Abulafia also appears to remain faithful to the commandments in spite of temptation.<sup>68</sup>

In fact, the focus of all three ecstasies is on mystical experience rather than on intellectual study. Muktananda is delighted that his experiences confirm the sacred writings and, as a result of his ecstatic visions, his faith in the scriptures is strengthened:

Before, I had believed that the only truth was Self-realization and had not believed in heaven, hell, the world of the gods, and other such things. Now I was convinced that what the scriptures said was perfectly true and that it was we who were unable to understand. The ancient sages could see deeply into areas that we cannot see and had composed the scriptures with the omniscience acquired through yoga. This is why their words are true.<sup>69</sup>

## VI. PARALLELS OF EXPERIENCE:

Abulafia and Muktananda both experience their spiritual enlightenment in stages over the course of many years, and in both cases anguish, fear, the threat of madness and the threat of death characterize progression through the lower stages. Repeatedly they employ similar descriptions of these experiences, beginning with initiation into the mystical experience. Abulafia implies that his awakening to mystical experience was at the hand of God. He does not mention here by name the master who introduced him to *Sefer Yetzirah*,<sup>70</sup> and no element of his own personal willingness or resistance is present:

When I was thirty-one years old, in Barcelona, God awakened me from my sleep, and I learned the *Sefer Yetzirah* with its commentaries. God's hand was upon me, and I wrote books of wisdom and also some wondrous prophetic books. My soul awakened within me, and a spirit of God touched my mouth. A spirit of holiness fluttered through me, and I saw many fearsome sights and wonders, through signs and miracles.

But at the same time, spirits of jealousy gathered around me, and I was confronted with fantasy and error. My mind was totally confused, since I could not find anyone else like me, who would teach me the correct path. I was therefore like a blind man, groping around at noon. For fifteen years, the Satan was at my right hand to mislead me.

All this time, I was driven mad from what my eyes saw. But I was able to keep the *Torah*, and seal in the second curse for fifteen years, until God granted me wisdom and counsel.<sup>71</sup>



### A. Initiation:

Muktananda's initiation is a profound experience, both euphoric and devastating. Although his initiation is at the hands of his master, whom Abulafia lacked, his experience is nonetheless similar. Muktananda's Guru fixes him with a piercing gaze, and thereby transmits the "divine ray, full of *Chiti*, which grants all powers...In this way he gave me his divine initiation."<sup>72</sup> Muktananda also receives from his Guru a "highly charged *mantra*" containing the name of God. Muktananda is to repeat this *mantra* in his daily meditation. He experiences his initiation as an identification with his Guru and with the One:

I slowly made my way homeward. Love for the Guru and a feeling of oneness with him rose within me again and again. And once more I followed the prescribed method for worshipping the Guru and became drunk, repeating, "The Guru is inside, the Guru is outside." I felt waves of emotion, and on these waves I felt my identification with Nityananda grow and grow.<sup>73</sup>

Soon his love for his Guru becomes love for the Absolute:

For a moment I had an intuition of the One in the many, and I lost the ordinary mind that differentiates between the inner and the outer world, that sees the many in the One...I repeatedly opened and closed my eyes. When I shut them I saw innumerable clusters of sparkling rays, and millions of tiny twinkling sparks bursting within me...I was overcome with awe and ecstasy. This was something completely new unfolding, not on a screen, but all around me. I was moving so slowly that I did not know whether I was following the road or the road was following me...Even today I can remember that experience of oneness. I still see those tiny blue dots.<sup>74</sup>

### 1. Bliss...:

According to Idel, Abulafia, like Muktananda, refers to the bliss of ecstatic adventure: "Abulafia makes it quite clear that this pleasure is in fact the aim of mystical experience."<sup>75</sup>

And you shall feel in yourself an additional spirit arousing you and passing over your entire body and causing you pleasure, and it shall seem to you as if balm has been placed upon you, from your head to your feet, one or more times, and



you shall rejoice and enjoy it very much, with gladness and trembling; gladness to your soul and trembling of your body, like one who rides rapidly on a horse, who is happy and joyful, while the horse trembles beneath him.

Other sensuous images abound in Abulafia, the most significant being the feeling that "his entire body, from his head to his feet, had been anointed with anointing oil..."<sup>76</sup> Muktananda describes the mystical experience with a similar image:

When the sun of knowledge rises in the heart and a person experiences the essence of the Self, the universe of diversity with its countless beings and objects is dissolved for him. Duality perishes. The radiant sun of the Self blazes in his eyes. Its flame radiates through every pore of his body. As it flashes, his entire body is filled with the nectar of love. Drops of nectar from the stream of love flow from his eyes.<sup>77</sup>

Muktananda also describes fragrances,<sup>78</sup> tastes,<sup>79</sup> sounds<sup>80</sup> and visions, which bring him exquisite pleasure in meditation:

I meditated constantly and always saw the sweet, radiant Blue Pearl in its infinite variations. Its luster was more dazzling at each moment, and my enjoyment was forever growing. I...was also hearing the divine *nada* (sound, music) of thunder. As I listened to this thundering, my meditation became so joyful that the desires which remained in my mind were smashed by the thunder and just disappeared. As I listened to this sound for a while I experienced complete union with the taintless *Parabrahman*.<sup>81</sup>

### **3. ...and Torment:**

But Muktananda the initiate cannot yet stabilize himself in this blissful state. By the next day, restlessness, torment, and anxiety replace his rapture. "My peace of mind had been destroyed, and all my thoughts were leading me into a deep melancholy. My state of mind was just the opposite of what it had been before...torture and anguish returned and grew. I cannot write the horrible thoughts that filled my mind, but, it's true, I had them. I was obsessed with impure, hateful, and sinful thoughts."<sup>82</sup>

Even though his initiation is received through the intermediacy of his Guru, still, Muktananda describes the intense agitation, visions, and physical discomfort, which follow his initial euphoria in terms strikingly similar to Abulafia's:



My limbs and body got hotter and hotter. My head felt heavy, and every pore in me began to ache...Something told me that I would die at any moment...Someone had seated himself in my eyes and was making me see things. ...It seemed that I was being controlled by some power...I no longer had a will of my own. My madness was growing all the time. My intellect was completely unstable...<sup>83</sup>

Muktananda begins to have dramatic visions:

The world on fire; the world submerged under water. He is convinced his apocalyptic visions are of reality and is disoriented when he discovers the world is undamaged. He also begins to experience *kriyas*, or involuntary body movements. Abulafia, too, warns of the emergence of fear and trembling, hair standing on end, and convulsion of limbs in his instructions to the disciple.<sup>84</sup> Mystic disciples in both traditions fear these involuntary effects. Idel writes, "Once the power of the imagination grew, there existed the danger that there would appear before the eyes of the mystic visions which have no connection whatsoever with the intellect. These images, which constitute the primary source of danger in mysticism, are understood as 'messengers of Satan.'"<sup>85</sup>

Muktananda writes for the benefit of his disciples:

When *shaktipat* takes place, some people experience it instantly in the form of visions of light, heaviness of the body, intoxication, bodily tremors, sweating, shivers of joy, and so on. These are the first signs of *Siddha Yoga*.

When the *Shakti* is awakened, various yogic movements take place. A person may utter different sounds. He may experience ecstasy, agitation, negativity, apathy, fear, loss of faith, and other feelings. But though the *kriyas* may differ due to people's temperaments, the final experience is the same for everyone. There is only one experience of perfection.<sup>86</sup>

Abulafia's description of his own prophetic experience in '*Ozar 'Eden Ganuz*' is not specific with regard to physical, spiritual, or psychological phenomena, although we know that he produced many manuscripts, both prophetic and intellectual, while in an altered state, and that he spent the fifteen years subsequent to that initial experience tormented by Satan at his right hand.<sup>87</sup> In order to compare his student's experience with his own, I will look



at one other excerpt from Abulafia's work, a section from *Hayye Ha 'Olam Haba'*.<sup>88</sup> Although the preparation for prophecy and the description of physical and metaphysical effects is presented here as a manual of praxis written in the second person as a guide to what may be expected, the details are too specific for us not to conclude that we have here a veiled description of Abulafia's own experience:

...All this will happen to thee after having flung away tablet and quill...because of the intensity of thy thought. And know, the stronger the intellectual influx within thee, the weaker will become thy outer and thy inner parts. Thy whole body will be seized by an extremely strong trembling, so that thou wilt think that surely thou art about to die...And be thou ready at this moment consciously to choose death.<sup>89</sup>

The disciple follows Abulafia's instructions, and experiences the anticipated phenomena. After two months of working with Abulafia, he finds his thoughts disengaging from the world, and sets himself the task at night, taking a quill and tablet to hand, of permuting and combining letters and pondering them in meditation. His initial experience is of light emanating from his body,<sup>90</sup> which he does not anticipate and which occurs as a result of manipulating the letters.<sup>91</sup> His teacher is delighted, and tempts him with the enthusiastic comment that even greater things would occur if the student manipulated holy names.<sup>92</sup> Two weeks later the pupil is rewarded with another success, and he is so overcome with the effects of his meditation at "midnight, when this power especially expands and gains strength whereas the body weakens,"<sup>93</sup> that he starts to work with holy names. The effect this time is different, but equally dramatic. The student experiences physical phenomena specifically described by Abulafia,<sup>94</sup> and receives images and impressions that reflect forms Abulafia discusses:

...The letters took on in my eyes the shape of great mountains,<sup>95</sup> strong trembling seized me and I could summon no strength, my hair stood on end, and it was as if I were not in this world. At once I fell down, for I no longer felt the least strength in any of my limbs. And behold, something resembling speech emerged from my heart and came to my lips and forced them to move. I thought, perhaps this is, God forbid, a spirit of madness that has entered into me? But behold, I saw it uttering wisdom.<sup>96</sup>

The trembling body, hair standing on end,<sup>97</sup> weakness of limbs, are all anticipated by the teacher from his own experience. The "something resembling speech" which emerges involuntarily is also well-known to Abulafia.<sup>98</sup> Idel



comments, "Unlike light, which is the source of 'personal' prophecy, speech is the source of true prophecy, that is, that prophecy which is directed both to the prophet himself and to his fellow man."<sup>99</sup> Abulafia's disciple, so new to the experience of prophecy, has this time attained a higher level than the first experience of light, but not yet the true prophetic experience of dialogue with the divine.<sup>100</sup> Like his teacher, in his initial reaction to prophecy, the disciple fears that this involuntary voice is madness or worse. Idel writes, "Once the power of the imagination grew, there existed the danger that there would appear before the eyes of the mystic visions which have no connection whatsoever with the intellect. These images, which constitute the primary source of danger in mysticism, are understood as 'messengers of Satan'."<sup>101</sup> But the disciple has the advantage of his teacher, who had no guidance through the initial phases of prophetic experience and spent so many years dogged by the devil. The disciple has been well prepared by Abulafia and by his studies of Maimonides. The voice is speaking wisdom, so it must be divine and not Satanic.<sup>102</sup>

When he reports to Abulafia in the morning, the student is questioned about his use of the divine name without specific authorization, but his teacher acknowledges that his disciple has attained to a high level.<sup>103</sup> The pupil articulates a feeling he experienced at the moment of divine influx, and asks for protection from his fear of drowning in the waters of the divine flow. Abulafia compassionately answers that only God's grace can protect him, and indeed this loss of self in the divine ocean is a danger of the prophetic experience.<sup>104</sup>

Abulafia, as a master of ecstatic experience, warns his disciples of what they can expect from their own initiation into his mystical technique. They, like Muktananda, will experience involuntary physical effects and the fear of death. Death, and the fear of dying are, in fact, intimately bound up with the ecstatic encounter. As Abulafia notes in his instructions, an initiate must be prepared to surrender to death at the moment of divine contact.<sup>105</sup>

Another of the effects of following an ecstatic spiritual path is apparently the acquisition of magical powers. Both authors allude to a variety of these supernatural abilities, including levitation, clairvoyance, and clairsaudience, among others, and both counsel caution in succumbing to the trap of believing these magical abilities to be the goal of the spiritual path.<sup>106</sup>

## **VII. SYMBOLS AND IMAGES:**

In addition to the importance of the master-disciple relationship, and to the parallels of subjective experience on the mystical path in both traditions, many similar symbols and images occur in both Abulafian writings and Muktananda's. For the purposes of this paper, a simple listing must suffice to indicate their scope.

Both masters refer to metaphysical knots that must be cut or loosened for ecstatic union to occur;<sup>107</sup> both refer to the ocean as an analogy of God, and the



individual as a drop or a cup in the ocean, although Abulafia describes a fear of drowning, while Muktananda embraces a merging into the All;<sup>108</sup> both recognize a hierarchy of ecstatic experience, striving to reach the highest point themselves and encouraging their disciples to do the same.<sup>109</sup> Both Abulafia and Muktananda counsel the practice of sexual restraint as part of their prescribed mystical practice, although both use sensuous sexual imagery to describe the unitive experience.<sup>110</sup> Mystics of both schools experience visions and hear voices and sounds, but Muktananda emphasizes the value of visual experiences while Abulafia is most comfortable with aural encounters with the divine.<sup>111</sup> Both counsel moderation, and even austerities as part of the spiritual path.<sup>112</sup> And both describe a special kind of meditative sleep that overtakes the seeker at some stages.<sup>113</sup>

This listing is more indicative than inclusive, but it does offer some idea of the variety of parallels in expression and concept of the ecstatic experience between the two mystics.

While the theological and religious frameworks of Abraham Abulafia and Swami Muktananda are very different, and their temporal and cultural milieus could not be further apart, their specific techniques and their descriptions of the stages of mystical growth are remarkably analogous.

Among the many themes in common: Progression through various phases of philosophy and systems of thought; extreme geographic mobility; the importance of the master/disciple relationship in spiritual growth for each; an intimate relationship with God and awareness of divine guidance in the unfolding of spiritual development; focus upon the individual's achievement of ecstatic experience as a major transformative experience; awareness of and exposure to the dangers inherent in these practices; similarity of imagery in descriptions of ecstatic encounters; and the importance of disseminating the received wisdom in order to lead their students to ecstatic experience.

From a stylistic point of view, the works of both are primarily autobiographical within the context of illustrating for the reader a model of spiritual evolution, a sampling of the kinds of experiences produced by specific mystical techniques, and a warning of potential dangers. These dangers are specified, and are remarkably alike for each master. Both authors use their own personal experiences as didactic tools in instructing others who will read their words.

The purpose of a comparative exercise like this one is to find common ground where none was suspected before. Comparisons made in this study of similarities in objective, genre, and experience do not eliminate the vast differences between the two cultures represented by Abulafia and Muktananda. They do, however, highlight the common ground of human experience expressed in these texts. My goal in this study is simply to put on the table a literary analysis informed by phenomenology and reception theory. It is enough for me here to suggest commonalities in the recounting of mystical experience in two



very different times and places. Further study may account for these. Perhaps other scholars will be stimulated by the similarities noted here to ask more questions of the material, and to raise other methodological issues, opening inquiry, for example, into whether there might be direct or indirect cultural contact,<sup>114</sup> or a biological experience,<sup>115</sup> or alternate avenues of historical, literary, biological or social scientific inquiry.

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## Notes

- 1 Terry Eagleton, *Literary Theory: an Introduction*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), pp. 58-60. See also Edmund Husserl, "The Idea of Phenomenology," The Hague, 1964.
- 2 For comments on phenomenology as Idel applies it to Abulafia's ecstatic Kabbalah, cf. Moshe Idel, "The Contribution of Abraham Abulafia's Kabbalah to the Understanding of Jewish Mysticism," in Peter Schafer and Joseph Dan ed., *Gershom Scholem's Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism 50 Years After*, in "Proceedings of the Sixth International Conference on the History of Jewish Mysticism," Tübingen, J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1993, pp. 117-143, especially pp. 126, 141; Louis Jacobs, "[Review of] Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, Moshe Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, Moshe Idel, *Language, Torah and Hermeneutics in Abraham Abulafia*," in *Journal of Jewish Studies*, 40 (1989), pp. 251-252; Ivan G. Marcus, "[Review of] Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives, The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia, Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah, Language, Torah and Hermeneutics in Abraham Abulafia*," in



- Speculum*, 67, (January 1992), pp. 159-192; and Elliott K. Ginsburg, "[Review of] Idel's *Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia*," in *Jewish Quarterly Review*, 62, 1-2 (July-October 1991) pp. 207-214.
- 3 Cf. Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1988), xi and passim, and Muktananda, *Secret of the Siddhas*, (South Fallsburg, NY: SYDA Foundation, 1980), pp. 58 and passim.
  - 4 Eagleton, p. 56.
  - 5 Eagleton, pp. 56, 58-59.
  - 6 Eagleton, pp. 58-59.
  - 7 Eagleton, pp. 76-88. For reception theory and reader-response criticism, cf. Umberto Eco, *The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts*, (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1979); Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretative Communities*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980); Elizabeth Freund, *The Return of the Reader: Reader-response Criticism*, (London & New York: Methuen, 1987); E. D. Hirsch, Jr., "In Defense of the Author," in *Intention & Interpretation*, Gary Iseminger, ed., pp. 11-23, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1992); and Wolfgang Iser, "The Reading Process: A Phenomenological Approach," in *Reader-response Criticism*, Jane P. Tompkins, ed., (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1980), pp. 50-69.
  - 8 B. Schatz-Uffenheimer, "Prolegomenon of the Problem of Prophecy and Ecstasy," in *Annual of Bar-Ilan University: Moshe Schwarcz Memorial Vol.*, Ramat Gan, 1987, p. iii.
  - 9 W. James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1958), pp. 7-9.
  - 10 See G. Scholem, *On the Kabbalah and its Symbolism*, (New York: Schocken Press, 1965), pp. 15-21.
  - 11 Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, (New York: Schocken Press, 1967), pp. 119-22.
  - 12 Cf. M. Idel, *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia*, (Albany: SUNY Press, 1987), p. 10, note 23, pp. 11-12.
  - 13 For references, see M. Idel, *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia*, (Albany: SUNY Press, 1987), pp. 4-5.
  - 14 Cf. Scholem, *Ha-Kabbalah Shel Sefer Hatemunah Veshel Abraham Abul'afiah*, (Jerusalem: Academon, 1969), p. 101, and M. Idel, *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia*, (Albany: SUNY Press, 1987), p. 4.
  - 15 Scholem, *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, (New York: Schocken Press, 1967), p. 146.
  - 16 There are six schools of Indian philosophy which base their teachings on the authority of the Vedas, the four ancient Hindu scriptures. Muktananda's *Siddha Yoga* and the philosophy of *Kashmir Shaivism* belong to one of these schools.



- 17 Muktananda, *Play of Consciousness*, see biographical note on back cover.
- 18 Scholem, *Ha-Kabbalah*, p. 193, where Scholem publishes significant segments from Abulafia's autobiographical work *Ozar Eden Ganuz*.
- 19 Scholem, p. 193.
- 20 Idel, pp. 2-3.
- 21 Muktananda, *I Have Become Alive: Secrets of the Inner Journey*, (South Fallsburg, NY: SYDA Foundation, 1985), biographical note.
- 22 Muktananda, *Play of Consciousness*, (Oakland, CA: SYDA Foundation, 1978), biographical note.
- 23 Muktananda, *Alive!*, biographical note.
- 24 Scholem, p. 195.
- 25 Literally, "walking at the heels of the horses."
- 26 Scholem, p. 245.
- 27 Scholem, p. 251.
- 28 "A term of address for the Guru, signifying the Guru as an embodiment of God." See Muktananda, *Play of Consciousness*, p. 299.
- 29 "The practice of spiritual discipline." See Muktananda, *Play of Consciousness*, p. 305.
- 30 Muktananda, *Play of Consciousness*, pp. xvii-xix. *Chitshakti Vilas* is the title of the book in the original.
- 31 Scholem, pp. 193-5.
- 32 Scholem, pp. 245-253.
- 33 Scholem, pp. 193-4, and idem, *Major Trends*, p. 148.
- 34 Muktananda, *Play of Consciousness*, p. xxvi.
- 35 Muktananda, p. xxvi.
- 36 Kaplan, p. 66, Scholem, p. 193.
- 37 Scholem, *Major Trends*, p. 148; Scholem, *Ha-Kabbalah*, p. 246.
- 38 Muktananda, p. xxviii.
- 39 Muktananda experiences an elaborate chariot vision as part of his spiritual journey. See Muktananda, *Consciousness*, pp. 131-3; 139, 149, 154. Even though the chariot is not one of Abulafia's visions, it figures strongly in the mystical experience of his predecessors. See Idel, *New Perspectives*, pp. 49-63, 77-95, 122-5, 140-153, 232-239.
- 40 Scholem, p. 81, and Idel, *Abulafia*, p. 5.
- 41 Idel, pp. 78-9.
- 42 Idel, pp. xi, 62.
- 43 Cf. Scholem, *Ha-Kabbalah*, p. 188.
- 44 Idel, p. 97.
- 45 Scholem, p. 245. See also, Scholem, *Major Trends*, p. 147, notes 105, 384 for Abulafia and Sufi ideas.
- 46 Idel, p. 62. Unlike Scholem, who claims in *Major Trends*, p. 141, that in Abulafia, as in Kabbalist writings in general, "complete identification is neither achieved nor intended," Idel writes in *New Perspectives*, p. 60, that



"far from being absent, unitive descriptions recur in Kabbalistic literature," and in Abulafian thought in particular (*Abulafia*, p. 124).

47 Muktananda, *Secret*, p. 58.

48 Paul Zweig, in the introduction to Muktananda, *Secret*, p. 15.

49 Muktananda, *Consciousness*, pp. 32-36, 66-68.

50 Idel, *Abulafia*, pp. 22-40.

51 Scholem, *Kabbalah*, p. 180.

52 Idel, *New Perspectives*, p. 97.

53 Idel, p. 97.

54 Scholem, pp. 180-1; Idel, *Abulafia*, p. 24 and *New Perspectives*, p. 108.

Interestingly, Muktananda recognizes the power in a technique of manipulation of groups of letters and syllables that appears to be different from the practice of *mantra* repetition. Muktananda's cryptic references to this technique are evocative of the power that Abulafia ascribes to his "Path of the Names." Muktananda refers to *shakta upaya* as "the process by which the mind and intellect completely merge into the inner Self." (Muktananda, *Secret*, pp. 85-6):

The *shakta upaya* is a means of transcending worldly existence. It is a technique for pursuing a particular mental awareness arising from the groups of syllables. Groups of syllables contain letters, words, and sentences and are forever ready to conceal a seeker's true nature. Opinions and thoughts arise from groups of letters; attachment and aversion spring from groups of thoughts. But thoughts can also lead to the thought-free state.

Limitless powers are created by groups of letters. Bondage is the failure to realize the influence of the...powers of the groups of letters. To understand the powers of the letters is to attain everything...Through the means of dualistic knowledge, knowledge of unity is attained."

Unfortunately, he is not more specific than that. But this comment is certainly provocative in light of other parallels of praxis and experience between Abulafia and Muktananda.

55 Scholem, *Major Trends*, pp. 136-7; Scholem, *Ha-Kabbalah*, pp. 210-11.

56 See B. Uffenheimer's third type of ecstatic experience, in *Prolegomenon*, pp. 59-61, which he terms, loosely translated, as the ecstasy of inner apathy. Both Abulafia and Muktananda fit this category, in which the initiate, individually and in isolation, engages in specific activities or techniques to induce a state of the mind separating from the body, which the initiate hopes will result in revelations or unitive experiences.

57 Muktananda, p. 44.



- 58 Muktananda, pp. 44-5.
- 59 Scholem, *Ha-Kabbalah*, pp. 168-9.
- 60 See Muktananda, *Alive!*, pp. 45-6, for a similar attitude toward the need to test disciples.
- 61 Cf. Scholem, *Major Trends*, p. 130 where he cites Jellinek.
- 62 Muktananda, *Secret*, pp. 59-62.
- 63 Scholem, *Ha-Kabbalah*, pp. 193-4. For Abulafia's great admiration for Maimonides, see Scholem, *Major Trends*, p. 126.
- 64 Scholem, *Major Trends*, p. 148. In the original Hebrew the final phrase reads literally, "...because nature redeems nature, and like does not cease from like," (Scholem, *Ha-Kabbalah*, p. 246), which has Neoplatonic overtones and which Scholem in *Ha-Kabbalah*, p. 189, also identifies as being a dictum of ancient alchemy. On page 133 of the same work he cites Abulafia's related Neoplatonic idea that when spirit and energy are released, they run to their source in the infinite.
- 65 Muktananda, *Alive!*, pp. 29, 58.
- 66 Muktananda, *Consciousness*, p. 81.
- 67 Scholem, *Major Trends*, p. 149; idem, *Ha-Kabbalah*, p. 246.
- 68 On the subject of keeping the commandments, see also Scholem, *Ha-Kabbalah*, p. 189.
- 69 Muktananda, p. 133.
- 70 Probably *Baruch Togarmi*, see Scholem, *Major Trends*, p. 127, and Kaplan, p. 63.
- 71 This is a difficult passage, and my own reading is equivocal (Scholem, *Ha-Kabbalah*, p. 195). I quote here Kaplan's reading, p. 67.
- 72 Muktananda, p. 67.
- 73 Muktananda, p. 69.
- 74 Muktananda, pp. 69-70.
- 75 Idel, *Abulafia*, p. 188.
- 76 Idel, p. 129.
- 77 Muktananda, *Secret*, p. 61.
- 78 Muktananda, *Consciousness*, pp. 113, 119, 147, 174.
- 79 Muktananda, pp. 164, 173.
- 80 Muktananda, pp. 138, 162-5, 173.
- 81 Muktananda, pp. 173.
- 82 Muktananda, pp. 72-3.
- 83 Muktananda, pp. 75-7.
- 84 Idel, p. 15.
- 85 Idel, p. 121.
- 86 Muktananda, *Secret*, p. 15.
- 87 Scholem, *Ha-Kabbalah*, p. 195.
- 88 Scholem, pp. 210-11. Cited by Scholem, *Major Trends*, with portions translated on pp. 136-7.



- <sup>89</sup> Scholem, *Major Trends*, 136-7; Scholem, *Ha-Kabbalah*, pp. 210-11.
- <sup>90</sup> Scholem, *Ha-Kabbalah*, pp. 247-8.
- <sup>91</sup> Idel discusses this phenomenon as a product of Abulafian techniques in *Abulafia*, p. 82.
- <sup>92</sup> Idel notes in *Abulafia*, p. 41, that critics of Abulafia raised no objection to the apparently counter-halachic manipulation of holy names. Nevertheless, it appears from the interchanges described here between Abulafia and his student that use of divine names even among his disciples was reserved for the very advanced.
- <sup>93</sup> Scholem, *Major Trends*, p. 150 and Scholem, *Ha-Kabbalah*, p. 248. Note especially the emphasis for Abulafia and his disciple on the need for the body to weaken as a condition for the intellect to strengthen.
- <sup>94</sup> Note that Scholem, in *On the Kabbalah and its Symbolism*, pp. 15-21, suggests that the master molds the disciple's mystical experience with his own conceptions; on p. 18: "How does he accomplish this? By preparing his student for what he may expect along the way and at the goal." If this is so, perhaps it is not surprising that teacher and pupil here share so many similarities of language and image. This does not explain the many similarities between Abulafia and Muktananda's ecstatic development, however.
- <sup>95</sup> See Idel, *Abulafia*, pp. 156-7, note 128 for discussion of mountain imagery in *Abulafia*, especially as an indication of level of prophecy. See also Idel, *Abulafia*, pp. 102-103 for related mountain imagery in other works.
- <sup>96</sup> Scholem, *Major Trends*, p. 151, and Scholem, *Ha-Kabbalah*, p. 248.
- <sup>97</sup> Idel cites another section of this work in *Abulafia*, p. 15, in which Abulafia predicts, "the emergence of fear and trembling upon him, the hairs of his head will stand up whereas his limbs will convulse."
- <sup>98</sup> See B. Schatz-Uffenheimer, p. 111, on the emergence in Hasidism of this idea of the divine entering a person who has emptied himself of thought, and speaking from his throat. Here she quotes the *Maggid*, but for a larger discussion of divine speech through the human throat. Cf. Schatz-Uffenheimer, pp. 110-120.
- <sup>99</sup> Idel, *Abulafia*, p. 83. For a discussion of the relationship of speech to prophetic experience, see Idel, *Abulafia*, pp. 83-86.
- <sup>100</sup> Idel, *Abulafia*, pp. 86-7. Idel, *New Perspectives*, p. 44, writes that "the experience of union can be regarded as a series of intermittent acts that...enable the person to remain alive and active in this world." See Idel, *Abulafia*, pp. 91-92, 93-94, on the hierarchy of prophetic experiences. This student recognizes that he has not yet achieved the highest level. On p. 92, Idel cites this disciple as writing, for example, "But I did not merit to see the form of myself standing before me, and this I was unable to do."
- <sup>101</sup> Idel, *Abulafia*, p. 121.
- <sup>102</sup> Idel, p. 121. See also Idel, *New Perspectives*, pp. 38-40 for discussion of this concept.



- <sup>103</sup> Scholem, *Ha-Kabbalah*, p. 248.
- <sup>104</sup> Scholem, p. 248. See Idel, *New Perspectives*, pp. 67-68, and Idel, *Abulafia*, p. 123, for discussion of these images of drowning, and Scholem, *Ha-Kabbalah*, p. 173, for overview of dangers inherent in the path of seeking contact with the divine.
- <sup>105</sup> Scholem, *Major Trends*, pp. 136-7; idem, *Ha-Kabbalah*, pp. 210-11.
- <sup>106</sup> Muktananda, *Secret*, pp. 83, 90, and idem, *Consciousness*, pp. 108, 137-8, 165, 308; Scholem, *Ha-Kabbalah*, pp. 178-81. For the existence of and attitude towards magic among Abulafia's predecessors, see idem, *Major Trends*, pp. 277, 348-9, idem, *Kabbalah*, p. 182, and Idel, *Abulafia*, p. 74.
- <sup>107</sup> Muktananda, *Consciousness*, 310; Idel, *Abulafia*, 135-7.
- <sup>108</sup> Muktananda, *Alive!*, pp. 8-9; Idel, *New Perspectives*, pp. 67-8, and idem, *Abulafia*, p. 123.
- <sup>109</sup> Muktananda, *Secret*, pp. 85, 88-9, 96-7; idem, *Consciousness*, pp. 11-12, 81. Idel, *Abulafia*, pp. 86-7. Idel, *New Perspectives*, p. 44, see note 100 above. See Idel, *Abulafia*, pp. 91-92, 93-94, on the hierarchy of prophetic experiences.
- <sup>110</sup> Muktananda, *Company*, p. 43; idem, *Consciousness*, pp. 91, 145; Idel, *Abulafia*, pp. 203-5.
- <sup>111</sup> Muktananda, *Consciousness*, pp. 138-9; Idel, *Abulafia*, pp. 86-7; idem, *New Perspectives*, pp. 78-9.
- <sup>112</sup> Muktananda, *Alive!*, p. 65; Scholem, *Major Trends*, p. 150, and idem, *Ha-Kabbalah*, p. 248.
- <sup>113</sup> Muktananda, *Consciousness*, p. 104; Idel, *Abulafia*, p. 79.
- <sup>114</sup> See, for example, P. S. Alexander, "Comparing Merkeveh Mysticism and Gnosticism: An Essay in Method," in *Journal of Jewish Studies*, 35, 1, Spring 1984, pp. 1-18.
- <sup>115</sup> See, for example, Evan Fales, "Scientific Explanations of Mystical Experiences, Part 1: The Case of St. Teresa," in *Religious Studies*, 32, pp. 143-164.