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Moshe Idel's Phenomenology and its Sources

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Abstract:

This article opens with a brief phenomenological comparison between Gershom Scholem's Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism and Moshe Idel's Kabbalah: New Perspectives. Scholem's book is diachronic or historical in approach while Idel's is primarily synchronistic, focusing on devekut (devotion) in Jewish Mysticism, the concept of Unio Mystica, a variety of mystical techniques, Kabbalistic theosophy, theurgy, and Kabbalistic hermeneutics.

The author concentrates on four characteristics of Idel's studies in Kabbalah and Jewish mysticism: ecstatic Kabbalah, the definition of Jewish mysticism, Hasidism as a spiritual movement and the study of Jewish magic. In addition he discusses key criticisms leveled at Idel's treatment of these subjects.

Key Words:
Phenomenology of Jewish Mysticism, Models, Methodology of Kabbalah, Ecstatic Kabbalah, Mystical experience, Hasidism, Theurgy.

Moshe Idel's book, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, was published by Yale University in 1988, forty seven years after the publication of Gershom Scholem's *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*. Scholem's book established a new, separate field of research in Jewish Studies, termed Jewish Mysticism and Kabbalah, which became an independent academic field in the mid twentieth century. Idel's work opened a new era of research in this field, an era characterized by fresh thinking, which, though respectful and appreciative of previous research, was open to new directions of research that could enrich, add depth, and refresh our understanding of Jewish mysticism and Kabbalah. For almost twenty years, this approach introduced by Moshe Idel to the research of Kabbalah and Jewish Mysticism has been directly and indirectly affecting dozens of researchers working on the subject .

Idel's Phenomenology

Scholem's work was written diachronically, meaning that the knowledge of what Scholem termed the mystical branches of Judaism was arranged by historical period. This book was written according to a scheme laid out by Martin Buber thirty five years earlier, in the introduction to his work The Tales of Rabbi Nachman, titled *Der Judische Mystik*. In this introduction, Buber reviewed the different stages in the development of the mystical tradition of Judaism. He started with the roots of this tradition in the mid-

dle ages and the creation of the Zohar, the Kabbalah of Safed, centered around the Kabbalah of Rabbi Isaac Luria (*He-Ari*), described by him as a reaction to the Expulsion from Spain, and in the reappearance of this Kabbalistic tradition in the Messianic Shabtai Zvi movement. Hasidism, established by a small circle centered on the character of Rabbi Israel Baal Shem Tov in Eastern Europe in the mid 18th century, was described in the scheme adopted by Scholem as the final stage of this mystical tradition. Unlike Buber, who devoted most of his interest to Hasidism, Gershom Scholem dedicated elaborate studies to the review of each of these stages.

Idel, in *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, raised numerous problems in the research of Kabbalah as based on Scholem's book, and offered new categories of thought for the examination of the large body of work chronologically reviewed in the latter's seminal work. Idel's book is arranged primarily according to a synchronistic research approach, and therefore each section is dedicated to a different issue in the study of Kabbalah: varieties of Devekut (devotion) in Jewish Mysticism, Unio Mystica, mystical techniques, Kabbalistic theosophy, theurgy, and Kabbalistic hermeneutics.

The book's division into these issues reflects Idel's decision to use a phenomenological research method, very much free of the chronological structure outlined for Kabbalah research by Scholem. This choice is not an innovation, but rather a decision in favor of emphasizing the phenomenological, rather than the historical, element in the ideological research of Kabbalah and Jewish mysticism. Idel did not neglect or ignore the historical-philological aspect, which was Scholem's main concern, just as Scholem was involved not only in historical-philological research, but also laid the foundation to the phenomenological research of Kabbalah and Jewish Mysticism. Most of Scholem's phenomenological essays were the fruit of his participation in the Eranos Conferences in Switzerland, starting in 1949.[1]

Idel's innovation is found mainly in shifting the balance between the historical and the phenomenological elements. In Scholem's works, the historical element served as the anchor and the starting point of any discussion. This principle was retained by him even in phenomenological studies, in which he usually focused on issues from the spiritual world of Kabbalah, such as the Torah, the Zaddik,, the Gilgul (reincarnation), the Zelem (image of God), good and evil, the Shekhinah, the Golem, etc., while arranging the discussion on basis of the historical development of each of the topics of discussion.

The focus of discussion in Idel's *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, is different from that in Scholem's phenomenological studies. I believe that this difference testifies to a change of focus in the phenomenological outlook. Scholem's focus is content-related, while in Idel's work, the organization of the content-related discussion around fundamental concepts in religion studies is evident. Idel's decision in favor of a phenomenological method, placing at the center of discussion fundamental concepts of general religious studies, is connected to his great interest in general religious studies, and especially in the works of Mircea Eliade, who also started since 1950 to regularly attend the Eranos Conferences in Ascona. Idel diligently read through all of Eliade's work, from the stories written in Romanian and were not translated into other languages, through to the last of his comparative religion studies, written during his years of working in the USA. Idel's comprehensive familiarity with Eliade's studies, as well as with other researches in religious studies, especially those concerned with the phenomenology of religion, contributed to his tendency to change the methodology of Kabbalah and Jewish mystical research, and to place at the center of discussion not only historical periods or intra-

Kabbalistic matters, but also key concepts in general religious studies. Earlier phenomenological works in Kabbalah research were usually diachronic in character, like Scholem's works discussed above, or focused on a specific historical period or character, like Werblowsky's exemplary book on Rabbi Yosef Karo. Idel's phenomenological approach emphasizes inquiry into different manifestations of phenomena such as theurgy, Unio Mystica or magic, within the entire Kabbalistic-Jewish body of works, on all its periods. In these researches, the historical-diachronic aspect is used as a secondary aid, and the focus is on the actual spiritual phenomenon. This change of emphasis in Idel's methodology reflects a conscious decision to favor the phenomenological element in Scholem's work over the historical element, which was of great importance in the latter's work, in light of his obvious inclination toward a historical view in general, and his commitment to Hegelian dialectic thought in particular. Emphasizing the spiritual phenomena reflected in the entire Kabbalist body of works has opened the field to the interest of new audiences among Jewish studies scholars, and especially among spiritual studies scholars worldwide. Scholem emphasized the uniqueness of Jewish mysticism, in comparison with other forms of mysticism (Scholem 1946, 15-16). Idel's approach suggests that despite the uniqueness of Kabbalah, one interested in phenomena related to religious devotion, theurgy, magic or hermeneutics could find phenomenological parallels, and sometimes even direct or indirect contact, between these phenomena in Kabbalah, and their manifestations in other traditions.

Ecstatic Kabbalah and its meaning

But I would rather place at the heart of Idel's research work the developments related to his decision to develop on the fourth chapter of Scholem's book, titled Abraham Abulafia and the Doctrine of Prophetic Kabbalism, which has been left rather neglected until the seventies. In fact, Idel's doctorate work on "Abraham Abulafia's Works and Doctrine", which was approved by the Hebrew University in 1976, has been sustaining his work up to the present day. To a large extent, it is the key not only to the insights later expressed in his book, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, discussed earlier, but also to understanding the change generated by Idel's studies in the understanding of the mystical experience and messianism in Kabbalah, and to clarifying the difference between these and the theurgical and magical elements of Kabbalah. It is interested to note that Idel's first book, based on parts of his doctorate thesis, is titled *The Mystical Experience in Abraham Abulafia*, while the term Kabbalah, rather than mysticism, is used in the title of his second book, discussed above.

This fact actually implies Idel's fundamental argument against Scholem, who differentiated between Jewish writings termed Kabbalistic writings, and the term 'mysticism'. Idel, who devoted years of meticulous work to deciphering the numerous manuscripts of Abulafia's books, has reached the conclusions that Abulafia's objection to the Kabbalah of the Sephirot has more profound meaning than that previously attributed to it. He reexamined the general picture of Kabbalah, as outlined by Scholem and his students, and concluded that the difference between prophetic Kabbalism and theosophical Kabbalism, characterizing much of Kabbalistic literature, should be clarified. The great familiarity Idel has acquired with Abulafia's writings enabled him to understand that later Kabbalistic writings, especially those written in 16th century Safed, were a synthesis of different elements that in some respects were even contradictory. Idel

called for the clarification of this difference, not just because originally a conscious tension existed between them, but also in order to achieve better understanding of the complexity of Kabbalistic literature in its different periods.

At the heart of Abraham Abulafia's prophetic-ecstatic Kabbalah are techniques intended, as in other mystical traditions, for the achievement of states of altered consciousness, to the point of experiencing the unification of the human mind with the divine, as in Unio Mystica. The theosophist-ideological aspect of Kabbalah is focused on learning the inner structure of the divine world, through the Kabbalistic Sephirot system. Scholem argued that the origins of this knowledge are in the introduction of Gnostic systems into the Jewish world in the 12th century (Scholem 1987), while Idel, and other researchers, insisted that the fundamental concepts of the Sephirot system are derived from intra-Jewish worlds, including the Rabbinical literature. But as for the use of the term 'mysticism', Idel proposed a differentiation between the mystical elements, which are basically personal and experiential, and which are entered around the aspiration of achieving even momentary unity with God, and theosophical elements, which are concerned with knowledge of God, acquired through discursive learning, one of the goals of which is to affect God through theurgical means.

Jewish Mysticism and its definition

Idel wished to engage in a discussion on Scholem's conclusions regarding Jewish mysticism, out of an increasing awareness of the gap between the meaning of the more specific usage of the term "mysticism" in the study of general religious experience, and the ambiguous use of the term made by Scholem. Scholem argued that: "It would be a mistake to assume that the whole of what we call mysticism is identical with that personal experience which is realized in the state of ecstasy or ecstatic meditation. Mysticism, as an historical phenomenon, comprises much more than this experience, which lies at its root." (Scholem 1946, 5).

Idel, on the other hand, argued that a more acute differentiation should be made between theosophical thought, like that found in discursive Kabbalah, which is expressed objectively, and ecstasy, like that found in prophetic Kabbalah, which is more experiential, subjective and non-verbal in character, and which, therefore, is the only one kind that should be termed "mysticism".

R. J. Zvi Werblowsky was the first among Kabbalah scholars to try to solve the perplexity created due to this gap between Scholem's historiosophic definition of mysticism, and the common usage of this term in religious studies. But unlike Idel, Werblowsky attempted, by emphasizing the difference between the non-verbal, subjective element and the theosophical, objective element, to justify Scholem's general usage of the term 'mysticism' as reflecting the whole of the contents of Kabbalah.

Werblowsky argues, following Rudolf Otto's book, Mysticism East and West (Otto 1932), for a differentiation between cognitive mysticism, which is a kind of a higher science, formally similar to the normal sciences, and which is discursive, objective and detailed in character, and mysticism, which rejects individual content, both prophetic and cognitive, the official representative of which is Ekhardt. Unlike Otto, Werblowsky offers Saint John of the Cross as a clearer representative of this mysticism, as he rejected any spiritual illumination or occult knowledge as "pseudo-mysticism and the complete opposite to pure spirituality" (Werblowsky 1963/4, 212) On basis of this compari-

son, Werblowsky claimed that: "Jewish mysticism can serve as an enlightening example of this discursive trend, as its literary creation is mostly theosophical polemics replacing Rabbinical Halakhic polemics. This trend was assisted by the traditional identification of mysticism with prophesy. As prophesy is a matter of 'clear and distinguishable' contents, the same can be said of all attainments of the Holy Spirit." (Werblowsky 1963/4, 205).

Idel actually rejected Otto's and Werblowsky's approach, which defined discursive theosophies as mystical. In his view, the mystical aspect is the non-discursive aspect of religious life, which seeks contact, and even unification, with God, in an experiential and subjective manner. He called for recognition of the existence of a mystical, experiential and subjective element in Kabbalah, the writings of Abraham Abulafia being one of its prominent sources, which should be essentially differentiated from the discursive, theosophical element. Idel, who based this on his profound knowledge of Abraham Abulafia's writings, reached the conclusion that Abulafia's expressed reservations against the Kabbalah of the Sephirot should not be downplayed. He found that Abulafia's focus on mystical techniques for achieving inner unification of the mind with God was contradictory to the theosophical branch which focused on knowledge of God through the Sephirot system. In fact, it turns out that at the onset of the creation of Kabbalistic traditions in the 13th century AD, the different groups were in complete disagreement as to their contents and religious purposes. Idel challenged those denying the existing of Unio Mystica in Judaism, headed by Scholem himself, pointing out that the aspiration to achieve unification with God is a central motive in the prophetic-ecstatic Kabbalah of Abraham Abulafia's school of thought. Despite of the excommunication imposed on Abulafia by Rabbi Shlomo ben Aderet (Rashba), and although his best student, Rabbi Joseph ben Abraham Gikatilla, writer of Sha'are Orah, became a clear representative of the Kabbalah of the Sephirot, Idel argues that Abulafia's writings never ceased being influential, and that this influence clearly spread out in the circle of Safed's Kabbalists, and among the first teachers of Hasidism, who were exposed to Abulafian manuscripts. In this manner he explained the increase in the significance of the experiential-mystical element among these groups, which was not derived from the theosophical materials, but rather from the experiential-mystical elements found in Abulafia's writings. (Idel 1988, 59-73; Idel 1988, ch 1,7; Idel 1995, 45 – 102). In Idel's opinion, throughout the Middle Ages, the various Kabbalistic branches did not work independently from each other, and the Kabbalah of Safed experienced a fertile synthesis of these different branches. In Scholem's studies, and as a consequence, in the studies of most of his students, there is an unbridgeable gap between the theosophical element of Kabbalistic writings, which is deemed by these scholars and objective and worthy, and the ecstatic component which is prominent among some of the Kabbalistic groups, and which reached its pinnacle in early Hasidism, which they deemed subjective and therefore not as worthy.[2] Idel's approach attempts to present a more complex description of the world of Kabbalah, as a world which contains theosophical knowledge, which is objective in character, mystical practices, which are subjective in character, and magical techniques. At times, all of these are presented individually, and at times they are integrated. Through this development, Idel advanced Kabbalah studies towards a more complex understanding, which less influenced by unilateral emphasis.

This emphasis is derived, in Idel's view, from the tendency Scholem and his students had to assume what is permitted and what is prohibited in the ideological world of Judaism, first and foremost on the issue of the Unio Mystica. In Idel's view, this ten-

dency was strongest among Western-European oriented scholars, who tended to view Kabbalah as a type of philosophy or theology. These scholars ignored the context in which Kabbalah was created and practiced which was not only theoretical discursive, but practical as well.

In my opinion, it is significant that Idel grew up in 1950's north-eastern Romania, on eastern foothills of the Carpathian Mountains, more than 230 years after the Baal Shem Tov, the founder of Hasidism, grew up in this same area, as related in Hasidic tradition. Obviously, this area has gone through many changes, which certainly affected Jews residing in it after the World War II, but as Idel said more than once in informal circumstances, the manifestations of traditions and customs which survived among Jews in the area, retained something of their past, up to the days of Idel's childhood. These memories, which arose within him more than once when reading Kabbalistic and Hasidic texts, reinforced his understanding that life and writings should not be disconnected, and that when researching, it is necessary to open up to diverse contexts, which can enable us to construct a picture of the past which is truer to the studied reality than that which is created when adhering to principles which are foreign to the studied system. The remnants of magical traditions which he remembered from the environment of his childhood could account for his courage to unbiasedly research the various magical texts which are found in the literature of Kabbalah and Hasidism.

Idel's standpoint brought about harsh criticisms, the harshest of which was that of Isaiah Tishby, the most prominent scholar of Kabbalah among Gershom Scholem's early students. In his criticism, Tishby argued that Idel ignored the fact that in his book The Wisdom of the Zohar, he has already mentioned Unio Mystica in Kabbalah. Thus Tishby diverted the discussion from the essence of Idel's argument, that much more emphasis should be given to the mystical-experiential elements in the entire Kabbalistic-Hasidic body of works. Idel's fundamental argument was that in fact, later writings contained syntheses of ecstatic Kabbalah, characterized by Unio Mystica, and theosophical Kabbalah. The diachronic thought common in the Scholem school of thought emphasized finding the innovation in the chain of Kabbalistic ideas, while Idel expressly adopted Ernst Kassirer's approach, as put forth in his book on the originality of the renaissance. "What we want to know is not the particular idea as such, but the importance it possesses, and the strength with which it is acting in the whole structure. The same ideas are always appearing again and again, and are maintained for centuries... But the historian of ideas is not asking primarily what the substance is of particular ideas. He is asking what their function is. What he is studying - or should be studying - is less the content of ideas than their dynamics." (Kassirer, 55).

Kassirer claimed that the spiritual innovation of a certain period is expressed in the degree of importance given at that period to existing ideas which were previously neglected. The dynamics of the world of thought are of utmost importance in understanding the spiritual difference between periods, as the number of new ideas is limited, and they can usually be found in earlier periods. On the other hand, the inner balance between difference ideas sometimes changes completely from one period to another. Idel's goal was not to discover the first appearance of Unio-Mystica in Kabbalah but how and when it became a crucial element in Kabbalah and Hasidism.

Idel and Hasidism

Idel's phenomenological approach and his argument that the mystical-ecstatic element, mixed in Kabbalistic writings with the theosophical elements, can exist irrespectively and independently from the theosophical element, were found very productive in his studies on Hasidism, the pinnacle of which is his book *Hasidism: Between Ecstasy and Magic*.

Free from Scholem's claim that Hasidism is a popularization of Kabbalistic ideas, Idel started researching this world in which, in Scholem's opinion as well, the mystical Jewish experience has reached unprecedented heights.

As mentioned above, Idel's basic position is that Kabbalah should not be approached from perspective of western philosophical, which aspires to expose coherent methods of thought, but rather from an understanding of it being a synthesis of different conceptual, ecstatic and popular elements, based on all Jewish resources preceding them. This approach enabled Idel to propose an innovative view of Hasidism as well.

In the well known polemic between Scholem and Martin Buber regarding the latter's interpretation of Hasidism, Scholem claimed that Buber's interpretation presented Hasidism as a mysticism which aspires to act in this world, while, in his opinion, the principle goal of the teachers of Hasidism was to retire from world, and negate it. Idel preferred to deal with this issue by enhancing the phenomenological methods he already developed in the past, and by integrating these with more structural thinking, thus bringing about the development of the theory of models he presents in the introduction to his book on Hasidism. (Idel 1995, 49-53, 212). At the basis of each of the models is a different religious ideal, each with its own special terminology. Each model is reproduced through sources which characterize a system of religious concepts, which are interrelated and which interact and create through this interaction spiritual processes which are different from processes created through different systems of concepts. The models are intended to assist in producing an explanation of changes which occurred in Hasidic mysticism, in a manner which is not based on assumptions through historical proximity (Idel 1995, 48). The arguments between Scholem and Buber were to a large extent due to the personal moral belief of each of the two. Scholem, who saw in the mystical experience a subjective, irrational experience, characterized by a desire to be free of this world, tended to reject it. Buber, following Max Weber, differentiated between mysticism which affirms the world and mysticism which negates it. Although the personal changes he went through in the third and fourth decades of his life caused him to have reservations regarding ecstatic-mystical experiences, he attributed great importance to religious experiences in which man meets the world, and considered them experiences of a type which affirms the world and life in it. Idel's theory of models enables us to break free from this polemic between Scholem and Buber, which is undoubtedly affected by their personal standpoints. It moves the discussion away from the question of the connection between mysticism, irrationality and rejection of the world, and puts at the center of discussion the quality of the human interest behind the different aspects of the phenomenon termed by Scholem 'Jewish mysticism'.(Idel 1988, 256-260). Scholem, who argues against the existence of Unio Mystica in Judaism, defined devotion, in the sense of an intimate relationship with the divine, as being the center of Hasidism in the first generations of its existence. Idel identified this devotion with Unio Mystica, and thus raised the objection of scholar of Hasidism Mendel Piekarz.

Piekarz argues decisively against Idel's argument regarding the centrality of the mystical element in early Hasidism. In his opinion, the term devotion may have different meanings, not necessarily mystical ones. Idel agreed with the central argument that the term 'devotion' may have many different meanings, but, on this matter as well, argues against Piekarz, in the spirit of Kassirer's approach, that the meaning of Hasidic devotion should be determined by exposing the change of emphasis within the entirety of Hasidic thought. (Idel 1995, 212). Finding the roots of 'Hasidic ideas' in the Mussar and Drosh (Ethical and Homiletical) literature preceding them, which is what Piekarz specialized in, does not necessarily lead to evidence of the inexistence of a clear mystical aspect in Hasidism. The very fact that with Hasidism came about a surprising change in the number of people devoting themselves to intensive mystical life, testifies, in Idel's opinion, to the mystical character of this unique phenomenon. Idel's openness to the examination of the similarity between Hasidic mysticism and the mysticism existing in the Christian world in whose surroundings Hasidism was born, supported his fundamental arguments. Idel insisted, for example, on the great similarity between the Baal Shem Tov's description of the ascent of the soul, and the ascent of the soul described by Eliade in his work Zalmoxis, according to the letter sent by Archbishop Marcus Bandinus to the Pope, Innocent X, dated 1648, in which he summarizes his visits to the villages of Moldavia at that period (Eliade 1972, 191-194; Idel 2005, 149). The recognition of the similarities between Eastern European mystical worlds and the mystical world of Hasidism is another mean used by Idel to establish an open, fresh approach to the study of Eastern European Jewish mysticism.

However, Idel's central claim regarding the character of Hasidism is related to his perception of an emphasis given to a new factor, which led to the conception of mystical life as a mean to benefit others, rather than the final personal goal of the mystic. In Idel's opinion, the meaning of devotion in pure mystical conception is different from its meaning in an approach integrating mysticism and magic out of an anthropocentric altruistic perception, like that of Hasidism.

The Study of Jewish Magic

Idel presents the system of inter-relations between magical and mystical elements in the world of Hasidism, as a crucial basis for understanding its spiritual quality. He bases this on the relations between Hasidism and ecstatic Kabbalah, and the magical perceptions which were widespread in general Jewish thought and in Kabbalistic thought in the Middle Ages, aspects usually neglected in Scholem's studies of the Kabbalah, as well as in the studies of many of his students.

Even in *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, Idel deduces, on basis of the phenomenological similarity between Hasidism and Ecstatic Kabbalah, that they are both anthropocentric in character. (Idel 1988, xvi-xvii). "When a certain mystical system focuses on inner experiences more than on theurgical activity, the entities to be activated are no longer the objectivity existing divine Sefirot but rather the human spiritual Sefirot". (Idel 1988, 146 – 153).

In his discussion on the similarities between the mystical-ecstatic model and the magical model, which he claims were joined in Hasidism as a unified integrative model, Idel states: "Both of these models are strongly anthropocentric: man is the center of activity as well as the main beneficiary of the results of these activities. In a more

detailed manner, we may also describe man as the place where the encounter with the divine takes place: not a sacred place, a shrine or a temple, but the human person hosts this contact" (Idel 1995, 82).

To understand the mystic's interest in affecting the outside world and human activity in it, Idel employs Jungian psychologist Erich Newman's description of the mystical man, in which he is described as a person who aspires, when returning to worldly life, to transform the world by expanding consciousness through his mystical experience. (Neumann 1982). "Thus, we may characterize Jewish mysticism as a "world-Transforming mysticism" (to use again Neumann's phrase), even in those cases when extreme unifying expressions are to be found, including the consummation imagery of the Habad school. No mention of the dissolution of the mystical core of the personality is to be found." (Idel 1996, 27 – 57).

Understanding the quality of the innovation found in Hasidism requires us to reveal the integrative, mystical-magical model which characterizes Hasidism. "However while ecstatic and theosophical-theurgical Kabbalah focus their efforts on transcending mundane conditions and needs in favor of trans-natural aims – total spiritualization in the case of ecstatic Kabbalah and repairing the inner structures of divinity in the theurgical-theosophical Kabbalah – both ideals have become directly instrumental in Hasidism in the improvement of the life of the group. This shift of the focus of religious interest from the theocentric and anthropocentric toward an anthropocentric type of experience that serves, in many cases, a more altruistic way of life, is crucial for the understanding of this distinct type of religious mentality." (Idel 1995, 210).

Idel argues that the premises in the study of Hasidism, shared by Buber and Scholem, despite of the fundamental differences between them, essentially restricted the horizons of Hasidic studies in the twentieth century. Contrary to their approaches, each of which focused on only one aspect of the Hasidic experience, Idel turned to what he termed a panoramic approach.(Idel 1995, 2 – 15). It could be said that paradoxically, this approach, which enables presentation of the uniqueness of Hasidism through the magical-mystical model, cast additional doubt over the decisiveness of Scholem's views in his polemic with Buber. It is precisely Idel's research, which dealt with Hasidism without depending on the terms commonly used in the discussion, which raised renewed doubt over the presentation of the issue by Scholem and his students; Buber's arguments regarding Hasidism bridging between the divine and the human and worldly were revalidated. The argument made by Scholem and some of his students, that the first teachers of Hasidism were mystics, to whom real interest in this world and in matters of society cannot be attributed, contradicts, in light of Idel's new perspective, the image arising from Hasidic texts. It is in fact Buber, although he tried to diminish the importance of magic in Hasidism, who indirectly recognized the implications of the magical aspect on the spiritual world of the Hasidim. Unlike him, Scholem and some of his followers recognized the magical activity of the Baal Shem Tov (Scholem 1982), yet ignored the implications of the integration of the mystical interest with the magical interest on the understanding of the unique spiritual world of Hasidism. The magical-mystical model presented by Idel enables us to view Hasidic mysticism as a mystical model intended to bridge the divine and the worldly.

Idel's studies open new horizons in the studies of Kabbalah and Hasidism for younger scholars. The integration of phenomenological and structuralist methods, which use basic concepts from religious studies, supplied new tools for the study of Kabbalistic-Hasidic literature, and for understanding its mystical-experiential quality,

together with other elements which characterize it. This usage also raises new disagreements regarding the advantages and disadvantages of using external terms for explaining a spiritual world these terms are not an integral part of. Freedom from authoritative approaches in regard to previous studies and previous views, even if those are based on solid opinions and scientific theories about the object of study; genuine openness to new fields of study, and general religious and mystical studies; and placing phenomenological thought at the center of the study of the religious phenomenon, are the key principles in Moshe Idel's scientific work, which are willingly adopted by his students and readers.

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Notes:

1. Since 1933, the Eranos Conferences have been held at Ascona in southern Switzerland at the villa of Mrs. Olga Froebe-Kaptain. Distinguished scholars from Europe, Asia, and America have been invited to a "shared feast" (eranos) and have lectured on themes chosen by Mrs. Froebe-Kaptain who published the lectures in the

Eranos-Jahrbucher.

2. In the Hebrew edition of his book on Rabbi Yosef Karo, published after Idel's *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, Werblobsky writes: "As Gershom Scholem argues, and this argument is valid, even though some question it: Kabbalah does not aspire for Unio Mystica (which would render the system of erotic imagery in place), but rather aspires for Devekut (devotion)... In more psychological language, it can be said that the unification, or the Yehuda Kadisha (holy union) is found in projection within divinity, rather than in the relationship between the Lord (the divine lover) and man (the loving soul) (Werblowsky 1996, 134). At the same time, in this book, when reviewing the spiritual life of the Kabbalists of Safed, Werblowsky repeats his original statements, writing "the two main goals of these Kabbalists were raising the Shekinah from its ashes, and its redemption from exile, as well as unconditional devotion to the Lord, 'unification' with him 'with no boundaries'. This devotion was enabled through the profound understanding that the Kabbalist's heart is the true 'dwelling of the Shekinah'" (ibid, 68).