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Home > Vol 1, No 1 (2002) > **Idel**

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«Unio Mystica» as a Criterion: Some Observations on «Hegelian» Phenomenologies of Mysticism

Moshe Idel

Abstract

During the Renaissance period, Jewish mysticism was considered as one of the most important form of religious literature. In the twentieth century however, two major developments can be singled out: the Hegelian one envisions the future as open to progress, for the emergence of an even more spiritual version of the religion as manifested in the past, the archaic one sees the forms of religion as more genuine religious modalities. Problematically in these phenomenologies is the generic attitude to complex types of religious literature which are conceived as embodying one central type of spirituality. In our case, the centrality of the notion of devequt in Jewish mysticism is more important than the attempt to define it in a certain way, namely that it stands for union or communion. Or the kind of interactions between devequt, theosophy and theurgy, will define better the essence of Kabbalistic mysticism than the analysis of devequt in abstracto. The difference between the theological versus the technical approach implies more than methods to deal with the role of an imponderable experience as part of the more general understanding of a certain form of mysticism. When studying the religious writings we do not witness fixed systems, clear-cut theologies or frozen techniques, whose essence can be easily determined, but living structures and proclivities for moving in a certain direction, or directions, rather than crystallized static entities.

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