

this field. Kabbalah is characterized by the importance shown to theosophy and to the theosophic processes, which is underlined by its symbolism.

M. Idel claims that in order to understand the higher structures and dynamics of Kabbalah, the practitioner is summoned to take his/her stand in the divine mystery by means of an imitation of these dynamics. The major role of symbolism is that of reflecting the theosophic structure.

M. Idel succeeds in this vast work in alternating phenomenology, the science of the text, history and psychology so that their blending should help the reader to consider in full the various aspects of the texts and ideas in Kabbalah.

The outlook of the Romanian reader on Kabbalah, though quite poor as regarding the domain of the mystic, expands substantially by the amount and the novelty of the information put together in this major work of the scholar M. Idel, professor at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

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Moshe Idel, *Maimonides and the Jewish Mystic*, Dacia Publishing House, Cluj-Napoca, 2001

By the studies joined in "Maimonides and the Jewish Mystic," published by Editura Dacia, M. Idel attempts to underline a specific approach to the relation between philosophical and religious meditation, analyzing the standard modes of the major tendencies in Kabbalah versus Maimonides' philosophy.

These specific and contradictory attitudes make the author assert that some of the first kabbalists had tried to re-emphasize the importance of an older mystical tradition in response to Maimonides' two important statements by which he considered that authentic Jewish esoterism was lost and suggested an Aristotelean interpretation of the accounts "Genesis" and "the Chariot". Certain kabbalists who belonged to the major school of Kabbalah relaying on Sefer ha-Zohar, who had embraced the Sephirotic theosophy, having been also influenced by neo-Platonism, had negatively responded towards Maimonides' philosophy. Nevertheless, the ecstatic school whose main representative was Abraham Abulafia, had employed notions from Maimonides' philosophy in order to built up concepts which would enable Abulafia to depict the mystical experiences; this is evident in the terminology which Abulafia made use of to speak about the experiences of unio mystica.

The kabbalists did not reject philosophy, on the contrary, they were open to the neo-Platonic ideas; still they were aware of the difference which existed between their traditions and the philosophical interpretation of these traditions. It was Nachmanides that openly attacked Maimonides, deprecating the knowledge which the philosophers detailed about Creation.

When dealing with the same issues, the features of the ancient Jewish esoterism (conveying the secrets to the believers only, and demeaning philosophy) come into opposition with Maimonides' perspective. If one acknowledges that the contents of Jewish tradition cannot be alienated, then this contradicts the opinion of R. Samuel ibn Tibbon which maintains that a Jewish tradition may be preserved in exile; an oppinion which is in accordance with the interpretations of an anonymous kabbalist and of Maimonides to "ma'aseh Bereshit" and"ma'aseh Merkavah". To Maimonides, "Sefer ha-Mada" signifies that the Jewish tradition may provide recognition for any kind of speculative nature. This opinion was challenged by the prompt reaction of those who preserved the esoteric traditions which eventually led to the emergence of a literary genre of the ancient Kabbalah. This clash of opinions had a fundamental impact on another important issue: the commandments which are related to the superior entities, that is Sephirot which come into existence as a result of the inner processes of "Bereshit" and "Merkavahk," and on which they depend. This is regarded as a devaluation of the secret significance of the commandments conceived as instruments in the power of the kabbalists to influence the Divinity, and also connotes theurgic meaning which plays an important role in the major orientation of Kabbalah.

Overlooking this meaning as a consequence of his historic-rationalist outlook, Maimonides was regarded with skepticism; and even his lawyer had to assume that Maimonides was not convinced that he had discovered the true significance of the 613th commandments, but the instruments which would enable the ordinary people to fight against the questions raised by the faithless.

Idel believes that the kabbalist thinkers did not create the doctrine of "the sacrifice" which was provided as an alternative to Maimonides' historic doctrine, but rather they had discovered a preexisting thinking which allowed them a detailed presentation of certain formulae, still maintaining the controversy.

Idel's argument is that "the historic materialization of kabbalistic texts in Provence and Spain partially represented a response given by the Jewish rabbis, who were in possession of an older esoteric tradition, to Maimonides' assertion according to which the Jewish esoterism is constituted by rational truths" (pp. 31). Maimonides considered that through his works he had re-discovered the esoteric Jewish traditions; this generated among the kabbalists a rewording of these traditions of which they had knowledge in a more coherent system. This system represents a theosophic-theurgic interpretation of classical Jewish sources, and is incompatible with theology or

Maimonides' thinking which was seen as an innovation of Aristotelean influence.

However, Idel brings forth a turning point by which Maimonides is brought to the side of the kabbalists. This is considered as a rejection of his philosophical outlook which was regarded as dangerous for the Jewish tradition, and his conversion to Kabbalah as a result of his thorough denial of philosophy. Yet, Idel comes to the conclusion that this was merely an innuendo which Ibn Gabby quoted from an anonymous source.

Analyzing the ecstatic Kabbala, especially the work of A. Abulafia, Idel points out that there is a constant and dominant influence from Maimonides. To Abulafia, the study of the kabbalistic writings appears as a transitory stage from the philosophical stage of his formation to the mystical one. The major reason for his remaining faithful to Maimonides thinking and to the kabbalistic language was his detachment from the centers of theosophic thinking. Idel sees this attempt as a synthesis between the "Guide for the Perplexed" and the Kabbala of language out of which had emerged the ecstatic Kabbalah. In this case, the "Guide" may still stand in opposition to the study of Kabbalah, or may be considered an intermediary stage which includes both speculative and kabbalistic elements. This will cause us consider the "Guide" as a partially kabbalistic work.

In this case, Idel believes that Abulafia suggested a phenomenological approach the "Guide" in accordance with his own method founded on a transitory stage of the hidden aims of Maimonides, or with the method of his successors who ascribed their own perspectives to him. Abulafia showed a special interest in the secrets in the "Guide". Idel points out that for the theosophic Kabbalah, the "Guide" is viewed as a doubtful work bearing more dangerous inferences than an explicit message, whereas for the ecstatic Kabbalah, the more the"Guide" becomes better understood, the more kabbalistic it becomes. Abulafia assumed two important ideas: Maimonides' metaphysics and the phenomenology of the prophetic phenomenon through which Maimonides marked a path to an effective and up-to-date practice of the central elements of Jewish mysticism.

Dealing with higher secrets, Maimonides had always used esoterism when discussing "ma'aseh Bereshit" and "ma'aseh Merkava" in his works and identifying these with "physics" and "metaphysics". To Maimonides it was the severe restraint of any lust that granted the access to metaphysical knowledge; this allows us to identify an essential characteristic of Maimonides' understanding of the relation between "ma'aseh Bereshit", "ma'aseh Merkava", and " sitre arayot" (the secret of forbidden unions). Idel considers that the major aim of Maimonides' "Guide" is to present in a particular manner the account of Bereshit and Merkava, as well as of the divine Names. Thus he put forward a tradition sunk into oblivion as a consequence of the Exile, and decisively contributed to the re-birth of the interest for this tradition.

Idel traces the itinerary which Spinoza could have read, and which may have been the cause of his statement "Elohim=Nature,» from Maimonides back to the kabbalistic sources. Maimonides referred to the Aristotelean physics as "hokmat ha-teva" (the science of nature), and he used the equation "elohi" (the divine)= "tivi'i" (the natural) when referring to different topics in the "Guide". He conceived the divine activity as being of natural origin: the human intellect, body, the inherent objects, both the spiritual levels and the corporeal levels of nature are susceptible to be divine.

Idel notices that in "Ghet ha-Îemot,» Abulafia had used for the first time the gematria combination: Elohim=ha-Teva. To Abulafia, Elohim is the act of Creation, and not its agent, as this name is the same with nature, and the gematria combination should not be understood as a simple linguistic pun, but as a way of considering the identity of nature with the divine, just as Maimonides had suggested it in the"Guide". The theosophic kabbalist Iosif Gikatila had mentioned for several times Elohim and ha-Teva in "Ghinat Egoz," and came to the conclusion that Elohim stood for the idea of power which manifests in the perpetual characteristic of the natures inculcated upon the matter during the creation process.

Analyzing the pre-hasidic sources, Idel draws the conclusion that the essence of the hasidic theory is nothing but a synthesis between the theosophic-theurgic occasionalism and the implicit pantheistic orientation of the philosophical texts, as well as of philosophical Kabbalah whose main representative is Abraham Abulafia. Nature is depicted as the contraction of the divine infinite.

According to Idel, the study of the classical literature of Kabbalah which was written by kabbalists of the theosophic-theurgic school shows that this type of mystical thinking is reticent to gematria combinations in general, and to those referring to God and Nature in particular. This reveals the absence of gematria in the latest works of I. Ghikatilla, yet reinforces the existence of a mystical element helpful for a more detailed presentation of the intellectual background of Spinoza.

Discussing a decisive event in the history of Kabbalah, Idel succeeds in performing an exercise of thinking by which he underlines the infinite wisdom of the Jewish thought and the intrinsic links which the various schools of wisdom engender.