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A Critical Return to Moshe Idel's *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*: An Appreciation

Abstract:

The publication of Moshe Idel's book, Kabbalah: New Perspectives marks a turning point in the field of Jewish mysticism. In this volume, Moshe Idel offered phenomenology as an alternative key to appreciating the history and ideas of Jewish mystical traditions. This study returns to this book in order to assess and critique the meaning and function of phenomenology in his early scholarship, as a prelude to the developing and possibly changing methodologies that he has employed in numerous studies published since the appearance of his now classic study. The study considers the connection between phenomenology and experience and its role within the multiple perspectives suggested in the volume. Moshe Idel's methodology is thus appreciated within the larger context of his work, positioned within the history of scholarship in the field and serves as a measure of the turn to new perspectives.

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Moshe Idel's work and persona have had a tremendous impact on a generation of scholars who have enjoyed the fruits of his erudition and open minded consideration of new possibilities for Kabbalah research. His scholarly publications have illuminated many subjects, historical periods, and this from numerous methodological perspectives. Indeed, there are many Moshe Idels which are manifest in the various platforms, languages and genres of his published works. Here, I would like to share my appreciation of the Moshe Idel I first met in a summer course I took in New York in the late 1980s and experienced shortly thereafter in print with the publication of *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, namely erudition combined with a creative openness to rethink basic assumptions. I remember being impressed by his uncompromising appreciation for these two essential pillars of scholarship, even when I had no idea what the study of Jewish mysticism entailed. From conversations with him, I could detect his silent disdain for the blind acceptance of generalized conclusions and his unexpressed pleasure in any critical engagement of the sources. I believe that it is appropriate therefore to offer this critical return to his first monograph and appreciate the methodology set forth in it. My aim here is to be complimentary by assessing the contribution of his achievement, beginning with this monumental book, no less than in critiquing his methodology as a testimony to his openness and his tireless search for newer perspectives and advances in the study of Jewish mysticism. In what follows, I will present the first part of a more expanded study on Idel's methodology, which will be published elsewhere in full. The current discussion will be limited to the rather central question of the meaning and function of phenomenology in Idel's first major monograph.

The publication twenty years ago of Moshe Idel's *Kabbalah: New Perspectives* (KNP) marked a turning point in the study of Jewish mysticism.¹ This book offered more than a new thesis statement. It proposes various new perspectives to the study of Jewish esotericism and mystical phenomena. Against the common assumptions about what this book and his scholarly corpus claim, Idel, as I read him, seeks to destabilize prior conclusions and dogmas of the field in order to open up the sources to ever-new scrutiny, while remaining vigilant about preserving scholarly distance, so as not to replace a former ideology with a newer currency of academic beliefs. KNP therefore presumes a distinction between methodology and the scholarly conclusions that result from any one inquiry, even if these categories are functionally blurred in the execution of any study. Beginning with KNP and argued in different forms, Idel claims to have no particular perspective, applying various methodologies which were excluded from previous studies of Kabbalah.

In the limited context of this paper, I will not attempt a comprehensive overview of Idel's methods nor will it be possible to fully document his implementation of 'phenomenology'.² Instead, I will offer what I trust will be some observations on how phenomenology functions within Idel's first major monograph, and some related studies published subsequently, in order to highlight the development and changes in his thought. Such developments and shifts across his studies reveal a necessary tension in reading his works as a whole and offer an opportunity for interrogating the changes in his methodology over the years. In this essay, I will chart the major moves that have constructed Idel's methodologies and present the recurring strategy that characterizes his approach to the study of Jewish mysticism.

The Moshe Idel I know is bored with summaries and thrives on critical engagements that challenge existing assumptions, including foremost his own. As I have learned from him, every method necessarily offers certain benefits and limitations and it is the responsibility of every scholar to employ the methods most appropriate for a given context and problem. As a scholar, he is allergic to all ideologies, whether they be political, hermeneutic or religious, because they predetermine the outcome of the act of reading by essentializing issues, and in many cases they substitute for reading and remove the need to ask critical questions about possible interpretations. Idel is weary of long-term attachments to conceptual approaches and has little patience for inquiries into Jewish mysticism which do not emerge from the reading of manuscripts or rely exclusively on sources already treated in the secondary literature. In Idel's study of Jewish mysticism, nothing is outright excluded from any inquiry, and KNP in particular is structured around those areas which were dismissed, for whatever reasons, by earlier scholarship. Idel's openness is kept in check by scholarly erudition that is responsible to textual detail, and the choice of the method of inquiry is based on the literary and cultural context of the texts and the religious phenomena. My conscious aim in this essay is to be complimentary by assessing the contribution of his achievement, no less than to critique his methodology as a testimony to his openness and tireless search for newer perspectives and advances for the study of Jewish mysticism. After many years of reading manuscript sources, Idel published a number of important and original studies, which culminated in the first theoretical presentation of his overview of the field and break with commonly held assumptions, mainly those forwarded in the works of Scholem.

I would venture to say that the major point of Idel's departure from the methodologies of Scholem revolves around the position of the scholar from within and without

of the tradition. While the matter is complex in the rich corpora of each these scholars, Scholem often searched for foreign influences while Idel gives maximum credence to the kabbalists' claim of ancient roots in investigating the possibilities. Nevertheless, both scholars sought objectivity through intellectual otherness. Scholem at one point admitted an affinity, true or desired, between his identity and that of the Christian kabbalist, Johannes Reuchlin.³ I wish to compare this reflection by Scholem to Idel's fundamental use of R. Abraham Abulafia's Ecstatic Kabbalah as a means of charting the divergence and later convergence of kabbalistic systems and appreciating the attempts at reordering kabbalistic traditions. In such a comparison, Scholem's history of ideas can be seen as a non-traditional appraisal, removed from the inner presumptions of the kabbalistic tradition. Idel's orientation, by contrast, is similarly based on difference, but *from within* the Jewish mystical tradition. Stated in terms of 'phenomenology', the scholar who compares both schools without being personally invested in either one, finds sufficient difference within the Jewish mystical tradition to achieve the critical distance necessary to construct a history of Kabbalah.

Even within Scholem's appreciation of Ecstatic Kabbalah as a separate school of Kabbalah, and worthy of its own chapter and designation as a trend in *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, Idel's scholarly program rejects the subsuming power of a historically layered and comprehensive assessment that places the prophetic Kabbalah within the strictures of a history of theosophic Kabbalah.⁴ The move from trends to phenomena allows for the inclusion of aspects of Kabbalah that did not find their place in prior historical schematizations.⁵ Furthermore, by breaking down the historical boundaries that delineated the chapters of Scholem's inquiries, Idel is better positioned to trace the later influence, re-appearance and transformation of traditions in later times, not to mention freely documenting earlier precedents of esoteric traditions and mystical techniques.⁶ It should be noted further that in an important study on the relationship of Kabbalah to rabbinic literature (1991), Idel critiqued what he called, 'Scholem's Phenomenology of Judaism', by which he compared Scholem's structuring of Jewish traditions over the centuries outside of the major trends of Jewish mysticism and the library of sources unique to the Jewish mystical tradition. This terminology places *these* studies of Scholem under the same methodological rubric of Idel's program, even if he is highly critical of Scholem's basic assumptions and conclusions.⁷ Phenomenology here seems to imply a comparison between different systems that are not necessarily interlinked as evolving historically one from the other in causal chains of influence and reaction, but are presented by the scholar in a history that is a reconstruction of affinities between the disparate bodies of knowledge.

A Critical Return to Kabbalah: New Perspectives

A critical return to KNP is both outdated and long overdue.⁸ Upon its publication in 1988, few could appreciate the book or predict its later influence. Today, it is difficult to read it outside of the prism of his later publications and numerous developments in the field. Unchanging has been Idel's conviction that ideology blinds the scholar and restricts thinking about alternative possibilities. According to Idel, as scholarship develops through time and specific studies explore in detail the richness of texts and religious phenomena, the field necessarily becomes more complex.⁹ This runs in the face of popular assumptions which are based, I believe, in a numinous regard for kabbalistic litera-

ture, where even its academic study is revered as somehow separate from the other branches of Jewish studies. Even within Jewish studies as a whole, and possibly most strongly in social history, many wish for an authoritative scholar to sift through the difficult sources and present conclusions for wider (scholarly) consumption. Accordingly, the prevalent expectation is that the more that Kabbalah is investigated and its research published, the clearer the picture should become, correcting, proving and fine-tuning the conclusions of academic predecessors. Idel's optimism, or perhaps his openness, rejects this assumption and views serious scholarship as indebted to detail, complexity and tension between perspectives, so that all generalizations become *increasingly* inappropriate over time. Moreover, in Idel's academic writing and thinking, theology is a dirty word, marking the abandonment of difference, whereby multiplicity is systematized under a rubric of answers that are modified to agree with the demands of internal consistency.¹⁰ Indeed, the serious study of Jewish mysticism is based on an antipathy to committed scholarship that is invested in theology or any other ideology, and so preserves the maximal ability to identify difference from a vantage point of neutrality.

KNP, as I read it, aims at polyvocality, valorizing the multiple voices in the corpora of Jewish mystical literature and the various methodological approaches at the modern scholar's disposal in adducing the texts and religious phenomena. Put negatively, the 'new perspectives' in the title of KNP is not intended to express Idel's new perspective, but is offered as his assessment of the untapped riches of related disciplines as they are brought to bear upon the study of Kabbalah: 'Even when the first stages of historical-textual studies were far in the past, the approach was not enriched by additional perspectives'.¹¹ This statement is made in his sub-chapter, 'An Appraisal of a Phenomenological Approach', showing the overlap between 'perspectives' and 'phenomenology' in this work. Phenomenology carries yet another sense in KNP, referring to the categories of religious events that are worthy of note in the scholar's purview, whether they be literary or experiential. Here too, however, the recognition of mystical phenomena as *phenomenology* overlaps with a scholarly perspective, so that Idel calls for the scrutinizing of 'experiential phenomena' which have been neglected or marginalized in the past with new methodologies such as 'myth, symbolism, and mysticism',¹² and even psychology, in order to offer a new focus to the field of Jewish Mysticism, and render new conclusions specific to his book.¹³ The new perspectives of KNP include more than the use of other disciplines as methodological tools. KNP is adamant that types of literature have been overlooked to present a one-sided portrayal of what is to be expected from such subjects as myth, Rabbinism and the historical development of the trends of Jewish mysticism.¹⁴

KNP begins with a discussion of 'critical approaches' and the 'criticism' of the texts and religious phenomena which constitute Jewish mysticism. The ground is thus laid in the opening chapter of the book for a history of such surveys in order to characterize and delimit earlier treatments, from the middle ages though the scholarly achievements of Gershom Scholem. Idel's choice of these parameters works in competing directions as he wishes to expand the range of insights to include the consideration of associations raised in the traditional sources, against the presumptions and limitations of prior academic scholarship. At the same time, he culls from medieval, Renaissance and Early Modern sources those comments which offer comparisons between ideas and texts of different orientations and historical periods. Moving from the more pointed attacks on the first kabbalists to the observations of Jews and Christians in the Renaissance, Idel sifts through ideologically invested attacks to outline

a history of comments, that although not intended as such, amount to critical appraisals of the history of Kabbalah.

Important here are observations which note difference between the religious character of doctrines and those which provide the corner stones of the periodization of Jewish and kabbalistic literature, including foremost the identification of foreign and late sources which helped create kabbalistic literature. 'Critique' and 'criticism' in their polemical sense of religious and culturally motivated attacks on ideology and heterodoxy are appreciated in the historicist sense because of the contrast in competing systems of thought for what they yield in observing the uniqueness and contexts of religious phenomena.¹⁵ Put differently, traditional claims within kabbalistic literature are first scrutinized from without, so that the academic scholar can consider the literature from within the corpus and mindset, in order to extract the important moves that construct a history of ideas. Although indebted to its roots in the history of religions and various predecessors in the *Wissenschaft des Judentums*, KNP is fine-tuned to identifying the affinities between literatures. By taking the lead for such an investigation from the prior observations made by figures who were ideologically invested with faith-based claims, KNP breaks down much of the difference between criticism and modern academic methods and thus constructs a particular type of phenomenology. Idel is aware of this relationship when he writes that, 'modern scholarship has only elaborated, deepened or explicated their findings'.¹⁶

The academic reception of KNP has largely been polarized between the acceptance of a new set of conclusions about the history of Jewish mysticism and a rejection of his presentation in favor of a defensive loyalty to the scholarly persona and literary presentation of Gershom Scholem.¹⁷ Both, in my opinion are misplaced.¹⁸ Despite Idel's framing of his research and conclusions in terms of Scholem's methods, thinking and the rich bibliography of his printed studies, Idel sought to free Kabbalah research from dogma by sharply distinguishing between research about Kabbalah and the kabbalistic sources themselves.

Scholem dedicated his life to revitalizing Jewish life and culture against a rationalist ideology of assimilation that turned its back on the mythic pulse of sources exemplified by Kabbalah. Scholem became a cultural icon for many, becoming the supreme authority, and for many, identical with the Kabbalah itself, so that to cite the idea of 'the Kabbalah', a reference would be offered to Scholem and not to a kabbalistic source.¹⁹ KNP was as much a return to Scholem's methods of reading the sources as it was a rejection of the dogmatic reception of how many perceived Scholem's work. In this context, phenomenology becomes the foil that empowers the individual scholar to arrive at independent observations from manuscript sources without becoming beholden to the edifice of the historical program of prior scholarship. Phenomenology functions in KNP as one scholar's impressions of recurring patterns of thought, themes or myths.²⁰ This implies therefore that another scholar might arrive at a separate, and potentially equally legitimate, phenomenology. Both subjective and ahistorical, this understanding of phenomenology is liberating for a field that has reified its own conclusions.

'Phenomenology' in Kabbalah: New Perspectives

Phenomenology is of course a major topic in philosophy, most known from the works of Husserl and more recently Sartre and Merleau-Ponty. Idel decidedly does not

draw upon this philosophical tradition when employing the term in his work. Even if not referred to specifically, what is relevant from the philosophical theory is the distinction between epistemology and subjective experience. Impressions and scholarly subjectivity are at issue when Idel notes the difference between the Kabbalah 'according to the perception of the kabbalists themselves'²¹ and Kabbalah as perceived from 'an academic perspective' in line with Scholem's research. Here too, Idel employs the term phenomenology to describe prior assessments: 'The historicist bias of the academic perspective, if not coupled with the sensibility that grows out of the phenomenological effort to understand a mystical phenomenon as an entity in itself, may cut the dialogue short at the beginning'.²²

Idel thus finds his opening in privileging experience as a methodological tool in evaluating Kabbalah, repositioning himself with respect to prior scholarly attempts to write a history of the doctrines somehow contained with kabbalistic literature.²³ One of the main facets of this approach was to theorize the way Kabbalah functioned for kabbalists as a lived system of religious practice and experience that maintains the upper world and draws down blessing from above. So, for example, KNP and other studies focus on mystical techniques, the mystical reinterpretation of the commandments (*ta'amei ha-mizwot* as well as their theurgic effect), incidentally laying the groundwork for later research on nomian and anomian speculation in Jewish mystical literature. The doctrinal yield of Scholem's appraisal of theosophic Kabbalah was now re-designated as the theosophic-theurgic Kabbalah (instead of just 'theosophy'), heightening the contrast with Abulafia's Prophetic Kabbalah.

In my reading of KNP and subsequent studies published by Idel, I note a constant tension on clearly identifying the object of study. Certainly the stated goal is to appreciate and interpret the texts and phenomena from within their own contexts in order to link them together into a history of ideas. The first is natural or immanent to the texts or religious lives of the kabbalists and the second is the product and interest of the modern scholar. There need not be a necessary conflict between these enterprises, but a qualitative difference remains at the outset. The crucial juncture perhaps is with the identification of 'central' myths that amount to the 'structure' of Jewish mysticism, as implicitly known to the kabbalists and that are formulated abstractly in the exposition of modern scholarship. This structure might indeed be synonymous with what Idel intends as a phenomenology of Jewish mysticism.

Turning once again to the text of KNP, we can identify various definitions of phenomenology. The more common use of the term which echoes the stated methodology of the book, even when the term is not cited, is this scholar's impressions from his reading of a wide range of material:

It has nevertheless been undertaken in order to supply insights resulting either from my perusal of Kabbalistic material unavailable to Scholem (some has been unearthed only since the late sixties) or from my focusing on portions of the material that were dealt with by Scholem only in passing. The very fact that a substantial number of the quotations cited in the following discussions stem from manuscript sources illustrates the need to return to the path opened by Scholem and explore available manuscripts before attempting more general discussions of the nature of Kabbalah.²⁴

Idel joins Scholem in stating that a full history of Kabbalah cannot be written, and at best, according to Scholem's conscious compromise, chapters on its 'major trends'

could only be composed in the early years of scholarship. As both scholars have intimated, Kabbalah is comprised of many schools and traditions and it would be imprudent to speak of 'the Kabbalah'. Instead, traditions are culled from the vast corpus of writings in manuscript and print in order to present an overview that explicates various issues significant to the modern scholar. Scholem's organization of the major trends of Jewish mysticism is thus admittedly arbitrary even if it was later reified as obvious in his later studies and in the work of later scholars. Although never presented systematically by the kabbalists, Idel too presumes that these texts emerge from 'elaborate bodies of mystical thought, [and] that although they may be difficult to understand, [they] nevertheless reflect comprehensive approaches rather than brief insights or remarks'²⁵ We can summarize this first sense of phenomenology as the subjective impression of the scholar of Jewish mysticism in assessing the main themes and character of the unsystematic presentations of traditions in various periods which conceal a deeper organization of ideas.

A second sense of phenomenology in KNP is the identification by the modern scholar of central myths of Kabbalah that are based on the medieval kabbalists' reconstruction of ancient, 'subterranean' traditions that resurfaced in later times. The legitimacy of this method is based on a approach which Idel distinguishes from his predecessors and which is seen to be in consort with the kabbalists:

Furthermore, an attempt to study Jewish mysticism along the lines I have proposed has a manifest methodological advantage: it postulates a relatively organic evolution of Jewish mysticism that can be demonstrated by using Hebrew material found in the various layers of Jewish literature and that, consequently, can also be rejected by philological or historical analysis of the texts. It is obvious that my proposal is consonant with some of the assertions of the Kabbalists themselves, who repeatedly asserted that the Kabbalah is a genuine ancient tradition which is an esoteric interpretation of Judaism. This self-perception has been systematically disregarded by modern research of Kabbalah, with no detailed analysis.²⁶

Reconstruction presumes that theosophic Kabbalah is 'a systematic exposition of a worldview' of the fragmentary traditions of antiquity. Here, the historian's phenomenology seeks to identify the recurring patterns of associations found between the various textual units of antique Judaism that served the kabbalists in offering a unified picture of their thought. These associations were not identified nor created in Idel's reading, but were rather preserved through written and oral transmission:

I assume that Kabbalah has probably preserved some ancient conceptual structures that supply a more unified view of the otherwise unrelated and sometimes unintelligible motifs and texts. This reconstructionist approach mostly concerns the pre-Kabbalistic texts, the understanding of which can be improved by applying a previously unexpected conceptual structure to an ancient text. The adequacy of this method, however, is indirectly important for the question of the antiquity of the Kabbalah; the possibility of approaching some ancient material with the help of modes of thinking preserved in Kabbalah may demonstrate that this lore not only makes use of older motifs but also continues more comprehensive intellectual patterns.²⁷

The academic agenda of KNP rests upon an optimism of validating the claims of the kabbalists, that their traditions have ancient roots. While Idel does not discount the

possibility that traditions were transmitted orally, he nevertheless does not approach the problem from within the categories of the kabbalists. Behind Idel's search for the historical continuity of Jewish mystical traditions is a looming sensitivity to myths that hover over or within earlier sources, from the bible and through rabbinic traditions, and which were passed on to the kabbalists, understood as medieval rabbinic figures. Against Scholem's reading, myth is the thread, internal to Jewish traditions, that offers a great measure of continuity and even an ahistorical appreciation of how sources were and can be read. Idel's phenomenology thus bridges the gap created in Scholem's thinking between Rabbinism and Kabbalism. Put differently, if it can be shown that a kabbalistic idea or pattern of thinking existed in ancient times, the medieval Kabbalah is better appreciated as the return to traditions that were preserved from antiquity. As Idel writes:

Therefore, it is as fruitful to discuss Kabbalistic phenomena in contradistinction to one another as to give a chronological account. The unfolding of the key concepts that characterized and directed Kabbalistic activity and thought, their exposition as atemporal modes, and the understanding of their interplay in various Kabbalistic schools is the 'inner' history of Kabbalah or of Jewish mysticism, just as the temporal description can be considered the 'outer' history.²⁸

History serves as the temporal backdrop for the growth and merging of traditions, not their cause or full context. Numerous examples could be cited from Idel's later publications, foremost amongst them are those that challenge Scholem's argument for a causal connection between the Expulsion from Spain and messianism. As many may know, Idel explains such developments as the meeting of cultures and traditions due to the geographic displacements of figures and ideas that forced or prompted new interactions such as those that took place Italy and with the rise of Hasidism.²⁹

The phenomenology that Idel works with in *KNP* is in constant dialogue with the demands of both an ahistorical survey of the forms of experience and the temporal and geographic contextualization of their appearances across the full range of Jewish mystical activity. I understand this as a dialectic, neither a sign of methodological ambivalence, nor of a lack of clarity on his part. Idel is most comfortable navigating his way through different structures of thought without being committed to any one form. This is his strength for within this flexibility, he is able to remain faithful to the demands of the texts and their contexts. For Idel, methodological commitment concretizes the results in advance of their detailed analysis and becomes the major pitfall of the modern scholar. Idel, as I understand him, is on guard against overarching systems of thought that impose structures on the texts or harmonize competing traditions. With the publication of *KNP*, the study of Jewish mysticism moved into a new era that sought and appreciated more complex explanations to the phenomena of Jewish mysticism.

Notes:

1. Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, London and New Haven 1988.
2. For an annotated listing of the all his publications through 1997 see: *Bibliography of the Writings of Professor Moshe Idel*, edited and annotated by Daniel Abrams, Los Angeles 1997 [Hebrew/English].
3. Gershom Scholem, 'Die Erforschung der Kabbala, von Reuchlin bis zur

Gegenwart', *Vortrag gehalten anlässlich der Entgegennahme des Reuchlin-Preises der Stadt Pforzheim*, 10. Sept. 1969, p. 1, Pforzheim, 1969; reprinted in *Judaica: Studien zur jüdischen Mystik*, Frankfurt am Main 1970, III, pp. 247-264 (p. 247), and translated in Hebrew in: *Scholem, Explications and Implications: Writings on Jewish Heritage and Renaissance*, Tel Aviv 1986, vol. 2, pp. 309-320 (p. 309). See the discussion of David Biale, *Gershom Scholem: Kabbalah and Counter-History*, Cambridge and London 1979, p. 31.

4. This despite his comments on the chapter in *Major Trends* in his article, Moshe Idel, 'The Contribution of Abraham Abulafia's Kabbalah to the Understanding of Jewish Mysticism', *Gershom Scholem's 'Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism': 50 Years After*, ed. P. Schäfer and J. Dan, Tübingen 1993, p. 119.

5. See Ioan Culianu, 'Kabbalah Revisited: Review of Kabbalah: New Perspectives by Moshe Idel', *History of Religions* 30 (1990), pp. 215-217, esp. p. 216: 'Once cannot say that Scholem ever undertook a history of Kabbalah or a presentation of all its possible themes'. (emphasis in original).

6. Scholem's historical writing suffered methodologically from its division into trends in that it could not appreciate the life of a text or idea across various periods, not to mention the reformulation of text within its reception history (Daniel Abrams, 'The Condensation of the Symbol "Shekhinah" in the Manuscripts of the Book Bahir', *Kabbalah* 16 (2007), pp. 7-82). Scholem's survey of early Kabbalah, further suffered because of the expanded treatment of the Bahir through Geronese kabbalists (including a number of other texts and circles in the thirteenth century) as a separate volume, *Reshit ha-Qabbalah*, Jerusalem 1948 and published in an expanded English version as *Origins of the Kabbalah*, Princeton and Philadelphia 1948. (see my 'Critical and Post-Critical Textual Scholarship of Jewish Mystical Literature: Notes on the History and Development of Modern Editing Techniques', *Kabbalah* 1 (1996), pp. 17-19). This is especially important for an appreciation of Abulafia's placement in Scholem's historiography of Kabbalah since the Ecstatic Kabbalah was positioned between German Pietism and the Zohar in *Major Trends*.

7. See Moshe Idel's criticism and explanation of Scholem and Tishby's phenomenology and historiography in his article, 'History of the Kabbalah and History of the Jews', *Theory and Criticism* 6 (1995) pp. 137-147, esp. pp. 146-147 [Hebrew]. (This study serves as a précis of Idel's critique of the historical assumptions that guided past scholarship). For Scholem's own reflections on 'phenomenology' and the theurgic interpretation of ritual see the fascinating comment in: *On the Kabbalah and Its Symbolism*, p. 121: 'The ritual of Rabbinical Judaism makes nothing happen and transforms nothing. ... A penetrating phenomenology of Rabbinical Judaism would be needed to determine the nature of the powers of remembrance that made this possible and to decide whether other secret factors may not after all have contributed to this vitality' (emphasis in original).

8. See, however, the important discussion of Hava Tirosch-Rothschild, 'Continuity and Revision in the Study of Kabbalah', *AJS Review* 16 (1991), pp. 161-192. For more recent appraisals of the field with respect to Idel's methodology and influence see Peter Schäfer, 'Jewish Mysticism in the Twentieth Century', *Jewish Studies at the Turn of the Twenty-First Century*, ed. J. Borrás and A. Sáñezbadillos, Leiden, Boston, Köln 1999, pp. 3-18, esp. pp. 13-16; Elisabeth Hamacher, *Gershom Scholem und die Allgemeine Religionsgeschichte*, Berlin-New York 1999, pp. 34-36; Daniel Weidner, *Gershom Scholem: Politisches, esoterisches und historiographisches Schreiben*, München 2003, p. 341; J. H. Laenen, 'The Twilight between Scholarship and Mysticism', *Zutot* 2 (2002) 189-199.

9. Moshe Idel, 'Kabbalah Research: From Monochromatism to Polymorphism', *Studia Judaica* 8 (1999), pp. 15-46.
10. Moshe Idel, 'On the Theologization of Kabbalah in Modern Scholarship', *Religious Apologetics - Philosophical Argumentation*, ed. Y. Schwartz and V. Krech, Tübingen 2004, pp. 123-174.
11. *KNP*, p. 23.
12. *KNP*, p. 23.
13. *KNP*, pp. 24-25.
14. See also Moshe Idel, 'Sexual Metaphors and Praxis in the Kabbalah', *The Jewish Family: Metaphor and Memory*, ed. D. Kraemer, New York and Oxford, 1989, pp. 179-224. Idem, 'Some Remarks on Ritual and Mysticism in Geronese Kabbalah', *Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy* 3 (1993), pp. 111-130.
15. For similar phrasing see *KNP*, p. 10.
16. *KNP*, p. 5.
17. For a statement of the magnetism of Scholem's (scholarly) charisma see Idel's comments in 'Rabbinism Versus Kabbalism: On G. Scholem's Phenomenology', *Modern Judaism* 11 (1991), p. 282: 'Of Judaism Just like a magnet which restructures a magnetic field it enters charging, at the same time, the constituting entities with its own valency, so did Scholem bestow modern Judaica scholars with valences of his own. However, with the discovery of new Kabbalistic material and the disappearance of the magnetic power of Scholem's personality, it now seems that the field of Judaica in general and that of Jewish mysticism in particular is more prepared for a complex restructuring'.
18. For a discussion of the various types of responses and reviews to *KNP* see Nathaniel Deutsch, 'Mahloket', *Incognita* 2 (1991), pp. 241-250.
19. *KNP*, p. 17.
20. See the criticism of Roland Kiener in his review of *KNP*, *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 82, (1991), pp. 224-226: 'Significant theories are backed up with no more than catch-phrases like "it stands to reason that. . ." or "it seems reasonable to regard . . .," and the proclamation "I assume" appears with singular frequency in many of Idel's discussions. Substantiations of textual evidence are often few and far between these reconstructive threads. Such are the pitfalls of a reconstructive methodology' (p. 226).
21. *KNP*, p. 28.
22. *KNP*, p. 26.
23. See more recently Joëlle Hansel, 'La Cabale, Doctrine ou expérience?', *Revue des études juives* 163 (2004), pp. 301-308.
24. *KNP*, p. 19.
25. *KNP*, p. 21.
26. *KNP*, pp. 31-32.
27. *KNP*, p. 33. See, however, *KNP* 21: I would like to stress that Kabbalah may well be the result of certain religious developments without, however, stemming in its entirety from such earlier periods.
28. *KNP*, p. xiii.
29. Moshe Idel, 'Introduction', A.Z. Eshkoli, *Messianic Movements in Israel*, Jerusalem 1987, pp. 9-28 [Hebrew]; idem, 'Encounters between Spanish and Italian Kabbalists in the Generation of the Expulsion', *Crisis and Creativity in the Sephardic World, 1391-1648*, ed. B. Gampel. New York 1997, pp. 189-222; idem, 'Religion, Thought and Attitudes: The Impact of the Expulsion on the Jews', *Spain and the Jews - The Sephardi Experience, 1492 and After*, ed. E. Kedourie, London 1992, pp. 123-139. A special treatment was devoted to the com-

parison of approaches to the Expulsion its aftermath (unseen): John Steven Sewell, 'Lurianic Kabbalah and the Expulsion of 1492: The Scholem-Idel Debate', M.A. Thesis, Arizona State University, 1999.