



Absorbing Perfections: Kabbalah and Interpretation

Professor Moshe Idel

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In this discussion of Kabbalah - from the mystical trends of medieval Judaism to modern Hasidism - Moshe Idel considers different visions of the nature of the sacred text and of the methods to interpret it. He takes as a starting point the fact that the post-biblical Jewish world lost its geographical centre with the destruction of the temple and so was left with a textual centre, the Holy Book. Idel argues that a text-oriented religion produced language-centred forms of mysticism. Against this background, the author demonstrates how various Jewish mystics amplified the content of the Scriptures so as to include everything: the world, or God, for example. Thus the text becomes a major realm for contemplation, and the interpretation of the text frequently becomes an encounter with the deepest realms of reality. Idel delineates the particular hermeneutics belonging to Jewish mysticism, investigates the progressive filling of the text with secrets and hidden levels of meaning, and considers in detail the various interpretive strategies needed to decodify the arcane dimensions of the text.

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