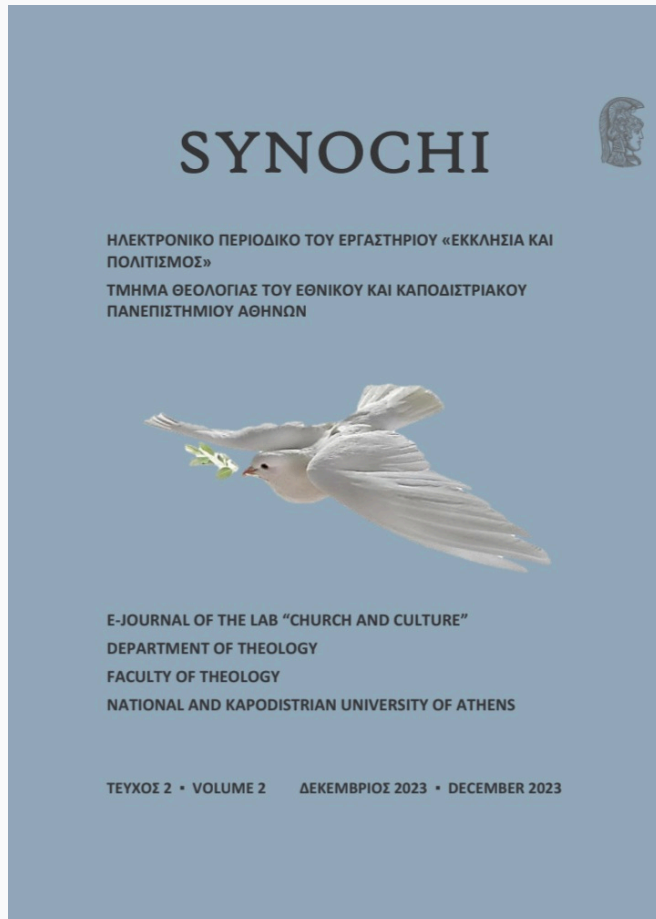


## Synochi

Vol 2 (2023)



**Φωτὶ Φῶς, Θεὸν Θεῶ - By Light Light, By God God:**

*Konstantinos Zarras*

doi: [10.12681/syn.41987](https://doi.org/10.12681/syn.41987)

### To cite this article:

Zarras, K. (2025). Φωτὶ Φῶς, Θεὸν Θεῶ - By Light Light, By God God:: Viewing some core elements of unio mystica in Philo. *Synochi*, 2. <https://doi.org/10.12681/syn.41987>

# SYNOCHI



ΗΛΕΚΤΡΟΝΙΚΟ ΠΕΡΙΟΔΙΚΟ ΤΟΥ ΕΡΓΑΣΤΗΡΙΟΥ «ΕΚΚΛΗΣΙΑ ΚΑΙ  
ΠΟΛΙΤΙΣΜΟΣ»

ΤΜΗΜΑ ΘΕΟΛΟΓΙΑΣ ΤΟΥ ΕΘΝΙΚΟΥ ΚΑΙ ΚΑΠΟΔΙΣΤΡΙΑΚΟΥ  
ΠΑΝΕΠΙΣΤΗΜΙΟΥ ΑΘΗΝΩΝ



E-JOURNAL OF THE LAB "CHURCH AND CULTURE"

DEPARTMENT OF THEOLOGY

FACULTY OF THEOLOGY

NATIONAL AND KAPODISTRIAN UNIVERSITY OF ATHENS

ΤΕΥΧΟΣ 2 ▪ VOLUME 2

ΔΕΚΕΜΒΡΙΟΣ 2023 ▪ DECEMBER 2023

**“Φωτὶ Φῶς, Θεὸν Θεῶ - By Light Light, By God God: Viewing some core elements of *unio mystica* in Philo”**

**Zarra Konstantinou<sup>1</sup>**

“Intus Deus altus est”

(“The God within is [the God] above”)

Augustine<sup>2</sup>

The issues concerning the foundations of Philo’s thought are notoriously complex and some of their details still trouble scholars around the world. Perhaps, the most intricate of them all is the question about his mystical tendencies. Though the interpretation of the relevant passages in his voluminous work on this issue are hotly debated even today, it is undeniable that the Jewish philosopher presents clear characteristics of an early mystic. In this brief inquiry our discussion will focus only on the core of his main ideas regarding the mystical union;<sup>3</sup> a theme that pervades important trends of later Christianity (Eastern and Western alike) and Islam.

---

<sup>1</sup> Professor in the Department of Theology, School of Theology, National and Kapodistrian University of Athens.

<sup>2</sup> Augustine, *Homiliae in Psalmos* 130. 12 (PL 37.1712); quoted by Guy Stroumsa, *Hidden Wisdom: Esoteric Traditions and the Roots of Christian Mysticism*, Numen 70, Leiden, Brill 2005, 181. To Stroumsa, Augustine disseminated “widely” “in the religious mentality of the West a fundamentally Plotinian metaphor about the mystical ascent” (181). To Winston, through the eyes of Philo, the “light by light/God by God’ formula” was an obvious “part of a well-known Greek philosophical tradition” (David Winston, *Logos and Mystical Theology in Philo of Alexandria*, Hebrew Union College Press, Cincinnati 1985, 44).

<sup>3</sup> There is a vast bibliography on the subject. For the Jewish elements or traits, see Moshe Idel, *Ben: Sonship and Jewish Mysticism*, Bloomsbury Academic, New York 2007, 57-107. Idem, “Unio Mystica and Ancient Jewish Mysticism,” in his *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, Yale University Press 1988, 59-73 (esp. 59-60). For the possibility of direct vision and union with God without the mediation of another agent in Philo, see Eric Dodds, *Pagan and Christian in an Age of Anxiety: Some Aspects of Religious Experiences from Marcus Aurelius to Constantine*, Norton & Company, New York 1965, 93-96. Also, Andrew Louth, *The Origins of Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys*, Oxford Publication Society 2007 (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), 32-34. Also, Bernard McGinn “Mystical union in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam,” in the *Encyclopedia of Religion*, Thomson Gale, Macmillan 2005 (2<sup>nd</sup> ed.), vol. 9, pp. 6334-35. Elliot R. Wolfson, *Through a*

Philo's language in many of his works proves that he was a mystic and the aim of all mystics was to see and understand God.<sup>4</sup> Even more, to the Jewish philosopher, as is nuanced in some of his passages, though ceaselessly discussed in their interpretation, the crown of all religious experience was to be united with God. A previous state, but not necessarily a prerequisite one, would be the numinous vision of Him. The person would first ascend over the mundane sphere and then pass into mystical *theoria* (θεωρία). Even so, mind's unswerving vision of the Deity<sup>5</sup> did not mean a deeper contact or understanding of His essence, too; that one remained unknown and unapproachable. It did not even mean an ecstatic or prophetic state.

It is in his work *On the Posterity of Cain and His Exile*<sup>6</sup> that he presents his views on the truly pious and wise person. This one is spiritual and constantly seeking God in all things of his daily life. So, virtue and piety came as very important criteria for achieving this experience.<sup>7</sup> To Philo, the archetype of the wise, virtuous, and pious was to be found in the person of Moses and his ascent to Mt Sina. The luminous events that took place there were the prototype of this kind of experience. Moses' opposite in Philo would be seen in the person of Biblical Cain, who represents the mundane type driven by his five senses.

It is necessary to note that Philo seems to build his rationale about "union" with God on the interpretation of certain verses in Genesis and in Deuteronomy. These are mostly Gen 2:24 and Deut 4:4; 10:20; 11:22; 13:5 and 30:19-20. Deut 10:20 and 30:19-20 are the most important, since their focus is in cleaving and being attached to God. Gen 2:24 carries some special meaning we will address last. The axial term

---

*Speculum that Shines: Vision and Imagination in Medieval Jewish Mysticism*, Princeton University Press 1994, 52-73.

<sup>4</sup> See the analysis in David Winston, *Logos and Mystical Theology in Philo of Alexandria*, 43-58 (esp. 54 ff.).

<sup>5</sup> "Do not however suppose that the Existent which truly exists is apprehended by any man; for we have in us no organ by which we can envisage it, neither in sense, for it is imperceptible by sense, nor yet in mind" (*Mut.* 7.10), in Louth, *The Origins of Christian Mystical Tradition*, 19.

<sup>6</sup> See especially chapters 12 – 23. For all Philo works here it is mostly the *Thesaurus Linguae Graecae* and their *LOEB* editions that have been consulted and followed.

<sup>7</sup> See Philo, *De migratione Abrahami* 24:132.

(and idea) in all these verses is the noun *devequt*, meaning ‘cleaving’ and ‘attachment.’ Its root is *dvq* (דבד) for ‘to attach’ or ‘to cleave’ or ‘to cling.’ It is in Deut 10:20<sup>8</sup> that Israel is commanded to revere the Lord “your God,” only Him to worship, only to Him “to hold fast” (κολληθήσῃ דבד) and only His name to swear by. In Deut 30:19-20, where strong elements of ancient Near Eastern pact-composing, “the heaven and the earth” are called as witnesses “against” Israel who stands between the choices of “life and death, blessing and curse.” The only way of life for Israel is to love the “Lord your God,” to fulfill His commandments and “to cling” to Him constantly. Thus, Israel shall reside always safe and protected in the promised land. Probably, David Winston is quite right when in Philo’s interpretation of Deut 30:19-20 he sees not only a genuine first in approaching a Biblical verse in a purely mystical light, but also the very theme of *unio mystica* so prevalent in later Christianity and Islam.<sup>9</sup> Of course, the concept of *devequt* will play a major role in later mystical Judaism and especially in some strands of the medieval and post-medieval Kabbalah and Hasidism.<sup>10</sup>

It should be mentioned here that in all the above-mentioned Biblical verses Philo uses the translation of the LXX. It is most probable that Philo did not actually know the Hebrew of the Jewish Scriptures. In the Septuagint and in its several forms the Hebrew verb דבד is translated by various Greek verbs: προσκολληθήσεται in Gen 2:24, κολληθήσῃ in Deut 10:20, and ἔχεσθαι in Deut 30:20. The main idea is the same, one of clinging, sticking together, holding fast, and being attached. Perhaps, it is in his *On the Posterity of Cain and His Exile* that he shows both Moses and his achievement in the brightest light.

Μωυσεῖς δὲ τοῖς γνωρίμοις αὐτοῦ παράγγελμα κάλλιστον ὑποθήσεται,  
 “ἀγαπᾶν τὸν θεὸν καὶ εἰσακούειν καὶ ἔχεσθαι αὐτοῦ” (Deut. 30, 20)· ταύτην

<sup>8</sup> κύριον τὸν θεόν σου φοβηθήσῃ καὶ αὐτῷ λατρεύσεις καὶ πρὸς αὐτὸν κολληθήσῃ [דבד] καὶ τῷ ὀνόματι αὐτοῦ ὀμῆ.

<sup>9</sup> For similar material in mystical Islam, see Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, SUNY Press 1988, pp. 11-12. Also, David Winston, “Was Philo a Mystic?” in Gregory E. Sterling (ed.), *The Ancestral Philosophy: Hellenistic Philosophy in Second temple Judaism*, Brown Judaic Studies, Providence 2001, 167.

<sup>10</sup> See the analysis in Moshe Idel, *Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, 35-58; in certain instances, “*devekut* [was] understood as *unio mystica*” (pp. xvii, 57-58).

γὰρ εἶναι ζῶν τὴν πρὸς ἀλήθειαν εὐήμερόν τε καὶ μακραίωνα. πάνυ δ' ἐμφαντικῶς ἐπὶ τὴν τοῦ τριποθήτου καὶ ἀξιεράστου καλεῖ τιμὴν εἰπὼν ἔχεσθαι αὐτοῦ, τὸ συνεχές καὶ ἐπάλληλον καὶ ἀδιάστατον τῆς κατ' οἰκείωσιν ἀρμονίας καὶ ἐνώσεως παριστάς. ἃ μὲν δὴ τοῖς ἄλλοις παραινεῖ, ταῦτά ἐστι καὶ τοιαῦτα. αὐτὸς δ' οὕτως ἀπαύστως ὀρέγεται τοῦ ὄραν καὶ πρὸς αὐτοῦ ὀρᾶσθαι, ὥσθ' ἰκετεύει δυστόπαστον οὔσαν τὴν ἑαυτοῦ φύσιν δηλῶσαι γνωρίμως (Exod. 33, 13), ἴν' ἤδη ποτὲ ἀψευδοῦς δόξης μεταλαβὼν ἀβεβαίου ἐνδοιασμοῦ βεβαιωτάτην πίστιν ἀλλάξῃται. καὶ ἐπιτείνων οὐκ ἀνήσει τὸν πόθον, ἀλλὰ καὶ γνοὺς ὅτι δυσθηράτου μᾶλλον δὲ ἀνεφίκτου πράγματος ἐρᾷ, ὅμως ἐπαγωνιεῖται μηδὲν συντόνου σπουδῆς ἀνιείς, ἀλλὰ πᾶσι τοῖς παρ' ἑαυτοῦ εἰς τὸ τυχεῖν ἀπροφασίστως καὶ ἀόκνως συγχρώμενος. ἤδη γοῦν καὶ εἰς τὸν γνόφον ὅπου ἦν ὁ θεὸς εἰσελεύσεται (Exod. 20, 21), τουτέστιν εἰς τὰς ἀδύτους καὶ ἀειδεῖς περὶ τοῦ ὄντος ἐννοίας. οὐ γὰρ ἐν γνόφῳ τὸ αἴτιον οὐδὲ συνόλως ἐν τόπῳ, ἀλλ' ὑπεράνω καὶ τόπου καὶ χρόνου· τὰ γὰρ γεγονότα πάντα ὑποζεύξας ἑαυτῷ περιέχεται 14.5 μὲν ὑπ' οὐδενός, ἐπιβέβηκε δὲ πᾶσιν. ἐπιβεβηκῶς δὲ καὶ ἔξω τοῦ δημιουργηθέντος ὧν οὐδὲν ἦπτον πεπλήρωκε τὸν κόσμον ἑαυτοῦ· διὰ γὰρ δυνάμεως ἄχρι περάτων τείνας ἔκαστον ἐκάστῳ κατὰ τοὺς ἀρμο15.1 νίας λόγους συνύφηεν.<sup>11</sup>

There are so many thought-provoking themes and ideas here that one may write more than one monograph. From the start, Moses seems exemplar, leaving “a charge most noble” (παράγγελμα κάλλιστον) for his followers (“pupils” in the LOEB translation). Of course, that “charge” is the Biblical one to love, obey and follow God (Deut 30:20<sup>12</sup>). And the best way to honor God is to ἔχεσθαι αὐτοῦ, that Philo interprets as proving the value of “how constant and continuous and unbroken is the concord and union that comes through making God your own.”<sup>13</sup> The Jewish philosopher continues stating that Moses’ unceasing yearning was “to see God and to be

<sup>11</sup> Philo, *De posteritati Caini* 12.4 – 15.1.

<sup>12</sup> ἀγαπᾶν κύριον τὸν θεόν σου εἰσακούειν τῆς φωνῆς αὐτοῦ καὶ ἔχεσθαι αὐτοῦ [יְהִי לְךָ אֱלֹהִים] ὅτι τοῦτο ἡ ζωὴ σου καὶ ἡ μακρότης τῶν ἡμερῶν σου κατοικεῖν σε ἐπὶ τῆς γῆς ἧς ὤμοσεν κύριος τοῖς πατράσιν σου Ἀβραὰμ καὶ Ἰσαὰκ καὶ Ἰακώβ δοῦναι αὐτοῖς.

<sup>13</sup> Here I follow the LOEB translation, p. 335.

seen by Him” (τοῦ ὁρᾶν καὶ πρὸς αὐτοῦ ὁρᾶσθαι).<sup>14</sup> Though Moses knows that he is “enamored” with a most difficult quest (δυσθηράτου μᾶλλον δὲ ἀνεφίκτου πράγματος ἐρᾷ), he is fully devoted to his task. Needless to say, here Philo clearly idealizes Moses and crosses the interpretive line going beyond the Biblical text. Yet, his take is most valuable all the same. As a result, the Lawgiver is accepted “into the thick darkness where God was” (ἤδη γοῦν καὶ εἰς τὸν γνόφον ὅπου ἦν ὁ θεὸς εἰσελεύσεται). To Philo, that meant the passing from the corporeal to the celestial, even to the “unapproachable region where there are no material forms,” beyond space and time (ὑπεράνω καὶ τόπου καὶ χρόνου). This is one more instance where translation is unable to do justice to the text (of course, with a little help from Philo). His phrase εἰς τὰς ἀδύτους καὶ ἀειδεῖς περὶ τοῦ ὄντος ἐννοίας, one of capital importance, is usually not properly translated. The LOEB edition renders it thus, “into conceptions regarding the Existent Being that belong to the unapproachable region where there are no material forms.” That is, a nine words phrase in the ancient text is translated by eighteen in modern day English. The key word here is ἀδύτους<sup>15</sup> (“adyta,” sing. “adytum”), of course following the other key verb, εἰσελεύσεται (“to enter”).<sup>16</sup> Both are closely related to the temple theology and praxis. Moses is presented as the high priest *per se*, who enters the Holy of Holies, the *devir*, of the supernal sanctum; and perhaps, even beyond that. Here, too, the language is unmistakably temple language and as is shown in many of his works, Philo is very fond of it. Still, the terms ἀειδής (invisible, incorporeal, formless), ὄν (being), and ἐννοία (“to think”, the “inner content” or a “product of nous”) are beaming in Platonic and

---

<sup>14</sup> In other instances, Philo deems the experience of seeing God impossible; seeing the One in His essence is categorically denied. See for example: *De posteritate Caini* 167-169 (esp., 168: τὸ δ’ ὁρατὸν εἶναι τὸ ὄν οὐ κυριολογεῖται; still, 169: οὐ τὴν οὐσίαν, τὴν δ’ ὑπαρξιν); *De opificio mundi* 70-71. That is, the mystic can only see that God exists, but he cannot go any deeper than this. Perhaps, Gershom Scholem based his views on this subject more on Philo than previously thought (see the ending paragraphs of this brief article).

<sup>15</sup> “Adytum” is a place where only authorized persons may enter (e.g., the high priest); mostly, a holiest *topos*, reserved only for the elected and properly prepared ones.

<sup>16</sup> This combination of the themes of ascent and entry brings in mind the similar (yet, not the same) “story of the four rabbis” in paradise. See the relevant chapter in my *The Ancient Jewish Mystical Tradition of the Throne*, Typophilia, Thessaloniki 2000 (in Greek).

perhaps Stoic light, too (to say the least). In another instance, Jacob, too, is said to have elevated himself higher than the “ladder” to the point of seeing not the essence of God, but that He exists.<sup>17</sup>

One word on Philo’s use of the Biblical phrase ἔχεσθαι αὐτοῦ (see above). It does not necessarily mean the mystical union *as we have come to comprehend it today*. It is significant that the phrase follows the commandment to love and obey God and they all form a whole. That is, it shows a pious way of rather being *with* God and not of a total absorption *in* God. A better approach to what he really means would be “to follow God” or “to imitate His holiness,” as Jesus Christ exhorts his disciples to “be perfect, as the Father in heaven is perfect.”<sup>18</sup>

Another noteworthy instance, where Philo idealizes Moses is in his *Preliminary Studies*, where another reference to Deut 30:20,

οὗτός ἐστι Μωυσῆς, ὁ καθαρῶτατος νοῦς, ὁ ἀστεῖος ὄντως, ὁ νομοθετικὴν ὁμοῦ καὶ προφητεῖαν ἐνθουσιώσῃ καὶ θεοφορήτῳ σοφίᾳ λαβών, ὃς γένος ὦν τῆς Λευιτικῆς φυλῆς καὶ τὰ πρὸς 133.1 πατὴρ καὶ τὰ πρὸς μητὴρ ἀμφιθαλῆς τῆς ἀληθείας ἔχεται. μέγιστον δὲ ἐπάγγελμα τοῦ γενάρχου τῆς φυλῆς ἐστὶ ταύτης· θαρρεῖ γὰρ λέγειν, ὅτι αὐτός μοι μόνος ἐστὶ θεὸς τιμητέος (Exod. 20, 3), ἄλλο δ' οὐδὲν τῶν μετ' αὐτόν, οὐ γῆ, οὐ θάλασσα, οὐ ποταμοί, οὐκ ἀέρος φύσις, οὐ 133.5 πνευμάτων οὐχ ὡρῶν μεταβολαί, οὐ ζώων οὐ φυτῶν ἰδέαι, οὐχ ἥλιος, οὐ σελήνη, οὐκ ἀστέρων πλῆθος ἐν τάξεσιν ἐναρμονίῳ περιπολούντων, 134.1 οὐχ ὁ σύμπας οὐρανός τε καὶ κόσμος. μεγάλης καὶ ὑπερφυοῦς ψυχῆς τὸ αὔχημα, γένεσιν ὑπερκύπτειν καὶ τοὺς ὄρους αὐτῆς ὑπερβάλλειν καὶ 134.3 μόνου τοῦ ἀγενήτου περιέχεσθαι κατὰ τὰς ἱερὰς ὑφηγήσεις, ἐν αἷς διείρηται “ἔχεσθαι αὐτοῦ” (Deut. 30, 20). τοιγάρτοι τοῖς ἐχομένοις καὶ 134.5 ἀδιαστάτως θεραπεύουσιν ἀντιδίδωσι κληρὸν αὐτόν. ἐγγυᾶται δὲ μοι τὴν ὑπόσχεσιν λόγιον, ἐν ᾧ λέγεται· “κύριος αὐτὸς κληρὸς αὐτοῦ” 135.1 (Deut. 10, 9). οὕτως ἐν γαστρὶ λαμβάνουσαι μᾶλλον ἢ

<sup>17</sup> See Erwin R. Goodenough’s treatment in his famous *By Light, Light: The Mystic Gospel of Hellenistic Judaism*, Philo Press, Amsterdam 1969, 177-178.

<sup>18</sup> Matt. 5:48, ἔσεσθε οὖν ὑμεῖς τέλειοι ὡς ὁ πατήρ ὑμῶν ὁ οὐράνιος τέλειός ἐστιν.

ἔχουσαι αἱ ψυχὰι τίκτειν πεφύκασι. καθάπερ δ' οἱ σώματος ὀφθαλμοὶ πολλάκις μὲν ἀμυδρῶς πολλάκις δὲ τηλαυγῶς ὀρῶσι, τὸν αὐτὸν τρόπον καὶ τὸ τῆς ψυχῆς ὄμμα τοτὲ μὲν ὑποσυγκεχυμένας καὶ ἀδήλους τοτὲ δὲ καθα<sup>136.1</sup>ρὰς καὶ τρανὰς δέχεται τὰς ἀπὸ τῶν πραγμάτων ιδιότητας.<sup>19</sup>

Here Moses is called “the purest mind” (ὁ καθαρῶτατος νοῦς) who has received θεοφορήτῳ σοφία (“God-inspired wisdom”) and τῆς ἀληθείας ἔχεται (“clings to the truth” or “follows the truth”). There follows a powerful statement about his choice not to worship anything that is created and his devotion to the one and only the uncreated God. Then, in a way like apostle Paul’s in 2 Cor 12:1-4, Philo boasts for such a supreme soul who can rise high above all creation, overleaping its boundaries and clinging to the uncreated God. And this superb work is done after following the “sacred commands” in Deut 30:20 to “cling to Him” (ἔχεσθαι αὐτοῦ). Of equal importance is the phrase τοῦ ἀγενήτου περιέχεσθαι (“to be contained into the uncreated” or “to be attached to the uncreated”), probably presupposing entry or the awareness of being surrounded by the presence of God. Again, the phrase does not mean mixing with God. Then, as a reward to all who cling to Him in such a way and constantly serve Him, God offers Himself as a portion. And of course, Philo here refers to Deut 10:9, where the Levites receive not a hereditary portion, but they have God as their inheritance.<sup>20</sup>

Elsewhere, in his *Allegorical Laws*, still after the model of Moses, Philo speaks again about the ability of a most sublime mind to rise above the created and obtain a vision of God.

ἔστι δὲ τις τελεώτερος καὶ μᾶλλον κεκαθαρμένος νοῦς τὰ μεγάλα μυστήρια μνηθεῖς, ὅστις οὐκ ἀπὸ τῶν γεγονότων τὸ αἴτιον γνωρίζει, ὡς ἂν ἀπὸ σκιᾶς τὸ μένον, ἀλλ’ ὑπερκύψας τὸ γενητὸν ἔμφασιν ἐναργῆ τοῦ ἀγενήτου λαμβάνει, ὡς ἀπ’ αὐτοῦ αὐτὸν καταλαμβάνειν καὶ τὴν σκιάν αὐτοῦ, ὅπερ ἦν τὸν τε λόγον καὶ τόνδε τὸν κόσμον.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Philo, *De congressu eraditionis gratia* 24.132-135 (LOEB, vol. IV, 527).

<sup>20</sup> Deut 10:9, διὰ τοῦτο οὐκ ἔστιν τοῖς Λευίταις μερὶς καὶ κληρὸς ἐν τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς αὐτῶν κύριος αὐτὸς κληρὸς αὐτοῦ καθὰ εἶπεν αὐτῶ.

<sup>21</sup> Philo, *Legum allegoriarum* 3.100; for a better understanding, see 3.99-103.

This is a more perfect and more purified mind (νοῦς) -that is, Moses-,<sup>22</sup> initiated into the Great Mysteries (τὰ μεγάλα μυστήρια μνηθείς), who knows the supreme Cause not by its creations, but by ascending higher than the created attains a lucid vision (ἔμφασιν ἐναργῆ) of the uncreated God. Notice that both terms (ἔμφασις, ἐναργής) refer to the appearance and not to the substance. Notice also that in Philo Moses wants to see and to know God without the use of any created form or intermediary. Again, like the wording of apostle Paul,<sup>23</sup> Moses wants to see God not through a looking-glass (μηδὲ κατοπτρισαίμην),<sup>24</sup> but in a direct way (yet, just to see). The substratum of Tent of Meeting and temple language and symbolism appears again in the next verses, where Moses is compared to Bezaleel<sup>25</sup> who is also called by God.<sup>26</sup> But, though the former sees God directly, the latter only calculates and forms “an idea of the Creator as if from the shadow of the things created.” The link to the Tent and temple theology unfolds even more and becomes impressive,

διὰ τοῦθ' εὐρήσεις τὴν σκηνὴν καὶ τὰ σκεύη πάντα αὐτῆς πρότερον μὲν ὑπὸ Μωυσέως, αὖθις δ' ὑπὸ Βεσελεὴλ κατασκευαζόμενα Μωυσῆς μὲν γὰρ τὰ ἀρχέτυπα τεχνιτεύει, Βεσελεὴλ δὲ τὰ τούτων μιμήματα· χρῆται μὲν γὰρ Μωυσῆς ὑφηγητῆ τῷ θεῷ, ὡς φησι· "κατὰ τὸ παράδειγμα τὸ δεδειγμένον σοι ἐν τῷ ὄρει πάντα ποιήσεις", Βεσελεὴλ δὲ Μωυσεῖ.<sup>27</sup>

Here it is Moses that crafted the tabernacle and the vessels in the first place - actually, their archetypal forms- and then came Bezaleel to make their factual reflections. Again, Platonic material lurks all over the place. While on the Mt Sina, it

<sup>22</sup> Philo, *Legum allegoriarum* 3.101: οὗτός ἐστι Μωυσῆς. The Biblical instance here is Exodus 33:13, where Moses asks to see God.

<sup>23</sup> 1 Cor. 13:12, βλέπομεν γὰρ ἄρτι δι' ἐσόπτρου ἐν αἰνίγματι, τότε δὲ πρόσωπον πρὸς πρόσωπον· ἄρτι γινώσκω ἐκ μέρους, τότε δὲ ἐπιγνώσομαι καθὼς καὶ ἐπεγνώσθη. Even more, Paul speaks here for knowledge “in part” (now) and then for *a two-ways knowledge* (to know and to be known). His language is to be found in many a Sufi mystic later.

<sup>24</sup> Philo, *Legum allegoriarum* 3.101.

<sup>25</sup> *Bezaleel* means “in the shadow of God.” He was the son of Uri (“my flame;” what a name, in relation to his son’s!) from the tribe of Judah, and an architect for the Tabernacle (Ex 31:1-8; 37:1; 38:22. 1 Chr 2:20).

<sup>26</sup> See Philo, *Legum allegoriarum* 3.102-103.

<sup>27</sup> Philo, *Legum allegoriarum* 3.102.

was God Himself that showed Moses how to craft everything.<sup>28</sup> God was his instructor and then Moses became Bezaleel’s instructor.<sup>29</sup> It is noteworthy that in the next verses Aaron is called “the word” and Miriam “the outward sense” (Ἰακώβ, ὁ λόγος καὶ Μαριαμ ἡ αἴσθησις). When they revolt against Moses (the purified mind-νους), his superiority is asserted again by God himself. Due to his purity and faith, God speaks to him “mouth to mouth in His own form” and not through “riddles” (στόμα κατὰ στόμα λαλήσει, ἐν εἶδει καὶ οὐ δι’ αἰνιγμάτων).<sup>30</sup> The foundation verse here is Num 12:6<sup>31</sup> and the wording is again close both to apostle Paul’s and to Jesus’,<sup>32</sup> when he answered to his disciples on his use of parables. In fact, these similarities are astonishing and call for a re-examination of the sources.

How this experience of the divine is accomplished, Philo shows in his *De praemiis et poenis*.

<sup>43</sup> ἀλλ’ οὐτοί γε οἱ θεσπέσιοι καὶ τῶν ἄλλων διενηνοχότες, ὅπερ ἔφην, κάτωθεν ἄνω προῆλθον οἷα διὰ τινος οὐρανίου κλίμακος, ἀπὸ τῶν ἔργων εἰκότι λογισμῶ στοχασάμενοι τὸν δημιουργόν. εἰ δέ τινες ἐδυνήθησαν αὐτὸν ἐξ ἑαυτοῦ καταλαβεῖν ἐτέρω μηδενὶ χρησάμενοι λογισμῶ συνεργῶ πρὸς τὴν θέαν, ἐν ὁσίοις καὶ γνησίοις θεραπευταῖς καὶ θεοφιλέσιν ὡς ἀληθῶς ἀναγραφέσθωσα

<sup>44</sup> τούτων ἐστὶν ὁ Χαλδαῖστί μὲν προσαγορευόμενος Ἰσραήλ, Ἑλληνιστὶ δὲ ὀρῶν θεόν, οὐχ οἷός ἐστιν ὁ θεός τοῦτο γὰρ ἀμήχανον, ὡς ἔφην. ἀλλ’ ὅτι ἐστὶν, οὐ παρ’ ἐτέρου τινὸς μαθὼν, οὐχὶ τῶν κατὰ γῆν, οὐχὶ τῶν κατ’ οὐρανόν, οὐχὶ τῶν ὅσα στοιχεῖα ἢ συγκρίματα θνητά τε αὖ καὶ ἀθάνατα,

<sup>28</sup> See Ex 25:40.

<sup>29</sup> Philo, *Legum allegoriarum* 3.103.

<sup>30</sup> Philo, *Legum allegoriarum* 3.103. Similar language to Paul is shown again.

<sup>31</sup> Num. 12:6, καὶ εἶπεν πρὸς αὐτούς ἀκούσατε τῶν λόγων μου ἐὰν γένηται προφήτης ὑμῶν κυρίῳ ἐν ὁράματι αὐτῷ γνωσθήσομαι καὶ ἐν ὑπνῷ λαλήσω αὐτῷ.

<sup>32</sup> See Matt 13:10-17, where Jesus clearly means that there are levels of understanding in his parables, thus separating his disciples (who are to know the “mysteries of the Kingdom”) from those “outside” (v. 13, διὰ τοῦτο ἐν παραβολαῖς αὐτοῖς λαλῶ, ὅτι βλέποντες οὐ βλέπουσιν καὶ ἀκούοντες οὐκ ἀκούουσιν οὐδὲ συνίουσιν).

ἀλλὰ παρ' αὐτοῦ μόνου μετακληθεὶς τὴν ἰδίαν ὑπαρξιν ἀναφῆναι θελήσαντος ἰκέτη. πῶς δ' ἢ προσβολὴ γέγονεν, ἄξιον διὰ τινος εἰκόνοσ ἰδεῖν.

<sup>45</sup> τὸν αἰσθητὸν τοῦτον ἥλιον μὴ ἐτέρω τινὶ θεωροῦμεν ἢ ἡλίω; τὰ δὲ ἄστρα μή τισιν ἄλλοις ἢ ἄστροις θεωροῦμεν; καὶ συνόλως τὸ φῶς ἄρ' οὐ φωτὶ βλέπεται; τὸν αὐτὸν δὴ τρόπον καὶ ὁ θεὸς ἑαυτοῦ φέγγος ὧν δι' αὐτοῦ μόνου θεωρεῖται, μηδενὸς ἄλλου συνεργοῦντος ἢ δυναμένου συνεργῆσαι πρὸς τὴν εἰλικρινῆ κατάληψιν τῆς ὑπάρξεωσ αὐτοῦ.

<sup>46</sup> στοχασταὶ μὲν οὔν οἱ ἀπὸ τῶν γεγονότων τὸν ἀγένητον καὶ γεννητὴν τῶν ὄλων σπεύδοντες θεωρεῖν, ὁμοίον τι δρῶντες τοῖσ ἀπὸ δυάδοσ μονάδοσ φύσιν ἐρευνῶσι, δέον ἔμπαλιν ἀπὸ μονάδοσ ἀρχὴ γὰρ αὕτη δυάδα σκοπεῖν· ἀλήθειαν δὲ μετίασιν οἱ τὸν θεὸν θεῶ φαντασιωθέντες φωτὶ φῶσ.<sup>33</sup>

So, there are some superior men, that can rise high and ascent “to heaven” “as if by some heavenly ladder” (διὰ τινος οὐρανίου κλίμακοσ). This is achieved through philosophical contemplation of God’s works. By forming sequences of reasoning and constant deduction, one may come to the knowledge of God’s existence (ἀπὸ τῶν ἔργων εἰκότι λογισμῶ στοχασάμενοι τὸν δημιουργόν). Yet, there might be others (εἰ δὲ τινεσ) able to know of God in a more direct way, actually seeing Him (πρὸς τὴν θέαν) without using their reasoning. These men Philo calls holy and true servants of God (ὁσίοισ καὶ γνησίοισ θεραπευταῖσ). By the way, the text here is almost begging for the links between the terms ὁσίοσ, θεραπευτῆσ and Ἑσσαῖοσ. As is known, Philo makes the connections all by himself.<sup>34</sup> He calls the Essenes both ὁσίοισ and θεραπευταῖσ and one of his most widely known works is dedicated to the Healers (*On the contemplative life*) by the lake Mareotis in Lower Egypt. In the Lexicon of Suda<sup>35</sup> it is also maintained that they were called “Essenes” and that this name means those of the mystical *theoria*: ἔνθεν καὶ Ἑσσαῖοι καλοῦνται, τοῦτο δηλοῦντοσ τοῦ ὀνόματοσ, τουτέστι θεωρητικοί. Now, one cannot help but bring in mind some paragraphs from Epiphanius, where he passes down a very enigmatic tradition about the first followers of Jesus Christ. We shall dwell there only for a moment,

<sup>33</sup> Philo, *De praemiis et poenis* 1.43-46.

<sup>34</sup> E.g., see Philo, *Quod omnis probus liber sit* 75.3; idem, *Hypothetica sive Apologia pro Judaeis* 198.2.

<sup>35</sup> Lexicon of Suda, Alphabetic letter epsilon, 3123.10.

... Ἰεσσαῖοι ἐκαλοῦντο πρὶν τοῦ καλεῖσθαι Χριστιανοὶ οἱ εἰς Χριστὸν πεπιστευκότες, τούτου ἕνεκα ἔφημεν ὅτι ὁ Ἰεσσαὶ πατὴρ γίνεται τοῦ Δαυίδ, καὶ ἦτοι ἐξ ὑποθέσεως τούτου τοῦ Ἰεσσαὶ ἦτοι ἐκ τοῦ ὀνόματος Ἰησοῦ τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν ἐπεκλήθησαν Ἰεσσαῖοι διὰ τὸ ἐξ Ἰησοῦ ὀρμαῖσθαι, μαθηταὶ αὐτοῦ ὄντες, ἢ διὰ τὸ τῆς ἐτυμολογίας τοῦ ὀνόματος τοῦ κυρίου Ἰησοῦς γὰρ κατὰ τὴν Ἑβραϊκὴν διάλεκτον θεραπευτῆς καλεῖται ἦτοι ἰατρὸς καὶ σωτὴρ. ὁμῶς τούτῳ τῷ ὀνόματι πρὶν τοῦ Χριστιανοῦς αὐτοὺς καλεῖσθαι τὴν ἐπωνυμίαν ἐκέκτηντο. ἐπὶ Ἀντιοχείας δέ, καθάπερ ἄνω ἐπεμνήσθημεν καὶ ὡς ἔχει ἢ τῆς ἀληθείας ὑπόθεσις, ἤρξαντο οἱ μαθηταὶ καὶ πᾶσα ἡ ἐκκλησία τοῦ θεοῦ Χριστιανοὶ καλεῖσθαι.<sup>36</sup>

According to this witness, the first believers in Christ were called Ἰεσσαῖοι, either because the father of king David was Jesse or because of the etymology of Jesus' name. Still, as stated by Eriphanius, in Hebrew the name Ἰησοῦς means θεραπευτῆς, ἰατρὸς, and σωτὴρ; that is, healer and savior. His disciples were called after his name, Ἰεσσαῖοι. This happened before the times at Antioch, when "the disciples and all the church of God" were termed Χριστιανοὶ. Eriphanius goes even more astonishing in the very next paragraph, when he calls Ἰεσσαῖοι the Therapeutai at lake Mareotis. To the Eriphanius' source, these (according to many a source) Esenes were Ἰεσσαῖοι and Christians,

Εὔροις δ' ἄν, ὧ φιλολόγε, καὶ τούτων τὴν ὑπόθεσιν ἐντυχῶν τοῖς τοῦ Φίλωνος ὑπομνήμασιν ἐν τῇ περὶ Ἰεσσαίων αὐτοῦ ἐπιγραφομένῃ βίβλῳ, ὡς τούτων τὴν πολιτείαν καὶ τὰ ἐγκώμια διεξιῶν καὶ τὰ αὐτῶν μοναστήρια ἐν τῇ κατὰ τὴν Μάρειαν λίμνην ἱστορῶν περιουκίδι οὐ περὶ τινῶν ἐτέρων ὁ ἀνὴρ ἱστόρησεν, ἀλλὰ περὶ Χριστιανῶν.<sup>37</sup>

And as mentioned, contemplation was of capital importance to their asceticism.<sup>38</sup>

<sup>36</sup> Eriphanius, *Panarion* 1.325.17 – 1.325.25.

<sup>37</sup> Eriphanius, *Panarion* 1.326.1 – 1.326.7.

<sup>38</sup> Eusebius in *Historia Ecclesiastica* (esp. 2.17.16-17) speaks on this work of Philo, wrongly presenting the Jewish philosopher as a Christian. Yet, both his and Eriphanius' ready acceptance of these practices and views for the very first followers of Jesus Christ are tale-telling.

Back to treating Philo's paragraph in *De praemiis et poenis*, the Jewish philosopher presents Israel as the only one who saw God<sup>39</sup> by being elected and instructed by God himself (παρ' αὐτοῦ μόνου μετακληθεὶς τὴν ἰδίαν ὕπαρξιν ἀναφῆναι θελήσαντος ἰκέτη) and not by any kind or reasoning. Leaving aside the fact that Philo perceives Israel as a collective entity,<sup>40</sup> he also understands him as one who saw God (Ἰσραήλ, Ἑλληνιστὶ δὲ ὁρῶν θεόν) in mystical *theoria*. It is as if all the people that constitute Israel were in deep contemplation of the divine. Yet, here again lies an element usually undetected. Philo speaks not of an understanding of God's essence, but just of seeing that He exists: οὐχ οἷός ἐστιν ὁ θεός τοῦτο γὰρ ἀμήχανον, ὡς ἔφην, ἀλλ' ὅτι ἔστιν. Clearly, this is not the same as the *unio mystica* of the later Christian saints and holy men or even the Sufi mystics.

What follows is Philo's famous allegory of sun and light. He says, a man can see the sun and the stars only by their own light. Consequently, and only for the selected few, they can reach truth and perceive and see light only by light (φωτὶ φῶς) and God only by God (θεὸν θεῶ).<sup>41</sup> Though this is an amazing statement by Philo, subject to various interpretations, the notion that man is also spiritual and numinous is more than obvious. It points back to the creation of man "by our image, by our likeness" (Gen 1:26-27), too. Therefore, endowed with light and by spirit divine,

---

<sup>39</sup> Winston sees "intensely nationalistic inclinations" in Philo, since for the philosopher "Israel is to him [to Philo] the best of races since it sees the truly Existent (*Cong.* 51)"; Winston, *Logos and Mystical Theology in Philo of Alexandria*, 55. On the subject of Israel seeing God, see also Gerhard Delling, "The 'one who sees God' in Philo," in Fr. E. Greenspahn, E. Hilgert, B. L. Mack (eds.), *Nourished with Peace: Studies in Hellenistic Judaism in Memory of Samuel Sandmel*, Scholars Press, California 1984, 34-39.

<sup>40</sup> On this fascinating subject of Israel as a collective entity, perhaps predating the makranthropus idea of Adam Kadmon in later Kabbalah (in Mandaeism, too), see my "Jacob/Israel in the Prayer of Joseph as a collective, heavenly entity and its origins," στο συλλογικό, *Δίκαιον Ὁφλημα. Τιμητικός τόμος ἐπὶ τῇ πεντηκονταετηρίδι τοῦ Μητροπολίτου Καρυστίας καὶ Σκύρου κ.κ. Σεραφεῖμ*, ἔκδ. Ἰ. Μ. Καρυστίας καὶ Σκύρου, Ἀθήνα 2018, pp. 499-510.

<sup>41</sup> Philo, *De praemiis et poenis* 1.46.

contra the Biblical affirmation,<sup>42</sup> man can see God (though to Philo, only superior and elected men).<sup>43</sup>

Needless to say, the very nature of this experience is dubious and subject to an age-old discussion. What is more, the phenomenology of *unio mystica* in its various texts and instances presents a protean wealth of forms and types. Moshe Idel's views on the subject in his work *Ben: Sonship and Jewish Mysticism*<sup>44</sup> prove this fact beyond doubt. Not to mention that God in Philo is totally transcendental. It has been maintained, mostly by David Winston, that Philo's accounts (though not uniform at all) are the product of reasoning, analysis, and inference. In other words, it is deemed as an exquisite function of the mind, who rises high above creation and achieves this direct luminous vision.<sup>45</sup> Therefore, I must agree with Louth that Philo speaks rather more on the ecstatic element concerning the surely transcendental God than on mystical union *per se*.<sup>46</sup> On the other hand, I cannot agree completely with Stroumsa that, "The unio mystica, or rather the way leading to it, would usually be perceived, from now on, essentially through two different but combined metaphors. One is the metaphor of going up, or ascent, and one that of going inside, or interiorization."<sup>47</sup> At the same time, on the other hand, he is quite right when he writes that, "Yet in seeking to understand the religious praxis of late antique

---

<sup>42</sup> As it is stated, man cannot see God and live (Ex 33:20), for God is a consuming fire. On this subject in ancient Jewish texts, see Elliot R. Wolfson, *Through a Speculum that Shines: Vision and Imagination in Medieval Jewish Mysticism*, Princeton University Press 1994, 13-51.

<sup>43</sup> To Scott D. Mackie, the possibility of mystical union in Philo is "absent" or doubtful at best; see his "Seeing God in Philo of Alexandria: Means, Methods, and Mysticism," *Journal for the Study of Judaism* 43 (2012), 147-179.

<sup>44</sup> See M. Idel, *Ben: Sonship in Jewish Mysticism*, pp. 67-8, 301 (where he speaks of "intellectual *theosis*," his emphasis), 336, 599 (Idel links mystical union with the "Agent Intellect"). Idem, "Universalization and Integration: Two Conceptions of Mystical Union in Jewish Mysticism," in M. Idel, B. McGinn (eds), *Mystical Union and Monotheistic Faith, An Ecumenical Dialogue*, Continuum, New York 1989 27-58 (esp. 40-41). Also, Moshe Idel, *Ascensions on High in Jewish Mysticism: Pillars, Lines, Ladders*, Central European University Press, Budapest 2005, pp. 101-42.

<sup>45</sup> See Winston, *Logos and Mystical Theology in Philo of Alexandria*, 44 ff. and 50-55.

<sup>46</sup> Louth, *The Origins of Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys*, 33.

<sup>47</sup> Guy Stroumsa, *Hidden Wisdom: Esoteric Traditions and the Roots of Christian Mysticism*, 180-181.

Judaism, there is no reason a priori to ignore patterns of behavior or traditions of belief current in the *Umwelt* in which Judaism flourished.”<sup>48</sup>

It is almost predictable that by and large the Rabbis ignored Philo.<sup>49</sup> Perhaps he seemed too allegorical, too philosophical, mystical and/or too exposed to Hellenic and Hellenistic influences. After all, their aims and purposes were different: to form an almost bulletproof code of practical nomism according to the precepts of the Torah and keep Israel safe from Christians, Gnostics, and Gentiles. Therefore, it is no surprise that their treatment of the above-mentioned Biblical verses and the meaning of *dvq* (קִבְּד) is based on Gen 2:24<sup>50</sup> and on founding a kind of a marital relationship with God. Most importantly, clearly reflecting the spirit of the first centuries CE and the then Rabbinic Judaism (in formation), this relationship should be created via the Rabbis. As a projection of mAvot 1:1, they posed as the true heirs of the Mosaic Torah and the interpreters of His will on earth. Deut 4:4, 11:22, and 30:20, were all interpreted in this light. The tractate Kethubot 111b in the Babylonian Talmud provides ample evidence of this view. There the commandment to cling to God has the meaning of forming a familial relationship first among the community of Israel on earth and then, all together, with the Lord on high.<sup>51</sup> The potential of a *unio mystica* is non-existent to the Rabbis. To their view, as in many a case to Philo,<sup>52</sup> too, though communication with God was possible, actual union with Him was out of the question. Truly, here may lie one common mistake made by many in approaching these difficult passages: to be ecstatically absorbed in the vision of God is one thing, but to be in ontological union with Him is quite another.

---

<sup>48</sup> As above, 180.

<sup>49</sup> See what David Winston has to say in his “Philo and Rabbinic Literature,” in Adam Kamesar (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Philo*, Cambridge University Press 2009, 231-253.

<sup>50</sup> ἔνεκεν τούτου καταλείπει ἄνθρωπος τὸν πατέρα αὐτοῦ καὶ τὴν μητέρα αὐτοῦ καὶ προσκολληθήσεται [קִבְּד!] πρὸς τὴν γυναῖκα αὐτοῦ καὶ ἔσονται οἱ δύο εἰς σάρκα μίαν [דָּבָר אֶחָד וְאֶחָד].

<sup>51</sup> Interestingly enough, what the Rabbis proposed was the same kind of Philo’s inference and reasoning that led to mystical union, but only to the level of the people of Israel. According to their view, by fulfilling the commandments and following the precepts of the Sages the pious weaved a net of relationships and a living community that related to God.

<sup>52</sup> It is no secret that sometimes Philo seems to contradict himself. Even so, his work is vast and on various subjects and the reality of his mind and grasp of things seems to change and evolve.

Should one compare to the similar material in Teresa of Avila<sup>53</sup> or to Jan van Ruysbroeck, where “a union without distinction,” the difference with the commonly accepted today *unio mystica* (mostly, in Christian and Sufi mystics) is more than obvious.

Probably, Rabbi Akiva’s insistence to include Song of Songs among their sacred Scriptures showed back to Gen 2:24 and the formation of a close bond with God.<sup>54</sup> Most importantly, Akiva thinks of the Song of Songs as “the Holy of Holies” in the Torah.<sup>55</sup> Yet, though Gen 2:24 speaks of a man and a woman, Adam and Eve, united in one flesh (ἔσονται οἱ δύο εἰς σάρκα μίαν - וְהָיוּ לְבָשָׂר אֶחָד), it is not meant that they form another type of being (e.g., an androgynous one). Clearly, Gen 2:24 speaks for a very specific *carnal* union between two of His creatures, for a very specific reason,<sup>56</sup> and not for a union with God.<sup>57</sup> Still, there is no clear statement either from Akiva or from other rabbis that a *unio mystica with God* was possible. Even to Philo, as already mentioned, to know the essence of God or His inner being was impossible. Therefore, there is no ontological *henosis*. There is only revelation and reception. The higher one could reach was only a sublime visionary experience that He exists. One more noticeable element here is that in all relevant passages concerning mystical *theoria* in Philo the corporal and physical vehicles are absent. There

---

<sup>53</sup> See the description of rupture and ecstasis experienced by Teresa of Avila in her *The Life of Teresa of Jesus* (Doubleday, New York 1960, 190-193). Here the experience is violent, sudden, and overwhelming, as if she quits herself and immerses into God. That is why she uses the analogy of the sponge.

<sup>54</sup> It is an element that calls for closer examination, that in the Song of Songs the king/lover is actually absent. Yet, the bride is consumed by her love for him and constantly seeks for his presence. *It is his absence that sets alight her quest*. Given that God is both revealed (present and known) and unmanifest (transcendental and incomprehensible) at the same time in the Jewish texts, the modern scholar should ponder whether this idea played a role in the formation and development of *apophasis* and *apophatic* theology and praxis in mystical Christianity. Truly, both the bride in the Song and the mystic in his/her quest are after an *ap-ousia*, an absence they cannot live without.

<sup>55</sup> See mYadayim 3:5.

<sup>56</sup> To multiply and fill the earth; see Gen 1:22 and 28.

<sup>57</sup> Combined to the Song of Songs and Akiva’s statement, Gen 2:24 presents elements of ‘sacred marriage’ and perhaps that is the highest it may reach.

are no elements of bodily or angelic transformation in light and glory, as in Enochic and other apocalyptic or mystical texts.

In closing, though Gershom Scholem seemed to deny the existence of a total *unio mystica* in the *corpus* of mystical Judaism,<sup>58</sup> after his passing a lot seems to have changed. Ecstatic trends in Kabbalah and Hasidism called for more analysis. It should be noted that Winston is right that “the earliest application of the term *ekstasis* to mystical experience is in Plotinus,”<sup>59</sup> but he fails to see its full importance to the subject.<sup>60</sup> Certainly, Philo’s passage in *De praemiis et poenis* (1.43-46) seems

---

<sup>58</sup> What he actually said is somewhat different from what he is usually thought to have said, “only in extremely rare cases that ecstasy signifies actual union with God in which the human individuality abandons itself to the rapture of complete submersion in the divine stream.” So, he accepted some “rare cases” where “actual union” was possible in Jewish texts, though indeed he maintained that a certain “distance” remained between the two and God stayed out of human grasp (*Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism*, Schocken, New York 1961, pp. 122-123). Moshe Idel (*Kabbalah: New Perspectives*, 24) has been too critical about Scholem’s view, but I think he pushed this thesis to the extreme.

<sup>59</sup> David Winston, *Logos and Mystical Theology in Philo of Alexandria*, 53.

<sup>60</sup> Plotinus offers an amazing wealth of information on how he and his school saw the mystical *theoria* of God in *Enneads* 5.3.7.1-21: Ἀλλὰ τὸν θεὸν θεωρεῖ, εἵπομεν ἄν. Ἄλλ' εἰ τὸν θεὸν γινώσκειν αὐτὸν τις ὁμολογήσει, καὶ ταύτη συγχωρεῖν ἀναγκασθήσεται καὶ ἑαυτὸν γινώσκειν. Καὶ γὰρ ὅσα ἔχει παρ' ἐκείνου γνώσεται, καὶ ἃ ἔδωκε, καὶ ἃ δύναται ἐκεῖνος. Ταῦτα δὲ μαθὼν καὶ γνοῦς καὶ ταύτη ἑαυτὸν γνώσεται· καὶ γὰρ ἔν τι τῶν δοθέντων αὐτός, μᾶλλον δὲ πάντα τὰ δοθέντα αὐτός. Εἰ μὲν οὖν κάκεινο γνώσεται κατὰ τὰς δυνάμεις αὐτοῦ μαθὼν, καὶ ἑαυτὸν γνώσεται ἐκεῖθεν γενόμενος καὶ ἃ δύναται κομισάμενος· εἰ δὲ ἀδυνατήσῃ ἰδεῖν σαφῶς ἐκεῖνον, ἐπειδὴ τὸ ἰδεῖν ἴσως αὐτό ἐστὶ τὸ ὁρώμενον, ταύτη μάλιστα λέιποιτ' ἂν αὐτῷ ἰδεῖν ἑαυτὸν καὶ εἰδέναί, εἰ τὸ ἰδεῖν τοῦτό ἐστὶ τὸ αὐτὸ εἶναι τὸ ὁρώμενον. Τί γὰρ ἂν καὶ δοίημεν αὐτῷ ἄλλο; Ἡσυχίαν, νῆ Δία. Ἀλλὰ νῶ ἡσυχία οὐ νοῦ ἐστὶν ἔκστασις, ἀλλ' ἔστιν ἡσυχία τοῦ νοῦ σχολῆν ἄγουσα ἀπὸ τῶν ἄλλων ἐνέργεια· ἐπεὶ καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις, οἷς ἐστὶν ἡσυχία ἐτέρων, καταλείπεται ἢ αὐτῶν οἰκεία ἐνέργεια καὶ μάλιστα, οἷς τὸ εἶναι οὐ δυνάμει ἐστίν, ἀλλὰ ἐνεργείᾳ. Τὸ εἶναι οὖν ἐνέργεια, καὶ οὐδέν, πρὸς ὃ ἡ ἐνέργεια· πρὸς αὐτῷ ἄρα. Ἐαυτὸν ἄρα νοῦν οὕτω πρὸς αὐτῷ καὶ εἰς ἑαυτὸν τὴν ἐνέργειαν ἴσχει. Καὶ γὰρ εἴ τι ἐξ αὐτοῦ, τῷ εἰς αὐτὸν ἐν ἑαυτῷ. All emphasis is mine. Long before the Sufis and John of the Cross, Plotinus shows in very clear language the close relationship (if not identity, at some point) between the seer, the vision, and its object.

to have elements in common with Plotinus' *Enneads* (esp. 5.3.17<sup>61</sup> and 5.5.10<sup>62</sup>). Middle Platonism and other schools at that time have been detected as possible influencers.<sup>63</sup> Though they have been compared, Philo nowhere in his works reaches the clarity and directness of Plotinus concerning mystical union. When speaking about the seer and "the thing seen," Plotinus is lucid clear, "since they were not two, but the seer was one with what is seen, as though it was not being seen by him, but was unified with him, if he remembers who he became when he mingled with the One, then he will have in himself an image of it" (*Enneads* 6.9.11.5-8). It is only later, in Medieval Kabbalah, that types of union with God in Jewish texts will be clearer, more obvious and refined than Philo's passages.<sup>64</sup> As Elliot Wolfson has it, when writing on "the mystical conjunction facilitating the theurgical task" in later mystical Judaism, he thinks it "better to imagine a core experience of ecstasy with two facets: reintegration of the soul in the divine, and fusion of the sefirotic potencies into harmonious unity."<sup>65</sup> And it was only after the writings of Dionysius, where God became truly known by an apophatic process of *unknowing* Him, that this mystical union led to another peak; that of *theosis*.<sup>66</sup> And as

---

<sup>61</sup> "When she is illuminated, she has what she sought, and this is the soul's true goal: to make contact with that light and to see it by itself, not by the light of something else; to see that very thing through which it sees. For the means of its illumination is what the soul ought to see; we do not see the sun by the light of something else. How, then, can this come about? Abstract from everything." Notice that Plotinus makes use of the same metaphor of light and sun. Yet, the common ground is easier to be found in Middle-Platonism and Stoicism.

<sup>62</sup> "But think what it would be to grasp that which is in itself, pure, mixed with nothing, all things partaking in it, but nothing holding it."

<sup>63</sup> See what Winston has to say in his *Logos and Mystical Theology in Philo of Alexandria*, 44. Also, Louth, *The Origins of Christian Mystical Tradition: From Plato to Denys*, 20-21, 36-37 (where word on his vast dependence from Plato), 39 ff. (on soul's yearning for the One), and 46-47 (where soul's sudden rupture to the One, "Strictly speaking, in this ascent, the soul does not become nous, nor does nous become the One: it passes out of itself into the other").

<sup>64</sup> See for example the case of the ecstatic Abraham Abulafia in Moshe Idel, *Studies in Ecstatic Kabbalah*, SUNY Press 1988, 1-32.

<sup>65</sup> Elliot R. Wolfson, *Language, Eros, Being: Kabbalistic Hermeneutics and Poetic Imagination*, Fordham University Press 2006, 209.

<sup>66</sup> E.g., see Pseudo-Dionysius Areopagita, *De ecclesiastica hierarchia* 65.12; 83.23; 87.24.

is known, *theosis* was sometimes closely connected to *theurgy* – another heavily fortified term.

ISSN 2945-0683