Foreword

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The clues to answering age-old questions may turn out to be just as old as the questions themselves.

In this thought-provoking book, Shahar Arzy and Moshe Idel present compelling evidence that over hundreds of years, a group of mystics, collectively part of the Jewish Kabbalah, mastered techniques to probe and potentially unlock the secrets of human consciousness, mind and body, sense of self, and ecstatic experiences.

The substantial body of knowledge given to us by Kabbalah mystics and explored in this book complements and greatly expands upon insights to these phenomena from other sources. For instance, as the authors note, similar experiences have been spontaneously reported by people in the context of their epileptic seizures. The so-called ecstatic seizure became

widely known through the books of Fyodor Dostoevsky. In describing his own seizures, Dostoevsky said: “I experience such happiness as is impossible under ordinary conditions, and of which other people can have no notion. I feel complete harmony in myself and in the world and this feeling is so strong and sweet that for several seconds of such bliss one would give 10 years of one’s life, indeed perhaps one’s whole life” (as noted in *Dostoevsky: His Life and Art*, by Avrahm Yarmolinsky). Likewise, blissful states have been described in detail by non-Kabbalah practitioners of meditation.

With this immeasurably valuable treasure trove uncovered by the authors, will we, as they suggest, come closer to understanding these longstanding and beguiling issues? Can we indeed “decode the brain mechanisms and processes” by studying the mystics’ methods and experiences through the lenses of modern neurological and cognitive sciences and our own worldviews?

Perhaps so, though in keeping with Kabbalah teaching, it will require patience and diligence.