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# Oskar Goldberg on Kabbalah or Why We Should Not Become Frankists and Not Denigrate Fellow Scholars

[Translation of Chapter X, § 4–6 from \*The Reality of the Hebrews\*](#)

*For Keren A. Jung with gratitude for impeccable Service*

## Summary

The presented paper, in its gist, is intended to be a translation of a fragment of an important 20th century source, *The Reality of the Hebrews* by Oskar Goldberg (1885–1953). Goldberg’s work has largely been overlooked in the world of Jewish thought, quite likely due to a deliberate effort to stifle its influence; an effort whose motivations, moreover, have been personal and malicious. The translation is bracketed by a brief introduction and a comment in conclusion. Thus, the paper’s “sandwich structure” comprises three parts:

- 1) A brief introductory note presenting Gershom Scholem’s view of Oskar Goldberg’s ideas on Kabbalah<sup>1</sup> and what effect this view

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1 To mention only a few titles from the main literature on the subject in: English: B. Rosenstock, *Transfinite Life: Oskar Goldberg and the Vitalist Imagination*, Bloomington 2017; G. Smith, “Die Zauberjuden: Walter Benjamin, Gershom Scholem, and Other German-Jewish Esoterics between the World Wars”, [in:] *The Journal of Jewish Thought and Philosophy*, 1995, vol. 4, pp. 227–243; A. Krawczyk, “The Names, the Heights and the 26:

had on the negative pigeonholing and forgetting of Goldberg's research. I will refrain at this point from delving into presenting Scholem's biased perspective on Goldberg *ad personam*, and instead focus now only on the passages from the article in *Encyclopedia Judaica*<sup>2</sup> that deal with the latter's output.

- 2) An English translation of part of one chapter from Goldberg's *opus magnum*, *The Reality of the Hebrews* (original title: *Die Wirklichkeit der Hebräer*<sup>3</sup>) specifically addressing the exposition of the system of Kabbalah in contrast to the system of Torah. The fact that until today this book has not been translated into either Hebrew or English (and remains available only in German and Polish<sup>4</sup>) should be considered a scandalous situation. It is my hope that bringing forth a translation of this excerpt from the first section of chapter IX, "The Empirical Manifestations and Institutions" might inspire the world of Jewish thought – both independent scholars and representatives of academia – so that the project of a complete rendition of the whole book into Hebrew and English will no longer remain a mere idea, but become a realized fact<sup>5</sup>.

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Significance of Gematria Method. Further Findings on Gematria 26 Structures within the Torah", [in:] *Jewish History Quarterly* vol. 2 (278), Warsaw 2021, pp. 349–371; C. Labuschagne, *Numerical Secrets of the Bible*, North Richland Hills, 2000, pp. 111–116; M. Björk, *The Politics of Immortality in Rosenzweig, Barth and Goldberg*, London 2022.

German: M. Voigts, *Oskar Goldberg. Der mythische Experimentalwissenschaftler. Ein verdrängtes Kapitel jüdischer Geschichte*, Berlin 1992; O. Goldberg, *Zahlengebäude, Ontologie, Maimonides und Aufsätze 1933 bis 1947*, ed. Manfred Voigts, Würzburg 2013.

Polish: T. Sikora ["Life from Infinitude – differences between goldbergian and kabbalistic hermeneutics"], "Życie z bezkresu – różnica pomiędzy hermeneutyką kabalistyczną i goldbergowską", [in:] O. Goldberg, [*Die Fünf Bücher Moses: Ein Zahlengebäude – The Five Books of Moshe: The Numerical System*] *Pięcioksiąg Mojżeszowy jako system liczbowy. Ustalenie spójnego zapisu liczbowego*, Cracow 2018, transl. K. Hussar-Mizierska) pp. 97–107; T. Sikora ["Aliud valde – on the idea of Hebraism by Oskar Goldberg"], "Aliud valde – Wokół idei hebraizmu Oskara Goldberga", [in:] O. Goldberg, *Rzeczywistość Hebrajczyków* [*Die Wirklichkeit der Hebräer*], transl. T. Sikora, Kraków 2012, pp. I – XCIV.

French: R. Goetschel *Le rapport d'Oscar Goldberg à la Kabbale* [in:] <http://jec2.chez.com/archgoetchel.html> [last accessed 18.11.2024].

- 2 G. Scholem, "Oskar Goldberg", [in:] *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Jerusalem 1972, vol. 7, cols. 705–706.
- 3 O. Goldberg, *Die Wirklichkeit der Hebräer*, Berlin 1925, 2005 and the Polish edition: *Rzeczywistość Hebrajczyków*, tłum. T. Sikora, Cracow 2012.
- 4 There is an ongoing, advanced project to translate *The Reality of the Hebrews* to English. It was initiated by late Bruce Rosenstock and has been continued by Sam Langer and Hunter Bolin.
- 5 I would like to express the gratitude here to Sam Langer. His invaluable comments and corrections were in vast majority applied in this translation.

- 3) A conclusion that is mostly dedicated to summarizing Roland Goetschel's preface to the German re-edition of *The Reality of the Hebrews*, "The relationship of Oskar Goldberg to Kabbalah"<sup>6</sup>, as this source is strictly focused on the topic under discussion. Additionally, further views on Kabbalah, presented in *Maimonides*, another book by Goldberg, will be discussed.

### Introductory note

Gershom Scholem, in his copy of *The Reality of the Hebrews*, annotated the title page with his own subtitle for the book: "or why we should become Frankists"<sup>7</sup>. This prejudiced statement speaks for itself. The most severe flaw in Scholem's criticism of Goldberg's ideas is his misunderstanding of the latter's understanding of Kabbalah. Scholem notably labelled Goldberg's ideas as being "kabbalistic"<sup>8</sup> and "magical"<sup>9</sup>. He claims<sup>10</sup> that:

"...the kabbalistic origins of his [i.e. Goldberg's] thought are conspicuous<sup>11</sup> and Goldberg himself recognized this despite his attempts to define *specific differences between the spheres of Torah and that of Kabbalah*" (my emphasis).

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- 6 As mentioned, originally written in French. German and Polish versions are included in the 2005 and 2012 editions.
- 7 M. Voigts *O. Goldberg. Der mythische Experimentalwissenschaftler*, Berlin 1992, p. 314. Thus the subtitle of this paper acts as a retort to Scholem's quite unjust private comment.
- 8 As if Goldberg was allegedly some pseudo-kabbalist and not the scholar, among others, of Kabbalah.
- 9 In Scholem's brief article in EJ, the epithet "magical" in relation to Goldberg appears 7 (!) times, obviously an attempt to stigmatize him. If one wished to criticise Goldberg from this direction, it would be much more correct to state that he strongly accentuated the meaning of the Hebrew ritual, including its theurgical (not magical!) components – Hebrew theurgy, on Oscar Goldberg's account, being the process of drawing down YKVK's Presence (*Shechinah*) to dwell among His people. Yet even this line of critique was already acutely refuted by Franz Rosenzweig in his reply to Scholem's famous *Letter to Rosa Okun* (23.8.1928). F. Rosenzweig, *Gesammelte Schriften*, v. 1, Den Haag 1976, p. 1200: "I find again in [Scholem's] *Letter on Goldberg* all his weaknesses, and although he [Scholem] is over thirty now, unfortunately one has to say: [this shows] all his *abstract culture's* weaknesses. It [i.e. the letter] consists of four pages of scolding (meaningless content accompanied with puffed up face) and, at the end, there is one page, where he says, what he thinks. Unfortunately, one can see that, basically, he has no idea about anything else but the commonly known liberal ideology. If "ritual" and "good" could be divided so smoothly in the Bible, then truly, there would not be any Goldberg, but all the more there would not be any Judaism".
- 10 G. Scholem, *op. cit.* Emphases mine.
- 11 Scholem consciously ignores the contradictory opinions that he himself states in this single sentence. In fact, Goldberg distinguishes between the Kabbalah and the Torah but is also self-aware that Kabbalists used the lore of the Torah to explain the Torah itself in their own language. These topics are far more complex and entwined than Scholem would like to have in this simplistic, coining statement.

There are two claims here that need explanation:

- 1) In his article on Goldberg in the *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Scholem does not provide any sources for his allegation that Goldberg would agree that the ontological and other dimensions of his output have kabbalistic sources. On the contrary, it is Goldberg who, in his other major study, *Maimonides*, reflects on his own position and provides thorough analysis of own [i.e. Goldberg's] thought to refute potential accusations of "being pseudo-kabbalist himself". We can only pose the question now, before reading Goldberg's text, whether plain similarity in some general areas of terminology and vocabulary necessarily means that it is rooted in Kabbalah lore, as Scholem wants to argue.
- 2) A review of the specific differences between Torah and Kabbalah precisely comprises the content of chapter IX of *The Reality of the Hebrews*. The text consists not only of "attempts to define specific differences", as Scholem put it, but it is a full-fledged elaboration of a unique perspective on this question, which deserves far more attention than biased, abbreviated note.

The excerpt below contains some ideas that Goldberg discusses in preceding chapters of the book. Within the framework of this paper it is not possible to elucidate all of them, therefore I restricted myself to briefly indicate the meaning of specific terms and perspectives, whenever I found it crucial and helpful for the understanding of Goldberg's argument. For a deeper understanding I would invite the reader to refer to the mentioned literature on Goldberg and consult with the German (or Polish) complete texts.

Chapter IX<sup>12</sup>The Empirical Manifestations and InstitutionsPart APeople – IndividualParagraphs 4–64.

The type of a man called *gibor*, the owner of the *shem*<sup>13</sup>, “the mighty individual”, by all means does not disappear after the Flood<sup>14</sup>. Of course, this is the case because the formation of the peoples [*Völker*]<sup>15</sup> only begins a f t e r the Flood. Initially only three fathers of the races exist: Shem, Cham and Yaphet. They themselves are also “individuals”, as they are presented as the possessors of the potential p r e c e d - i n g the [formation of the] peoples. It is from these [predecessors, also known as] race-individuals, that the tribal patriarchs stem, and afterwards specific p e o p l e s develop (in subsequent configurations of the elements of the world: spirit, matter and the biological category – see above<sup>16</sup>). The patriarchs of the g r o u p s of the

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- 12 My translation is of the first German edition, published in 1925, Berlin, and now in the public domain: <https://sammlungen.ub.uni-frankfurt.de/freimann/content/titleinfo/6995542>. I also extensively drew on the Polish translation by Tomasz Sikora, published in Cracow in 2012. Nevertheless, different translational solutions and amendments of Goldberg’s transliteration and footnotes were quite often applied. The original textual distinctions were kept; however, some words and terms are written in capital letters, unlike in the German version. I also introduced the Hebrew system for the notation of Tanach verses in place of the Latin one.
- 13 The category of *shem* in Goldberg’s thought is pivotal for an understanding of the “human-deity” relationship. In chapter II of *Wirklichkeit*, Goldberg defines it the following way: “The word *shem*, which is usually translated as “the name”, is closely related to *shamaim* – “world”, “heaven”, and also to the term related to the direction *sham* – “there”, and the verb *sum* – “to introduce”, [*sim*] “to place”, “to lay”: it stems from the root *shamam*, which means “to coagulate, [to harden, to concentrate, to thicken]”, “to crystallize”. In ancient Hebrew, *shem* denotes “the point of crystallization” – the system. By *shem* one understands the whole system of the relationship of people to deity, i.e., the relationship of the centre, that is, of the deity, with its peripheries, the people. *Die Wirklichkeit...* p. 19 [translator’s note].
- 14 In the previous three paragraphs of chapter IX, Goldberg explains how Torah distinguishes between the realities preceding and coming after the Flood, especially in reference to “man-deities” types of relationships and the ritual forms of communication between the two subjects [translator’s note].
- 15 The best possible translation of German term *Völker* is “peoples”, though in English it might sound awkward. Translation to “nations” would be misleading [translator’s note].
- 16 Goldberg refers here to chapter I, where he discusses ontological axioms [translator’s note].

peoples are [still] mingled as far as the substance of peoples and elohim<sup>17</sup> are concerned. [This remains so] until the decomposition of the pre-racial potential is fully completed, that is, till the perfect differentiation of elohim and the allocation of the parts of the Earth is finished<sup>18</sup> – a process that is known in Torah by the term *hafradah*<sup>19</sup>. It follows from this, that the “the mighty individuals” appear for as long as the peoples are being formed. The emergence of new peoples continues to occur even into a relatively late period: thus Lot “separates himself” (*parad*) from Avraham<sup>20</sup> in order to search for his own place for settlement, where afterwards he begets his sons, Amon and Moav<sup>21</sup>. The Arameans, in whom both Lot and Avraham are included<sup>22</sup>, are family of peoples that continues to be subject to differentiation even in the most recent<sup>23</sup> times<sup>24</sup>. However, especially after establishing the Hebrew people, the new *Reshit*<sup>25</sup> begins, namely the new period of the formation of the peoples, during which for example Edom, Amalek and others emerge.

Through the stabilisation of the Semitic race, Elokim YKVK initially achieved the established existence of the metaphysical direction related to Him. Namely, it is the direction of His Shem (compare the name Shem<sup>26</sup>), which by itself would never lead to the creation of “the people of YKVK”, because this could never be reached through gradual, continuous development – as was explained above<sup>27</sup>. Therefore, establishing the semitic race has some advantages and disadvantages for the metaphysics of “the Y-force”<sup>28</sup>: the advantage is that the transcendent background that lies as the basis of the metaphysics that we should call “the Semitic one”, differs completely from the metaphysics characterized necessarily as “Chamitic” and “Yaphetic”. In other words, from this moment Elokim YKVK once and for all releases Himself from the relationship with elohim of Chamites and Yaphetites, to which perforce until now He was bound to

17 Goldberg uses this term here and in most of the book to designate “gods” [translator’s note].

18 Goldberg refers here to the equation “People = Deities = World = Lands”, presented in chapter II. He stresses that particular people and deity are bound to particular land [translator’s note].

19 *Devarim* 32:8.

20 *Bereshit* 13:9–11.

21 *Bereshit* 19:30–38.

22 *Bereshit* 26:5, 22:20–23, 25:20, 13:8b, 11:31.

23 “Recent” in comparison to the times of Avraham, according to the history presented in Torah [translator’s note].

24 Compare the Aramean genealogy in *Bereshit* 22:20–24 and 10:22–23; further (partially later) ramification to: Aram Naharayim, Damesek, Maachah, Zova, Beit Rechov.

25 *Bamidbar* 24:20. *Reshit* being the “initiation point” [translator’s note].

26 *Bereshit* 9:26a.

27 In chapter VII of “The Reality of the Hebrews”, entitled “Special position of the Hebrews in the equation: people = god”, Goldberg discusses the special aspect of relationship of YKVK and the Hebrew people, in contrast to relationships between other elohim and other peoples. Hebrew people are “established”, whereas other people are “created” [translator’s note].

28 Original: “I-Kraft”. By „the Y-force” Goldberg means the metaphysics of YKVK. Again, thanks to Sam Langer for advising on the best rendering of this peculiar expression [translator’s note].

in “transcendentally-dynamic” way. It has however also this *d i s a d v a n t a g e* that Elokim YKVK remains still all the time the God of *a l l* Semites, that is, He is both Elokim of *S h e m*<sup>29</sup> and of the Aramean *B i l e a m*<sup>30</sup>, a fact that Torah clearly emphasizes. Elokim YKVK is therefore within the framework of the Semitic race – until the comprehensive differentiation of the peoples is complete – all the time still bound to the complex of *elohim*, that belong to the metaphysical direction of “Semitism as such”. Translated into dynamic terms, just as one must differentiate between the Hebrew “race”, that is nothing else (however important) but a sub-group of Semitic race, and the Hebrew “people”, so there must also be a cardinal contradiction between the metaphysics of “the race” and the metaphysics of the Hebrew “people” – despite the initial common metaphysical point of departure (“descending from Shem”). *T o r a h* contains the metaphysics of the Hebrew *p e o p l e*, whereas the metaphysics of the Hebrews as *a r a c e* is *K a b b a l a h*.

## 5.

The so-called Kabbalah (contrary to the known, childish concept that it supposedly “emerged suddenly and randomly several centuries ago”<sup>31</sup>) in its specific constituents is much older than Torah, which presents itself as *a p r o t e s t* action against the former. Its first exponents, Shem and Ever<sup>32</sup>, are the two “mighty individuals” of the Semitic and Hebrew race at the same time. As the tradition states, even in the times preceding Avraham, their metaphysical schools<sup>33</sup>, *batei midrashim* – that is “houses of scholarly research”, where the metaphysics of *Shem* YKVK (in the *p r e -* avrahamic, that is “Hebrew in terms of race” sense) was practiced. Torah explicitly speaks about it as a fact that indeed such “schools” existed: when Rivkah started to feel birth pangs before delivering Yaakov and Esau, she “went to ask YKVK”<sup>34</sup>. Therefore, there must have been at that time places – also *a p a r t* *f r o m* [the dwellings of] the patriarchs Avraham and Yitzchak – where one would be able “to ask YKVK”. However, it did not last for too long in such a peaceful manner. In the times of Moshe, the Semitic metaphysics turns against the metaphysics specific to the Hebrew *p e o p l e*, when the mages, “Hebrews according to the race” (namely, Arameans) attack “Hebrews according to the people” (namely, the people of Israel), in a life-or-death struggle. *B i l e a m* – whose identity is easy to recognize from his name, because it means “[the man] without people”, that is: “the individual”. The very word consists of the elements: *bal* or *bli*, “without, no” and *am*, “people”. He is the sorcerer from the city of dream interpreters, *Patar*,<sup>35</sup> next to the river Euphrates (*patar* means “to interpret a dream”) , being “the individual”

29 *Bereshit* 9:26a

30 *Bamidbar* 22:18.

31 Goldberg implicitly hints here at the concept promoted also by Scholem. We thus see how sharp is the opposition between Goldberg’s *meta-historical* and Scholem’s *historical* point of view on Kabbalah [translator’s note].

32 *Bereshit* 10:21–24.

33 See Rashi’s commentary to *Bereshit* 25:22.

34 *Bereshit* 25:22.

35 *Devarim* 23:5.

without people, whose power lies in the abovementioned potency p r e c e d i n g the [emergence of the] people. He is hired by the (authentic) people of Moav and Midian in order to be further brought forth to the metaphysical test of power against the Hebrew people<sup>36</sup>. The underlying assumption behind this experiment had the following basis:

firstly – initially, Avraham was himself an Aramean<sup>37</sup>,  
secondly – both Midian<sup>38</sup> and Moav<sup>39</sup> are also peoples that emerged from the Aramean-Hebrew race,  
thirdly – because the Aramean race was still branching off into different peoples<sup>40</sup>,  
and fourthly – because Bileam, as an Aramean<sup>41</sup>, was also able to operate with the *Shem* of YKVK<sup>42</sup>.

The war between Bileam and the Hebrew people should be therefore regarded as an act of confrontation of two metaphysical methods: namely, Kabbalah (in its broad and correctly understood sense) and Torah. The metaphysics of the Hebrews emerges victorious out of this struggle<sup>43</sup>.

## 6.

Torah, in comparison to Kabbalah, presents the following features:

1. The ancient term *Kabbalah*, which means “receiving”, stems from the fact that the metaphysics of the s i n g l e “individual” who is in possession of the might [*Dynamis*], is “transferred” to someone e l s e or is “placed upon” him. It means that always whenever the origination [*Urzeugung*]<sup>44</sup> does not take place, the following rule still applies: *omne vivum ex vivo*, “all that is alive stems from another

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36 *Bamidbar* 22–24.

37 Goldberg refers here to page 117, footnote 4 of his book of the German edition, however it seems to be a mistake. The topic of Avraham’s transition from Aramaean heritage to establishing the Hebrew lineage is discussed on page 79, footnote 4. Polish edition does not amend this mistake [translator’s note].

38 *Bereshit* 25:2.

39 Plausibly amended reference to page 211, footnote 4 of the German edition, where the topic of Moav is discussed. Polish edition does not amend this mistake [translator’s note]

40 Plausibly amended reference to page 211, footnote 8 of the German edition, where the Lot’s progeny is discussed. Polish edition does not amend this mistake [translator’s note].

41 *Devarim* 23:5.

42 *Bamidbar* 22:18.

43 *Bamidbar* 24:10, 31:8.

44 Goldberg refers here to the concept discussed for the first time in chapter IV. Origination, or as the Polish translator proposed, *abiogenesis*, is understood as tool of particular elohim to expand its power within the realm of biology. Goldberg makes sharp distinction between Elokim YKVK, who acts against the origination (by means of annihilating the previous forms of life through the enactment of the Flood) and other elohim, who are dependent on it and attempt continuously to expand it [translator’s note].

alive being”. Therefore, within the framework of metaphysics, the [analogous] rule applies to the Kabbalah: since once “the metaphysical origination” took place, for example in the form of the act of establishing a new race, then the metaphysical potency of the founder of that race (e.g. Shem) can only come forward a n e w as long as it will be either t r a n s f e r r e d in the continuity of the genealogical chain (that occurs through descent and birth) or t a k e n o v e r from such “mighty individual” by some less talented member of the race. Admittedly, the metaphysics of Torah also involves the processes of establishing and transfer, however – as we will present it further – the system of t h e e s t a b l i s h e d people (contrary to the developmental process of t h e s e l f - - g e n e r a t e d , [created] people) represents an endeavour oriented towards the f u t u r e and its p r i m a r y construction provides not only the capacity to sustain, but also to produce and augment the force [*Dynamis*]<sup>45</sup>.

2. Being the metaphysics of the i n d i v i d u a l , Kabbalah must be therefore a methodology of the i n n e r world, contrary to the metaphysics of the people, which constitutes a technique related to the e x t e r n a l world. Kabbalah corresponds to t h e e s o t e r i c , Torah corresponds to t h e e x o t e r i c . It follows that all the realm of “esoteric” means and “magical” operations is n o t included in Torah, constituting rather an aspect of “the Kabbalah” within the Semitic metaphysics.

3. These “mighty individuals” are comparable to some extent with the great capitalists, who c a n give away to others a part of their capital, but – apart from “moral motivations” – they do not by any means have to do so. “Morality” – without any pressure of [vital] interests – is also not binding on the already mentioned “individuals”: the totality of all the fellow members of their race has no benefit from their might, because it is “egoistic” in nature. And here lies the difference between “the metaphysically potent individual”, the kabbalistic magus, and t h e p r o p h e t of Torah. Whereas the “individuals” are the prominent representatives of the genealogical chain – they are wealthy metaphysical “aristocrats” – the prophet is perforce “a man from the folk”, because he “operates” with the transcendent powers of t h e p e o p l e and therefore he draws his own force from the people, for which he himself is a dynamic equivalent. Thus, “the altruism” of prophecy relies on the mutual, multi-faced relationship of the prophet and the people: the prophet, who dynamically n e e d s the people, is not only bound to make it “useful” or to ensure that it is fit [to perform service for Elohim], but he is also compelled to let the people p a r t i c i p a t e in the empirical forms of expression that his (i.e., the prophet’s) transcendental might [*Macht*] receives. Consequently, the prophet always g o e s a m o n g the people, whereas the magus i s o l a t e s h i m - s e l f from the people<sup>46</sup>.

45 See above the information about “Y-force”. The Hebrew term that is in the background is *kavod*, that should not be rendered as “glory” [translator’s note].

46 Compare *Pirke Avot* 2:4: “Hillel says: Do not separate yourself from the community”. Thanks to Sam Langer for pointing this obvious connotation [translator’s note].

4. As mentioned above, since “the mighty individuals” of a race should be regarded as the outstanding persons in the genealogical chain and thus as centres of accumulation of *m a n y* *elohim*<sup>47</sup> – this has the result that the *Shem* Elohim YKVK, transcendently-dynamically related to *shemot* of “the other” *elohim* of the Semitic race, cannot express Himself in a pure fashion. It is thus clear that as long as Elohim YKVK finds Himself in the realm of “Semitism”, His *Shem* perforce remains *c o n t a m i n a t e d*. It is therefore in this vein that we should interpret the old tradition that notices [peculiar notion] in reference to the information that (because of Icchak) Avraham sent the sons of all the wives (other than Sarah) to the East, with “the gifts”<sup>48</sup>. [These gifts] were in fact *shem tumah*, that is: “*shem* of impurity”<sup>49</sup>. Contrary to Torah, the task of which is to obtain the pure *Shem* of Elohim YKVK, the roots of Kabbalah are in this *e n t a n g l e m e n t* of *shemot* (that is: *t h e s y s t e m s o f r e a l i t y*), which stems from the antediluvian “state of mixture of *elohim*”. Therefore, Kabbalah in its true meaning of the term constitutes the “pre-Flood” method of dealing with the *shem*. Consequently, one must state that just as there is a sphere of undifferentiation between “the people” and “the individual”, so, too, exist the same sphere between “Kabbalah” and “Torah”. These two spheres of undifferentiation come together in the person of Avraham (under other conditions also in the person of Eliyahu). Within the collection of the so-called kabbalistic texts kept by the tradition, *Sefer Yetzira* [“The Book of Formation”]<sup>50</sup> occupies a unique place, because it belongs neither to the typical Kabbalah nor to the metaphysics of Torah – thus it stands as it were somewhere in between them. Accordingly, the historical attribution of the system described therein to Avraham is intrinsically justified.

5. The means of power of the kabbalistic metaphysics is, as before the Flood, an act of coercing the gods, namely what gets falsely and vulgarly termed as “*p r a y e r*”. The so called “prayer” – which can be understood as “plea” and “seeking mercy” only within the framework of the world religions – is not in the least a harmless institution. One should recall that in [religions of] Hindu people the term “prayer” means *c o n j u r a t i o n a s s u c h*, and is regarded as “the topmost deity”, identified with *B r a h m a*. This way the conjuring is equalled to “the primordial point [of the origin] of gods”. Similarly, also in Torah, the terms that are falsely and vulgarly recognised as the words related to [the concept of] “prayer” do not bear the meaning of “plea”, but rather of “setting oneself in connection” and “penetrating”. The word *tfilah* comes from the two-letter root *p – l*, to which – due to its polarisation – the primary meaning of “to divide – to join” is assigned. Also, the form *palah* means “*t o s e p a r a t e*” (see above<sup>51</sup>), whereas

47 Goldberg refers here to the concept presented at the beginning of chapter IX [translator’s note].

48 *Bereshit* 25:6.

49 See Rashi’s commentary to *Bereshit* 25:6.

50 For the critical edition of this book, see: *Sefer Yetzira – Edition, Translation and Text-Critical Commentary*, transl. and ed. P. Hayman, Tübingen 2004 [translator’s note].

51 Goldberg does not specify where exactly earlier he discusses the topic of the root *palah* [translator’s note].

*palal* means “to j o i n , t o b i n d ”. Regarding the second meaning, we have already brought forth [above] the key fragment, where Eli speaks to his sons<sup>52</sup>: “if a man fails regarding another man (or: commits a fault towards another man), *up-ilelo elohim*, which means: then the elohim (meaning: “the judge”) would b i n d him with that other [man] (or: would s e p a r a t e one from another, depending on the nature of “the fault”); however, if someone fails towards YKVK (then there is no other superseding instance in rank that could compensate it), who would be willing to ‘ c o n n e c t ’ himself instead of that man?”, which means, the one who would be willing to substitute him, would a l s o be compelled to take over his fault. Therefore, *plilim* constitute the acts of a judge, who – depending on the circumstances – reconciles or separates both sides [at the court]. Thus, the verb *palal* means “to decide something oneself (to perform an experiment on oneself<sup>53</sup>), “to consider some decision as possible”<sup>54</sup>, “to c a u s e e f f e c t i v e l y s o m e c o n c l u s i o n t o h a p p e n”<sup>55</sup>. [Reflective] form of a verb *hitpalel* (that appears with *el-YKVK*, which means: “oriented towards YKVK”) in fact designates “to join or to separate oneself from Elohim”. (Analogous meaning – though of more intimate overtone – has the verb *hitchanen*<sup>56</sup>, “to join with Elohim in order to receive some sort of m e s s a g e ”, especially in the sense of positive resolution).

Much stronger meaning bear the terms *atar* [*ayin – tav – resh*] and *chul*. In reference to *atar*, it means “to aggregate”, “t o m u l t i p l y ” (and from here the form in *hiphil*) – it constitutes originally the old-Hebrew verb “to intensify” – in fact, it designates the dynamic, forceful act (for example, the application of t h e s a m e w o r d , namely the utterance of *Shem* – [which constitutes] “the metaphysics of the language” [see above]<sup>57</sup>) – [the utterance act] repeated so many times till it achieves the successful result. This strong expression is essentially used during the war with Mitzraim<sup>58</sup> (in case of the so-called “ten plagues”<sup>59</sup>), when the unleashed attack (“the plague”) needs to b e s t o p p e d . Achieving this involved from Moshe to perform specific metaphysical contraction (similarly, when one needs to suddenly tame the furious outbreak of some “force of nature”). However, the strongest term is the word *chul*. The root *ch – l* appears in forms: *chalal*, *chul*, *chil*, *yachal*. It should be ascribed with the fundamental meaning of “performing a spiral or circular movement”. Therefore, *chazor chalilah*<sup>60</sup> means “to turn in a circle”, *chalal*<sup>61</sup> “to pierce through [with a drilling movement of the sword]”, *lachul bamechalelot*<sup>62</sup>,

52 *1 Shmuel* 2:25.

53 *Devarim* 32:31.

54 *Bereshit* 48:11.

55 *Tehilim* 106:30.

56 *Devarim* 3:23.

57 Goldberg refers here to previous analysis of the Hebrew language, presented in chapter II:7 [[translator’s note].

58 Goldberg uses the term “Egypt”, but since we apply consequently the transcript according to Hebrew original, the emendation was made [translator’s note].

59 *Shemot* 8:4–5, 24–26, etc.

60 *The Book of Yetzilah*, chapter 2.

61 *Bamidbar* 19:16.

62 *Shoftim* 21:21.

„to dance in circles”, (*mecholelot*<sup>63</sup>, “female dancers”). From here stems the most crucial meaning: “to set the organism in rotative motion”. In such sense this root denotes: “to writhe in labor pains”<sup>64</sup>, “to assist someone in labor, set something into circulation” (for example: an animal<sup>65</sup>, people<sup>66</sup>, land<sup>67</sup>). Further meanings go forth from here: to be in bodily crisis, for example *chalah*<sup>68</sup>, “to become sick”, *chil*<sup>69</sup>, “to tremble”, *hitchalchal*<sup>70</sup>, “to get scared”, but also – as a result of verb’s polarisation – “to be strong”<sup>71</sup>, “to be healthy”<sup>72</sup>; and further: “to be in a state of tension”, “to gain momentum”, for example: *yachal*, “to wait”<sup>73</sup>, *chalal*, “to commence”<sup>74</sup> (*techilah*<sup>75</sup>, “the beginning”), or also: “to be relaxed”, for example: *chalal* (*chilel*), “to release”, “to dissolve”, “to foul up”<sup>76</sup>. [This root occurs also] in the meaning of setting in motion the t r a n s c e n d e n t organism, thus in the political meaning: *asah chayil*<sup>77</sup>, “to cause a crisis within the people” (*chil*<sup>78</sup>, “crisis”), and from here further *chayil*<sup>79</sup>, “people in motion”, “the army”. Therefore, as Torah states, when – after the Golden Calf is cast – Moshe intercedes for the people and during this process he acts radically towards the both sides – by destroying the tablets, sentencing to death the guilty ones and resigning from his service to YKVK<sup>80</sup> – he says the following: *va-yechal (...) et pnei YKVK*<sup>81</sup>. These words [in reference to Moshe] do not mean “he pleaded”, but rather “he set it” (that is the *panim*, [“the presence”]) – he set the plane of YKVK in motion. It is the strongest thing one can say in this context and at the same time t h e o n l y place in Torah, where such word appears in such form and meaning (it is so, because Torah constantly retains the intuition of the etymological meaning of this e x p r e s s i o n , for example, in comparison to the already faded, metaphorical usage in which the term *chilah* is applied in the later literature). All in all, Torah does not speak at all about any “prayer”, but about putting everything at stake and demanding to test all of the sphere of transcendence.

It thus becomes clear, that in the later development of Kabbalah, the prayer of “the individual” obtains decisive meaning: the prayer becomes a substitute for the conjuration – the latter being the necessary metaphysical means of power a s l o n g as the period of “Kabbalah” (that is the time p r e c e d i n g [the

63 *Shoftim* 21:23.

64 *Yeshayahu* 13:8; 23:4.

65 *Tehilim* 29:9.

66 *Devarim* 32:18.

67 *Yeshayahu* 66:8; *Tehilim* 114:7.

68 *Bereshit* 48:1.

69 *Tehilim* 96:9.

70 *Ester* 4:4.

71 *Tehilim* 10:5.

72 *Iyov* 20:21.

73 *Bereshit* 8:10; 2 *Malachim* 6:33.

74 *Bereshit* 44:12.

75 *Bereshit* 13:3.

76 *Bamidbar* 30:3; *Vayikra* 21:6; *Bereshit* 18:25.

77 *Bamidbar* 24:18.

78 *Shemot* 15:14.

79 *Shemot* 14:9.

80 *Shemot* 32:32.

81 *Shemot* 32:11.

emergence] of the potential of the people) lasts. It continues up to the moment, when as the final result of the process of segregation and differentiation [*Entmischungsprozess*], “the people” emerge. For only with the emergence of “the people” that remains in contact with t h e o n e deity<sup>82</sup> (alternatively, with one correlated complex of several elohim] can particular god “develop” himself within the people, namely, to [proportionally] distribute himself therein, and in such manner that all the people – all this “multitude” – becomes the basis for the action or “the field of power” of the god. However, as long as the people, that is, the perfect organism (for only with [the people] the fundamental function of “regular” organism can be initiated – here we mean the process of “breeding/proliferation”) is yet not present, but instead the race (that denotes the state of entanglement – being still the result of antagonistic factors) exists, so long there is only an organism that “remains in the state of [inner] conflict”, that must be ruled over via “the metaphysical therapy of its organs”, i.e. via acts of c o n j u r i n g . Following further this path [of reasoning], the prayer constitutes therefore the complete surrogate of t h e o f f e r i n g , which – as far as it remains as the centralized, public institution – is combined with the institution of t h e p e o p l e . In later kabbalistic literature, the general Semitic origin [of the prayer] can be recognised – even if only feebly. Both in the accentuation of the existence of “the other side of godhead” and in “the erotic aspect” present in numerous kabbalistic writings, both in the topic of “prayer” and in “coercing of gods” – one can see repeatedly the reemergence of the “state of entanglement of elohim”<sup>83</sup>. Contrary to this state of affairs, Torah d o e s n o t k n o w such “service of prayer”, because it has a private and an inward character. However, Torah does know its opposite: t h e s a c r i f i c i a l s e r v i c e o f a l l t h e p e o p l e , that is oriented outwards.

6. Kabbalah is therefore a n e s o t e r i c i s m . It means that the metaphysical powers that are crucial for the Kabbalah, being related only to “the individual”, serve only for the sake of p e r f e c t i o n i n g o f t h e i n d i v i d u a l . Even the latest (and already oriented towards “the ethics”) branch of the Kabbalah, i.e. the Chassidism, presents clear tendency towards “the individual upbringing and cleansing of the soul”. It is thus apparent that the Kabbalah is completely a p o l i t i c a l and does not know the notion of “the institution of the people”. In opposition to [Kabbalah] one finds t h e m e t a p h y s i c a l e x o t e r i c i s m in Torah. It means that the powers described in Torah are related to the people and serve one mean – to provide the people with the c o r p o r e a l , transcendental p o l i t i c a l might. For this reason, the old-Hebrew i n s t i t u t i o n s o f t h e p e o p l e emerged – which will be the topic of the following [chapter]<sup>84</sup>.

82 Here Goldberg speaks about any deity and any people, though his argument is later perforce applicable to YKVK and the Hebrew people *par excellence* [translator’s note].

83 Here Goldberg mentions several key topics of the theurgical/theosophic Kabbalah, obviously referring to the zoharic literature [translator’s note].

84 See also *Maimonides, op. cit.* p. 192 [in:]: O. Goldberg, *Zahlengebäude, Ontologie, Maimonides und Aufsätze 1933 bis 1947*, ed. Manfred Voigts, Würzburg 2013.

## Conclusion

One can easily judge – in comparison with Scholem’s over-simplifying, abbreviated and prejudiced sketch – that Goldberg’s concept of Kabbalah, especially in opposition to many prevailing perspectives, both scholarly and inner-religious (and to some measure – complementary, coexistent, in complex relationship), is quite unique and hardly comparable to any other output whether in the self-declaredly kabbalistic literature or among scholarly perspectives. One can oppose or agree with what Goldberg presents, but it is hardly reasonable to refuse him the dignity of presentation. Roland Goetschel’s summary does do justice, to some extent, to the uniqueness of Goldberg’s thought; yet in trying to pigeonhole the general theme of *The Reality of the Hebrews* by calling it “some sort of neo-sadduceism or neo-karaimism”<sup>85</sup>, he seemingly makes the same error as Scholem, namely forcing into an oversimplified frame a very sophisticated and precise system of thought. Still, one cannot accuse Goetschel of an unjust or prejudiced approach to Goldberg.

First of all, Goldberg’s first book, *The Five Books of Moshe – The Numerical System*<sup>86</sup> cannot be considered a “kabbalistic” work, though it is obviously inspired at least by Tur’s (r. Yaakov ben Asher, c. 1270–1340) *Baal ha-Turim*<sup>87</sup> and Ramban’s *Perush al ha-Torah* commentaries. The fact that Goldberg had found in Torah some complex numerical structures that are much more elaborate than simple *gematria* equations, does not necessarily make this rather analytical and arithmetical output a part of the literature typical of the kabbalistic lore. In short – *gematria* is not intrinsically kabbalistic hermeneutical technique – it is inherently present in Hebrew language and in Torah, *per se*.

Secondly, the differentiation between the Kabbalah as a mode of the Hebrew race and Torah as a mode of the Hebrew people does not mean the separation of the two – as Goldberg explains, both are perforce intermingled, because the Hebrew people, from the biological perspective, constitute a part of the Hebrew race. The key symbolic person here is the forefather Avraham<sup>88</sup> – in him both Kabbalah and Torah unite, emerge, and begin to run in parallel, yet never fully detaching one from another. What is important for Goldberg is to show that even if this situation is inherited, Kabbalah has other goals than Torah. In Kabbalah – to simplify in the

85 R. Goetschel, *op. cit.*, <http://jec2.chez.com/archgoetchel.html>. “Ainsi le voit-on opposer successivement Pentateuque et Bible, Pentateuque et Talmud, Pentateuque et kabbale ce qui pris à la lettre identifierait le judaïsme de Goldberg à une sorte de néo-sadducéisme ou de néo-caraimisme”.

86 O. Goldberg, *Die Fünf Bücher Mosis – Ein Zahlengebäude*, Berlin 1908, Polish edition: Cracow 2018, English edition: Hamburg 2025. One needs to realize that Goldberg finished writing this book in 1903 at the age of 18 (!). Similarly, regarding *The Reality of the Hebrews* it is claimed that its content is based on a series of lectures that he delivered till the year 1908, when he was 23 years old.

87 O. Goldberg, “Zur Einleitung in den Baal ha-Turim. Die Zahlenmystik eines großen Talmudisten. Zum Andenken an Bernhard Mayer” [in:] *Zahlengebäude, Ontologie, Maimonides und Aufsätze 1933 bis 1947*, ed. M. Voigts, Berlin 1946/2013, pp. 345–349.

88 See above in the paragraph 6.4 of the translated fragment.

extreme for the sake of the discussion – the aim is at balanced harmonising and unification of the polarised world of oppositions. In Torah – the orientation is for the future goal of complete victory of Elokim YKVK: “Torah teaches that balance is indeed harmony and harmony is beauty – alas, beauty does not constitute justice, and for Torah establishing real justice is the neverendingly expected goal”<sup>89</sup>. What is much more problematic and dramatic in this kind of perceived historiosophic process is that the foreign influences of *elohim acherim*, still apparent also in the later strata of the Kabbalah, stand in firm opposition towards the goals of Torah. However, Goldberg explains that – according to the anticipations of Torah – the solution to this tense entanglement would find its realization only in eschatological times.

Thirdly, in already mentioned *Maimonides*, Goldberg explains further: “The closest to the times of Torah is Kabbalah. The same way it precedes Torah, the same way it comes after it [...]. [This sequence] is obviously not an expression of any conscious tendency that stands in opposition to Torah, but rather [...] further continuous development, not taken with awareness by its carriers [of the tradition], which never fully lost its connection to Torah”<sup>90</sup>. As discussed there further, Goldberg claims that the reemergence of “kabbalistic” (in Goldbergian *sensu largo*) streams occurred later in Tanach literature, especially in year 586 BCE, after the first instance when the ritual in *Beit ha-Mikdash* ceased. That would include the *merkava* vision of Yechezkel and the eschatological and dream-interpretative notions in Daniel (the only representative of apocalyptic literature that was included in Tanach)<sup>91</sup>. Moreover, we experience the emergence of “kabbalistic” lore in Talmudic literature, with its peculiar aggadic stories of the creation and destruction of the world by r. Abahu, for example<sup>92</sup>.

Fourthly, as Goetschel duly notes, Goldberg expressly contrasts his own view of Torah with the kabbalistic ideology of Lurianic stream (and this relationship seems to have been the core of Scholem’s absurd accusation, claiming that Goldberg is just a post-lurianic pseudo-frankist). For example, according to Goldberg<sup>93</sup>, one needs to differentiate between the concept of the creation of the world in Torah and in the Lurianic teachings. Namely, in the Kabbalah, the idea of *tzimtzum* designates the pre-wordly self-restraining of YKVK, whereas in Torah, the way Goldberg sees it, YKVK suffers His contraction from within the world (being submerged within the nature as the only Elokim stemming from Infinity – which, as is believed, causes infinite pain when Infinite is drowned in the finitude<sup>94</sup> – contrary to other *elohim* that are constitutive part of the world itself.)

89 *Maimonides, op. cit.* p. 194.

90 *Maimonides, op. cit.* p. 198.

91 *Maimonides, op. cit.* p. 198.

92 *Maimonides, op. cit.* p. 192.

93 *Maimonides, op. cit.* p. 194.

94 Let us note here about the fact known to Goldberg, namely stemming as far as from r. Avraham Abulafia’s (1240-ca.1292) crucial gematria of *ha-teva*, “the nature” and “Elokim” = 86. *Litboa*, infinite form of the verb behind the word *teva*, means “to drown, to sink deep”. Obviously to everyone acquainted with gematria hermeneutics, this notion stood behind Baruch Spinoza’s pantheistic idea. See: M. Idel, “Gematria and Prognostication” [in:] *Prognostication in the Medieval World*, ed. M. Heiduk, De Gruyter 2020, pp. 785–787.

Fifthly, one must admit Goetschel that the core of the thought of Goldberg revolves around the conflict of Elokim YKVK (who belongs to Infinity) with the other elohim. And here, in this point, the resemblance to the kabbalistic teaching about the 70 archonts, *sarim*, ruling the traditional 70 nations/peoples and opposing YKVK by acting against the Jewish people, is indeed striking. Then again, it does not have to mean that Goldberg uses kabbalistic ideas to explain the reality of Torah – as is commonly known, Rashi’s reading of the account about the battle at the river Yabok also points to this topic (*saro shel Esau*, “the archont of Esau”, who fought with Yaakov). Not surprisingly, nobody classifies Rashi as a proponent of the kabbalistic lore.

Finally, one must stress that when Goldberg compares kabbalists to sorcerers or practitioners of magic, he most probably does not include in it the self-proclaimed prophets of later times, who were themselves in quite strong opposition to theurgical/theosophic Kabbalah. I have in mind here, for example, the main representative of ecstatic/prophetic Kabbalah, r. Avraham Abulafia – unlike the magus-kabbalist who secludes himself from the people, r. Abulafia was even overtly active in a role of a prophet, oriented towards the people<sup>95</sup>. Also, quite important part of the teachings of *chasidei ashkenaz* would seem to constitute some sort of sentiment towards ancient practices of “drawing down the *Shechina*” to this world (thus expressing the longing for Torah’s *Mishkan* and *Beit ha-Mikdash* ritual of ensuring the presence of YKVK among the people).

All in all, Goldberg’s perspective on Kabbalah is not that of a neo-kabbalist, rather that of a 20th-century scholar of Jewish thought, who – as Tomasz Sikora called him in the words of Rudolf Otto – was too much *Aliud Valde*<sup>96</sup> for most of his contemporaries to be properly understood.

I hope that this brief exposure of Goldberg’s thought, in the aftermath of pioneering research of late Manfred Voigts<sup>97</sup>, Polish translations and editions by Tomasz Sikora, the publication of an excellent monography by late Bruce Rosenstock<sup>98</sup>, and the most recent, outstanding work of Mårten Björk<sup>99</sup>, might further ignite interest

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- 95 Of course, r. Abulafia’s self-description as a prophet means something completely different from the way Torah views the function of a prophet. Goldberg would probably say that r. Abulafia’s mission was eventually unsuccessful exactly because the people to whom he addressed his teachings was already dispersed, therefore did not provide enough “might” to the prophet himself to ensure his influence might have a broad retroactive impact.
- 96 T. Sikora [„*Aliud valde* – on the idea of Hebraism by Oskar Goldberg”], „*Aliud valde* – Wokół idei hebraizmu Oskara Goldberga”, [in:] O. Goldberg, *Rzeczywistość Hebrajczyków* [Die Wirklichkeit der Hebräer], transl. T. Sikora, Kraków 2012, p. I.
- 97 Oskar Goldberg. *Der mythische Experimentalwissenschaftler. Ein verdrängtes Kapitel jüdischer Geschichte*, Berlin 1992. He passed away in September 2019.
- 98 *Transfinite Life: Oskar Goldberg and the Vitalist Imagination*, Bloomington, 2017. He passed away in January 2023.
- 99 *The Politics of Immortality in Rosenzweig, Barth and Goldberg*, London 2022.

in Oskar Goldberg's groundbreaking ideas, and contribute to dispersing the odium of denigration created by Gershom Scholem<sup>100</sup> (and Thomas Mann, too<sup>101</sup>).

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100 Quote from own memoirs speak about Scholem's pitiful level by itself: "...I know who Oskar Goldberg is, and I am inclined to regard him as a representative of the devil in our generation" [in:] G. Scholem, *From Berlin to Jerusalem*, New York 1980, p. 147

101 The hateful description of Goldberg by Mann as "the typical Jewish fascist" speaks strongly itself against the (in)famous German Nobel Prize winner. See: M. Voigts *O. Goldberg. Der mythische Experimentalwissenschaftler*, Berlin 1992, pp. 235–270 and the parody Goldberg in the character of Chaim Breisacher in *Doktor Faustus* in chapter XXVIII.

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## Abstract

### Aryeh Krawczyk – Oskar Goldberg on Kabbalah or Why We Should Not Become Frankists and Not Denigrate Fellow Scholars

Presented paper provides the first translation to English of a fragment of *The Reality of the Hebrews* by Oskar Goldberg (1885–1952). The text is dedicated to the exposure of how Goldberg viewed Kabbalah. It also aims to be refutation of Gershom Scholem's negative view on Goldberg's output.

**Keywords:** Oskar Goldberg, Kabbalah, Gershom Scholem, The Reality of the Hebrews, Torah, Pentateuch, Prophecy, Prayer

## Streszczenie

### Arieh Krawczyk – Oskar Goldberg o kabale, czyli dlaczego nie powinniśmy stawać się frankistami i deprecjonować kolegów po fachu

Prezentowany artykuł stanowi pierwsze tłumaczenie na język angielski fragmentu książki Oskara Goldberga (1885–1952) *Rzeczywistość Hebrajczyków*. Tekst jest poświęcony przedstawieniu poglądów Goldberga na kabałę. Ma on również na celu obalenie negatywnej opinii Gershoma Scholema na temat twórczości Goldberga.

**Słowa kluczowe:** Oskar Goldberg, Kabała, Gershom Scholem, Rzeczywistość Hebrajczyków, Tora, Pięcioksiąg, Proroctwo, Modlitwa