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The Genealogy of Shem According to Oskar Goldberg

ABSTRACT

Through the ages, the Hebrew Torah has generated innumerable interpretations which could be grouped into theological, mystical and magical, not to mention explanations given in scientific research. The fundamental question, however, namely concerning the source of its marvellous character – is still open to multidimensional research perspectives and awaits possible answers. My lecture concentrates upon the hermeneutics of the *Book of Genesis* 10: 21–32 (the genealogy of Shem) proposed in 1908 by Jewish scholar Oskar Goldberg in his book: *Die fünf Bücher Mosis – ein Zahlengebäude*, Berlin. Bearing Goldberg's discovery in mind, I will discuss some of its consequences.

KEY WORDS

semiotics, philosophy of language, Jewish mysticism, Oskar Goldberg

The issue of logical, ontological, and epistemological functions of the 'name' has been the subject of a number of philosophical analyses.¹ The subject of the present article is significantly less extensive being limited to an indication

¹ E.g.: S. Kripke, *Nazywanie a konieczność*, tłum. B. Chwedeńczuk, Warszawa 1988, p. 50–51. In Kripke's analytical approach, the name is correspondent with a „rigid designator” facilitating determination of „identity across possible worlds”. An extended, in its character Neo-Platonic philosophy of the name is provided by A.F. Losiev's work, see: T. Obolovitch, *Aleksego Losiewa filozofia imienia*, [in]: J. Uglik, E. Tacho-Godi, L. Kiejzik, *Aleksy Losiew czyli rzecz o tytanizmie XX wieku*, Warszawa 2012, p. 441–451.

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of a certain aspect of symbolism of the name in the reconstruction of the Old Hebrew vision of the world performed by Oskar Goldberg.² However, before we proceed to analyse the concept of the name of God and its presence in the genealogy of Shem, let us briefly examine the subject of the name from a linguistic point of view.

According to common opinion, a proper name, *nomen proprium*, is:

Semantically defined class of nouns that unequivocally identifies objects and states of affairs within a given context. By designating an object or a state of affairs in a given statement, proper nouns replace deictic, or pointing, gestures such that direct reference to that object or state of affairs is made.³

From a general point of view, the names of humans and gods are special cases of proper nouns being the focus of a sub-discipline of linguistics – onomastics. Anthroponymy and theonymy make use of proper nouns as identifiers of personal or personalised objects or processes.

The prominent function of proper nouns – especially personal names – is particularly obvious in different magico-religious systems, where they are the building elements of their ritual, organisational, and doctrinal dimensions.⁴ For example, in Hebrew and Jewish traditions, man is imagined as a name-giving being:

So from the soil Yahwe God fashioned all the wild animals and all the birds of heaven. These he brought to the man to see what he would call them; each one was to bear the name the man would give it. The man gave names to all the cattle, all the birds of heaven and all the wild animals. (Gen 2: 19)⁵

Also, God is the owner of the name, the Tetragrammaton (YHWH): “I am Yahweh your God who brought you out of Egypt, where you lived as slaves.”

² O. Goldberg, O. Goldberg, *Die Wirklichkeit der Hebräer*, Wiesbaden 2005.

³ *Routledge Dictionary of Language and Linguistics*, ed. H. Bussmann, London–New Yorks 2006, p. 958.

⁴ The comparative science of religion so far lacks a holistic study of the issue of the nominality of deities. H. Usener’s *Götternamen. Versuch einer Lehre von der religiösen Begriffsbildung* (Bonn 1896) is a classical monograph in this scope. In principle, Usener restricts his analysis to etymological and lexical derivations of the names of Greek and Lithuanian deities (H. Usener, *Götternamen. Versuch einer Lehre von der religiösen Begriffsbildung*, Bonn 1896, p. 79–115). Amazing as it is, in reference to the Old Hebrew and Jewish material, there is no monograph comparable to the analysis of God’s names in Islam, presented in: D. Gimaret, *Les noms divins en Islam*, Paris 1988.

⁵ Biblical quotations after: *New Jerusalem Bible*, ed. H. Wansbrough, New York 1990.

(Ex 20, 2) and the angelomorphic divine being representing Esau may try to avoid giving away his name in order not to be subjugated to human will as in the famous episode with Jacob on the Jabbok stream:

After he had taken them across the stream, he sent all his possessions over too. And Jacob was left alone. Then someone wrestled with him until daybreak who, seeing that he could not master him, struck him on the hip socket, and Jacob's hip was dislocated as he wrestled with him. He said, 'Let me go, for day is breaking. Jacob replied, 'I will not let you go unless you bless me.' The other said, 'What is your name?' 'Jacob,' he replied. He said, 'No longer are you to be called Jacob, but Israel since you have shown your strength against God and men and have prevailed.' Then Jacob asked, 'Please tell me your name.' He replied, 'Why do you ask my name?' With that, he blessed him there. Jacob named the place Peniel, 'Because I have seen God face to face,' he said, 'and have survived.' (Gen 32: 25–31)

Pronouncing the divine name was surrounded by the strictest taboo and it is allowed only in the ritual context, once a year, ten times during the Day of Atonement, only by the High Priest (Tosefta Yoma 2).⁶ According to Rachel Elior, the text of Tosefta constitutes the first testimony clearly attesting the existence of such a practice.⁷ Its full use was limited only to the shrine and the temple: "In the sanctuary one says the Name as it is written, but in provinces with a euphemism." (Sotah 7: 6)⁸

Based on the aforementioned, it comes as no surprise that different streams of Jewish mysticism have been focused on the issue of the name of God. They speculated on its ontological dimensions and were involved in theurgical and magical applications (*shimushei ha-torah*) of its infinite potential. Ezra ben Salomon, one of the colleagues of rabbi Nakhmanides from his school in Gerona, writes in the XI-century: "The five books of the Torah are the Name of the Sacred Being. Blessed be the Lord."⁹

A multidimensional development of the same idea is to be found in the first theoretical study of the *sefirot* concept presented in the work entitled „Sha'arei orah" written by Joseph Gikatilla (124–1325), a disciple of Abraham Abulafia:

⁶ (ב) בא לו למזרה העזרה [ולצפון] המזבח הסגן בימינו וראש [ב"ד בשמאלו שני שעירים היו שם פניהם] כלפי העם ואחוריהם כלפי הקדש כהן גדול פניו כלפי הקדש **עשרה פעמים מזכיר את השם** בו ביום ששה לפר שלשה לשעיר ואחד לגורלות וקלפי היתה שם ובה שני גורלות של אשכרוע [היו] ועשאן בן גמלא של זהב

⁷ Private information obtained by the author from Professor Rachel Elior.

⁸ The Mishnah. A New Translation – J. Neusner, London 1988, p. 458. במקדש אומר את השם ככתבו, ובמדינה בכנויו

⁹ After: G. Scholem, *The Name of God and the Linguistic Theory of Kabbalah*, Diogenes 1972, 20, p. 78.

It is within the parameters of our historical covenant, however, that those who want their needs fulfilled by employing the holy Names should try with all their strength to comprehend the meaning of each Name of God as they are recorded in the Torah, names such as EHYE, YAH, YHVH, ADoNaY, EL, ELOH, ELoHIM, ShaDaY, TZVAOT. One should be aware that all the names mentioned in the Torah are the keys for anything the person needs in the world. When one contemplates these Names one will understand that all of the Torah and the Commandments are dependent upon them. Then when he knows the purpose of every Name, he will realise the greatness of “He who spoke and thus the world came into being.”¹⁰

He will be fearful before Him and he will cleave to Him through his blessed Names. Then he will be close to God and his petitions will be accepted, as it is written: “I will keep him safe, for he knows my Name. When he calls on Me, I will answer him.” The verse does not promise safety by merely mentioning His name, but by knowing His Name. It is the knowing that is most significant. [...] Know that all the Holy Names in the Torah are intrinsically tied to the Tetragrammaton, which is YHWH. If you would contend, however, that the Name EHYE is the ultimate source, realise that the Tetragrammaton is like the trunk of the tree [from which the branches grow] and the Name EHYE is like the root from which grow the other roots. It is the trunk of the tree that nurtures the branches which are the other Names of God, and each one of these branches bears a different fruit. Know too that all the words in the Torah are connected to the one of the unerasable Divine names just as the other cognomens [for the different Names of God] are intrinsically tied to a specific Name. For instance, Cognomens for the ineffable Tetragrammaton are NORA (awesome), NOSEH AVoN (remover of sin) and OVeR al PeSHA (ignorer of sin). The Cognomens for EL are GaDOL (great), RaCHUM (merciful) and CHaNuN (pardoning). The Cognomens for ELoHIM are ADIR (mighty), SHoFeT (judge), DaYYaN (judge). Just as EL, ELoHIM and the Tetragrammaton have Cognomens, their Cognomens also have Cognomens until one finds that all the words of the Torah are intrinsically woven into the tapestry of God’s Cognomens which are tied to God’s Names which, in turn, are tied to the ineffable Tetragrammaton, YHVH, to which all the Torah’s words are inextricably linked.¹¹

¹⁰ J. Gikatilla, *Gates of Light. Sha`areh orah*, trans. and intro. A. Weinstein, London 1994, p. 4.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 5. Hebrew edition: J. Gikatilla, *Sha`areh orah*, ed., intro. and notes J. ben Shlomo, Jerusalem 5749, V. I, p. 248–249:

וגדר האמת ומסורת הברית כי הרוצה להשיג חפציו בעניין שמותיו של הקב"ה הוא שישתדל אדם בכל כוחו בתורה להשיג כוונת כל שם ושם מאותן שמות הקודש הנזכרים בתורה, כגון אהיה, יה, יהוה, אדני, אל, אלוה, אלהים, שדי, צבאות. וידע אדם ויבין כי כל שם ושם מאלו השמות כולם הם כדמיון מפתחות לכל דבר ודבר

The radical distinctness of Jewish mystical hermeneutics of the Torah, visible in the quoted text, and compared against the classical rabbinic exegesis and scientific philological, historical and critical analyses, has become the subject of much review.¹² Trail-blazing and now enjoying the status of a classical study, Gershom Scholem professes that the basic relevant presumption of the kabbalist view was that:

[...] of the Name of God as the metaphysical origin of all language, and the conception of language as the explanation – by dismantling – of this name, such as it appears principally in the documents relating to Revelation, but also in all language in general. The language of God which is crystallised in the Name of God and, in the last analysis, in the one single name itself, which is its centre, is the basis of all spoken language, in which it is reflected and symbolically manifest.¹³

The diligent reader of the literary corpus of Jewish mysticism cannot help feeling to ask: What could be the gravitational pull directing kabbalists to adopt this kind of attitude and approach toward their holy text as reflecting the name of God? One of the possible answers can be given by devoting attention to the formal construction of the holy text of the Torah. This was undertaken by a forgotten Jewish-German researcher Oskar Goldberg (1885 Berlin–1952 Nice) in his small book: *Die fünf Bücher Moses – ein Zahlengebäude*.¹⁴

שאדם צריך לכל צד ועניין בעולם. וכשיתבונן באלו השמות, ימצא כל התורה והמצוות תלוי בהם; וכשידע כונת כל שם ושם מאלו השמות, יכיר וידע גדולת מי שאמר והיה העולם, ויפחד ויירא מלפניו וישתוקק ויכסוף ויתאוהו להידבק בו מתוך ידיעת שמותיו יתברך, ואז יהיה קרוב ל"י"י ותהיה תפלתו מקובלת, ועל זה נאמר, אשגבהו כי ידע שמי יקראני ואענהו (תהלים צא, טו). לא אמר הכתוב אשגבהו כי יזכור שמי, אלא 'כי ידע שמי', הידיעה היא העיקר

דע כי כל שמותיו הקדושים הנזכרים בתורה כולם תלויים בשם בן ד' אותיות שהוא יהוה. ואם תאמר והלא שם אהי"ה הוא העיקר והמקור? דע כי שם בן ד' אותיות הוא כדמיון גוף האילן, ושם אהי"ה הוא עיקר האילן הזה וממנו ישתרשו שורשים ויתפשטו ענפים לכל צד וצד, ושאר כל שמות הקודש כולם בדמיון ענפים וסנסנים נמשכים מגוף האילן, וכל אחד מן הענפים עושה פרי למינהו ומלבד שמות הקודש הידועים שאסור למוחקן, יש כמה כינויים אחרים תלויים בכל שם ושם, כגון שתאמר כינויין של יהוה מי הם: נורא, נושא עוון, עובר על פשע. כינויין של אל מי הם: כגון גדול, רחום, וחנון. כינויין של אלהים מי הם: כגון אדיר, שופט, דיין. ולכל אחד מאלו הכינויים יש כינויין אחרים תלויים בכל כינוי וכינוי מאלו, והם שאר כל מלות התורה. עד שנמצא כל התורה כולה נארגת על הכינויין, והכינויין על השמות, והשמות הקדושים כולם תלויים על שם יהוה וכולם מתאחדים בו.

¹² The most complete study of the issue is provided by: M. Idel, *Absorbing Perfections. Kabbalah and Interpretation*, New Heaven–London 2002. Idel discusses Gikatilla's combinatorial exegesis as a technique used to induce paranormal experiences, *ibidem*, p. 89–92.

¹³ G. Scholem, *op. cit.*, p. 63.

¹⁴ Berlin 1908.

One of the subjects he analyses is the number structure of the so called “Genealogy of Shem” in Genesis 10: 21 – 31, the list of the descendants of the patriarch Shem, one of the sons of Noah. Of utmost importance in the context of our research is the fact that the name of the patriarch – Shem – means ‘name’ and the noun *shem* – ‘name’ in the Hebrew and Jewish tradition is usually associated with the Tetragrammaton (YHWH). Therefore, the question arises as to what the presumed relationship between these words is. Before we briefly sum up Goldberg’s discovery, let us first look at the relevant verses in Hebrew and English:¹⁵

- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>כא וְיֵשֶׁשׁ יָלֵד, גַּם-הוּא: אָבִי, כָּל-בְּנֵי- כא
 עֵבֶר--אָחִי, יָפֶת הַגָּדוֹל</p> | <p>21 And unto Shem, the father of all the children of Eber, the elder brother of Japheth, to him also were children born.</p> |
| <p>כב בְּנֵי שֵׁם, עֵילָם וְאַשּׁוּר, וְאַרְפַּכְשָׁד, כב
 וְלֹוד וְאַרָם.</p> | <p>22 The sons of Shem: Elam, and Asshur, and Arpachshad, and Lud, and Aram.</p> |
| <p>כג וּבְנֵי, אָרָם--עוּז וְחֹול, וְגֶתֶר וּמַשׁ כג
 וְאַרְפַּכְשָׁד, יָלֵד אֶת-שֶׁלַח; וְשֶׁלַח, כד
 יָלֵד אֶת-עֵבֶר.</p> | <p>23 And the sons of Aram: Uz, and Hul, and Gether, and Mash.</p> |
| <p>כד וְאַרְפַּכְשָׁד, יָלֵד אֶת-שֶׁלַח; וְשֶׁלַח, כד
 יָלֵד אֶת-עֵבֶר.</p> | <p>24 And Arpachshad begot Shelah; and Shelah begot Eber.</p> |
| <p>כה וְלְעֵבֶר יָלֵד, שְׁנֵי בָנִים: שֵׁם הָאֶחָד כה
 פֶּלֶג, כִּי בְיָמָיו נִפְלְגָה הָאָרֶץ, וְשֵׁם אָחִיו
 יֹקָטָן.</p> | <p>25 And unto Eber were born two sons; the name of the one was Peleg; for in his days was the earth divided; and his brother’s name was Joktan.</p> |
| <p>כו וַיֹּקָטָן יָלֵד, אֶת-אַלְמוֹדָד וְאֶת-שֶׁלֶף, כו
 וְאֶת-חַצְרָמָוֶת, וְאֶת-יֶרַח.</p> | <p>26 And Joktan begot Almodad, and Sheleph, and Hazarmaveth, and Jerah;</p> |
| <p>כז וְאֶת-חַדּוֹרָם וְאֶת-אִזָּל, וְאֶת-דִּקְלָה; כז
 וְאֶת-עוֹבָל וְאֶת-אַבִּימָאֵל, וְאֶת- כח
 שֶׁבָא.</p> | <p>27 and Hadoram, and Uzal, and Diklah;</p> <p>28 and Obal, and Abimael, and Sheba;</p> |
| <p>כח וְאֶת-אוֹפִיר וְאֶת-חַוִּילָה, וְאֶת-יֹבָב; כח
 כָּל-אֵלֶּה, בְּנֵי יֹקָטָן.</p> | <p>29 and Ophir, and Havilah, and Jobab; all these were the sons of Joktan.</p> |
| <p>כט וַיְהִי מוֹשְׁבָם, מִמֶּשָׂא, בְּאֶבֶךָ סְפָרָה, ל
 לְלִשְׁנֹתָם, בְּאַרְצֹתָם, לְגוֹיֹתָם.</p> | <p>30 And their dwelling was from Mesha, as thou goest toward Sephar, unto the mountain of the east.</p> |
| <p>לא אֵלֶּה בְּנֵי-שֵׁם, לְמִשְׁפְּחֹתָם לא
 לְלִשְׁנֹתָם, בְּאַרְצֹתָם, לְגוֹיֹתָם.</p> | <p>31 These are the sons of Shem, after their families, after their tongues, in their lands, after their nations.</p> |

¹⁵ English translation after: *A Hebrew – English Bible According to Masoretic Text and the JPS 1917 Edition* (<http://www.mechon-mamre.org/p/pt/pt0110.htm>, Access: 03.08.13).

Approaching this text, Goldberg takes into consideration its different dimensions and parameters such as: the number of sons, the number of words, the number of verses and gematria, a hermeneutic method based on the number-letter correspondences characteristic of the Hebrew language, dating back to at least the early Tannaic period and midrashic literature. The following table shows the basic form (*mispar gadol*) of assigning numerical values to Hebrew letters according to gematria:¹⁶

VALUES TABLE

The *Mispar gadol* (see below) values are:

Decimal	Hebrew	Glyph
1	<i>Aleph</i>	א
2	<i>Bet</i>	ב
3	<i>Gimel</i>	ג
4	<i>Daled</i>	ד
5	<i>He</i>	ה
6	<i>Vav</i>	ו
7	<i>Zayin</i>	ז
8	<i>Heth</i>	ח
9	<i>Teth</i>	ט

Decimal	Hebrew	Glyph
10	<i>Yud</i>	י
20	<i>Kaph</i>	כ
30	<i>Lamed</i>	ל
40	<i>Mem</i>	מ
50	<i>Nun</i>	נ
60	<i>Samech</i>	ס
70	<i>Ayin</i>	ע
80	<i>Pe</i>	פ
90	<i>Tsadhe</i>	צ

¹⁶ Tabulation from: Wikipedia, entry: *Gematria* (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gematria>, Access: 26.07.13).

Decimal	Hebrew	Glyph
100	<i>Qoph</i>	ק
200	<i>Reish</i>	ר
300	<i>Shin</i>	ש
400	<i>Taw</i>	ת

According to the equivalences reflected in the table, the numerical value of the Tetragrammaton – the Name YHWH, which is 26^{17} – provides the fundamental data of Hebrew mystical exegesis.

Y	=	1
H	=	5
V	=	6
H	=	5
YHVH	=	26

Goldberg first analyses the number of the descendants of Shem:

Shem	has	5 sons:	Elam, Asshur, Arpachshad, Lud, Aram
Aram	has	4 sons:	Uz, Hul, Gether, Mash
Arpachshad	has	1 son:	Shelah
Shelah	has	1 son:	Eber
Eber	has	2 sons:	Peleg, Joktan
Joktan	has	13 sons:	Almodad, Sheleph, Hazarmaveth, Jerah, Hadoram, Uzal, Diklah, Abimael, Sheba, Ophir, Havilah, Jobab
Sum		26 sons	

As results, the number of sons in general equals the number of the Tetragrammaton – 26. In the next step, Goldberg proceeds to analyse the number of words and the number of the letters:

¹⁷ All tables are provided by: O. Goldberg, *Die fünf Bücher Mosis – ein Zahlengebäude. Die Feststellung einer einheitlich durchgeführten Zahlenschrift*, Berlin 1908, p. 4–9. They have been adapted for the purposes of the present study by Maciej Nabiałek.

Verse	Number of words	Verse	Number of letters
1	11	1	34
2	7	2	29
3	6	3	21
4	8	4	27
5	14	5	51
6	10	6	37
7	6	7	22
8	6	8	22
9	10	9	34
10	7	10	27
11	7	11	33
12	12	12	53
Sum	104	Sum	390

As results, the number of words equals $104 = 4 \times 26$ and the number of letters equals $390 = 15 \times 26$.

Goldberg also notes that the prevailing character of the number 26 emphasises the fact that the names of the sons are distinctly divided into two groups composed of $13 + 13$:

Shem	has	5 sons		
Aram	has	4 sons		
Arpachshad	has	1 son		
Szelach	has	1 son		
Ewer	has	2 sons	Joktan	has 13 sons
Shem, Arpachshad, Shelah, Eber		Aram have together 13 sons	Joktan	has 13 sons

In the next step Goldberg proceeds to calculate the gematria according to the basic form (*mispar gadol*), mentioned in the table above, of the names of descendants of Shem:

1	Elam	=	150	1	Almodad	=	85
2	Asshur	=	507	2	Sheleph	=	410
3	Arpachsad	=	605	3	Hazarmavet	=	744
4	Lud	=	40	4	Jerah	=	218
5	Aram	=	241	5	Hadoram	=	255
6	Uz	=	166	6	Uzal	=	44
7	Hul	=	44	7	Diklah	=	139
8	Gether	=	603	8	Obal	=	108
9	Mash	=	340	9	Abimael	=	84
10	Shelah	=	338	10	Sheba	=	303
11	Eber	=	272	11	Ophir	=	287
12	Peleg	=	113	12	Hawilah	=	59
13	Joktan	=	169	13	Jobab	=	20
<hr/>				<hr/>			
	Sum	=	3 588		Sum	=	2 756

Once again the principle of the number 26 occurs twice as:

$$3558 = 138 \times 26$$

$$2756 = 106 \times 26$$

So, having looked at the entirety of Goldberg's reasoning, we can summarise it as follows:

Recapitulation:	Descendants of Shem	=	26
	Number of words	=	4 x 26
	Number of letters	=	15 x 26
	Gematria value of first 13 names	=	138 x 26
	Gematria value of second 13 names	=	106 x 26

In conclusion, we see that in its different numerical dimensions the entire section in Genesis 10: 21–31, the description of Shem's descendants as descendants of the man called 'Name', is thoroughly structured by the number of the Name YHWH – 26

Y	=	10
H	=	5
V	=	6
H	=	5
<hr/>		
YHVH	=	26

The question remains as to where the structure – discovered by Goldberg – comes from. To answer it, we should be equipped with precise statistical evaluation of the data stemming from mathematical linguistics applied to Semitic languages. As, for the time being, we have not been equipped therewith, there are two possible answers. Either the structure is of divine inspiration, supporting its transcendental character, or it results from the conscious or unconscious activity of the human brain. In the second case, we should not neglect the obvious fact that even the most complicated crossword has its own author. Perhaps creating and deciphering this kind of sacred ‘sudoku’ was an important part in educating ancient *soferim*¹⁸ or even a part of their initiation into the mysterious profession of composing and transmitting the holy text centred upon the personage of **Mosheh** who, according to the anagram structure of his name, is also the Name – **ha-Shem**.¹⁹

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¹⁸ The legitimacy of this supposition is indirectly attested by the key analyses performed by illustrious Dutch Biblical scholar Casper Labuschagne. *Rediscovering the Bible Codes, Numerical Secrets of the Bible*, North Richland Hills 2000 with an overview of Goldberg’s research, p. 75–104.

¹⁹ The intentional character and tenor of this anagrammatical recombination are obvious in light of the systemic reconstruction of the Old Hebrew ritual: O. Goldberg, *Die Wirklichkeit der Hebräer*, Wiesbaden 2005.

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