

cal definitions, on the basis of which lies the appearance of unconditional moment in the earlier conditional being. In terms of the PMO, this means that those elements of the logical-philosophical framework which acted as a predication of being at a higher level, become sources of new predications at lower levels.⁷

Such a multi-level logic of the Absolute in Solovyov's system can be compared with the conception of levels of high principle (*Ein-Sof*, or *Ayn Sof* (Hebrew *אין סוף*)) in Judaism. The transition from a higher level to a lower one is expressed in this case with the metaphysical concept of "Tzimtzum" (Hebrew *צמצום* – *šimšūm*), the self-compression of the Divine light.

Therefore, we see many expressions of Judaic themes and subjects in the works of Vladimir Solovyov, and owing to the logical-philosophical analysis, we can obtain additional possibilities of studying the influence of the metaphysical ideas of Judaism on the philosophical constructions of V.S. Solovyov's metaphysics.

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Philo of Alexandria and Vladimir Solovyov: Two ways of sophiology

In recent years an active discussion of the problem which may be called "Vladimir Solovyov in the Jewish context"¹ has been in progress. Some main issues have been crystallized in the discussion, such as Vladimir Solovyov and Kabbalah; Solovyov's articles in defense of the Talmud and Jewish culture in its entirety; a Jewish reception of poetry and religious philosophy by Solovyov and others.

At times in these debates a statement is expressed about the influence of the ideas of Philo Judaeus (Philo of Alexandria) on the genesis of So-

¹ In May 1999 an international conference "Vladimir Solovyov and the Jews: a problem of the relations between the Russian intelligentsia and Jews at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries" was organized by Petersburg Jewish University and Ben-Gurion University. The issue is also discussed in W.G. Moss, *Vladimir Solovyov and the Jews in Russia*, "The Russian Review" 29 (1970), p. 181-191; H. Bar-Yosef, *Sophiology and the Concept of Femininity in Russian Symbolism and in Modern Hebrew Poetry*, "Journal of Modern Jewish Studies" 2/1 (2003), p. 59-78; H. Bar-Yosef, *The Jewish Reception of Vladimir Solovyov*, in W. van den Bercken, M. de Courten, E. van der Zweerde (eds.), *Vladimir Solovyov – Reconciler and Polemicist*, Leuven: Peters 2001, p. 363-392 (2nd volume in the series "Studies in Eastern Christianity"); J.D. Kornblatt, *Vladimir Solovyov on Spiritual Nationhood, Russia and the Jews*, "The Russian Review" 56 (1997), p. 157-177; K. Burmistrov, *Christian Orthodoxy and Jewish Kabbalah: Russian Mystics in the Search for Perennial Wisdom*, O. Hammer, K. von Stuckrad (eds.), *Polemical Encounters: Esoteric Discourse and Its Others*, Leiden – Boston: Brill Academic Publishers 2007, p. 25-54; P.L. Michelson, *Freedom, Faith and dogma: Essays by V.S. Solovyov on Christianity and Judaism*, "Canadian Slavonic Papers," March – June 2010, <http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3763/is_201003/ai_n55488140/>; K. Бурмистров, *Владимир Соловьёв и Каббала. К постановке проблемы*, in М.А. Колеров (ed.), *Исследования по истории русской мысли. Ежегодник за 1998 год*, Москва: ОГИ 1998, p. 7-104.

⁷ В.И. Моисеев, *Логика всеединства*, p. 75-99, 344-349.

lovyov's sophiology.² The textual analysis demonstrates that the name of Philo is found in Solovyov's writings rather often – beginning with the early *Lectures on Godmanhood* (1878)³ and up to the series of articles written for *Brockhaus and Efron Encyclopaedic Dictionary* (1891–1893)⁴ and *The Justification of the Good* (1895). We may arrive at that conclusion that for Solovyov, Philo is one of the key figures in the history of human thought. So Solovyov calls the Alexandrian Hellenistic Jews – “such as Philo” – the first real descendants of Plato;⁵ and in *The Justification of the Good* he characterizes Philo as “the last and major thinker of the ancient world,” since two roads to “the idea of God's Realm and to the ideal of Godmanhood” (prophetic inspiration and speculative philosophical thought) agreed in his mind.⁶ But for once Philo is never mentioned by Solovyov in the specific, “sophiologic” context (and we have all evidence to claim that Solovyov was acquainted with the “sophiologic” texts by Philo, such as *De congressu eruditionis gratia*, 2-14, 74-76; *Quod deterius potiori insidiari soleat*, 54, 115-117 and others). The significance of this author for Solovyov consists first of all in realizing the synthesis of philosophy and religion (an aim which was so important for Solovyov himself); and especially in the elaboration of the teaching on Logos as a special hypostasis mediating in the relation of God to the world and to the human. At the same time, however, we may see that some aspects of Solovyov's and Philo's teachings on So-

² See В.С. Соловьёв, *Философские начала цельного знания*, in idem, *Полное собрание сочинений и писем в двадцати томах*, vol. 2. Москва: Наука 2000, p. 380-381 (A.A. Nosov, the author of footnotes to Solovyov's *The Philosophical Principles of Integral Knowledge* in this edition, maintains that V. Solovyov has borrowed the concepts of “inner or hidden Logos,” λόγος ἐνδιάθετος, and “revealed Logos,” λόγος προφορικός, directly from Philo); У. Фузайлов, *София и Талмуд: Владимир Соловьёв в еврейском контексте*, “Лехаим” 1 (2008), <<http://www.lechaim.ru/ARHIV/189/paz.htm>>; Vladimir Solovyov (philosopher), an article from the Wikipedia, <[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vladimir_Solovyov_\(philosopher\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vladimir_Solovyov_(philosopher))>.

³ В.С. Соловьёв, *Чтения о Богочеловечестве*, in idem, *Собрание сочинений*, ed. by С.М. Соловьёв, Э.Л. Радлов, Санкт-Петербург: Просвещение 1911–1914, vol. III, p. 80-81.

⁴ See the following articles: *Мистицизм (Mysticism)*, *Платон (Plato)*, *Ориген (Origen)*, *Провидение (The Providence)*.

⁵ В.С. Соловьёв, *Платон*, in idem, *Собрание сочинений*, vol. X, p. 479.

⁶ В.С. Соловьёв, *Оправдание добра*, in idem, *Собрание сочинений*, vol. VIII, p. 215. Also see a similar judgment in *Lectures on Godmanhood*, VI: “Philo, in his concept of the Logos as expression of God in His relation to the world, realized the synthesis of philosophical teaching of God as the absolute idea and the prophetic relation to God as the absolute Person.” Solovyov supposes that Philo's teaching of Logos is the common source both for Christian and for neo-Platonic triadology (*Чтения о Богочеловечестве*, p. 80-81).

phia reveal extraordinary resemblance, and it would be very interesting to explore the causes of this.

The aspects of Solovyov's Sophia

It's generally acknowledged that the idea of Sophia was the central intuition in the poetry and philosophy of Vladimir Solovyov. For many decades the problem of the definition of sources and contexts of this sophiology has baffled scholars. We can see that the thought of Solovyov grew in the wide field of images, problems and concepts that, for two and a half thousand years, have formed in the western (in the very wide sense) tradition concerning the main issue of expression and presence of the absolute being in the being of the world and human (or, which is the same, the issue of bond, embeddedness of the relative being in the absolute); we can call this problem field “the sophian.” Among the contexts important for Solovyov's sophiology we can point to, first of all: (1) the dialectics of the three primordial ontological essences and especially the issue of intelligible matter in *neo-Platonism* (vide *The Lectures on Godmanhood*, VII: definition of Sophia as “the matter of God imbued with the principle of divine unity”⁷); (2) *The Old Testament* texts devoted to Sophia (*Hokmah*): Scriptural imagery of Sophia the Wisdom of God features prominently in Solovyov's poetry, and in *Russia and the Universal Church*, Vol. III we come across a sophisticated philosophical exegesis of The Proverbs 8 and 9; (3) *Gnostic sophiology*, and first of all the one by Valentinus, who – according to Solovyov – was “the most important gnostic philosopher and one of the greatest thinkers of all times,”⁸ philosophic sequences from a basic gnostic “myth of Sophia” in some Valentinian systems (e.g. in *The Gospel of Truth*) are very similar to some of Solovyov's thoughts in *The Lectures on Godmanhood*, VIII and IX; Solovyov's general intuition of Sophia as captivated and suffering in the world corresponds to the gnostic one too;⁹ (4) *Kabbalah* is also often mentioned among the sources of Solovyov's sophiology;¹⁰ (5) lastly, some

⁷ В.С. Соловьёв, *Чтения о Богочеловечестве*, p. 115.

⁸ В.С. Соловьёв, *Валентин и валентиниане*, in idem, *Собрание сочинений*, vol. X, p. 285.

⁹ See A.A. Каменских, *Трагедия космогонической объективации в валентинианстве и в русской религиозной философии*, in Н.В. Пожарская, И.Н. Потылицына, Т.Б. Всехвятская (eds.), *Россия и Гнозис. Материалы конференции*, Москва: Рудомино 2004, p. 22-29.

¹⁰ К. Бурмистров, *Владимир Соловьёв и Каббала. К постановке проблемы*, p. 7-104.

European mystics (Paracelsus, J. Böhme, E. Swedenborg) and *philosophers* (B. Spinoza, F.W.J. Schelling) of *modern times*.¹¹ This syncretic variety of the contextual framework of Solovyov's sophiologic texts is a cause of the extraordinary difficulty of their interpretation for a historian of philosophy. One of the successful attempts to reveal, in the complex of these texts, a consistent system of views was undertaken by Aleksei Losev,¹² a brilliant Russian philosopher.

Having supposed that the essence of the sophian issue in Solovyov's thought is "the dialectic teaching about the indissolubility of idea and matter, whereby the idea acts only being in matter and matter acts only being self-moved by its nature,"¹³ Losev emphasises in Solovyov's teaching on Sophia a number of aspects: 1st) *absolutely divine* — non-created pre-earthly and extra-earthly (here Sophia is "the body of God, the matter of God imbued with the principle of divine unity"¹⁴); 2nd) "Godhuman Sophia, presupposing the embodiment of the absolute Sophia in the material world, and hence *both created and non-created*" (presumably Losev means here passages from *Russia and the Universal Church*, III, 7, where Solovyov writes about the primordial unity of the Creator and creation, featuring in the thought of God and emerging in the cosmological and historical process. He finds it the fullest expression in the threeness of Christ, the Mother of God and the Church); 3rd) and 4th) "purely created Sophia in the image

¹¹ See Solovyov's famous words from a letter to S.A. Tolstaya (April 27, 1877): "В библиотеке не нашел ничего особенного. У мистиков много подтверждений моих собственных идей, но никакого нового света, к тому же почти все они имеют характер чрезвычайно субъективный и, так сказать, слюнявый. Нашел трех специалистов по Софии: Georg Gichtel, Gottfried Arnold и John Pordage. Все три имели личный опыт, почти такой же, как мой, и это самое интересное, но собственно в теософии все трое довольно слабы, следуют Беме, но ниже его. Я думаю, София возилась с ними больше за их невинность, чем за что-нибудь другое. В результате настоящими людьми все-таки оказываются только Парацельс, Бэм и Сведенборг, так что для меня остается поле очень широкое" (В.С. Соловьёв, *Письма*, ed. by Э.Л. Радлов, Санкт-Петербург: Общественная польза 1909, vol. II, p. 200). See also: K. Burmistrov, *Christian Orthodoxy and Jewish Kabbalah: Russian Mystics in the Search for Perennial Wisdom*, p. 25-54; П.П. Гайдено, *Гностические мотивы в учениях Шеллинга и Вл. Соловьёва*, "Знание. Понимание. Умение" 2 (2005), p. 202-208; 3 (2005), p. 220-229.

¹² А.Ф. Losev, *Владимир Соловьёв и его время*, Москва: Прогресс 1990.

¹³ Ibidem, p. 258. Also see a definition of "sophia" in Losev's work *The History of Antique Aesthetics. The Totals of the millennial development*: "sophia is a principle which functions not merely as such but also actively develops in all other, actively gives birth to it, dwelling itself nevertheless immutable." А.Ф. Losev, *История античной эстетики. Итоги тысячелетнего развития*, Book 2, Москва: Ладомир 1994, p. 166-232.

¹⁴ В.С. Соловьёв, *Чтения о Богочеловечестве*, p. 115.

and likeness of the first and second Sophias." She is either an "intelligent spiritual amenity of the cosmos in its entirety" (3rd one, *cosmic aspect*), or "the same amenity in the humankind which, taken as a whole, is also the created likeness of the first and second Sophias" (4th one, *anthropological aspect*). These four main aspects are complemented by six more: 5th) *universally feministic* ("a species of the fourth"); 6th) *intimately romantic* and 7th) *aesthetically-creative* (both suited to the third and fourth aspects); 8th) *eschatological*; 9th) *magic*; and 10th) *nationally Russian*.¹⁵ Thus, for Solovyov Sophia is the principle of the identity of ideal and real, the presence of God in "His other," and conceived and experienced besides as the absolute person. It's not always possible to clearly distinguish these aspects in Solovyov's texts, but an obvious merit of Losev's approach is the possibility of systematizing the multiformity of texts and views and – at the same time – of realizing the phenomenological description of all shades of meaning surfacing in this system.

As a detailed exposition of Solovyov's sophiology is not the task of this paper, I would like to draw attention to those aspects of the system which reveal the most intriguing resemblance to some aspects of Philo's teachings.

Some aspects of Philo's sophiology

In the works of Philo of Alexandria, a famous philosopher and theologian and a Hellenistic Jew, once named "the founder of religious philosophy in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam"¹⁶ (20BC-50AD), we encounter the same issue (a kind of "philosophy of revelation") with similar methodological principles (to justify philosophically the creed of fathers) which are so characteristic of Solovyov's attitude.¹⁷

¹⁵ А.Ф. Losev, *Владимир Соловьёв и его время*, p. 209-260.

¹⁶ See H.A. Wolfson, *Philo. Foundations of the Religious Philosophy in Judaism, Christianity and Islam*, vol. 1-2, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press 1948.

¹⁷ These principles are concisely characterized by an unconditional belief in the very possibility of such an employment of philosophy to express religious contents. Neither for Philo nor for Solovyov the problem of "Athens and Jerusalem" seemed insoluble. For both thinkers a similar premise acts as ground for this belief: for Philo it is a conviction that the wisdom of Torah and that of philosophy have the same source – once the Greek philosophers while travelling through the East borrowed the biblical wisdom and now there is nothing to be ashamed of in that restitution of the legacy to the chosen people. For Solovyov religion and philosophy (on an equal footing with science and art) in their isolated condition are only "abstract principles;" only having been integrated do they become the aspects of all-encompassing truth.

The similarity of the systems becomes the most evident if we take but a quick look at the main aspects of Philo's sophiology. It's obvious that Philo's dialectics of Logos and Sophia (categories at times undistinguished in his texts) is the dialectics of the theophania. We, partly after H.A. Wolfson, can stress in Philo's Logos/Sophia *four main aspects*: (1) *In the first*, upper aspect of its being, Logos (or Sophia) may be defined as the immanent mind of God Himself or the principle of presence of one God in a variety of powers;¹⁸ it's the principle maintaining the relation of all manifoldness of powers to the one absolute subject.¹⁹ (2) *In the second* aspect Logos/Sophia in Philo is *the expression of God Himself taken as single*: it is the *topos* containing all plenitude of God's thoughts – ideas for subsequent creation; so Logos (or Sophia) here is the intelligible world itself as essentially single and moreover – conceived as a person. According to Philo, bringing many names appears as God's creative power which opens in His relation to the world by a variety of special powers or as the primordial Torah letters, which are put together in the grammatical cloth of the universal law. It is the Angel of the Lord and individual angels are its particular manifestations and it is the celestial Jerusalem, the city-mother (μητρόπολις)²⁰ from which the "colonies" (particular creative λόγοι and powers organizing the created being) led out. (3) Through these λόγοι, with which the being is sown, Logos/Sophia becomes embodied in the material body of the universe, becomes immanent in it (*the third* aspect). In this aspect it is interpreted by Philo as the connection of all being in the universe and the cause of the laws of nature, "a cutter" segmenting the things and a mediator which reconciles the opposites. (4) Finally, *the fourth* aspect of Logos (Sophia) in Philo is connected with its relation to the human logos-reason and with mutual likening of Logos and the human. The creation of the human "in God's image" means that the human mind resembles the mind of the Creator and the place of the human on the earth resembles the place of God in the universe.²¹ On the other hand, the divine Logos itself may be interpreted at times anthropomorphically – as "the Human in His image" and even as "Israel."²²

Now I'd like to discuss a rather specific aspect of sophiology which we find both in Philo and in Solovyov. Above we have already seen an aspect in

¹⁸ It's very interesting in this reference to compare two texts of Philo: *De Cherubim*, 27-31; and *De sacrificiis Abeli et Caini*, 59-60.

¹⁹ See in *De Cherubim*, 27-28, 30 Philo's analogy of the divine Logos with the human logos-reason as a principle of unity of all (inner and external) manifestations of the human ego.

²⁰ *De fuga et inventione*, 18, 95.

²¹ *De opificio mundi*, 134-135, 139, 146.

²² *De confusione linguarum*, 146.

sophiologic views of Solovyov which Aleksei Losev names "intimately romantic," and emphasizes that a "purely noumenal, already cordial, but also already chaste understanding of Sophia" radically distinguishes Vladimir Solovyov from any known forms of Gnosticism.²³ In the famous *Meaning of Love* this aspect of Sophia turns out closely related with the issue of human, individual love in the discussion of which Solovyov, relying on Gn 1:27, includes the theme of androgynism. This theme also appears in *Russia and the Universal Church*, III, 7 already directly in a sophiological context.

We find something similar in Philo. In a number of treatises he discusses matrimonial images of the Old Testament giving them, as it were, "a categorical interpretation." All biblical images are viewed by Philo as living categories, intelligible faces – identity of ideal and personally-real. Matrimonial images in the light of this "categorical interpretation" are conceived by Philo as androgynous. All male images in Philo are particular modes of mind: e.g. Abel is described in his essence as "a mind elevating all to God" (*De sacrificiis Abeli et Caini*, 2; see *Quod deterius potiori insidiari soleat*, 32); Cain – a pattern of thought admitting that the human mind is self-sufficient; Joseph is here a mind sticking to eclectic teachings (*Quod deterius potiori insidiari soleat*, 6) etc. But the interpretation of female images corresponding to the male ones is much more complicated. A "wife" of that or another personage-mind may be described by Philo as a soul,²⁴ sensation,²⁵ a virtue suited to this mind,²⁶ or – on the contrary – a vice;²⁷ a mode of life; a subject of mind's intention and the very intention itself. Besides that Philo often speaks about the possibility of a soul (or virtue) to become pregnant from God and to bear "a gift" for its mind-husband.²⁸ Is there any theoretical concept or are we only dealing with an example of Philo's notorious eclecticism? I think that the variety of these particular meanings in Philo's interpretation of female images in the Scripture may be conceived in the definition of a soul as the notional element of mind's other-being which involves all the vast sphere of personal expression. Moreover, a wife (or soul) is interpreted by Philo as notional energy of the mind which mediates

²³ А.Ф. Лосев, *Владимир Соловьёв и его время*, p. 250 (italics in the reference is Losev's).

²⁴ *De sacrificiis Abeli et Caini*, 59.6.

²⁵ *De Cherubim*, 41 ("wife is a sensation presented as an image"), 57-61.

²⁶ *De sacrificiis Abeli et Caini*, 59.3, *De posteritate Caini*, 62, *De Cherubim*, 41, 47, *De congressu eruditionis gratia*, 26 etc.

²⁷ *Quod deterius potiori insidiari soleat*, 50, *De posteritate Caini*, 75, 79, 112, *Quod deterius potiori insidiari soleat*, 178 etc.

²⁸ For the discussion of this subject see *De Cherubim*, 40-61, 106; particularly 43-52.

between the mind and the "other" (the world or God – in the dependence on the general direction of the mind): without a wife-soul the mind is blind, deaf, helpless – "a defective part of itself" (*De Cherubim*, 58-59).

In this quality a soul is viewed by Philo in two ways: as "passive" and as "active."

1) The "passive aspect": a soul is viewed as perception, either an intellectual one – turning to God (that is intellectual intuition – Leah,²⁹ Sarah³⁰) or a sensual one – turning to the world (Eve,³¹ Rachel³²); it is "eyes" and the pregnant bosom of the mind. The "intellectual soul" may accept God's seed in ecstatic contemplation and in the following meditation bear "a gift" for its mind-husband. But in the union with a soul-sensation immersed in material things a mind may acquire only false opinions (just so does Philo describe the fall of mind-Adam seduced by sensation-Eve³³).

2) The "active aspect" of the soul: here a soul comes over as an objectivation of the mind, its active, practical expression.³⁴ As an objective manifestation, *πράξις* of mind, a soul influences it and even defines it.

Making an attempt to define the place of Philo's "dialectics of expression" in the general context of the late antiquity we may presuppose, first of all, that the conceptual framework for such an interpretation of the Scriptural texts is the Platonic teaching about the soul as an emanation or expression of the mind. Thus, the description of the process in the terms of emanation: *μονή* (a mind dwelling in itself) – *πρόοδος* (a soul: procession of a mind in "other," other-being of mind) – *ἐπιστροφή* (a soul bringing to a mind "a gift" of its procession) may seem acceptable enough.

But here the thought of Philo does not completely correspond to the logic of the (neo-) Platonic triad, according to which the soul is ontologically lower than the mind, nearer to matter and therefore only the mind but not the soul may ascend to the One. But in Philo it is actually the soul the "ascends to the source of the celestial wisdom" and "becomes pregnant from God."

Here the thought of Philo comes in contact with the Old Testament Judaic tradition. So the image of the soul as God's bride, which Philo describes in *De Cherubim*, 49-52, 98-106, occurs already in the rabbinic exegesis of

²⁹ *De Cherubim*, 46.

³⁰ *De sacrificiis Abeli et Caini*, 59.

³¹ *De Cherubim*, 60 and subsequent.

³² *De congressu eruditionis gratia*, 25-27; *De posteritate Caini*, 135.

³³ *De Cherubim*, 58-65.

³⁴ *De congressu eruditionis gratia*, 26-33.

the Song of Songs. But the connection of female images in Philo's texts with the ideas of the biblical "wisdom literature" is the most interesting. For example, Philo affirms that "wives" of righteous sages are virtues granted by God and they belong not to the earthly but to the heavenly world. Such a virtue is not so much an objectivation of intellectual contents of the sage's mind as an object of intense intellectual and moral aspirations given to his contemplation; it is the divine Sophia herself in one of her aspects or in one of her images revealed in humankind. Just such is the meaning of Sarah (the "imperishable virtue," named by Philo σοφία – wisdom), who gradually prepares righteous men for comprehension of herself, giving them her maidservants as concubines – particular sciences symbolized by Hagar.³⁵ Sarah's long-lasting childlessness means that Abraham who already in his youth chose her as his lady and beloved was for many years unable to comprehend her (which is not a sum total of secular erudition) and to accept a child – a gift of righteous and happy life from her arms.

It is very interesting that Philo himself speaks about Sarah-Sophia as his own beloved (*De congressu eruditionis gratia*, 74-76). We may affirm that the mentioned texts of Philo are nothing else but paraphrases of numerous texts of the biblical "wisdom literature," in which the same divine Wisdom who is referred to as the beloved and consort of God Himself is also referred to as a celestial beloved and even a consort of a righteous sage. "I loved her, and have been looking for her since my youth, I desired to make her my spouse, and I was a lover of her beauty" – says the author of the Wisdom of Solomon.³⁶ In other words that wisdom-virtue (σωφροσύνη) which becomes the expression of a perfect, righteous mind is extremely close to the Wisdom of God Himself, becomes a kind of locus where the mystic and intellectual meeting between God and a human takes place.

In conclusion, we might say that the similarity between sophiological systems of Vladimir Solovyov and Philo of Alexandria along with common tasks and shared sympathies with Platonism are also dependent on the common tradition of the Scriptural, Old Testament sophiology. In these texts as well as in philosophical systems of Philo and Solovyov we may not always be able to distinguish the non-created and created aspects of Sophia; in the language of the authors of Sophia's speeches in the Book of Proverbs (Ch. 8) or in Ben Sirah (Ch. 24) we don't find the dogmatic or philosophical strictness. It was far more important to express an immediate intuition: all

³⁵ This is the central theme of the treatise *De congressu eruditionis gratia*.

³⁶ See also: Si 51:18-29.

sacred and beautiful, tending to harmony and concord in nature and among humans have *eternal divine source and ground*, and this source connecting the world and the human with God – *alive and wise, having his own personal being, own – and besides female – face*.

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The Symbol of Torah as Wisdom and Light reflected in Eastern European Culture

I

In this presentation I am offering a conceptual reading of Jewish and Christian cultures in Eastern Europe, by paying attention to the continuous reinterpretation of the foundational biblical concepts and the development of the symbol of Torah¹ as wisdom and light. In one of my previous papers I showed, by analyzing the texts of late antiquity, how the Torah, the foundational symbol of Jewish culture, although strongly rejected by surrounding nations, was emerging as a messenger from earlier cultural eras. On the other hand, the Torah was actively relating to and interacting with the cultural context of its time, receiving a new interpretation and becoming itself a formative cultural factor. This time we will turn to Eastern European Hassidism and the development of Russian religious philosophical thought in the 19th–20th centuries CE.

Let me start by turning your attention to the beginning of Genesis:

When God began to create heaven and earth² – the earth being unformed and void, with darkness over the surface of the deep and a wind from God sweep-

¹ Traditionally the term Torah (or Law) refers to the Five Books of Moses or the Pentateuch. The term Torah derives from the root *y-r-h*, “to shoot (an arrow),” and thus etymologically refers to that which “hits the mark.” See *The Jewish Study Bible (JSB)*, A. Berlin, M.Z. Brettler (eds.), Oxford: Oxford University Press 1999, p. 1.

² A tradition over two millennia old sees 1.1 as a complete sentence: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.” In the 11th century, the great Jewish commentator Rashi