



Introduction into the Family and Life of Hakham Ya'aqob Abuhatzera

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The Abuhatzera family is famous throughout all of Moroccan Jewry. Many great Sages and Kabbalist masters have arisen from among their ranks. Indeed, the name Abuhatzera itself points to one of the miraculous deeds of a family ancestor.

The original family name was Elbaz. The first to bare the title Abuhatzera was Rabbi Shmuel Elbaz. He lived in Djubar, Syria in the early 1600's and was a personal student of Rabbi Haim Vital, the master Kabbalist who codified the system of the Ari'zal.

Because of the financial needs of his community, Rabbi Shmuel, as its leader, had to many times travel to nearby Turkey on fund raising trips. On one such occasion, he did not have the fair to pay for passage to board the ship. Not to be deterred, he took a small prayer rug, which in Arabic is called a hatzera, placed it upon the water, called upon the holy Name of G-d, and like a magic carpet, this hatzera took him all the way to Turkey upon the water. This event was witnessed by many people. Rabbi Shmuel was thus called 'father of the carpet' or in Arabic Abu (father) Hatzera (carpet).

There is no clear record as to when the Abuhatzera family moved to Tafillalt, in southern Morocco. It was here that Ya'aqob Abuhatzera was born in 1807. From his youth Rabbi Ya'aqob shined in Torah learning. A child prodigy who seemed destined from birth to ascend to a role of leadership in the Jewish community. At an early age Rabbi Ya'aqob began his studies of Kabbalah and took to them like a fish to water. Rabbi Ya'aqob almost didn't need a teacher to teach him Kabbalah. It was as if he was born to know its ways.



Well known in his own community, Rabbi Ya'aqob was almost unknown outside of it. Many books did he write in his lifetime. Yet, they were not published until after his death. One of Rabbi Ya'aqob's sons traveled to Jerusalem to receive financial support and Rabbinic approbations for his fathers works. Yet, being that Rabbi Ya'aqob was unknown to them the request for support was denied.

That same night the spirit of Rabbi Ya'aqob spoke in dreams to all who had rejected his son the previous day. The next day the rabbis called on Rabbi Ya'aqob's son, all with apologies, and pledges for support.

The rest is history. Rabbi Ya'aqob's numerous works have long been published and held dear by Jews from all communities and walks of life. Following in his footsteps, members of the Abuhatzera family have become prominent Rabbis and Kabbalists throughout the Sephardic world. Indeed, members of the family have held high positions of power in the governments of the State of Israel. Most famous in our generation was Rabbi Ya'aqob's grandson, Rabbi Yisrael Abuhatzera (died 1984), better remembered as Baba Sali, the master of miracles.

Rabbi Ya'aqob's works include books of poetry, commentaries on the Bible, the Talmud and Pesah Hagadah. He also wrote a number of works on Jewish Law and Torah ethics. Yet, his most treasured works are his Kabbalistic writings. Among his commentaries on the Torah, Sefer Pituhei Hotam stands out as a brilliant blend of moralistic lessons coupled with Kabbalistic explanations.

Rabbi Ya'aqob did not write his works for beginners. He anticipated that his readers would be well versed in Torah, Judaism and Kabbalah. Therefore, his writing style takes for granted a pre-knowledge on behalf of the reader. This makes his works somewhat more difficult to translate. Without proper footnoting many of the concepts that Rabbi Ya'aqob viewed as self evident would never be properly understood.