

Pre-Adamic Civilizations

Secrets of the Kabbalistic Shemitot

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“For six years you shall plow your fields, but the seventh year shall be holy to HaShem, in that year you shall do no work.” Lev. 25:3-4

One of the most controversial teachings among Kabbalists is the doctrine of the Shemita(ot), the cosmic Sabbatical epochs of pre-Adamic times. According to many of the great Rabbis, Adam was not the first human to have walked the earth. These Rabbis teach that there were full pre-Adamic human civilizations that had arisen and were eventually destroyed.

Among the earlier generations of Kabbalists, prior to the Ari'zal, the doctrine of the Shemita was written about by all Kabbalists, including the Ari'zal's Kabbalistic teacher, Rabbi David Ibn Zimra. These Kabbalists taught that not only is the source for doctrine of the Shemita to be found in the Oral tradition, they went directly into the simple and plain words of the Torah text to show that the history of time is not fully told in the Bible.

In the very beginning it is written, "In the beginning G-d created the Heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1). Immediately, the following verse states, "And the earth was without form and empty" (Gen. 1:2). The Kabbalists have noticed that the prophet Isaiah has written (45:18) that "the earth was not created empty," revealing an apparent contradiction between Genesis and Isaiah. Yet, as it is known to every true scholar of Torah, there is no contradiction between what Genesis says and what Isaiah says. Something, however, is definitely missing. For when G-d created the earth it was not empty upon its creation as per Isaiah. How then did the earth become empty as related in Gen.1:2? This leads us to the inevitable conclusion that something is missing; not that part of the text is missing (G-d forbid), but rather something has been intentionally left out of the narrative. This is glaringly obvious to any student of the Bible.

I have even spoken to one ex-Christian minister (now an Orthodox Jew) who, upon learning about this anomaly, had mentioned that he had heard of this before from reading Christian Biblical commentaries. Therefore, it seems that we have a mystery, the secret solution of which, of course, is known to the Rabbis and Kabbalists. In the Midrash (Gen. R. 3:7) a question is posed of what was G-d occupied with, prior to His creation of our world. The Midrash relates that G-d was busy building and destroying other worlds. The Kabbalists have always had profound insight and understanding into the nature of these pre-Adamic worlds. Much of Kabbalistic literature discusses these worlds in detail. Nevertheless, one will not be able to just open a book and read about them. Before I proceed, I find it necessary to provide you with the following introduction into the methodology of Kabbalistic study. Without this understanding, Kabbalistic teachings will never be fully comprehended.

Kabbalistic language of discussion is highly cryptic and coded. One cannot just pick up a Kabbalistic text, read it, and receive the correct understanding of what is read. Only one knowledgeable in the literature can guide another through it. This is why this material is called Kabbalah, which means, "to receive." Only one who has directly received from one who himself has received from a qualified giver can be called a real Kabbalist. Even in religious Jewish circles, the majority of the students of Kabbalah are not learning from such Sages.

As for those outside of religious Jewish circles, whatever Kabbalah they think they are learning, they are sadly mistaken if they believe that what they are learning is legitimate and authentic. Non-religious Jews and non-Jewish students are being deceived by their kabbalistically blind teachers. **One can only be a true Kabbalist when one is trained and is an expert in all areas of Judaism, fully observant of Jewish law in accordance to the Shulkhan Arukh (Code of Jewish Law) and has received the Kabbalistic tradition from a known and bona fide Kabbalistic Rabbinic source.** Unless all these criteria are met, no person has any business learning or teaching Kabbalah.

Regardless of how many books one may study, this does not qualify that person to teach Kabbalah. The reason is that this so-called teacher has never been given the true keys to understanding the inner system. As for those who think that somehow they have gone around the system and received the inner understandings other than in the accepted way, those teachers are only fooling themselves and those students who have the misfortune to study under them.

The Ari'zal, Ba'al Shem Tov and others have repeatedly taught that Kabbalistic understanding does not come about as does Talmudic understanding, i.e., through rational, analytical learning. Rather, Kabbalistic understanding comes because of the holy lifestyle that a Kabbalist chooses to lead over and above that of his peers.

The scrupulous observance of the commandments and an introverted lifestyle enables the Kabbalist to receive that which we call Hasagat Ruah HaKodesh, guidance by the Divine spirit. The resulting knowledge that a true Kabbalist receives is complementary to that which the Kabbalist has received from his legitimate Kabbalist teacher.

The job of the true Kabbalist teacher is to make sure his students are not only learning the right things, but that they are learning them in the right way. For only learning right things in the right way leads one to the right place. The opposite is, of course, true. If the right thing is learned in the wrong way, then the wrong way will make the right thing work in the wrong way.

Since the days of the Ari'zal (1570's) Kabbalah has been allowed to be made public to those who meet the stringent criteria required to study it. The schools of the Kabbalah have, therefore, grown dramatically for there are a good number of worthy students out there. Yet, just because Kabbalah is now allowed to be made public does not mean that all of the Kabbalistic teachings are passed to every student, nor does it mean that all the secrets are revealed.

I assure you that among Kabbalists the vast majority of true knowledge still remains hidden in small private circles, each of which is guarded like the inner circle of the best intelligence agencies in the world. These Kabbalistic inner circles have been around since Talmudic times

(and before). They are the ones who truly know what is going on in the world. They are the ones chosen by G-d to have the power to influence the course of human events. Through these secret groups of Kabbalists is fulfilled the verse, "For the L-rd HaShem does nothing unless He has revealed His secret to His servants, the prophets." (Amos 3:7).

Now to return to the topic of the Shemita. It is written in the book of Leviticus that, "for six years you shall plow your fields, but the seventh year shall be holy to HaShem, in that year you shall do no work." It is also taught by our Sages in the holy Talmud (San. 98A), "six thousand years shall the world last, then for one thousand years shall it remain desolate." Our Sages have learned from the secret meaning of the verse in Leviticus that the days of our world, i.e., our civilization, will be measured in the same way, as is the Biblical Sabbatical year. Six years shall we labor, and in the seventh shall we rest. So, our civilization will grow for six thousand years, and then for a thousand years shall it "remain desolate" which means to be left alone to rest. After this time, it is said that G-d renews his creation.

The Bible proceeds to speak about the Jubilee year. We are instructed to count seven times seven years and then to proclaim a Jubilee, a year of complete release. The Kabbalists have revealed that just as our civilization will last for the Sabbatical period of six thousand years and one thousand years of desolation, so will there be seven cycles similar to this, corresponding to a cosmic cycle of Sabbaticals and Jubilee. Therefore, according to this calculation, human civilization will rise and fall seven times, each for a period of six thousand years, with a rest period of a thousand years between.

Now arises the question, which Sabbatical are we in today? Many Kabbalists look back to the verse in Genesis and notice the discrepancy. They answer the problem of the emptiness of the land (Gen. 1:2), when this was not the way it was created (Is. 45:18), by saying that we are not in the first Shemita. The earth was indeed created full. It only became empty as a result of the previous civilization. They are the ones who left the land "empty and desolate." According to many of the Kabbalists, therefore, we are in the second Shemita.

Although they say we are in the second Shemita, they do not exclude the possibility that we are in the third, fourth or fifth, but rather conclude that we are definitely not in the first. They say we are in the second, meaning we are in at least the second.

Rabbi Yisrael Lifshitz, the author of the authoritative commentary to the Mishna, Tiferet Yisrael, addresses the topic of pre-Adamic life in the introduction to the eleventh chapter of Tractate Sanhedrin. Drawing upon what was the scientific discoveries of his day, and the Darwinian conflict on creationism and evolution, Lifshitz points out that the Torah does acknowledge the existence of dinosaurs. These were the creations of the prior Shemita, he says.

Not only this, but Rabbi Lifshitz goes further to say that Adam was not really the first human being, but that there were countless people before him, which he calls pre-Adamites. This controversial view of Rabbi Lifshitz has placed his commentary and other written works on the taboo list in certain Jewish circles, which considered his revelations not in accordance with the spirit of Judaism. However, nothing could be further from the truth.

There are some Kabbalists such as Rabbi Yehuda Fatiyah who, in his Beit Lekhem Yehuda (2,66A), wrote questioning certain aspects of the doctrine of the Shemita. Yet, even Rabbi

Fatayah, in *Minhat Yehuda* (pg. 222), expounds on a section of the Zohar that speaks of the pre-Adamic parents of Adam. He even states that Adam's parents copulated on the spiritual plane, that his mother conceived and gave birth to Adam's body, which, as I referenced earlier, was completely non-physical. Where Adam's parents came from, Rabbi Fatayah does not say. However, he makes it quite clear that they are individual beings and not simply an appellation for G-d.

The Talmud in Hagigah 13B speaks of 974 pre-Adamic generations. One of the early Kabbalistic classics, the *Ma'arekhet Elokut*, states specifically that these generations refer to the pre-Adamic Shemita cycles. There are a great number of both earlier and later generation Rabbis, Hasidic masters and Kabbalists who have spoken quite openly about the doctrine of the Shemita. With regards to the Shemitot, Rabbi Shmuel Lifshitz opens his discussion of the matter in his *Anafim Shatul Mayim* commentary to *Sefer Halkarim* by saying "[I] open my mouth like a talebearer to reveal hidden secrets."

Not everyone, however, accepted the doctrine of the Shemitot. Rabbi Haim Vital in his *Sha'ar Ma'amrei Rashbi* 44A says outright that the doctrine of the Shemitot is Kabbalistically incorrect. Many later Kabbalists follow Rabbi Haim's position on this. Nonetheless, many more do not.

Rabbi Aryeh Kaplan has written on this topic of the Shemitot and pointed out correctly that Kabbalistic learning does not follow Halakhic learning. Whereas in Halakha there is need of an authoritative conclusion to decide proper practice, this is not the case with Kabbalah. Therefore, although Rabbi Haim Vital himself did not accept the teachings of the Kabbalistic Shemitot this in no way makes his words the final authority, even more so seeing that almost every other master Kabbalistic, before him and after him, disagreed with him on this matter.

Interesting to note is the *Sha'at Ratzon* commentary on the *Tikunei Zohar* (36). The author Rabbi Shlomo Kohen is one of the great later generation Kabbalists of the Rabbi Haim Vital/Rashash school. He is also the author of the authoritative commentary to Rabbi Vital's *Etz Haim* entitled *Yafeh Sha'ah*.

In his commentary to the *Tikunei Zohar* 36 Rabbi Kohen comments on the clear reference made there to the Shemitot and then mentions Rabbi Vital's objections to this view. Rabbi Kohen then elucidates a brilliant compromise how the view of the ancients and the view of Rabbi Vital can be synthesized.

Thus, no present day student of Kabbalah should be so quick to dismiss the doctrine of the Shemitot out of hand based on the comments of Rabbi Haim Vital. For as we see, they are open to various interpretations. Indeed, even the Gaon of Vilna in his commentary to the *Tikunei Zohar* 36 clearly states that the text is speaking about the pre-Adamic Shemitot.

Though my readers who are not Orthodox Jews will not recognize the following names, they are still important for me to document for the sake of my Orthodox Jewish readers. This is only a partial list of those Rabbis and Kabbalists, from the earlier and later generations, which held that the doctrine of the Shemita is correct and true:

1. Sefer HaTemunah,
2. Sefer HaKana,
3. RaMBaN,
4. Rabbeynu Bahya,
5. Rabbi Yitzhak D'Min Acco,
6. Recanati on the Torah,
7. Tziyuni on the Torah,
8. Ma'arekhet Elokut,
9. Shatul Mayim on Sefer Halkarim,
10. Sefer Livnat HaSapir of Rabbi David ben Yehuda HaHasid (Sefardi),
11. Sefer Shoshan Sodot,
12. Radbaz, Rabbi David Zimra (the Kabbalistic teacher of the Ari'zal),
13. Tekhelet Mordechai,
14. Rabbi Lifshitz's Tiferet Yisrael
15. Rabbi Tzvi Hirsch Eichenstein of Zidatchov *in his Ateret Tzvi commentary on the Zohar HaRakia*,
16. Rabbi Eliyahu, the Gaon of Vilna
17. Tikunei Zohar 36

This is only a partial list. My orthodox Jewish readers will recognize that these names are giants in the world of Jewish learning, they are the pillars upon which our holy traditions rest. To say that all these giants of Torah are incorrect is to both dishonor these Rabbis and the Torah itself. The legitimacy of the pre-Adamic worlds has never been questioned in authoritative Torah literature.

Rabbi Tzvi Hirsch Eichenstein, in his commentary Ateret Tzvi (126B) on the book Zohar HaRakia, states that even though the Ari'zal himself was silent on this matter, he definitely ascribed to the doctrine of the Shemita and that **“G-d forbid anyone would disagree with the holy Sages of Israel.”**