



Noah and the Near-East (II)

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The Judaic Kabbalah stressed more than once the harmony between heaven and earth, which in Christianity is said as “on earth as it is in heaven” (**Matthew** 6:10). For example, *Knesseth-Israel* from below corresponds to *Malkuth*, “Kingdom,” and to Shekinah as divine presence in the world; but there is also a *Knesseth-Israel* from above, celestial, and every (sacred) activity the Community of Israel does on earth imitates the divine archetypes: “When we are told that the whole land of Israel came and folded itself under Abram, this refers to another holy supernal land which God has and which is also called «the land of Israel.» ... and it is called «the land of the living» (**Zohar** III, 84 a).¹ The Community of Israel only superficially means the Jewish people, in the same way as Islam bears a universal spiritual significance, beyond the particular Arabic point of view. This Community represents especially “the traditional society” as “explication” of a spiritual center, and is therefore a sort of earthly paradise, image of the Heavenly Paradise. In a perfect case, the Kabbalistic disciple hides in this *Knesseth-Israel*, which he essentially represents, and follows Shekinah’s way to unite with the Community of Israel from above, with God, being also the intermediary through whom the whole community will rise to the Most High, and the community being the intermediary through which the whole world will do the same. *Sephira Malkuth* designates *Knesseth-Israel*, yet, as we said, not as Jewish people in a common sense, but as an “organism” (in the same way the *sephirothic* Tree is an “organism”), as world, as kingdom, as spiritual center and also as king, that is, as illuminated man, who, in some specific epochs, can fall from sacred to profane. In the middle of this *Malkuth* (a “kingdom” that can be in man’s heart) resides the divine presence, Shekinah, the perfect mediator nearby the king (**Zohar** II, 51 a),² very similar to the Babylonian goddess Ishtar.

Generation of the universal manifestation necessarily means the beginning of cosmic divorce, and the Judaic Kabbalah calls this “Shekinah’s exile,” the divine presence leaving the Holy One, blessed be He (*Kaddosh-Baruch-Hu*), and going away, farther and farther; the theme of the exile obsesses the Judaic tradition. We could say that the whole modern world is in exile, in diaspora, from this point of view, the Jews’ exile being somehow the visible model of worldly diaspora. In fact, a double exile takes place: on the one hand, Shekinah’s exile with respect to the Holy One, blessed be He, and on the other

¹ Vol. 5, p. 97. We saw that Guénon considered the name “Israel” as representing the assembly of the initiates.

² Vol. 3, p. 156.

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hand, Israel's exile with regard to Shekinah, which becomes the hidden sun, where this exile represents "the misery" (*daleth*) when the candle of Ishtar's worshiper becomes extinct; the man falls then into ignorance and profanity, since the exile refers not only to the Community of Israel but also to each individual. The straightening means evidently the beginning of a new cycle, after all the scattered ones in diaspora are reunited, after "my scattered family will come back together" (as a Babylonian hymn to Ishtar tells), when Shekinah will unite with *Kaddosh-Baruch-Hu*. The union is first of all, of course, an initiatory one, of spiritual essence, symbolizing the union of the Self with Brahma (in the Hindu tradition), the Supreme Identity when *jîvâtma* breaks the worldly chains and reveals his splendour as *Âtmâ*, identical to Brahma.

We witness an attempt to reconcile two points of view, one transcendental, the other one immanent. In all the genuine traditions, the Principle is at the same time the Most High (transcendent) and the Heart or the Center (immanent). A traditional society of "righteous men" respects and imitates the things from the High, and at the same time it is in harmony with the spiritual kernel (center) from where it receives its reality and the kernel is *Zaddik*, "the pillar of the world."

In Noah's times, there were no more "righteous men" in the exoteric domain, and Shekinah was in exile. In other words, the harmonious communication between heaven and earth broke, and the esoteric domain became dry; the spiritual influence withdrew from the world, due to the lack of "righteous men." To regenerate and straighten the world "ten righteous men" were needed, yet at the time of the flood only Noah (and his sons) was found blameless, and only with him did God make a Covenant having as an earthly token the ark, and as a celestial token the rainbow (**Zohar**, I, 67 b).³ It is interesting that Noah's embarking on the Ark (of the Covenant) is considered a union similar to the union in the highest, being therefore a symbol of a supernal archetype; as the river derived from the supernal waters watered the paradisiacal Garden, fertilizing it, and then the river parted into four to produce the world (**Genesis** 2:10), in the same way the union of Noah with the Ark will produce future generations that will multiply upon the earth (**Zohar**, I, 59 b).⁴

As Guénon explained (**Symboles**, pp. 173, 175), the ark from below is analogous to the rainbow from above modeling a complete cycle. The rainbow represents the superior Waters, the ark the inferior Waters and they come together, united in order to regenerate the world and produce a new cosmic cycle. The Judaic Kabbalah says that the greatest sin of the flood generation was that Noah's contemporaries did not let the union between the superior and inferior Waters occur, that is, due to the corruption, crimes and injustice reigning among the people, heaven and earth became completely separated. That is why they were punished with water. The waters of the flood were burning like fire, emerging boiling from the abyss: they corresponded to the inferior Waters⁵; at the same time,

³ Vol. I, pp. 223, 241. The Ark of the Covenant is equivalent to the Garden of Eden, that is, with the spiritual center; on the other hand, the Ark is the World Egg that contains the seeds of the future cycle. The union of Noah with the Ark suggests the union with the Principle from an immanent point of view, as a response to the Covenant with the transcendental God (Noah has already walked with this God).

⁴ Vol. I, p. 193.

⁵ We note that in Greek mythology Minos was killed in a barrel with boiling water; the connection between Minos and the cosmic cycles is known. Regarding the combination fire-water, besides the

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heaven opened and humankind was flooded with the waters from above: they corresponded to the superior Waters.⁶ In this mode the two types of waters came together to punish mankind in proportion to its sin (**Zohar**, I, 62 a, 68 b).⁷ The end of the world means the reassembling of the World Egg as it has been at the beginning, it means the reunification or the superior and inferior Waters as they been before Genesis.

We reach now a capital problem. From a cosmologic point of view and from the doctrine of cosmic cycles perspective, the flood is something normal and logical. When a world has exhausted its possibilities, it has to die and a new one will be born. From an initiatory point of view, salvation (regeneration) of the world is logical and so Noah appears as an ambiguous character.⁸

alchemical symbolism, we should observe that it illustrates *coincidentia oppositorum*, which will be present at the end of times, when the end and the beginning are one; we noted already that “the pillars of Enoch” represent the water and the fire.

⁶ The Greek flood is described as a combination of the waters from above (controlled by Zeus) and from below (controlled by Poseidon).

⁷ Vol. I, pp. 202, 228. “Noah’s folk denied it long before them; they rejected Our servant and said: «He is crazy!» and he was rebuffed. ... So We opened Heaven’s gates for water to pour down. We drilled the earth full of springs and the waters met at a command which had been decreed” (**Qur’ân** 54:9-12).

⁸ For example, Judaic esotericism considers that Noah brought sin into the world: “Noah himself drew death into the world, through his own sin, of which is written, «And he drank of the wine and was drunken, and he was uncovered within his tent»” (**Zohar**, I, 63 b, vol. I, p. 207); on the other hand, we saw what Guénon said about Noah and the initiatory symbolism of the wine. For Saint John Chrysostom, Noah’s drunkenness is a debauchery, yet if it is an initiatory “drunkenness” then Noah’s uncovering is equivalent to a revelation and that is why Ham was punished (in the same way as in **Chymische Hochzeit Christiani Rosencreutz**, those who saw Venus naked were punished). With regard to this Biblical episode, we should note that here is suggested the difference between the exoteric and the esoteric. “Ham, the father of Canaan, saw his father’s nakedness and told his two brothers outside. But Shem and Japheth took a garment and laid it across their shoulders; then they walked in backward and covered their father’s nakedness. Their faces were turned the other way so that they would not see their father’s nakedness. When Noah awoke from his wine and found out what his youngest son had done to him, he said, «Cursed be Canaan! The lowest of slaves will he be to his brothers.» He also said, «Blessed be the Lord, the God of Shem! May Canaan be the slave of Shem. May God extend the territory of Japheth; may Japheth live in the tents of Shem, and may Canaan be his slave.»” (**Genesis** 9: 22-27). Philo explained the episode: “In the first place, because he [Ham] did not report the involuntary evil of his father to one brother only, but to both of them; and no doubt if he had any more he would have told it to them all, as he did in fact to every one he could; and he did so with ridicule in his very words, making a jest of what ought not to have been treated with laughter and derision” (QG II, 71, **The Works of Philo**, Hendrickson Publishers, 1997, p. 837). Philo also suggested that the three brothers, Shem, Japheth and Ham, correspond to good, indifferent and bad, which we may interpret in various ways. First, it is possible to compare this triad to the three *gunas* of the Hindu tradition and to Lao Zi’s sayings: “When the best pupil hears about Dao he practises it assiduously; when the average pupil hears about Dao, he seems now to keep it and now to lose it. When the worst pupil hears about Dao, he laughs out loud. If he did not laugh, Dao would be unworthy of being Dao” (**Dao De Jing** XLI). Ham, who did laugh, is the worst pupil and relates to *tamas* (the *guna* directed downwards); Shem corresponds to *sattwa* (the *guna* directed upwards). On the other hand, we may say that Ham represents exotericism, while his brothers illustrate esotericism; or, in more details, Ham should be related to the “outside darkness,” Japheth to exotericism and Shem to esotericism. From a Christian point of view, Shem would indicate the Jews and Japheth the Greeks (or the Gentiles). Eventually, we note that Flavius Josephus and some other traditions considered that Ham was perpetuating the teachings of the Giants and of the fallen angels, after the flood (in the **Bible**, Nimrod is Ham’s grandson), which shows Ham as the ancestor of the present counter-initiation.

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A perfect spiritual realization supposes not only an ascendant initiatory way, but also a descendant one, the two phases being comparable (as Guénon affirmed) to the two halves of a circle⁹; the descendant half is related to the *avatâra*'s function (*avatarana* means in Sanskrit "to descend"), a function, which, compared to Christ, Noah did not have. In the Islamic tradition there is a difference between *walî* and *nabî*: the former is an initiate for himself, the latter for the others (Guénon, **Initiation**, pp. 256-262); *walî*, said Guénon, lacks something, and such a "lack" we find in Noah's case: it is about Mercy.¹⁰ Only when a straightening is no longer possible, the kernel of Tradition and the spiritual seeds gather in the Ark to get ready for a new cycle and the old world is completely destroyed. Yet the initiates have the obligation of striving for a regeneration and revivification of the world in which they operate and that is what happened in the cases of Christianity and Islam. If Noah had operated as a *nabî* maybe the flood would have been avoided. The change of the cycles comes only when all other means are exhausted; therefore the initiates' intervention is compulsory.

When the individuals are "righteous," Shekinah, the divine presence, is among them; but when the world is decayed and full of sins, the people throw Shekinah into exile: this was the flood generation, Noah's people (**Zohar**, I, 61 a).¹¹ When there is one "righteous man" in this world, Shekinah joins him and does not leave him; and Noah was allowed to embark on the Ark only because he was "righteous," since nobody else but the righteous (*Zaddik*) can unite with the Ark (**Zohar**, I, 66 b).¹² When the righteous men multiply the earth is fruitful.¹³ When the sinners multiply the waters dry (the earth becomes a desert and the heart solidifies). God, even if He destroyed the sinners in the time of Noah, He wanted to spare the world, yet couldn't find a redeemer to save the world from His Wrath.¹⁴ The world's salvation required the existence of "ten righteous men," and besides Noah nobody was "righteous."¹⁵ With regard to Noah, all his efforts were required to save himself and repopulate the world (**Zohar**, I, 67 a, b)¹⁶; that is all Noah was capable of, and if from a cosmogonic point of view his role is beneficent, from an initiatory point of view he appears with a "lack."¹⁷

⁹ Even if we obtain the same diagram as the one composed by the ark and the rainbow, here the two semicircles are "vertical" not "horizontal"; there is though a close connection between the two diagrams.

¹⁰ Allâh's greatest name, synthesizer, is *Er-Rahmân*, "the Merciful"; in the same way "the Prayer of the Heart" in Hesychasm is nothing else than divine Mercy.

¹¹ Vol. I, p. 198.

¹² Vol. I, p. 219.

¹³ See also **Qur'ân** 7:57-58.

¹⁴ Since, in fact, Mercy not Wrath is the essential characteristic of God.

¹⁵ In the Sodom episode, Abraham asked God: "«May the Lord not be angry, but let me speak just once more. What if only ten [righteous men] can be found there?»" God answered, «For the sake of ten, I will not destroy it»" (**Genesis** 18:32).

¹⁶ Vol. I, pp. 222-223. "When the sinners were destroyed in the time of Noah, God was anxious for the preservation of the world, but could see no one who might save it from His wrath; for the whole efforts of Noah were required to save himself and to repopulate the world."

¹⁷ Noah "was righteous only by comparison with his contemporaries" (**Zohar** I, 67 a).

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That is the difference between Noah and Moses. The latter, even if he admonished the population, gave the Law and saved them. Compared to Moses, Noah did not intervene to save his contemporaries; he let them perish. Moses, on the other hand, offered his life in change for salvation of his people; Noah saved himself and left the world in God's hands. Moses planted Shekinah in the middle of Israel, risking his life for it. Even if Noah was a "righteous man," he was not holy enough to make God consider him qualified to save the world. Noah should have mercy for others, since when the sinners multiply, the "righteous man" suffers first for their sins. On the other hand, Noah "walked with God," and he was saved in the Ark, having the mission of repopulating the world; moreover, he daily admonished and warned the people and asked them to repent because the flood was coming, and the Wrath of God was awakened, and it is written that the one who admonishes the sinner "saves himself and is not involved in the punishment which befalls them" (**Zohar**, I, 67 b-68 a).¹⁸

¹⁸ Vol. I, pp. 223-225.