

Is There a Place for Prehistoric Man Within the Torah? The View of One European Gadol, Rabbi Israel Lipschitz

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This article is a companion to the prior article, “Dinosaurs and Woolly Mammoths - is there a Torah Viewpoint?” [1] and the rationale for publication is the same -- numerous Jewish day schools and yeshivot visit The Museum of Natural History in Manhattan, NYC. The students are not prepared to view dinosaurs, mammoths, and prehistoric man, and are faced with a universe dated in the billions of years. As such, the Museum appears anti-Torah and leads to confusion in the minds of the students. In the mid-nineteenth century, Rabbi Israel ben Gedalyah Lipschitz (1782-1860), known as the *Tiferes Yisrael*, was faced with a similar problem. Instead of shying away from the scientific discoveries in his time, he welcomed these discoveries, and showed how the fossilized bones of dinosaurs, mammoths, and prehistoric man confirmed various *midrashim*, Talmudic passages, and *kabbalistic* thoughts. This article continues the ideas presented by Rav Lipschitz as applied to prehistoric man. Rav Lipschitz, a proponent of the *kabbalistic* idea of the existence of Sabbatical worlds prior to our current world, composed his thoughts in the *Derush Or' HaChayim* published at the end of the *Mishnayos, Seder Nezikin*, and which has been translated into English by Rav Aryeh Kaplan [2].

Rav Lipschitz, a proponent of the Devine Doctrine of Sabbatical Cycles, held there will be a total of seven distinct worlds, in tandem, with each world existing for 7,000 years, consisting of six millennia of productivity followed by a seventh millennium of destruction and desolation. This concept is noted in Sanhedrin (97a), “Rav Katina said, for 6,000 years will the world exist and for 1,000 years, *i.e.*, the seventh millennium, it will be destroyed. This will repeat seven times (49,000 years) culminating in a “grand” Jubilee millennium (*Yovel*) in which, according to some opinions (*e.g.*, Rav Menachem Recanati, an Italian kabbalist, 1223-1290), all creation returns to the primordial state of existence [see 3]. This Sabbatical cycling of seven worlds followed by a millennium of rest mimics the *Shmittah* cycle of work-

ing the land for 6 years and leaving it fallow for the 7th, or *Shmittah*, year, occurring seven consecutive times and culminating in *Yovel* in the 50th year.

A corollary of Sabbatical world cycling is that the destruction of one world leads to the creation of the following world. This idea is found in the Talmud (*Chagigah* 13a) and in several *midrashim* (*Bereshis Rabbah*, 3:7; 9:2; *Koheles Rabbah* 3:1.11; *Yalkut Shimoni Koheles Rabbah* 968:3): according to Rabbi Avahu, prior to this world, *HaShem* created many other worlds and destroyed them, saying, “This one pleases Me, those did not please Me.” The word “destroyed” probably is too harsh and needs to be understood as “recreate” [4] or as “remodel,” as planet Earth was not obliterated but rather was remodeled through the occurrence of natural disasters that destroyed most of human, animal and plant life (*Rabbeinu Bachya*, *BaMidbar* 10:36). On a lesser scale, for example, consider the *mabul* (*i.e.*, the flood) in Noach’s time, in which the world was remodeled through a natural (albeit, *HaShem* orchestrated) cataclysmic event. The progression from one Sabbatical world to the next Sabbatical world is a positive event. Rav Lipschitz noted that “each cycle is a preparation for the following cycle, and that each cycle is more highly perfected than the one before.”

Rav Lipschitz’s excitement with the discovery of fossilized human bones was that such findings supported the Torah’s concept of other worlds before our world, which commenced with *Adam HaRishon*. He noted, “Now, my dear friends see how firm is the basis upon which our holy Torah rests, for this secret (*i.e.*, of the existence of prior worlds) was revealed to our ancestors and teachers, and they revealed it hundreds of years ago, and now in our times we find this again most clearly visible to our eyes in nature.” Apparently worldly, he cited specific paleontological discoveries, such as the uncovering of remnants of various life forms at different strata and organized according to their complexity, frozen mam-

moths in ice in Siberia, aquatic creatures on mountain tops, and discovery of various varieties of dinosaurs (e.g., specifically, he noted a megalosaurus and the iguanodon). As these creatures do not exist in the current world, Rav Lipschitz concluded that cataclysmic events in prior Sabbatical worlds led to the destruction of these creatures.

Rav Lipschitz also tackled the discovery of fossilized bones of *pre-Adam HaRishon* hominoids. “Nevertheless, my dear brothers, observe the greatness and wondrous loftiness of the Torah, note the large letter *bet* with which the Torah opens and scrutinize the four “crowns” on this *bet*. The Kabbalists have a tradition that these four crowns hint that the creation of the world and all its hosts as described herein is the fourth in the order and that the letter *bet* which in *gematria* is equivalent to the number two informs us that the crowning glory of creation, the human intellect, is here for the second time.” Apparently, this current world is the fourth in the Sabbatical cycling and is the second time that humans were created. Thus, calculating backwards, the third of the Sabbatical worlds, as noted by Rav Lipschitz, had some form of human being (termed, “*pre-Adamites*” or pre-historic man), including mammoths. Possibly, in the second of the Sabbatical worlds the dominant life forms were reptiles, the age of the dinosaurs. Fossilized bones of dinosaurs and human beings are never found intermixed, as their coexistence was an impossibility, because human beings were no match for carnivorous dinosaurs [5]. Perhaps, the first of the Sabbatical worlds commenced with extremophilic bacteria and unicellular algae and culminated with simple plant and animal life.

Rav Lipschitz continued, “In my humble opinion, those humans who lived in the primordial world, known as “*pre-Adamites*” in the vernacular, are the humans who lived in the world before the creation of *Adam HaRishon* of the current cycle of creation, are identical to the 974 generations mentioned in Shabbas (88b) and Chagigah (14a) who were fashioned before the current cycle of creation. Continuing this thought, Rav Lipschitz noted, “Make the following calculation: According to the words of our sages, may their memory be blessed, this is derived from the verse, ‘He commanded a Word for 1,000 generations’ (Tehillim 105:8), that the Torah was fit to be given at the end of a thousand of these early generations, *viz.*, at the beginning of the current cycle of creation, which was created with greater perfection

in intellect and character traits than the previous one.” However, the *pre-Adamites* “behaved egregiously” and that prior world was terminated after 974 generations, or 26 generations short of 1,000. The destruction of that world occurred in the year 6818 from the beginning of that creation. The 26 generations which were lacking in the previous cycle were completed during the period between *Adam HaRishon* to Moishe, *viz.* the 10 generations from *Adam HaRishon* to Noach, the ten generations from Noach to Avraham, and the 6 generations from Avraham to Moishe, when the world matured and was purified to the point of being fit for the giving of the Torah.” Apparently, the fossilized human bones discovered in Rav Lipschitz’s era were the remnants of the *pre-Adamites*, i.e., prehistoric man.

Rav Lipschitz did not discuss what sins these *pre-Adamites* committed, but if they were punished, they must have been intelligent creatures with an understanding of right-from-wrong. According to paleontologists, the hominoids prior to modern man are Cro-magnon man, taking their name from a cave in France where they were discovered in 1868. Cro-magnon man and modern man both are scientifically classified as belonging to *Homo sapiens*. Anatomically, Cro-magnon man was like modern man, except that his face was slightly boarder, he was more muscular, and had a slightly larger brain. Cro-magnon buried their dead, used tools, made weapons, carved and sculptured small statues of humans and animals, practiced body painting, made beautiful cave paintings, lived in caves and huts, wove cloth, wore animal skins, and made jewelry. However, there is evidence that Cro-magnon man may have practiced cannibalism, shamanism, and was overly concerned with sex [6]. An early contemporary of Cro-magnon man were the Neanderthals, a distinct species of hominoid who, to some extent intermingled with Cro-magnon. The race for dominance between Neanderthals and Cro-magnon played out in in the Middle East; Cro-magnon won and the Neanderthals disappeared from the fossil record [7].

The man difference between Cro-magnon man and modern man was not anatomy, but rather it was spirituality - modern man has a *neshamah*. Rav Aryeh Kaplan [2] noted “that less than six thousand years ago, G-d created Adam as the first of a new type of human being. Although human beings may have existed before Adam, he was the first to acquire a special spiritual sensitivity

and to be able to communicate with G-d.” Beginning with *Adam HaRishon* all mankind had a *neshamah*. This concept was discussed seven hundred years ago by Ramban on the phrase “and G-d breathed into his nostrils the *neshama* of life and the Adam became to a living soul” (Bereshis 2:7). The preposition “to” bothered Ramban, who suggested that it may describe mankind progressing through stages of mineral, plant, fish, and animal. Finally, upon receiving the *neshama*, that creature which had already been formed (possibly, Cro-magnon man?) became a human, Ramban concluded with, “Or it may be that the verse is stating that prior to receiving the *neshama* it was a completely living being (possibly, Cro-magnon man?) and by the *neshama* it was transformed into another man, i.e., *Adam HaRishon*, and beginnings of the present mankind [see 7].

The concept of creatures with a human morphology but without a *neshama* is not foreign to Jewish thought. The Rambam in *The Guide of the Perplexed* noted the existence of human look-a-likes during the era of *Adam HaRishon*. These creatures were animals devoid of a *neshamah*, had the shape and configuration of man, exhibited a higher level of intelligence than other animals, but were “inclined to cause various kinds of harm and injury that are not possessed by the other animals” [8]. A Mishnah in Kilayim (8:5) discusses a creature called the *adnei ha’sadeh*, for which several definitions are presented, ranging from orangutan to feral human being. Rav Shimon Schwab [10, 11] suggested that the *adnei ha’sadeh*, as well as the phrase “*chayas ha’sa’dah*” (Bereishis 2:19), referred to isolated populations of pre-historic man. “They [*i.e.*, these prehistoric men] looked like men, walked upright like men, and perhaps even talked like men. Nevertheless, they were merely highly intelligent animals, because *Hakadosh Baruch Hu* had not endowed them with a *neshamah*.”

The beauty of Rav Lipchitz’s approach is the agreement between Torah and science, as noted in the following: (1) the occurrence of cataclysmic events that overturn an existing world, leading to the rebirth of a new world: Scientists suggest that planet Earth experienced five mass extinctions, in which 75-95% of the life species disappeared in any one cataclysmic event. The cataclysmic events causing these extinctions included: (a) an ice age; (b) rapid depletion of atmosphere oxygen; (c) erupting volcanoes; (d) a surge in global temperatures; and (e) asteroids impacting upon the planet [12].

(2) destruction of one world leads to the creation of a more perfect new world: The creation of *pre-Adamites* (e.g., Neanderthals, Cro-magnon men) necessitated the destruction of carnivorous dinosaurs, which would have viewed hominids as food. The age of the dinosaurs ended suddenly presumably because of the impact of the asteroid, the Chicxulub meteorite, onto the Yucatan Peninsula near the Gulf of Mexico, leaving a crater more than 110 miles wide. This impact projected more than 12,000 cubic miles of particulate material into the atmosphere, blocking sunlight from reaching the surface of the planet and causing a decades-long winter and an acidification of the oceans. When the dark covering lifted, 75% of all species on Earth had disappeared, including the dinosaurs, which was crucial for the emergence of mammals and eventually of mankind [13]. And, (3) in progressing from one Sabbatical world to the next, there is some carryover, in that the annihilation is not total, with the newly formed world having some benefit from the prior world: Rav Yisroel Belsky [14] provided two examples: (1) the world’s supply of fossil fuels, including oil, gasoline, natural gas, and coal, are derived from the remains of plants and animals that existed in prior Sabbatical worlds; and (2) the formation of soil occurred during the ice age in a prior Sabbatical world, when glaciers slowly advanced and then retreated, pulverizing the rocky surface into a fine powder, which formed the basis of soil.

Interesting the human genome shows some carryover of DNA from *pre-Adamites*. Apparently, in the prior Sabbatical world, ancient Cro-magnon *Homo sapiens* mated with members of *Homo neanderthalensis*, as current Europeans and Asians have approximately 2% Neanderthal DNA. A rather new hominoid species, *Homo denisovav*, anatomically like modern humans recently was discovered. Interesting, sequences of this ancient DNA are present in the DNA of living East Asian individuals, South Asians, and Aboriginal people in Australia [15]. She *et al.* (2004), focusing on the pericentromeric regions of human chromosomes, identified ancestral hominoid DNA in the DNA of modern man. Another example of carryover of DNA is the hemoglobin gene family in modern man, which is thought to have an ancestral (*pre-Adam HaRishon*) origin. The hemoglobin gene family is a set of several similar genes, formed by duplication of a single original ancestral gene, and now consisting of ten genes in two clusters on different chromosomes, called the α -globin and β -globin loci. These

two gene clusters are thought to have arisen as a result of duplications and mutations in an ancient precursor gene [17], originating in a prior Sabbatical world.

It is recognized that this article is not for everyone. People usually view religion and science as opposite ends of a spectrum. However, the explanation of ancient fossils as developed by Rav Lipschitz is an exception, as the Torah view and the scientific view are complimentary to the other. Rav H Billet [18] noted an embarrassing Internet video that was circulating about an unprofessional exchange between *frum* Jews concerning some aspect of evolution. In response, Rav Billet noted Rav Lipschitz's approach, as it harmonizes a Torah approach and a scientific approach, without either side bending their position. Praising Rav Lipschitz, Rav Billet wrote, "He performed a great service to Jewish scholarship that believes that Torah and reality are one and the same. A Jew must choose faith (*emunah*) above all else when there is no alternative. But where reason and faith can live together, that is ideal. Faith is greatly strengthened when scientific reality confirms the Torah reality that we all believe to be true."

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