**YESHIVAT HAR ETZION**

**ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)**

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**THE PHILOSOPHY OF *SHEMITTA***

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This shiur is available in the archives at:

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**Shiur #04: The Interdependence of the Man and the Land**

In our last lesson, we saw that although most of the descriptions of *shemitta* in the Torah make no mention of the severity with which its violation will be met, *Parashat Bechukotai* seems to change all of that. There the Torah links the nonobservance of *shemitta* with the exile of the Jewish people from the land, leading to the land of Israel’s being uncultivated and fallow as compensation for all the years in which *shemitta* had not been properly observed.

We noted that the relationship between man's actions and the ground he lives on is not really new, as the Torah explicitly indicates that the punishments of Adam, Kayin, and the generation of the Flood affected the ground (*adama*) as well.

The nature of the relationship between man's actions and the land may be understood if we analyze the origin of man. The first man is called by the name Adam specifically to remind us that his body was formed from the dust of the earth (*adama*). As the Torah indicates, man is a composite of earthly dust from the *adama* and a soul breathed into Him by the Almighty.

And the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground (*afar min ha-adama*), and He breathed into his nostrils the soul of life, and man became a living soul. (*Bereishit* 2:7)

Man's actions therefore result in repercussions for the land, his source, as well. Therefore, the *adama* is cursed on account of Adam's first sin, and it is further cursed after Kayin's slaying of Hevel. In both cases man is also sent into exile, as Adam is sent out of the Garden of Eden, and Kayin is made to be a ceaseless wanderer.

Yet, as we noted, this common fate of man and ground seems to come to an end in the aftermath of the Flood, as God says He will no longer curse the *adama* on account of *adam*, mankind.

This calls into question the almost identical punishment of exile and desolation described in *Bechukkotai* on account of the nonobservance of *shemitta*. If the bond between *“adam”* and “*adama”* is severed in *Parashat Noach*, why does it reappear in such a stark way in *Bechukotai*?

In order to understand what changed we have to understand the nature of the relationship of *“adam”* and “*adama*,” and to find out why the word *adama,* which is so common in *Sefer Bereishit*, is almost not mentioned in *Sefer* *Vayikra* and *Bamidbar*, only to reappear again in *Sefer Devarim*. As we analyze the verses we may find that although the relationship between “*adam”* and “*adama”* might have been severed in *Parashat* *Noach*, the relationship between the Jew and his *eretz* might have only begun at that point.

**The Name “Adam”**

At first glance, the name “*adam*,” emphasizing the earthly aspect of man's existence, might be viewed as a bit derogatory, as it seems to overlook the other aspect of man's character, the divine breath of life. It essentially would seem to state that although man has a divine soul, when all is said and done, he is not much more than a piece of dirt.

After all, although man's physical form as well as his spirit are divinely created, it is the breathing of the divine into man that makes him the crown of creation. Rav Hirsch (*Bereishit* 2:7) explains that this, in fact, is what distinguishes man from other creations:

What is it that sets man apart from the animal? The living individuality of the animal depends on earthly matter; like its body, so its soul too, was taken from the earth. Not so man. In the creation of man, only the inert material was taken from the earth; only *when God breathed into him the breath of life did he become a living individual.* Herein lies the ability and immortality of man… Thus man is composed of two elements that are completely different from each other. One of these was taken from the earth. But man does not belong to the earth; rather, the earth — as its name, *adama*, implies — has been given to man to rule. So too, man's body, which is dust of the ground, is subject to man's control…

For this reason, referring to man as *“adam”* seems to be a self-defeating expression of man's inability to overcome his earthly nature.

The Maharal, however, views it differently: referring to man as *“adam”* is not relegating him to a base, physical existence. He explains that the link to *adama* focuses on the power of activating one's potential, as the value of the dirt of the earth lies solely in its potential for production, indicating that man's true value lies not in where he is but in where he can be:

A name indicates that which is exclusive and special to a creature; that which expresses what makes man unique. And that is why man is called “*adam”* on account of his [being created from] dust of the “*adama*.” And now we must ask: are not other creatures as well made from the *adama*… But [in truth] man is more connected to *adama*, as the ground is special in that it signifies potential which can be brought out and activated through plants, trees, and everything else which can potentially be brought forth from the land. Similarly, man is all potential, which achieves completion when activated; and therefore, the name which is appropriate for man is that which is shared by the *adama*, as it is reminiscent of the power of activating the potential in man and the ground.(*Tiferet Yisra’el* 3)

The exact potential that *“adam”* possesses might be dependent on exactly which dirt was used to form man.

**From What Dirt?**

It is clear from the verses that Adam was not created from the dust of the Garden of Eden, as he was only placed there afterwards. When he sins, he is returned to the *adama* which he was created from. Yet, the actual location of this dust is debated in the Midrash, as cited by Rashi (ad loc.):

"DUST FROM THE *ADAMA*: He gathered his (Adam's) dust from the four corners of the globe so that in whatever place he might die, the ground will absorb him in burial.

AN ALTERNATIVE READING: God took his dust from the place of which it is said, "You shall make an altar of *adama* for me" (*Shemot* 20:21)… I only wish that he may achieve atonement...."

The first opinion views man as a collection of dust from all over the world, while the second opinion focuses on man's unique nature due to his being created from the dust of the place where the great altar will be built on Mount Moriah; man's origin from the dust of the altar will ensure he will always be able to achieve atonement for his actions.

The second opinion, which sees man being created from the most unique dust of the world, seems to echo the notion of man's potential. In fact, if Adam's name reminds us of the sanctified physical dirt that is his source, then his name actually possesses an added spiritual element.

Rav Soloveitchik points out that there is a certain dichotomy in man, so both of these opinions are true:

Man was created of cosmic dust. God gathered the dust, of which man was fashioned from all parts of the earth, indeed, from all the uncharted lanes of creation. Man belongs everywhere. He is no stranger to any part of the universe.... Man is cosmic through his intellectual involvement. His intellectual curiosity is of cosmic, universal dimensions. He wants to know, not only about the things that are close to him as for example, the flowering bush in his backyard, but also things far removed from him, things and events millions of light years away.

...Let us examine the other interpretation of the verse in Genesis: man was created from the dust of a single spot. Man is committed to one locus. The creator assigned him a single spot he calls home. Man is not cosmic, he is here-minded. He is a rooted being, not cosmopolitan but provincial, a villager who belongs to the soil that fed him as a child and to the little world into which he was born.

Rav Soloveitchik explores these two views in the way man searches for God, yet his notion that one need not choose which one is correct, as there is merit to both, is significant for us as well. Man is both cosmic, connected to the world, and origin-centered, rooted in a specific place and a specific message. Rashi doesn't choose one of the two opinions in the Midrash, as both reflect a certain aspect of man.

The fact that *“adam”* is connected to the *adama* of the whole world allows us to explain how man's actions impact his surroundings. He is derived from the physical world, from the dust of the ground, and is awarded the potential through a divine soul to transform physicality into a merged spiritual wonderland. Failure to live up to this calling taints one's surroundings; if *“adam”* doesn't elevate himself and activate his potential, he contaminates the *adama* which was the raw material for his growth.

This natural relationship begins at the dawn of time: Adam is sent from the Garden of Eden, Kayin relegated to wandering, the world flooded and destroyed at the time of Noach. As man failed to rise to his potential, he takes the *adama* and everything with it down. After the Flood, when Noach builds an altar — according to tradition, on the very spot where man was created — and offers sacrifices, God promises that he will no longer punish the *adama* on account of man's actions.

Rav Hirsch (*Bereishit* 8:21) explains that initially "God impeded the development of the *adama*, and he did so for man's benefit and for his moral and spiritual salvation; thus it was in the days of Adam, Kayin, and so on. Henceforth, God will no longer curtail the power of the earth; He will not limit its fertility in order to educate mankind."

Thus, when the generation of the Dispersion builds their tower — which, according to tradition, was an attempt to wage war with God in heaven — they are not destroyed along with the land, but they are dispersed throughout the four corners of the earth, all the areas where the dust of their creation is derived from.

At the same time that God disperses humanity, and the seventy nations are sent throughout the world, God commands one man to leave all he has and knows and to go to the land that God will show him. It is here again that we see a certain level of significance to a certain type of land and earth.

In fact, the notion of the second opinion that man is created from the dust of the place of the altar is given even greater significance. As much as man is distinguished by his Godly spirit, the uniqueness of man lies in his ability to sanctify the physical as well. Recognition of the spiritual potential of the physical world is man's calling. The fact that the human body housing the soul is physical indicates that it too was created in a form worthy of God, and man's duty is to sanctity the physical, including his body. There is no better place to indicate such a mission than the site of the altar. It is there that heaven meets earth, as man sacrifices physical objects towards a spiritual goal. Man might be connected to the *adama* throughout the world, but his mission is to elevate the physical to the sanctified dirt of the altar.

**The Special Dirt: From *Adama* to *Eretz***

Although the *adama* will not be cursed due to the actions of Adam, man's actions will still have a clear impact on his surroundings. Yet, in most of the world in the post-Flood era, the *adama* will no longer be cursed. However, a special *eretz*, the land housing the unique dirt of the altar, is only beginning to show its importance. The mutual interdependence of the land and the nation chosen to receive it as a divine gift will be crucial.

It is interesting that the word "*adama,*" which is so prominent in *Sefer* *Bereishit,* is almost completely absent from the rest of them Torah, appearing intermittently in *Sefer Shemot*, only twice in *Sefer Vayikra*, and a few times in *Sefer* *Bamidbar*. Instead, the term used is “*eretz*” (or “*aretz*,” depending on the syntax); the Land of Israel is often referred to as “*ha-aretz*,” **the** Land; due to its special and unique nature, no further description is necessary.

What is interesting is that in *Sefer Devarim*, known as *Mishneh Torah* due to, among other things, its repetition of certain important principles of the Torah, the Land of Israel is referred to in two ways: *ha-aretz* as well as *ha-adama*. (See also *Shemot* 20:12)

The *adama* which responds in kind to every act of man at the dawn of time would not be able to survive if divine providence continued to make its success and even existence dependent on the acts of man. But at the same time, God chooses a man who has chosen Him (see <http://vbm-torah.org/archive/chavero2/26chavero.htm>), and in the process chooses one land to serve as the model for the interconnection of the physical world with the spiritual behavior of man. All the world will see the descendants of this person and will understand the nature of divine providence which, by rights, should have affected the whole world.

**Avraham's Dual Connection to the Land**

This would seem to be explicit in the command to Avraham to leave his homeland:

And God said to Avram: "Go forth from your land and from your birthplace and from your father's house, to the land [*ha-aretz*] that I will show you. And I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you, and I will aggrandize your name, and [you shall] be a blessing. And I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse, and all the families of the earth [*adama*] shall be blessed in you."

Avram is given an *eretz* which will serve as the educational forefront for the people in all four corners of the *adama.*

Why is this land chosen to be the model? As becomes clear from the comment of the Keli Yakar, it is because the unique *afar min ha-adama* comes from the site of the altar, which lies at its center.

The Keli Yakar (ibid.) explains that God could not initially reveal the place He wanted Avraham to go, because he could not appreciate it properly outside of Israel, and only after experiencing the unique soul one attains in the land of Israel can one truly recognize how the Land is uniquely suited to development of oneself.

*"Lekh"* – Go; *"lekha"* - to yourself.... To the land that I will show you... To the place of the origin of Man's body and soul. … for as long as you are outside the land, you cannot appreciate the identity of your soul, whose source is from Mount Moriah, nor appreciate even your physical self, which also was formed from the dust of the mount… therefore, it is worth your leaving all you know behind to go and cleave to that holy place…

The Land of Israel is the extension of Mount Moriah, the same place where Avraham would later be sent with the same words, “*Lekh lekha,”* for the binding of his son to the altar, the altar whose site is the origin and life-force of man.

The Keli Yakar (*Bereishit* 13:17) continues his train of thought, beautifully describing the dual nature of the Land of Israel as a physical wonderland and a spiritual storehouse, later in the portion. He notes the varying description of Avraham's future in the land. At first, Avraham is told:

And God said to Avram after Lot had parted from him: “Now raise your eyes and see, from the place where you are, northward and southward and eastward and westward. For all the land which you see I will give to you and to your seed forever. And I will make your seed like the dust of the land (*afar ha-aretz*), so that if a man will be able to count the dust of the land, so will your seed be counted.” (*Bereishit* 13:14-16)

Avraham is promised all the land that he can see, which will be given to him and his descendants, as they will be more numerous than the dust of the earth. In the following verse, however, Avraham is told:

“Go walk the land, to its length and to its breadth, for I will give it to you.”

From this statement, it would seem that Avraham's acquisition of the Land of Israel requires walking its length and breadth; and the only promise is that he will be given the land, not his descendants.

The Keli Yakar explains that there are actually two acquisitions of the Land of Israel, as it is both a physically beautiful land and an extension of the spiritual potential of Mount Moriah. As he explains, the two acquisitions have different rules.

The spiritual advantage is acquired merely by seeing, by looking at Mt. Moriah, the site from which all universes, spiritual and physical, were created. He who looks at the Place is immediately clothed in a spirit of purity and holiness, ennobled by the Presence of God. This phenomenon was enshrined for eternity in the mitzvaof the pilgrimage to the Temple on the holidays of Pesach, Shavuot and Sukkot.

The physical blessings promised to Avram were to be acquired only by physical occupation of the Land, by get up and walk the entire Land, its length and breadth. And this physical acquisition will not be forever and unconditional, as is the first, spiritual one; so verse 15 says, "For all the land which you see I will give to you and to your seed forever," but verse 17 says, "Go walk the land, for I will give it to you," but it does not say "forever.”

Avraham's children will always have the capability of recognizing that inner spiritual plane which is so central to the land of Israel; in the process, they will become as numerous as the dust of the land. This dust is not the physical dust of *afar min ha-adama*, but rather the dust with a spiritual character; *afar ha-aretz*, as the verse describes. If the whole world, both of mankind and the entire earth, could not live upon the plane of divine providence, at least one nation in one land could.

**The Link of the Nation's Actions to the Land of Israel**

The *eretz* is significant because it is the land of the special *afar min ha-adama*, the warehouse of the transcendent potential that enables mankind to spiritualize the physical world. For that reason, throughout *Sefer Devarim*, this term *adama* reappears alongside *aretz.* In chapter 28 of Devarim, the chapter that details the second *tokhacha* in the Torah, both terms appear side by side. The impact of man's obedience or disobedience towards God will affect the Jewish people's right to reside on the *adama* which will be given to them as their special *eretz.*

Throughout the rest of the world, the bond of the physical *adama* to the actions of man has been severed; the earth will no longer be cursed on account of man. However, the unique bond of the Jewish people to the Land of Israel is very much dependent on the Jews’ actions. This forms the basis of the second paragraph of the *Shema*, recited twice daily:

If you follow the commandments that I enjoin upon you this day ... I will give rain for your land in season...you shall gather in your new grain, wine and oil.... Take care not to be lured away to serve other gods and bow to them, for God's anger will flare up ...and there will be no rain and the ground (*adama*) will not yield its produce; and you will soon perish from the good land (*aretz*) that God is assigning to you." (*Devarim* 11:13-17)

The Ramban (*Vayikra* 18:25) explains that the Land of Israel requires a certain level of spiritual commitment due to its being God's Land. Lack of fulfillment of *mitzvot* will result in dispersion and exile. Yet even the *mitzvot* which one fulfills in exile, according to the Ramban, pale in comparison to those very same *mitzvot* when performed in the Holy Land.

God is the God of all powers outside the Land of Israel, but in the Land of Israel He is the ‘direct’ God of the Land which is the “heritage of God”…The Land is thus not like other lands; it does not sustain sinners… And so it says (I *Divrei Ha-yamim* 22:18) “And the land has been conquered before Godand before His people.” Based on this concept, the Sages state in Sifrei, “And so even though I exile you from the Land, make yourselves distinguished through my commandments, so that when you return to the Land they will not be new to you”… For in fact, the primary obligation of all of the commandments is for those who reside in the Land of God… and this is the meaning of the Sages’ statement that dwelling in the Land of Israel is equal in importance to observing all the commandments of the Torah. For living in the Land of Israel leads almost automatically to a more complete fulfillment of all the laws of the Torah.

It is in fact the spiritual component of the Land of Israel which requires that its mistreatment be expressed physically in the land itself. With this background, we can begin to understand the tremendous punishments described in *Parashat Bechukotai* to be inflicted on the nation and the land for failing to fulfill *Shabbat ha-aretz*. The Jewish right to the *eretz* depends on their behavior, and the greatest expression of recognizing the spiritual character of the physical land of Israel is through the mitzva of *shemitta*. In next week's lesson, we will hopefully see why.