YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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***MIKDASH***

**Rav Yitzchak Levy**

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In memory of Fred Stone, Yaakov Ben Yitzchak A"H,

beloved father, grandfather and great grandfather,

whose Yarzheit is 25 Tammuz

Dedicated by Ellen & Stanley Stone, Jake & Chaya, Micah, Adeline,

Zack & Yael, Allie, Isaac, Ezra & Talia, Yoni & Cayley,

Marc & Eliana, Adina, Gabi & Talia.

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**Lecture #277: The History of the Divine Service at Altars (LXXXVII) – The Prohibition of Bamot (LXIII)**

### The Background for God's acceptance of the changes introduced by Yerovam

In the [previous *shiur*](http://etzion.org.il/en/lecture-276-history-divine-service-altars-lxxxvi-%E2%80%93-prohibition-bamot-lxii)we asked how it was possible that the people living in the kingdom of Israel followed after Yerovam. One possible answer that was suggested is that the reality of idol worship in Jerusalem in the days of Shelomo allowed for the introduction of an alternative to the centralized cult in the house of God in Jerusalem. The Ralbag asks in similar manner how it was possible that Israel accepted Yerovam's plan to transgress the words of the Torah:

To offer sacrifices outside the Temple when *bamot* were prohibited, and by way of non-priests, and to believe that the golden calves were the gods who took Israel out of the land of Egypt. It would appear to me that Israel was not involved in Torah study, but rather they ate, and drank, and were happy, as happened before at the beginning of the reign of Shelomo. This was the reason that they fell into these sins. (I *Melakhim* 12:28)

The Ralbag is referring to what was stated earlier:

Yehuda and Israel were many, as the sand which by the sea for multitude; they ate, and drank, and were happy. (I *Melakhim* 4:20)

From here the Ralbag understands that the people were not involved in Torah study. This might explain the fact that the new cult did not overly shock the people and therefore Yerovam was able on his part to carry out such a great revolution without significant objection in his kingdom.

The Ralbag continues:

They also already saw in the days of Shelomo that abominations were performed in Jerusalem from among the abominations of the nations with whom Shelomo made marriage alliances, and it is from here that these sins spread across all of Israel. As for what he said to them: Why should you go up to Jerusalem, in which are found the gods worshipped by the nations? It is better that we should worship the gods worshipped by our ancestors, which were fashioned by Aharon who was a prophet who substituted for Moshe, and about which it was stated: "These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt" (*Shemot* 32:4). (I *Melakhim* 12:28)

In addition to the fact that the people did not engage in Torah study, already in the days of Shelomo the abominations of the nations were worshipped in Jerusalem, and this was a significant factor that led to the spread of these sins throughout all of Israel.

Yerovam proposes to the people of Israel that instead of going up to Jerusalem for the worship of the idols of the nations, it would better for them to serve God as did Aharon the priest at the time of the sin of the golden calf.

### Yerovam's ideological Arguments

The Radak relates to the manner in which Yerovam sees the relationship between the splitting of the kingdom and the separation and detachment with regard to the site of worship:

"The king took counsel" – He asked for advice what to do, and he accepted the suggestion of his advisors that he should make two calves. Why calves? He seduced them with words, saying to them: Surely you know that the kingdom was split by the will of God, as the prophet Achiya the Shilonite told me. If so, God did not find favor in the kingdom of the house of David, and so too He did not find favor in Jerusalem, which is the kingdom of the house of David. If so, let us establish another place for you to come and offer sacrifices there. And why a calf? He said to them: Surely Aharon made a calf for Israel for the *Shekhina* to rest upon instead of Moshe who was missing. So too you now who do not have the place of the *Shekhina* which is Jerusalem, let us make a calf in its place for the *Shekhina* to rest upon. Therefore he said: "Behold your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of the land of Egypt," as was stated regarding the calf in the wilderness, for his intention was not for idol worship.

"It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem" – It was enough for you until now; from now on refrain from going up to Jerusalem. And Yonatan translates: The road going up to Jerusalem is too much for you; this is your God, O Israel. And in the Midrash: "It is too much for you to go up" – what did he do? He set up two guards or fortifications, one on Tavor and one on Mitzpa. This is what Hoshea said: "Because you have been a snare on Mitzpa, and a net spread on Tavor" (*Hoshea* 5:1). (I *Melakhim* 12:28)

According to the Radak, Yerovam seduced the people with his words. Despite the fact that God only wanted to divide the kingdom of the house of David, Yerovam raises the possibility that owing to the fundamental connection between the kingdom of the house of David and the city of Jerusalem, it is clear that the division of the Davidic kingdom includes also the abandonment of Jerusalem. He makes this argument while totally ignoring the prophecy of Achiya the Shilonite who put forward the very opposite claim.

### The meaning of the division of the kingdom as a separation from the site of the sacrificial worship

In the previous *shiur*, we brought many proofs testifying to the close connection between the Temple and the kingdom in general, and to the special connection between Jerusalem and King David. This fundamental connection expresses the revelation of God's kingdom in this world by way of the king of Israel.

The connection in particular between the kingdom of David and Jerusalem shows that the permanent kingdom in Israel is connected to the place where God has chosen to rest His name there, and that the earthly kingdom should not be separated from the heavenly kingdom of God.

Since there is only one place in which God chose to dwell permanently, namely, Jerusalem, King David, the first king to begin a permanent dynasty, is connected with all his soul to the city of Jerusalem and the site of the Temple.

In order to draw a clear separation between the two kingdoms (so that the people of the kingdom of Israel should not go up to Jerusalem and recognize the kingdom of Rechavam), Yerovam makes use of the fundamental connection between the Davidic monarchy and the city of Jerusalem. He offers his own interpretation of the division of the kingdom as something that also dictates a separation of the places of worship, seeing that the two of them are so intrinsically connected.

Theoretically, it would have possible to argue, that after the *Mishkan* stood in Shilo for 369 years, the great *bama* was in Nov for thirteen years, and afterwards it was in Giv'on forty-four years while at the same time the ark was in Kiryat-Ye'arim for twenty years and afterwards in the City of David, and therefore even though the house of God in Jerusalem was a permanent structure, there is no certainty that this permanence would be eternal. It is possible that in certain situations, such as the current reality in which the kingdom was to be divided in accordance with the word of God, there is room to allow for a return to another place chosen by God in the days of the Patriarch Yaakov, and to reach Bet-El in order to set up the southern calf of the kingdom and the house of *bamot.*

The difficulty with this, as we have already mentioned, is that the prophet Achiya the Shilonite explicitly emphasizes the selection of Jerusalem, both in his words to Shelomo and in his words to Yerovam himself: "The city which I have chosen out of all the tribe of Israel… in Jerusalem, the city which I have chosen Me to put My name there" (I *Melakhim* 11:32-36).

It would seem that this explicit wording is intended from the prophetic perspective of Achiya the Shilonite to negate any other understanding, according to which the division of the kingdom could possibly imply a separation of the places of worship. Therefore it cannot be argued that Yerovam did not understand that the Divine selection of Jerusalem is eternal.

In any case, Yerovam exploits the understanding of the deep connection between the Davidic monarchy and the city of Jerusalem to nullify the words of Achiya the Shilonite and establish a ritual alternative to Jerusalem, while Scripture testifies that all this was done in order to enable the continuation of his reign over the entire kingdom of Israel.

Two other aspects of this issue still need to be discussed: What is the significance of placing two calves and houses of *bamot* in Bet-El and in Dan, and what is the significance of choosing calves for this purpose?

### The meaning of two calves in Dan and in Bet-El

There are two explanations for the placing of calves in Dan and in Bet-El.

The first explanation is that one in the north and one in the south allow the inhabitants of the kingdom of Israel to worship the calf and offer sacrifices at the house of *bamot* in a place that is relatively close to where they live, thus making it easier for the northern and southern tribes to participate in the service.

The second explanation is that they were established on the boundaries of the kingdom: Dan in the north and Bet-El in the south. (This is over and beyond the glorious past of each of these places: Bet-El, especially in connection with Yaakov, and Dan, in connection with Avraham, and later in the period of the Judges.) The houses of *bamot* and the calves in them constituted, as it were, external border temples.[[1]](#footnote-1)

Border temples are national temples, and they are usually connected to the defense of the territory whose borders they mark. According to this ritual-national-territorial concept, every territory and every people has a patron god who is the master of the land. Conquering nations offered sacrifices to the gods of the conquered land in order to appease them.

The opposite view, which is presented by the Torah, is that the Temple is internal and priestly, distinct from the monarchy and its wars, and that its borders express a difference in level within a single system. The sanctity of God's territory does not limit God's rule and the belief that He fills the universe. The added sanctity of God's territory relates to the special commandments applying to the priestly kingdom, and obligates the people of Israel who dwell within it with extra *mitzvot.*

The military-political boundaries express the intensity of the salvation that God gives to the king. On the other hand, the boundaries of the kingdom should not be turned into places where sacrifices are offered in times of war, into permanent temples. The Temple is fixed to an inner world, and its boundaries are the camps of the *Shekhina* and of the Levites.

The concept that found expression through Yerovam advocated royal temples (in the words of the prophet Amos, 7:13) along the kingdom's boundaries. In this case these royal temples included a calf and an open and exposed house of *bamot* (as the *bama* uncovered at Tel Dan was revealed without walls), and priests that did not come from the tribe of Levi, but from all sectors of the people.

Rav Yoel Bin Nun suggests that this element is found also to some extent in the *bamot* in Yehuda, which disappeared only in the periods of Chizkiyahu and Yoshiyahu. This is strikingly evident in the words of the prophet about the destruction of the *bamot* at the hand of King Yoshiyahu:

And he brought all the priests out of the cities of Yehuda, and defiled the *bamot* where the priests had burned incense, from Geva to Be'er-Sheva. (II *Melakhim* 23:8)

The emphasis placed on Geva along the northern border of the kingdom of Yehuda and on Be'er-Sheva along its southern border, is somewhat reminiscent of Yerovam's border temples, and of the houses of *bamot* and calves in Dan and in Bet-El.

In contrast to this fundamentally pagan concept, Rav Yoel Bin Nun presents in his article the idea of the territory of Binyamin as the territory of the *Shekhina*, which has no external border with an enemy, but rather is surrounded only by the tribes of Israel. It is an inner sanctified territory that does not separate between Israel and the nations, but between the priests and the Levites, on the one hand, and the entirety of the priestly kingdom, on the other. This is the peace boundary of an inner temple.

Yerovam, with his actions, gives sharp expression to the opposite view that the houses of the *bamot* and the calves are deliberately located along the border of the kingdom, identifying the border of the kingdom with the border of the rule of God.

These are two explanations for placing the calves in Dan and in Bet-El.

We wish to propose another explanation. At the outset, we raised the possibility that the permanent selection of Jerusalem as the site of the resting of the *Shekhina* may not yet have taken root, and therefore Yerovam chose in effect to present a formal alternative, justifying it ideologically with the fundamental inner connection between the kingdom and the site of the resting of the *Shekhina*.

An even more radical approach[[2]](#footnote-2) can be suggested here, namely, that the division of the kingdom itself testifies to and proves that God abandoned Jerusalem. The alternative to the fact that Jerusalem was abandoned as the place where God chose to rest His name is to place two calves along the boundaries of the kingdom, which serve as a kind of substitute for the two *keruvim*.[[3]](#footnote-3) However, as opposed to the *keruvim* which are found in the innermost sanctuary, in the Holy of Holies, and it is forbidden for ordinary people to see them, here the two calves stand out in the open, and they are located in Dan and in Bet-El to express the fact that from now on the entire kingdom is holy and is located between the two calves.

It might be possible to draw a parallel between this idea and the prophecy of Yirmeyahu:

And it shall come to pass, when you multiply and increase in the land, in those days, says the Lord, they shall say no more, The ark of the covenant of the Lord: nor shall it come to mind; nor shall they remember it; nor shall they miss it; nor shall that be done any more. At that time they shall call Jerusalem the throne of the Lord; and all the nations shall be gathered to it, to the name of the Lord, into Jerusalem; nor shall they walk any more after the stubbornness of their evil heart. (*Yirmeyahu* 3:16-17)

The prophet says that in the days of redemption the people will not remember the ark of the covenant of the Lord, they will not feel its absence, and they will not make another ark to substitute for the original ark.

It is reasonable to assume that the background to this prophecy is the fact that when Menashe defiled the Temple with idolatry, those who were faithful to the Torah removed the ark of the Lord from the Temple, so that it would not be desecrated. In the days of Yoshiyahu, the ark was returned to its place:

And he said to the Levites who taught all Israel, who were holy to the Lord, Put the holy ark in the house which Shelomo the son of David king of Israel did build; you need no longer carry it upon your shoulders. (II *Divrei ha-Yamim* 35:3)[[4]](#footnote-4)

Yirmeyahu prophesied that in the future the people's hearts would be filled with the knowledge of God and the entire city would serve as the Holy of Holies and as a throne for the *Shekhina* due to the holiness of its inhabitants, and there would no longer be a need for a throne in the form of an ark.

In those days there will no longer be a need for the ark of the covenant of God, and the purity of the hearts of the people will sanctify Jerusalem more so than the presence of the holy ark in the city.

Therefore, according to Yirmeyahu, at the time of the future redemption, all of Jerusalem will become the throne of God in this world, and people will show no interest in the original ark of God's covenant in its place in the Holy of Holies.

This prophecy stands in contrast to Yerovam, who, as we have suggested, wishes to say through his actions that God has abandoned Jerusalem as the place where He chose to rest His name, and he adds to this the alternate *keruvim*, the calves. According to his outlook, the *Shekhina* departed from its place between the two *keruvim* in the Temple and is now located between the two calves that stand along the borders of the kingdom, between Dan in the north and Bet-El in the south.

In the next *shiur* we will discuss the matter of the calves, their essence and meaning.

(Translated by David Strauss)

1. Rav Bin Nun discussed this issue in his article, "The Territory of Binyamin – the Territory of the *Shekhina*" (Hebrew), in *Lifnei Efrayim, Binyamin u-Menashe*, Bet Sefer Sadeh Ofra, Jerusalem 5745, pp. 39ff. We will bring here the gist of his words pertaining to our discussion. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. This approach was suggested by Rav Yaakov Medan in an oral conversation. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The clear connection between the calves and the *keruvim* will be discussed in the next *shiur*. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *Chazal* in *Yoma* 52b explain (against the plain meaning of the verse) that Yoshiyahu hid the ark in the Temple itself lest the enemies send it into exile after the destruction of the Temple. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)