YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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STUDENT SUMMARIES OF SICHOT DELIVERED BY THE ROSHEI YESHIVA

**PARASHAT BECHUKOTAI**

**SICHA OF HARAV YEHUDA AMITAL ZT”L**

**Perfection of Man and Nature**

Summarized by Rav Eliyahu Blumenzweig

Translated by Kaeren Fish

"If you walk in my statutes... I will give your rains at their proper time, and the land will give of its produce and the tree of the field will give its fruit." (Vayikra 23:3-4)

 We may ask ourselves, what is so special about this blessing promised to us if we walk in God's statutes? After all, is it not natural – the accepted, expected way of the world - that the land gives of its produce and that the trees give of their fruit?

 Before Adam's sin in Gan Eden, he was at one with the natural world; he lived in harmony with the Divine creations of heaven and earth. He was at peace with the animals of the field and the birds in the sky, without fear, and the fruits and produce of the land were laid ready before him with minimal effort required on his part. Man did not stand helpless before nature but rather controlled it in the manner of someone who held the power of nature in his hand.

 Since the sin, the forces of nature threaten us from every side. Previously, there was no such thing as an animal of prey or a poisonous snake. Since the sin, nature is full of threats and dangers to our existence. Everywhere in the world man faces powerful natural forces, and it seems that it is they who hold all the power.

 Since the first sin, man has tried in every possible way to reconquer nature, to remove its threats. In previous generations people used to try to appease nature – they would sacrifice their children in order that nature would not bring disasters upon them. Later on there were attempts to control the natural forces, and as technology progresses these attempts gain momentum. But despite all our progress, it is clear that success is not easy to achieve. We have indeed succeeded in controlling some of the dangerous natural forces with which we were familiar, but that has brought about an imbalance in the natural order which in turn has brought about new problems. Man's battle against the natural forces continues.

 Judaism suggests a different solution – not the correction of nature but rather the correction of man. With Adam's sin the world was dragged down with him, and with his self-perfection the world will also return to its original state, wherein man will be at one with the world rather than being engaged in a constant battle against it.

 By means of correcting the primal sin man will return to a state where he will no longer constantly live in fear of natural disasters. He will not sow the seeds of his new crop with trepidation, he will no longer walk about fearing wild animals. "And I shall make a covenant with them on that day with the animals of the field and with the birds of the sky and with the creeping creatures of the earth, and I will break the bow and the sword and war from the earth, and I shall lay them down in peace" (Hoshea 2:20).

 When the creations of heaven and earth truly look the way they are meant to, man will be able to come to the realization that God's wisdom is indeed revealed in all of creation. He will be able to perceive the creation about which God said, "And behold it was very good" - the living force of God which gives life to all of creation, such that everything is truly good.

 If this is the case, then what reward is the Torah promising us? It would seem that what the Torah is describing is the world as it is meant to be, if only man would not destroy the Divine plan.

 This is in fact so, and what the Torah is conveying here is not a promise of reward but rather a description of the natural consequences of our actions. "Walking in the statutes of God" and correction of the degeneration which has come about in the wake of the primal sin - which is our aim in fulfilling the laws of the Torah - will return the entire world to its proper state: "And they will do no evil nor any corruption throughout My holy mountain" (Yishayahu 11:9).

 To date we have not yet merited this berakha in its entirety. But in the meantime we can attempt to apply it in relation to what is written in the first part of the verse, and Chazal's commentary: "If you walk in My statutes - that you should toil diligently in Torah." Sometimes a person senses that he is not at one with the Torah; he feels that he is waging a constant battle for conquest and control, and he feels helpless. A person is obligated to work towards perfecting himself, at least to the point where one battle - the question of whether or not he is at one with the Torah - no longer bothers him. A person must feel himself within the world of Torah, and within this world he can wage the battle for better and more profound understanding, for deeper and more all-encompassing comprehension. But all of this must be based on the feeling that he is "living Torah," not fighting the Torah from outside, not fighting over whether or not to enter the Beit Midrash. Within this embrace of life he can continue in his struggle towards perfection.

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