**YESHIVAT HAR ETZION**

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

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**A River Flows from Eden:**

**The Garden of Eden**

**as the Inner Source of the Jewish Holidays**

**Rav Uriel Eitam**

**Shiur #11:**

**The Holiday of Sukkot**

**Part II**

**Remaining in the Garden of Eden**

**Difference Between This World and the Garden of Eden**

We saw in the previous *shiur* that there is a difference between Chapters 1 and 2 of the Book of *Bereishit*, regarding the form of the appearance of water: in Chapter 1, the upper water, and in Chapter 2, the lower water. This difference is an expression of a more fundamental difference between the two chapters.

The description of the creation of the world in Chapter 1 is based on the principle of separation. On the first day, a separation is made between light and darkness, and between day and night; on the second day, between the upper water and the lower water; on the third day, between the sea and the dry land. On the fourth day, the heavenly bodies are created, whose function is to distinguish between day and night and between light and darkness.

As a heading for all of these separations, the chapter begins with the fundamental distinction between heaven and earth: "In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth" (*Bereishit* 1:1). The Divine source is one, and the reality through which it is revealed is built on a duality that is contradictory, balancing and complementary. Heaven and earth are separated one from the other; distant from each other, together they embrace the entire expanse of reality. All of reality originates in God, Who is found beyond it. The separate space that is given to each of the various elements of Creation, which balance and complement each other, is what reveals the Creator.

In contrast to the separations and distinctions on which the story of Creation is based, in the story of the Garden of Eden, reality is united and is found on earth. Neither darkness nor night is mentioned. The earth comprises all of reality, there being no mention of heaven, the seas or the heavenly bodies. The distinction between weekdays and Shabbat is not mentioned, as if all of time is sanctified. God Himself is described as walking about the garden toward the cool of the day, not as beyond reality.

If so, the Garden of Eden expresses a unified reality that reveals the single source,[[1]](#footnote-1) and the story of Creation expresses a reality of fragmentation and separation that stems from one God. The reality that emerges from Chapter 1 reflects the verse "God has spoken once, twice have I heard this" (*Tehillim* 62:12).

Corresponding to the difference between the story of Creation and the story of the Garden of Eden, we would expect different conceptualizations of water in the two chapters. In the unified reality of the Garden of Eden, water is appropriately provided by rivers flowing here on earth, not outside it. Indeed, in the Garden of Eden there is no need for rain from heaven. In the story of Creation, which is based on the fundamental distinction between heaven and earth, it is appropriate that hydration is provided by rain that falls from heaven to earth.

Adam begins his life in the realm of the lower water of the Garden of Eden, but his banishment from the garden to the world known to us sends him back to the realm that accords with Chapter 1, the realm of rain. Moreover, the Midrash states:

Thus the earth would drink at the outset, as it is written: "But there went up a mist from the earth" (*Bereishit* 2:6). But the Holy One, blessed be He, contracted, so that the earth would drink only from the upper water.

Rabbi Chanan of Tzipori said in the name of Rabbi Shemuel bar Nachman: For four reasons the Holy One, blessed be He, contracted so that the earth would drink only from the upper water: because of violent people, and in order to lead away bad clouds, and so that the high ground would drink like the low ground, and so that everyone cast their eyes toward heaven. This is what is stated: "So that He sets up on high those that are low" (*Iyov* 5:11). (*Bereishit Rabba* 13, 9)

The serpent, who eats dust, has ample food readily available to it, and its life is free of dependence on God and of connection with him. In contrast, man, after having sinned, is wholly dependent on God and on rain.

To summarize, two levels of life are open to man, and they are reflected in the water upon which man relies in order to live. These are two possible levels of connection between man and God. There is the reality of life based on the lower water, life in which there is uninterrupted abundance which invigorates the world, independent of the season of the year and without alternating states of rain and drought. This uniform reality belongs to the level of the Garden of Eden, in which there is continual closeness to God, and in which God is described as walking about the garden, not as one beyond the world. At this level, God is present in the world and inseparable from it. The lower water, which flows constantly and endlessly, thus expressing the Divine vitality that is revealed in the world at every moment, is the abundance that is fitting for one who succeeds in living close to God from this abundance, for one who does not need deprivation in order to be in a continuous relationship with God.

On the other hand, there is also a reality of life based on the upper water, life that is dependent upon rain. Rain is abundance that arrives out of a situation that involves distancing and drawing close; abundance that is sometimes found, and sometimes not; abundance that arrives and then stops intermittently; abundance that depends on the season of the year, and upon the measure of blessing that rests upon the world that year, whether it is a rainy year or not.

This reality is founded on separation, on the barrier between the upper and the lower worlds. It appears in practice as a result of the banishment from the Garden of Eden, a result of man's failure to live close to God based on uninterrupted abundance, a result of his fall into a world in which he needs deprivation to arouse him to lift his eyes upward and pray for rain. In such a world, God, as it were, is not found in the world itself, but rather He stands over it and supervises it from above, to pour blessing upon it.

**The Holiday of the Lower Water**

This distinction between the different types of water explains the secret of the holiday of Sukkot. It we examine all of the matters relating to Sukkot, we see that they are all connected to the lower water. In contrast, the negative attitude toward water on Sukkot is specifically toward rain — the upper water. There is no prayer for rain, and according to Halakha there is not even any mention of rain, because rain is an accursed sign on Sukkot. Rain on the holiday is considered like throwing a pitcher of water in the face of the Jewish people.

Let's first consider the positive aspects of the holiday and see how they are all connected to the lower water. We will then delve deeper in order to better understand the negative attitude toward rain on Sukkot.

Sukkot is, as stated, the harvest festival, the holiday during which the Jewish people rejoice over the produce that grows from the earth with the help of water. Of course, the vast majority of this water is originally rainwater, but it has seeped into the ground and has become part of the lower water absorbed in the ground, causing the growth of the crops planted in it. On Sukkot, the people of Israel stand after about half a year without rain, gathering in the produce that has grown with the help of the lower water.[[2]](#footnote-2)

The essence of the *sukka* is its thatch roof, which, as stated, is also something that grows from the ground, from the water absorbed in the soil. According to the opinion that the *sukkot* in which the Israelites dwell following the Exodus from Egypt are clouds of glory, the Gemara (*Sukka* 11b) derives the laws of thatch from the primeval mist that rises from the earth to water the ground in the Garden of Eden, before there is rain: "But there went up a mist from the earth, and watered the whole face of the ground" (*Bereishit* 2:6). This mist is an appearance of the lower water, in a world whose water emanates from within it before it becomes dependent on the upper water, "for the Lord God had not caused it to rain upon the earth" (*Bereishit* 2:5).

The Four Species, as well, come from trees that grow from the water absorbed in the ground.[[3]](#footnote-3) When we consider the *etrog* and the *arava*, regarding which, as stated earlier, the connection to water is more pronounced, we find that we are dealing specifically with the lower water.

The *arava* is referred to in the Torah as "willows of the brook" (*Vayikra* 23:40). A brook is, of course, lower water, water that flows on the ground. In addition, at the end of the summer, on the eve of the coming winter, it is clear that the water flowing in brooks and streams is not rainwater or floodwater, but rather spring water or water that has collected a while back.

As for the *etrog*, we saw earlier that one of the explanations of the name "fruit of the *hadar* tree" is "fruit of the water tree." It is called by that name, because it is the only tree that “grows by every water" — that is to say, not specifically on rainwater, but rather on all water that is absorbed in the ground or that is irrigated, independent of the rainy season (*Sukka* 35a).

The most direct encounter with water on the holiday of Sukkot is in the mitzvaof *nisukh ha-mayim*. What does this mitzvainvolve? Water is drawn from the Shiloach spring and then poured into a basin on the altar (*Sukka* 4:9). From the basin, it seeps down through a hole to the pit, a deep cavity that reaches down to the abyss (*Sukka* 49a).

This mitzva changes the natural order and creates a new reality: in contrast to the natural water cycle, in which water rises from the earth to the sky, moving away from man and then coming down once again as rain, with the *nisukh ha-mayim* ceremony, the Jewish people create a water cycle within the earthly reality itself, from the depths of the abyss and then back to it. In contrast to the natural water cycle, where abundance depends on distance, in the *nisukh ha-mayim* ceremony the Jewish people create a cycle of inner abundance, of abundance that goes down to the depth of reality, and whose source is also in its internal flow. This mitzvabrings the people back to the reality that is all lower water, a reality in which there is no split, no duality and no distance; rather, it is wholly constant abundance and full closeness.

**The Curse and the Upper Water**

As we have seen, Sukkot is not just a water holiday, but rather a lower water holiday. In contrast, we find that on Sukkot a particularly negative attitude is shown toward the upper water. Why is rain on Sukkot seen as an accursed sign? Surely, rain is the greatest blessing in the world, and especially on Sukkot, when judgment is issued concerning water and the Jewish people rejoice in water, rain should be seen as a sign of blessing!

The answer to this question emerges from what we have seen thus far. The holiday of Sukkot is the holiday of nature, which is revealed in the lower water and in the plant life that grows from the ground by virtue of it. Life in natural reality, in which the lower water flows and causes the growth of fruit trees that are pleasant to the sight, good to eat and full of abundance, is life in the image of the initial reality of the Garden of Eden. Sukkot brings the Jewish people back there. The role of the holiday commandments — to bring man back to the Garden of Eden — also explains why rain on Sukkot is an accursed sign.

As we have seen above, the appearance of rain, and the need for and dependence on it, are a result of Adam's sin and his expulsion from the Garden of Even. While rain is a great blessing, it is a blessing in the reality of a curse. In the Garden of Eden there is unending abundance, and a perpetual closeness to God. In the aftermath of sin, man is banished from the Garden of Eden and descends into a reality in which the closeness of God is not felt at all times, nor is abundance regularly found; it comes only occasionally. There is a connection between distance from God and the fact that there is limited and interrupted abundance. From now on, it is precisely the deprivation of abundance that emphasizes dependence and awakens man, bringing people to pray for mercy and rain, thus helping to renew and maintain contact with God. In light of the above, if we wish to be precise about the words of *Chazal*, it should be noted that they do not say that rain is a curse, but rather that it is "an accursed sign." Rain signals to and reminds us that we are living in a partial and defective reality. It reminds us of the curse pronounced upon Adam, in the wake of which blessing appears as a result of deprivation and distance.

According to the above, we can reach a deeper understanding concerning the image that *Chazal* use for rain on Sukkot, a master pouring a pitcher on his servant's face. On Sukkot we celebrate the reality of the lower water, of the unending abundance that appears in the world. In this sense, being in the *sukka* is like being in the Garden of Eden. When the Jewish people come on the holiday of Sukkot to pour a cup before God with the help of the lower water, like a servant before His master, and they receive an answer in the form of rain, which originates with the curse of Adam and his banishment from the Garden of Eden, it is considered the pouring of a pitcher in their faces, as a statement that God does not want them to minister to Him in perpetual closeness, as was the case in the Garden of Eden. Rainfall on Sukkot, which forces a Jew to abandon life in the shadow of God in the *sukka*, is like a renewed experience of banishment form the Garden of Eden, to the world of rain.[[4]](#footnote-4)

**To Continue the Governance of the Garden of Eden**

This approach also allows us to appreciate the timing of Sukkot in the Jewish calendar. The Tur, at the beginning of his discussion of the mitzvaof *sukka*, raises the question: if the *sukkot* constructed for this holiday recall the *sukkot* of the Exodus, why does the Torah mandate celebrating Sukkot in Tishrei, not in Nisan, the season of the Exodus? He answers that only by dwelling in a *sukka* during the rainy season is it evident that the Jewish people are doing so because of God's command:

Even though we left Egypt in the month of Nisan, God does not command us to build a *sukka* at that time, because it is the summer, and everyone builds a *sukka* for the shade, and it would not have been evident that we do so at the command of the Creator. He, therefore, commands that we do so in the seventh month, which is the time of rain, when everybody leaves the *sukka* to dwell in the house, whereas we leave our houses to sit in the *sukka*. Thus, it is evident to all that we see it as the command of the king that we must follow. (*OC* 625)

We wish to add to the words of the Turand explain the matter in accordance with our approach. In the cycle of the year, as well, we can distinguish between the two levels of life discussed above. During the winter, people depend upon the rain and await it, whereas during the summer people do not expect rain. Rather, people live on the abundance that is found in the world, on the surface of the earth, and below it. It is appropriate, then, that Sukkot, the holiday of the lower water, should be celebrated in the second half of the year, from Nisan to Tishrei. Thus, Sukkot is celebrated specifically at the end of the period of the lower water, rejoicing in the produce and life that grows from that abundance.

To be precise, however, the Jewish people do not celebrate Sukkot at the end of the summer, but rather at the beginning of the winter. We have already seen that the rainy season begins on the fifteenth of Tishrei, and this is also the way that the Turexplains the timing of Sukkot. Why does Sukkot, the holiday of the lower water, break out from its appropriate time?

On Sukkot, which comes at the end of the summer, the period of life based on the permanent lower water is completed, which brings man into contact with the impression of the Garden of Eden. On this holiday, the Jewish people are happy and thank God for the possibility of tasting life that alludes to perpetual closeness to God. This joy takes place moments before it would no longer be possible to rely on the lower water, when the people of Israel must cry out once again for rain.

As the Jewish people rejoice over the harvest and the produce, over the rest of the commandments of the holiday and especially the *nisukh ha-mayim* ceremony, they express their recognition of the fact that all of the abundance coming from the land itself, with no distancing, is Divine abundance. The holiday of Sukkot's "invasion" of the rainy season expresses the hope to drag out the summer season a bit longer. Halakha pushes off mentioning rain and praying for it, even though the water in the cisterns has already been used up and the people need the rain, just so that the nation of Israel may enjoy a few more short moments of governance by way of the lower water. Spiritually, as well, the Jewish people know that in their situation they must return for several more months to governance by way of the upper water, in order to renew and re-establish their connection to and dependence on God. Still, the people of Israel ask to be sheltered and close to God's shadow for a bit longer. The Jewish people say to God that they want not only the water itself, but a unified world in which the water, the abundance of life, and God's presence and closeness, are inseparable.

On Sukkot, the Jewish people want to continue enjoying for a few more moments the governance of the Garden of Eden.

(Translated by David Strauss)

1. The only exception in which we find duality in the Garden of Eden is the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, and this is what allows Adam to exercise free choice. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. It would appear that the harvest or ingathering festival relates primarily to the picking of the fruit of trees, as opposed to the holiday of Shavuot, the reaping festival, which relates to the harvest of grain.

In contrast to grain, which depends on rain in the most direct manner, trees have deeper roots, by way of which they may draw water that has seeped lower in the ground, even a long time after the rain has stopped. We see from the verses that trees are connected to the lower water, whereas the grasses of the field depend on rain.

In the Garden of Eden, in which there is an abundance of lower water, we find trees, but there is no mention of shrubs or vegetation. On the other hand, the verse that describes the absence of rain speaks specifically about “the shrub of the field" and “the vegetation of the field" (see *Bereishit* 2:5). In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Chava are to eat only from the fruit of the trees that grow on the abundance of lower water: "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat" (*Bereishit* 2:16). Only after the sin is Adam told: "You shall eat the vegetation of the field" (*Bereishit* 3:18) — the vegetation that depends on rain, the upper water. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The *hadas* is also referred to in the Torah as "bough of thick trees" (*Vayikra* 23:40). See the previous note for the connection between trees and lower water, in contrast to shrubs and vegetation. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. For a *sukka* to be kosher, it must be built in such a way that its thatch will not protect the person if it rains (see *Sukka* 2a, *Tosafot*, s.v. *Ki*). This halakha as well is directly connected to principles that we have explained thus far. The *sukka* brings the people of Israel back to a state similar to that of the Garden of Eden, where there is governance by way of the lower water, and rainfall is not expected. Therefore, only a *sukka* that offers protection from the sun, but not from rain, is kosher. These conditions also allow for testing the question of whether God wants His nation to serve Him, something that would not be possible were the *sukka* to protect against the rain.

When it does rain on Sukkot, it expresses the fact that humanity has been expelled from the Garden of Eden to a world of rainfall because the unending abundance has brought the human race to detachment from God and to sin. On the other hand, since the role of rain is to re-establish man’s dependence on and connection to God, and to bring to a repair of the sin of detachment, rain is an educational "punishment" that brings the people back and draws the people closer to God. When there is no rain on Sukkot, the Jewish people enjoy the taste of the Garden of Eden; when there is rain, the Jewish people experience the process of repair for which rain has come into the world. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)