



Shabbat Table Talk

Parashat Bereishit – Erev Shabbat 5th October 2018

Week of 30th September – 6th October 2018

Torah portion: Genesis 1:1-6:8 **Haftarah:** Isaiah 42:5-43:10

Was adam more than just the first man? In Genesis 1:26, we read: “God said: Let us make humankind, in our image, according to our likeness!” The Hebrew word translated as humankind in this verse is adam. Fox (p.15) notes that the term does not specify sex, for God creates adam male and female (1:27). The creation of adam comes as the culmination of creation and is “exceedingly good (1:31)!” Coupled with the double command to have “dominion” (1:26, 28) over the rest of creation and to “fill the earth and subdue it” (1:28), is it any wonder that adam has brought Earth to the point of ecological crisis?

Have adam and Earth always been in a state of estrangement? One only has to look to the text to find the answer: “there was no human/adam to till the soil/adamah – but a surge would well up from the ground [adamah] and water all the face of the soil [adamah]; and YHWH, God, formed the human [adam], of the dust from the soil [adamah]” (Gen 2:5-7). Arthur Waskow (pp. vii-viii), notes that adam and adamah [earth] are in fact intertwined, with the Hebrew word for each bearing the echo of the other. He notes further that the absence of the breath-like “ah” sound at the end of adamah from adam represents the loss of the “unconscious breathing that connected the earliest human beings with the earth from which they had just emerged.” (p. viii) The wanton exploitation of Earth’s resources by adam – particularly in the last centuries – only serves to highlight this estrangement. (N.B. The word adamah can also be translated as ‘ground’ or ‘soil’, but is translated as ‘earth’ in many Jewish texts dealing with ecology, eco-spirituality and eco-justice.)

What chance does adam have of rehabilitation and reconnection with Earth? The answer lies once more in a careful and creative reading of the Hebrew text. Shai Cherry, (p. 47) notes, “the Hebrew for imagination is dimyon, which echoes both the name adam (human) and our likeness (d’mut) to the Divine.” What then does it mean to be created in the Divine image? Joseph Soloveitchik remarks that “[adam’s] likeness to God expresses itself in [adam’s] striving and ability to become a creator” (in Cherry p. 48). It is in our ability to imagine a solution that our salvation might be found and that salvation must recognise adam’s interconnectedness with adamah.

What part does Sabbath play in the solution? Franz Rosenzweig describes the Sabbath as the dream of perfection that becomes the constant renewal of creation. This thought is echoed by Simchah Bunam who speaks of creation as being in an “uncompleted state.” His argument is that since God created the world in a state of beginning “it requires continuous labour and renewal by creative [imaginative] forces” so that it does not return to the “primeval chaos” from which it was created (Plaut p. 25). Shai Cherry (p. 48) reminds us: “Our imaginative faculty brings out what is distinctive about us humans. We can imagine a different world.” A possibility that places adam in a unique place within creation.

For Reflection and Discussion: (1) How might I describe my relationship with adamah? (2) What future do I imagine for those yet to be born? How might I creatively make that dream a reality? What part does Sabbath play in adam’s reconnection with adamah?

Bibliography: Bernstein (Ed.) Ecology & the Jewish Spirit (Woodstock, 1998); Cherry, Torah Through Time (2007, Philadelphia); Fox, The Five Books of Moses (New York, 1997); Plaut, The Torah: A Modern Commentary (New York, 1981); Waskow ed. Torah of the Earth (Woodstock)

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