



The Site of Noach's Offering

By Rabbi David Silverberg

We read in Parashat Noach (8:20) that upon emerging from the ark after the flood, Noach constructed an altar and offered sacrifices to God. Maimonides, in his discussion of the site of the Temple in the Hilkhot Beit Ha-bechira section of his *Mishneh Torah* (2:2), cites a rabbinic tradition that Noach constructed the altar on the site that later become the site of the *Mikdash*:

There is a tradition conveyed by all that the site where David and Shelomo built the altar, in the granary of Aravna, is the site where Avraham constructed the altar and bound Yitzchak upon it, and this is the site where Noach constructed an altar when he left the ark, and this is the altar upon which Kayin and Hevel offered sacrifices and where Adam the First offered a sacrifice when he was created, and from there he was created.

Ever since the human being's creation, this has been the site designated for sacrificial offerings. Adam, Kayin, Hevel and Noach all sacrificed at the site of the future Temple, and it was at that site where Avraham prepared to slaughter his son Yitzchak. Moreover, this is the site from which Adam was first created.

At first glance, Maimonides records this tradition in the context of Hilkhot Beit Ha-bechira to underscore the importance and significance of this specific site. Indeed, in the previous *halakha*, Maimonides emphasizes that the site of the *Mikdash* is very exact and the structure may not be built even slightly to the side of the designated spot. It would thus appear that Maimonides relates the history of this site to explain why *Halakha* is so demanding with regard to the place upon which the Temple must be built. It is imperative that it be constructed on the precise spot from which Adam was created and where the first sacrifices in history were offered.

However, Maimonides concludes this passage by citing a comment from the Sages that might reflect a different perspective: "The Sages said: The human being was created from the place of his atonement." This formulation appears to reverse the equation. The site was not chosen for the Temple because Adam was created there; rather, Adam was created there because it was chosen as the site of the Temple. *Chazal* here seem to afford significance to the fact that Adam was created specifically at the spot where atonement would be achieved through the sacrificial offerings.

Underlying this statement, perhaps, is the notion that the human being was not made as a perfect creature. We originate from the dust of the earth – specifically, from the dust collected onto the spot which serves as our means of atonement. The great challenge that the Almighty presented to mankind is not to live a perfect life, but rather to live a life of "atonement," of constant struggle to improve, correct our flaws and

overcome our failings. God created us at the site designated for atonement, because the process of growth and self-improvement lies at the heart of our existence. He made man not to live a life of perfection, but rather to live a life of pursuing perfection.

(Based on Rav Yitzchak Stollman's *Minchat Yitzchak* [Detroit, 1948], vol. 3, p. 42)