Session 2: Land, Place, and Human Entanglement

Core themes:

SHIMMERING WORLD
LAND AS ACTOR
FOODWAYS AND SENSE OF PLACE
TREES AND ANIMALS

SHIMMERING WORLD

Moses Cordovero (sixteenth century Safed), *Shi'ur Qomah*, Modena Manuscript, 206b, commenting on Zohar 3:141b (Idra Rabba – trans. Matt, *Essential Kabbalah*, 24)

The essence of divinity is found in every single thing. Nothing but it exists. Since it causes every thing to be, no thing can live by anything else. It enlivens them; its existence exists in each existent.

Do not attribute duality to God. Let God be solely God. If you suppose that Ein *Sof* emanates until a certain point, and that from that point on is outside of it, you have dualized. God forbid! Realize, rather, that Ein Sof exists in each existent. Do not say, "This is a stone and not God." God forbid! Rather, all existence is God, and the stone is a thing pervaded by divinity.

עצם האלוהות נמצא בכל הנבראים כולם, ולא יהיה שום נמצא חוץ ממנו. מפני שאחר שהוא המהוֶה את כולם, אין ראוי שיהיה שום בריה חיה על־ידי זולתו, אלא הוא הוה אותם והוא חיותם, ומציאותו נמצא בכל הנמצאים כולם.

והטעם העיקרי לזה שלא תאמר שניות באלוה, 'ולמהוֵי הוא הוא בלחודוי' [שיהיה הוא הוא לבדו]. ירצה: אם תאמר בדעתך [ש]האין־סוף מתפשט עד מקום פלוני ומשם ולמטה חוץ ממנו – חס ושלום אתה עושה שניות... אלא אתה צריך לומר שהוא נמצא בכל הנמצאים, ואין לך לומר: זו אבן ואינו אלוה; חס ושלום! אלא כל המציאות הוא אלוה, והאבן הוא בריה שאלהותו מתפשט בה.

Kedushat Levi, bereshit

The blessed Creator made everything and is everything. In each moment, without ever ceasing, the Divine bestows blessing upon God's creatures and upon all the worlds above and below, onto the angels and onto all living beings. It is for this reason that we say in our morning prayers, "Who *forms* light and creates darkness" (Is. 45:7) and not "Who *formed* light and created darkness." We use the present tense, because God is constantly forming, revitalizing all of life, moment to moment; all is from the blessed Holy One, who is perfect and all-inclusive...

הכלל שהבורא ב״ה ברא הכל והוא הכל,
והשפעתו אינה נפסקת מעולם, כי בכל רגע
משפיע שפע לברואיו ולכל העולמות ולכל
ההיכלות ולכל המלאכים ולכל חיות הקודש.
ולכן אנו אומרים ״יוצר אור ובורא חושך״
(ישעיה מה:ז), ולא יצר אור וברא חושך, רק
״יוצר״ בלשון הוה, כי בכל רגע הוא יוצר,
שבכל רגע הוא משפיע חיות לכל חי והכל
מאתו יתברך, והוא שלם והוא כלול מהכל.

Zohar 3:266a-b (Based on Matt, Pritzker Zohar, 9:700, 702)

Come and see: the River gushing forth waters the whole Garden, saturating every single place, as we have established, until filling the place in the Garden called "a well of living waters" (Jer. 2:13), whence those above and below are nourished, as is said:

ת"ח נהרא דנגיד ונפיק אשקי לכל גינתא (ס"א ורוי לכל גנתא) ורוי לכל אתר ואתר כמה דאוקימנא עד דמלי (נ"א דמטי) לההוא אתר בגנתא דאקרי באר מים חיים. ומתמן אתזנו עלאין ותתאין (נ"א עלמין תתאין) כד"א ומשם יפרד... "From there it divides" (Gen. 2:10)... And one who succeeds in guarding it becomes worthy of being watered by that flow of the stream in this world and in the world that is coming, and he becomes worthy of having that supernal Well filled, conveying blessings above and below. Such a person is happy in this world and in the world that is always coming, and regarding this it is written: *You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring* (Isa. 58:11)...

When they reached a certain field, they saw trees and sat down beneath them. Rabbi Abba said, "Here is clarity for words of Torah! Let us sit." He opened and said...

וההוא דזכי לנטרא ליה זכי לאתשקייא מההוא נביעו דנחלא (בעלמא דין) בעלמא דאתי וזכי דאתמלי ההוא באר עלאה לנגדא ברכאן לעילא ותתא זכאה איהו בעלמא דין ובעלמא דאתי על דא כתיב והיית כגן רוה וכמוצא מים אשר לא יכזבו מימיו...

כיון דמטו בחקל חד חמו אילנין יתבו תחותייהו אמר רבי אבא הא צחותא דמלי דאורייתא. ניתיב...

LAND AS SUBJECT

Lev. 18:25

Thus the land became defiled; and I called it to account for its iniquity, and the land spewed out its inhabitants.

וַתִּטְמֵא הָאָׁרֶץ וָאֶפְקֹד עֲוֹגָהּ עָלֵיהָ וַתָּקֵא הָאָרֵץ אַת־יֹשְׁבֵיהָ:

Lev. 25:2-4

Speak to the Israelite people and say to them: When you enter the land that I assign to you, the land shall observe a sabbath of the LORD. Six years you may sow your field and six years you may prune your vineyard and gather in the yield. But in the seventh year the land shall have a sabbath of complete rest, a sabbath of the LORD: you shall not sow your field or prune your vineyard.

דַּבְּּר אֶל־בְּגֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶׁם כִּי תָבּאוּ אֶל־ הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר אֲגָי נֹתַן לָכֶם וְשָׁבְתָה הָאָרֶץ שַׁבָּת להי: שֵשׁ שָׁנִים ׁתִּזְרַע שָּׁדָּדְּ וִשֵּׁשׁ שָׁנִים תִּזִּמִׂר כַּרִמֵּדְּ

Lev. 26:32-35

I will make the land desolate, so that your enemies who settle in it shall be appalled by it. And you I will scatter among the nations, and I will unsheathe the sword against you. Your land shall become a desolation and your cities a ruin.

Then shall the land make up for its sabbath years throughout the time that it is desolate and you are in the land of your enemies; then shall the land rest and make up for its sabbath years. Throughout the time that it is desolate, it shall observe the rest that it did not observe in your sabbath years while you were dwelling upon it.

וַהַשִּׁפֹתִי אֲנָי אֶת־הָאֶרֶץ וְשֶׁמְמִּיּ עָלֶיהָ אִיְבִילֶּם הַיּשְׁבִים בָּהּ: וַהָּשִׁמִּתִי אֲנָרֶהְ בַּגּוֹיִם וַהַרִיקֹתִי אַחֲרִיכֶּם חֻרֶב וְהִיְתָּה

אַרְצְכֶם שְׁמְלֶּה וְעָרֵיכֶם יִהְיָּוּ חְרְבֶּה: בְּאֶרֶץ אֹיְבֵיכֶם אָז תִּשְׁבָּת הָאָרֶץ וְהִרְצֵת אֶת־ שׁבתתיה: שׁבתתיה:

כָּל־יְמֵי הָשַּׁפֶּה תִּשְׁבָּת אֵת אֲשֶׁר לְא־שָׁבְתֶּה בְּשַׁבְּתֹתִיכֶם בְּשִׁבְתְּכֵם עָלֶיהָ:

Netivot Shalom

The verses describing the flood's descent make no mention of the blessed Holy One doing this, unlike [the overturning of] Sodom and הנה בפסוקים אלו המתארים את ירידת המבול לא נזכר כלל שהקב״ה פעל כל זאת, שלא כבענין סדום ועמורה... לשון הכתובים כאן מורים Gomorrah... Here the verses' formulation suggests that everything happened automatically (me-elav), since the 'all the fountains of the great deep broken up, and the windows of heaven were opened. And the rain was upon the earth' (Gen. 7:11-12). Why was God's name not mentioned? Because there are many kinds of punishment, but the most painful is that of the consequence (hashlakhah), as providence has been removed.

שכאילה הכל נהיה מאליו, שנבקעו כל מעינות תהום רבה וארובות השמים נפתחו ויהיה הגשם על הארץ. וי״ל זאת למה לא נזכר שמו ית׳ על ירידת מי המבול. ויש לבאר בזה דהנה יש כל מיני עניני עונשין, אר העונש החמור ביותר העולה על כולנה, הוא בח׳ השלכה, שניטלת ההשגחה העליונה.

FOODWAYS AND SENSE OF PLACE

Joy Harjo, "Perhaps the World Ends Here" (23rd poet laureate of the USA, 1994)

The world begins at a kitchen table. No matter what, we must eat to live.

The gifts of earth are brought and prepared, set on the table. So it has been since creation, and it will go on.

We chase chickens or dogs away from it. Babies teethe at the corners. They scrape their knees under

It is here that children are given instructions on what it means to be human. We make men at it, we make women.

At this table we gossip, recall enemies and the ghosts of lovers.

Our dreams drink coffee with us as they put their arms around our children. They laugh with us at our poor falling-down selves and as we put ourselves back together once again at the table.

This table has been a house in the rain, an umbrella in the sun.

Wars have begun and ended at this table. It is a place to hide in the shadow of terror. A place to celebrate the terrible victory.

We have given birth on this table, and have prepared our parents for burial here.

At this table we sing with joy, with sorrow. We pray of suffering and remorse. We give thanks.

Perhaps the world will end at the kitchen table, while we are laughing and crying, eating of the last sweet bite.

Babylonian Talmud, Hagigah 27b (6th century)

Rabbi Yohanan and Reish Lakish both said: When the Temple stood, the altar atones for one, but now their table atones for them.

רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן וְרֵישׁ לַקִּישׁ דָּאָמְרִי תַּרְוַיִיהוּ: בִּזְמַן שְבֵּית _ הַמְּקָדָשׁ קַיַּים _ מְזְבֵּחַ מְכַפֵּר עַל אָדָם, עַכִּשִׁיוֹ שלחנו של אדם מכפר עליו.

Rashi (11th century France)

One's table atones – through welcoming guests.

שולחנו מכפר עליו - בהכנסת אורחין:

Shlomo Gantsfried, Kitsur Shulhan Arukh, no. 199 (19th century Hungary and Lithuania) When making a coffin, take care that the remnants of the boards not be used for any other purpose. They should be burned for fuel to heat the cauldron in which water is warmed for the ritual purification. Benevolent people,

ַבָּשָׁעוּשִיון אַרוֹן, יֵשׁ לְזַּהֶר בָּשְׁיּוּרֵי הַנְּסַרִים, שֵׁלֹא לַעשוֹת מֶהֶם אֵיזֶה תַשִּׁמִישׁ, וְיֵשׁ לְהַסִּיק בַּהֵן תַּחַת הַבְּלִי שֵׁמְחַמְמִים אֶת הַמַּיִם לְטָהֶרָה. טוֹבֵי לֶבָב שֶׁהֶאֱכִילוּ עַנְיִים עַל שַׁלְּחַנַם, יֵש לַעֲשוֹת לַהֶם אַרון מו השלחו, כמו שַכַּתוב, והלַד לפניד ַצְדָקַךּ.

who in their lifetime fed the poor at their table, should be buried in a coffin made of boards from the table, as it is says, "Your righteousness shall go before you" (Isa. 58:8).

Babylonian Talmud, Bava Batra 9a

Rav Huna says: We examine the claims of one asking for food, but not clothing...Rav Yehudah says: We examine the claims of one who asks for clothing, but for food...

אָמַר רַב הוּנָא : בּוֹדְקִין לִמְזוֹנוֹת, וְאֵין בּוֹדְקִין לִכְסוּת... וְרַב יְהוּדָה אָמַר : בּוֹדְקִין לִכְסוּת, וְאֵין בּוֹדְקִין לִמִזוֹנוֹת

Babylonian Talmud, Yevamot 47a

It was taught: we say to one who comes to convert in the present time...We tell them some of the less stringent commandments, and some of the more stringent ones, and we inform them of the sin of [neglecting] gleanings, forgotten sheaves, and the corners of one's field, and the poor person's tithe.

תָנוּ רַבְּנֵן: גֵּר שֶׁבָּא לְהִתְּנַּיֵּיר בִּזְמֵן הַיֶּה...וּמוֹדִיעִין אוֹתוֹ מִקְצָת מִצְוֹת קַלּוֹת וּמִקְצָת מִצְוֹת חֲמוּרוֹת, וּמוֹדִיעִין אוֹתוֹ עְוֹן לֶקֶט שִׁכְחָה וּפֵאָה וּמַעְשַׂר עָנִי. וּמוֹדִיעִין אוֹתוֹ עְנְשָׁן שֶׁל מִצְוֹת. אוֹמְרִים לוֹ: הֱנִי יוֹדֵעַ שָׁעַד שֶׁלֹּא בָּאתָ לְמִדָּה זוֹ, אָכַלְתָּ חֵלֶב — אִי אַתָּה עָנוּשׁ כָּרֵת. חִלַּלְתָּ חֵלֶב — עָנוּשׁ כָּרֵת, חִלַּלְתָּ שַׁבָּת — עָנוּשׁ סְקִילָה.

TREES AND ANIMALS

Zohar 2:127a

Rabbi Shim'on, Rabbi El'azar, Rabbi Abba, and Rabbi Yose were sitting one day beneath some trees on the plain by the Sea of Ginnosar. Rabbi Shim'on said, "How nice is the shade of these trees covering us! We must adorn this place with words of Torah"

רבי שמעון ורבי אלעזר ור' אבא ור' יוסי, הוו יתבי יומא חד, תחות אילני, בבקעתא גבי ימא דגנוסר. אמר רבי שמעון, כמה יאה צלא דא, דחפיא עלן מגו אילני, ואנן צריכין לאעטרא האי אתר במלי דאורייתא

Joy Harjo, "Speaking Tree"

I had a beautiful dream I was dancing with a tree.

-Sandra Cisneros

Some things on this earth are unspeakable:

Genealogy of the broken—

A shy wind threading leaves after a massacre,

Or the smell of coffee and no one there—

Some humans say trees are not sentient beings,

But they do not understand poetry—

Nor can they hear the singing of trees when they are fed by

Wind, or water music-

Or hear their cries of anguish when they are broken and bereft—

Now I am a woman longing to be a tree, planted in a moist, dark earth

Between sunrise and sunset—

I cannot walk through all realms—

I carry a yearning I cannot bear alone in the dark—

What shall I do with all this heartache?

The deepest-rooted dream of a tree is to walk

Even just a little ways, from the place next to the doorway—

To the edge of the river of life, and drink—

I have heard trees talking, long after the sun has gone down:

Imagine what would it be like to dance close together In this land of water and knowledge. . . To drink deep what is undrinkable.

b. Ta'anit 5b-6a

When they were taking leave of one another, [Rav Naḥman] said to Rabbi Yitshak: Teacher, give me a blessing. Rabbi Yitshak said to him: "I will tell you a parable. To what is this matter comparable? To one who was walking through a desert and who was hungry, tired, and thirsty. He found a tree whose fruits were sweet and whose shade was pleasant, and a stream of water flowed beneath it. He ate from its fruits, drank from the water, and sat in its shade. When he wished to leave, he said: 'Tree, tree, with what shall I bless you? If I say to you that your fruits should be sweet, your fruits are sweet. That your shade should be pleasant? Your shade is pleasant. That a stream of water should flow beneath you? a stream of water flows beneath you. Rather, may it be God's will that all saplings which they plant from you be like you.

So, too, with you. With what shall I bless you? If I bless you with Torah, you already have Torah; if I bless you with wealth, you already have wealth; if I bless you with children, you already have children. Rather, may it be God's will that your offspring be like you.

כָּי הֲוֹוֹ מִיפַּטְרִי מִהְדָּדֵי, אֲמֵר לֵיהּ : לִיבָרְכַן מָר! אֲמֵר לֵיהּ : אֶמְשׁוֹל לְךְּ מָשָׁל, לְמָה הַדָּבָר דּוֹמֶה? לְאָדָם שֶׁהָיָה הוֹלֵדְ בַּמִּדְבָּר וְהָיָה רָעֵב וְעָיֵף וְצָמֵא, וּמָצָא אִילָן שֶׁפֵּירוֹתָיו מְתוּקִין וְצָלוֹ נָאֶה וְאַמַּת הַמַּיִם עוֹבֶרֶת תַּחְתָּיו. אָכַל מִפֵּירוֹתָיו, וְשָׁתָה מִמֵּימִיו, וְיָשַׁב בְּצִילוֹ.

וֹּכְשֶׁבִּיקֵשׁ לֵילֵךּ, אָמַר: אִילָן אִילָן, בַּפָּה אֲבָרֶכְךּ: אִם אוֹמַר לְךְּ שִּיְהוּ פֵּירוֹתֶיךְ מְתוּיִקִין — הֲרֵי פֵּירוֹתֶיךְ מְתוּיִקִין, שֻׁיְּהֵא צִילְךְּ נָאֶה — חֲרֵי צִילְךְּ נָאֶה, שֶׁתְּהֵא אַמַּת הַמַּיִם עוֹבֶרֶת תַּחְתָּיךְ — חֲרֵי אַמַּת הַמַּיִם עוֹבֶרֶת תַּחְתָּיךְ, אֶלֶא: יְהִי רָצוֹן שֶׁכָּל נְטִיעוֹת שֶׁנּוֹטְעִין מִמְךְ יִהִיוּ כְּמוֹתָךְ.

אַף אַתָּה, בַּפֶּה אֲבָרֶכְּךְּיִ אִם בְּתוֹרָה — הֲבֵי תּוֹרָה, אִם בְּעוֹשֶׁר — הֲבִי תּוֹרָה, אִם בְּעִוֹשֶׁר — הֲבִי בָּנִים, שֶׁכְי בְּנִים לְּבִי בָּנִים, שֶׁלָּא: יְהִי רָצוֹן שֶׁיִּהְיוּ צֶאֱצָאֵי מֵעֶיךְ כְּמוֹתְךְּ.

Martin Buber, I and Thou, trans. Kauffman (57-59)

I contemplate a tree.

I can accept it as a picture: a rigid pillar in a flood of light, or splashes of green traversed by the gentleness of the blue silver ground.

I can feel it as movement: the flowing veins around the sturdy, striving core, the sucking of the roots, the breathing of the leaves, the infinite commerce with earth and air—and the growing itself in its darkness.

I can assign it to a species and observe it as an instance, with an eye to its construction and its way of life.

I can overcome its uniqueness and form so rigorously that I recognize it only as an expression of the law—those laws according to which a constant opposition of forces is continually adjusted, or those laws according to which the elements mix and separate.

I can dissolve it into a number, into pure relation between numbers, and eternalize it.

Throughout all of this the tree remains my object and has its place and its time span, its kind and condition.

But it can also happen, if will and grace are joined, that as I contemplate the tree I am drawn into a relation and the tree ceases to be an It. The power of exclusiveness has seized me...

Whatever belongs to the tree is included: its form and its mechanics, its colors and its chemistry, its conversation with the elements and its conversation with the stars—this in its entirety.

The tree is no impression, no play of my imagination, no aspect of a mood; it confronts me bodily and has to deal with me as I must deal with it—only differently.

One should not try to dilute the meaning of the relation: relation is reciprocity.

Does the tree then have consciousness, similar to our own? I have no experience of that. But thinking that you have brought this off in your own case, must you again divide the indivisible? What I encounter is neither the soul of a tree nor a dryad, but the tree itself.

Nahman of Bratslav, Likkutei Moharan 2:63 (eighteenth-century Ukraine)

Each shepherd has a unique melody (*niggun*), reflecting the grasses and the place where they pasture. Every animal has some unique vegetation that it must eat, and the shepherd does not always remain in the same place ... Each grass has a song... and the shepherd's melody is made from their songs....

This is connected to, "From the ends of the earth, song shall be heard" (Isa. 24:16). Melody and song erupts from "the ends of the earth," for the vegetation that grows upon the earth creates song. The shepherd knows the melody through which strength is given to the grasses, and thus food is produced for the animals.

בִּי דַּע, כִּי כָל רוֹעֶה וְרוֹעֶה יֵשׁ לוֹ נִגּוּן מְיָחָד לְפִי הָעֲשָׂבִים וּלְפִי הַמְּקוֹם שֶׁהוּא רוֹעֶה שָׁם, כִּי כָל בְּהֵמָה וּבְהֵמָה יֵשׁ לָהּ עֵשֶׂב מְיֵחָד, שְׁהִיא צְרִיכָה לְאָכְלוֹ. גַּם אֵינוֹ רוֹעֶה תָּמִיד בְּמְקוֹם אֶחָד. וּלְפִי הְעֲשָׁבִים וְהַמְּקוֹם שֶׁרוֹעֶה שְׁם, כֵּן יֵשׁ לוֹ נִגּוּן. כִּי כָל עֵשֶׁב וָעֵשֶׂב יֵשׁ לוֹ וּמִשִּׁירַת הָעֲשָׂבִים נַעֲשֶׂה נִגּוּן שֶׁל הָרוֹעֶה. וְזֶה בְּחִינַת (ישעיהו כ״ד:ט״ז): מִכְּנַף הָאָרֶץ וֹמְירוֹת שָׁמַעְנוּ, הַיְנוּ שֶׁוְּמִירוֹת וְנִגּוּנִים יוֹצְאָים מִכְּנַף הָאָרֶץ, כִּי עַל־יְדֵי הְעְשֻׂבִים הַגְּדֵלִים בָּאָרֶץ נַעֲשֶׁה נִגּוּן כַּנַּיִיל. וְעַל־יְדֵי שֶּהָרוֹעֶה יוֹדֵעַ הַנְּגוּוֹן, עַל־יְדֵי־יֻה הוּא נוֹתֵן כֹּחַ בְּהָעֲשָׂבִים, וַאֲזִי יֵשׁ לַבְּהַמוֹת לֶאֱכֹל.

b. Eruvin 100b

Rabbi Yoḥanan said: If the Torah had not been given, we would have learned modesty from the cat, stealing from the ant, forbidden relations from the dove, and proper relations from the rooster, which appearses and then mates.

אָמַר רַבִּי יוֹחָנֶן :אִילְמָלֵא לֹא נִיתְּנָה תּוֹרָה, הָיִינוּ לְמֵידִין צְנִיעוּת מֵחָתוּל, וְנָזֵל מִנְּמָלָה, וַעֲרָיוֹת מִיּוֹנָה. דֵּרַדְּ אַרֵץ מִתַּרָנָגוֹל — שְׁמִּפַיֵּיס וָאָחַר כַּדְּ בּוֹעֵל.

Maimonides, Guide of the Perplexed, 3:13 ((trans. Shlomo Pines, p. 452)

"It should not be believed that all the beings exist for the sake of the existence of humans. On the contrary, all the other beings too have been intended for their own sakes and not for the sake of something else."

שלא יאמן בנמצאות כולם שהם מפני מציאות האדם אבל יהיו גם כן שאר הנמצאות כולם מכוונות לעצמם לא מפני דבר אחר.

Ya'akov Leiner, Beit Yaakov, bereshit p. 26, no. 41 (nineteenth-century Poland)

The statement "let Us make the human being in our image" (Gen. 1:26) was spoken to all creations. When all creatures were formed. other than human beings, the blessed One asked each one individually for its consent to be created, as it says in the Talmud, "They were created willingly, with their form" (b. Rosh Hashanah 11a). But no creature was asked regarding the others, since they do not have free choice and thus cannot destroy or lay waste [to other species]. They will surely gain from the creation of other beings, and thus implicitly agree to their creation, since "one may be granted merit without explicit knowledge." But when it came to humanity, the blessed One asked all other creatures if they should be formed because they have free will and can destroy all the rest of creation. They agreed, however, and all gave permission for the formation of humanity.

ויאמר אלוהים נעשה אדם... המאמר נעשה אדם היה לכל הברואים כי בשאר הברואים חוץ מהאדם שאל השי"ת לכל בריאה בפרט אם ברצונה להיות נברא, וכדאיתא בגמ' (ר"ה יא) לדעתן נבראו לצביונם נבראו. אבל בריאה אחת על חברתה לא שאל השי"ת יען ששאר הברואים אין להם בחירה ואין ויכולים לקלקל ולהפסיד ובבריאתם יהי' להם ריוח ובטח יסכימו כל הברואים להיות נבראים כי זכין לאדם שלא בפניו. אבל על בריאת האדם שאל השי"ת לכל הברואים יען שהאדם יש לו בחירה ובקלקולו יכול לקלקל גם את שאר הברואים, אבל הסכימו כל הברואים גם את שאר הברואים, אבל הסכימו כל הברואים על בריאת האדם וכלם נתנו מכחם להצורת אדם.