

Rocks and Dust

By Hillel ben David (Greg Killian)



"Rock" is the normal translation of the [Hebrew](hebrew.html) words *tzur*. There are a couple of other words which are sometimes translated as *rock*: *eben* [stone], *selah* [rock formation], or *matzeivah* [stone monument]. Whenever these words appear, they are metaphors for [HaShem](hashem.html).

Maimonides notes, in his Guide for the Perplexed,[[1]](#footnote-1) in his explanation of the term *tzur* - *rock*: Tzur - rock is an equivocal term.

That is to say, the word has several meanings, entirely different [one](one.html) from the other, as opposed to a borrowed term, namely, a metaphor, where there is a similarity between the various meanings. [One](one.html) way that the Torah conceals its esoteric truths is by using words having multiple meanings. It is for this reason that the story relating to the cleft in the rock[[2]](#footnote-2) is formulated the way it is, the term "tzur" intentionally chosen because of its multiple denotations. Maimonides explicates the various meanings of the word "tzur."

*It is a term denoting a mountain… It is also a term denoting a hard stone like flint… It is, further, a term denoting the quarry from which quarry-stones are hewn…*

*In derivation from the* [*third*](three.html) *meaning of this equivocal term (quarry), the word was applied to G-d, who is also designated by the term "tzur."*

*Subsequently, in derivation from the last meaning, the term was used figuratively to designate the root and principle of every thing… On account of the last meaning,* **quarry***, G-d, may He be exalted, is designated as The Rock, as he is the principle and the efficient cause of all things other than himself. Accordingly, it is said:*

***Debarim (Deuteronomy) 32:4*** *The Rock, His work is perfect.*

***Debarim (Deuteronomy) 32:18*** *Of the Rock that begot you, you were unmindful.*

***Debarim (Deuteronomy) 32:30*** *Their Rock had given them over.*

***Shmuel alef (I Samuel) 2:2*** *And there is no Rock like our G-d.*

***Yeshayahu (Isaiah) 26:4*** *The Rock of Eternity.*

The last verse cited by Maimonides to illustrate the meaning of the term *tzur* relates to G-d's revelation to Moses in the cleft of the rock:

The verse, "And you shall stand upon the rock"[[3]](#footnote-3) means: Rely upon, and be firm in considering, G-d, may He be exalted, as the [first](one.html) principle. This is the entryway through which you shall come to Him, as we have made clear when [speaking](mashal.html) of His saying [to Moses]: "Behold, there is a place by Me".[[4]](#footnote-4)

Think, for a moment, about the implications of [HaShem](hashem.html) being a quarry from which other rocks are hewn.

As we progress in this [study](study.html), we will see that Maimonides was surely correct when he said that Tzur is equivocal. So, lets look at another common word for rock.

*Eben* the [Hebrew](hebrew.html) word for rock, "eben", is all about **connecting**. According to Rashi,[[5]](#footnote-5) the [Hebrew](hebrew.html) word *stone* or *eben -* אבן,[[6]](#footnote-6) is a contraction of the words father (ab *–* אב) *and* son + (ben - בן). Both words share the [letter](letters.html) beit - ב. This word shows what we all [know](daat.html), that a son is an extension of his father. [Yaaqov](israelja.html)’s hope for the [Jewish](gen-jew.html) people is that we **connect** from [generation](toldot.html) to [generation](toldot.html) – through the Torah.[[7]](#footnote-7)

The [Hebrew](hebrew.html) words “stone” (eben - אבן), “father” (ab - אב), and “son” (ben - בן) were spoken by [Mashiach](mashiach.html) in which he put all the pieces together:

***Matthew 3:9*** *And do not suppose that you can say to yourselves, ‘We have* [*Abraham*](avraham.html) *for our father’* (ab - אב)*; for I say to you that from these stones* (eben - אבן) *G-d is able to raise up children* (ben - בן) *to* [*Abraham*](avraham.html)*.*

With this introduction, lets turn over a few rocks and see if we can’t connect to the Torah’s usage of this common word.

# Rock

[First](one.html) usage of *tzur* in the Torah is found in:

***Shemot (***[***Exodus***](exodus.html)***) 17:6*** *Behold, I will stand before thee there upon the rock in Horeb; and thou shalt smite the rock, and there shall come water out of it, that the people may drink. And Moshe did so in the sight of the elders of Israel.*

This suggests that a rock has an association with [HaShem](hashem.html) and a rock is meant to provide something for us. In the case above, the rock was to provide water, a [**connection**](connection.html) to life.[[8]](#footnote-8)

[**HaShem**](hashem.html) **as a rock**

Why is [HaShem](hashem.html) referred to in the following Pasuk as a tzur, a rock?

***Debarim (Deuteronomy) 32:15*** *But Yeshurun waxed fat, and kicked: thou art waxen fat, thou art grown thick, thou art covered with fatness; then he forsook G-d which made him, and lightly esteemed the Rock of his* [*salvation*](salvation.html)*.*

In an earlier Pasuk, Rashi explains this term used as an alternative description of [HaShem](hashem.html).

***Debarim (Deuteronomy) 32:4*** *He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are judgment: a G-d of truth and without iniquity, just and right is he.*

Tzur, rock, implies strength, Rashi explains.[[9]](#footnote-9) [HaShem](hashem.html) is called by this [name](name.html) when we wish to talk about His power and steadfastness. It is as Targum Yonatan renders the word, *mighty*, and his elaboration makes it clear that [HaShem](hashem.html) is a rock when he is involved in **connecting** people, animals, or things.

***Targum Pseudo Jonathan*** *32:4. Moshe the prophet said: When I ascended the mountain of* [*Sinai*](stages.html)*, I beheld* [*HaShem*](hashem.html) *of all the* [*worlds*](worlds.html)*,* [*HaShem*](hashem.html)*, dividing the day into* [*four*](four.html) *portions;* [*three*](three.html) *hours employed in the* [*Law*](law.html)*,* [*three*](three.html) *with judgment,* [*three*](three.html) *in making* [*marriage*](mashal.html) *bonds between man and woman, and appointing to elevate or to abase, and* [*three*](three.html) *hours in the care of every created thing: for so it is written: The Mighty* [*One*](one.html) *whose works are perfect, for all His ways are judgment, a faithful G-d before whom no iniquity comes forth, pure and upright is He.*

Notice that all of the activities, inn the Targum, involve **connecting**.

**Water from a rock[[10]](#footnote-10)**

[One](one.html) of the more famous Torah rocks was the well that traveled with the Children of Israel in the wilderness. Let’s examine this incident a bit more closely. We need to remember that Moshe was told to bring forth water from a rock on [two](two.html) different occasions.

The [first](one.html) [time](time.html) was in Shemot ([Exodus](exodus.html)) 17:1-7, which tells of an incident in which the [Jews](gen-jew.html) asked for water during their [***first***](one.html) year in the desert, at which [time](time.html) Moshe was told to ***strike*** a rock and bring forth water.

The second is Bamidbar ([Numbers](nchart.html)) 20:1-13, which tells of the incident in the beginning of the [Jews](gen-jew.html)' ***fortieth year*** in the desert, when the [Jews](gen-jew.html) asked for water, Moshe was told to [***speak***](mashal.html) to a rock to bring forth water, and Moshe struck the rock, instead.

Recall that the reason Moshe could not enter the Promised Land was because of a rock. When the people cried for water at [Kadesh](stages.html), [HaShem](hashem.html) told Moshe to take his [rod](staff.html) and before the [eyes](body.html) of the [community](community.html) order the rock to give water. So Moshe took the [rod](staff.html) as he was commanded, went to the rock in front of the [community](community.html) and struck it to bring forth water. [HaShem](hashem.html) immediately told Moshe that because he had not trusted enough to affirm [HaShem](hashem.html)'s sanctity, Moshe cannot enter the Promised Land.[[11]](#footnote-11) Fair enough. [HaShem](hashem.html) had said to [*speak*](mashal.html) to the rock and did not say to *hit* the rock. Moshe did not follow orders. Others who had not followed orders precisely were struck dead immediately. This is a relatively mild punishment.

***Bamidbar (***[***Numbers***](nchart.html)***) 20:7*** *And G-d* [*spoke*](mashal.html) *to Moshe, saying, “Take the* [*staff*](staff.html) *and* [*gather*](gather.html) *the Assembly, you and Aharon your brother, and* [*speak*](mashal.html) *to the rock (selah) before their* [*eyes*](body.html) *and give from its waters; bring forth water from the rock to give water to the Assembly and their animals.”*

The [Midrash](orallaw.html) *Yalkut Shimoni*, makes the following comment:[[12]](#footnote-12)

"[Speak](mashal.html) to the rock, do not strike it. G‑d told Moshe, 'when a child is young, the educator may hit the lad in order to [teach](teacher.html) him. When the child grows into adulthood, however, the educator must rebuke him only verbally. Similarly, when the rock was but a 'small child,' I instructed you to strike it; but now [after 40 years when it has "grown up"] you must only [speak](mashal.html) to it. [Teach](teacher.html) it a chapter of Torah and it will produce water."

This is a strange [Midrash](orallaw.html). What is the comparison between a rock and a child? And how are you supposed to [teach](teacher.html) a rock a chapter of Torah?

Obviously, according to the [Midrash](orallaw.html), the story with the rock was more than a [physical](physical.html) [event](feasts.html) concerning an attempt to draw water from a hard inanimate object. It was also a psychological and moral tale about how to educate and refine human "rocks" so that they can produce water, and use the water for connecting to [HaShem](hashem.html) and to others.

Before any refinement could be achieved, the outer "rock" needed to be cracked. The "hard skin" they naturally developed over 210 years in [exile](galuyot.html), needed to be penetrated before its inner vibrant and fresh waters could be fully discovered.

That is why, immediately after the [Exodus](exodus.html), G‑d instructed Moshe to strike the rock. At this primitive point in [Jewish](gen-jew.html) history, smiting the "rock" was appropriate, indeed critical. Their hearts were too dense to be pierced in any other way. Moshe needed to be forceful, direct and blunt.

[Forty](forty.html) years later, their children and grandchildren, born and raised in liberty and in a highly [spiritual](physical.html) environment, developed a sense of selfhood quite different from their parents and grandparents. [Forty](forty.html) years in wilderness, in the presence of Moshe, Aaron and miracles, left a dent. The [nation](nations.html) had [spiritually](physical.html) and psychologically matured.

But suddenly, they, too, began to lament and kvetch about a lack of water. Yet a subtle reading of the text exposes us to a tune quite different from the tune present in their parents' [cry](mashal.html) 40 years earlier. This [new](new.html) [generation](toldot.html) of [Jews](gen-jew.html) asks only for water, not for meat or other delicacies. They do not express their craving to return to Egypt. Nor do they wish to stone Moshe. They are simply terrified of the prospects of death by thirst.

G-d was sensitive to the nuanced distinctions. He commanded Moshe to [speak](mashal.html) to the rock, rather than strike it. "Now you must [speak](mashal.html) to it, [teach](teacher.html) it a chapter of Torah and it will produce water", in the above recorded words of the [Midrash](orallaw.html). The [Jews](gen-jew.html) have come a long way. The model of smiting must be replaced with the model of [teaching](teacher.html) and inspiring.

At that critical juncture, however, Moshe was unable to metamorphose himself. Moshe, who came to identify so deeply with the [generation](toldot.html) he painstakingly liberated [from Egypt](thebirth.html)ian genocide and slavery and worked incessantly for their development as a free and holy people, could not easily assume a [new](new.html) model of leadership. Moshe, calling the people "rebels", struck the rock. He continued to employ the method of rebuke and strength.

And he struck it twice, because when you attempt to change things through pressure, rather than by persuasion, you must always do it more than once.

This demonstrated that Moshe belonged to the older [generation](toldot.html) and because of his profound love and loyalty to that [generation](toldot.html) - about whom he told G-d that should He not [forgive](forgive.html) them, He could erase Moshe' [name](name.html) from the Torah,[[13]](#footnote-13) he was not the appropriate person to take the [new](new.html) [generation](toldot.html) into the land.

Moshe did not possess the ability to properly assess the transformation that had taken place in the young [generation](toldot.html) of [Jews](gen-jew.html) who had come of age. This was not a flaw of Moshe; it was his virtue: A result of his extraordinary intimate [connection](connection.html) with the minds of his [generation](toldot.html). Moshe has become [one](one.html) with them.

What is more, Moshe wished not, perhaps could not, [speak](mashal.html) to the rock, for that would demonstrate the flaws of the [Jews](gen-jew.html) he faithfully led for [forty](forty.html) years; it would highlight the contrast between enslaved parents and liberated children. Moshe chose to diminish himself rather than diminish his people. That is what made Moshe such a unique leader.

So G‑d told Moshe, "*You did not have faith in Me, to sanctify Me in the* [*eyes*](body.html) *of the children of Israel*". Instead of exposing the elevated [spiritual](physical.html) status of the [new](new.html) [generation](toldot.html) of [Jews](gen-jew.html), Moshe diminished their moral level, creating a crack in their profound and mature relationship with G‑d.

# [Two](two.html) Types of Stones

The above explanation will clarify another curious anomaly in the biblical description of the [two](two.html) incidents with the water. The description for the "rock" in the [first](one.html) incident is the [Hebrew](hebrew.html) term "tzur." The description for the rock in the second incident is the [Hebrew](hebrew.html) term "selah." Why?

(In the case of the tzur, the [nation](nations.html) had yet to reach such a high level, though they had been in need of a great miracle in terms of the water. Hitting the rock was a way to do this and to counteract the [spiritual](physical.html) imbalance at that [time](time.html). In fact, “tzur” is the [name](name.html) used to indicate that the rock itself had yet to become transformed to a higher [spiritual](physical.html) level, indicated by the word “selah” used 40 years later.)

In English we translate both [Hebrew](hebrew.html) words, tzur and selah, to mean a rock. But in the [Hebrew](hebrew.html) there is a significant difference between the [two](two.html) terms. A tzur is a rock that is hard and solid both in its exterior and interior parts. It is all rock. A selah, on the other [hand](fourteen.html), is a rock that is hard and rocky on its outside, but its interior contains water or moisture.

When you are dealing with a "rock" that has no moisture stored in it, you have no choice but to smite it. However, when you are confronted with a rock that is merely rocky on the outside but soft on the inside, you have no right to smite it. Now, you must [speak](mashal.html) to it and inspire it to reveal its internal waters of wisdom, love and inspiration.

# Dust

Dust, afar - עפר,[[14]](#footnote-14) is an unexpected ingredient in the composition of [Adam](adam.html). It is rare that anyone thinks of themselves as “dust of the earth”. We tend to have a more elevated concept of ourselves as a the ‘highest form of earthly being’. Never the less, when [HaShem](hashem.html) went to create man, He started with dust.

***Bereshit (Genesis) 2:7*** *And* [*HaShem*](hashem.html) *G-d formed man* ([adam](adam.html)) *from the* ***dust*** *of the earth* (adamah) *and He blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being.*

But man is called [Adam](adam.html). What is established here is an interesting [connection](connection.html): [Adam](adam.html) and Adamah, man and earth. And not just earth, but “dust of the earth”. The word used for the earth out of which [*Adam*](adam.html) was made is *Adamah*. They are the same noun: [Adam](adam.html) is the masculine form, Adamah is the feminine. We are literally earth-creatures. There is a sense of this [connection](connection.html) also in English in the cognate relationship between the words "human" and "humus[[15]](#footnote-15)". (The identification of the earth as feminine and humans as masculine reflects the traditional agricultural or poetic characterization of the earth being, like woman, the receiver of [seed](flower.html) and bearer of fruit.)

They are the same word: [*Adam*](adam.html) and *Adamah*. Just by virtue of his [name](name.html), it would appear that of the elements which form man, it is Adamah rather than the G-dly element, which would seem to be the primary ingredient.

Dust represents death, the inanimate that has no life-force. The [body](body.html) alone is just “**dust** of the earth”, it [needs](needs.html) the soul to give it life.

From the above pasuk, we see that there are [two](two.html) unique building blocks that form the basic elements of man: **Dust** and the **breath** of [HaShem](hashem.html). Man is both [physical](physical.html) and [spiritual](physical.html), earthly and G-dly.[[16]](#footnote-16)

Because of [Adam](adam.html)’s [sin](sin.html), the dust which formed our humble beginning, will also be our end:

***Bereshit (Genesis) 3:19*** *In the sweat of thy* [*face*](body.html) *shalt thou* [*eat*](eating.html) *bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for* ***dust*** *thou art, and unto* ***dust*** *shalt thou return.[[17]](#footnote-17)*

Rashi, draws our attention to the origin of the dust out of which [Adam](adam.html) was formed. He brings [two](two.html) very different midrashic explanations:

“DUST FROM THE ADAMA: He [gathered](gather.html) his ([Adam](adam.html)’s) dust from the [four](four.html) corners of the globe so that in whatever place he may die, the ground will absorb him in burial.

AN ALTERNATIVE READING: G-d took his dust from the place of which it is said “You shall make an altar of earth (adamah) to Me”[[18]](#footnote-18).. I only wish that he may gain [atonement](atonemen.html) ...”

Let us examine the images that Rashi presents to us here. It is difficult to understand what these colorful interpretations are trying to suggest. What do we mean when we talk about the raw materials for man [coming](coming.html) from the entire globe? Apparently, we are suggesting that man somehow encompasses the entire [world](worlds.html). This [first](one.html) interpretation of Rashi’s is expanded upon by The Netziv[[19]](#footnote-19) in his commentary, HaEmek Davar.

“G-d [gathered](gather.html) earth, a little from here and a little from there, unlike the way that he created animal and beast. Human existence differs greatly from that of the animal kingdom. Animals will live only in a specific climate, each according to their specific nature. Each animal is born and thrives in a particular climate. Man is different, living throughout the [world](worlds.html), in hot and cold climate, adapting diet and nutrition in accordance with the local conditions. This is the result of G-d gathering the materials for man from all over the globe. In addition, certain lands breed certain temperaments ... but man has no defined temperament due to his diverse origin.”

So the unique aspect of man is his adaptability and universality. His versatile, portable, robust nature is encapsulated in this image. Man lives everywhere in the [world](worlds.html). There is nowhere where man is a stranger. Because man is a [creation](bara.html) of all places, he is at home in all places. The [first](one.html) [Midrash](orallaw.html) emphasises the universal nature of man.

But what of the second [midrash](orallaw.html)? The second [midrash](orallaw.html) plays on the word ‘adamah’, knowing that the altar in the [Temple](temple.html) is described using that self-same word: “mizbeach adamah”.[[20]](#footnote-20) On this basis the [midrash](orallaw.html) proposes that man’s origin’s lies in a single spot, the site of the [future](future.html) [Temple](temple.html) in [Jerusalem](city.html). Why? Why does man need to be created from this hallowed place?

According to Rashi, this particular ingredient is vital to grant man the [future](future.html) opportunity of [atonement](atonemen.html) and [forgiveness](forgive.html). In this very daring reading, the [midrash](orallaw.html) notes an inherent ‘flaw’ within the blueprint of man, the inevitable tendency towards [sin](sin.html), a devastating imperfection. Man, if he is to exist as man, is going to [sin](sin.html), and thus the very fact of his existence necessitates teshuva,[[21]](#footnote-21) leading to [forgiveness](forgive.html), and [atonement](atonemen.html).[[22]](#footnote-22) Thus [forgiveness](forgive.html) must precede his very [creation](bara.html). Indeed, this [Midrash](orallaw.html) tells us that it is a crucial ingredient of every fibre of his being.

This suggests that man has a higher purpose than merely being the “dust of the earth”. This higher purpose is lost in [Adam](adam.html). [Adam](adam.html) after the fall, epitomizes the “dust of the earth” aspect.

Our humble beginning as the “dust of the earth” is turned around later when [Avraham](avraham.html) recognizes and acknowledges [HaShem](hashem.html). [HaShem](hashem.html), then, makes a promise to [Avraham](avraham.html).

***Bereshit (Genesis) 28:14*** *And* [*HaShem*](hashem.html) *said unto* [*Abram*](avraham.html)*, after that Lot was separated from him, Lift up now thine* [*eyes*](body.html)*, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: 15 For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy* [*seed*](flower.html) *for ever. 16 And I will make thy* [*seed*](flower.html) *as the* ***dust*** *of the earth: so that if a man can* [*number*](nchart.html) *the* ***dust*** *of the earth, then shall thy* [*seed*](flower.html) *also be numbered.*

The [Midrash](orallaw.html) explains the very powerful significance of this choice of words. This is more than just a blessing of multitudes. The blessing of “dust of the earth” represents the history of the [Jews](gen-jew.html). Everybody tramples over the dust of the earth, but in the end the dust of the earth always remains on top.

In the final analysis, the “dust of the earth” is always on top. This is the analogy and the blessing of “Your descendants will be like the dust of the earth.” [Yaakov](israelja.html) is told that his children will be trampled upon and spat upon, like the dust. But in the end, like the dust, they will remain on top.

That same dust ultimately covers those who trample it.

***Bereshit (Genesis) 3:19*** *From dust you are taken and to dust you will return.[[23]](#footnote-23)*

***Shabbath 152b*** *Our Rabbis* [*taught*](teacher.html)*: ‘And the dust return to the earth as it was, and the spirit return unto G-d who gave it’: Render it back to him as He gave it to thee, [viz.,] in* [*purity*](purity.html)*, so do thou [return it] in* [*purity*](purity.html)*.*

Thus we come full circle to show that the tremendous blessing also carries with it a powerful reminder that we should remain humble, knowing what our end will be.

[Adam](adam.html)'s purpose, was to lift himself up beyond the *dust* within himself and reach an exalted level of spirituality. This is alluded to in the pasuk:

***Kohelet (Ecclesiastes) 3:21*** *Who knows the spirit of the sons of man that goes up above, and the spirit of the animal that descends below to the earth.*

Indeed, a scholar who succeeds in learning Torah lishmah, for its own sake, experiences a similar ascendancy:

***Avot 6:1*** *And he is lifted up and elevated above all that is mundane.*

# Little Dust

Efron the Hittite sold a cave and its land to [Avraham](avraham.html).[[24]](#footnote-24) This cave was called Machpelah.[[25]](#footnote-25) Normally *Efron* is spelled ‘full’ (with [five](five.html) [letters](letters.html)). However, after he negotiated in bad faith with [Avraham](avraham.html) for the field for burying Sarah, Efron’s [name](name.html) is spelled ‘missing’ (with [four](four.html) [letters](letters.html))[[26]](#footnote-26) as a [sign](signs.html) by the Torah of the belittling of his stature.

[Avraham](avraham.html) found the cave in the fields that belongs to Efron. He could see [Adam](adam.html) and Chava in the cave. He also saw that they were buried by the entrance to the [Garden of Eden](eden.html) that was in the cave of Machpelah.[[27]](#footnote-27)

That was the reason why he wanted to have ownership of this place. He was ready to pay any price and he did pay the full price. His intension was to give us, the [future](future.html) [generations](toldot.html), the [connection](connection.html) to the [tree of life](eternal.html). The patriarchs and the matriarchs that are buried there protect the entrance to the [Garden of Eden](eden.html) for us until the [time](time.html) of the [resurrection](techiyat.html) of the dead. [Avraham](avraham.html) established control over the gates to the [Garden of Eden](eden.html) and bridged the gap between death (our [world](worlds.html), the Tree of the [Knowledge](knowledge.html) Good and Evil) and life ([Garden of Eden](eden.html) and [Tree of Life](eternal.html)).

It is by no accident that [Abraham](avraham.html) bought the Machpelah Cave from Efron (עפרון)[[28]](#footnote-28) the Hittite, whose [name](name.html) is derived from the same root as “dust” (עפר). Man was created, “dust from the earth” and after his [sin](sin.html) he was destined to die, “for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” Yet “dust” takes on [new](new.html) significance when [Abraham](avraham.html) states his famous expression of submissiveness and lowliness:

***Bereshit (Genesis) 18:27*** *And* [*Abraham*](avraham.html) *answered and said, Behold now, I have taken upon me to* [*speak*](mashal.html) *unto the Lord, which am but dust and ashes:*

 “I am dust and ashes”, the attribute of submissiveness is implied in our context too, in the above mentioned phrase, “Sarah died in Kiryat Arba, which is Chevron,[[29]](#footnote-29) in the land of Canaan”. Canaan (כנען) is from the same root as “submissiveness” (הכנעה). As the indicated by the [Zohar](orallaw.html), the [four](four.html) elements of the “[city](city.html) of [four](four.html)” (Kiryat Arba) remain connected by the [merit](merit.html) of “the land of Canaan” i.e., the dust-like attribute of a submissive soul.

The field [Avraham](avraham.html) buys is called *Sde Efron*: the field of little dust. The [name](name.html) “field of little dust” has resonance: It is as if [Avraham](avraham.html) buys the dust, the *afar* out of which [Adam](adam.html) was [first](one.html) made. [One](one.html) [midrash](orallaw.html) says the dust that created [Adam](adam.html)’s [body](body.html) was from the place of the [Temple](temple.html), while another [midrash](orallaw.html) says that [Adam](adam.html)’s [body](body.html) was created using dust from every corner of the [world](worlds.html). We can understand both of these *midrashim* as containing the truth. [Avraham](avraham.html) is buying a stake in the land on which he lives, the land on which the [Temple](temple.html) will [one](one.html)-day stand. And, there is a [connection](connection.html) between [Avraham](avraham.html) and the whole earth.

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1. 1:16 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Shemot (Exodus) 33:22 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Shemot (Exodus) 33:21 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. ibid. 3 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Rashi Bereshit (Genesis) 49:24 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Eben shetiyah – foundation stone, is the foundation of the world and was located in the Holy of Holies in the Temple. This is the stone that **connects** heaven and earth. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Bereshit (Genesis) 48:15-16 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. At multiple hermaneutical levels. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. **The deeds of the [Mighty] Rock are perfect**Even though G-d is strong [like a rock], when He brings retribution upon those who transgress His will, He does not bring it in a flood [of anger], but [rather] with justice because “His deeds are perfect.” [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. By Yosef Y. Jacobson [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Bamidbar (Numbers) 20:6-13 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Yalkut Shimoni Chukat Remez 763 toward the end. This book is one of the most popular early Midrashic collections on the Bible, compiled by Rabbi Shimon Ashkenazi HaDarshan of Frankfurt (circa 1260). Many Midrashim are known only because they are cited in this work. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Shemot (Exodus) 32:32 [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. We learn from the Zohar that the neck (luz) bone "עצם־הלוז" (numerical value is 248), is the starting point in creating Adam’s body. "עפר" (dust) also appears first time in the creation of Adam. Genesis 2:7 "Then G-d formed man of the dust of the ground". That dust is the seed of the physical body encapsulate into the neck bone " עצם־הלוז ", which is immortal. It will stay until the resurrection of the Dead. It is interesting to know that babies are born with 350 bones in their body. 350 is the numerical value of " עָפָר ", dust. As the baby grows to become adult, many bones fused together to form 206 bones and 42 joints and together 248. It is the same numerical value as Avraham and " עצם־הלוז " (neck bone). [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Humus is the organic component of soil, formed by the decomposition of leaves and other plant material by soil microorganisms. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Animals too are created from “adamah” but the elements of “afar” (dust) and the Divine breath are absent. Compare Bereshit 2:7 with 2:1. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Kohelet (Ecclesiastes) 3:20-21 [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Shemot Exodus) 20:21 [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Rabbi Naftali Zvi Berlin - Volozhin 1817-1893 [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Shemot (Exodus) 20:21 [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. repentance [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Rashi on Sanhedrin explains that there is atonement in the very degradation of being lowered into the earth. (The Rishonim discuss the paradox this creates in light of the gemara's previous statement that it is the lack of burial which is degrading.) This does indeed have a parallel in the atonement of the altar, which according to the Ramban stems from the fact that the slaughter of the sacrifice is a kind of humbling symbolic slaughter of the sinner. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. When it says "for you are dust, and unto dust you shall return", we see the past and the future. It **doesn’t say** into the ground as in the death of the body, but we are to return to “dust - עפר", which is the genesis of its creation and its resurrection. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. As the Midrash states, this is one of three places where Scripture attests to the Jews’ uncontestable possession of the Holy Land. For the Cave of Machpelah, the site of the Temple, and the Tomb of Joseph were all purchased without bargaining and paid for with unquestionably legal tender. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. The Cave of the Patriarchs, also called the Cave of Machpelah (Hebrew: מערת המכפלה, Me'arat ha-Makhpela, thetranslation is "cave of the double tombs"), is a series of subterranean chambers located in the heart of the old city of Hebron (Kiryat Arba), in the Hebron Hills. The Hebrew name of the complex reflects the very old tradition of the double tombs of Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob and Leah. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Bereshit (Genesis) 25:9 [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. from the root word " כפל " \’double\’ in Hebrew. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Lit. “little dust” or “of the dust”. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Hebron comes from the root word is "חֶבְר" and it means *connection of two sides*. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)