



5778 Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Yosef Bronstein Parashat Bo / פרשת בא

## Slighting Yerushalayim

The first mitzvah of the Torah is the command to sanctify the new moon and to establish a Jewish calendar. It is clear from our sources that in an ideal setting this mitzvah is supposed to be performed by the High Court in Yerushalayim. However, when the community in Israel weakened due to Roman persecution an attempt was made to transfer the authority of the calendar to Babylonia.

The Gemara<sup>1</sup> tells a story that once a sage named Hanina decided to establish the calendar in Babylonia. The Chochamim in the Land of Israel were so upset with this initiative that they sent two sages to visit Hanina to convince him to abandon his plans. When they first met they learnt together and the sages from Israel were aggressively argumentative for the duration of the conversation. Finally, the bewildered Hanina gives up and asks them:

Why is it that when I rule something impure, you rule it pure; when I prohibit it, you permit it?  
They said to him: We do this because you intercalate the years and establish the months outside of Eretz Yisrael.

When Hanina hears this, he begins to protest and only backs down when they threaten him with excommunication. In the course of the conversation they compare the attempt to establish the calendar in Babylonia with heresy.

This story underscores the high stakes of moving the control over the calendar to Babylonia. But what is the justification for this extreme behavior on the part of the sages of the Land of Israel? Why would they threaten Hanina with excommunication and equate his initiative with heresy?

Perhaps the rationale is the source that the Gemara brings for the law that the calendar must be established in the Land of Israel:

Because it is stated: “For out of Zion shall go forth the Torah, and the word of the Lord from Yerushalayim”

<sup>1</sup> Brachos 63a-b. Translations are based on that of sefaria.org.



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Something as central to our national identity as a joint sanctified calendar must come from Yerushalayim, and by extension the rest of the Land of Israel.<sup>2</sup> Any attempt of the community in Babylonia to seize control over this enterprise is an affront to the centrality of Yerushalayim as the headquarters of the Jewish people.

This law should underscore for us the centrality of Yerushalayim. While there might be communities overseas which boast of a bursting infrastructure of Jewish life including much Torah learning, still “Out of Zion shall go forth the Torah.” Our national nerve center is Yerushalayim and any slight deviation from this fact has heretical strappings.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> For the idea that the sanctity of Yerushalayim extends to all of the Land of Israel, see the following article from Rav Zalman Baruch Melamed <https://www.yeshiva.org.il/midrash/27976>).

<sup>3</sup> This idea is reminiscent of the comments of the Meshech Chochma (Vayikra 26:44) who criticizes those who refer to Berlin as their Yerushalayim.