

5778 Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Yosef Bronstein Parashat Vayakhel-Pekudei / פרשת ויקהל-פקודי

Outside But Connected

When describing the rite of the parah adumah, the Torah states that the slaughter and burning of the cow must take place “out of the camp.”¹ Rashi comments that the ritual must occur out of the entirety of the camp – even the outer most periphery of the camp of the Yisraelim. The Gemara records that when this system is transposed from the desert to the Land of Israel, the cow was brought outside of Yerushalayim to a designated location on Har ha-Zeitim and slaughtered and burnt there.²

Why must the parah adumah be taken outside the Yerushalayim? What might this symbolize? The fact that the Torah places the ritual outside of the camp is especially ironic in light of the fact that the ultimate purpose of the parah adumah is to let the impure people enter areas from which they were previously forbidden.

Perhaps one of the lessons embedded in this unique halacha is that, at times, in order to help those who are impure one must leave the confines of sanctity and go out to meet them on their own level. If the kohen was to remain in his safe and sanctified space and never venture forth, then he would be unable to connect with and uplift his brethren who were on literally and metaphorically “outside” the walls of Yerushalayim. As such, personal sacrifice and risk that are inherent to meeting the people where they are is an integral element to religious leadership.³

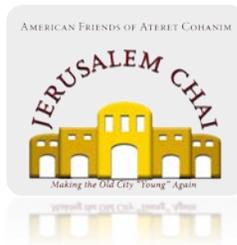
However, it is important to note that even though the cow was sacrificed outside the confines of Yerushalayim, the Torah emphasizes that the kohen must sprinkle the blood “toward the front of the Tent of Meeting seven times.”⁴ Rashi, citing the Midrash, comments that the Kohen needs to be

¹ Bamidbar 19:3.

² Mishna Parah 3:6.

³ Inspired by a thought of the Lubavitcher Rebbe.

⁴ Bamidbar 19:4.



5778 Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Yosef Bronstein Parashat Vayakhel-Pekudei / פרשת ויקהל-פקודי

able to see into the Beit HaMikdash: “he is to stand to the east of Jerusalem and to direct his gaze toward the entrance to the Temple while sprinkling the blood.”

This halacha represents a counterbalance to the above interpretation. Yes, it is necessary for the kohen to leave the sanctified space of Yerushalayim and to meet the impure people on the outside. Yes, one might need to sacrifice a personal spiritual level in order to help other Jews. However, while doing all of this one must always keep one’s vision glued back on Yerushalayim. The only way that a person can keep up the stamina and strength to venture forth beyond the walls is if the mental and visual connection is maintained.

This can be a lesson for all of us. Many of us do not live in Yerushalayim and do not even spend a significant portion of time within its holy confines. However, even those of us who’s life-missions are centered on the people or areas that are outside of the walls of the city need to draw strength from the geographic foundation of the Jewish people. Without Yerushalayim being at the forefront of our consciousness we risk going astray and drifting apart from the world of sanctity.