



Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Yosef Bronstein 5778 Parashat Chukat / ״-ø״ ״-Û

The Fearful Wisdom of Yerushalayim

Our parsha open with the phrase “this is the law (*chok*) of the Torah,” referring to the rite of the *parah adumah*. The choice of the word for “law” – *chok* – is precise, as this refers to a mitzvah without a readily understandable logic and rationale. The midrash¹ comments that *parah adumah* is the ultimate *chok*, as even King Shlomo in his great wisdom was unable to pierce the depths of the mitzvah. Accordingly, the midrash continues that following verse in Kohelet verse was said by Shlomo regarding this mitzvah: “I said, ‘I will become wise,’ but it was far from me.”²

If the greatest human minds cannot fathom the depth of the Torah with their wisdom then how are we supposed to approach Hashem and his Torah? The answer is that when human wisdom fails, we need to fall back on a different form of wisdom: “The beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord.”³ Fear of heaven requires us to humbly recognize our own finitude and the limitations of our physical and mental abilities. Despite our great and divine ability to think, we are not God and cannot hope to fully understand Him or his Torah. Realizing this fundamental but difficult point and letting go on our dream of complete knowledge is itself the beginning of true wisdom.

This process is highlighted by the name Yerushalayim. In one approach, this name is a composite of two words – *yirah shalem* – fear and perfection. If one wants to reach completion and perfection then the path must be through *yirah* – fear of God. While cognitions and other emotions have important roles to play, the path towards true wisdom and true perfection is the stepping back and realizing how puny we are compared the All-Knowing and Almighty. Only then can we reach the perfection of *shalem*.

¹ Bamidbar Rabbah 19:3.

² Kohelet 7:23.

³ Tehillim 111:10; Mishlei 9:10.



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The connection between fear of God and Yerushalayim is also apparent in Tehillim chapter 24. There, Dovid sings of the person who is worthy of ascending the Mountain of Hashem where the Beit HaMikdash later stood. Far from focusing on level of Torah knowledge or other mental measures, Dovid writes as follows:

Who will ascend upon the Lord's mount and who will stand in His Holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart, who has not taken My name in vain and has not sworn deceitfully.

One who obediently fulfills the mitzvos is the one who is worthy to go up to the Mountain of Hashem.

Later in this chapter, Dovid, filled with awe, describes the coming of the King of glory through the gates:

[You] gates, lift your heads and lift up, [you] everlasting portals, so that the King of Glory may enter. Who is this King of Glory? The Lord of Hosts-He is the King of Glory forever.

In order to enter Temple Mount, one must realize with trepidation and awe the first being to enter the gates – God himself. This is the message of Yerushalayim and the true path towards wisdom.