

Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Yosef Bronstein 5778 Parashat Balak / פרשת בלק

The Dual Lion of Yerushalayim

The emblem of the modern city of Yerushalayim is a blue lion standing on its two hind legs. It roars towards it right as it threateningly stretches out its other two legs. This posture is reminiscent of a part of Bilam's blessing in this week's parsha:¹

Behold, a people that rises like a lioness and raises itself like a lion. It does not lie down until it eats its prey and drinks the blood of the slain.

Bilam describes the Jewish people as fierce and formidable, ready to devour any enemies.

Our modern city and its inhabitants certainly deserves this description. Unfortunately, Jewish soldiers twice fought for sovereignty of Yerushalayim and now, with the help of God, it is in our hands. Yerushalyim rises like a royal lion, prepared to pounce on those who dare attack it.

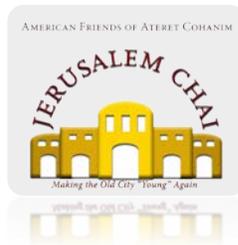
However, Rashi tempers this depiction of the Jewish people with the following interpretation:

Behold, a people that rises like a lioness: When they awaken from their sleep in the morning they show the vigor of a lioness and a lion in grasping mitzvot, to don a 'tallith' [prayer shawl], recite the shema and put on 'tefillin'

It does not lie down: [I.e., a Jew does not lie down] on his bed at night until he consumes and destroys any harmful thing that comes to tear him. How so? He recites the shema on his bed and entrusts his spirit to the hand of the Omnipresent. Should an army or a troop come to harm them, the Holy One, blessed is He, protects them, fights their battles and strikes them [their attackers] down dead.

According to Rashi, Bilam's blessing highlights the Jewish people's piety. They begin and end their day with scrupulous observance of mitzvot and in this merit they are saved in spiritual and physical battles. Ultimately, in this rendition, it is God, not the Jewish people themselves, who strike down

¹ Bamidbar 23:24



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the attackers. In this interpretation, the lion on the emblem of Yerushalayim might be represented by the yeshivot and shuls that permeate the city and generate such a unique flavor.

These two interpretations of Bilam's blessing and descriptions of the Jewish people, embody the delicate balance of the modern State of Israel with Yerushalayim at its center. On the one hand we must be the ferocious lion, ready to fend off any attacker. However, simultaneously, we must recognize that, ultimately, Yerushalayim is God's home and he bequeathed it to us pending our deservingness.

Thus, the two narratives of Yerushalayim create a unified whole. The lion is both the Torah scholar and the soldier, spiritual and physical might together. May God grant us the strength to properly value and synthesize these two majestic lions.