



Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Yosef Bronstein Parashat Vayeshev / פרשת וישב 5779

## From Yerushalayim to the Periphery

Yosef experiences one unfortunate incident after another. His brothers turn on him, he gets sold as a slave, is falsely accused and ends up in an Egyptian prison. Yet he manages to rise from the deepest pits and jumps on a divinely orchestrated opportunity and turns his fortunes around. What is the secret of Yosef's ability to face adversity with a positive orientation?

One can suggest that it was his ability to see the silver lining in everything that occurred. Yosef found the positive elements embedded in the most horrible situations and realized that these were signs for God's continued interest and involvement in his life. This gave him the strength to continue on and seize the opportunity when presented.

One manifestation of this trait is an anecdote told in the midrash.<sup>1</sup> When Yosef and his brothers return to the Land of Israel to bury their father, the midrash records that Yosef searched for the pit that he was thrown into and made the blessing "Blessed are you God... who performed a miracle for me at this place." Instead of associating the pit with trouble and travail, Yosef recognized the miraculous nature of his continuing to stay alive despite the snakes that occupied the pit and his brothers' animosity. Yosef recognized the hidden hand of God.

How are we to develop this trait within ourselves and see the hand of God guiding our own lives? How can we recognize God when He seems to be absent? Ramban famously teaches that from the large and overt miracles we can come to recognize the "hidden miracles."<sup>2</sup> If we contemplate the times that God demonstrated his transcendence over nature then we will come to realize that He is always in charge and guiding every aspect of our existence. The overt miracles are the batteries to keep us charged even when miracles are no longer clearly occurring.

Perhaps the same can be said about religious experiences. While we do not always feel close to God, we should use the powerful moments of connection that we do experience as significant

<sup>1</sup> Midrash Tanchuma, end of parshat Vayechi.

<sup>2</sup> Ramban, end of parshat Bo.



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centers in our religious lives. These moments can empower us to feel traces of that connection even when God does not feel as close.

If focusing on overt miracles and spiritual experiences create the central pillar of one's religious life that can then be expanded outwards and drawn into the totality of one's life, it is safe to say that Yerushalayim is the location where this pillar is created. The Mishna teaches of the overt miracles that occurred daily in Yerushalayim. Even nowadays when overt miracles no longer occur, many people associate Yerushalayim with strong spiritual experiences. It is by spending time in and experiencing the unique spiritual life of Yerushalayim that we can charge our religious batteries and gain the strength to detect the hand of God even outside our holy city.