



The Secret Pleasantness of Yerushalayim

The end of this week's parsha deals with the topics of the impurity of seminal emissions and of menstrual blood. These are rather unpleasant topics both in terms of their content and the ramifications for those who become impure due to them and are therefore often not the focus of inspirational public lectures. Far from being a modern phenomenon, the midrash itself notes this:¹

R. Shmuel the son of Yitzhak said... even though parts of Torah seem “dark” and “ugly” to discuss in public such as niddah, tzara'at, one who becomes impure due to seminal emission and one who becomes impure due to birth, still God says that they are sweet to me, as the verse states “And then the offerings of Yehuda and Yerushalayim shall be pleasant to God, as in the days of old and former years.”²

The midrash asserts that the topics that seem inappropriate for public conversation are in fact “pleasant” for God as the sacrifices offered in Yerushalayim. All parts of Torah, without exception, are part of God's vision for the world.

While certainly illuminating, one aspect of this midrash seems out of place. What is the connection between these parts of the Torah and Yerushalayim in particular? Why did the midrash highlight a verse that focuses particularly on Yerushalayim?

Perhaps one approach is that a similar phenomenon exists regarding Yerushalayim. For many people, Yerushalayim is just one city amongst many in the world. Many ancient capitals have been transformed into modern urban centers and offer a similar array of synthesis between the old and the new. Many other cities offer a wider array of cultural outlets, diversity, quality of life. By many objective standards there is little pointing to Yerushalayim's utter uniqueness. In fact, many people

¹ Vayikra Rabbah 19:3.

² Malachi 3:4.



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will not have a hard time to point to the negatives of living in Yerushalayim, similar to the seeming uncouthness of many of the Torah's laws.

The response to these points is in the midrash. Despite appearances and externals, charts and graphs, God says that He finds Yerushalayim to be sweet and pleasant. In ways that we don't fully understand but we can sense deep inside of us, Yerushalayim is God's abode. This attraction was apparent to all in the "days of old" when God overtly and discernably dwelt in Yerushalayim. And we hope and pray for the day that it will once again