



Yerushalayim as the Concealed Rose

The midrash in parshat Acharei Mot expounds on the following verse in Shir HaShirim:¹ “As a rose among the thorns, so is my beloved among the daughters.” According to one interpretation, this imagery refers to the difficulty of the redemption from Egypt:

Just as this rose when it is amongst the thorns is difficult to extract, so too the redemption of the Jewish people was difficult for God.

The midrash goes on to explain that the Jewish people looked and acted just like the Egyptians and therefore, initially, God’s attribute of justice would not allow Him to redeem the Jewish people. It was only after God rose above this attribute and swore to save the Jews that redemption occurred.

While on the one hand this imagery is scary and does not paint the Jewish people in a good light, it contains a redeeming element. Despite the difficulty entailed in justifying the redemption, the midrash still compares the Jewish people to a rose. The rose might be concealed in a thicket of thorns and difficult to see, however, it remains a rose. There is something deeply embedded in the Jewish identity, irrespective of external appearances, that is divine, holy and pure and it is from that point redemption will emerge.

With this background we can better understand the Zohar’s association of this verse of “as rose among the thorns” with a verse from Yechezkel about Yerushalayim: “This is Yerushalayim; in the midst of the nations I have placed it, and around it are lands.”² According to the Zohar, Yerushalayim is the rose that is surrounded by the thorns of other cities and nations.

As noted above, the imagery of the rose among thorns relates to the deep nature of the Jewish soul that remains forever pure. It is no wonder then that this same imagery is associated with

¹ Shir HaShirim 2:2.

² Yechezkel 5:5.



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Yerushalayim. The Jewish people's eternal longing for its city stems from the deepest recesses of its collective soul. Our connection to Yerushalayim is the rose that always remains pure within the Jewish soul, even when they externally seem to simply be part of a thorn bush.

If the midrash describes the redemption from Egypt as “difficult” for God, the same seemingly holds true for our own redemption. As we transition from Yom HaSho'ah to Yom HaZikaron and eventually to Yom Ha'atzma'ut the difficulty of this redemptive process is something that we viscerally feel. During this time of year, it is all the more important to focus on the “rose within” and further develop our relationship to the deep parts of our Jewish soul, including, of course, the city of Yerushalayim.