



5779 Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Yosef Bronstein Parashat Devarim / פרשת דברים

Rebuilding Yerushalayim Through Truth and Peace

In his introduction to the Book of Bereishit, the Netziv elaborates on the Sinat Chinam (baseless hatred) that led to the destruction of the Second Beit HaMikdash and our current exile. He explains that as a result of a lack of a strong central governing body there were different groups and strands within normative rabbinic Judaism. Instead of each group respecting the different flavors that appeared in other groups and celebrating them as a distinct path in the service of God, each group, due to a false sense of “fear of heaven” thought that their path was the sole legitimate one and called the other groups heretics. Thus, it was idealistic religious zeal and fervor that partially generated the hatred which resulted in the events of Tisha B’Av.

The careful balancing of religious fervor and proper interpersonal relationships is already hinted to in the name Yerushalayim. According to one interpretation, the first part of the word “Yiru” refers to the fear of heaven which causes us to be terrified of deviating from the word of God.¹ The second half of Yerushalayim is “Shalem” or peace, referring to proper interpersonal relationships. Yerushalayim in its fullness represents the proper synthesis of fear of heaven and peaceful interactions with other groups of society. The overemphasis of fear of heaven at the expense of a peaceful society, or being too tolerant in the pursuit of peace, ruins this careful balance and distorts the message of Yerushalayim.

The Torah tells us that in the time of exile God’s throne and name are torn asunder.² Considering that Yerushalayim is the seat of God’s earthly kingdom, this is also true of Yerushalayim. In the time of exile, when Yerushalayim is broken and shattered and the two halves of the word are torn asunder. The proper equilibrium is lost and people veer to one extreme or the other.

Redemption requires fixing the sins of exile. The generation that lives in the reunited Yerushalayim needs to learn to reunite the two halves of the city’s name. In light of the Netziv’s

¹ Midrash HaGadol to Bereishit 22:14.

² Shemot 17:16.

