

5779 Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Yosef Bronstein Parashat Ki Teitzei / פרשת כִּי-יֵצֵא

## Our Mother Yerushalayim

Our haftorah opens with the following stirring verse: “Sing you barren woman who has not borne; burst out into song and jubilate, you who have not experienced birth pangs.”<sup>1</sup> According to Rashi, at least,<sup>2</sup> the Navi compares Yerushalayim to a barren women who begins to sing when she becomes a mother through the return of the Jewish people into her embrace.

What is the meaning of this imagery? On a simple level, just as a mother’s warm embrace of her children signifies safety and home, Yerushalayim similarly embraces the Jewish people. A Jewish person feels at home, nurtured and warm within the confines of mother Yerushalayim.

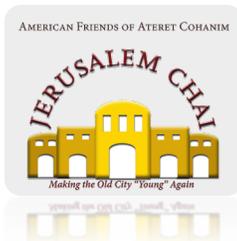
However, the Navi focuses on a different element of motherhood - birth. This signifies a deeper and more profound relationship. As Chava, the “mother of all living things”<sup>3</sup> already states, birth is an act of creation “and she conceived and bore Kayin, and she said, "I have acquired/created a man with God.” Before birth, the person did not exist as an independent entity and it is birth that brings the person into this world. How is Yeurshalayim our mother in this sense? The Jewish people have existed since the time of Avraham and will continue to exist eternally. Is Yerushalayim responsible for our very existence?

Perhaps the Navi is hinting to us that in a certain sense, the answer is yes. Yerushalayim may not have literally birthed us as a mother, but the city adds a dimension to us as people that is otherwise lacking. When the Jewish people are in exile, there is something missing about their identity. They eat, drink, sleep, work, perform mitzvot and learn Torah, but an essential aspect of who they are is simply not present. In this sense, returning to Yerushalayim creates something new – there is part of us that is born-again.

<sup>1</sup> Yeshayahu 54:1. Translations are adapted from Chabad.org.

<sup>2</sup> Ibn Ezra identifies the barren woman as the Jewish people.

<sup>3</sup> Bereishit 3:20.



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Can this element of our identity be identified? Can we point to the part of us that is born again when we return to Yerushalayim? Perhaps a later verse in our haftorah provides us with a clue: For your Husband is your Maker, the Lord of Hosts is His name and your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel, shall be called the God of all the earth.”<sup>4</sup> According to this metaphor, it is God who is Yeurshalayim’s husband. God and Yerushaalyim as a husband/wife and father/mother pair, together create and birth the Jewish people. Ultimately, what we are lacking in exile is God – the presence of the Almighty that enervates and makes life meaningful. It is in Yerushalayim that this element of our personhood can be reborn.

May we merit to live in Yerushalayim, in the presence of God.

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<sup>4</sup> Yeshayahu 54:5.