



5780 Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Yosef Bronstein Parashat Toldot / פרשת תולדות

Yerushalayim's Balancing Act

At the beginning of the parsha we are introduced to Yaakov, the third and final of the forefathers. This position is a difficult one to occupy. Avraham was the trailblazer who initiated the greatest religious-cultural revolution in human history with his introduction of monotheism. Yitzhak seems to follow in Avraham's path and repeats many of his father's actions. But this too is innovative as it shows that there would be continuity to Avraham's revolution. But what role does Yaakov play? What new characteristic does he bring to the table?

One response is that Yaakov's role as the third forefather is to represent balance and integration. As many have noted,¹ Avraham represents "Chessed," or an outgoing form of loving-kindness. Yitzhak represents "Gevurah," or a form of personal constriction and the development of an inner-strength. Yaakov represents "Tiferet" which includes both of these elements and integrates them into a single harmonious whole. Yaakov is a person who knows how to sit in the tents and study Torah and how engage with the broader world. He is a man of truth who also knows when it is necessary to deceive.

It is for this reason that the Gemara identifies Yaakov as being a beautiful person: "the beauty of Yaakov was similar to the beauty of Adam HaRishon."² As Rav Kook³ explains, beauty emerges from the integration of different elements into a single whole, when each part is in its proper place and like a puzzle they fit together to create something that is more than the sum of their parts. Yaakov knows how to encompass seemingly opposing extremes and he therefore contains the quality of beauty.

¹ This idea has its roots in the Zohar to parshat Toldot.

² Bava Metzia 84a.

³ Ein Ayah Berachot 6:46. For an elaboration, see R. Yeshayah Steinberger, "Estetika BeMishnat HaMaharal MiPrague," available at <http://www.daat.ac.il/daat/art/yahadut/estetika.htm>.



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With this in mind, the meaning of the description of Yerushalayim as “Kelilat Yofi”⁴ or the epitome of beauty. Similarly, the Talmud teaches that “ten portions of beauty came down into the world, Yerushalayim took nine of them and the rest of the world took one.”⁵ What makes Yerushalayim beautiful?

According to the above definition of beauty perhaps we can suggest that it is Yerushalayim’s amazing integration of all elements and peoples. Yerushalayim is a place of Torah study and spirituality but also of business and ‘regular’ life. Yerushalayim is a place for the holy to live in the presence of God, but also makes space for the lowly. Yerushalayim is the middle point – the connector between heaven and earth that integrates elements of both. It is this ability to encompass opposite extremes and demonstrate how they all fit together into a single harmonious whole that creates the special beauty and charm of Yerushalayim.

⁴ Eicha 2:15.

⁵ Kiddushin 49b.