



5780 Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Yosef Bronstein Parashat Vayetzei / פרשת ויצא

Yerushalayim: Local and Global

Our parsha opens with Yaakov as a fugitive trying to find safety in a foreign land. However, he is not alone. When sleeping in Yerushalayim,¹ God promises Yaakov that He will protect him and eventually give him not only the land, but his reach will extend to the entire world:² “And your seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and you shall gain strength westward and eastward and northward and southward; and through you shall be blessed all the families of the earth and through your seed.” While now a single and lonely individual, Yaakov’s progeny will eventually have a global impact.

The Talmud highlights the expansive inheritance of Yaakov’s children:³

Rabbi Yohanan said in the name of Rabbi Yosei: With regard to anyone who delights in the Shabbat, God gives him a boundless portion as it is stated:⁴ “If you keep your feet from violating Shabbat, from pursuing your affairs on My holy day, and you call Shabbat a delight... I will cause you to ride on the heights of the world, and to feast on the inheritance of Yaakov your father, as the mouth of God has spoken” ... [like Yaakov], about whom it is written, “And your offspring will be like the dust of the earth, and you will spread out to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south, and all of the families of the land will be blessed through you and your offspring.” There are no boundaries for Yaakov’s portion.

By honoring and taking delight in Shabbat, a person merits the boundless inheritance promised to Yaakov.

The Sefat Emmet⁵ notes that this expansive inheritance is not an independent gift. Rather, it stems from a clear and unambiguous attachment to the “center” of the system. On the one hand, Shabbat represents the antithesis of a boundless inheritance as on Shabbat one’s movement is restricted. However, Shabbat is the “center” of the week’s holiness and it is only through properly

¹ This follows Rashi to Bereishit 28:11.

² Bereishit 28:14. Translation adapted from Chabad.org.

³ Shabbat 118a. Translation adapted from Sefaria.org.

⁴ Yeshayahu 58:13-14.

⁵ Sefat Emmet to Vayeitzei 5652 d”h “*Ita BeGemara*.”



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recognizing the importance of this “center” that one merits to take the intense sanctity of Shabbat and have it spread throughout a boundless inheritance.

The original story with Yaakov contains the same lesson. God promises Yaakov that his children will have a global impact through spreading to the four corners of the world. However, God delivers this blessing in Yerushalayim, after Yaakov recognizes the sanctity of the “center” and retraces his steps to be able to pray there. By its very nature, Yerushalayim is a single spot on the globe and one might think that an over-attachment to this single city will impede Judaism’s global and expansive mission. However, the lesson of our parsha is that it is only through the process of becoming “swallowed up” by the center that one is armed with the sanctity and holiness to emerge from Yerushalayim and transform the world.