



5780 Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Yosef Bronstein Parashat Vayechi / פרשת ויחי

The Eternal Truth of Yerushalayim

Many have noted the irony that a parsha that speaks of Yaakov's preparations for his impending death is called "VaYechi" ("And He Lived"). It seems that in some way, Yaakov was able to transcend death through actions taken while he was alive. A fascinating Talmudic passage highlights this theme:¹

After they had eaten, Rabbi Yitzhak said to Rav Nachman that Rabbi Yoḥanan said as follows: Our patriarch Jacob did not die. Rav Nachman asked him in surprise: And was it for naught that the eulogizers eulogized him and the embalmers embalmed him and the buriers buried him? Rabbi Yitzhak replied to Rav Nachman: I am interpreting a verse, as it is stated: "Therefore do not fear, Jacob My servant, says the Lord, neither be dismayed, Israel, for I will save you from afar, and your seed from the land of their captivity."² This verse juxtaposes Jacob to his seed: Just as his seed is alive when redeemed, so too, Jacob himself is alive.

This passage raises the question of Yaakov's uniqueness. If all righteous individuals – Yaakov included – pass away, why is Yaakov singled out as the one righteous individual who is still alive in some symbolic way?

One approach, suggested by Rav Tzvi Yehudah Kook, is that Yaakov embodied the character trait of "truth" (*emmet*).³ Since "truth" is the seal of God himself and the verse states: "God, the Lord, is true,"⁴ truthful people become deeply connected to God. Accordingly, Yaakov's trait of "truth" led him to gain the quality of "eternality" (*netzach*). It is adherence to truth that creates a connection to the eternal God and the truthful person gains something of God's eternity.

This connection between "truth" and "eternality" is also apparent regarding the city of Yerushalayim. As the Talmud teaches us, the word *netzach* at times refers to Yerushalayim.⁵

¹ Taanit 5b. Translation adapted from Sefaria.org.

² Yirmiyahu 30:10

³ <https://www.yeshiva.org.il/midrash/9289> Also see, *Likkutei Sihot* 26, *Shemot* #1, *se'if* 5

⁴ Yirmiyahu 10:10.

⁵ Brachot 58a.



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Perhaps this description of our holy city is best expressed in its rebirth in the times of Mashiach after being barren for so many years. In this sense, Zechariah's famous prophecy that in future times "Old men and women shall yet sit in the streets of Jerusalem" together with "with boys and girls playing in its streets" is the perfect description of the eternity of Yerushalayim.⁶

What is less famous, though no less important, is the verse immediately preceding those describing a flourishing Yerushalayim. Zechariah teaches that "So said the Lord: I will return to Zion, and I will dwell in the midst of Jerusalem; and Jerusalem shall be called the city of truth."⁷ Before Yerushalayim becomes the city of eternity it first becomes a city of truth and a home for God. Only after achieving the character trait of "truth" will Yerushalayim's potential as the eternal city be realized.

⁶ Zechariah 8:4-5. Translation is from Chabad.org.

⁷ Zechariah 8:3.