



5778 Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Yosef Bronstein Parashat Lech-Lecha/ פרשת לך-לך

Yerushalayim and Brit Milah

It is well known that the mitzvah of Brit Milah is tightly connected with our inheritance of the Land of the Israel. In this week's parsha, the Torah describes both the Brit Milah and the Land of Israel as expressions of the special covenant that Hashem makes with Avraham and his descendants.¹ The Midrash, picking up on the Torah's descriptions, relates that it is in the merit of Brit Milah that Jews can enter and dwell in the Land of Israel.² In fact, immediately after crossing the Jordan River, Yehoshua makes sure to circumcise all of the Jewish males who did not undergo this procedure in the desert.

With this background in mind, it is fascinating to note a Sefardi custom at the Brit Milah. According to Sefardi tradition, immediately after the baby is brought into the room and welcomed, he is placed into the waiting arms of his father. The first sentence uttered by the father is a call to remember Yerushalayim:³

If I forget you, O Yerushalayim, may my right hand forget [its skill]. May my tongue cling to my palate, if I do not remember you, if I do not bring up Yerushalayim at the beginning of my joy.

It is only after this introduction that the actual ceremony of the Brit Milah commences.

¹ Bereishi 17:7-8.

² Bereishit Rabbah 46:9

³ Tehillim 137. Translation is adapted from Chabad.org.



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While it is possible that this mention of Yerushalayim is merely a way of remembering our fallen city in the midst of our joy, the tone-setting placement of the verse indicates that it is intimately connected with the actual Brit Milah itself. It seems, that in addition to a general connection to the Land of Israel, the Brit Milah has a special bond with the city of Yerushalayim.

Rav Eliezer Melamed⁴ suggests that the common feature shared by the Brit Milah and the Land of Israel is the ability for the Jewish people to sanctify the mundane. All nations have a land and all human beings have a body. However, it is the unique task of a Jew to take these “secular” features of daily life and transform them into vehicles for divinity by instilling.

According to this approach, the unique linkage of Brit Milah to Yerushalayim flows naturally. Yerushalayim represents the epitome of our ability to sanctify the mundane. Through our proper performance of the mitzvot and particularly the laws of purity and sanctity, we are able to take a lonely hilltop and transform it into a home for the Shechinah. As the meeting point of heaven and earth, Yerushalayim is the zenith of the Jewish people’s ability to sanctify the secular. Perhaps this special connection between Yerushalayim and Brit Milah is an explanation for the custom to mention Yerushalayim before a Brit.

⁴ Available at <http://ph.yhb.org.il/06-01-08/>.



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