

5778 Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Yosef Bronstein Parashat Vayeshev / פרשת וישב

Mourning a Live Yerushalayim

When Yaakov surmises from his sons' report that Yosef has been killed by a wild animal he understandably has a strong emotional reaction:¹

And Yaakov rent his garments, and he put sackcloth on his loins, and he mourned for his son many days. And all his sons and all his daughters arose to console him, but he refused to be consoled, for he said, "Because I will descend on account of my son as a mourner to the grave"; and his father wept for him.

Yaakov immediately begins the process of mourning his beloved son, unconsolably crying over the tragedy.

However, as Rashi famously notes, it is clear from the above verses that this was not a transient bout of intense mourning. Rather, "he mourned for his son for many days," refusing to be consoled for the duration of Yosef's absence – a total of twenty-two years. Rashi explains that this inability to remove Yosef from the forefront of his mind stemmed from the fact that, in fact, Yosef was alive:

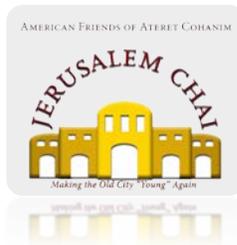
No one accepts consolation for a person who is really alive but believed to be dead, for it is decreed that a dead person should be forgotten from the heart, but not a living person

The blessing of forgetfulness is only bestowed on those mourning for the dead.

The Chatam Sofer² explains that this Rashi contains the secret for the Jewish people's constant mourning over Yerushalayim, despite the fact that it was conquered two thousand years ago.

¹ Bereishit 37:34-35. Translation from Chabad.org.

² *Chiddushei Chatam Sofer*, Ta'anit 30a.



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If Yerushalayim was really “dead” and its historical ties to the Jewish people severed, then we would be able to gain consolation and have the memories of our city recede.

However, in reality, the heavenly Yerushalayim and Beit ha-Mikdash still currently exist. They are alive and well in the celestial realm as well as in our consciousness and prayers. It is the fact that, similar to Yaakov, our mourning is over something that is in essence alive and present that impedes us from true consolation. Just like with Yaakov, the only true consolation will occur when the death is revealed as the illusion that it is and the object of mourning is disclosed for all to see.

This idea imparts a lesson to all of us. If we desire redemption and the rebuilding of the ideal Yerushalayim then it is incumbent upon us to focus on our current, living connection to our city. Continuing and intensifying this connection that has lasted two thousand years will lead to the coming of Mashiach and our only true consolation.