



5778 Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Yosef Bronstein Parashat Shemot / פרשת שמות

Having the Destination in Sight

This week's parsha tells the story of Moshe's development from a desert shepherd to a leader of the Jewish people. Famously, the midrash teaches us that Hashem chose him due to his sensitivity towards the sheep that were in his care. After recording Moshe's efforts to soothe the pain of a tired and thirsty animal, the midrash continues:¹

Hashem said: 'if you exhibit so much compassion on the sheep of people, I swear that you will shepherd, my sheep, the Jewish people.

It was after this episode that Hashem spoke to Moshe at the burning bush.

It is interesting that before recounting this episode, the midrash has a lengthy exposition on the verse in Chavakuk: "But the Lord is in His Holy Temple. Silence the whole earth before Him."² The direct connection of this verse to the story of Moshe's sheep is that despite God's residing in his heavenly sanctuary, he scours the whole earth and is intently focused on human deeds. From his celestial abode, God saw all of the happenings on earth and chose Moshe due to his superlative kindness.

However, there might be a deeper connection as well. After citing this verse from Havakuk, the midrash cites a debate about the location of God's presence in the post-Temple era:

Rebbi Shmuel b. Nachman said: 'Before the Beit HaMikdash was destroyed, the Shechina resided within it... Once it was destroyed, the Shechina left and ascended to the heavens as the verse states "The Lord is in His Holy Temple."³

Rebbi Elazar says: 'The Shechinah never left the sanctuary... despite its destruction it is still holy. Come and see what Koresh said "Who is among you of all His people, may his God be with him, and he may ascend to Jerusalem, which is in Judea, and let him build the House of the Lord, God of Israel; He is the God Who is in Jerusalem."⁴

¹ Shemot Rabbah 2:2.

² Chavakuk 2:20. Translation is from Chabad.org.

³ Tehillim 11:4.

⁴ Ezra 1:3.



5778 Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Yosef Bronstein Parashat Shemot / פרשת שמות

Only after recording this debate does the midrash then launch into a discussion of Moshe's leadership qualities. While the simple reason that this debate is recorded is that it associatively also deals with God's home in heaven, perhaps this juxtaposition encodes an important lesson.

This second opinion that God's presence eternally resides in Yerushalayim, is effectively the introduction to the story of Moshe's ascent to leadership. Its placement seems to remind us that before we begin to learn about the Jewish people's first national leader and the beginning of our peoplehood, we need to have the endgame in sight. Our history which begins with Moshe's search for the lost sheep is destined to end in Yerushalayim. As we read through the stories in Chumash and march through Jewish history in our own lives we need to keep the vision of Yerushalayim as the ultimate home for God and the Jewish people in the forefront of our minds.