



5778 Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Yosef Bronstein Parashat Eikev / פרשת עקב

Blessing God for Yerushalayim and for the Jewish People

This week's parsha contains beautiful descriptions about the Land of Israel and its bounty. The culmination of this section is that in response to this divine gift the Jewish people need to thank God after eating in the form of Grace after Meals: "And you will eat and be sated, and you shall bless the Lord, your God, for the good land He has given you."¹

While blessing God for one's food and the Land of Israel are rooted in the simple meaning of this verse, the Gemara records that there is another section of Grace after Meals – the blessing of Yerushalayim. The Gemara derives this from the phrase "good land" in the verse: "For the land, that is the blessing of the land; 'good,' that is the blessing: Who builds Yerushalayim."²

The above passage does not provide a text for this blessing over Yerushalayim. However, a simple reading of the Gemara would lead one to believe that the blessing is all about Yerushalayim.

However, the continuation of the Gemara surprisingly opens new vistas for this blessing.

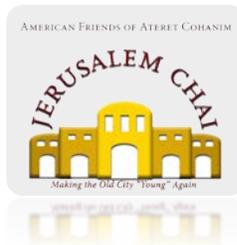
The Sages taught in a baraita: With what formula does he conclude the third blessing of Grace after Meals? He concludes it with: The building of Jerusalem. ... Rabbi Yosei son of Rabbi Yehuda said the following: One who recites the blessing concludes either with: The building of Yerushalayim, or even with: Who redeems Israel.

Rabbi Yosi ben Rabbi Yehuda allows a person to omit Yerushalayim from the end of the blessing and instead discuss the Jewish people. On a similar note, the Gemara also makes it clear that one can begin the blessing with the phrase "Have compassion on your people, Israel," thus omitting Yerushalayim from both the beginning and the end of the blessing. What is the meaning of this?

Perhaps the solution is embedded in the Gemara's last surprise. There is a rule of parallelism in blessings, meaning to say that the beginning and end should be of the same theme. Therefore, Rav

¹ Devarim 8:10.

² Berachot 48a. Translation is adapted from sefaria.org.



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Sheshet rules that a person must choose to either begin and end with Yeurshalayim, or to begin and end with the Jewish people. However, Rav Nahman says that one can begin the blessing with a mention of the Jewish people and end it with Yerushalayim. He explains that this is not asymmetrical:

because it is stated: “The Lord builds Yerushalayim; He gathers in the exiles of Israel” (Psalms 147:2). This verse is interpreted to mean: When does God build Yerushalayim? When He gathers in the exiles of Israel. The rebuilding of Jerusalem symbolizes Israel’s redemption.

Here we have the solution to our queries. Yes, the blessing is derived from the phrase “good land” and its topic is Yerushalayim. But the Gemara freely jumps to the Jewish people since there is a strong affiliation and even identity between the Jewish people and Yerushalayim. Starting a blessing with the Jewish people and ending it with Yerushalayim is perfectly symmetrical as the Jewish people and Yerushalayim are bound together as one.³

³ Inspired by an article of R. Shmuel Eliyahu, available at <https://www.yeshiva.org.il/midrash/28089>.