



5779 Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Yosef Bronstein Parashat Pinchas / פרשת פינחס

Connecting Heaven and Earth

Our parsha opens with the aftermath of Pinchas's zealous act for God in which he extrajudicially killed Zimri and Kozbi. God reacts by granting Pinchas a covenant of peace. The commentators struggle to define the nature of Pinchas's seemingly rash action and God's response. This discussion begins with the Talmud itself which asserts that cohabiting with a non-Jewess is not a sin that is punishable by death. However, there is a special allowance of "the zealots can strike him."¹ What is the meaning of this two-tiered system? If an action is legally justified it should presumably be allowed for anyone as all are equal before the Law?

The Sefat Emmet² explains that even as the Torah is the will of God, at times God calibrated the practical halacha to the realities and frailties of human existence. The issue of one who cohabits with a non-Jewess is one such example. By the strict force of God's judgement such a person should be killed. However, due to God's understanding of the realities of human nature and desire, God "lowered" the practical punishment.

How then should Pinchas' action be judged? The Sefat Emmet explains that the average person must adhere to the strict letter of the this-worldly law. However, a certain type of righteous individual is able to rise above the practical restrictions of this world and tap into the heavenly divine law. This is the true meaning of Pinchas' action. He rose to the heavens and brought down the heavenly law to earth. In doing so, he acted as a bridge between heaven and earth. This is the meaning of God rewarding him with a covenant of peace – that he was able to create peace between the realms and unify heaven and earth.

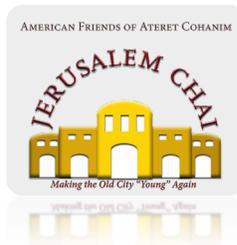
In the realm of space, an identical notion is true regarding Yerushalayim. It, too, bridges heaven and earth in its role as "the gate to heaven."³ It is comprised of a heavenly "upper" Yerushalayim with an earthly, lower half.⁴ And therefore it is no coincidence that the city's name

¹ Mishna Sanhedrin 9:6.

² Sefat Emmet, Pinchas 5659.

³ Bereishit 28:17.

⁴ Midrash Tehillim, perek 122.



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includes the word “shalom” or peace. Yerushalyim connects the spiritual and the material realms. It is a way to bring heaven down to earth and to elevate the material worlds.

Similar to Pinchas, if we appreciate this aspect of Yerushalayim we will merit the divine blessing of peace. Peace amongst the Jewish people, peace from our enemies and peace between God and His earthly abode. We will then be able to live in perfect balance and harmony in Yerushalayim, the city of peace.