



5778 Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Yosef Bronstein Parashat Vayigash / פרשת ויגש

A Reaction to Chosenness

The Midrash Tanchuma in this week's parsha, draws a parallel between the tumultuous and dramatic life story of Yosef and the history of Yerushalayim:¹

Come and see, all of the troubles that occurred to Yosef, also occurred to Zion... Regarding Yosef the verse states "and they hated him"² and regarding Zion the verse states "she raised her voice against Me; therefore, I hated her."³ ... Regarding Yosef the verse states "only the throne shall be above you,"⁴ and regarding Zion it says "at that time Yerushalayim will be called the throne of Hashem."⁵

As is apparent from this small excerpt, the midrash begins with a list of the troubles of Yosef with their parallel verses regarding Yerushalayim. Then, positive and redemptive verses from the second half of the Yosef story are compared with similar prophecies for the future of Zion.

However, it is interesting that the midrash does not begin with a list of the suffering of Yosef and Zion. Instead, this is the beginning of the midrash:

Regarding Yosef the verse says "and Yisrael loved Yosef from all of his sons,"⁶ and regarding Zion the verse states "God loves the gates of Zion."⁷

Before launching into the lachrymose litany, the midrash highlights that Yosef and Zion were chosen and beloved by God.

The import of this heading seems to be clear. The hatred of the others towards Yosef and Zion and their subsequent suffering is does not occur in a vacuum. Rather, it is a direct outgrowth of

¹ Midrash Tanchuma, VaYigash, siman 11.

² Bereishit 37:4.

³ Yirmiyahu 12:8.

⁴ Bereishit 41:40.

⁵ Yirmiyahu 3:17.

⁶ Bereishit 37:3.

⁷ Tehillim 87:2.



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the jealousy caused by chosenness. The brothers and non-Jewish nations inability to cope with the concept of chosenness is what causes their hatred and persecution.

However, by putting this line at the opening of the passage, the midrash seems to be hinting that this love is also part of the solution. What allows Yosef and Yerushalayim to survive during the long hard years of isolation and persecution? What is the secret of their endurance? The answer is a deep seated belief in the initial love. Yosef realized that Yaakov loved him and that kept him loyal to the family throughout his ordeals. Similarly, the Jewish people realize that God loves them and Yerushalayim, and this constant keeps them going throughout the long exile.

If so, our response to non-Jewish opposition to Yerushalayim needs to be a strengthening of our belief in God's love for us and for his holy city. This will help us make it from the first half of the midrash that describes the hatred, suffering and persecution, to the second half of the midrash that highlights the positive prophecies. May these prophecies be fulfilled soon.