

Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Yosef Bronstein 5778 Parashat Nitzavim / פרשת נצבים

Yerushalayim's New Identity

Generally, the haftorah is chosen due to a thematic connection between it and the parsha. However, for the past few weeks it seems that the calendar theme of consolation in the wake of Tisha B'Av outweighed the factor of connecting the haftorah to the parsha. This week, as well, seems to present us with a parsha and a haftorah that lack a clear thematic connection. The parsha teaches us of the covenant the Jewish people made with God and the power of repentance, while the haftorah discusses the future bounty of Yerushalayim.

However, a deeper look allows us to at least glimpse at one connecting theme. Amongst other beautiful prophecies about Yerushalayim, Yeshayahu tells us:¹

And nations shall see your righteousness, and all kings your glory, and you shall be called a new name, which the mouth of the Lord shall pronounce.

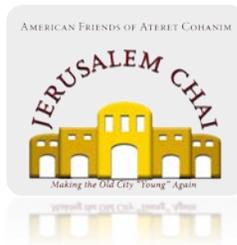
Yerushalayim will gain a new name in the end of time, bestowed by God himself. What will engender this new name and identity for our ancient city? Yeshyahu continues:²

And you shall be a crown of glory in the hand of the Lord and a kingly diadem in the hand of your God.

Instead of focusing on the Jewish people's return to the city, Yeshayahu connects Yerushalayim's new identity with God's return to the city. Once the city once again experiences the revelation of the Divine Presence, it can no longer be identified as the same city that existed in the exilic period. Being touched by God results in a shedding of one's old identity and the ascent towards a new one.

¹ Yeshayahu 62:3.

² Ibid 62:4.



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Obtaining a “new name” is one of the goals of repentance, a key mitzvah of our parsha. Rambam identifies the following as one of the paths of repentance: to change his name, as if to say "I am a different person and not the same one who sinned."³ This, however, is easier said than done. How is a person supposed to change their basic core identity to achieve the repentance highlighted in the parsha?

The solution, perhaps, is embedded in the haftorah’s description of Yerushalayim. Our capital city will attain a new name and identity through God’s return to its space. Similarly, a beginning step of repentance and a key method of changing one’s identity is simply inviting God back into our lives. One of the first laws in Shulkhan Arukh is to keep God’s presence constantly in one’s mind. While “living with God” does not rectify any specific sin, this mode of thought and feeling will slowly but surely fundamentally change our identity and grant us a “new” and more godly “name.”

May we merit to use the consolation of Yerushalayim as a model for our repentance.

³ Rambam, Hilchot Teshuvah 2:5.