



Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Yosef Bronstein 5779
Parashat Vayeilech / פרשת וילך Yom Kippur / יום כפור

The Emotions of Yerushalayim

Yom Kippur is described as a day of conflicting emotions. On the one hand, fear and trepidation permeate the day as we stand in shul pleading with God for atonement and a positive final judgement. This theme is perhaps best expressed in the passage of U-Netaneh Tokef which describes how even the angels tremble in fear of the divine judgement.

In contrast, the Mishna teaches us that Yom Kippur was one of the most joyous days of the year.¹ Even if one is to argue that the Mishna's description is only true after the atonement had been achieved, there is ample evidence for an undercurrent of joy on Yom Kippur. For example, Rambam rules that one does not recite Hallel on Yom Kippur as it is not a day of "excessive joy," implying a presence of a lower level of joy.²

Rav Avraham Shapira³ explained that this is a perfect expression of King Dovid's dictum: "Serve the Lord with fear, and rejoice with quaking."⁴ It seems that the presence of God engenders these opposite emotions. On the one hand a person is overwhelmed by God's awesomeness which results in quaking out of fear. However, simultaneously, a person is filled with joy by the presence of the Absolute anchor of existence.

It is no coincidence that the service of Yom Kippur occurs in the Beit HaMikdash. Yerushalayim embodies this same emotional paradox. On the one hand, the very name YERushalayim is rooted in "yirah" or fear of God.⁵ Similarly, the Beit HaMikdash is governed by a special mitzvah of fearing the temple as a means of honoring the One who resides in it.⁶

¹ Ta'anit, end of chapter 4.

² Rambam, Hichlot Chanukah 3:6.

³ Available at <https://www.yeshiva.org.il/midrash/13845>.

⁴ Tehillim, 2:11.

⁵ Bereishit 22:14

⁶ Yevamot 6b.



Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Yosef Bronstein 5779
Parashat Vayeilech / פרשת וילך Yom Kippur / יום כפור

However, Yerushalayim is also a center of joy. Jews must come to Yerushalayim to celebrate Pesach, Shavu'ot and Sukkot in joy. Bikkurim and partaking of Ma'aser Sheni are both described as joyous events that also occur within the walls of Yerushalayim.

The confluence of Yom Kippur in Yerushalayim results in the ultimate divine revelation and, hence, the ultimate meeting of joy and fear. This combination of seemingly opposite emotions is part of the completion/perfection that is expressed in the conclusion of the city's name – "shalem."

May we all merit to see the service of the Kohen Gadol of Yom Kippur in Yerushalayim and experience the perfect joyous fear.