



Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Yosef Bronstein Parashat Bereshit / פרשת בראשית / 5779

To Do and to Be

The Torah begins with a study in contrasts. The first six days of the world contain a gusto of activity and creation. God is constantly creating, assessing and then adding another layer to our reality. Then comes Shabbat, the cessation of activity. The work is completed and God rests. As Rashi explains: “When Shabbat comes – rest comes.”¹

Rav Yaakov Nagen² explains, these two time periods represent two fundamentally different mindsets: “doing” and “being.” If we approach the world through the lens of a doer, we are always looking for tasks to be completed and new challenges to overcome. Never satisfied with our current reality, we are fully engaged in the mission of advancing the world and changing our environment. This leads to progress and great achievements – worthy endeavors from a Torah perspective.

Shabbat, though, represents the mindset of “being.” We are prohibited from changing our environments and are taught to accept reality as it is – simply to “be.” We cannot even think about or prepare for the next day – all that exists is the present restful moment. It is in the current space and time moment/reality we find God.

It is this interplay between “doing” and “being” that creates the magic of Judaism. A religion that is too focused on “doing” and progress will not enable its adherents to appreciate God in the present moment. Contrawise, a sole focus on “being” can leave society in the dark ages as one always accepts reality as it is. The Torah tells us to balance “doing” and “being” by having the six days of the week bleed into Shabbat, and then vice-versa.

Yerushalayim also embodies this dialectic. On the one hand, it is a city of great activity. The Beit HaMikdash was always filled with people rushing to perform the rituals with alacrity, as the Gemara records “Kohanim are quick to do the service.”³ The king sat in Yerushalayim and from

¹ Bereishit 2:1

² Available at <http://yakovnagen.com/index.php/english/spirituality/1011-doing-being>

³ Shabbat 20a.



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there constantly sought to improve his country. The Rabbis relate to Yerushalayim as a bustling metropolis, filled with business and foreigners.⁴

Yerushalayim, however, is also referred to as “menucha” – a resting place.⁵ The Shechina rests in the city, never to leave. Presumably, this “resting” applies to people as well. Even when a person takes a step back from the hustle of the city and rests and “is”, (s)he can connect to God. Simply “being” in the city is enough to tap into the Shechina that rests there.

May we merit to “do” and to “be” – especially in Yerushalayim, our holy city.

⁴ Peticha to Midrash Rabbah Eicha.

⁵ Devarim 12:9.