

Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Yosef Bronstein Parashat Lech-Lecha / פרשת לך-לך 5779

Berit Milah and Yerushalayim

The end of our parsha intertwines two key elements in the life of Avraham: Berit Milah and the Land of Israel. Instead of just commanding Avraham to perform the Berit, God tells him that this mitzvah is crucial for living in the Land:¹

And I will establish My covenant between Me and between you and between your seed after you throughout their generations as an everlasting covenant, to be to you for a God and to your seed after you. And I will give you and your seed after you the land of your sojournings, the entire land of Canaan for an everlasting possession, and I will be to them for a God."

What is the connection between Berit Milah and the Land of Israel?

One explanation inspired by the Lubavitcher Rebbe² is that both represent the ability to sanctify the mundane material world. Berit Milah is performed on the part of the male body that is most associated with sinful lust. The symbolism of the Berit is that despite this veneer of mundanity and sinfulness, the very same organ, desire and act, can be transformed through hard work into a lofty and spiritual enterprise. It can become a "holy Berit."

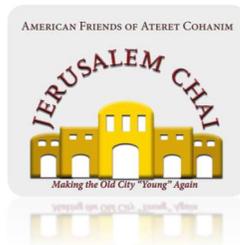
The Land of Israel represents the same ideal. In the diaspora the dirt is just dirt. In the Land, however, the seemingly secular dirt is imbued with sanctity and thus the produce of the Land is at first off limits to humans until the requisite mitzvot of terumot and ma'asrot are performed. The ability to redeem and sanctify the material world is the hallmark of Berit Milah and the Land of Israel and, hence, their intertwining.

With this background we can perhaps disclose a layer of meaning in the words of the Shelah HaKadosh.³ Part of the Berit Milah is referred to in halachik literature as "the revealing of the

¹ Bereishit 17:7-8. Translation from Chabad.org.

² See, <http://chabad.org.il/ParashotArticles/Item.asp?CategoryID=78&ArticleID=305>.

³ Shelah, parshat Lech Lecha, Torah Or.



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crown.” The Shelah comments: “and this is called Zion, and then the Shechinah is restored to Zion.” What is the connection between Berit Milah and Yerushalayim?

One possibility is that Yerushalyim epitomizes revealing the sanctity of the mundane. As the terrestrial home of God, the city is the ultimate seemingly mundane location that in truth shines with the light of God. On the surface, Yerushalayim is a large urban center like so many others around the world, but it is really so much more than that. Therefore, the Shelah teaches, Berit Milah is a means of returning the Shechinah to Zion. When a person performs Berit Milah and realizes about the sanctity of the mundane and material, we are one step closer God revealing Himself in his holy city.