



Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Yosef Bronstein Parashat Vayetzei / פרשת ויצא 5779

The People of Yerushalayim

Our parsha opens with Yaakov journey to Haran: “And Jacob left Be’er Sheva, and he went to Charan.”¹ Rashi comments that by emphasizing that Yaakov *left* Be’er Sheva, the Torah encoded a deeper message in the verse:

Scripture had only to write: “And Jacob went to Haran.” Why did it mention his departure? But this tells [us] that the departure of a righteous man from a place makes an impression, for while the righteous man is in the city, he is its beauty, he is its splendor, he is its majesty. When he departs from there, its beauty has departed, its splendor has departed, its majesty has departed

It was not only that he *went* to Charan, but that his presence in Be’erSheva was sorely missed.

This Rashi teaches us an important lesson about the relationship between a person and their place. One might think that a person’s place is just a setting of where their lives happen to unfold, but other than that, where one lives is tangential.

The Torah, however, seems to emphasize that this is not the case. A person and his place have a deeper relationship allowing a person who lives a righteous life to uplift and elevate the entire locale. As Rashi comments regarding the Me’arat HaMachpeilah after being acquired by Avraham:² “It experienced an elevation, for it left the possession of a simple person [and went] into the possession of a king.”

Just as a person affects his place, the place has an affect on a person. A person’s location becomes part of their identity. The culture, flavor, and spiritual makeup of one’s place often become integrated into one’s personality.

¹ Bereishit 27:10.

² Rashi to Bereishit 22:17.



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Perhaps this is the reason that the Mishna speaks of “the people of Yerushalayim” as a group that maintained aspirational levels in their performance of mitzvot, such as holding the Lulav and Etrog in Sukkot for the entire day.³ The very fact that they lived in the holy environment of the most sanctified spot on earth, together with their own hard work, helped shape their personalities and they reached great heights in the service of God.

This idea might also undergird the law taught in the Mishna that one spouse can force the other to “ascend” and live in Yerushalyim – *HaKol Ma'alim LeYeurshalyim*.⁴ Living in Yerushalayim is a special status as the place itself becomes integrated into the inhabitants and elevates them.

May we all merit to spiritually and physically be “people of Yerushalayim!”

³ Mishna Sukkah 3:8.

⁴ Mishna Ketubot 13:11.