



5779 Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Yosef Bronstein Parashat Re'eh / פרשת ראה

Elul and the Walls of Yerushalayim

The midrash relates that when Haman wanted to find an auspicious day to obliterate the Jewish people he reviewed each of the months and found a merit in it that would counteract his diabolical plans. When he drew the month of Elul from his lots, Haman rejected the entire month as in the beginning of the era of the Second Beit HaMikdash, Nechemia and his people completed the walls of Yerushalayim on the 25th of Elul.¹ This historic accomplishment gave the month of Elul a unique merit.²

This midrash tantalizingly highlights a connection between Elul and the building of the walls of Yerushalayim. What is the nature of this connection? How are the walls of Yerushalayim associated with the month of Elul and the unique status that this month has on the Jewish calendar?

Perhaps one approach relates to the fact that Elul is a unique time to encounter God. Many commentators associate the verse of “seek out God when He is found”³ with the entirety of the month of Elul. In Chabad literature,⁴ the significance of Elul is explained by means of a parable in which a king leaves his palace and enters the field. When there, the simple peasants are free to directly see him and greet him, without the pomp, preparation and fanfare of the palace. Similarly, God is present throughout the world during the month of Elul and is easily accessible.

From one perspective, this idea would weaken the importance of Yerushalayim. If God is accessible throughout the globe without fanfare or fuss, then what is unique about Yerushalayim? Why would completing the walls and demarcating the area with Yerushalayim’s sanctity be significant if God is not even in the city but rather in the “field” with His people?

By connecting Elul with the walls of Yerushalayim, the midrash is highlighting the codependence of these themes. Yes, God is accessible everywhere, and particularly in the month of

¹ Nechemia 6:15.

² Ester Rabba 7:11.

³ Yeshayahu 55:6.

⁴ Likkutei Torah, parshat Re'eih, pg. 32.



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Elul. But what allows God to be accessed in New York and Tokyo, in the “fields” of the world? The Midrash is saying that it is the walls of Yerushalayim. There must be a center point is saturated with divinity from which sanctity spreads to the rest of the world. That center point is demarcated by the walls of Yerushalayim, walls which simultaneously set Yerushalayim apart as unique but also create the possibility for the sanctity to spread and for God to be sought out anywhere.

May we merit to appreciate the importance of the center point and find God in the month of Elul.