



5779 Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Yosef Bronstein Parashat Parashat Shoftim / פרשת שופטים

## The Middle of the Ladder

Our parsha opens with an injunction to establish judges and courts throughout the Land of Israel: “You shall set up judges and law enforcement officials for yourself in all your cities that the Lord, your God, is giving you, for your tribes.”<sup>1</sup>

However, despite the universal need for judges and justice, a special relationship exists between the theme of justice and Yerushalayim. The Navi Yeshyahu explains that a lack of justice was one of the sins that precipitated the destruction of the city: How has she become a harlot, a faithful city; full of justice, in which righteousness would lodge, but now murderers.”<sup>2</sup> Later in this prophecy, he describes that a return of justice will engender the redemption: “Zion shall be redeemed through justice and her penitent through righteousness.”<sup>3</sup> Why is Yerushalayim so intertwined with justice if it is a common need for all Jewish communities?

In a recent shiur, Mrs. Sivan Rahav Meir elaborated upon an idea about Yerushalayim that she heard from Rav Chaim Sabato. Rashi teaches that the ladder in Yaakov’s dream had three points – the bottom of it was in Be’er Sheva, the top of it rested over Beit Eil and the middle of the ladder hovered over Yerushalayim.<sup>4</sup> At first glance, this is an odd description. Wouldn’t one expect that Yerushalayim would be parallel to the top of the ladder?

Rav Sabato explained that these three cities represent three themes in our service of God. Beit El means “the house of God,” and represents our pure, pristine and lofty relationship with God. This is why it is parallel to the top of the mountain. In contrast, Be’er Sheva is where Avraham established his home that was open to all those who passed by. It was there that he made treaties with

<sup>1</sup> Devarim 16:18. Translations are from Chabad.org.

<sup>2</sup> Yeshayahu 1:21

<sup>3</sup> Ibid 1:27.

<sup>4</sup> Bereishit 28:17.



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Avimelech, the local king. This place represents the pole of proper interpersonal relationships. Since all of these relationships occur within the confines of our lowly world, this is represented by the bottom of the ladder.

Yerushalayim, then at the middle of the ladder, represents the place where heaven and earth meet. It is the attempt to take the lofty and heavenly ideals of Bet Eil and to apply them in a real world setting. It represents the aspiration and conviction that living in the “real world” does not mean an abdication of the lofty divine values but rather there is a way to live with God even on earth.

The endeavor to infuse earthly life with divine values is deeply intertwined with the Torah’s view of justice and the judicial system. The “real world” of interpersonal relationships is messy and people will often end up in monetary disputes. Therefore, the Torah emphasizes the importance of judges and justice as a means of applying Torah values to the nitty gritty of daily life. This is why judges and justice are the key to Yerushalayim’s redemption.