



5780 Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Yosef Bronstein Parashat Vayera / פרשת וירא

## Double Vision

In the aftermath of the Akeidah, we find Avraham's partial naming of the city Yerushalayim: "And Abraham named that place, The Lord will see (Hashem yireh), as it is said to this day: On the mountain, the Lord will be seen."<sup>1</sup> As Rashi explains, this name signifies that God's presence will be felt and even "seen" on that mountain for all of eternity. And this has come to pass. In yesteryears the Beit HaMikdash stood at the heart of Yerushalayim where the Jewish people went to "see the face of God." Even today people are drawn to Yerushalayim for its unique spiritual qualities.

It is interesting to note that this verb of "seeing" – "yireh" – also appears in the beginning of the parsha. The parsha opens: "Now the Lord appeared (va-yeira) to him in the plains of Mamre, and he was sitting at the entrance of the tent when the day was hot."<sup>2</sup> After Avraham's brit milah he is spiritually capable of "seeing" God to a different degree than before. Here he is, sitting at the edge of his tent and experiencing the apex of spiritual experiences – the presence of God himself.

However, as the Gemara highlights, Avraham soon rises and abandons God. The reason for this is mentioned in the next verse: "And he lifted his eyes and saw, and behold, three men were standing beside him, and he saw and he ran toward them from the entrance of the tent, and he prostrated himself to the ground." Avraham leaves God to help the Arab travelers, leading the Talmud to conclude "inviting guests is greater than receiving the Divine Presence."<sup>3</sup>

Recognizing the divinity of another person and lending him a helping hand is a higher level than reveling as an individual in the Divine Presence. Spirituality cannot be a socially isolating experience but must rather strengthen the bonds that connect a person to other people.

<sup>1</sup> Bereishit 22:14. Translation is from Chabad.org.

<sup>2</sup> Bereishit 18:1.

<sup>3</sup> Shabbat 127a.



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This lesson embedded in the “va-yeira” of the beginning of the parsha also impacts the “yireh” at the end. Yerushalayim is not only the place where God is seen and sees in the sense of being the spiritual capital of the world. Rather, it is also the city that connects all Jews to each other and represents the ideals of interpersonal and social cohesiveness. In Judaism, personal experiences and the traits of love and kindness to others must go hand in hand. In a word, a message of Yerushalayim is that one’s vision must be set not only on God directly, but also on the divinity that is embedded in the other.