



5780 Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Yosef Bronstein Parashat Chayei Sara / פרשת חיי שרה

Preservation and Creativity within Yerushalayim

After the death of Sarah, Avraham seeks to ensure the continuity of his family and asks Eliezer to travel to Charan and choose a wife for his son Yitzhak. While the Torah describes Eliezer as a simple “servant of Avraham,” the Midrash discloses that Avraham did not entrust such a delicate mission to just anyone. Rather, we learn that Eliezer was Avraham’s prime disciple who “drew and then watered from the teachings of Avraham.”¹ In fact, before Yitzhak’s birth, Avraham assumed that Eliezer would be his natural heir.

This highlighting of Eliezer’s unique piety and status makes us wonder as to why Avraham sent him to Charan in the first place. After all, the midrash teaches that Eliezer had a daughter whom he wanted to marry Yitzhak. Why would Avraham skip his prize student’s daughter in order to seek out a girl whom he did not know and had no contact with? Multiple suggestions appear in our commentators.

Rav Yaakov Filber offers an explanation² that emanates from the very phrase used to praise Eliezer: that he drew and watered from Avraham’s Torah. The impression one receives from this is that with an almost mechanical precision he was a conduit for the teachings of Avraham. However, despite the admirability and usefulness of this trait, he was not creative within the tradition, did not think about its implications nor probe its depth. He was a vessel for the spreading of Avraham’s Torah to the world but he himself did not “own” the mesorah and become one with it. He simply dutifully parroted what Avraham taught. While functionally important, such a person could not be the true next link in the mesorah.

¹ Rashi to Bereishit 15:2

² “Mivchana shel Rivka,” available at

<https://www.kipa.co.il/%D7%99%D7%94%D7%93%D7%95%D7%AA/%D7%9E%D7%91%D7%97%D7%A0%D7%94-%D7%A9%D7%9C-%D7%A8%D7%91%D7%A7%D7%94/>



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Perhaps it is for this reason that when speaking of the messianic Yerushalayim, the prophets describe an alive and flowing river that emerges from the city. For example, Zecharia foretells:³ “And it shall come to pass on that day that spring water shall come forth from Jerusalem; half of it to the eastern sea, and half of it to the western sea; in summer and in winter it shall be.” The Torah of Mashiach, as represented by water, is sourced in the heart of Yerushalayim, the center of sanctity and tradition. However, from there it will emerge as a bubbling river that spreads in all directions.

Yerushalayim, then, teaches us of the delicate balance that is needed when relating to Torah and the mesorah. On the hand, we must always make sure that we are accurately recording and preserving the sacred teachings from the previous generations. The source of the water must be the heart of Yerushalayim. However, we cannot suffice with the water remaining stagnant within the city, but each generation has the obligation to learn the mesorah anew and create an ever-increasing river from the waters of Torah.

³ Zecharia 14:8.