



5780 Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Yosef Bronstein Parashat Vayishlach / פרשת וישלח

No Evil in the House of God

As Yaakov triumphantly returns to the Land of Israel as a man of family and wealth, suddenly a fear betakes him. While still in Charan he was confident that the merit of his young son Yosef would protect him against his murderous brother Esav. However, as the confrontation grew closer, the Torah tells us: “Yaakov became very frightened and was distressed.”¹ He immediately initiated his three-pronged strategy for success: prayer, bribery and readiness for war.

Commenting on Yaakov’s fear, the Ba’al Shem Tov² notes that a common problem that human being contend with is our inability to identify divine kindness. Really, everything God does is for the best. Every hardship is the platform for greater opportunity and every descent can be the beginning of an even greater ascent. However, we view the world through our limited human perspective and have our own finite way of differentiating between good and evil. As such, we sometimes react negatively to situations instead of trying to find the silver lining.

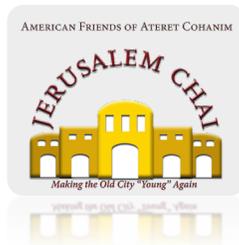
The Ba’al Shem Tov said that this is the deeper meaning of the verse in Tehillim: May only goodness and kindness pursue me all the days of my life.”³ While the verse read simply is a prayer for unlimited divine goodness, the Ba’al Shem Tov explained that it also reflects an unfortunate reality. God’s goodness and kindness can be a chasing a person from behind for one’s entire life and the person, instead of turning around to receive the good, continues to run in the opposite direction. The subject of the verse runs away from the divine kindness as he is stuck within his own limited perspective which identifies this divine goodness as an evil to be avoided.

While the Ba’al Shem Tov does not extend his interpretation to the end of the verse, perhaps we can suggest that the solution to this problem is embedded in the chapter’s final words: “and I will dwell in the house of the God for length of days.” How does one develop a more divine perspective

¹ Bereishit 32:8. Translation from Chabad.org.

² Ba’al Shem Tov al HaTorah, VaYishlach siman 3.

³ Tehillim 23:6.



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on the nature of good and evil? How does one truly live with God in this world and not run from Him? It is by dwelling in and attaching oneself to Yerushalayim.

Yerushalayim is the bridge between heaven and earth that allows one to live on earth but see things from heaven's perspective. The notion of an all-encompassing divine goodness is embedded in the history of the city as the midrash notes that even the destruction of Yerushalayim itself triggered the birth of Mashiach. If one dwells in the "house of God" then one will not run from the divine goodness but rather turn around and embrace it with open arms.