



5780 Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Yosef Bronstein Parashat Bo / פרשת בא

Yerushalayim: The City of Peace and Diversity

During the ninth plague, we are told that the darkness was so thick that “[the Egyptians] did not see each other, and no one rose from his place for three days.”¹ The Chiddushei HaRim adds another layer on interpretation regarding interpersonal relationships. He says that the ultimate darkness is if one does not “see” his friend, i.e. understand his friend’s his plight. The second half of the verse teaches how this attitude boomerangs back to the perpetrator. While the self-absorbed person thinks that he is independent and self-sufficient, he is in fact hurting himself by his narcissistic behavior. This is inferred from the second half of the verse: “no one rose from his place.” If a person does not care for his friend, then he himself will not be able to arise and grow in his material and spiritual endeavors.

In other words, the Chiddushei HaRim is teaching us about interdependency. All Jews are a single entity and we rise and fall together. The more we are splintered into subgroups, the weaker each group will be.

However, what sort of unity is this? Do we want everyone to be assimilated into a monolithic entity without color or diversity?

Perhaps Yerushalayim provides the model for the ideal form of unity. On the one hand, the singular nature of the single Jewish entity is accentuated in Yerushalayim. It is the city that makes all Jews into friends. It is the city where all Jews gathered three times a year to “see” and be “seen” by God as a nation. It is the seat of the King and the High Court which represented the people as a whole.

However, we are also taught that every person in Yerushalayim had a space. The Mishna teaches us that the Jewish people in the Beit HaMikdash stood in crowded fashion, but when they

¹ Shemot 10:22. Translation adapted from Chabad.org.



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bowed down there was space for each person.² On a spiritual level this represents the fact that even in the crowded Yerushalayim where one might think that they are just another person in the crowd without uniqueness, there is still room for one's individuality.

Rav Kook sees this form of connectedness as the meaning of the word "Shalom" (peace) which is part of Yerushalayim's name. Shalom, he argues, is by definition comprised of different elements that are interdependent and coexist as opposed to the bludgeoning of everyone into a single unit. This is why the Talmud teaches that Torah scholars, who excelled in debate, create Shalom in the world. Each Torah scholar realized that their opinions all needed each other and were all part of Torah.³

May we all recognize our own uniqueness while embracing our interdependence!

² Mishna Avot 5:5.

³ Final section of Ein Ayah, Berachot