

Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Yosef Bronstein Parashat Vayechi / פרשת ויחי / 5779

Gaining Immortality

In our parsha, Yaakov feels that his death is encroaching and he prepares accordingly. He makes arrangements for his funeral, blesses his grandchildren and children. The midrash at the beginning of our parsha uses this story as a platform to reflect on the fleeting nature of human life more generally:¹

“For we are strangers before You, and inhabitants like all our forefathers; as a shadow are our days on the earth, and there is no hope.”² And we wish that our lives were as the shadow of a wall or of a tree, but really it is as the shadow of a flying bird... no one hopes not to die...

All human life is transient and ephemeral. As such, Yaakov rightfully prepared for his own passing.

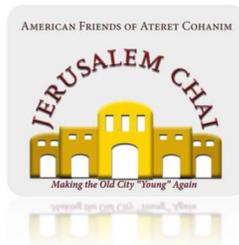
From a certain perspective coming to terms with this aspect of the human condition is healthy and humbling. However, at the same time, we all desire immortality. If given a choice, the average person would want to live forever as the Mishna teaches “against your will you die.”³ How are we to attain the goal of immortality if, as the midrash teaches, death is inexorable?

One method of gaining immortality is by attaching ourselves to something that is eternal. While our bodies are finite, there are things that transcend the regular bounds of time and merit eternity. The more that we allow these things to enter us and we become part of these things, the

¹ Bereishit Rabbah 96:2.

² Divrei HaYamim I, 29:15.

³ Pirkei Avot 4:22.



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more eternal we become. One example of this is *Olam ha-Ba* – the World to Come. Through fulfilling God’s mitzvot we merit a measure of eternity.

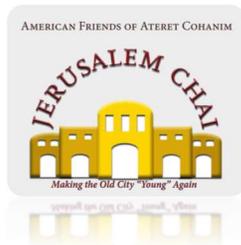
Another such item is Yerushalayim. The Gemara teaches:⁴

It was taught in a baraita in the name of Rabbi Akiva: “Yours, O Lord, is the greatness;” this is the splitting of the Red Sea; “the power;” this is the plague of the firstborn; “the glory;” this is the giving of the Torah; “the triumph/eternality (*netzach*);” this is Yerushalayim; and “the majesty”; this is the Temple.

The word “*netzach*” in the verse, which means “triumph” or “eternality” refers to Yerushalayim. The Maharal explains that God chose Yerushalayim as His eternal capital and it is therefore one of the chief expressions of divinity on our world.

According to the above model, the more we connect ourselves with Yerushalayim, the more we will be enveloped in its eternality and gain immortality. If we invest properly in Yerushalayim, even long after our bodies cease to exist, our spirits will become a permanent fixture of our eternal and holy city.

⁴ Berachot 58a.



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