



5781 Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Yosef Bronstein Parashat Beresheet/בראשית

## Yerushalayim As A Process

The Torah opens with God creating the world. One would think that God's creation would be perfect, an ideal setting within which to live. And while there is much beauty and order in the cosmos, we know that God intentionally did not create a perfect world. The final verse of the creation story is: "And God blessed the seventh day and He hallowed it, for thereon He abstained from all His work that God created to do."<sup>1</sup> As many explain, the words "to do" are directed to us - human beings who must complete God's creation by perfecting the world in His image.<sup>2</sup>

This idea is poignantly expressed in the story of Kayin and Hevel. According to a midrash, the subtext for their argument which eventually deteriorated into murder, was ownership over Yerushalayim. The Torah cunningly hides the source of their fight, merely stating; And Cain spoke to Abel his brother, and it came to pass when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and slew him."<sup>3</sup> One midrash, though, identifies "the field" as Yerushalayim:<sup>4</sup>

Rebbi Yehoshua of Sichnin said in the name of Rebbi Levi: They split the land and movable objects of the world. What, then, was their fight about? This one said that the Beit HaMikdash should be built in my portion and this one said that the Beit HaMikdash should be built in my portion, as the verse states: "when they were in the field," and "the field" refers to the Beit HaMikdash as the verse states: 'Zion will be plowed as a field.'<sup>5</sup>

In this midrashic read, the first murder of history was an act of religious violence – Kayin grew heated over his desire to "own" Yerushalayim and the Beit HaMikdash.

<sup>1</sup> Bereishit 2:3. Translation adapted from Chabad.org.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, the sicha from R. Yechezkel Yaakovson, available at <http://shaalvim.co.il/torah/view.asp?id=1068>.

<sup>3</sup> Bereishit 4:8.

<sup>4</sup> Bereishit Rabbah 22:7.

<sup>5</sup> Micha 3:12.



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How ironic it is that the name of the city – Yerushalayim – connotes perfection and peace! Yet, this area was the site of the first act of violence in human history. How are we to understand this? How can it be that the city of perfection and peace is the beginning of the dreadful history of murder?

Clearly, the name Yerushalayim is not a static description of a place but a latent potential – an aspiration that we human beings are supposed to actualize. Yerushalayim is a special location. It has the potential to be the city of ultimate peace and perfection. But it was not created with this potential fully realized. It is up to us who care about the city to slowly “fix” God’s creation and help bring Yerushalayim to its ultimate state of perfection and peace.