

5781 Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Yosef Bronstein Parashat Shoftim/פרשת שופטים

Yerushalayim Connections

Our parsha opens with the laws of the Jewish judicial system. There are to be judges in every Jewish community who are to implement justice. In addition, the High Court, located in Yerushalayim, will take the most difficult cases from all over the Land of Israel.

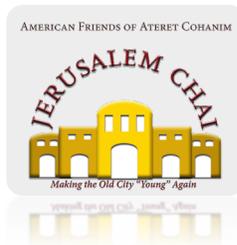
The Sefat Emmet¹ notes that this section about judges comes on the heels of the end of last week's parsha that discussed the pilgrimages to Yerushalayim during the holidays of Pesach, Shavu'ot and Sukkot. What is the meaning of this juxtaposition? What is the thematic connection between the laws of judges and the laws of the festivals?

He explains that they serve a similar spiritual function. Torah scholars and judges are referred to as "the eyes of the congregation" as they help guide each Jew on the proper path towards connecting with God. The holidays have a similar, if less overt, impact on the Jewish soul. Correct and intentional observing of the holidays will lead to the kindling of a light within the Jewish person's soul that will last for the entire year. Thus, both the justice system and the holidays serve the same function of bringing Jews closer to their Father in Heaven.

The Sefat Emmet continues that it is no coincidence that these processes have their optimal impact in Yerushalayim. While one can observe the holidays from the diaspora, it is during the pilgrimage to Yerushalyim that one can see and be seen by God. Similarly, as noted above, while each city must appoint its own court, the High Court sat in Yerushalayim. It was from there that "instruction" emanated to the Jewish people.² If the function of judges and the holidays was to light up the way towards God, it is readily understandable that they occur in Yerushalyim. It is there that God resides and within such a setting the heart of a Jew can be best opened to experience divinity.

¹ Sefat Emmet, parshat Shoftim 5656.

² Taanit 16a.



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Perhaps we can add that this is a reason that in the original Shemona Esreih, the prayer for judges and righteous people immediately precedes the prayer over Yerushalayim. Judges, Torah scholars and righteous individuals shine a light on our path and help us connect with God. It follows, then, that the next prayer should be about the rebuilding of Yerushalayim which is the ideal location for the development of this connection to God.