



5782 Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Yosef Bronstein Parashat Vayera / פרשת וַיֵּרָא

## Yerushalayim: The Grounded City

In the middle of our parsha, Avraham and Sarah are blessed with their long-awaited son, Yitzhak. The Midrash teaches us that Sarah was biologically barren and it was a divine miracle that enabled her to conceive and give birth.<sup>1</sup> The Maggid of Mezeritch, though, offers a fascinating spiritual take on the journey of Avraham and Sarah from infertility to having a child.

The Maggid<sup>2</sup> suggests that when we first meet Avraham and Sarah in parshat Lech Lecha they are almost entirely spiritual beings. Rashi tells us that Avraham did not even notice Sarah's physical beauty.<sup>3</sup> Together, the Torah says, they create "souls in Charan," a reference to the people they brought close to God. Though they were intimate as husband and wife, their relationship was so transcendent and spiritual that a physical human could not be conceived from them.

In our parsha, though, due a series of events and their development as people, Avraham and Sarah become more interested in the material world. This allowed them to not just "create" spiritually but also to create an actual physical child. Ultimately, their child Yitzhak embodied their legacy as their initial "spiritual" children did not have a lasting impact on the story of the Torah.

This perspective of the Maggid follows the Chassidic notion that as lofty as spiritual realms and spiritual experiences might be, if they are sundered from this world, they can have little lasting value. God put us into bodies and placed us on this world to take our inherent spirituality and channel it towards fixing the world itself. We must holistically unite the spiritual with the physical.

Perhaps this idea helps explain why the parsha concludes with the introduction of Yerushalayim to Avraham and the Jewish people. Avraham's revolution of being a spiritual presence who takes up his position in this world can only be complete if he brings it down to the ground level. He needs a physical place – ground with trees, rocks and other simple, inanimate objects – to infuse

<sup>1</sup> Midrash Tanchuma Toldot siman 9.

<sup>2</sup> Cited in Degel Machaneh Efraim to Bereishit 20:16.

<sup>3</sup> Rashi to Bereishit 12:11.



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with spirituality and to become the meeting point between heaven and earth. A wandering people cannot transform land itself.

Therefore, God grants Avraham and the Jewish people the location and city of Yerushalayim. This physical land and bustling city is very much on earth, but is also “the gateway to the heavens.” This sanctification of the physical stands at the heart of both Yerushalayim and the ultimate mission of Avraham.