



5782 Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Yosef Bronstein Parashat Vayeshev / פרשת וישב

The “Coincidences” of Yerushalayim

This week’s parsha begins the long saga of Yosef’s life. His eventful story begins as a young teenager in his father’s home and through a highly unlikely series of events he winds up as the viceroy of Egypt and is instrumental in saving a civilization from extreme hunger. His journey is (literally) the material of movies.

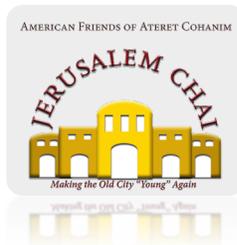
To an outside observer, the turning points of Yosef’s life are a string of coincidences. It just so happened that he was sold several times and taken to Egypt. It just so happened that he was framed and ended up in prison where he met the former butler and baker of Paraoh etc. At the moment of each turning point, there seems to be little indication to Yosef that each event is anything more but a coincidence – a lucky or unlucky turn of the dice of fate.

Yosef, however, actively chooses to look at things differently. In an statement of sheer heroism, he tells his brothers that he firmly believes that it is God who brought him down to Mitzrayim for the purpose of saving his family and the world.¹ Notwithstanding the seeming randomness and arbitrary nature of his twists and turns, Yosef sees his life through the lens of divine providence. By doing so he imbues meaning in every stage of his life and is ready to seize the opportunities that God is truly giving him.²

Similarly, we are faced with the same two options when we think about the history of Yerushalayim and our current situation. Yerushalayim has a storied history, filled with ups and downs, and unexpected twists and turns. Books are filled with the stories behind its stones and alleyways that have seen so much invasion, settlement, war, civilization and spirituality. And, against all odds, the Jewish people are now back and have resettled and rebuilt the city to a level not seen since the end of the Second Temple period.

¹ Bereishit 45:8.

² Based on Seforno to Bereishit 45:8.



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What are we to make of this story? Many people will see it as the result of chance and coincidence. After all, there were no open miracles that broke with the laws of nature in 1948 or 1967. We, however, must take our cues from Yosef. We must look into events that seem strange and coincidental and see the hand of God orchestrating the history of Yerushalayim. Everything that occurred was part of the divine plan to bring us back to Yerushalayim in this particular manner.³

As such, the fact that we are back in control of Yerushalayim is not merely a strange coincidence but a God-given opportunity. We must rise to the challenge and build Yerushalayim materially and spiritually and help God complete His plan for his holy nation and city.

³ For an extended discussion about this point, see the symposium that the Tradition journal organized in the year following the Six Day War entitled "The Religious Meaning of the Six-Day War: A Symposium." This symposium is available at <https://lessons.myjli.com/survival/index.php/2017/03/24/the-religious-meaning-of-the-six-day-war-a-symposium/>.