

5782 Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Yosef Bronstein Vaera פָּרָשַׁת וָאֵרָא/

The Continuity of Yerushalayim

Our parsha opens with the broadest of all possible lenses. While Moshe is beset with pain over the Jewish people's current suffering, God tells him about the bright future of this people. God says that He will take them out from Egypt, give them the Torah, bring them to the promised land and they will live as God's people in an eternal covenant with Him. Later commentators highlight the significance of these verses for understanding the sweep and stages of redemption.

The next section of the parsha, though, seems to stand in stark contrast with this bird's eye view. The Torah takes a step back and traces the pedigree of Moshe and Aharon. They are the children of Amram, grandchildren of Kehat, and great-grandchildren of Levi. Instead of a grand perspective of Jewish history, we read a list of names - a family tree that traces a particular family back several generations. What is the meaning of this study in contrasts?

Perhaps one lesson to be gleaned from this juxtaposition is that we cannot have one without the other. The prophecies about our future are cosmically important, grand, and glorious. When reading the opening section of our parsha or the prophecies of redemption that appear later in Tanach, it is hard not to dream about the future redeemed and utopian world.

The Torah is warning us, though, that we can only move forward by looking over our shoulders. Yes, Moshe and Aharon will accomplish unparalleled feats. But they can only create this glorious future if they know where they are coming from. We cannot forget our past, we build on it. It is only through appreciating the contributions of previous generations that we can try to create a better world for our children.

This idea is extremely relevant for our relationship with Yerushalayim. We are privileged to live in the generation that sees the beginning of the rebuilding of Yerushalayim. Today, our city is a flourishing metropolis, filled with the old and young, scholars and laymen and everything in between. We look at our current reality and try to plan how to build upon it to fulfill the ancient prophecies about Yerushalayim that have begun to be fulfilled before our eyes. We try to be future oriented.



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However, we cannot forget that we are building on nearly two millennia of Jewish hope and yearning. Generations of Jews that never merited to see the city, but they prayed for it, yearned for it, and mentioned it on their happiest and saddest days. In order for us to plan ahead, we must appreciate that we are representatives of generations before us in our family trees. The great prophecies of redemption can only be fulfilled when we think of ourselves as part of a chain that traces itself back to the beginning of Jewish history. Like Moshe and Aharon, we can only move forward if we feel connected to the history of our families and of the Jewish people.