



5783 Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Yosef Bronstein Parashat Vayeshev / פרשת וַיֵּשֶׁב

Yosef and the Dreams of Zion

Our parsha revolves around dreams. It opens with a young Yosef dreaming about things that were beyond the family's immediate experience – of a grainfield for a family of shepherds and of the celestial beings. These dreams at first get Yosef in trouble, as his brothers react to them negatively and eventually sell him into slavery.

At this point, Yosef should give up on his dreams. After all, there was a great and ever-growing distance between his life experience as a Hebrew prisoner and his dreams of having other bow to him. Instead, Yosef never gave up on his dreams. He possessed a form of quiet courage and patience, biding his time and trusting these prophetic dreams. One might even say that these dreams sustained Yosef, keeping his hope and inner-self alive despite his life of hardships. Eventually, this approach reaped its own benefit, and, with God's help, Yosef greeted his family as the viceroy of Egypt.

The midrash notes that there is a deep connection between Yosef and Zion: “everything that occurred to Yosef occurred to Zion.”¹ Both were beloved but then hated and feared. Both faced downfalls and were forced into subservience to foreign forces. Yet, eventually, both triumphed. In fact, the numerical value of the letters of Yosef and Zion are both 156, underscoring the affinity between them.

The matter of dreams is no exception. So many Jews for so many generations dreamt about the return to Zion. Similar to Yosef, these Jews were hated and berated by others for daring to dream of a different future. And at many points in Jewish history this dream seemed well beyond anyone's wildest imaginations.

¹ Midrash Tanchuma Vayigash, siman 11.



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And yet, this dream was kept alive and sustained the Jewish people. Jews who kept this dream alive retained their identity, their pride and their stubborn refusal to submit to reality as it is. As with Yosef, God was with these Jews and the millions of Jews living in the State of Israel are the beginning of the living fulfillment of these dreams. “When God returns the returnees to Zion, we shall be like dreamers.”²

But the dream persists. Just as Yosef continues to dream throughout his life of the return of the entire Jewish people to the Land of Israel, we must also not become complacent with our reality. We must continue to dream. When we walk the streets of Zion we should dream about seeing the Beit HaMikdahs on the top of Temple Mount. We should dream about being citizens of a country led by Mashiach. And, most of all, we should dream about feeling God’s presence return to His holy city.

² Tehillim 126:1. Translation adapted from Chabad.org.