



5783 Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Yosef Bronstein
 פרשת בהר-בְּחֻקֵי / Parashat Behar-Bechukotai

The Commercial Spirituality of Yerushalayim

Our parsha discusses the laws of business: “And when you make a sale to your fellow Jew or make a purchase from the hand of your fellow Jew, you shall not wrong one another.” At first glance one might think that all of these laws are a compromise for a less-than-ideal reality. Really, it would be better for all Jews to always be involved in purely spiritual matters. However, due to the fallen nature of our world, humans need to work for a living and therefore God needed to provide detailed instructions about the proper way of conducting business. These laws, then, do not represent an ideal.

Hassidic master, though, taught a different approach to these laws. The Me’or Einayim¹ cites the Baal Shem Tov that conducting business according to the Torah’s vision helps fulfill God’s purpose in creating the world. The Baal Shem Tov said:

If a person studies Torah for the sake of God, for example, he learns the Mishna regarding the laws of bartering a cow for a donkey – this is very important to God. Certainly, then, if a person actually barter a cow for a donkey and conducts himself according to Torah law – this is certainly an even greater and supernal form of service! For everything was created for God’s honor... and through everything one can serve God.

Observing the Torah’s business laws practically brings God into the workplace and merchandise. This is a lofty service as it helps bring to actuality the notion that everything was created for God’s honor.

We find this idea manifest regarding Yerushalayim. We know that Yerushalayim is the global center of spirituality and connection. Simultaneously, though, our sources teach us that Yerushalayim was also a great center of commerce. For example, the Navi tells us that in the times of King Shlomo

¹ Commentary to Shabbat d”h “nasata ve-natata be-emunah”



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international merchants were commonplace in the city.² The Malbim explains that this commerce led to the reality that precious commodities such as gold and cedar wood were staples in Yerushalayim.³

How does being an international trade-hub fit with our image of Yerushalayim as the center of spirituality? Are these not seemingly two opposite characteristics? Perhaps we can explain this paradox through the words of the Baal Shem Tov cited above. Yerushalayim is God's home and this creates a palpable spiritual aura throughout the city. But being God's home also means that life should be lived in accordance to His rules for His glory. If God's ideal vision for this world includes a certain form of business conduct, then that also must find a place in Yerushalayim. Thus, Yerushalayim is both a center of spirituality and of commerce.

²Melachim I, 10:15.

³Malbim to Melachim I, 10:27.