



5781 Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Yosef Bronstein Parashat Vaetchanan / פרשת וַאֲתַחֲנֶן
 Tu B'Av / טו בְּאָב Shabbat Nachamu / שַׁבַּת נַחֲמוּ

The Yerushalyim Experience

In the beginning of the parsha, Moshe delivers a motivational speech to the Jewish people about the beauty, sophistication and rightness of the Torah's mitzvot. He passionately declares:

Observe [the Mitzvot] faithfully, for that will be proof of your wisdom and discernment to other peoples, who on hearing of all these laws will say, "Surely, that great nation is a wise and discerning people."... Or what great nation has laws and rules as perfect as all this Teaching that I set before you this day?¹

The commentators note that Moshe does not describe the Torah as an otherworldly, spiritual and mystical system. Rather, the Torah is a way of life in the here and now of this world which, when followed, should engender an ideal human society. That is why Moshe focuses on the non-Jewish perception of the Torah. In some way that is discernable or even measurable to all members of the world, a society which follows the Torah should be better off than a society that does not follow the Torah.

The Netziv highlights this point in his comments to the above verse:

It will amazing to people that the laws that the Sages derive from the verses of the Torah will also be correct and righteous in the rational mind of human beings.²

The greatness of the Torah is supposed to be discernable to the nations of the world.

It is fascinating to apply this concept to another verse in this section of Moshe's speech:

For what great nation is there that has a god so close at hand as is the LORD our God whenever we call upon Him?³

¹ Devarim 4:6, 8. Translation is adapted from sefaria.org.

² Ha'amek Davar to Devarim 4:8.

³ Devarim 4:7.



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In addition to the uniqueness of the Torah, the Jewish people themselves are uniquely close to God. Once again, this spiritual connection to God should be apparent and discernable to the other nations of the world in the form that God responds to the Jewish people's prayers.

Nowadays we live in a world where this manifestation of God's love and closeness to us are not as overt as they used to be. With the destruction of the Beit HaMikdash and the waning of open miracles, it is no longer as apparent that we have a unique spiritual connection to God. If so, this verse might seem more like a messianic prophecy that something directly relevant for ourselves.

Perhaps we can suggest, though, that there are still ways for the nations of the world to perceive the unique spirituality and closeness to God of the Jewish people. One such method, is through the city of Yerushalayim. The prophets speak of non-Jews streaming to Yerushalayim in order to learn about and encounter the God of the world. Even though we are not witnesses to the full extent of this prophecy, nonetheless, there are endless memoirs and personal statements of non-Jews who *feel* and *experience* the unique atmosphere of Yerushalayim. Something about the city is discernibly (though, not measurably) different, and it is the site of intense spiritual experiences for travelers and pilgrims alike. Even today, the closeness of the Jewish people to God can be felt by all people through the medium of the city that binds God and His people together.