

## The City and the Field

This week's parsha delineates the blessings and curses that the Jewish people will receive based on their loyalty to God. One of the blessings is: "Blessed shall you be in the city and blessed shall you be in the field."<sup>1</sup> The simple understanding of this verse is that wherever a Jew might be – whether in an urban or rural area – he will be blessed.

Interestingly, though, a midrash<sup>2</sup> interprets this verse as referring to a specific location:

"Blessed shall you be in the city" – this refers to Yerushalayim as the verse states "Is this the city that they said was the epitome of beauty?"<sup>3</sup>

"Blessed shall you be in the field" – this refers to Zion as the verse states "Zion will be plowed into a field."<sup>4</sup>

According to this interpretation, the terms "city" and "field" refer to the same location – Yerushalayim.

There is much to unpack about this midrash but let us focus on one crucial point. In what way is the urban Yerushalayim like both a city and a field? What characterizes each of these areas and how are these qualities manifest in Yerushalayim?

Perhaps one approach is that a city and a field represent two diametrically opposed lifestyles. Cities are where the big events happen. They are brimming with the quick pulsation of life as throngs of people hustle and bustle to and from various activities. People with dreams to impact the world, to change the face of society, to be an influencer, often move to cities in order to network and have a platform for their ideas.

A field, though, reflects the opposite lifestyle. It is a quiet and pastoral setting where the pace of life is much slower. Change takes place in a field at a much more gradual pace. Such a

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<sup>1</sup> Devarim 28:3.

<sup>2</sup> Midrash Tanchuma, Ki Tavo, siman 4.

<sup>3</sup> Eicha 2:15.

<sup>4</sup> Yirmiyahu 26:18.

location, away from the noise of the city, provides time for contemplation, meditation and other such mindful activities.

While these are usually considered mutually exclusive lifestyles, Yerushalayim encompasses both. On one level, Yerushalayim is certainly a city. Yerushalayim was and is a bustling metropolis and a meeting-point for people from many countries and walks of life. Such an international center is important for the Jewish people to fulfill their mission of being a light unto the nations. In order to influence the world, the Jewish people need to be centered in a city – “From Zion Torah shall come forth.”

Simultaneously, though, Yerushalayim leaves room for personal contemplation and reflection. Whether it be in a literal or figurative quiet corner, something about the city enables people to have the time and space to think through their lives and connect with the spiritual realm. Yerushalayim is certainly of this world, but it is simultaneously apart from this world, like a field that is at the outskirts of society.

In this way, Yerushalayim is both a city and a field. In a word, it is the ultimate location of blessing – “Blessed shall you be in the city and blessed shall you be in the field.”