



5782 Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Yosef Bronstein Parashat Toldot / פרשת תולדות

## The Planting of the Shechina in Yerushalayim

Yitzhak tends to repeat the behaviors of his father Avraham. Therefore, when there is a famine in the land it seems that he wanted to follow in his father's footsteps and take refuge in Egypt. God, however, has other plans and tells him "Do not go down to Egypt; dwell in the land that I will tell you. Sojourn in this land, and I will be with you, and I will bless you, for to you and to your seed will I give all these lands, and I will establish the oath that I swore to Abraham, your father."<sup>1</sup> Accordingly, Yitzhak stays in the Land of Israel.

The Midrash comments that God's command to "dwell" in the land has a double connotation:

"Dwell in the Land": Make the land of Israel into a dwelling place – plant trees and plant crops. Another interpretation of "Dwell in the Land" is to make the Shechina dwell in the land.<sup>2</sup>

At first glance, these two approaches seem to be at odds with one another. Planting and cultivating the land develops it physically, while creating a home for the Divine Presence seems to be a spiritual pursuit.

However, as is often the case, the two interpretations of the Midrash are complementary and not contradictory. When relating to the Land of Israel, the material and spiritual work in tandem. As Rav Kook beautifully writes, "the sanctity of the Land of Israel is the sanctity of nature."<sup>3</sup> In the Land of Israel, we can sense that plowing, planting, and other activities usually associated with the material buildup of the land also help create a home for the Shechina.

<sup>1</sup> Berishit 26:2-3.

<sup>2</sup> Bereishit Rabbah 64:3.

<sup>3</sup> Orot HaTehiyah, perek 28.



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This theme also appears later in the parsha. Yitzhak blesses Yaakov with the “dew of the heaven and the fats of the land,”<sup>4</sup> once again combining the heavenly with the earthly. The blessing then makes reference to Esav serving Yaakov, a clear reference to a time period when the Jewish people are sovereign in the Land of Israel. This combination of materiality and spirituality occurs in the Land.

Perhaps it is with this synthesis in mind that the Midrash offers a surprising interpretation of Yitzhak’s blessing: “from the dew of the heaven – this is Yerushalayim.”<sup>5</sup> This synthesis between heaven and earth reaches its zenith in Yerushalayim which is the terrestrial gateway to heaven. As the students of the Vilna Gaon have taught us, the “physical” settling and building of homes in Yerushalayim is a prerequisite for God’s presence to return to the city.<sup>6</sup> It is our dwelling in the city that paves the path for God to make the city into His dwelling place as well.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Bereishit 27:28.

<sup>5</sup> Midrash Tanchuma, parshat Toldot, siman 16.

<sup>6</sup> Kol HaTor 1:2.

<sup>7</sup> This idea was inspired by Rav Gur Galon’s essay on the parsha, available at <https://yhb.org.il/shiurim/תורה-לשבת-תולדות-דבר-תורה-לשבת/>