



5783 Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Yosef Bronstein Parashat Ki Tisa 5783 / פְּרַשְׁתֵי כִי תִּסָּא

The Defense of Yerushalayim

In the aftermath of the sin of the golden calf, God tells Moshe that He intends to destroy the Jewish people. Instead of humbly conceding to God's plan, Moshe takes the role of the Jewish people's defense attorney. He argues with God that the sin was not entirely the fault of the Jewish people, and that God should give them another chance. He "reminds" God that the Jewish people are descendants of Avraham, Yitzhak and Yaakov and have the potential to reach great heights. Finally, God acquiesces, and the Jewish people are saved.

The desire and ability to speak well of the Jewish people despite their faults is a hallmark of Jewish leadership. In fact, according to one interpretation, this trait is highlighted in the closing verse of Megilat Ester. We read that:

For Mordecai the Jew was viceroy to King Ahasuerus, and great among the Jews and accepted by most of his brethren; seeking the good of his people and speaking peace to all their seed.¹

What does it mean that Mordechai was "seeking the good of his people?" The simple meaning of the verse is that Mordechai used his influence for the betterment of his people.

The Degel Machane Efraim,² though, offers an additional read of the verse. He suggests that Mordechai sought the good of his people not just in conversation with Achashverosh, but also in his prayers to God. Mordechai, following the model of Jewish leadership established by Moshe, defended the Jewish people to God and "reminded" Him of their great merits.

Interestingly, there is an additional interpretation of this phrase "seeking the good of his people." The Chatam Sofer³ writes that the word "good" in the Torah is elsewhere interpreted by the

¹ Megilat Ester 10:3.

² Degel Machane Efraim, Derush for Purim, Ester 10:3.

³ Torat Moshe to Ester 10:3.



5783 Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Yosef Bronstein Parashat Ki Tisa 5783 / פְּרַשְׁתֵי כִי תִּשָּׂא

Sages to refer to Yerushalayim.⁴ Mordechai not only helped his people and defended them to God, but also actively worked in the halls of power to advance the resettlement of Yerushalayim and the rebuilding of the Beit HaMikdash.

Perhaps we can suggest that the approaches of the Degel Machane Efraim and the Chatam Sofer complement each other. One way to defend the Jewish people to God is to focus on their connection to Yerushalayim.

Arguably, the golden calf is unfortunately not a one-time occurrence. Not infrequently one can look at the Jewish people and conclude that they are not spiritually worthy of redemption. But a great Jewish leader like Moshe and Mordechai can point to the Jewish people's undying loyalty to God as being expressed through their connection to Yerushalayim.

No matter where they lived in exile, the Jewish people kept their connection to Yerushalayim. Be it from the royal palaces of Shushan or the impoverished shtetls of eastern Europe, the Jewish people prayed toward Yerushalayim and dreamed of resettling it. *Thus, one way of "seeking out the good of his people" is to think about "the good – this is Yerushalayim."*

⁴ Rashi to Devarim 3:25.