



5785 Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Reuven Schreier Parashat Nitzavim / פרשת נצבים

The *Betulah* of Israel: *Yerushalayim*'s Loyal Love

In this week's *haftorah*, the *Navi Yishayahu* (62) passionately describes the restoration of *Tzion* and *Yerushalayim*. No longer will the holy city lie desolate; *Yerushalayim* – and the land of Israel that draws *kedushah* from her – will be resettled and renewed.

Yishayahu compares this reunion between *Am Yisrael* and *Yerushalayim* to the consummation of a marriage (62:5): "As a young man lives with a virgin, so shall your children live in you, and the rejoicing of a bridegroom over a bride shall your God rejoice over you."

Yerushalayim is described as a *betulah*, a woman untouched by other men. There are two powerful messages contained in the *Navi*'s poignant comparison. First, the *Radak* explains that *Eretz Yisrael* and *Yerushalayim* are unwaveringly loyal to the Jewish people, much like a *betulah* refuses to have a relationship with anyone but her own husband. When *Tzion* is settled by her fitting soulmate, the Jewish people, she flourishes and brings forth her fruit. It is a *דבר נאה ונתקבל* – a fitting match that is beautiful to behold. However, when *Klal Yisrael* is exiled and various other nations attempt to possess her, she rejects them. Their attempt to settle the land bears no fruit and she remains desolate and unforgiving. Refusing to be consoled, she loyally remains a *betulah* awaiting the return of her rightful spiritual mate.

The *Malbim* adds another layer of meaning to this metaphor. *Yerushalayim* and *Eretz Yisrael* have been destroyed and defiled countless times. The enormous tragedies that have taken place in this land over the last 3,000 years are difficult to imagine. And yet, when the *Chattan* is reunited with His *Kallah*, her physical and spiritual beauty will shine so brightly that it will be difficult to see the tragedies of the past. "The land will be similar, in its goodness and beauty, as if she had never been destroyed before."

When a man divorces his wife and then remarries her, there is certainly happiness, but the celebration is bittersweet. The wedding is haunted by the specter of past conflict, pain, and betrayal. But not so the return to *Tzion*; it will be so stunning and magnificent that we will celebrate as though there was never any separation at all.

Yishayahu's vision of Jerusalem's restoration parallels the power of *teshuvah*. The *Navi Amos*, delivering a scathing rebuke to *Am Yisrael* for its idol worship, initially seems to proclaim that our relationship with *Hashem* has been irreparably damaged (*Amos* 5:2): "נפלה לא תוסיף קום, בתולת ישראל" – She has fallen and shall not rise again, O' Virgin of Israel." Our former loyalty to *Hashem* has been tarnished; our purity has been defiled, never to be reclaimed. But the *Gemara Berachos* (4b) reveals to us that the Torah scholars of *Eretz Yisrael*, the authors of the *Talmud Yerushalmi*, read this verse quite differently: "נפלה ולא תוסיף לנפול עוד", "קום בתולת ישראל" – She has fallen and she shall no longer fall. Rise O' Virgin of Israel!" Even after sin and



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betrayal, *HaKadosh Baruch Hu* demands that we return to Him again as if nothing ever happened. The essence of our relationship remains unadulterated and pure.

Any Jew who walks through the Jewish Quarter to the Kotel witnesses this paradox. The Old City of Jerusalem is literally built on ruins. One must descend many steps in order to approach what used to be the highest point of Jerusalem, the Temple Mount. The city stands on the ruins of our own dashed hopes, the happy marriages that ended in tragedy and ruin. Even today, the city still experiences division, pain, and heartbreak. Her children suffer immeasurably and fear for their safety within her very own streets.

But the *Navi* already promised us that she will never bend to the will of another suitor. Her full restoration and reunion with *Klal Yisrael* will come to be. And the blinding light of her righteousness and beauty will eclipse centuries of heartbreak.

With fervent prayers for the speedy restoration of *Yerushalayim*, the comforting of the many mourners who reside within her, and the glorious rise of *Klal Yisrael* within her embrace.

