



5786 Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Reuven Schreier Parashat Chayei Sara / פרשת חיי שרה

Holy Competition? Rav Kook's Warning from the *Chevron-Yerushalayim* Dispute

In 1906, a dispute arose between the communal leaders of *Yerushalayim* and *Chevron* concerning the distribution of *tzedakah* funds collected from Jews in *Chutz La'aretz*. The leaders of *Chevron* were dissatisfied with the existing arrangement and sought to establish an independent fund for their ancient community, advancing several arguments that highlighted *Chevron's* spiritual distinction and unique Torah significance.

A representative of *Colel Chabad* turned to the recently appointed Chief Rabbi of *Yaffo*, the great Rav Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook, asking for his view on the matter. Rav Kook (*Igrot HaRa'ayah* 1:39) responded emphatically that to elevate the sanctity of any city in *Eretz Yisrael* at the expense of *Yerushalayim* is to engage in the spiritual distortion of *issur bamot* – the prohibition to bring *korbanot* outside the *Beit HaMikdash*. By building a *mizbeach* outside of *Yerushalayim*, a Jew symbolically challenges the city's chosenness. So too, elevating another holy city above *Yerushalayim* challenges its role as *HaKadosh Baruch Hu's* chosen *makom*.

Rav Kook explained that every city in *Eretz Yisrael* possesses its own unique aspect of *kedushah*. In fact, Rav Kook went on to expound upon the beautiful spiritual character of his new home, *Yaffo*. Yet, no matter how exalted each city's sanctity may be, the root of all *kedushah* flows from *Yerushalayim* alone. Indeed, Rav Betzalel Ashkenazi – the great author of the *Shitah Mekubetzet* and rebbe of the *Arizal* – had already rejected such claims centuries earlier, declaring: אם אין ירושלים ח"ו אין חברון – if there is no Jerusalem, Heaven forbid, there is no *Chevron* (see *Teshuvot Chatam Sofer* 2:233).

It is for this reason, Rav Kook concluded, that rebuilding and strengthening *Yerushalayim* must take precedence over any other city in the land.

Most critically, Rav Kook noted that the root of *churban* lies in turning away from *Yerushalayim*. *Yerovam ben Nevat* sealed the tragic fate of *Klal Yisrael* and *Yerushalayim* when he abandoned the holy city, establishing alternate centers of worship elsewhere. Nothing could endanger the budding *yishuv* of *Eretz Yisrael* more than internal division and rivalry among its leaders.

More than a hundred years after Rav Kook penned these powerful words, we are *zoche* to read *Parshat Chayei Sarah* with both *Yerushalayim* and *Chevron* under Jewish sovereignty. These two holy cities are not rivals: they are deeply intertwined, each expressing essential aspects of our spiritual composition and national destiny. But as Rav Kook taught, the unique *kedushah* of *Chevron* cannot exist without the foundational sanctity of *Yerushalayim*.

If there is no *Yerushalayim*, there can be no *Chevron*. But when we turn our hearts toward *Yerushalayim* in unity, we draw its sanctity into every corner of our beloved *Eretz Yisrael*.