



5786 Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Reuven Schreier Parashat Toldot / פרשת תולדות

Seesaw of Nations: Yerushalayim Drains the Power of Evil

Our ancient family tree has two significant offshoots: *Yishma'el* and *Eisav*. Both were sons of the *avos* and both were rejected as the principal heir in favor of their younger brothers. Both were promised powerful descendants who would rise to great worldly influence.

Yet, one key distinction separates between these two estranged sons.

Yishma'el's physical success and spiritual force are not inherently antithetical to the destiny of *Klal Yisrael*. His conflict with *Yitzchak* hinged on one question alone: Who would be the true successor of *Avraham Avinu*. *Sarah Immeinu* demanded that *Yishma'el* be removed from *Avraham's* household when she saw him “מצחק – mocking”. According to many commentators (see *Radak* and *Ha'amek Davar* to *Bereishis* 21:9), *Yishma'el's* chief offense was his ongoing slander of *Yitzchak's* lineage, claiming that *Avimelech*, not *Avraham*, was his true father. *Yishma'el* wanted to be *Avraham's* primary son; *Yitzchak* could exist, so long as he stayed second tier. And if *Yitzchak* dare tries to assert himself and claim his rightful place as *Avraham's* heir, *Yishma'el* is quick to “shoot arrows” at him, violently resisting any challenge to the mantel he falsely claimed (see *Rashi* *ibid*).

Yishma'el's hatred stems from *Hashem's* unequivocal declaration of Jewish chosenness: כי ביצחק יקרא לך זרע – for through *Yitzchak* will your seed be established. The progeny of *Yishma'el* cannot concede *Yerushalayim* to us without also acknowledging that the ultimate test of *Avraham Avinu* was the *Akeidah* of *Yitzchak*, not *Yishma'el*. Once the beloved child bound to the altar on the Temple Mount was *Yitzchak*, the chosen status of *Klal Yisrael* as the spiritual successors of *Avraham Avinu* becomes fully sealed.

Theoretically, though, *Yishma'el* can accept *Yitzchak's* primary role and be redeemed. Indeed, *Chazal* tell us that he repented at the end of *Avraham's* life, acknowledging *Yitzchak* as the primary child and allowing him to enter the *Maharat HaMachpeila* first when burying their father (see *Rashi* to *Bereishis* 25:9). Many suggest that the principle of *ma'aseh avot siman labanim* – the actions of the forefathers impact upon the destiny of their children – is also true of *Yishma'el* and his descendants. In the end of days, the children of *Yishma'el* will ultimately step aside and acknowledge *Yitzchak's* chosen status.

Not so *Eisav*. Again and again, our *parshah* emphasizes that *Yaakov* and *Eisav* cannot coexist in harmony or parallel success. *Chazal* emphatically declare that Jewish destiny cannot reach its fruition while *Eisav* remains ascendant. *Eisav* is synonymous with inherent evil; his heavenly patron is none other than the *Satan* himself.

The *Gemara Megillah* (6a) asserts that the city of *Yerushalayim* and the city of *Keisari* (representing *Eisav*) exist in a metaphysical seesaw. When one rises, the other falls. As *Rivka Immeinu* was told by *Hashem*, ולא יאמץ מלואם – one kingdom will overpower the other (*Bereishis* 25:23). The *Gemara* cites *Yechezkel's* depiction of Rome declaring triumphantly that it will be filled by Jerusalem's destruction (*Yechezkel* 26:2).



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Why is Yerushalayim's downfall so tightly bound with the rise of Eisav?

Rav Chaim Volozhiner (*Nefesh HaChaim* 1:12) explains that *Yerushalayim* is the principal conduit through which spiritual sustenance enters the world. It is the *sha'ar hashamayim*, the heavenly gateway through which our world is sustained. When spiritual *shefa* is being channeled through the proper passageways of sanctified *Yerushalayim*, none of the raw spiritual sustenance pouring into this world can be siphoned into the impure vessels of *Eisav*. When *Klal Yisrael* are properly serving the *Ribbono Shel Olam* in His chosen city, there is no oxygen, no metaphysical fuel, for *Eisav's* evil to grow.

But when the *Beit HaMikdash* is destroyed and *Yerushalayim* lies in ruin, the spiritual pipelines begin to "leak." The misdirected *shefa* reaches a dark, unholy destination – the irredeemable realm of *Eisav*.

Given this essential metaphysical equation, the renewal of *Yerushalayim* is not merely a national longing; it is the engine that drains the lifeblood of evil from the world. As Rav Chaim notes, evil has no inherent staying power. It can only exist by constantly leaching away from the rightful spiritual powers of *Yerushalayim*. The more *Yerushalayim* is rebuilt, sanctified, and aligned with the Divine will, the less strength remains for the forces of *Eisav*.

May we speedily merit witnessing the day that evil evaporates like smoke in the wind, with the full restoration of *Yerushalayim*.