

Yerushalayim: Where Compassion Refuses to Die

Sodom is typically viewed as the most morally corrupt and spiritually bankrupt society to have ever existed. Deemed irredeemable by God – even after the excessively generous terms negotiated between *Avraham Avinu* and *Hashem* – it was doomed to utter destruction. The entire region was overturned by *HaKadosh Baruch Hu*, left a barren wasteland to this day.

Yet, the *Gemara Sanhedrin* (104b) makes a startling claim: the iniquity of *Yerushalayim* surpassed that of *Sodom*! The sins of *Yerushalayim* were so great that the punishment of the city equaled, or even exceeded, that of *Sodom*. As *Yirmiyahu HaNavi* cries mournfully in *Eicha* (4:6), “the iniquity of the daughter of my people is greater than the sin of *Sodom*.”

And yet, there is a clear distinction between the fates of these two cities. *Sodom* was destroyed forever, never to rise again. *Yerushalayim*, however, was promised renewal, restoration, and return. Why did *Yerushalayim* merit such a special dispensation?

The *Gemara* explains that through all the horrors of *Churban Yerushalayim*, the residents of the city maintained one essential attribute. Even after the tortures and destruction, even as Jewish women were forced to consume the flesh of their deceased children, the residents of *Yerushalayim* remained compassionate to one another (see *Yad Ramah* *ibid*). This precious *middah* – the character trait of *rachmanut* – is the sole reason why *Yerushalayim* was given another chance.

Rav Chaim Kanievsky *zt'l* noted that this is why *Yirmiyahu* refers to *Yerushalayim* as a *niddah* – a woman who is impure due to her menstruation cycle. Yes, her impurity forces her Husband to distance Himself from her. But, by its very nature, the *tumah* is temporary. Eventually, the stain of sin will pass and *Yerushalayim* will emerge purified. It is specifically in the *zechut* of compassion and loyalty to one another that *Yerushalayim* has the capacity to regenerate herself and restore her greatness.

It is crucial to note: the acts of compassion that spared *Yerushalayim* were not mass *chessed* organizations or national movements. The holy city was redeemed with simple and sincere care that individual Jews had for each other, even as their lives were falling apart. These small, quiet acts of care served as powerful foundations for *Yerushalayim*'s restoration.

Yes, it is exceedingly difficult for small individuals such as us to tackle the national problems that plague us. But the small acts of compassion, the sincere expressions of care and concern that we make for one another, are ultimately the metaphysical glue that will pull *Yerushalayim* back together.

Sodom died because no one cared for anyone. *Yerushalayim* lives on because we never gave up on each other. Never underestimate the power of *rachmanut* for a fellow Jew. May we be *zoche* to speedily witness the purification of *Yerushalayim* and the restoration promised to us so long ago.