



5786 Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Reuven Schreier Parashat Bo / פרשת בא

A Street Named for Heresy and a Lesson in Eternity

One of the most charming features of *Medinat Yisrael* is its street names. Simply walking the streets of *Yerushalayim* – or any other city in the country – one encounters roads named after heroes of *Tanach* and champions of our *Mesorah*. The names of Tanaitic sages, Amoraic scholars, and modern-day *gedolim* appear constantly on street signs throughout the land. (I personally have the distinct privilege of living on *Rechov HaRav Kook*.)

But of all the street names I have seen, one always stands out as my favorite. In the Old City of *Yerushalayim*, in the heart of the Jewish Quarter, there is a street named after a heretical sect of Jews that once posed a serious threat to our mesorah: *Rechov HaKaraim*, the Street of the Karaites. This street was once the center of Karaite life in the Old City. The Karaites denied the validity of *Torah SheBa'al Peh*, rejecting the Oral Tradition and relying exclusively on the Written Torah to derive Jewish practice. Throughout the Middle Ages, towering rabbinic figures such as the *Rambam* and *Ibn Ezra* battled the Karaites and their corrosive influence. Over time, the Karaite community dwindled, and the danger it posed to traditional Judaism faded.

Why am I so excited about a street in our holiest city named after a group of heretics?

In a penetrating essay on this week's *parshah*, the *Beit HaLevi* (*Shemot* 12:42) explains that the true underlying cause of the *Yerushalayim's* destruction was not merely political decay or disunity, but the denial of *Torah She Ba'al Peh* itself. During the Second Temple period, various heretical sects arose across *Eretz Yisrael* that rejected the oral traditions of *Chazal*. Among the most prominent and powerful were the Sadducees – unsurprisingly, the ideological forerunners of the Karaite movement many centuries later.

Once Jews splintered over the authority of *Torah SheBa'al Peh*, unity around the Torah became impossible. The shared language of *halachah* and *mesorah* eroded, giving way to suspicion, fragmentation, and ultimately baseless hatred. That internal disintegration, explains the *Beit HaLevi*, tore apart the social fabric of the nation and led directly to the destruction of the *Beit HaMikdash*.

For this reason, *Chazal* place such extraordinary emphasis on the study of *Mishnah* and the Oral Torah as a cornerstone of redemption. By reattaching ourselves to *Torah SheBa'al Peh*, we rectify the original breach that caused our disunity. In doing so, we prepare ourselves for reunion within the sacred four cubits of *halachah*, the *havayot* of *Abaye* and *Rava*.

The Karaite movement, and the threat it posed to our *Mesorah*, represented the lingering spiritual fallout of *Yerushalayim's* destruction. A thriving Karaite presence in the Old City was a painful reflection of unfinished spiritual work. But as this once-vibrant sect gradually disappeared, and the fire of *Torah SheBa'al Peh* continued to burn brightly in the *batei midrash* of *Klal Yisrael*, a stark truth emerged: those who deny the

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