



5786 Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Reuven Schreier Parashat Shoftim / פרשת שופטים

The Slumber of Yerushalayim

In this week's stirring *haftorah* (Yeshayahu 51-52), the *Navi* repeatedly calls upon *Yerushalayim* to awaken:

הַתְעוֹרְרִי הַתְעוֹרְרִי קוֹמִי יְרוּשָׁלַם אֲשֶׁר שָׁתִית מִיַּד יְקוֹק אֶת־כּוֹס חֲמָתוֹ...

Awaken, awaken, arise, *Yerushalayim*, for you have drunk from the hand of *Hashem* the cup of His wrath...

עוֹרִי עוֹרִי לְבָשִׁי עֲזָר צִיּוֹן לְבָשִׁי בְּגָדֵי תִפְאָרֶתךָ יְרוּשָׁלַם עִיר הַקֹּדֶשׁ...

Awaken, awaken, don your strength, *Tzion*; put on the garments of your beauty, *Yerushalayim* the Holy City...

These beautiful verses feature prominently in our weekly recitation of *Lecha Dodi*. Many do not realize that when we call out "עוֹרִי! עוֹרִי!" we are actually echoing the biblical words of *Yeshayahu*, calling upon *Yerushalayim* herself to awaken. Before we enter into *Shabbos*, we implore *Yerushalayim* to awaken, to shake off the tears of exile, and rise once again as the mighty city that serves as *Hashem's* beloved bride.

While these verses certainly refer to *Yerushalayim*, I could not help but think how much more meaning they carry when recited and *leined* immediately after *Rosh Chodesh Elul*. The *Rambam* famously writes (*Teshuva* 3:4) that the blowing of the *shofar* is akin to a wake-up call. Over the year, a Jew begins to "slumber," losing his grasp of his ultimate purpose and forgetting his Creator. The pettiness of this mortal world and the vicissitudes of daily life dull our awareness of truth and weaken our passion for the service of *Hashem*.

The *shofar* powerfully sounds the alarm. The same instrument that heralds Divine coronation awakens us from our spiritual slumber, reminding us who we are and what we ought to be.

While the formal *mitzvah* of *shofar* only applies to *Rosh HaShanah* itself, *Chazal* instituted that we blow *shofar* starting from *Rosh Chodesh Elul* itself (*Tur, Orach Chayim* 581). Our spiritual wakeup call therefore begins a full thirty days before the day of *Hashem's* coronation.

Seen through the lens of the *Rambam's* understanding of the slumbering Jew and *teshuva*, *Yeshayahu's* symbolism of a sleeping *Yerushalayim* takes on a whole new depth. In the darkness of exile, *Yerushalayim* and *Klal Yisrael* do not only experience suffering. They experience confusion and a loss of purpose. They are "drunk, but not from wine," pitifully oblivious to their intended destiny.

The tragedy of exile, therefore, is not merely our physical wandering, persecution, and pain. It is a profound state of spiritual disorientation. The Jewish people stumble through the darkness, blindly grasping for the glorious destiny that once illuminated their path.

If our slumber is not only physical, then our reawakening cannot be merely physical either. *Yerushalayim's* restoration is more than just the rebuilding of stones and concrete; it is the reclamation of her spiritual destiny, the donning of "the garments of her beauty" once again.



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This is why the words of *Yeshayahu* are so particularly appropriate as we enter *Chodesh Elul*. The *shofar* calls upon the Jewish people to awaken in repentance: עורי! Wake up! So too, *Yeshayahu* calls upon *Yerushalayim* to awaken, to shake off the slumber of exile and and reclaim her glorious destiny.