



**5785 Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Reuven Schreier Shmini Atzeret / שְׁמִינִי עֶצְרֵת /  
Parashat Bereshit / פְּרַשְׁת בְּרֵאשִׁית**

**Jerusalem and the Divine Image**

The *Gemara Yoma* (64b) records a fundamental debate amongst the *Tannaim* as to how the world was created. Throughout the extended discussion, the *Chachamim*, the sages of the *beit medrash*, conclude that Jerusalem is truly the center of the world. מציון נבראו, both the land and sky were created from *Tzion*. The אבן שתייה serves as the Foundational Stone for all of creation.

This central role of Jerusalem is not simply about geography or even primacy. The beginning of this physical universe begins with the *Har HaBayit*. When God, in His inscrutable wisdom, decided to create the physical cosmos, he “constricted” and clothed Himself with a mysterious process referred to in the Kabbalistic literature as *Tzimtzum*. So began the greatest illusion of all time and space. Physical creation now possessed a perception of independence from its Ultimate Source. Pathetic and petty man was granted the miraculous capacity of *bechira*, free choice. In fact, this great illusion is so thick that man can even flout the will of his Creator.

But we are created in the Divine Image. As Rav Chayim Volohziner explains at length in the first section of *Nefesh HaChayim*, a *Tzelem Elokim* means that our souls are a sanctified spiritual chain that transcends this physical universe through all of the higher spiritual worlds. Eventually, the soul’s root can be found in the highest of spiritual realms. The role of a *tzelem Elokim* is to dispel the darkness, this illusion of separation. The Jewish people are the key to unlocking the reality of God’s control over the cosmos. We crown Him King, expressing to the entire world the truth of ה' הוא האלוקים. Because of the brilliant composition of the *Neshama*, a Jew can transcend this physical world and gaze past the coarse exterior, peering into the spiritual realms that invigorate and sustain our corporeal universe.

The prime place in which a Jew can tap into the higher root of his or her soul and reveal the Divine Hand at work is Jerusalem. This is why *David HaMelekh* was the one to discover and purchase the place of the *Mikdash*, the place where the soul of *Adam* was first breathed into his physical body. As we discussed last week, *David* is the ultimate *eved Hashem* who sees God’s providence and control in all situations. When the Jews gathered in Jerusalem for the three festivals, they achieved a renewed sense of awe and love for the God that they realized was lovingly providing them with everything. The full capability of their *tzelem Elokim* was maximized.

However, this unique power is a double-edged sword. On one hand, a Jew could achieve the highest perception of his true spiritual self and transcend this physical realm when visiting Jerusalem. This is why *Chazal* tell us that countless *neviim* experienced their first prophecy when visiting the *Mikdash* during the festivals. *Nevuah* is only possible when someone can transcend the physical illusion of this world and tune into Divine frequencies that exist beyond.



**5785 Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Reuven Schreier Shmini Atzeret / שמיני עצרת /  
Parashat Bereshit / פרשת בראשית**

On the other hand, it also can create an obsession with the spiritual elements that invigorate the physical universe, leading to the tragic sin of *avodah zara* that is described for the first time in our *parsha* (*Bereishit* 4:26). When the leading sages of the *Anshei Kenneset HaGedolah* sought to capture the evil inclination for idol worship, it emerged in the form of a fiery lion from the Holy of Holies (*Yoma* 69b). Why would such a despicable, evil entity come forth from the holiest place on earth? Rav Moshe Shapira explains that the cause of *avodah zara* is actually the power to transcend this physical realm. The *Kodesh HaKodashim* is the most sanctified place on earth specifically because it is the gateway to higher realms.

Hence, this “evil inclination” is really just the opposite side of the same coin as *nevuah*. It is not a coincidence that the period of *nevuah* ended just as the evil inclination for idol worship was rendered ineffective. The thickening of the illusory *Olam HaZeh* shielded us from *avodah zara* but disabled our ability to transcend and perceive that which is beyond us. As we near the final redemption, the power of *nevuah* will *be’ezrat Hashem* return without its foolish and painful side effects.

May we merit to speedily witness the return to a fully built Jerusalem in which the nations of the world will see past the illusion of this world and recognize the God of Israel as their true Creator.



**5785 Divrei Torah on Jerusalem by Rabbi Reuven Schreier Shmini Atzeret / שמיני עֶצֶרֶת /  
Parashat Bereshit / פְּרַשְׁת בְּרֵאשִׁית**

