

Overcoming Terrorism

Category: Devarim, Re'eh

What if every place a Jew stands, wherever they bring G-d into their life, is as sacred as Jerusalem itself?

Jerusalem in the Torah

Whenever the topic of peace between Israel and its neighbors comes up, the Arab states assert that without resolving the issue of Jerusalem's ownership, peace in the Middle East is impossible. They argue that Jerusalem is at the heart of the conflict. Muslims claim it as their holy city, while Jews assert that Jerusalem rightfully belongs to the Jewish people.

One common argument used by Jews to refute the Muslim claim is that Jerusalem isn't mentioned even once in the Quran, while the Hebrew Bible references the city nearly 700 times. This, they argue, leaves no doubt that Jerusalem belongs to the Jews.

While this argument sounds compelling, it's not entirely accurate. It's true that in the Prophets and Writings, Jerusalem is mentioned hundreds of times—from its first mention in the Book of Joshua to the very last verse of the Bible. However, in the Five Books of Moses, the foundational texts of Judaism, Jerusalem isn't explicitly mentioned even once.

There is only a hint in the Torah, where the verse "Melchizedek king of Salem" (Genesis 14:18) refers to Jerusalem, as translated by the ancient Aramaic Targum. But the name Jerusalem itself doesn't appear.

In this week's Torah portion, Re'eh, we read that the only place where offerings can be brought is "the place that the L-rd will choose to put His name." Rashi explains that this refers to Jerusalem, and the Torah repeats this phrase six times without ever naming the location explicitly.

It wasn't until many centuries later, when King David arrived in Jerusalem, that it became clear that this was the chosen place. The Book of Chronicles states: "From the day I brought My people out of Egypt, I chose no city... but I chose

Jerusalem.” This raises the question: why didn’t the Torah explicitly state that Jerusalem is “the place the Lord will choose”?

Other cities in the Land of Israel, like Be’er Sheva, Hebron, and Bethlehem, are mentioned by name in the Torah. Yet Jerusalem, the holiest city to the Jewish people, is not mentioned at all.

What makes this even more perplexing is that according to the Midrash, Jerusalem was already known as the most sacred place to the Jewish people. It’s where Abraham built the altar for the binding of Isaac, where Jacob had his dream, and where Noah built his altar after the flood (as noted by Maimonides). All commentators agree that the Jewish people have known from the dawn of history that this was “the place the Lord will choose.” So why didn’t the Torah state this outright?

Jerusalem of the Heart

In his work *Guide for the Perplexed* (3:45), Maimonides offers a few reasons why Jerusalem isn’t explicitly mentioned in the Torah. One reason is that if the nations of the world had known it was the holiest place for the Jewish people, they might have fought to take it from them. Therefore, it was better to keep this fact hidden.

Another explanation is that if the Jewish people knew Jerusalem was the holiest city, each tribe might have tried to claim it for their own territory, leading to disputes and conflicts over who should control the city. By leaving it unnamed as “the place that G-d will choose,” these potential conflicts were avoided.

Some commentators draw a parallel to Avraham. When G-d commanded him to leave his homeland, He didn’t tell him exactly where to go, saying only, “to the land that I will show you.” This left Avraham searching for the place, making it all the more precious to him once he found it. Similarly, G-d wanted the Jewish people to seek out Jerusalem on their own, making it more valuable in their eyes.

The Rebbe provides a deeper insight. The Rebbe explains that the reason Jerusalem isn’t explicitly named in the Torah is that, in truth, wherever a Jew goes and engages in Torah and mitzvot, that place becomes “the place that G-d will choose.”

The Baal Shem Tov taught regarding the verse “to establish His name there,” that a Jew must recognize that their journey from place to place isn’t just by chance—it’s divinely guided so that they can reveal G-dliness wherever they are. In that place, they should bring their “Olahs and Zevachim” (Deuteronomy 12:6).

An Olah represents complete dedication to G-d, just as the entire sacrifice is burned on the altar, while Zevachim is the peace offerings, where part is offered on the altar, part is given to the priests, and part is eaten by the one bringing it.

This reflects the two types of mitzvot: those between a person and G-d, like prayer and tefillin, which are solely for G-d, and those between a person and others, like charity, where another person benefits, yet through the same act, one connects to G-d.

The Rebbe teaches that by fulfilling these mitzvot and transforming the place where G-d has led them into a spiritual sanctuary, where they offer both types of “sacrifices,” they are truly preparing for the time when G-d will bring us to “the place that G-d will choose”—Jerusalem, the holy city, and the Third Temple, speedily in our days, Amen.