

## A Daily Bread

**Date:** 24Adar, 5785 (March 24, 2025)

**Torah Portion:** Pekudei

**Topic:** Joy of All the Earth

King David says of Yerushalayim (Psa. 48:3), “Fairest joy of all the earth, Mount Zion, by the northern side of the great king’s city.” The Midrash translates Hebrew word נֹף (*nof*) “fairest; elevation; height) as a נִינְפֵי (*nin-fei*) “bride” – “joy of all the earth.” There was an incident involving a merchant who went to Yerushalayim to sell his wares. But he wasn’t able to sell any of his wares. He said, “Is this the city about which they say, ‘Joy of all the earth?!’” The seller’s surprise indicates that one could typically sell his wares immediately upon entering the city. He said, after selling all his wares, “Yerushalayim is indeed ‘fairest’ of site, joy of all the earth!”

R' Yochanan said: There was a “vault of calculations” outside of Yerushalayim, and anyone who wised to make a reckoning would go there to do so. Why is that? So that one would not make a reckoning in Yerushalayim and become distressed, for it is called “joy of all the earth.” It was a city brimming with happiness, whose inhabitants were involved only in joyous and *kadosh* matters. Because financial reckonings could distress a man who would realize that he had suffered a loss, they were conducted beyond the city limits so that distress would not be experienced in the city.

Yefeh To’ar suggests that this section of the Midrash may be describing the city’s spiritual attributes. Thus, the merchant may have been a sage looking for an interested party to whom he could dispense ethical guidance or with whom he could discuss Torah matters. And the “vault of reckonings” may have been a place where one would examine his actions for any shortcomings. The verse concludes with “the Great King’s city.”

Why was all this praise lavished upon Yerushalayim? Because the city was consecrated for Hashem and His Divine Presence was manifest there. Although some commentators believe that King David is the king of this verse, the Midrash maintains that since he himself spoke these words, as was pointed out above, it is impossible that he would have spoken this way about himself.

Although the plain sense of this passage is that potentially saddening activities were performed outside the joyous confines of the city. A deeper meaning is that in many places, Scripture promotes the virtue of contentment, of being satisfied with whatever one has. For example (Psa. 34:10-11), “There is no deprivation for His reverent ones; young lions may want and hunger, but those who seek Hashem will not lack any good.” The intention is not that the righteous are always well housed and well fed; oftentimes, they are not. In their own eyes, they never lack any good, as it is said (Psa. 21:3), “His heart’s desire [is what] You have given him.” The person of faith desires nothing beyond that which Hashem allots to him, for he is confident that this heavenly allotment is measured precisely to serve his best interests. A person of this caliber, though needy he may be, will always avow, as Ya’akov said to Esau, “I have all I need” (Gen. 33:11), that is, all that I need or want, no more and no less.

However, there will always be people who fall short of this ideal. They are painfully conscious of what they lack, envious of the good things others have, they form their own ideas about what their lot in life should be. King Shlemo said of them, “Elohim has made men simple, but they sought many intrigues” (Eccl. 7:29). But even such people had their moments of clarity and faith. Those occurred when they were in the *kadosh* city of Yerushalayim, the place where Hashem’s Providence was most acutely felt. It is as if you are walking about in the King’s court, and the people had a tendency to forget their want and experience the pure joy of a contented soul, as it is said (Deut. 8:9), “A land in which you eat bread without scarcity.”

The Midrash says that there was a “vault of calculations” outside the city, it alludes to the idea that the “intrigues” sought by those who small-mindedly calculate what they have and do not have held attraction only where the ennobling aura of the Divine Presence did not reach. But, inside the “city of the Great King”, where thoughts of living before Hashem filled people’s mind, the spirit of contentment predominated, making the City the true joy of all the earth.

Shalom.