

He took from the stones of the place. (28:11)

The *Midrash* disputes how many stones Yaakov *Avinu* took. Rabbi Yehudah posits that the Patriarch took twelve stones. Rabbi Nechemiah contends that he took three stones. The *Rabbanan* say that he took only two stones. **Horav Yechezkel Abramsky, zl**, offers a homiletic understanding of Rabbi Nechemiah's position that there were three stones. He suggests that "stones" are a metaphor which alludes to the three Patriarchs, who are the foundation stones upon which the world is built. Each Patriarch represents his individual approach towards serving the Divine. Avraham *Avinu* represents the *middah*, attribute, of *chesed*, kindness. Yitzchak *Avinu* characterizes *avodah*, service and devotion to Hashem; Yaakov embodies Torah.

Our Patriarch Yaakov arrived at the *makom Hamikdash*, place where the *Bais Hamikdash* would one day be constructed, and he encountered three stones. *Chazal* teach that the stones began to debate one another. "Upon my head, the *tzaddik* will rest his head," they each declared. When Hashem saw the stones becoming embroiled in controversy, He immediately fused them together to form one stone. What is *Chazal's* message? What lesson does the debate among the stones and Hashem's fusion of them impart to us?

Rav Abramsky explains that the stones represent the three Patriarchs who began to contend with one another. The issue was: Which of the three foundations upon which the world rests is actually the *rosh*, head, most significant? Where should the *tzaddik* place his head, his primary *avodah*, service to Hashem? On which one of the three media represented by the stones should he place his greatest focus? Avraham claimed that *chesed* is the prime vehicle for achieving distinction and for inspiring the world. Yitzchak felt that *avodah* should be characterized by prayer and intense spiritual devotion. Yaakov insisted that it is through Torah that one can make his most significant contribution toward maintaining the world.

Hashem settled the dispute by fusing them all together. His message to them was straightforward: One who seeks *shleimus*, spiritual perfection, is compelled to complete and perfect himself in all three foundations. One who exemplifies only one – or two – will not succeed in attaining perfection.

Yaakov arose in the morning, anointed the stone with oil, and declared, "This stone which I have set up as a pillar shall become a House of G-d" (*Bereishis* 28:22). He taught that one who strives to erect a veritable sanctuary for Hashem must embody and perfect himself in all three areas: Torah, *avodah* and *gemillus chassadim*.