

They shall make an Ark of atzei shittim, acacia wood, two and a half cubits its length; a cubit and a half its width, and a cubit and a half its height. (25:10)

Chazal (Talmud Yoma 21a) teach that one of the miracles which occurred in the *Bais HaMikdash* was *Aron einah min ha'middah*, the place of the *Aron HaKodesh*, Ark, was not included in the measurement of the *Kodesh HaKedoshim*, Holy of Holies. Based on the measurement, the Ark should not have fit inside the room. The *Kodesh HaKodoshim* measured twenty cubits by twenty cubits, and a *Braissa* states that a space of ten cubits was on either side of the *Aron*. Thus, only through a miracle did the *Aron* fit in the *Kodesh HaKodoshim*. Obviously, how this occurred is beyond the grasp of our mortal minds, but that it did occur is all that matters. Clearly, this miracle presents profound symbolism and a significant lesson for us.

Four levels of *hashroas ha'Shechinah*, resting of the Divine Presence, occurred within the environs of *Eretz Yisrael*. *Horav Eliyahu Baruch Finkel, zl*, observes that, concerning all four, the parameters of space miraculously did not exist. First (and the highest level) was the *Kodesh HaKedoshim*, with the *Aron HaKodesh*'s measurements not being included in its internal measurements – as if it were there, but not there – since it took up no space. Next was the *Azaray*, Temple Courtyard. During the *Shalosh Regalim*, Three Festivals, when the People ascended to *Yerushalayim* for the pilgrimage, they stood crowded (in the Temple Courtyard) but, when they bowed, they had sufficient space, such that no one was too close to his fellow (in order that no one would hear the confession of another). The miracle of space in *Yerushalayim* was manifest by everyone obtaining a place of hospitality in the Holy City. Jews came from all over; yet, they each had place to sleep. *Eretz Yisrael* is quoted in the *Talmud* (*Gittin 57a*). In *Eretz Yisrael* on *Har HaMelech*, King's Mountain, 600,000 cities sat, each containing a population paralleling the number of Jews that left Egypt. Three of those cities had a population double of those who left Egypt. The space of the *Har Hamelech* was far from able to absorb so many cities with so many people. When a certain heretic asked Rabbi Chanina why he had exaggerated the numbers, his response was, “*Eretz Yisrael* is called *Eretz HaTzvi*, Land of the Deer. Just as the skin of the deer cannot hold its flesh (for, after the deer is skinned, its hide shrinks), so, too, when *Eretz Yisrael* is settled, it expands; when it is not settled, it contracts.”

In any event, we observe that space miraculously does not play a role concerning *hashroas haShechinah*. Why? *Rav Elya Baruch* explains that while the *Mishkan* and *Bais HaMikdash* are physical edifices, they are infused with a spiritual dimension due to the fact that Hashem rests within them. Indeed, we can posit that these structures serve as the link which connects the physical world to the spiritual. In the spiritual dimension, no limitation of space exists. It transcends space. Thus, we may say that when the two connect, the spiritual sphere overwhelms the physical in such a manner that physicality no longer plays a role. Therefore, the *Aron HaKodesh*, which is the central point and focus of the *Mishkan/Bais HaMikdash*, the place where Hashem rests His Divine Presence, is not bound by physical parameters. It transcends them.

Having said this, we suggest that the more one is able to focus and connect with spirituality, the less he is constrained by physical limitations. This is why a holy person can experience extreme pain, yet neither feel it nor be encumbered by it. One can face the greatest adversity if his mind is focused on the spiritual. *Horav Elazar M. Shach, zl*, endured painful leg surgery without general anesthesia, because it would cloud his mind. His students held his leg down as the surgeon operated. *Rav Shach*, clearly in pain, never once emitted a cry of pain. His mind was on the Torah. He was transported to the world of the spirit, in another realm, where physical pain was non-existent.

Horav Yisrael Taub, zl, the *Modziter Rebbe*, composed his famous *Ezkerah*, a searing melody, during the surgical amputation of his leg, which he was compelled to undergo without anesthesia (his heart could not tolerate the anesthesia – it was 1913). The lengthy and intricate melody, expresses the profound agony he experienced viewing the thriving metropolis of pre-World War I Berlin, while simultaneously remembering the wretched state of Yerushalayim (at that time). For *Modziter Chassidus*, music is not merely an ancillary to worship; rather, it is the very essence of spirituality and the primary avenue for achieving true *avodah she'b'lev*, service of the heart. Indeed, *Rav Yisrael* was wont to say, “The world sees *heichal ha'neginah*, celestial sphere of melody, as being adjacent to the *heichal ha'teshuvah*, celestial sphere of repentance. I see the *heichal ha'neginah* as standing even higher than the *heichal ha'teshuvah*. Through song, we are able to captivate one’s heart and reach it, and, through the music, bring him back to Jewish observance. Music is like a switch that turns on the light that illuminates his soul.”

We all know simple Jews, some who were even distant from Jewish observance, who have been able to transcend pain and fear by connecting – even on an elementary and modest level – to a spiritual entity. An elderly Russian patient in a west coast hospital, who had many years earlier been observant, was asked by the hospital’s chaplain if he would like to touch a Torah scroll. This man was gravely ill, his morale sagging lower and lower, as the pain of his illness and the awareness of the inevitable were obviating any sense of joy. Yet, he wanted to touch the scroll. He requested water to wash his hands, then recited a blessing and touched the Torah. He asked if he could hold it – he did – and then wept and smiled simultaneously. From that day on, he was transformed into a different realm, a world where pain and fear did not exist.

The chaplain took note of this amazing metamorphosis and had a small *sefer Torah* commissioned, so that he could take it with him on his visits with patients who were feeling discouraged and depressed. As one patient encapsulated the effect on him, “I have not seen one of ‘these’ in such a long time. I have felt so separated from my family and from my people. Now, all of a sudden, I feel connected again. I am prepared to face whatever the future holds for me.”

Patients who were nearing their final hours of life have found strength and spiritual healing in holding the Torah. A grandson remarked shortly after his elderly grandfather’s passing, “In these past months, my grandfather lost much of his faculties and memories, but one thing he never lost was his connection to Torah.” Connecting with the spirit allows us to “lift up” from this physical

world.