

He took from the stones of the place which he arranged around his head. (28:11)

Chazal teach that the stones began quarreling, each one vying for the *tzadik* to rest his head upon it. Thereupon, Hashem combined them all into one stone to serve the *tzadik* equally. Apparently, the competition among the stones lasted only as long as they were separated from one another. Why did it not continue, even when they became one with different surfaces? Each stone could have demanded that Yaakov rest his head on his portion of the stone. This teaches us that competitiveness and divisiveness occur only when people are separated from one another. When everyone lives together in harmony, when they coalesce as one unit, whatever preexisting issues seemed to have plagued their relationship are no longer a factor. Once they all became one stone, every surface of the stone represented the entire unit as one.

True *achdus* is not uniformity – but equality. We are not the same, but we are equal. *Achdus* is not merely the absence of conflict, but the realization that the whole is the sum of its parts. Thus, all its parts are indispensable. When unity exists, no one is above and no one is below – the entire surface is one representation of everyone's contribution.

Horav Shalom BenTzion Felman, zl, cites the *Shaarei Teshuvah* (*Hilchos Tefillin* 42), quoting the *Eliyahu Rabbah* who issued a *halachic* ruling based upon this concept of *achdus*, which is derived from the stones. If the *retzuah*, strap of one's *tefillin shel yad*, *tefillin* he wears on his arm, tears off at the site of the *kesher*, knot, where he wraps it around his arm, he makes a new *kesher* using the other end of the *retzuah*. [In other words, if the "A" part of the *retzuah* which is used for the *kesher* tears, a new *kesher* may be made from the "B" part, other end of the *retzuah*.] This is a *chiddush*, innovative ruling, since one would think that the part of the *retzuah* which had previously been used for the *kesher* maintains a greater, more elevated level of *kedushah*, holiness. Thus, to use the other end of the *retzuah* would theoretically degrade the level of *kedushah*. Obviously, due to the fact that they are both parts of one long strap, they are considered equal in level of *kedushah*. They are one and the same, as we see from the stones that became one.

The *Mishneh* in *Pirkei Avos* (5:5) records ten miracles which occurred in the *Bais HaMikdash*. One of them is that no one ever came on pilgrimage to the *Bais HaMikdash* and remarked that he had no room/place to sleep overnight. This is miraculous, because Yerushalayim is just so big and the number of pilgrims by far exceeded the available space. *Rav* Felman comments that actually the amount of available space in no way coincided with the number of people that converged on Yerushalayim. He explains that, during the *Chagim*, Festivals, the level of joy and harmony that reigned in Yerushalayim as the pilgrims came to imbibe the *kedushah* of the holy Sanctuary and to revel in their exposure to the *Hashroas Ha'Shechinah*, Divine Presence, was so that no one thought about room to sleep. Everyone found a place because everyone made sure that everyone had a place. The joy was so palpable and the love among Jews was so visible that people just made a place for everyone. He quotes *Teshuvos Chasam Sofer* (*Yoreh Deah* 2-234) who says

that, unquestionably, it was tight and cramped in the *Azarah*. The miracle was that out of intense love for Hashem and immense joy in being able to participate, no one gave a second thought about space. It all worked out.

The following story is recorded in *Sefer HaZikaron* memorializing *Horav Moshe Schneider, zl* (*Rosh Yeshivah* in Frankfurt and London). A Jewish traveler arrived in the middle of the night to the city in which *Rav Moshe* resided. The man needed a place to rest his weary body, and he went looking around the Jewish community to see if someone would host him for the night. He came upon a large mansion which had twelve rooms and two inhabitants. He asked the owner of the house whether he had room for a weary traveler.

The reply was a polite, “No.” The owner of the house explained that one room was for him, the other for his son. The third was a game room, and the fourth was for an afternoon nap. He went through every room in the house and stated its purpose. He had twelve rooms, and no place for a Jewish brother to sleep. (Some people have no shame. This man was not malicious – just thoughtless and self-centered.) It bothered him that the Jewish traveler would have nowhere to go. Suddenly, it dawned on him, “I will take you to *Rav Schneider*’s house. He is the *Rosh Yeshivah*, and he will surely be able to put you up for the night.”

They came to the *Rosh Yeshivah*’s home, which was comprised of four rooms which were filled with students. Learning was always happening in every nook and cranny. *Rav Moshe* welcomed the guest; the *Rebbetzin* immediately heated up a warm dinner for him.

As they left, the father said to his son, “See, I told you *Rav Schneider* will somehow find a place for this man.”

When a house is filled with joy; when harmony reigns, there is always room. When it is all about “me” – there is no room for anyone else.