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Set in Stone

The image of stones seems to be a recurring motif throughout our *parashah* this week. First, we meet Yaakov Avinu, fleeing the wrath of his brother Eisav, on the way to his uncle Lavan's home. He takes stones and places them around his head before he goes to sleep; he then dreams of angels ascending and descending a ladder that stretches up to the heavens. Upon awakening, he takes the stone and sets it as an altar; he pours oil over it and pledges one tenth of his future assets to Hashem.

In the next scene, Yaakov Avinu encounters a group of shepherds who are waiting to take a huge stone off the well so they can water their flocks. As he sees Rachel Imeinu approaching, he lifts the stone with unusual ease and allows the shepherds access to the water. Finally, at the end of the *parashah*, Yaakov Avinu and his family gather stones in a heap, calls it *"Gal-ed,"* and mark the separation between Yaakov and Lavan. Let us explore the significance of these stones and what they symbolize.



Rav Moshe Breslover, in his work *L'machar Atir*, offers a beautiful insight. In his blessings to the tribes at the end of his life, Yakov Avinu describes himself as, *"Avir Yakov mi'sham ro'eh even Yisrael*— the Mighty One of Jacob; from there he sustained the rock of Israel..." *(Bereisheet* 49:*24)* Rashi teaches that *even*, rock, incorporates the words *av* and *ben*, father and son, the letter *bet* connecting both the beginning and end of the word. The rock signifies continuity and *binyan*, building the future. Indeed, this is one of the reasons given for putting a stone on a *matzeivah*, indicating that one's legacy continues far after his passing. Our *parashah* this week is the section that chronicles the building of the Jewish people; these three episodes stand for three distinct aspects of building a family.

The first phase is having a vision. One must conceptualize and anticipate the kind of family he wants to have. Yaakov Avinu, as the Ramban notes, took the stones from the place of the *Akeidah*, representing deep devotion and faithfulness to Hashem. It is these stones that he put beneath his head. This symbolizes his lofty thoughts and his vision for the family he hopes to raise. The ultimate vision is when these stones form into one unit, collectively serving Hashem in harmony.

The next phase is expanding one's family. The Abarbanel suggests that the well is

emblematic of the fruitful woman and the stone blocking its opening symbolizes infertility. Through his *yichud lev* and determination to build *Am Yisrael*, Yaakov Avenue unblocks the well, and the tribes are born.

However, the last phase is the most crucial, wherein the Jewish people solidify their identity and their commitment to their vision. At this point he builds a mound that sets a clear demarcation between his family and that of Lavan. It is a testimony that the Jewish people are "*am l'vadad yishkon*," a nation that dwells alone, protected from surrounding cultures and influences.

Rav Elchanan Samet in *Pirkei Elisha* notes that this mound plays a significant role later in Jewish history. This is where Achav, king of Israel is killed in the battle of *Ramot Gilad*, the very same place where Yaakov Avinu clearly marked a separation. Achav was the first king to blur the lines between the Jewish people and the other nations, hence, his death occurs specifically in this place. It is also not coincidental that Na'aman, who killed Achav, was told by the prophet Elisha to immerse in the Jordan river to rid himself of leprosy. The Jordan river marks the border between Israel and her neighboring countries. The war with Aram was not simply a political war, it was a war that was meant to remind the Jewish people of their identity and to be loyal to their reality as G-d's people.

We live in a world where outside cultures permeate our lives in multiple arenas. It is essential that we remember our holy vision for our families and demonstrate our uniqueness with pride, projecting our mission to increase Hashem's glory wherever we can. ■



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