

VAYEITZEI 5773

Rabbi Aharon Ziegler

Gemara Chulin [91b] notes the variance of the Torah expression. It first states that Ya'akov took "mei'avnei ha'makom" [28:11] Ya'akov took from the 'stones of the place', avnei is plural, (Chazal tell us there were in fact 12 stones,) and then writes [28:18] "Vayikach et HaEven" and he took the stone, one singular stone. The message being that the Jewish people will be founded in a family consisting of 12 tribes. The Midrash tells us that Ya'akov said to himself, "If these 12 stones that I am placing under my head will merge into a single stone, I will take it as a Divine Sign that I am destined to fulfill the decree of merging the 12 tribes into one cohesive nation.

Ya'akov Avinu knew that the Beracha HaShem gave to his grandfather Avraham was "V'e'escha L'goy Gadol" [Bereishit 12:2], "I will make you into a great nation". The meaning of Goy Gadol certainly does not mean the biggest or largest nation, for we never did have large numbers like other nations [Chinese or Indians] of the world. What it means is that "Gadol" has a special connotation, as it is revealed to us by its first appearance in the Torah, "Et Ha'maor HaGadol" [Bereishit 1:16] referring to the great light, the sun. Here too, the sun is not called Gadol because it is so big. The sun is called "Gadol" because it provides light and heat for the entire world. And that is the true meaning of Gadol.

In the Shemoneh Esrei when we praise G-d as being the "HaKeil HaGadol" , we follow this by referring to HaShem as the "ME'CHAL'KEIL CHAIM B'CHESED, ME'CHAYEI MEITIM, SOMECH NOFLIM, ROFEI CHOLIM", The G-d that sustains us with our needs, that raises those who have fallen and cures the sick. That is the definition of a Gadol.

Ya'akov understood that his task would be to take the 12 stones and merge them into one. Develop a family of twelve tribes and forge them into a nation of people that care about each other and have the capacity to help one another. Baruch HaShem-Ya'akov was successful.

We are just beginning to come out of the great storm disaster that struck the east coast of the U.S., with thousands of homes and businesses totally wiped out. Total Jewish communities destroyed together with their shuls, Sifrei Torah and Sefarim. But on the other hand there are thousands of heartfelt stories of Jews coming to the aid of their fellow Jewish brethren. Jews who were not affected by the storm, be they Chassidic, yeshivish, secularists or anything else, all opened their homes and hearts. Millions of

dollars were raised, as well as Tefillot recited in all shuls. Even Israel dispatched teams of search and rescue experts in order to help the United States.

One story stands out. Each day of the storm, carloads of talmidim from the Queens Chafetz Chaim Yeshiva drove to Far Rockaway to assist those adversely affected. They schlepped, they cleaned, they loaded and unloaded sefarim that were water damaged beyond repair. They returned each day weary and quite sore, but satisfied that they had done a little something to ease the pain of fellow Jews in need.

One evening, after a day of cleaning as Mincha time was approaching, a group of them headed for the Young Israel of Queens Valley. In the lobby it dawned upon them that they were dressed in dirty, dusty, sweaty work clothes and they didn't feel comfortable to enter the main shul dressed like that. Just then, the Rabbi of the Y.I. walked into the lobby and noticed the bewildered talmidim. He noticed their hesitation and asked them what the problem was all about. They explained their predicament – the need to daven but the inappropriateness of their clothes. The Rabbi eyed their sorry faces and exclaimed, “Not only are you worthy to enter the shul, your clothes are “bigdei Kodesh”, holy garments, because you just returned from helping Acheinu Bnei Yisrael in their time of anguish”

Ya'akov Avinu, looking down upon his people from heaven, is truly satisfied. For with all our strife and differences we have demonstrated our ability to act with unity and achdut. When in need, the TWELVE stones can change into ONE.