



There is a line in an Israeli song by Yossi Gamzu about the *Kotel*, the Western Wall that surrounded the ancient Temple in Jerusalem and has been an important site to visit since the reunification of Jerusalem in 1967: “*Yesh anashim im lev shel even, yesh avanim im lev adam.*” “There are people with a heart of stone; there are stones with a human heart.”

I was thinking about these words this week while reading *Parashat Vayetze*. Silent stones are witness to history in ways that are powerful and mythic. Three times they appear in the text: passive, silent, sometimes manipulated by God, sometimes moved by humans, but always teaching a lesson.

As Jacob prepares to sleep in Luz, the text tells us he “took from the stones of that place and put them under his head” (Gen. 28:11). He wakes up, shaken by a divine dream of angels ascending and descending a ladder from the earth to the heavens, and takes *the stone* from under his head (28:18). The stones, plural, had become one single stone. Rashi explains the difficulty by stating that God fused them into one because the stones quarreled as to on which one Jacob would lay his head.

Jacob then takes that stone and sets it up as a pillar, anoints it with oil and vows to make it a “house of God.” What is important is that Jacob departs with the dream and new clarity of God’s presence, but the stone remains a witness to Jacob’s spiritual awakening.

As Jacob continues on his journey, he comes to a well with its mouth covered with a larger stone. The only way to roll the stone from the well was for all the shepherds to move it together. One midrash suggests it was put there because of mistrust and suspicion among the shepherds. When Jacob lays eyes on Rachel for the first time at the well, he is transformed from a simple man to a super man and rolls the stone away himself. This stone becomes symbolic of the power of love. Moving the stone was done with the intention to help, not to hurt, and by moving it Jacob finds the love of his life.

Finally, after 20 years, Jacob, with four wives and twelve children (Benjamin yet to be born) is fleeing from his uncle and father in law Laban. When Laban catches up with Jacob, intense conflict ensues until a peaceful settlement is offered. The two men collect stones and make a demarcation line, a border between them, and declare that the other cannot pass over to do harm (31:52). A single stone once again serves as a pillar, a “witness” to their good relations.

The stones of this *parasha* are monuments to transformation, instruments of love, and a testament to peace. May these stones that indeed contained elements of the human heart, serve as models for how we can turn our own hardened hearts to healing ones – in Jerusalem and everywhere.

Shabbat Shalom,  
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