Pirkei Avot 5:5
Plenty of Room for Everyone

> *"Our forebearers experienced ten miracles in the Holy Temple… They stood crowded but had ample space to prostrate themselves; never did a snake or scorpion cause injury in Jerusalem; and, no man ever said to his fellow, 'I have no room to lodge in Jerusalem.'"*

The "ample space in which to prostrate themselves" means that every individual had four cubits around him. The sages explain that this was also experienced when praying, "so that one person would not hear the prayer of the other,"[1] or "so that one individual would not hear the confession of the other [for instance on Yom Kippur] so that he would not be ashamed."[2]

The *Maharal*[3] explains that the ten miracles that appear in our *mishnah* correspond to the ten *sefirot*, from below to above. Thus, the final three miracles that we quoted above correspond to understanding, wisdom, and the crown. Standing crowded but having ample space to prostrate corresponds to the *sefirah* of understanding, which is connoted "the river's breadth" (רְחוֹבוֹת הַנָּהָר), a phrase that also suggests space. In addition, the Third Holy Temple is called *Rechovot*, which literally means "breadth."[4] Identifying the Temple with breadth serves to reveal the secret of the verse, "From the straits (crowded) I called *Kah* [and] *Kah* responded to me from the breadth."[5] The transformation from being crowded to standing with ample room can be encapsulated by the initials letters of the Hebrew words for "crowded" (צְפוּפִים) and "ample room" (רְוָוחִים) which together spell the word mentioned later in the *mishnah* in the phrase "I have no room [i.e., my accommodations are 'narrow'] to lodge in Jerusalem," the word meaning "narrow" (צַר). Thus, the miracle that occurred was a transformation of an initial experience of being crowded into one of feeling ample space.

The entire experience of standing crowded and prostrating with ample space is an expression of love of Israel, who crowd together without pushing. Subsequently, they make room for one another so that every individual can pray and confess his sins to God without being ashamed. There is an idiom from the sages that captures this state. It can be translated as, "the minute that contains the abundant" (מוּעָט מַחֲזִיק אֶת הַמְּרֻבֶּה). Amazingly, the value of this entire idiom is 949, which is also the numerical value of the term, "love of Israel" (אַהֲבַת יִשְׂרָאֵל). In Aramaic, the word for "love" is pronounced

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[1] *Bereisheet Rabbah* 5:7.

[2] *Rashi* to *Yoma* 21a.

[3] *Gevurot Hashem* Second Introduction; *Ibid*. c. 71.

[4] Genesis 26:22 and see *Ramban* to v. 20.

[5]. Psalms 118:5.

rechimu (רחֵימוּ) and its letters are a permutation of "ample spaced" (רְוָוחִים), suggesting that where there is love between people, there is plenty of room for everyone.

In recent decades, Jews "stand crowded" on Lag Ba'omer, the day of passing of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai in Meron. The annual event in Meron has become somewhat reminiscent of the pilgrimage to the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. Indeed the Zohar writes that, "Who is the face of the Master, God? This is Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai."[6] Incredibly, the value of the word "crowded" (צְפוּפִים) is equal to Meron (מִירוֹן), the burial place of Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai! It is imperative, however, to keep order in the crowd. In Hebrew order (סֵדֶר) equals "ample space" (רווחים)! It was Rabbi Shimon Bar Yochai who revealed the secret behind God's love of Israel, through the words of his son, Rabbi Eliezer who said that "love that compresses the flesh."[7] In other words, because of His love for the Jewish people, God pushes His infinite revelation—His infinite light—off to the side, He contracts the light that reaches us, so that we may exist.[8]

Three Levels of Nullification

Chassidut explains that there are three levels of nullification corresponding to the three dimensions of reality: Worlds, Souls, and Divinity.[9] The first level is nullification of the feeling of being, when from within the simple experience of independent, separate existence, a person consciously attempts to nullify his ego and to repeat to himself that all that he has is a gift from Heaven. This state corresponds to the dimension of Worlds.

Above this level is nullification in reality, absence of self-consciousness. This level exists in potential in every Jew. It manifests when an individual enters the great embrace of the public in a large gathering "standing crowded" (standing means nullification) and includes himself in the collective consciousness of the people of Israel. This state has a purifying energy, similar to immersion in a *mikveh* (ritual pool) as in the verse, "God is the *mikveh* of Israel."[10] Thus, when the Jews make the pilgrimage to the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, all of them are ritually pure. This level of nullification corresponds to the dimension of souls.

Above this level is the literal nullification in reality when the soul integrates completely with its Divine source, literally, with Divine consciousness. This is symbolized by the description, "ample space to prostrate." Prostration is nullification in reality. When a person is immersed in his essential broad space, it becomes infinite.

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[6] *Zohar Chadash* 2:38a.

[7]. *Bava Metzia* 84a.

[8] As explained in *Tanya*, c. 49, which, by Divine Providence, is the section of Daily *Tanya* read on *Lag Ba'omer*.

[9] See the introduction to *The Hebrew Letters*.

[10] There is a story told of Rabbi Nachum of Chernobyl and one Yom Kippur eve he did not manage to immerse in a *mikveh*. Instead, he lowered his head and "immersed" in the crowd that had gathered around him.