

CHAPTER VI — *The Kosel Maaravi*

Just as the synagogue assumes holiness because of the spirit of Hashem which dwells there, so too, the kosel maaravi which is the last remnants of the Beis Hamikdosh retains holiness because of the Shchinah which has never moved from it. As a result the area has been for centuries a place of prayer for many thousands. The western wall is treasured by all. Some kiss the stones, others place petitions written on sheets of paper in the cracks of the wall as a form of prayer.

To truly appreciate this hallowed spot one must trace the history of the wall and its sanctity as it relates to Halacha.

The kosel maaravi is not the remnant of the Beis Hamikdosh proper as was supposed by some scholars but rather the western wall of the Temple Mount. The wall rests on the rocky bottom of the Tyropean Valley and it separated the Temple from the upper city. In all there are 46 rows of stone. Nineteen are underground and the rest are above ground level. Originally the entire wall was exposed but due to many wars and exiles, parts of the wall was covered. In fact, there was a three hundred year period when the entire wall was buried under earth and rubble. The 19 underground rows and the first 5 above ground was constructed by Kings Dovid and Shlomo. These rows were laid in a terrace fashion, each row being set back a few inches more than the one beneath it. The wall thus slanted eastward. These 24 rows are of rough hewn stone and are uniformly arranged. The next four rows are smoothed stones which were added in the period of the Second Temple. Four more rows were added in the Herodian period bringing the total to 32 rows. Only a century ago, 11 rows were added, and finally three more in 1929. Thus the wall has had five periods of construction, 3 of which were constructed by Jews and the two by Arabs. The total height of the exposed wall is 58 ft. The rows constructed by Dovid and Shlomo are unusually large, each stone being approximately $3\frac{1}{4}$ ft. high, between 10 and 39 feet long, and weighing at least 100 tons. While some of the upper stones are cracked, broken and chipped the foundation stones of Dovid and Shlomo remain solid and have not been affected by earthquakes. This testifies to the statement of our Sages that the works of Dovid (and Moshe) will not be destroyed.

Because the wall assumes sanctity of the Temple one must act with dignity there. One may not take a piece of stone as a souvenir or carve his name in the stone, nor may he lean against the wall unnecessarily. Although it is permissible to touch the wall, fingers may not be placed in the cracks unless one has immersed in a mikvah.

Since the six day war (1967) the kosel maaravi has attained special significance.