

What Unity Really Means

I have always had difficulty understanding the concept of k'ish echad b'lev echad, as one person with one heart. How are we to conceptualize this level of kinship and unity? I recently came across a short story that conveys this message. This story is about an American entertainer who was asked to be part of a show that would go to Europe to entertain the United States troops who were battling in World War II. He said that he was very busy and could only give them a few minutes. Since the entertainer was quite famous, to have him for even a few minutes was well worth it. He agreed to do one short monologue before continuing on to his next appointment. He went up to the stage, performed his act, but instead of leaving - he stayed. He went on to another monologue. As the applause continued, so did he. Soon, the five minutes stretched into fifteen minutes. After a half hour, he finally left the stage to roaring applause. The director of the show came over and thanked him profusely. He said, "I thought you had to leave after five minutes. What made you stay for half an hour?"

The entertainer responded, "I did have to go, but if you will follow me, I will show you what it was that compelled me to stay on." They went to a corner of the stage where they could see the front row. "You can see for yourself why I stayed, if you look at the front row," said the entertainer.

In the front row were two men, each of whom had lost an arm in the war. One had lost his right arm, the other had lost his left. Together, they were able to clap, and that is exactly what they were doing - clapping loudly and cheerfully, one arm of one soldier with the arm of his friend. This is the meaning of "ish echad" - two people realizing that alone they cannot function. They each need the second person, so that together they both become one person. Unity is the realization that without my friend, I am not complete.