

# PARSHAS TERUMAH - EATING AT THE ROYAL TABLE

by Rabbi Yitzchok Adlerstein

## Eating At The Royal Table<sup>1</sup>

*The wings of the cheruvim should spread upwards, sheltering the Kapores with their wings. The face of each should turn to the other. Towards the Kapores will the cheruvim face.*

Simply put, the cheruvim speak of love. Their outstretched wings unfolded as a protective canopy of love, that ensure the safety and continuity of the contents of the Aron. Since the two cheruvim symbolize G-d and His people, they pose a striking image of sharing a deep passion for Torah. At the same time, the cheruvim look to each other - reminiscent of the deep longing of a bride and groom for each other. The relationship between G-d and His people is not primarily one of Master and subject, but of mutual commitment and love. More specifically, as they face each other expectantly, part of the gaze of both is directed downward to the Kapores, the cover of the Aron. If you must know what cements the relationship between Hashem and Klal Yisrael, it is the Torah itself. Our pasuk visually displays the famous claim of the Zohar, "Yisrael, Torah and Kudsha Brich Hu are one!" In the position of the cheruvim atop the Kapores, the three are visually joined

History, however, spoiled the image. At least it changed it significantly. When Shlomo built his Beis ha-Mikdosh, he installed cheruvim that stood beside the Aron, and are described[2] as facing out towards the Temple structure - not towards each other as specified by our pasuk. The gemara[3] posits a solution. The cheruvim turned towards each other when "Yisrael acted according to the will of the Omnipresent," but away from each other when Yisrael did not.

Rashbam explains that the cheruvim turned miraculously, responding to the spiritual qualities of the nation. This view is difficult to defend. The verse that describes Shlomo's cheruvim as facing outwards pictures them as they were initially emplaced by Shlomo, and not at a time of some later spiritual failing. Without doubt, every Shlomo's Temple faithfully followed explicit Divine instruction[4].

We could explain somewhat differently. The gemara does not imply anything miraculous in the posture of the cheruvim. Where they faced was a product of different epochs in Jewish history, not the spiritual vicissitudes within each epoch.

We can understand these epochs by looking to the way kings relate to their subjects. A beneficent

king provides sustenance for all in his realm, compensating his subjects who work the land for him. These workers not only work hard to earn what they eat, they must toil to turn their entitlement into a consumable meal. Food is not handed to them as a finished product. What they produce depends not only on the energy they expend, but on general conditions - mazal - that are beyond their ability to control. Very few of the king's closer advisors come from this group.

Members of a second group are treated very differently. To those who charge into battle to protect the honor of the sovereign and his realm, meals are provided, already prepared, in a relatively fixed and predictable manner. The king relates to these servants with special warmth. While he will not ordinarily stop to speak to a common laborer, he does not find it beneath his royal dignity to converse with a common soldier.

These two roles translate into different ways people are sustained by our Heavenly King. For most people, sustenance depends on labor - avodah. That avodah can come in the form of the korbanos (when the Temples stood) or of prayer (even when they didn't.) The quality of a person's avodah provides him with an "entitlement:" a potential to succeed in some activity or venture. The individual must still toil with great exertion to turn the potential into reality, doing what is required to generate some item or income.

A smaller number of people fight the wars of Torah. They take up and safeguard the honor of Hashem's precious Torah by their deep and diligent attention to their meaning - of constant involvement in the milchamto shel Torah. Their needs are provided for through the direct supervision of the King; what He gives them comes to them with limited exertion. As is well known, "Hashem loves the gates distinguished by halachah"[5] more than places of avodah.

In the decades of their travels in the wilderness, the Bnei Yisrael occupied themselves exclusively with the study of Torah. They were fed manna, for which they did not have to exert themselves. (While korbanos were offered, those offerings served primarily as a way of inviting in Hashem's Presence for the purpose of direct encounter. They were not offered as they would be in the future - as the preferred form of avodah. The cheruvim of such a period faced each other as a depiction of the mutual love of Hashem and His people.

This changed entirely with the inauguration of Shlomo's Beis ha-Mikdash. Klal Yisrael's sustenance would come through the avodah of korbanos. The expectant eyes of the people would be upon His special House. Hashem Himself would, kivayachol, look there expectantly for His beloved korbanos. The cheruvim, therefore, faced outward. Shlomo's cheruvim symbolized the lifestyle of the entire epoch, not spiritual failure within it. Even when the Bnei Yisrael were attentive to both halachah in general and the requirements of the korbanos, they were still as a society considered "not following the Will of the Omnipresent" relative to the years in which several million Jews occupied themselves with Torah study. At the same time, the meaning of Moshe's original cheruvim was never lost. Those cheruvim remained atop the Aron during the centuries of Shlomo's bayis, serving alongside the free-

standing cheruvim that Shlomo provided. Indeed, even the churban could not erase their significance, as Moshe's cheruvim were sequestered away for safe-keeping[6] , in a place where they are safe even today. Their symbolism would be relevant for all times, in regard to those individuals who make their life's work the study of Torah. They, too, would know this loving relationship and close management by Divine Providence.

The King does not demand that all serve in His army. Yet one who is capable of serving in the milchamtohshe Torah but chooses a different role for himself cannot be said to be "following the will of the Omnipresent."

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1. Based on Ha'amek Davar and Harchev Davar, Shemos 25:20
  2. Divrei ha-Yamim2 3:13
  3. Bava Basra 99A
  4. See Divrei ha-Yamim1 28:19
  5. Berachos 8A. The gemara apparently means places where Torah is studied deeply enough to arrive at definitive halachic conclusions.
  6. Rambam, Beis ha-Bechirah 5:1
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