

PARSHAS VAYAKHEL & PEKUDEI - COVERING ALL OPTIONS

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Covering All Options¹

He placed the Kapores on the Aron from above.

This is a rather strange piece of information, given that there was no other place that the Kapores would fit! This is not the only anomaly concerning the Kapores. Earlier, the Torah instructed that, "You shall put the Kapores upon the Aron of the Tablets of Testimony in the Kodesh ha-Kodashim[2]."

We can only conclude that the Kapores was placed atop the Aron twice. It was put firmly in place only inside the Holy of Holies. Prior to this, however, it was loosely "placed" -not "put" - on top of the Aron. Both were carried in together, with the Kapores placed perpendicular to its final, designated orientation as a snugly fitting cover of the Aron.

The question, of course, now becomes, "Why?" Why would the Torah insist on a particular way to carry in the components of the Aron for final assembly within the Kodesh ha-Kodashim? Our attempt to explain this instruction would instruct us to do this is fascinating, and requires us to revisit the lives and mission of the avos.

Avraham moved from place to place, distinguishing himself in the study of Hashem's word. His deep involvement with Torah study afforded him protection from all enemies. Yitzchok stayed put in Israel, occupying himself with avodah, which meant korbanos, but particularly prayer. Yaakov, like his grandfather, was not able to sink long-term roots in one place. He, too, moved from place to place; he was protected by merging his Torah with the determined pursuit of peaceful coexistence with hostile neighbors. The history of the Jewish people recapitulated these steps.

National immersion in the focused study of Torah sustained the Bnei Yisrael for the decades of wandering through the wilderness. That was what occupied them spiritually; HKBH based His hashgachah on their constant involvement with Torah.

After they entered the Land, however, it was avodah that determined the nature and quality of Hashem's providence. That providence is symbolized by the cheruvim, with their outstretched wings protectively covering the Aron. When Shlomo built the first beis ha-Mikdosh, he installed another set

of cheruvim, facing outward to the altars upon which the Bnei Yisrael would focus their national avodah. While the original cheruvim were still in place, looking down longingly to the Torah itself, as represented by the Tablets, this method of securing Divine protection became the province of only the few. For the majority, individual and national success hinged on the quality of their avodah, meaning korbanos and tefillah.

When aveiros forced us into galus, we needed to copy the *modus operandi* of Yaakov. We learned to pursue peace with the peoples with whom we lived, combining that pursuit with uncompromising loyalty to the demands of the mitzvah system.

Which configuration of the Aron represented Divine hashgachah during galus? Here is where our pasuk projects a crucial message. The Aron of galus is the Aron as it is being transported towards its destination, independent of the mikdosh. The Kapores rests loosely atop the Aron, but not wedged into place. Its stability on the Aron cannot be taken for granted; it requires the support of those who stand close to it.

In every period in our history, limud Torah plays a crucial role. Galus is no different - but deep, creative, quality limud Torah only flourishes in galus when it is supported by others. Like the Aron before it is placed in its position, it requires hands reaching out to support and sustain it.

Yirmiyahu speaks to a nation traumatized by Nevuchadnezer's destruction of the beis ha-mikdosh: "Thus said Hashem, 'This people that survived the sword found favor in the wilderness, as I led Yisrael to its place of tranquility[3].'" The text speaks of survivors of Nevuchadnezers' depredations finding favor in a wilderness. This is puzzling. The Jews at the time were not exiled to any wilderness!

We can apply our discussion above to Yirmiyahu's words. The survivors who looked back upon a beis ha-mikdosh in ruins wondered what sort of future could be possible. Hashem's providential oversight of their sustenance and their security had previously hinged upon their avodah and their learning. Without a beis ha-mikdosh, their avodah lifeline had been cut! With what would they approach Hashem? The navi relates that the people found a model that encouraged them. Their ancestors had lived in a wilderness for almost four decades. Their well-being was facilitated not by avodah, but by their learning. This possibility pleased them; they found favor in it.

The navi continues, "From the distance Hashem appeared to me." While the avodah of korbanos required that a person present himself at the beis ha-mikdosh, learning could take place anywhere, even in distant places. "And I have loved you with an eternal love." Korbanos were sensitive to time. They could be brought only at times that a beis ha-mikdosh stood. Even during those times, korbanos were only acceptable during the day, but not at night. The wilderness model of Torah study, on the other hand, is not time-bound. It is truly eternal.

The people were still uneasy. Torah study presented them with a substitute for the korbanos, but was it reasonable to expect that people could muster up enough focus and concentration to be able

to excel at learning? "Therefore I have extended kindness to you." Hashem offered them a share in Torah learning even if they could not directly involve themselves in it. Their kindness would earn for themselves a share in it. Those who earned a living could support young people and the like who devoted themselves to Torah learning.

The position of the Kapores for the short trip to the Kodesh ha-Kodashim, only hinted at in the text, turns out to describe the longest epoch to date in our history as a people.

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1. Based on Haamek Davar, Shemos 40:20 and 26:34, and Harchev Davar 40:20
 2. Shemos 26:34
 3. Yirmiyahu 31:1
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