

TORAH COMES DOWN FROM BETWEEN TWO CHILD-LIKE FIGURES

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Terumah

Torah Comes Down From Between Two Child-like Figures

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape #582 - Silk in Halacha. Good Shabbos!

The parsha contains one of the more unique artifacts used in the Mishkan -- the Cherubim [Cherubs], which were placed on top of the Aron which housed the Luchos. The Torah states: "It is there that I shall arrange audience with you, and I shall speak with you from atop the lid, from between the two Cherubim that are on the Ark of the Testimony, and it is all that I shall command you pertaining to the Children of Israel [Shemos 25:22].

We do not have an exact picture of what the Cherubim looked like, but we are taught that their faces were child-like. Imagine the scene: The holiest city in the world (Jerusalem), the holiest place in the city (the Temple Mount), the Holy of Holies within the Temple complex -- this was the holiest spot on the face of the planet. The Master of the Universe speaks to Moshe from above the Aron and His Voice comes out from between the two Cherubim! The Heavenly Voice comes out from between the faces of babes.

What is the symbolism? What is the message?

Rav Shmuel Rozovsky, zt"l, one of the Roshei Yeshivas from Ponnevitz writes that Torah can be taught from the best Rebbe in existence (the Almighty), to the best disciple in the world (Moshe Rabbeinu), under the best of conditions (in the Holy of Holies), but the receiver has to be child-like. In order to learn Torah, we need to maintain the child-like enthusiasm and child-like innocence that will allow us to accept Torah and integrate it into our personalities.

This is a challenge because the older we become, the less child-like we are. This is a Jewish quality

that the prophet refers to: "For Israel is a young lad and I love him" [Hoshea 11:1]. The Almighty testifies that He constantly loves Klal Yisrael because Klal Yisrael is still like a child. We have not become jaded and we have not become turned-off. We are still willing to accept, like a child.

This is mussar [chastisement] to all of us. The older we become, the more cynical we become. Cynicism is at the opposite end of the spectrum from the idea of "Israel is a young lad and I love him." The pasuk [verse] in Hoshea advises us to maintain our innocence and maintain our purity. It is a challenge for us all.

But what should NOT be a challenge for us is that at least our CHILDREN should still be "child-like". It may be difficult at age 40, at age 50, at age 60 to maintain child-like innocence. But it should not be a challenge that when a kid is 10 years old, he is no longer a child. It is unfortunately more and more the case that our children have picked up from us and from our society, even when they are 10 and 12 and 15, a cynicism that does not allow them to be considered "child-like" anymore. They are no longer the innocent Cherubim and as such, the Torah they are supposed to learn becomes exceedingly difficult for them to accept.

We have to try to ensure that our children should at least not become cynics, at least while they are still children. The only way we can try to ensure that is if there are incidents in life that tend to make us jaded and more cynical, we not bequeath that attitude to our children. There is plenty of time, unfortunately, for them to become cynical on their own. We do not need to help to make them cynics.

The Difference Between The Gentile and Jewish View of The Cherubim

The Talmud quotes in the name of Rav Katina that when the Jews came up for the pilgrimage festivals, the priests would pull back the curtain in the Beis HaMikdash and show them that the Cherubim (one of which had masculine features and one of which had feminine features) were embracing one another. The priests would say: "See how beloved you are before the Almighty, like the love of a male and female." [Yoma 54a]

The Gemara continues [Yoma. 54b], Reish Lakish stated that when the Gentiles invaded and entered the Holy of Holies, they saw the Cherubim embracing like man and wife and they brought them out to the street and mocked. "These Jews whose blessing is a blessing and whose curse is a curse, look at what they occupy themselves with in their Holy of Holies." They debased Klal Yisrael and ridiculed them for this perceived impropriety. This, Chazal interpret, is the meaning of the pasuk: "All who once respected her, disparage her, for they have seen her disgrace (ervasah, literally 'her nakedness')" [Eicha 1:8].

[The Rishonim in tractate Yoma ask a very interesting question: The Cherubim were not always embracing. They were only embracing when the Jews "did the Will of the Almighty". Their embrace mirrored how G-d felt toward His people. When He loved them, they embraced; when G-d was angry with His people, they were separate. The Rishonim ask that when the Gentiles came into the

Beis HaMikdash to destroy it, the last thing we would expect to find was the Cherubim embracing. They should have not even have been looking at one another! Why were they apparently mirroring G-d's Love for us at that moment?

The Rishonim answer -- at that point the destruction (Churban) had happened already. G-d's Wrath was already spent. The Temple had already been destroyed. "Now let's make up." Thus, even while the walls were still burning, the Cherubim were embracing again. They were back in love.]

Why, in fact, do we have in our Holy of Holies the image of a husband and a wife engaging in an embrace? This is something that the Gentiles could not understand. They mocked it. They used it to make us a laughing-stock.

How do WE understand this? The interpretation is that the Cherubim are like the famous Rorschach inkblot test. Psychologists and psychiatrists take blotches of ink that come out in random form and ask patients to tell them what they see. What a person "sees" says everything about what he is, where his thoughts are, where his values are, where his mind is.

The Cherubim were Rorschach tests. They were a man and a woman embracing in a loving and adoring fashion. What is that? Is that pure or impure? Is it holy or profane? The answer is -- it is all in the eyes of the beholder. A Gentile looks at that and has impure thoughts. There is only one thing that happens when a man and a woman are in such an embrace and it is very far from being holy. Therefore, to the Gentiles it was the biggest demonstration of an incongruity. "How incongruous!" they mocked, "to have such imagery in the Holy of Holies."

But to Klal Yisrael, the embrace between a husband and wife does not have to be impure and profane. It can be the holiest of acts. The mitzvah of onah (having conjugal relations with one's wife) of a Torah scholar is specifically on the night of the Sabbath, the holiest day of the week. If one would ask an untutored mind "On the holiest day of the week in what activities should a Talmid Chochom engage?" the secular or non-Jewish perspective would be that marital relations would be the last thing one should do on such a day.

This is the difference between Jews and the nations of the world who destroyed our Beis HaMikdash. To us, the embrace of the Cherubim represented exactly what the Holy of Holies is all about -- holy intimacy. This is what Kedusha [holiness] is all about: There is no aspect of human existence that can't be elevated and can't be made holy. This is symbolic of everything else in life.

Rabbi Akiva states: "All Biblical writings are holy, but the Songs of Songs (portraying the love of a male for a female) is holy of holies." [Yalkut Shimon] The unlettered person reads Shir HaShirim with a snicker. The sensual descriptions seem far from holy writings. Rabbi Akiva states that not only is it holy, it is holy of holies. It symbolizes our relationship with the Almighty. Holiness or lack of it is all in the eyes of the beholder.

This write-up was adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tape series on the weekly Torah portion. The complete list of halachic topics covered in this series for Parshas Teruma are provided below:

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