



INTRODUCTION: HASHEM’S EMBRACE IN OUR DARKEST MOMENTS

The Gemara, *Yoma* 54b depicts the powerful moment of Titus entering the sacred space of the Mikdash Hashem. Upon entering the Kodosh Hakadashim, he immediately recognizes the Keurvim situated on top of the Aron:

אמר ריש לקיש בשעה שנכנסו נכרים להיכל
ראו כרובים המעורין זה בזה הוציאון לשוק
ואמרו ישראל הללו שברכתן ברכה וקללתן
קללה יעסקו בדברים הללו.

Reish Lakish said: When the gentiles entered the sanctuary, they saw the Keruvim hugging one another. They took them to the market and said, “The Jewish people, whose blessing is a blessing and whose cursing is a curse, should engage in these matters?”

Titus takes these Keruvim to the market and uses them to mock the Jewish people; to call attention to our hypocrisy — that we don’t tolerate any idol worship, and here, in our Mikdash, there are idols.

The Keruvim are placed in the holiest place, a space from which Hakadosh Baruch Hu communicates directly with Klal Yisrael. Their presence within the deep recesses of the Mikdash, represents the intimate nature of our connection with Hashem. The Keruvim are two angelic cherubs that face one another.

וְעִשִּׂיתָ שְׁנַיִם כְּרֻבִים זָהָב מְקֻשָּׁה תַעֲשֶׂה אֹתָם
מִשְׁנֵי קְצוֹת הַכַּפֹּרֶת. וְעָשִׂה כְּרוֹב אֶחָד מְקֻצָּה
מִזֶּה וּכְרוֹב אֶחָד מְקֻצָּה מִזֶּה מִן הַכַּפֹּרֶת תַּעֲשֶׂוּ

אֶת הַכְּרֻבִים עַל שְׁנֵי קְצוֹתֶיהָ. וְהָיוּ הַכְּרֻבִים
פְּרָשֵׁי כַנָּפִים לְמַעַלָּה סֹכְכִים בְּכַנְפֵיהֶם עַל
הַכַּפֹּרֶת וּפְנֵיהֶם אִישׁ אֶל אָחִיו אֶל הַכַּפֹּרֶת יִהְיוּ
פְּנֵי הַכְּרֻבִים.

Make two cherubim of gold—make them of hammered work—at the two ends of the cover. Make one cherub at one end and the other cherub at the other end; of one piece with the cover shall you make the cherubim at its two ends. The cherubim shall have their wings spread out above, shielding the cover with their wings. They shall face each other, the faces of the cherubim being turned toward the cover.

The Gemara in *Yoma* 54a tells us that the *olei regalim* would get to see the Keruvim:



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אמר רב קטינא בשעה שהיו ישראל עולין לרגל מגללין להם את הפרוכת ומראין להם את הכרובים שהיו מעורים זה בזה ואומרים להן ראו חבתכם לפני המקום כחבת זכר ונקבה.

Rav Ketina said: When the Jewish people would make their pilgrimage for the festivals, [the kohanim] would roll up the curtain and reveal the Keruvim who were hugging one another and say, "look at your love in front of the Omnipresent like the love of a male and female."

This Keruvim are a symbol of our majestic relationship with Hakadosh Baruch Hu.

However, the Gemara in *Bava Basra* 99a tells us that the position of the Keruvim is dependent on the loyalty of Klal Yisrael to the Torah:

כיצד הן עומדין רבי יוחנן ור' אלעזר חד אמר פניהם איש אל אחיו וחד אמר פניהם לבית ולמ"ד פניהם איש אל אחיו הא כתיב (דברי הימים ב ג, יג) ופניהם לבית לא קשיא כאן בזמן שישראל עושין רצונו של מקום כאן בזמן שאין ישראל עושין רצונו של מקום.

How did they stand? This is the subject of debate between Rav Yochanan and Rav Elazar. Once said they faced one another and one said that they faced the Sanctuary. According to the opinion that they faced one another, doesn't it

say (Divrei Hayamim II 3:13) "They faced the Sanctuary"? This is not a contradiction. [They faced each other] when the Jewish people were following the will of the Omnipresent, [they faced the Sanctuary] when the Jewish people were not following the will of the Omnipresent.

The period of the *churban* was clearly an era in which the Jewish people were not following Hashem's will, resulting in its ultimate destruction. However, upon Titus' entrance, the Keruvim were in a position of embrace. Why would the Keruvim be discovered in an interlocking hug at a time of such dissonance between G-d and the Jewish people?

The *Bnei Yisaschar*, Av Ma'amar 3, explains that when a spouse is about to embark on a lengthy trip, there is a halachic obligation for the couple to solidify their connection by increasing the amount of time they spend together. Hakadosh Baruch Hu and Am Yisrael are compared to a loving couple. True, the experience of *churban* entails a distancing of their connection. However, explains the *Bnei Yisaschar*, before that alienation takes place, there is a final proverbial

"hug." The Keruvim embrace because Hakadosh Baruch Hu is showing our nation, that despite the experience of distance, the foundation of our relationship remains eternally connected.

Tisha B'Av is a day that we concentrate and focus upon the tragedies of Jewish history. The past number of months have certainly added to the long list of challenges throughout our history, as we have lost so many precious members of our people to the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, the toll it has taken on the tefilah, Torah, and the emotional and economic wellbeing of so many is staggering. Tisha B'Av is a day to confront the essence and impact of those challenges. Yet it is also described as a *moed*, a festival. It is a day to recognize that with all of the challenge, there remains an eternal hug of promise from the Ribono Shel Olam — that the Jewish people will ultimately persevere.

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