



Facing Your Fellow Parshas Teruma

My mother, who was known for her righteousness throughout Jerusalem, became suspicious at the sight of the Arab woman, she felt something was not right with the woman's gait. She was balancing something on her, looking in all directions. My mother understood she was hiding something. My mother inquired to the contents and discovered two new couch pillows, hidden under the fruit and vegetables. My mother, who was on her way to the Kotel, wanted to stop the theft, but did not know who the pillows belonged to.

My mother, who's *Yarzeit* we commemorate this week, would walk to the Kotel every day for forty years, using the same route. That day she diverted her route because of the theft. She then saw a furniture factory, and a couch missing two pillows. She pursued the Arab towards the Old City, until she tracked her down. She found her surrounded by the woman's family. My mother initially thought to walk away from the scene, but then decided to fight back. She began shouting "thief" in Arabic. The family looked like they were about to attack her, but then the woman took the pillows and threw them at my mother.

In our weekly Parsha we learn about the construction of the various structures, vessels and utensils used in the *Mishkan*, the Tabernacle. One of them is the Holy Ark. When we take a look at the Torah's description we see that the Torah is very precise about the positioning of the cherubim on top of the Holy Ark: "The cherubim shall have their wings spread upwards, shielding the ark cover with their wings, **with their faces toward one another**; turned toward the ark cover shall be the faces of the cherubim."¹

Our Sages elaborate on this issue in the Talmud: "How did they stand? Rabbi Yochanan and Rabbi Eleazar are in dispute on the matter. One Says: They faced each other; and the other says: Their faces were inward (toward the walls). But according to he who says that they faced each other, it may be asked: Is it not written, "And their faces were inward?" This is no difficulty: The former was at a time when Israel obeyed the will of the Omnipresent; the latter was at a time when Israel did not obey the will of the Omnipresent. According to he who says that their faces were inward it may be asked: Is it not written: "With their faces one to another?" They were slightly turned sideways."² The cherubim, served as a spiritual barometer for the Jewish People; if each one facing the other it is an indication that there is peace, love and companionship

among the Jews. If they do not obey the will of the Omnipresent – then the cherubim are also not equal.

Rabbis have inferred that it goes the other way as well – if the cherubim are facing each other it is a sign the G-d is pleased with them. When there is rift and disagreement then G-d responds in kind.

The last letters of the words in the verse "with their faces toward one another"³ in Hebrew form the word *shalom*, peace. This teaches us that the objective of the cherubim was to teach the Jewish nation the significance of peace and treating each other and a proper fashion.

The Holy of Holies in the Temple is the most sacred site for the Jewish People. The Kohen Gadol; the high priest, entered the chamber once a year on Yom Kippur. The Holy Ark stood in the middle of the room, containing the two tablets. On top of it we could find the cherubim. Only they could indicate our status vis-à-vis G-d. If we act in a brotherly fashion, the very heavens follow suit.

This is what we learn in Avos of Rabbi Nosan⁴: "If you wish to come closer to your friend you should negotiate for his wellbeing." One should seek his friend's wellbeing as if it was a business, "facing" one's fellow means going out and living for him, even to the degree of self-sacrifice for his sake.

In her last days, as she lay in a hospital bed, the family surrounded my mother's bed at all times. One night, one of the grandchildren heard her whisper: "the cushions." He tried to reposition the cushions she was resting on, but she continued to repeat the words, she was relating to our story, searching her soul and racking up good deeds as she prepared for the world to come.

³ "ופניהם איש אל אחיו".

⁴ A Jewish aggadic work probably compiled in the geonic era (c.700–900 CE). In the form now extant it contains a mixture of Mishnah and Midrash, and may be technically designated as a homiletical exposition of the Mishnaic tractate *Pirkei Avot*, having for its foundation an older recension (version) of that tractate.

¹ Shmot 25,20.

² Tractate Baba Batra 99a.