

SICHA SUMMARY

Likkutei Sichos, Vol. 28

Nasso, Sicha 3

The Context:

In the second chapter of the laws of the Beis Hamikdash's vessels, Rambam codifies the laws surrounding the incense, and then at the end of the chapter, discusses the transportation of the ark:

“When the ark is transported from place to place, it should not be transported on an animal or on a wagon. Instead, it is a mitzvah for it to be carried on one's shoulders.

Since David forgot and had it transported on a wagon, there was an outbreak of Divine anger at Uzzah. Instead, it is a mitzvah to carry it on one's shoulders, as Numbers 7:9 states: “For the holy task is their obligation. They shall carry it on their shoulders.”

When the Levites carry the ark on their shoulders, they should carry it face to face, with their backs pointed outward and their faces inward. (Klei Hamikdash, 2:12-13)

The Questions:

1) The verse which Rambam cites as support, “For the holy task is their obligation. They shall carry it on their shoulders,” is stated in regards to all the vessels of the Mishkan. Why, then, does the Rambam only rule that the ark should be carried on shoulders, and not the other vessels as well?

2) Why does Rambam include the narrative about the aftermath of King David's mistake of transporting the ark on a wagon? Why is that relevant in a halachic code?

3) Why does this law appear in the second chapter, following the laws of the anointing oil and the incense, and not in chapters 3 or 4 where the role of the Kohanim and Leviim and their respective roles and responsibilities are discussed?

The Explanation:

All these details suggest that the Rambam understands the mitzvah of carrying the ark on shoulders to be of a different category than the mitzvah to carry the other sacred vessels on shoulders as well.

It is not a mitzvah directed at the Levites themselves, that they must carry the ark on

their shoulders. It is, rather, a mitzvah in the object of the ark itself. The ark demands that it be treated and transported in a uniquely honorable fashion. Since it carries the tablets and the Torah, the ark requires a designated “place” at all times, and can never be relegated to a haphazard transportation or location. When the ark is in transit, its designated place is on the shoulders of its carriers.

Rambam therefore conveys the disastrous consequence that occurred to King David due to his negligence regarding the ark’s transportation — to illustrate how carrying the ark on a wagon is not just abrogating a positive mitzvah to carry it on one’s shoulders, but a severe dislocation of the ark’s honorable place and disrespect of its contents and elevated status.

The Inner Dimension:

This allows us to see the synchronicity between the revealed and inner dimensions of the Torah. Chassidus explains that the

reason the ark was to be carried on the Levites shoulders, and that the Levites had to carry it face to face, with their backs pointed outward and the faces inward, is because the tablets were “entirely inwardness.” The writing was engraved through the entire stone, there was no “external” and “internal” aspect, it was wholly internal. Carrying it on the shoulder points to the objective of transforming even the external parts of the person with the intense inwardness of the ark.

This aligns with the halachic definition of this law: carrying the ark on the shoulder is not just a command on the individual to honor the ark, it is the ideal location for the ark itself due to its uniquely sacred contents. Similarly, the chassidic definition connects the ark and its contents to the location where it was to be carried, the outwardness of the world with the inwardness of the ark.
