

# DIMENSIONS IN CHUMASH

## PARSHAS TERUMAH

### An Ark in the Sanctuary:

### — The Relationship of the Aron with the Vessels of the Mishkan —

וְאֵל הָאָרוֹן תִּתֵּן אֶת הָעֵדוּת אֲשֶׁר אֶתֵּן אֵלֶיךָ

*And into the Aron you shall put the Testimony that I shall give you.*<sup>1</sup>

#### INTRODUCTION: A QUESTION FROM RASHI

Rashi, in his comment to this verse, raises a simple question. This selfsame instruction has already been stated just a few verses earlier:

וְנָתַתְּ אֶל הָאָרוֹן אֶת הָעֵדוּת אֲשֶׁר אֶתֵּן אֵלֶיךָ

*You shall put into the Aron the Testimony that I shall give you.*

Thus, Rashi asks, why would the Torah see fit to repeat an instruction it had just given?

Rashi himself proceeds to offer an answer to this question; however, once he has opened the matter for discussion, we will not be surprised to hear that other answers are forthcoming from later commentators.

#### MAHARAL: WHAT REPETITION REVEALS

Let us consider a fascinating response to this question by the Maharal in the Gur Aryeh. First, he identifies the Testimony to which these verses refer as the two *Luchos* (tablets of stone) with the *Aseres Hadibros* engraved on them. Although the earlier verse has already stated that Moshe is to place the luchos inside the Aron, there may yet have been room to understand that while this is a mitzvah that pertains to the Aron, it is not critical. If so, then even if there were to be no luchos to place inside, there would still be a requirement to make the Aron. To this end, the Torah repeats the instruction of placing the luchos in the Aron. Through this, it indicates that this is something that is indispensable to the Aron; indeed it expresses the idea that the very definition of the Aron is: “A repository for the luchos”!

<sup>1</sup> Shemos 25:21.

## RESONANCE IN THE VERSES

This fundamental idea regarding the purpose of the Aron is expressed in various ways in other verses as well. In the beginning of Parshas Ki Sisa,<sup>2</sup> the Torah lists the component parts of the Mishkan. Within that list, the Aron is referred to as: “אֶת הָאָרֹן לְעֵדוּת – The Aron for the Testimony.” With these words, the Torah clearly indicates that the Aron is not simply “a place in which the luchos reside,” but rather, that it exists specifically *in order* for them to reside inside.<sup>3</sup>

The matter receives striking emphasis from a verse in the beginning of Sefer Shmuel, which describes the defeat the Jewish people suffered in battle against the Philistines, during which the Aron – which they had taken out to the battle with them – was captured. The verse describes this tragic event with the words: “וַאֲרוֹן הָאֱלֹקִים נִלְקָחָה – and the Ark of God was taken.”<sup>4</sup> Now, the Hebrew word “אָרוֹן” is a masculine noun, and treated as such throughout the Chumash and Prophets. If so, then the verse should not have used the feminine form “נִלְקָחָה” when describing it, but rather the masculine form – “נִלְקַח”!

What is behind this anomaly?

R Yaakov Kamenetzky<sup>5</sup> presents a stunning answer to this question, beginning by referring to a classic idea regarding Lashon Hakodesh. There are occasions where the Torah introduces and combines an element within a word that is not warranted by the laws of grammar, in order to reflect an additional aspect of what that word represents. As we have seen, the Aron exists in order to house the עֵדוּת (Testimony) in the form of the luchos. So intimately is the Aron bound up with this purpose that the verse actually ends up referring to it in the feminine form, as appropriate for the feminine word “עֵדוּת”!

Indeed, according to Rabbeinu Bachye, the very name “אָרוֹן”, which we translate as “ark” and assume denotes a container, actually derives from the word “אֹר – light”, reflecting the fact that it houses the luchos which are a source of spiritual illumination.

## PRACTICAL IMPLICATIONS – THE SECOND BEIS HAMIKDASH

Once we understand how crucial the presence of the luchos are for the Aron to fulfill its function – and even its very definition – we will appreciate that if there were to be no luchos to place inside, there would be no point in making an Aron. And indeed, this was the situation that pertained during the time of the second Beis Hamikdash. All of the vessels required were remade – with the exception of the Aron. Since the luchos resided in the original Aron, wherever that was at that time, there was no meaning in making a new Aron without them.

Moreover, it is noteworthy that when the Rambam discusses the prohibition of an individual replicating the vessels of the Beis Hamikdash, he mentions all the vessels with the exception of the Aron. If we say that the Aron is defined by the presence of the luchos inside, then in order to violate the prohibition of replicating the Aron, one would likewise have to place the luchos inside – for without them, it is not an Aron. Since there is only one set of luchos and it is in the original Aron, it is actually impossible to replicate it, and hence the Rambam does not include it in the prohibition!<sup>6</sup>

## THE ARON: “A VESSEL of THE MIKDASH” OR “A VESSEL *in* THE MIKDASH”?

Bearing the above in mind, let us approach the words of the Rambam<sup>7</sup> regarding the mitzvah of building

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2 Shemos Chap. 31.

3 Comments of Rashash to Yoma 53b.

4 Shmuel I, 4:17. See, likewise, Divrei Hayamim II, “וְאֶשֶׁר בָּאָה אֵלֵיהֶם אָרוֹן ה'” – For the Ark of Hashem had come to them.”

5 Commentary Emes l'Yaakov, Parshas Terumah.

6 Rabbi Isaac Bernstein, shiur on Parshas Terumah.

7 Sefer Hamitzvos, positive mitzvah 20.

the Beis Hamikdash, the source for which he identifies as verse 8 in the beginning of our parsha: “וַעֲשׂוּ לִי מִקְדָּשׁ – They shall make for Me a Sanctuary.” The Rambam further states that this mitzvah includes not only the making of the building of the Mishkan / Beis Hamikdash itself, but also its vessels:

*We have already explained<sup>8</sup> that this general command also includes particular items, and that the Menorah, Shulchan and Mizbeyach and their like are all considered part of the “Mikdash”.*

Noticeably absent from this list of items included in “the Mikdash” is the Aron! Likewise, in the Mishneh Torah,<sup>9</sup> the Rambam lists seven items within the Mikdash:

1. The Mizbeyach for korbanos
2. Its ramp
3. The Kiyor for washing the Kohanim’s hand and feet
4. Its base
5. The Mizbeyach for Ketores
6. The Shulchan
7. The Menorah.

Here, too, the Aron, which we might have expected to be at the top of the list, is not on the list at all!

Rav Moshe Soloveitchik<sup>10</sup> explains that the reason for this is as per the above. All of the above-mentioned vessels play a role in the avodah of the Mikdash and are thus considered as part of it. By contrast, the Aron is not involved in any avodah, and exists solely to house the luchos. Therefore, while it understandably resides in the innermost point within the Mikdash, it is not itself a “vessel of the Mikdash”! In this regard, we could say that while the other vessels serve the Mikdash *around* them, the Aron serves the luchos *within* it.<sup>11</sup>

## FOLLOWING THE COMMANDMENTS IN PARSHAS TERUMAH

Let us conclude this discussion by returning to our Parsha and seeing how the above idea is reflected in the phraseology of the various commands therein. We note that while the initial command to make the Mishkan is phrased in the third person plural, “וַעֲשׂוּ – they shall make,” all the subsequent commands are in the second person singular, “וַעֲשֵׂתָ – you shall make.”

R’ Yitzchak Ze’ev Soloveitchik, the Rav of Brisk,<sup>12</sup> explains that the initial command “וַעֲשׂוּ” represents the mitzvah of building the Mikdash which, as we have seen, incorporates its vessels as well. Since the mitzvah of building the Mikdash is one that devolves on the community, the command is phrased in the plural – “they shall make.” Beyond this point, the additional commands are not new mitzvahs, but are rather concerned with the specifications regarding how to make the various component parts. Hence, these commands are phrased in the singular, as they are addressed to Moshe or whoever he will delegate to perform those particular tasks.

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8 In *Shoresh* twelve of Sefer Hamitzvos.

9 *Hilchos Beis Habechirah* 1:6.

10 Cited in *Imrei Chen* vol 2 sec 11.

11 It is extremely interesting to note the resonance of this idea in the Gemara’s famous account (Berachos 55a) of the dialogue between Moshe and Betzalel regarding the order of building the Mishkan and the vessels. The Gemara relates that Moshe told Betzalel the order of: “the Aron, the vessels and then the Mishkan,” while Betzalel intuited Hashem’s instruction to Moshe to first make “the Mishkan and then the Aron and vessels.” Leaving aside the question of what lay behind these two viewpoints, we see that in both orders, the Aron receives distinct mention apart from “the vessels”. This corroborates the understanding that the Aron does not fully fall into the category of those vessels as “*keilim* of the Mikdash”.

12 Cited in *Imrei Chen* *ibid*.

Having established this, we proceed to note that the exception to the above rule is the Aron, the construction of which is also commanded with the plural “וַעֲשׂוּ”! We can now understand why this is so. Since, as we have seen, the Aron is not one of the vessels of the Mikdash, its manufacture is not covered by the initial mitzvah of “וַעֲשׂוּ לִי מִקְדָּשׁ”. As such, the making of the Aron is an independent mitzvah that likewise devolves on the community and hence the command to make it is phrased accordingly in the plural form.<sup>13</sup>

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13 Throughout our parsha, the Mishkan is referred to with the term “Mishkan”, with the exception of the initial command which uses the word “Mikdash”. On the one hand, we can understand the use of this term as *broadening the scope* of the mitzvah to include to the contents of the Mishkan, as well as extending to future Batei Mikdash. However, it is also possible to see that the verse is *qualifying* the mitzvah as pertaining specifically to items which are part of the avodah in the Mikdash. The Aron, by contrast, has no part in the avodah but is there to house the luchos, and hence is not included in the mitzvah of making a Mikdash. See further regarding the mitzvah to make an Aron, in *Kli Chemdah* to Parshas Terumah sec. 3, Chasam Sofer *ibid.* 25:21 and in *Responsa Chasam Sofer*, Yoreh Deah sec. 236.