YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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**Sichot of the Roshei Yeshiva**

**Parashat Teruma**

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Dedicated by Mr. and Mrs. Leon Brum for the *Refua Sheleima* of

Dana Petrover (Batsheva bat Gittel Aidel Leba)

and Marvin Rosenberg (Meir Chaim ben Tzipporah Miriam)

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In memory of six friends and family,   
strong pillars of the Montreal Jewish community,   
who have left us in the past seven years.   
All were אוהבי עם ישראל, אוהבי ארץ ישראל, אוהבי תורת ישראל.

Joseph (Yosie) Deitcher

Avrum (Avy) Drazin

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**The Measurements of the *Mishkan* and the Arrangement of Its Vessels**

**Sicha of HarAV Yaakov Medan**

Translated by David Strauss

The Torah elaborates at great length in its account of the *Mishkan* and its vessels. Indeed, the lengthy discussion is liable to weigh heavily on the reader, and even lead him to wonder why it is that the Torah is so particular about the precise measurements of length, breadth, and height. Why did it not give a little freedom to the craftsmen's creativity and understanding? We will suggest two answers and leave it to the reader to decide between them.

**I. The *Miskhan* and the Market**

Regarding the Temple as well, there is great preoccupation with measurements. This is especially true about the planning of the Temple that will be built in the future in accordance with the detailed plan spelled out in the prophecy of Yechezkel. Whole chapters of Yechezkel's prophecy are devoted to the measurements of the Temple:

And the man said to me: Son of man, behold with your eyes, and hear with your ears, and set your heart upon all that I shall show you, for to the intent that I might show them to you are you brought here; declare all that you see to the house of Israel. And behold a wall on the outside of the house round about, and in the man's hand a measuring reed of six cubits long, of a cubit and a hand-breadth each; so he measured the breadth of the building, one reed, and the height, one reed. Then came he to the gate which looks toward the east, and went up the steps thereof; and he measured the jamb of the gate, one reed broad, and the other jamb, one reed broad. And every cell was one reed long, and one reed broad; and the space between the cells was five cubits; and the jambs of the gate by the porch of the gate within were one reed. He measured also the porch of the gate toward the house, one reed. (*Yechezkel* 40:4-9)

The prophet expands even further on the measurements, and goes as far as to rebuke Israel for failing to learn the correct measurements:

You, son of man, show the house to the house of Israel, that they may be ashamed of their iniquities; and let them measure accurately. And if they be ashamed of all that they have done, make known to them the form of the house, and the fashion thereof, and the goings out thereof, and the comings in thereof, and all the forms thereof, and all the ordinances thereof, and all the forms thereof, and all the laws thereof, and write it in their sight; that they may keep the whole form thereof, and all the ordinances thereof, and do them… And these are the measures of the altar by cubits – the cubit is a cubit and a handbreadth: the bottom shall be a cubit, and the breadth a cubit, and the border thereof by the edge thereof round about a span; and this shall be the base of the altar. And from the bottom upon the ground to the lower settle shall be two cubits, and the breadth one cubit; and from the lesser settle to the greater settle shall be four cubits, and the breadth a cubit. (*Yechezkel* 43:10-14)

The many chapters regarding the measurements of the Temple end with a rebuke of the princes of Israel:

Thus says the Lord God: Let it suffice you, O princes of Israel; remove violence and spoil, and execute justice and righteousness; take away your exactions from My people, says the Lord God. You shall have just balances, and a just *efa*, and a just *bat*. The *efa* and the *bat* shall be of one measure, that the *bat* may contain the tenth part of a *chomer*, and the *efa* the tenth part of a *chomer*; the measure thereof shall be after the *chomer*. And the *shekel* shall be twenty *geras*; twenty shekels, five and twenty shekels, ten, and five shekels, shall be your *maneh*. This is the offering that you shall set apart: the sixth part of an *efa* out of a *chomer* of wheat, and you shall give the sixth part of an *efa* out of a *chomer* of barley; and the set portion of oil, the *bat* of oil, shall be the tithe of the *bat* out of the *kor*, which is ten *bats*, even a *chomer*; for ten *bats* are a *chomer*. (*Yechezkel* 45:9-14)

The rebuke of the princes of Israel is not directly connected to the measurements of the Temple**.** Rather, it is connected to the measurements used in the **marketplace** – to the mitzvaof being precise with one's measures when engaging in trade:

You shall do no unrighteousness in judgment, in meteyard, in weight, or in measure. Just balances, just weights, a just *efa*, and a just *hin*, shall you have: I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt (*Shemot* 19:35-36)

You shall not have in your bag diverse weights, a great and a small. You shall not have in your house diverse measures, a great and a small. A perfect and just weight shall you have; a perfect and just measure shall you have; that your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God gives you. For all that do such things, even all that do un-righteously, are an abomination to the Lord your God. (*Devarim* 25:13-16)

It seems from the words of the prophet that the precise measurements required for the service of the Temple – and in the context of our *parasha,* the *Mishkan –* are intended to habituate a person to be precise in his weights and measurements when engaged in trade in the marketplace. The Torah sees such accuracy as the cornerstone of the observance of the *mitzvot* (as we shall explain below regarding the connection to the Ten Commandments). One who is not careful in such matters commits an injustice, which is an abomination to God.

We will point out additional points regarding the importance of just scales and the avoidance of all dishonesty when measuring length, weight, or quantity – the *mitzvot* in light of which we explained in *Yechezkel* the importance of the measurements of the Temple.

1. In the places in the Torah where this mitzvaappears, it is accompanied by verses of warning and encouragement:

I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt. (*Vayikra* 19:36)

That your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God gives you. (*Devarim* 25:15)

These words appear also in the Ten Commandments, where they serve as a framework for the commandments of the covenant:

I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage. (*Shemot* 20:2)

That your days may be long upon the land which the Lord your God gives you. (*Shemot* 20:12)

2. In similar fashion, in the Holy of Holies, in front of the ark of the testimony and the tablets of the testimony, rests the jar of manna:

And Moshe said to Aharon: Take a jar, and put an *omer*-full of manna therein, and lay it up before the Lord… As the Lord commanded Moshe, so Aharon laid it up before the testimony, to be kept. (*Shemot* 16:33-34)

The essence of the mitzvaof manna was similar to the *mitzvot* concerning just weights and measures – so that nobody would deprive his fellow of his full share in the manna:

This is the thing which the Lord has commanded: “Gather you of it every man according to his eating; an *omer* a head, according to the number of your persons, shall you take it, every man for them that are in his tent.” And the children of Israel did so, and gathered some more, some less. And when they did mete it with an *omer*, he that gathered much had nothing over, and he that gathered little had no lack; they gathered every man according to his eating. (*Shemot* 16:16-18)

The root of the *mitzvot* governing weights and measure is thus clearly exceedingly important.

**II. “Which is Being Shown You in the Mountain”**

At the end of the section dealing with the *menora*, the Torah states:

And see that you make them after their pattern, which is being shown you in the mountain. (*Shemot* 25:40)

Rashi comments on this in the wake of the *midrash*:

"And see that you make" – See here, in the mountain, the pattern which I show you. This teaches you that Moshe was puzzled about the workmanship of the *menora* until the Holy One, blessed be He, showed him the pattern of it in a candelabrum of fire.

But according to the simple understanding, the words, "after their pattern," teach that we are not dealing here only with the *menora*. Rather, the verse summarizes the fashioning of all the vessels – the ark, the *kaporet*, the table, and the candelabrum. This is the formulation used also in other summarizing verses. Following the sections dealing with the curtains and the boards of the *Mishkan* – which deal with the structure of the *Mishkan* itself – it is stated:

And you shall rear up the *Mishkan* according to the fashion thereof which has been shown you in the mount. (*Shemot* 26:30)

And it is similarly stated at the conclusion of the section dealing with the outer altar:

Hollow with planks shall you make it; as it has been shown you in the mount, so shall they make it. (*Shemot* 27:8)

What emerges from these verses is that Moshe ascended Mount Sinai, and there he saw in a prophetic vision a complete pattern of the *Mishkan* and its vessels. This may have been the "heavenly" *Mishkan*, for *Chazal* speak of a heavenly Temple that corresponds to the earthly Temple, and especially of such a correspondence with respect to the Holy of Holies and the throne of glory:

The Holy of Holies on earth parallels the Holy of Holies in heaven. (*Yerushalmi*, *Berakhot* 4:5)

"The place which You have made for You to dwell in" (*Shemot* 15:17) – This is one of the indications that the earthly throne corresponds to the heavenly throne. (*Mekhilta Massekhta De-Shira*, *parasha* 10)

We see, then, that the measurements were not a law in itself. The purpose of the building of the *Mishkan* was to build it so that it be similar to the *MIshkan* that Moshe saw in his prophecy, the heavenly *Mishkan*. The verbal description that includes the measurements, the number of cups and flowers, and the like is too narrow to include the *Mishkan* and its vessels in their full image as Moshe saw them on the mountain. It reflects just a small portion of the details seen by Moshe.[[1]](#footnote-1)

A *Mishkan* that would be similar to the structure that Moshe saw in his prophecy on the mountain would have required a vast amount of Oral Law, since the measurements are just one detail of it. It may be argued that Moshe was supposed to identify in Betzalel's work the details most similar to those found in the *Mishkan* that he had seen in his prophecy and to confirm them, similar to the work done by a police sketch artist with the description of a criminal supplied by a witness to the crime. The plentiful and detailed measurements emphasize for us the connection between the two *Mishkans*: the one on the mountain, which Moshe saw in a prophetic vision, and the one in our material world, which was fashioned by Betzalel. A similar correspondence exists between the Temple that existed in reality and the Temple seen by Yechezkel in a prophetic vision. In his prophetic vision Yechezkel did not merely hear numbers and measurements; he saw the complete Temple, and in this way he identified all of its details.

This seems to have been the situation in the First Temple as well:

Then David gave to Shelomo his son the pattern of the porch [of the Temple], and of the houses thereof, and of the treasuries thereof, and of the upper rooms thereof, and of the inner chambers thereof, and of the place of the *kaporet*; and the pattern of all that he had by the spirit, for the courts of the house of the Lord, and for all the chambers round about, for the treasuries of the house of God, and for the treasuries of the hallowed things; also for the courses of the priests and the Levites, and for all the work of the service of the house of the Lord, and for all the vessels of service in the house of the Lord: of gold by weight for the vessels of gold, for all vessels of every kind of service; of silver for all the vessels of silver by weight, for all vessels of every kind of service; by weight also for the candelabra of gold, and for the lamps thereof, of gold, by weight for every candelabrum and for the lamps thereof; and for the candelabra of silver, silver by weight for every candelabra and for the lamps thereof, according to the use of every candelabrum; and the gold by weight for the tables of showbread, for every table; and silver for the tables of silver; and the flesh-hooks, and the basins, and the jars, of pure gold; and for the golden bowls by weight for every bowl; and for the silver bowls by weight for every bowl; and for the altar of incense refined gold by weight; and gold for the pattern of the chariot, even the *keruvim*, that spread out their wings, and covered the ark of the covenant of the Lord. All this [do I give you] in writing, as the Lord has made me wise by His hand upon me, even all the works of this pattern. (I *Divrei Ha-Yamim* 28:11-19)

It stands to reason that David did not receive the technical specifications of the Temple "from the spirit" by way of words and numbers. David saw with his *ruach ha-kodesh* the Temple as it was supposed to be built, similar to the heavenly Temple, and based on this vision he determined the technical specifications and passed them on to his son Shelomo. Here too the main thing is not the technical specifications, but rather the complete form and image that appeared to David by way of *ruach ha-kodesh*.

**III. A Note Regarding the Oral Law**

Perhaps it is possible to go further and say that this is the general way of the Oral Law. At first the Oral Law was not given to be committed to writing, because there is no end to the words needed to describe it in full. The Torah in its wholeness is not just a collection of guidelines that can be defined with words and sentences, but rather something far beyond that. On Mount Sinai Moshe saw a complete prophetic picture of the ideal people of Israel cleaving to God. In this picture, the camp of Israel is arranged in accordance with its tents, and is conducted in accordance with God's commandments and the entirety of the directives that are appropriate for a nation walking with God. The detailed guidelines are derived from this sublime image.

Following this approach, we can liken the Oral Law to a series of instructions given to a bride on the eve of her wedding day as to how she should conduct herself with her husband throughout their lives. It is impossible to record all the appropriate guidelines, as they are close to infinite in number. One can only try to paint a spiritual picture of ideal married life and allow the bride to act to the best of her understanding – according to the place, the time and the circumstances – so that the picture of ideal married life will remain in its full purity for years to come.

This is the relationship that we see between the Oral Law received by Moshe on Mount Sinai and the rulings of the Great Sanhedrin of every generation, and in their wake the laws and customs that the people of Israel have accepted upon themselves over the course of time, which are also included in the Oral Law. Moshe saw in his prophetic vision the complete picture of Israel's ideal cleaving to God, and the later Sages translated this into practical guidelines in accordance with the time and place for their respective generations. Oftentimes, the Sages revealed to us the correspondence between the Written Law and the picture that Moshe saw in the mountain, a picture that came down to us in the framework of the Oral Law.

**IV. The Arrangement of the Vessels – The Ark and the Jar of Manna**

In the Holy of Holies stood the ark of the testimony covered with the *kaporet,* and on top of that the *keruvim.* In the ark lay the tablets of the testimony, and later – at the end of Israel's forty years in the wilderness – also a Torah scroll. Placed before the ark was a jar of manna. Elsewhere, we compared the value of cleaving to God, which is expressed by the ark, to the value of refraining from committing injustice, which is expressed by the manna. They are not necessarily equal in value, but the Torah weighs the one against the other in order to express the great importance of justice and honesty.[[2]](#footnote-2)

**V. The Arrangement of the Vessels – The *Menora* and the *Shulchan***

The *menora* and the *shulchan* stand in the *Heikhal*, the "Holy." The *menora* stands on the south side, and the *shulchan* on the north side (*Shemot* 26:35), and together they are a continuation of the ark of the testimony and the jar of manna in the Holy of Holies. The connection between the jar of manna and the table is obvious; they both express the abundance of food that God bestows upon us. In the wilderness it was the manna, and in Eretz Israel the manna is replaced by the grains growing in the land, from which the showbread standing in the *Heikhal* was prepared. The major difference between manna and bread expresses itself on Shabbat. Manna did not fall on Shabbat, and in its place the Israelites in the wilderness ate of that which they had collected on Friday, whereas the showbread was baked specifically on Shabbat and eaten on the following Shabbat:

Every Shabbat he shall set it in order before the Lord continually; it is from the children of Israel, an everlasting covenant. (*Vayikra* 24:5)

The bread is sanctified on Shabbat when it is placed on the showbread table before God. The Shabbat also blesses the bread – the bread that had been baked on the previous Shabbat, and on this Shabbat is removed from its place, before the Lord, and given to the priests for eating.

The connection between the ark of the testimony and the *menora* is more complicated, but many verses express this connection. For example:

Your word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path. (*Tehilim* 119:105)

For the commandment is a lamp, and the teaching is light. (*Mishlei* 6:23)

The candle and the light in the *menora* express the Torah scroll and the tablets of the covenant in the ark of the testimony:

To cause a candelabrum to burn continually. In the tent of meeting, without the veil which is before the testimony, Aharon and his sons shall set it in order, to burn from evening to morning before the Lord. (*Shemot* 27:20-21)

Furthermore, during the Second Temple period, when there was no ark, the *menora* served as a substitute for the “testimony”:

"Outside the veil of testimony shall [Aharon] order it" (*Vayikra* 24:3). Does He then require its light? Surely, during the entire forty years that the Israelites travelled in the wilderness they travelled only by His light! But it is a **testimony** to mankind that the *Shekhina* rests in Israel. (*Shabbat* 22b)

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The third vessel that stood in the *Heikhal* was the incense altar. The pair of vessels that stood in the courtyard were the burnt-offering altar (*Shemot* 27:1-8) and the laver (*Shemot* 30:17-21). The altar expresses the atonement that must be achieved by anyone who wishes to appear before God, and the laver expresses the purity that is needed by anyone who seeks God in His sanctuary. These two elements – the vessel that purifies and the vessel that atones – stand in the courtyard, so that nobody will burst into the holy without first purifying himself and achieving atonement for his sins.[[3]](#footnote-3)

1. A precise description of a room to its minutest details, with its fixed elements and its movables, would require an almost infinite number of words, for the number of details in every room is enormous. It is in no way possible to construct a room and its furnishings so that it be a perfect replica of another room based only on a verbal description of the original room. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Chazal* (*Makkot* 24a) note that the prophet Chabakuk reduced all of the Torah's commandments to a single commandment: "The righteous shall live by his faith" (*Chabakuk* 2:4). The commentators explain that the single mitzva is belief in and cleaving to God. It seems, however, based on parallel terms elsewhere in Scripture, that the plain meaning of the verse is that the righteous shall live by his trustworthiness – that is say, by his honesty and integrity. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. We have not related here to the prohibition to enter the Holy that applies to anyone who is not a priest performing the service. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)