

MESHECH CHOCHMAH

Parshas Terumah

The Aron and the Luchos

וְנָתַתָּ אֶל הָאָרֶן אֶת הָעֵדוּת אֲשֶׁר אֶתֵּן אֵלֶיךָ

You shall place in the Ark the Testimony that I shall give you (25:16)

A REPEATED MITZVAH?

The Parsha of Terumah inaugurates a series of *parshiyos* discussing the construction of the Mishkan and its *keilim* (vessels). The first of the *keilim* presented by the Torah is the *Aron*, the holy ark which resided in the *kodesh hakodashim*. As our pasuk specifies, Moshe was commanded to place the *luchos*, which it refers to as “the *eidus*” (testimony), inside the *Aron*.

It is most interesting to note that just a few pesukim later,¹ the Torah seemingly repeats the exact same command to place the *luchos* inside the *Aron*, for it states:

וְאֵל הָאָרֶן תִּתֵּן אֶת הָעֵדוּת אֲשֶׁר אֶתֵּן אֵלֶיךָ

And into the Ark you shall place the Testimony that I shall give you.

What is behind this repetition?

The Meshech Chochmah provides two resolutions to this question, each one invoking a different tool of *parshanut*.

FIRST APPROACH: WHEN THE TORAH COMMANDS TWICE

Firstly, the Meshech Chochmah draws our attention to a most intriguing phenomenon. With the destruction of the first Beis Hamikdash, its *keilim* were plundered or destroyed. Hence, when the second Beis Hamikdash was built, all of its *keilim* were likewise manufactured anew – with one exception. The Gemara² relates that there was no *Aron* inside the *kodesh hakodashim* of the second Beis Hamikdash.

Why did they not make a new *Aron* in the same way they made all the other keilim?

1 Pasuk 21.

2 Yoma 21b.

The answer to this question brings us back to the fact that the *Aron* was used to house the *luchos*. Here, we ask:

What is the relationship between the *Aron* and the *luchos*? Is housing the *luchos* one of a number of functions which the *Aron* serves, or is it its sole function?

The practical outcome of this question will relate to a situation where there are no *luchos*. This was, in fact, the situation as pertained to the second Beis Hamikdash. As we know, the original *Aron*, together with its *luchos*, was hidden beneath the site of the Beis Hamikdash.³ Hence, when the time came to rebuild the Beis Hamikdash, there were no *luchos* to place inside the *Aron*.

There is a special principle which pertains to the realm of *kodshim* – *korabanos* and related matter – known as “שנה בה הכתוב לעכב”. This means that when the Torah repeats a command, it serves to indicate that this aspect is critical to the matter being discussed, and its absence will invalidate the mitzvah.⁴ Accordingly, in our case, the repetition of the command – in pasuk 21 – to place the *luchos* inside the *Aron* indicates that *the luchos are critical to the Aron!* The resulting implications are that if there are no *luchos* available, there is no point in making an *Aron*, and hence, no *Aron* was made for the second Beis Hamikdash.

SECOND APPROACH: WHAT WAS IN THE ARON?

In his second explanation, the Meshech Chochmah refers us to a pasuk at the end of Sefer Devarim⁵ where Hashem tells Moshe, “לָקַח אֶת סֵפֶר הַתּוֹרָה הַזֶּה וְשָׂמְתָם אֶתֹךָ מִצַּד אֲרוֹן” – *Take this Sefer Torah and place it next to the Ark of the covenant of Hashem.*” In this regard, the Gemara⁶ records a dispute among Tannaim as to where exactly the sefer Torah was placed.

- According to R’ Meir, it was actually placed inside the *Aron* together with the *luchos*.
- According to R’ Yehudah, it was placed outside the *Aron*, on a shelf which protruded from it.⁷

MAAMAR MUSGAR: PARENTHETICAL COMMENTS IN THE TORAH

The Meshech Chochmah suggests that the placing the sefer Torah together with the *Aron*, which is something that was commanded to Moshe many years later, is already alluded to in our Parsha – in pasuk 21! When the pasuk repeats the idea that the “*eidus*” in will be placed together with the *Aron*, it is referring, not to the *luchos*, but to the sefer Torah. Although the same term – “*eidus*” – is used in both pesukim, on this second occasion the

3 See Yoma 53b.

4 See Menachos 19b.

5 31:26.

6 Bava Basra 15a.

7 [As the simple reading of that pasuk indicates. See Bava Basra there for an explanation of how R’ Meir understands that pasuk.]

Torah proceeds to further define the eidus to which it refers.

After commanding in pasuk 21, “וְאֵל הָאָרֶן תִּתֵּן אֶת הָעֵדוּת אֲשֶׁר אֶתֵּן אֵלֶיךָ” pasuk 22 states:

וְנִוְעַדְתִּי לְךָ שָׁם וְדַבַּרְתִּי אִתְּךָ מֵעַל הַכַּפֹּרֶת מִבֵּין שְׁנֵי הַכְּרֻבִים אֲשֶׁר עַל אָרֶן הָעֵדוּת אֵת כָּל אֲשֶׁר
אֶצְוֶה אוֹתְךָ אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל

I will meet with you there and I shall speak with you from atop the kapores, from between the two keruvim that are on the ark of the testimony, (all that I shall command you to Bnei Yisrael.

We have placed most of pasuk 22 in parentheses because the Meshech Chochmah suggests that it is indeed a *maamar musgar* – a parenthetical comment – detailing an additional aspect of the *Aron* which related to Moshe Rabbeinu specifically, namely, that of communing with Hashem. Looked at in this way, the final phrase of pasuk 22, “all that I shall command you to Bnei Yisrael,” which follows the *maamar musgar*, is actually a *continuation of pasuk 21*.⁸ Thus, while in the earlier pasuk Hashem told Moshe to place the “*eidus*” consisting of the *luchos* in the *Aron*, here, He is telling Moshe to also place the “*eidus*” which comprises “all that I shall command you,” i.e. the *sefer Torah* which contains all the mitzvos!

FURTHER OBSERVATIONS: SUPPORT FOR R’ YEHUDAH’S VIEW

Indeed, once we understand that the command in pasuk 21 refers to the *sefer Torah*, it may help resolve a simple *pshat* question in the pasuk itself. The full pasuk reads:

וְנָתַתָּ אֶת הַכַּפֹּרֶת עַל הָאָרֶן מִלְּמַעְלָה וְאֵל הָאָרֶן תִּתֵּן אֶת הָעֵדוּת אֲשֶׁר אֶתֵּן אֵלֶיךָ

You shall place the cover on the Ark from above, and into the ark you shall place the testimony that I shall give you

A simple reading of the pasuk presents us with a difficulty, for it first tells Moshe to place the *kapores* on the *Aron* and only then states that he shall place the *eidus* inside! Obviously, these two things cannot happen in that order!

However, says Meshech Chochmah, according to R’ Yehudah’s view, we can understand the phrases of the pasuk in sequence. As mentioned above, R’ Yehudah maintains that the *sefer Torah* was not placed inside the *Aron*, but next to it. Accordingly, the Torah first states that Moshe shall place the *kapores* on the *Aron* (with the “*eidus*” mentioned in pasuk pasuk 16 – i.e. the *luchos* – already inside), and then states that he shall place the second “*eidus*” – the *sefer Torah* next to it.⁹

8 As if to say, “And into the Ark you shall place the testimony that I shall give you (And I shall meet with you...) all that I shall command you to Bnei Yisrael.”

9 And indeed, the term used by the Torah in both pesukim for where to place the *eidus* is “וְאֵל הָאָרֶן”. This term can in fact mean either “in the *Aron*” – as with the *luchos* in pasuk 16, as well as “towards the *Aron*” – as with the *sefer Torah* in pasuk 21.