



Pairs That Go In the Ark

By Ezra Lebowitz ('22)

The holiest of the Keilim of the Mishkan also has the strangest Lashon. When being told to make the Aron, Moshe Rabbeinu is told "VeNatata El Ha'Aron Eit Ha'Eidut Asher Etein Eilecha," "Put the 'testimony' that I'll give to you in the Aron," then is told how to make the Kaporet, and finally again told "Ve'El Ha'Aron Titein Et Ha'Eidut Asher Etein Eilecha," "Put the 'testimony' that I'll give to you in the Aron" (Shemot 25:16, 21). Why is the commandment of placing the Luchot in the Aron given twice? Even the great Rashi struggles with this question, saying he doesn't know why, but suggesting that it is to show that the Luchot should be put in it before putting the Kaporet on. This is a troubling suggestion to Rashi because why would it be repeated after the command to make the Kaporet?

Rav Shlomo Fischer suggests that there are two perspectives on the "Luchot house". One is that the Ikar is the Kaporet, covering the basis of our religion with the beautiful Keruvim. The other is the Ikar being the Aron itself, an exquisite golden box housing the most remarkable and important objects known to man. This duality sees its expression in the repetition of the commandment to place the Luchot in the Aron, once after the instructions for the Aron itself and once after the instructions for the Kaporet. This also is the reason why the Aron is made of both gold and wood. The wood is to show that from one side, the box itself does not really matter, only the Kaporet on top of it. On the other side, there is a gold box to show that the Aron is the crucial point in its own right.

Why does the Aron have these two sides? It's more than just that. The commandment for building the Mishkan is "Ve'Asu Li Mikdash VeShachanti Betochem," "You (pl.) make me a sanctuary and I will dwell among you" (ibid. 8) It is given as a collective commandment. The rest of the Parashah's commandments are all singular, except one: "Ve'Asu Aron Atzei Shitim," "You (pl.) make an Ark of Shitim wood" (ibid. 10). It's given to everyone. Ramban even says that the building of all of the

Keilim of the Mishkan is just a Hechsher (preparatory step) for the Avodah (service in the Beit HaMikdash) except for the Aron (which doesn't have Avodah). The Aron is its own Mitzvah, just like the Mishkan as a whole (Hasagot HaRamban Al Sefer HaMitzvot, Mitzvat Aseh 33). The lesson of the Aron is that there are multiple perspectives to everything, and it's important to understand them all. Both the views of the Keruvim from up above and from the people are important to fully understand the Aseret HaDibrot. This is so important that there is one Mitzvah to build the Aron and Kaporet to ensure that while the two perspectives exist, they are merged to create a house for our fundamental beliefs.

"Take" My Terumah!?

By Yakov Abrahams ('22)

דָּבַר אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיִּקְחוּ־לִי תְרוּמָה מֵאֵת כָּל־אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר יִדְבְּנוּ לְבֹו תְקוּוֹי "אֶת־תְּרוּמַתִּי" "Tell the Israelite people to take for Me gifts; from every man whose heart makes-him-willing, you are to take my contribution" (Shemot 25:2). In this week's Parashah, Hashem presents the Jewish people with the opportunity to donate to the Mishkan. God decides to reveal His presence on Earth and dwell amongst His chosen nation.

Rav Moshe Feinstein points out that the above Pasuk uses the Lashon of "take", implying that Bnei Yisrael were in some way coerced into contributing to the construction of the Mishkan. This is difficult because the Pesukim state that Bnei Yisrael not only donated generously, but even gave more than required, to the point where Moshe Rabbeinu had to tell them to stop. So, asks Rav Feinstein, why does the Torah indicate coercion?

He answers that the Pasuk is teaching a fascinating lesson about human nature in regards to generosity. Hashem created us with the natural tendency to be stingy. Our Yetzer HaRa gives us a particularly difficult time parting from money. Therefore, Mitzvot achieved by means of money such as Tzedakah, acts of kindness, and donating to the mishkan, call upon us to be Ma'avir Al Midoteinu, to overcome our natural

inclination. However, our mere fulfilling of the command is not Hashem's sole interest. Rather, He desires that we do it with utmost joy. In this light, Hashem instructs Bnei Yisrael to "take for me a donation", He wants that we not just be Mevatel our will for His own, but that we do it with enthusiasm. Hence, the proactive Lashon of "take".

Rav Moshe beautifully explains: "Often this requires an effort not just to overcome the objections of our Yetzer HaRa but to force it to agree with this generous attitude we must drive for ... Thus, the compulsion suggested in this verse is to be used to force our Yetzer HaRa to agree to this generous attitude we are to cultivate".

Hashem challenges us to be Ma'avir Al Midoteinu in order to give us merit. The ideal prototype of Ma'avir Al Midotav is not one who merely deters his Yetzer HaRa, but actively infuses his Mitzvot with joy. The Gemara (Rosh Hashanah 17a) defines the Ma'avir Al Midotav prototype, as one who forgives others. The Gemara says that one who forgives others for wronging him, all his sins are forgiven. Rav Elyahu Dessler explains in Michtav Eliyahu that Hashem forgives this person for two reasons: "It's measure-for-measure, being repaid in kind, for someone who forgives others to be forgiven by G-d. In addition to this, there is a second reason why heaven "passes over his sins." Someone who is Ma'avir Al Midotav connects himself to the community. He therefore is judged as part of that community, which is always more meritorious than having to stand on his own."

As pointed out by Rav Moshe, we see that Bnei Yisrael follow Hashem's hint and donate generously to the Mishkan. They don't just go against their natural inclination, but conquer it with enthusiasm. Let's "take" this lesson from our ancestors and infuse all our Mitzvot with joy. Whether it's in the context of forgiving one another, or jumping out of bed for Shacharit, the time has come for us to answer Hashem's call, to be Ma'avir Al Midoteinu. "If not now, when?" (Hillel HaZakein - Pirkei Avot 1:14).

Why We Wear A Kippah Part 1

By Chanan Schreiber ('22)

If you were asked, "What's that thing on your head? Why do you wear it?" how would you respond?

What is the fundamental reason for wearing a Kippah?

The Gemara in a few places discusses wearing a Kippah. They all seem to imply that covering one's head is not an obligation, but rather a Middat Chassidut – a good custom.

Gemara Kiddushin

The Gemara (Kiddushin 31a) states, "Rav Huna the son of Yehoshua did not walk four Amot with his head uncovered. He said: 'The Shechinah is above my head.'" It can be inferred that covering our head is not an obligation because, right before, the Gemara says, "Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi said: It's forbidden to walk four Amot in an upright position." Because the Gemara uses the language of assur in the case of standing up straight, but not regarding covering one's head, it seems that a head covering is just a Middat Chassidut.¹

Gemara Shabbat

In Masechet Shabbat² the Gemara says, "Rav Huna the son of Rabbi Yehoshua said: 'May it be a merit for me that I never walked four Amot bareheaded.'" Many³ believe that the words "לְיָיָהּ" – "May it be a merit for me" have the connotation of a Middat Chassidut, rather than an obligation, because it implies that one is going a step beyond what they need to do and, therefore, deserves a merit.

Elsewhere in Masechet Shabbat⁴ discusses why Rav Nachman bar Yitzchak wore a head covering: "For Rav Nachman bar Yitzchak's mother was told by astrologers, 'Your son will be a thief.' She therefore did not let him be bareheaded. She said to him, 'Cover your head so that the fear of heaven will be upon you, and ask for mercy.' He did not know why she was saying that to him. One day, he was sitting and learning under a palm tree. The cloak fell off his head. He lifted his eyes and saw the palm tree. His desire overcame him, and he climbed up, and cut off a cluster of dates with his teeth (the tree did not belong to him)."

This story shows that the reason someone would cover their head is so "the fear of heaven will be upon [him]." It also implies that, if Rav Nachman bar Yitzchak was not destined to become a thief, his mother would never have asked him to cover his head. Therefore this is, potentially, a third source that a head covering is not a Chiyuv and only a Middat Chassidut.

So far, the reasons for this Middat Chassidut are because the "Shechina is above your head" and "so the fear of Heaven is upon you." The Zohar to Parashat Balak also says a man should not have his head uncovered because "the light of the Shechina is above one's head." It seems that the fundamental reason for having our head

¹ The Shulchan Aruch (Orach Chayim 2:6) rules accordingly. It uses the language of assur by standing up straight, but just that "one should not" regarding uncovering one's head. The Maharshal (Shabbat 118, Siman 75) rules similarly.

² 118b

³ The Maharam Mirutinberg uses this as a proof that a Kippah is not an obligation and only a Middat Chassidut.

⁴ 156b

covered is so we will be constantly conscious of Hashem's Presence: "Shiviti Hashem LiNegdi Tamid."⁵

Maharshal

The Maharshal⁶ holds that wearing a Kippah is only a Middat Chassidut because of these Gemarot⁷. He quotes a source from a Midrash⁸ as another proof: "R' Yitzchak⁹ said: This can be compared to a [human] king who sends a royal letter to the people of his country. What did the people of the country do? They stood up, uncovered their heads, and read [the letter] in fear and trepidation. [However,] this is what Hashem says to Bnei Yisrael: With this royal letter of Mine, [Keriyat Shema,] I didn't burden you or say to you that you must stand up and uncover your heads. Rather, "Recite them when you stay at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you get up."¹⁰

The Maharshal proves from here, that when Hashem said "I did not burden you to uncover your heads," it implies that while we are not obligated to uncover our heads, we could if we wanted to do so. Therefore, according to the Maharshal, there is no obligation to wear a Kippah.^{11 12} However, the Maharshal says that because it has already been accepted that it is Assur to go without a Kippah, and the earlier Rabbanim have Paskened that it is Assur, he can't go against it.

What are the potential reasons it would be Assur to remove a Kippah nowadays?

Chukat Akum

The Taz¹³, (16th and 17th century), introduces another reason for wearing a Kippah. There is an Issur in the Torah called Chukat Akum. The Pasuk says, "וּבְהַקְתֵּיהֶם לָא תִלְכוּ" - "you should not follow in their laws"¹⁴. This means, if the non-Jews have an accepted rule or custom in their society it is Assur for us as Jews to have the same practice.

⁵ Tehillim 16:8. Rabbi Yehudah Balsam quotes this to make a similar point. <https://www.yutorah.org/lectures/lecture.cfm/815307/rabbi-yehuda-balsam/yarmulka-mitzva-mihag-or-midas-chasidus/>

⁶ Teshuvah Siman 72

⁷ Shabbat 118b and Kiddushin 31a

⁸ Vayikra Rabbah Parsha 27

⁹ The Maharal has it as Rabbi Barchei, but in the Midrash Rabbah it is Rabbi Yitzchak

¹⁰ Devarim 6:7

¹¹ The Beit Yosef quotes the Shuvut Yaakov and the Birchei Yosef who disagree with this proof of the Maharshal.

¹² The Maharshal doesn't understand why it would be Assur to Daven without a Kippah either. The Midrash quoted above seems to imply that we are not obligated to wear a Kippah during Kriyat Shema.

¹³ Taz: Shulchan Aruch 8:2 "ונכון שיכסה ראשו בטלית"

¹⁴ VaYikra 18:3

Nowadays, non-Jews have an accepted custom that removing one's hat is a sign of respect. They do this when in front of respected people and when going to pray. A clear contemporary example of this is when the American National Anthem is sung. The proper etiquette during the anthem is to stand up and take off one's hat. If someone is not doing this, it is usually a sign of disrespect. Since taking off one's hat is considered a sign of respect in the non-Jewish society, the Taz holds, if a Jew would take off his Kippah, it would fall under the Issur of Chukat Akum. He agrees that during the times of the Gemara it was just a Middat Chassidut, but nowadays it is Assur.

The question is, why doesn't the Shulchan Aruch¹⁵ mention anything about Chukat Akum in regards to a Kippah. Rav Moshe Feinstein¹⁶ explains that the Issur of Chukat Akum applies only in the places where non-Jews maintain those customs. The Shulchan Aruch, Rav Yosef Caro, lived among Moslems who do not have the practice of removing their head coverings, rather they usually wear them. Therefore, the reason the Shulchan Aruch never mentions anything about Chukat Akum is because, in the places (Turkey and Eretz Yisrael) that he lived, there was never a problem with it. Rav Moshe says that nowadays, because we live in places where most non-Jews uncover their heads, it is Assur for us to do the same.

Marit Ayin

Rav Ovadia Yosef¹⁷ says that, nowadays, there might be another reason taking off a Kippah would be Assur. Because the Kippah is accepted among all religious Jews, it distinguishes between the religious and non-religious Jew. If one would not wear a Kippah, people would think he is not religious. This issue potentially falls under the Issur of Marit Ayin. Rav Ovadia says, "הפכה הכפה" - "the Kippah has turned into" a symbol that the the fear of heaven is on you. Even though you might fear Hashem whether you're wearing your Kippah or not, it is important that others know that you fear Heaven as well.¹⁸ Rav Ovadia says that even though we cannot create Issurim, it seems that a Kippah is more than just a Middat Chassidut and by wearing one you eliminate the concern for Marit Ayin.

¹⁵ Orach Chayim 2:6

¹⁶ Egrat Moshe: Orach Chaim: Siman 1

¹⁷ Teshuvot Yechave Da'at 4:1.

¹⁸ Rav Ovadia quotes Proverbs 3:4 to support this.

What is Sefer Devarim? Part 1

By Rabbi Chaim Jachter

It is challenging to grasp the role of Sefer Devarim. Many assume Sefer Devarim is a summary of the first four books of the Torah. This misunderstanding stems from a misunderstanding of the “nickname” Chazal give to Sefer Devarim: Mishneh Torah (Megilla 31b). While the term Mishneh Torah literally means a repetition of the Torah, Sefer Devarim is far more than a mere repeat of the Torah.

Chazal's Nicknames for the Books of the Torah

The names Chazal give to the first four books of the Torah are fairly straightforward. Sefer BeReishit is called Sefer Yetzira, since BeReishit describes the creation of the world and the creation of Am Yisrael. Sefer Shemot is Sefer HaGe'ulah since we are redeemed from slavery and Hesteir Panim (distancing from Hashem). Torat Kohanim captures the meaning of Sefer VaYikra since the Sefer presents the laws of the Kohanim and how Am Yisrael can realize our mandate to be the Mamlechet Kohanim VeGoy Kadosh, a role model holy nation (Shemot 19:6). BeMidbar is referred to by Chazal as Sefer Pekudim, the book of countings, since the Sefer contrasts the generation that left Mitzrayim who are counted in the early part of the Sefer with the generation that will enter Eretz Yisrael who are counted in the later part of the Sefer.

Mishneh Torah, by contrast, seems not at all to capture the essence of Sefer Devarim.

Sefer Devarim is NOT a Summary of the First Four Books of the Torah

Sefer Devarim is undoubtedly not a mere summary of the Torah. Hardly any of Sefer BeReishit is summarized in Devarim. While some of Shemot is presented in Devarim – Matan Torah and the Cheit Ha'Eigel for example – much is missing such as the Ten Makkot and the Mishkan. Most of VaYikra is not presented in Devarim, with the exceptions of the list of Kosher creatures and the Berachot UKelalot. While Cheit HaMeraglim and the rules of the Ir Miklat are both presented in Sefer Devarim, much of the rest of Sefer BeMidbar, including the countings, the ordering of the camps, and the rules of the Parah Aduma do not appear in Devarim.

Moreover, there are many Mitzvot that appear in Sefer Devarim that do not appear in the earlier books, including the appointing of a Melech, Chalitzah, and the Ben Sorer UMoreh.

Finally, the stories that are addressed in Sefer Devarim that appeared earlier in the Torah, are presented significantly differently in Sefer Devarim. For example,

the Meraglim story is presented dramatically different in Devarim than it is in BeMidbar.

Most important, if Sefer Devarim is merely a summary of the first four books of the Torah, it would be worthless. To illustrate this point, imagine that a synagogue engaged a guest speaker. On the Shabbat, his speech consists of a summary of the first four books of the Torah. His presentation would be deemed a complete failure. Merely summarizing the first four books of the Torah would hardly be deemed a valuable speech. There must be something more to Sefer Devarim!

What is Sefer Devarim?

The following Pesukim help us understand the purpose of Sefer Devarim: Devarim 1:1 notes “Eileh HaDevarim Asher Diber Moshe El Kol Yisrael Be'Eiver HaYardein,” “These are the speeches that Moshe Rabbeinu delivered on the other side of the Jordan River.” This Pasuk defines Devarim as a series of speeches Moshe Rabbeinu delivered to us when we were about to enter Eretz Yisrael.

Devarim 2:2 is a Pasuk that typifies Sefer Devarim. The Pasuk states “VaYedabeir Hashem Eilai Lamor” Hashem spoke to me to communicate. This oft-repeated Pasuk in Sefer Devarim contrasts sharply with the Pasuk “VaYedabeir Hashem El Moshe Leimor,” Hashem instructed Moshe to communicate, that appears so often in Shemot, VaYikra, and BeMidbar.

“VaYedabeir Hashem Eilai Lamor” exemplifies how unlike the first four books of the Torah, Moshe Rabbeinu is “the speaker” in Sefer Devarim. In the other books of the Torah, the Narrator, meaning Hashem, is “the speaker”.

Devarim 1:3 informs us that he began delivering these speeches on Rosh Chodesh Shevat in the last year of Moshe Rabbeinu's life. Moshe Rabbeinu continued delivering these speeches until the day he died (Devarim 31:2 with Rashi). Being that Chazal (Kiddushin 38b) inform us that Moshe Rabbeinu died on the seventh of Adar, we learn that these speeches recorded in Sefer Devarim were delivered for a bit more than a month.

Devarim 6:1 informs us that Moshe Rabbeinu will be presenting matters relevant to our upcoming entry into Eretz Yisrael. Moshe Rabbeinu in Sefer Devarim prepares us for at least four major transitions that we are about to make.

One great change is the transfer of the leadership from Moshe Rabbeinu to Yehoshua. The former had been our leader for forty years. Most of Bnei Yisrael did not know of another leader during their adulthood. In Sefer Devarim, Moshe Rabbeinu prepares us for Yehoshua soon assuming the mantle of leadership.

Another monumental adjustment was from a life sustained by miracles in the Midbar to a much more

natural life in Israel. The Mitzvah of Birkat HaMazon is presented in Sefer Devarim since it is most relevant to Eretz Yisrael (aside from our thanking Hashem for Eretz Yisrael in Sefer Devarim). In Eretz Yisrael we will be eating natural meals for which we must recite Birkat HaMazon, unlike the Mahn which we ate in the Midbar.

Another major change was adjusting from living in isolation from other nations in the Midbar, to being exposed to many other nations in Eretz Yisrael. For this reason, Moshe Rabbeinu places much emphasis on “Shema Yisrael Hashem Elokeinu Hashem Echad” and refraining from Avodah Zara.

Finally, in the Midbar, at least for the most of our journey, we were not exposed to war with enemies. In Eretz Yisrael we will be faced with the need to conquer Eretz Yisrael. It is for this reason that Moshe Rabbeinu discusses at length Mitzvot relevant to waging war.

Moshe Rabbeinu is overwhelmingly successful with these speeches as evidenced by Sefer Yehoshua. The very end of Sefer Devarim and Sefer Yehoshua record the seamless and orderly transfer of power to Yehoshua. Moreover, relatively little goes wrong in Sefer Yehoshua. Very few deviations from the Torah occur during the time of Yehoshua’s rule. Thus, Moshe Rabbeinu perfectly prepared us and set us up for great success in Sefer Yehoshua.

In summary, Sefer Devarim is a series of speeches Moshe Rabbeinu delivered during the last thirty seven days of his life. These speeches beautifully prepared us to handle the monumental changes that lay before us.

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