



Likkutei Sichos

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Return to the Depths

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1.

A SANCTUM FOR THE ARK

At the beginning of chapter four of “*Hilchos Beis HaBechirah*,”¹ following Rambam’s description of the *Kodesh HaKodashim*² — “on the western side of the *Kodesh HaKodashim*, there was a stone on which the Ark was placed ...” — Rambam continues:

When Shlomo built the Temple, he knew it would ultimately be destroyed. So he constructed in it a place to sequester the Ark below in deep, maze-like vaults. King Yoshiyahu issued the command,³ and it was stored in the sanctum built by Shlomo, as it says,⁴ “And he said to the Levites who would teach wisdom to all of Israel and who were consecrated to Hashem: ‘Place the Holy Ark in the chamber built by Shlomo, the son of David, King of Israel. You will not carry it on your shoulders. Now, serve Hashem your L-rd.’” Aharon’s staff was stored with it..., all these {holy artifacts} did not return in the Second Temple. Moreover, the *Urim VeTumim*⁵ no longer responded with *ruach hakodesh*{to questions of national importance}

This requires clarification (as commentators⁶ inquire): Of what practical halachic relevance is the entire lengthy narrative describing where and how the Ark was stored and who facilitated the move? In his work, Rambam’s writings were intended “to teach **halachah**... topics from which neither laws, ethics, proper conduct, nor necessary knowledge are derived, are not dealt with by Rambam, of blessed memory, in this work”!

Furthermore, this matter (how and where the Ark was sequestered) is the subject of a dispute.⁷ Why, then, does Rambam adopt one opinion if it is, practically speaking, irrelevant?

¹ {*Mishneh Torah*, par.1.}

² {“*Kodesh HaKodashim*” — lit., “Holy of Holies,” the holiest place in the Temple, which was the normal repository of the Ark.}

³ *Yoma* 52b.

⁴ *Divrei Hayamim II* 35:3.

⁵ {“*Urim VeTumim*” — The *Urim VeTumim* was worn by the *Kohen Gadol* and would answer questions with Divine Guidance, *ruach hakodesh*. There is a dispute among the *Rishonim* about whether the *Urim VeTumim* was the breastplate worn by the *Kohen Gadol* or a piece of parchment inserted inside the breastplate (see *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 11, “*Tetzaveh*”).}

⁶ *Yavetz*, “*Chiddushim Ubiurim*” on Rambam; see *Chasam Sofer* on *Chulin* 7a.

⁷ *Yoma* 53b; *Beraisa*, “*Melech HaMishkan*,” ch. 7.

2.

THE COMMENTATOR'S EXPLANATION

The commentators answer that “our teacher {Rambam} has a great need for this matter, based on his ruling regarding these halachos later in Chapter 6⁸ ..., that the holiness of the Temple was never nullified.... For our teacher maintains that this matter of the Temple’s holiness never being nullified follows the opinion that the Ark was sequestered in its place..., and at the very least, is relevant to the prohibition of entering the {*Kodesh HaKodashim* in the} Temple, for it makes sense that it be contingent upon this, for the verse says,⁹ ‘(to) within the Curtain (and) in front of the Cover....’”

However, this answer requires further examination since —

[In addition to Rambam explaining his reasoning¹⁰ why “it was consecrated for that time and for eternity” — “because the sanctity of the Temple and Jerusalem stems from the *Shechinah* **and the *Shechinah*** can never be nullified,” and based on this, the (place of the) Ark specifically would be irrelevant, the answer is unclear]:

Based on this answer, Rambam should have stated briefly and explicitly that “the Ark was sequestered in its place.” However, Rambam —

a) Writes, “he constructed **in it** a place to sequester the Ark,” without any specifics. So we could construe the words “in it” as referring to the Temple (mentioned immediately prior), and not to the *Kodesh HaKodashim* (mentioned before that). Thus, based on this answer, the main point in the discussion is omitted — the concept that “the Ark was sequestered in its place” is not emphasized in Rambam’s words.

⁸ At the end (par. 15).

⁹ *Vayikra* 16:2.

¹⁰ *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Beis HaBechirah*,” sec. 4, par. 16.

b) Rambam does not quote the verse (quoted in the Gemara),¹¹ “And there they are until this day,”¹² which emphasizes that the Ark can be found in its place (even **now**).

c) And **mainly**, this does not address why Rambam cites (the opinion) that **Yoshiyahu** stored the Ark, which is entirely irrelevant to whether the Ark was sequestered in its place (or whether the Ark was stored in the chamber for the wood).

d) Furthermore, Rambam discussed both of these matters (regarding the place where the Ark was sequestered and who moved it there) at length and in much detail:

- (a) **King Shlomo** constructed the place to sequester the Ark.
- (b) The place was “below in deep, maze-like vaults.”
- (c) **King Yoshiyahu** issued the **command**, and it was stored — not stating simply, “they stored it.”
- (d) That “it was sequestered in the place built by Shlomo,” and not “that “it was sequestered there.”¹³
- (e) He brings proof from a verse.
- (f) He also quotes from the verse the additional words (“...to the Levites who would teach wisdom to all of Israel and who were consecrated to Hashem..., the son of David, King of Israel. You will not carry it on your shoulders. Now, serve Hashem, your L-rd, etc.”), which are seemingly unnecessary to prove that “King Yoshiyahu issued the command, and it was stored in the sanctum built by Shlomo.” —

¹¹ *Yoma* 53b.

¹² *Melachim I* 8:8.

¹³ The wording in *Yoma* 52b, 53b.

What practical relevance do all of the details mentioned above hold in halachah?

3.

PROBING FURTHER

The following also requires clarification:

- a) The simple understanding of Rambam's words ("and he was aware that it would ultimately be destroyed implies that Shlomo built the "place" in the Temple of his own volition (since "**he knew** that it would ultimately be destroyed"). This is astonishing: All parts and components of the Temple were built following Hashem's directive — "**All this** is put in writing **by the hand of Hashem** who instructed me."¹⁴ How could Shlomo have constructed a "place" in the Temple on his own initiative?
- b) Why does Rambam conclude the above (and at length) by reviewing the *Urim VeTumim* in the Second Temple? True, the *Urim VeTumim* shared a similarity with the Ark — neither returned in the Second Temple. Nevertheless, the topic of the *Urim VeTumim* does not belong in *Hilchos Beis HaBechirah*, but rather, together with the topic of the priestly garments discussed in *Hilchos Klei HaMikdash*. (Indeed, Rambam actually mentions them there.)¹⁵ Why does Rambam introduce this discussion in *Hilchos Beis HaBechirah*?

We must say that the connection of the *Urim VeTumim* with the Ark was not only that "they did not return in the Second Temple," but rather, the *Urim VeTumim* was connected with the Ark's essential quality. For this reason, Rambam mentions them in *Hilchos Beis HaBechirah* together with the laws of the Ark.

¹⁴ *Divrei HaYamim I* 28:19.

¹⁵ *Mishneh Torah*, "*Hilchos Klei HaMikdash*," ch. 10, par. 10.

4.

A PECULIAR PLACE

To understand this, we must preface with an analysis of nuance in Rambam's **placement** of this particular halachah:

Rambam says at the beginning of *Hilchos Beis HaBechirah*,¹⁶ “The following elements are essential when constructing this House, the *Kodesh*,¹⁷ the *Kodesh HaKodashim*..., *Ulam*...”¹⁸ Subsequently, he says,¹⁹ “The following utensils are required for the Sanctuary...,” and lists the Temple's utensils and where they were placed.

In the following chapters, Chapters 2 and 3, Rambam explains the design of the utensils, etc.; in Chapter 4, he explains the design of the Temple (the walls of the Temple, *Heichal*,²⁰ and its gates, **etc.**).

This raises a question: The Ark was one of the Temple's **vessels**. As such, how does the halachah mentioned above **elaborating** on the Ark's storage dovetail with the subject of Chapter 4 (the design of the Temple)?

From the placement of this discussion, we can infer that (according to Rambam) the Ark's placement in the *Kodesh HaKodashim* was a detail of the **Temple's design**. The Ark was not merely a **utensil found** in the *Kodesh HaKodashim* (as were the other utensils in the *Heichal*, etc.). Rather, the Ark was a part of the *Kodesh HaKodashim* itself. The Ark made the Temple into a “House **for Hashem**,”²¹ as the verse says,²² “It is there that I shall arrange an audience with you.”

¹⁶ *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Beis HaBechirah*,” ch. 1, par. 5.

¹⁷ {The “*Kodesh*” was a room in the main section of the Temple located before the “Holy of Holies,” and hosted the *menorah*, *shulchan*, and incense Altar.}

¹⁸ {“*Ulam*” – lit. “hall,” was the entry hall to the “*Heichal*.”}

¹⁹ *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Beis HaBechirah*,” ch. 1, par. 6.

²⁰ {In this context, the term “*Heichal*” refers to the entire main structure in the Temple, comprised of three rooms: the “*Ulam*,” the “*Kodesh*,” and the “*Kodesh Hakodashim*.”}

²¹ Rambam's wording, beg. of “*Hilchos Beis HaBechirah*.”

²² *Shemos* 25:22; see *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 4, p. 1346, and footnotes.

[This explains why Rambam does not mention the Ark along with the Temple's other utensils detailed in the halachah mentioned above (at the beginning of *Hilchos Beis HaBechirah*): “The following utensils are required for the Sanctuary...,” because the Ark was not a (discrete) artifact, but a component of the *Kodesh HaKodashim*].

This, however, is highly perplexing: It follows that in the Second Temple when the Ark was not present (in its regular place), the *Kodesh HaKodashim* (of which the Ark was a part) was incomplete. In other words, the Second Temple lacked an “**integral component of the House's structure**” (and not just a detail)!?

To forestall this question, Rambam brings the lengthy narrative of sequestering the Ark to clarify that even the Second Temple was not deficient in “the House's structure.”

5.

THE ORIGINAL PLAN

The explanation:

Rambam's statement — “When Shlomo built the Temple..., he constructed a place in it to sequester the Ark...” — is not **intended** to resolve the question of where the Ark was stored (for what happened in the past is academic) but to introduce a novel **ruling** about **building the Temple**.

Sequestering the Ark was not a suboptimal option²³ due to a lack of alternatives. Rather, the **original plan** for the Temple's construction was that the Ark would have two designated places (as it were): (a) a visible place — on top of the *even hashesiyah*²⁴ in the *Kodesh HaKodashim*, and (b) a place to

²³ {In the original, “*bedieved*”; something that arose “after the fact,” not in the original plan.}

²⁴ {“The Foundation Stone.”}

deposit the Ark “below” the *Kodesh Hakadoshim* (“in deep, maze-like vaults”). This place, to begin with, was also part of the Temple.

This means that storing the Ark was not something added to the {plan for the} Temple (carried out for [and at a time that necessitated] storing and protecting the **Ark**), but a law that concerned the **Temple’s construction**. For the Temple to be complete, just as there had to be a place built to serve as the Ark’s visible placement (the *Kodesh HaKodashim*), the Temple also had to have a designated place (in the *Kodesh HaKodashim*)²⁵ where to sequester the Ark. (This principle forestalls any question about the perpetuity of the *Kodesh HaKodashim*, seeing that the Ark was an integral component of the *Kodesh HaKodashim*, as mentioned above).

On this basis, we can explain Rambam’s wording: “When Shlomo **built...**, he knew it would ultimately be destroyed, he constructed a place in it...” The emphasis is not that Shlomo constructed the place of his own volition, Heaven forbid, but that when he **built** the Temple, he needed to know about its eventual destruction. Thus, by Divine command, he built this repository for the Ark:

The Ark had to be stationed in the *Kodesh HaKodashim*. If Shlomo had excavated an area below (adhering to the command) unaware of the area’s purpose, the area would not have been consecrated as a place for containing the (sanctity of the) Ark²⁶ (in the *Kodesh HaKodashim*) at the time of its construction.²⁷

Thus, Rambam emphasizes that “Shlomo... knew it would ultimately be destroyed (and) he (therefore) constructed a place in it to sequester the Ark.” At the very outset, he built a place to **sequester the Ark** [as Rambam emphasizes that the place was (suitable **for storage** —) “below in deep, maze-like vaults”];

²⁵ As discussed in Section 4, this chapter of *Mishneh Torah* (ch. 4) covers the Temple’s design, with the first halachah detailing the Holy of Holies (and communicating that the Ark was an element and component of it). Thus, when Rambam writes {in halachah 1}, “he constructed a place in it,” it is readily understood that he refers to the Holy of Holies.

²⁶ See *Menachos* 27b, where we learn that the place of the Ark has the sanctity of the Ark, as it states, “the place consecrated for the Ark.”

²⁷ And we require consecration at the time of the construction — see *Shevuos* 15b.

it is thus understood that Shlomo sanctified it (as a place for the Ark, and thereby) as part of the *Kodesh HaKodashim*.

6.

RAMBAM'S PROOF

On this basis, we can also understand why Rambam goes on to add that “King Yoshiyahu issued the command, and it was stored in the sanctum built by Shlomo”:

To further demonstrate that storing the Ark in this place was (not a matter of suboptimal solution, but was) part of the original plan (— that the area be designated as the [storage] place for the Ark, part of the *Kodesh HaKodashim*) —

Rambam explains that the Ark was sequestered (not during the Temple's destruction — a suboptimal circumstance, but) at a time that the Temple was not in danger **at all** — as the might of the Jewish nation in the era of **Yoshiyahu** is well-known — and even more so, bringing the Ark into its place of storage was similar to **Shlomo** bringing the Ark into the *Kodesh HaKodashim*:

- 1) **King Yoshiyahu** was the person who issued the “command” to sequester the Ark (similar to when the Ark was brought into the *Kodesh HaKodashim* by **King Shlomo**); and
- 2) The Ark was brought in by “the Levites who would teach wisdom to all of Israel, and who were consecrated to Hashem” — similar to Shlomo's time, when “the *kohanim* brought the Ark of Hashem's covenant to its place.”²⁸

Therefore, the verse uses nuanced wording: “**Place** the Holy Ark in the **chamber** built by Shlomo....” This was not an act of **removal**, **taking** the Ark from its place, but on the contrary, this was an act of **placing** the Ark **in the chamber**. Thus, Rambam also cites the end of the verse, “You will not carry it

²⁸ *Melachim I* 8:6.

on your shoulders. Now, **serve** Hashem your L-rd....” Although the Ark would be sequestered from then on, and thus, “You will not (be able to) carry it on your shoulders,” the Temple *avodah*²⁹ would still not be lacking. Instead, “serve Hashem your L-rd...” in the Temple (since the Ark’s storage did not negatively impact the integrity of the Temple).

7.

THE URIM VETUMIM

Based on all of the above, we can also understand why Rambam concludes the halachah with a lengthy discussion about the *Urim VeTumim* during the Second Temple period:

Rambam gives an example of what he says at the beginning of the halachah concerning the Ark — that the integrity of the Ark was unimpeached (that is, the Ark was in its designated place) even during the Second Temple, albeit with a noticeable, significant change, since it was no longer **visible** in the Temple —

This was also the case with the *Urim VeTumim* in the Second Temple — The *Urim VeTumim*, according to Rambam, were fully intact even in the Second Temple.³⁰ Although there was a significant change as “they did not **respond**” — they were not **heard** — their overt operation (as the *Urim VeTumim*) was lacking from how they functioned in the First Temple — yet, they were still intact. Therefore, (as Rambam concludes) the *Urim VeTumim* completed the required number of garments the Kohen Gadol wore.³¹

²⁹ {Divine service.}

³⁰ As explained by the commentators (*Be'er Sheva* on *Sotah* 48a; et al.), *Mishneh Torah* (“*Hilchos Beis Habechirah*,” ch. 4, par. 1; “*Hilchos Klei HaMikdash*,” ch. 10, par. 10) Rambam maintains that the *Urim VeTumim* were the stones of the breastplate (and not the parchment containing the Ineffable Name that was missing in the Second Temple). See *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 1, p. 136, fn. 16, and the sources cited there.

³¹ {While serving in the Temple, the *Kohen Gadol* was obligated to wear eight garments. Had the *Urim VeTumim* been missing, the service would have been invalid; see the mishnah on *Zevachim* 15b, and the discussion in the Gemara on *Zevachim* 17b ff.}

8.

THE ETERNITY OF THE TEMPLE

From all the above, we can derive a *chiddush* and something wondrous, not only concerning the consummate excellency and sanctity of the **Second** Temple — that even then, the *Kodesh HaKodashim* was complete and the Ark was in its designated spot — but also concerning the advantage in the sanctity of the **First** Temple.

Although, outwardly, the First Temple was not everlasting since it could be potentially destroyed, which ultimately occurred — on a deeper level, however, there was also an “everlasting” element in the First Temple, since the First Temple had a sanctum that was never destroyed. The Ark remains {there,} in its place “until this very day.”

The concept that “it was consecrated for that time and eternity” is a consequence of the sanctity of the **place** — it “stems from the *Shechinah*.” However, in this halachah, Rambam introduces a more profound insight — that even the **structure** had an element, a component, that was “for that time and eternity.” The *Kodesh Hakadoshim* was **initially built** for that time and eternity since it also had a sanctum.

9.

DELVING DEEPER

The above explanation also offers a deeper insight into the connection between the three Temples:

The Temples are not **three** (distinct) Temples sharing a connection. They are, in principle, **one** Temple. The Second Temple and the Third, as well, are (in their main components) not **new** Temples. Rather, the (First) Temple was rebuilt anew.

With the building of the First Temple, an everlasting aspect had been established for then and forever (as mentioned above) eternity; it subsumed the Second and Third Temples.

[We can posit that the same idea applies to the Revival of the Dead: The Revival of the Dead does not mean that bodies will be created **entirely anew**. Rather, bodies will be reconstructed from the “*luz bone*”³² — the bone from the original bodies not subject to decay (or “destruction”).

This is the underlying concept that “he constructed a place in it to sequester the Ark” — the place of the Ark is the “*etzem*” {lit., “bone”} ({also meaning} “the essence,” as was previously explained) of the Temple, which can neither be destroyed nor damaged and from which the Second and Third Temples would be built].

10.

POTENTIAL FOR DESTRUCTION

This halachah in Rambam also unveils remarkable insights regarding the general idea of the Temple’s destruction and exile:

Intrinsically, the Temple could not have been destroyed. On their own, Gentiles do not have the capability, Heaven forbid, to exert control over the Temple, Hashem’s House.

The Temple could be destroyed because while being **constructed**, the Temple itself {in its design} reflected the potential and possibility for its destruction

³² *Bereishis Rabbah* sec. 28 par. 3.

This is similar to the Jewish people as a whole. A Gentile, on his own, cannot subjugate a Jew unless the Jew (through his actions and behavior) creates the necessary space for it.

[Furthermore, not only can a Gentile not subjugate a Jew, but even the Heavenly Court, in a sense, cannot prevail over a Jew. Thus, a verdict issued by the Court upon a Jew {in the World to Come} must be consensual.]³³

This is what Rambam is saying. The possibility for the Temple to be destroyed came about because when Shlomo built the Temple, he did not merely know it would ultimately be destroyed. Rather, when building the Temple, he considered the eventuality of its destruction — “he constructed a place in it to sequester the Ark.”

11.

A DESCENT FOR THE SAKE OF AN ASCENT

Since, however, along with all the joy and celebration that accompanied the building of the Temple, King Shlomo actually thought about the Temple’s destruction and subsequently acted upon these thoughts, it is clear that (even) the Temple’s destruction is truly relevant and contributes to the purpose for which the Temple was built.

To break down this concept —

The Temple’s destruction was not for the sake of the destruction *per se* but to facilitate an ascent — a descent for the sake of an ascent — and eventually, an ascent to the Third Temple, which will be everlasting. Then, the integrity of the Temple will be complete since it will be “the workmanship of Hashem”³⁴ (“a Temple, my L-rd, that Your hands established”).³⁵

³³ See *Likkutei Sichos*, vol. 4, p. 1207. {See footnote 27, *ibid.*, referencing *Likkutei Maharan*, ch. 113.}

³⁴ *Zohar*, vol. 3, 221a; and similar wording in vol. 1, 28a.

³⁵ *Shemos* 15:17.

This is what Rambam means when he says, “When **Shlomo built** the Temple, and (**as a matter of course**) he knew it would ultimately be destroyed” — since the Temple was “the workmanship of a **mortal man**”³⁶ — and thus, “he constructed a place in it to sequester...”: At the outset, Shlomo embedded in the Temple (the possibility for and) room for its destruction. He did so to facilitate the attainment afterward of the ascent through the Third Temple (through the descent of the Temple’s destruction).

The idea that the Temple’s destruction was meant to pave the way for a more incredible elevation is illustrated by Shlomo’s creation of a sanctum within it to sequester the Ark, showing both extremes of the situation.:

On one hand, it indicated that the Temple “would ultimately be destroyed,” yet on the other hand, the purpose of constructing the sanctum was to ensure the **perpetuity** of the Ark and Temple. Constructing the sanctum ensured that the “Temple’s structure” in the Second Temple would also not be deficient. Even more so, it ensured that the Ark itself would remain complete and that the Third Temple would be rebuilt from it (as discussed in Section 9).

12.

THE DEEPER MEANING

On this basis, we can also explain (the deeper meaning of) the three words Rambam uses to describe the Ark’s sanctum, “deep, maze-like vaults”:

With these words, Rambam alludes to the **loftiness** in the Temple when Shlomo “constructed a place in it to sequester the Ark.” Although outwardly, this construction was linked with the Temple’s destruction — “it would ultimately be destroyed” — nonetheless, specifically through the descent (through the rectification and *teshuvah*³⁷ for the descent) does the ascent later materialize:

³⁶ As stated in *Zohar*, vol. 3, 221a, “**Shlomo knew** that because it was the handiwork of a mortal man, this structure would not stand.”

³⁷ {Lit., “return,” often translated as “repentance.”}

The level of “deep vaults” is revealed — this refers to the loftiest levels of G-dliness that are inherently “מְטוּמְנוּיִת עֲמֻקּוֹת deep vaults” (in the plural) — “**deep, deep down**, who can find it?”³⁸ — that cannot be drawn down through standard *avodah*, in a **straightway**.

Only through the *avodah* of ***teshuvah*** that results from a person conducting himself (not in the **upright** way that Hashem made man,³⁹ but) in a “maze-like” way that facilitates something “maze-like” in a positive light, enabling him to draw down the “deep vaults.” (This alludes to G-dly vitality that is not drawn down in a way of *or yashar*⁴⁰ but in a way of *or chozer*,⁴¹ “maze-like”).

This light will be revealed in the Third Temple, the everlasting structure that will be built and revealed speedily in our days through the true and complete redemption by our righteous Moshiach.

— From a talk delivered on Shabbos *parshas Devarim*, 5741 (1981)

³⁸ *Koheles* 7:24.

³⁹ *Koheles* 7:29.

⁴⁰ {“*Or Yashar*” — lit. “direct light,” refers to the predetermined manifestation of G-dliness through *seder hishtalshalus*.}

⁴¹ {“*Or Chozer*” — lit. “reflective light,” refers to drawing down G-dliness through a person’s *avodah*.}