

# SICHA SUMMARY

## Likkutei Sichos, Vol. 26

*Tetzave , Sicha 2*

### The Context:

One of the vestments unique to the Kohen Gadol was the *tzitz*, the golden plate worn across the Kohen Gadol's forehead.

The Torah commands, "you shall engrave upon it like the engraving of a seal: Sacred to G-d." (*Shemos 28:36*) The Talmud records a dispute regarding this engraving:

On it is written in two lines: G-d's four-letter ineffable name above, and *kodesh lamed*, i.e., "sacred to," below. And Rabbi Eliezer, son of Rabbi Yosei, said: I saw it in the Caesar's treasury in the city of Rome and Sacred to God was written on one line. (*Shabbos 63b*)

Rambam rules in accordance with the anonymous sages, that the forehead plate was engraved with two lines, but allows for Rabbi Eliezer's opinion as well, "If the words were written on one line it was valid. There were times when they were written on one line." (*Klei Hamikdash, 9:1*)

### The Question:

How could the sages ignore Rabbi Eliezer's eyewitness testimony? Surely they didn't think he was not telling the truth regarding what he saw? And if the law does follow the sages, that the engraving was on two lines, how could Rambam rule that one line was acceptable after the fact?

### The Explanation:

There is a well-known discussion surrounding the Menorah engraved on the Arch of Titus: conventional wisdom accepts that the engraving of the Menorah with curved arms depicts the historical Menorah used in the Beis Hamikdash. Yet a straightforward reading of Rashi's comments, and a drawing in the Rambam's hand, leads to the conclusion that the Menorah's arms were diagonal, not curved.

How, then, do we reconcile this with the "eyewitness testimony" of the Roman engravings? It is plausible that because the Menorah was a popularly revered item, people made approximate replicas of it. These replica menorahs were common enough that the artists in Rome based their depiction of the Menorah on these approximations.

A similar explanation can be provided for the forehead plate: Rabbi Elizer may have seen an inexact replica of the plate in Rome that had the words engraved in one line. The sages, however, had a tradition passed on from their teachers that the historical *tzitz* had two engraved lines. Rabbi Eliezer's testimony was not enough to persuade them, even though they did not doubt what he saw, since their tradition was ironclad. What Rabbi Elizer saw in Rome must have been an artisan's mistaken replica.

Rabbi Eliezer, however, did not have a tradition regarding the plate's engraving. Therefore, he had no reason to mistrust what he had seen. Without an opposing tradition, he could accept that what he had seen represented the historical forehead plate used in the Beis Hamikdash.

Rambam, however, rules that a one-line *tzitz* is acceptable, and that it did actually exist for a time. In order to avoid multiplying arguments between the sages, Rambam reasoned that Rabbi Eliezer's position was reliable but not optimal. In fact, because a one-line plate was seldom used, that may be how an incorrect version was replicated in Rome. Perhaps an observer had seen this rarer one-line engraving, leading to replicas of it in Rome as well.

This discussion has contemporary relevance as well. As new manuscripts are discovered with variations from our tradition of the Biblical text, it is prudent to recall that not every buried manuscript records historical truth, it is likely that they are remnants from traditions that strayed from the Sages, indeed, perhaps for that reason they were buried and discarded.

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