



לקוטי שיחות
PROJECT
LIKKUTEI
SICHOS



Likkutei Sichos

Volume 16 | Vayakhel | Sichah 3

The Same Height as the Courtyard Curtains

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1.

SIZING UP THE CURTAINS

“The Screen for the entrance to the Courtyard... twenty *amos*¹ long, and the height, in width, five *amos*, *le’umas* the curtains of the Courtyard.”²

Rashi quotes the words, “*le’umas* the curtains of the Courtyard,” and explains:³ “like the measure {the height} of the Courtyard curtains.”

Supercommentators⁴ explain: Rashi’s intent is to clarify that “*le’umas*” does not mean “opposite.”⁵ Although this is how this word is usually translated, here this cannot be its meaning (since the “entrance to the Courtyard” was not opposite the “curtains of the Courtyard,” but off to the side). Rather, in our verse, “*le’umas*” means, “like the measure.”

We need to clarify:

If Rashi only wishes to explain the word “*le’umas*,” why does he also quote, in his header, the words, “the curtains of the Courtyard”? Moreover, Rashi repeats these words again in his comments, “(like the measure of) the Courtyard curtains.” Rashi could have written succinctly, “*le’umas* — like the measure.”

¹ {*Amos* (singular *amah*) lit. “cubit.” A measurement, equal to approx. 20 inches.}

² *Shemos* 38:18.

³ {Rashi on *Shemos*, *ibid.*}

⁴ *Mizrachi*; *Gur Aryeh*; and *Sefer Zikaron*, commenting on Rashi.}

⁵ See Rashi on *Shemos* 25:27.

2.

BUT *LE'UMAS* USUALLY MEANS “ABOVE”?

In addition, we need to clarify:

There are other places in *Chumash*⁶ where the word “*le’umas*” cannot mean “opposite”: (a) “*le’umas* its seam” (in *parshas Tetzaveh*);⁷ (b) “*le’umas* the kidneys” (in *parshas Vayikra*).⁸ In these places, Rashi explains, “next to... above”;⁹ “above,”¹⁰ respectively.

Accordingly, Rashi should have also explained that here, “*le’umas*” means “next to... above,” and spelled out that “the height, in width, five *amos*, *le’umas* the curtains of the Courtyard,” means that the height of “the Screen for the entrance to the Courtyard,” was “five *amos*” **higher** than (“above”) the curtains of the Courtyard. Why does Rashi explain the word “*le’umas*” as, “like the measure.” This is the only such explanation of the term in *Chumash*!¹¹

Moreover: This explanation {“next to... above”} seems to conform better with the continuation of the verse than does Rashi’s interpretation: “like the measure.” According to the interpretation that it means “next to... above,” we understand why the verse must say “*le’umas* the curtains of the Courtyard.” These words inform us of the height of the “Screen for the entrance to the Courtyard” — “five *amos*” higher than the curtains). However, according to the interpretation that it means, “like the measure,” that is, the Screen was the **same** height as the Courtyard curtains, the words “*le’umas* the curtains of the Courtyard,” are superfluous. The verse already said, “and the height, in width,

⁶ {The *Pentateuch*, commonly referred to as the “Five books of Moses.”}

⁷ *Shemos* 28:27. {The verse states, “You shall make two golden rings and put them on the two shoulder straps of the *Eiphod* at the bottom towards its face, *le’umas* its seam, above the...”}

⁸ *Vayikra* 3:9. {The verse states, “From the sacrifice of the peace-offering he shall offer as a fire offering to Hashem its choicest part — the entire tail — he shall remove it *le’umas* the kidneys and the fat that covers the innards...”}

⁹ Rashi on *Shemos*, *ibid*.

¹⁰ Rashi on *Vayikra*, *ibid*.

¹¹ Whereas in the *Prophets*, this explanation is found. See Rashi on *Yechezkel* 45:6 (and also, *ibid*, 48:13, Rashi, *ad loc*); see *Metzudos* on *Yechezkel* 1:20; **et al**.

five *amos*”; what does the verse add by saying that the Screen was the same height as the curtains?

3.

THIS IS RABBI YOSSEI'S OPINION

This question becomes even stronger based on an earlier explanation offered by Rashi. By way of introduction: Rabbi Yehudah and Rabbi Yossi have a dispute regarding the height of the altar.¹² Regarding the verse,¹³ “And its height shall be three cubits,” Rabbi Yehudah maintains that “these words must be understood as they are written.” Rabbi Yossi however, infers (using a *gezeirah shava*¹⁴ based on the words, “square,” “square”) from the inner altar:¹⁵ “Just as there, its height was twice its length, so, too, here, the height was twice its length.” That is, the height of the altar was 10 *amos*.

The *Gemara* says:¹⁶

Rabbi Yehudah said to Rabbi Yossi... is it possible that the *kohen* would stand atop the altar and hold {the items with which he would perform} the sacrificial service in his hand, and the whole nation could see him from outside {the Courtyard}?¹⁷

(Since if the altar was 10 *amos* high, it would be higher than the Courtyard curtains which were five *amos* high.) Rabbi Yossi then responded that he maintains that the height of the curtains was 15 *amos*.

The *Gemara* in *Eruvin*¹⁸ says that the size of an entrance (according to the Rabbis) is “20 *amos* (high) and 10 *amos* wide.” The *Gemara*¹⁹ asks: “Let them

¹² *Zevachim* 59b.

¹³ *Shemos* 27:1.

¹⁴ {*Gezeira shava* — This type of analogy is called a *gezeira shava*, whereby details provided in one verse are applied to another verse on the basis of the two verses sharing a similar word.}

¹⁵ *Shemos* 30:2

¹⁶ *Zevachim* *ibid*.

¹⁷ {This would constitute a lack of respect for the service in the *Mishkan*.}

¹⁸ *Eruvin* 2a {discussing the maximum height of the crossbeam placed over the entrance to an alleyway, to enable one to carry in the alleyway on Shabbos.}

¹⁹ *Eruvin* 2b.

derive {the maximum size of an entrance} from the entrance of the gate to the Courtyard... just as there, it was five *amos* high by twenty *amos* wide, so, too, here, it is five *amos* high by twenty *amos* wide!” The *Gemara* replies (a second answer) according to *Tosafos*’s version:²⁰ “The curtains were 15 *amos* high, and when the verse says {regarding the entranceway of the Courtyard}, ‘and the height, in width, five *amos*,’ it refers to from the top of the curtains and up.” And *Tosafos* explains: The *Gemara* inquired regarding the 20 *amos* measure of the **height** of the entrance (for we see from the entrance to the Courtyard that the measure of the height of an entrance is only “five *amos*”). In its response, the *Gemara* teaches that in truth, the entrance to the Courtyard was 20 *amos* high. The verse that says, “and the height, in width, **five** *amos*,” refers to the area “from the top of the curtains and up” (five *amos* higher than the curtains, which, according to Rabbi Yossi were 15 *amos* high, as mentioned).

Thus, according to Rabbi Yossi (the way *Tosafos* explains it) the phrase, “*le’umas* the curtains of the Courtyard” means, **higher** than the “Courtyard curtains.”

Since we see that (**earlier**) in *parshas Terumah*,²¹ Rashi presented both the opinions of Rabbi Yehudah and Rabbi Yossi, here, too, in his commentary on the phrase, “*le’umas* the curtains of the Courtyard,” he should have also explained the phrase “*le’umas* the curtains of the Courtyard” as, “next to... above.” (Doing so would not only be justified because this explanation conforms with the wording of the verse, as mentioned, but also) because this fits with Rabbi Yossi’s opinion (which Rashi quotes).

²⁰ *Zevachim*, *ibid*, s.v., “*ve’omer*”; note Rashi’s version of the first answer in *Eruvin*, *ibid*.

²¹ *Shemos* 27:1.

4.

PSHAT CONCERNS US

However, in truth, this question carries no weight, for this whole discussion does not even begin according to the way Rashi understands the verse in line with *pshuto shel mikra*.²²

On the verse (at the end of *parshas Terumah*),²³ “The length of the Courtyard... and the height, five *amos*,” Rashi explains: “*And the height, five amos* — The height of the walls of the Courtyard, and this is the width of the curtains.” Meaning, although regarding the size of the altar, Rashi also quotes Rabbi Yossi’s opinion (“the height was twice its length”), nonetheless, regarding “the height of the walls of the Courtyard,” Rashi says **plainly** that they were “five *amos*.”

Thus, we must conclude that according to *pshat* — even according to the opinion that the altar was 10 *amos* high — “the height of the walls of the Courtyard” were (only) “**five amos**.” The reason is obvious: There is no compelling evidence in *pshat* that it was forbidden to see the *kohen* perform the *avodah* while he stood atop the altar. Therefore, the phrase, “and the height, five *amos*” should be understood **literally** (not the way the *Gemara* understands this — according to Rabbi Yossi — “from the top of the curtains and up”).

Consequently, it is clear that regarding the entrance of the Courtyard, we can presume that according to *pshat*, all opinions (even the one who maintains that the altar was 10 *amos* high) concur that the entrance was five *amos* high .

However, a difficulty still remains: True, considering the substance of the subject-matter,²⁴ according to *pshat*, there is no compelling evidence that according to Rabbi Yossi, the height of the Courtyard entrance was more than

²² {The plain meaning of Scripture, often referred to as “*pshat*.” Rashi says in his commentary to *Bereishis* 3:8: “I have come only to explain the plain meaning of the Scripture.” Though there are many levels and depths of interpretation on the Torah, Rashi adopts a straightforward approach.}

²³ *Shemos* 27:18.

²⁴ {In the succinct original, “*mitzad tochen ha’inyan*.”}

five *amos*. However, doesn't the **wording of the verse** (“*le’umas* the curtains of the Courtyard”) have to mean that the Courtyard entrance was five *amos* higher than the Courtyard curtains, as discussed?

5.

MATCHING HEIGHTS AS PART OF ONE WHOLE

The explanation:

The phrase, “*le’umas* the curtains of the Courtyard,” gives Rashi reason to pause because seemingly, these three words are superfluous. Even if we would have explained them, to mean “five *amos*” higher than the curtains, as mentioned, still we would need to clarify: Why does Torah inform us of their height by a nuanced inference from a lengthy phrase (“five *amos*, *le’umas* the curtains of the Courtyard”)? The Torah could have written succinctly and clearly, “(the height, in width) 10 *amos*!”²⁵

Therefore, Rashi explains that this verse teaches us a **reason** why the height of the Screen for the entrance to the Courtyard needed to be “five *amos*” (and not more — like “the Screen for the entrance of the Tent”)²⁶ — because this Screen **needed** to be “like the measure {of the height} of the Courtyard curtains.” The verse emphasizes that the function of this Screen (its purpose) is (the same as, and) a part of the **curtains**. Therefore, its height needed to match their height.

Parenthetically, this also answers a (**halachic**) question raised by our Rabbis, the *Tosafists*:²⁷ “If they were only five *amos* high, the entrance of the gate was not as high as the entrance to the *heichal*²⁸ in the *Beis Hamikdash*.”

²⁵ {Ten *amos* — five *amos* higher than the curtains, which according to simple understanding, were five *amos* tall.}

²⁶ *Shemos* 26:36.

²⁷ {*Daas Zekeinim* on} *Shemos* 27:18.

²⁸ {The *Heichal* is another name of the *Kodesh* (Holy), but is also a term used to refer to the entire enclosed building of the Temple. It is made of three rooms: the *Ulam* (hall), *Kodesh* (Holy), and the *Kodesh HaKodashim* (Holy of Holies). Every room had greater holiness than the room outside of it.}

(Thus, they explain there that the curtains on the east side (and as a result, the entrance to the Courtyard {which was on that side} also) were actually 20 *amos* high.)

According to Rashi (in line with *pshuto shel mikra*), this question poses no difficulty to begin with, since the verse itself addresses this issue by writing, “*le’umas* the curtains of the Courtyard.” The Screen for the entrance to the Courtyard was part of the **Courtyard curtains** — without indicating which side. Meaning, the curtains around the entire Courtyard were all the same (height).

Therefore, the gateway did not attain the status of an actual entrance like the entrance to the *heichal*.

6.

WHAT IS THE JOB OF A DOOR?

We will further clarify this novel idea — that “the Screen for the entrance to the Courtyard” was essentially part of the curtains — by analyzing a dispute between *Rishonim*²⁹ regarding the obligation to affix a *mezuzah*.

One of the conditions necessary in order to require a house to have a *mezuzah* affixed, as *Rambam* says, is that³⁰ “it must have doors.” *Raavad*,³¹ however, maintains — and many *Rishonim*³² are of the same opinion — that even an entranceway without a door requires a *mezuzah*.

Their dispute can be explained as hinging on the explanation of the function of a door: Either (a) a door is a part of the entranceway, whose purpose is to serve as an **opening** — allowing entry and exit; or, (b) a door has a distinct

²⁹ {Sages of the 11th-15th centuries.}

³⁰ *Mishneh Torah*, “*Hilchos Mezuzah*,” ch. 6, par. 1; see also par. 5.

³¹ Commenting on *Rambam*, *ibid*.

³² *Rosh*, “*Hilchos Mezuzah*,” ch. 8; see *Beis Yosef* {on the *Tur*}, “*Yorah Deah*,” ch. 286, (s.v. (the second) “*Bayis She’eino Mekora*.”

function — **closure**. (If not for the door, the doorway would always be open; the door **closes** the doorway.)

The practical *halachic* applicational difference between the two definitions is regarding the obligation to affix a *mezuzah*: If we presume that a door is a part of the entrance, and the purpose of the door is to serve as an **opening**, it would be reasonable to conclude that the obligation to affix a *mezuzah* (which needs to be in the place of **entry**³³ (and exit) of a house) only applies when the entrance is constructed **conventionally** and is **finished**, i.e., when it has a door, since (opening) the door enables entry into the house.

However, if we presume that the function of a door is to **close** the entrance, it makes no sense to suggest that the obligation to affix a *mezuzah* at the house’s “**entrance and gate**” (the place of **entry and exit**) has anything to do with a door. The purpose of a door is to **prevent** entry and exit.

7.

ACCORDING TO RASHI, A DOOR IS MEANT TO BE CLOSED

In our context, we see Rashi’s approach in his Torah commentary (in line with *pshat*) regarding this matter: Rashi maintains that the “Screen for the entrance to the Courtyard” needed to be “like the measure {of the height} of the Courtyard curtains.” For, as mentioned above, the Screen is inherently part of the curtains. Meaning, just as the purpose of the curtains was to **close off**,³⁴ so, too, the purpose of the “Screen for the entrance to the Courtyard” was (**not** to serve as a part of the “**entrance (of the gate)** of the Courtyard,”³⁵ but rather) **closure**, as its name “*masach* {Screen}” indicates, “it is a term that connotes ‘protection.’”³⁶

³³ The Torah states, “upon the doorways of *beisecha* {your house}.” The word *beisecha* is etymologically related to the word “*biascha*” meaning “your coming.” Our Rabbi thus explained that the *mezuzah* must be placed in the “way of your coming.” (*Yoma* 11b.)

³⁴ See Rashi on *Shemos*, 27:13: “those were not completely **closed off** by the curtains....”

³⁵ *Bamidbar* 3:26; *Bamidbar* 4:26. {Only the latter verse also says, “gate,” *shaar*.}

³⁶ Rashi on *Shemos*, 26:36.

On this basis, we can also understand the function of a door (for the “Screen for the entrance to the Courtyard” substituted as a door, as clarified by Rabbi Avraham ben haRambam,³⁷ in a responsum).³⁸ According to Rashi, the function of a door is to **close** (and not open).

This also conforms with Rashi’s opinion in his *Talmud* commentary,³⁹ where Rashi says that even an entrance without a door requires a *mezuzah* (as explained above, according to the opinion that a door does not constitute a part of the entrance).

8.

MALCHUS IS ALSO FUNCTIONS AS A “DOOR”

This question regarding the function of a door, which we have discussed from the perspective of the *halachic* part of Torah, also comes up regarding the definition of a door according to the *sod*⁴⁰ dimension of Torah.

Esoterically, “a door” corresponds to the *sefirah*⁴¹ of *malchus*,⁴² since *malchus* serves as the intermediary between the world of *Atzilus*⁴³ and the worlds lower than *Atzilus* (and more generally, *malchus* stands between each world and the next). The *sefirah* of *malchus* comprises two elements: a) *Malchus conceals* the higher *sefiros* (and as a result of this concealing element, *malchus* is called “the sea”⁴⁴). Additionally, by concealing, b) *malchus* brings forth and

³⁷ {See <https://www.chabad.org/215725>}

³⁸ *Birchas Avraham* ch. 41 (in the context of explaining Rambam’s opinion).

³⁹ *Menachos* 33a, s.v., “*Reish Galusa*.”

⁴⁰ {*Sod* is a method of commentary focusing on the secrets and esoteric teachings of Torah, based on *Kabbalah*.}

⁴¹ {*Sefiros* are divine emanations. There are ten *sefiros*, which are various phases in the manifestation of Divinity.}

⁴² {*Malchus*, lit., “kingship,” is the lowest level of the *sefiros* of each spiritual world. Each spiritual world denotes a complete realm of existence, resulting from its general proximity or distance to Divine revelation.}

⁴³ *Meorei Or; Koheles Yaakov*, “*Erech ‘Deles*.” {*Atzilus* is the highest and most exalted of the four spiritual “worlds,” which were emanated by Hashem. Each world is composed of ten *sefiros* or Divine attributes, which are manifestations of Divinity. *Malchus d’Atzilus* also serves as a bridge between the conclusion of the sublime world of *Atzilus* and the successive three lower worlds.}

⁴⁴ {The sea conceals all life within it, unlike the earth, upon which all life is revealed.}

shines the lights of *Atzilus* into the lower worlds (and as a result of this revealing element, *malchus* is called “earth”).⁴⁵

This raises the question: What is the **primary** function of the *sefirah* of *malchus* — concealment, or the revelation that it facilitates?

According to Rashi’s interpretation — “*le’umas* the curtains of the Courtyard, like the measure {of the height} of the Courtyard curtains” — the answer is as follows: From the perspective of the world of *pshat* — the world of **Asiyah**⁴⁶ (and its manner of Torah learning) — the “Screen” (and door) of *malchus* serves the same function as the curtains: to close and conceal.

Although the concealment of *malchus* also affects the worlds of *Beriyah*⁴⁷ and *Yetzirah*⁴⁸ — and for this reason, Divine *light*⁴⁹ does not shine in them as it does in the world of *Atzilus*, the world of unity — nonetheless, some measure of Divine **revelation** is diffused to them. Therefore, the majority of the world of *Beriyah* is good,⁵⁰ and *Yetzirah* is at least half-half.⁵¹

However, in the world of *Asiyah*, the concealment is total. *Asiyah* is “the world of *kelipos* and *sitra achra*,”⁵² and “all affairs of this world are severe and evil, and the wicked prevail in it.”⁵³ Therefore, what is sensed in the world of *Asiyah* (the world of *pshat*) is primarily *malchus*’s function of **concealment**.

⁴⁵ *Likkutei Torah*, “*Tzav*,” 14b; **and in many other places**.

⁴⁶ {The lowest of the four worlds, *Asiyah* with our physical world, and therefore corresponds to *pshat*, the simple and literal explanation.}

⁴⁷ {*Beriyah*; World of Creation; more specifically creation from nothing; in Kabbalistic terminology, the second of the four spiritual worlds, the realm of spiritual existence which represents the first beginnings of a consciousness of self.}

⁴⁸ {*Yetzirah*; World of Formation; the third of the four spiritual worlds, the realm of spiritual existence in which the limited nature of the created beings takes on form and definition; the abode of the lower classes of angelic beings and of the souls of ordinary Jews}

⁴⁹ {I.e., revelation.}

⁵⁰ {The admixture of *good* and *bad*, in the context of the spiritual worlds, corresponds to the degree of revelation and concealment of Divine light present in the respective spiritual worlds, both in a quantitative and qualitative sense.}

⁵¹ *Etz Chaim*, “*Shaar 48*,” ch. 3; see also “*Shaar 47*,” ch. 4, in the sidenote.

⁵² {*Kelipah* translates literally as “a shell” or “a peel.” The term refers to anything that conceals, and thus opposes *G-dliness*, just as a shell or a peel conceals the fruit within. *Kelipah* is often used to refer to evil or impurity, and has a similar connotation to *sitra achra*, lit., “the other side.”} *Tanya*, “*Likkutei Amarim*,” ch. 6.

⁵³ *Tanya*, “*Likkutei Amarim*,” ch. 6, and 24.

9.

TORAH ENABLES TRANSFORMING CONCEALMENT INTO REVELATION

However, the ultimate goal is to abolish the concealment and bring about Divine **revelation** down below.

Therefore, the Torah does not explicitly say, “like the **measure** of the Courtyard curtains,” but rather, “**le’umas** the curtains of the Courtyard.” “*Le’umas*” does not imply that the two things are exactly the same. Rather, it suggests a similarity and a likeness between the two (similar to the expression used to describe the relationship between holiness and *kelipah*: “this one **le’umas** that one”).⁵⁴

Meaning, “the Screen for the entrance to the Courtyard” was not exactly the same as the curtains. The curtains always create (complete) blockage and concealment. But the Torah empowers us to transform the Screen into an opening and {into a focal point of Divine} revelation.

{We are encouraged to engage in this *avodah*} until the entrance becomes as wide as the entrance to the *ulam*, “which had no doors,⁵⁵ since this entranceway was always open.”⁵⁶ That is, it brings about constant (and complete) Divine revelation without any concealment: “And the glory of Hashem shall be revealed, and all flesh together shall see that the mouth of Hashem spoke.”⁵⁷

⁵⁴ *Koheles* 7:14.

⁵⁵ *Middos* 2:3.

⁵⁶ *Likkutei Torah*, “*Shir Hashirim*,” 35a.

⁵⁷ *Yeshayahu* 40:5. See *Tanya*, “*Likkutei Amarim*,” ch. 36.

10.

THE WONDERS OF RASHI

In this context, we see again the brilliance of Rashi's Torah commentary. In a short remark offered by Rashi, which at first glance appears to be a simple explanation, we can see —

[not only how this particular interpretation emphasizes the rule (that Rashi himself establishes)⁵⁸ “ I have come **only** to teach *pshuto shel mikra*,”⁵⁹ but at the same time]

— how Rashi's commentary also contains “wondrous ideas”⁶⁰ in the area of *halachic* rulings, and how Rashi's commentary on Scripture here conforms with his viewpoint as articulated in his commentary on *Talmud*. In addition, we can see the compatibility between ideas as they appear in *pshat* and *halachah*, and the way they are explained in *Kabbalah* and *Chassidus*.

— Based on talks delivered on Shabbos, *parshas Vayakhel* 5725 (1965)

⁵⁸ *Bereishis* 3:8, 3:24.

⁵⁹ {See fn. 22.}

⁶⁰ *Shnei Luchos Habris* on tractate *Shavuos* (p. 181a).