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Table and Altar

The *Gemora* asks: The verse begins by mentioning “the Altar,” and concludes with “the Table”! [*Why does Scripture refer to the Table as the Altar?*]

Rabbi Yochanan and Rabbi Elozar both say: When the Beis HaMikdosh was in existence, the Altar would provide atonement for a person. Now that the Beis HaMikdosh is destroyed, a person’s table atones for him (*through acts of kindness, i.e. inviting guests to his house*). (97a)

The Props

The *Mishna* had stated: There were four golden props there etc. (*and there were twenty-eight rods etc.*).

Rav Katina cites the source for these requirements: *And you shall make its ke’aros, its kappos, its kasos, and its menakiyos. Ke’aros* are the molds (*which was used to shape, knead and bake the loaves*); *kappos* are the spoons (*for the levonah*); *kasos* are the props; and *menakiyos* are the rods; ‘*to cover with*’ teaches us that the bread was covered (*with the rods*).

Rava challenged Rav Katina from our *Mishna*: Neither the arrangement of the rods, nor their removal overrode the *Shabbos*. Now if we were to hold that the requirement for rods is a Biblical one, why would they not override the *Shabbos*? Later, however, Rava said: That what I said was

not correct, for we have learned in a *Mishna*: Rabbi Akiva stated a general rule: Any work which can be performed before *Shabbos* does not override the *Shabbos*, and these therefore did not need to override the *Shabbos*; for why were the rods required at all? It was in order that the bread would not become moldy. But in this short time (*from before Shabbos to afterwards*), it would not become moldy.

This explanation is supported by the following *braisa*: What was the procedure? The *Kohen* would enter the Sanctuary on the day before *Shabbos*, remove the rods, and place them on the ground parallel with the length of the Table. On the night after *Shabbos*, he would enter again, lift up the ends of one loaf and insert the rods underneath it, and then lift up the ends of another loaf and insert the rods underneath it (*until he completed the process*). [*We see that there was no concern for becoming moldy in such a short span of time.*] The four (*middle*) loaves (*of each row*) each required three rods underneath them, whereas the top loaf (*of each row*) required but two rods underneath it, for there was no weight (*from other loaves*) upon it. The bottom loaf required no rods at all, for it rested upon the surface of the Table. (97a)

Amos in the Temple

The *Gemora* cites a *Mishna*: Rabbi Meir says: All *amah* (*cubit*) measurements in the Temple were according to a cubit of medium size (*of six tefachim, not of five*) except

those of the Golden Altar, the horns, ledge and the base (of the Outer Altar). Rabbi Yehudah says: The *amah* used for the Temple building was of six *tefachim*, and that for the utensils was of five *tefachim*.

And Rabbi Yochanan said: Both derived their views from the same verse: *And these are the measures of the (Outer) Altar in amos, each amah is an amah and a tefach. The base shall be an amah (a five-tefach one), and also the amah of the width, and the border to its edge one half-amah all around and this (a five-tefach one) shall be the top of the Altar.*

Rabbi Yochanan explains: *The base shall be an amah* refers to the base of the Altar; *the amah of the width* refers to the ledge (*soveiv*); and *the border to its edge one half-amah all around* refers to the horns; and *this shall be the top of the Altar* refers to the Golden Altar. [Those mentioned in this verse were measured using five-tefach amos.]

Rabbi Yochanan explains the dispute: Rabbi Meir maintains that only this (the Golden Altar) was measured by an *amah* of five *tefachim*, but all the other vessels were measured by an *amah* of six *tefachim*. Rabbi Yehudah, however, holds all vessels shall be measured like this (using a five-tefach *amah*).

One might have thought that the verse was teaching us that the height from the base of the Outer Altar until the ledge (which was five amos) was measured by an *amah* of five *tefachim*; and when it was stated: *'The base shall be an amah (a five-tefach one), and also the amah of the width,'* it meant to say that the height from *'the base of the amah'* until *'the amah of the width'* was measured by an *amah* of five *tefachim*.

However, let us consider the following: The height of the Altar was ten *amos*; six *amos* (from the bottom until the ledge) was of five *tefachim* each (according to our present understanding), and (the remaining) four was of six *tefachim* each. It emerges that the height of the Altar was fifty-four *tefachim* ($6 \times 5 = 30$; $4 \times 6 = 24$; $30 + 24 = 54$). The half-way point of the Altar was twenty-seven *tefachim*. The distance from the top of the horns down to the ledge was twenty-four *tefachim*; that is, three *tefachim* above the half-way point. And we have learned in a *Mishna*: The red line encircled the altar in the middle. This was in order to separate the upper bloods and the lower bloods. But it was taught in a *braisa* regarding the *olah* bird: He goes up to the ramp and turns right onto the ledge. He goes to the southeastern corner, and proceeds to do *melikah* from the back of its neck, separating the head from the body. He then squeezes its blood onto the wall of the Altar (above the red line). And if he did it even one *amah's* distance below his feet, it was valid. But how can it be valid? He is applying blood - that is meant to be above - two *tefachim* below the line!?

Rather, it must be said therefore, that *'the base shall be an amah'* refers to the indentation of the base (its width). *'The amah of the width'* refers to the indentation of the ledge. *'And the border to its edge one half-amah all around'* refers to the indentation of the horns.

Accordingly, the height of the Altar was sixty *tefachim* (for all *amos* of its height were measured using six-tefach amos). The half-way point of the Altar was thirty *tefachim*. The distance from the top of the horns down to the ledge was twenty-four *tefachim*; that is, six *tefachim* above the half-way point. And we have learned in a *Mishna*: And if he did it even one *amah's* distance below his feet, it was valid (for it is being applied above the red line).

The *Gemora* asks: But how can you explain the verse to be referring to the indentations? But we have learned in a *Mishna*: The base of the Altar was thirty-two *amos* by thirty-two *amos*. It rose up one *amah* and went inward one *amah*; this formed the base (*yesod*). It emerges that above the base, the Altar was thirty *amos* by thirty. According to you (*that the indentation of the base was an amah of five tefachim*), however, it should be thirty *amos* and two *tefachim* by thirty *amos* and two *tefachim*! And furthermore, we have learned in that *Mishna*: It rose up five *amos* and went inward one *amah*; this formed the ledge. It emerges that above the base, the Altar was twenty-eight *amos* by twenty-eight. According to you (*that the indentation of the base and the ledge was an amah of five tefachim*), however, it should be twenty-eight *amos* and four *tefachim* by twenty-eight *amos* and four *tefachim*!?

And if you will answer that since they were less than one *amah*, the *Tanna* felt no reason to count them, but we have learned further in that *Mishna*: The place of the horns was one *amah* on this side and one *amah* on that side; it emerges that there were left (*in between the horns*) twenty-six *amos* by twenty-six *amos*, but according to you (*that the indentation of the base and the ledge and the width of the horns was an amah of five tefachim*), however, it should be twenty-seven by twenty-seven!?

The *Gemora* answers: The *Tanna* was not precise in his reckoning.

The *Gemora* challenges this answer from the next part of the *Mishna*: The place on which the feet of the *Kohanim* walked was one *amah* on this side and one *amah* on that side; it emerges that there were left twenty-four *amos* by twenty-four *amos* (*for the place of the pyre*). According to you, however, it should be twenty-five by twenty-five! And should you say also here that he was not being

precise, but is it not written: *And the Ariel (pyre) shall be twelve amos long by twelve wide, square*. Now you might think that it was only twelve *amos* by twelve; but it is written: *to its four quadrants*; it teaches us that one measures twelve *amos* in every direction from the center of the Altar (*which means that it is twenty-four by twenty-four; and it cannot be said that Scripture is written imprecisely*)!?

And if you will answer that originally only six of the thirty-two *amos* (*used to measure the dimensions of the Altar*) were *amos* of five *tefachim* (*but the other twenty-six amos were of six tefachim; and accordingly, the Mishna's dimensions are correct*); then the Courtyard must be larger than we have been taught in the following *Mishna* (*for it would emerge that the Altar was in fact thirty-one amos square using six-tefach amos*): The entire Courtyard was one hundred and eighty-seven *amos* long and one hundred and thirty-five *amos* wide. [*This is referring to the Inner Courtyard, which incorporated the Israelite's Courtyard and the Kohanim's Courtyard.*] The Courtyard measured from east to west one hundred and eighty-seven *amos*, and this section consisted of the area where the Israelites walked as they wished for an area of eleven *amos*, and the area in which *Kohanim* walked (*even those unfit to do the avodah*) for another area of eleven *amos*. The area also included the Altar which occupied an area of thirty-two *amos*, the area between the Antechamber and the Altar, which measured twenty-two *amos*, and the Sanctuary which was one hundred *amos* long. There was an area of eleven *amos* behind the chamber of the Ark-Cover (*which was the Holy of Holies*). [*Now, according to our present suggestion, the Altar was only thirty-one amos long, and there should be one more amah in the Courtyard!?*]

Rather, you must therefore say the following explanation of the verse: *The base shall be an amah* refers to the height



of the base; *the amah of the width* refers to the indentation of the ledge (*soveiv*); and *the border to its edge one half-amah all around* refers to the height of the horns; but as to the width of the horns, it makes no difference which way (*we measure – whether we use a five-tfach amah, or a six-tefach amah, for the width of the Altar either would total twenty-six amos and four tefachim, or twenty-six amos and two tefachim; and either way, it may be reckoned as twenty-six amos, for the extra does not total a complete amah*).

[*The braisa regarding the olah bird is also understandable:*] The height of the Altar was fifty-eight tefachim (*for all amos of its height were measured using six-tefach amos except the amah of the base and the amah of the horns*). The half-way point of the Altar was twenty-nine tefachim. The distance from the top of the horns down to the ledge was twenty-three tefachim; that is, six tefachim above the half-way point. And we have learned in a *Mishna*: And if he did it even one *amah's* distance below his feet, it was valid (*for it is being applied above the red line*). (97a – 98a)

DAILY MASHAL

Burial Caskets made from their Table

The Torah specifies (25:23) that the table in the Tabernacle was to be made specifically from *atzei shitim* – acacia wood. Why was this type of wood specifically chosen for this purpose?

Rabbeinu Bechaye notes that the letters spelling the word *shitim* are short for the words *shalom, tovah, yeshuah, mechilah* – peace, goodness, salvation, and forgiveness. This type of wood was also used in the Holy Ark and the Altar, hinting to us that the Divine Service performed

through these vessels was the source of bringing down all of these blessings to the world.

In our day, however, when we unfortunately lack all of these items, what do we have in their stead through which we may merit the rewards and bounty that they brought? Our *Gemora* derives from a verse in Yechezkel that in the absence of the Holy Temple, the generous opening up of a person's table to serve the poor and other guests serves in lieu of the Altar. The *Gemora* in Berachos (54b) adds that doing so is a merit for long life.

Reb Oizer Alpert cites the Rabbeinu Bechaye, who mentions the fascinating custom of the pious men of France who had their burial caskets built from the wood of their tables. This symbolizes their recognition that upon dying, none of their earthly possessions would be accompanying them and the only item they could take with them was the merit of the charity and hosting of guests that they performed in their lifetimes. In fact, the *Minchas Cohen* suggests that the letters in the word *shulchan* are abbreviations for *shomer likevurah chesed nedivosayich* – preserving for burial the kindness of your giving!