

Cubism – Noach

השעור מקדש לרפואת שמעונה בת שרה

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וזה אשר תעשה אתה שלש מאות אמה ארך התבה חמשים אמה רחבה ושלשים אמה קומתה. (בראשית א, ו-ז)

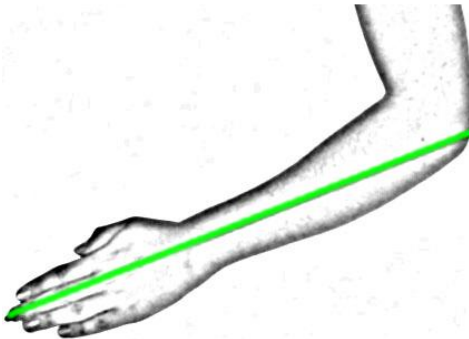
In a previous [shiur](#) we explored how Noah's Ark in fact was a floating Beit HaMikdash. It is the only parsha in the Torah, aside from the parshiyot discussing the Mishkan, which specifies precise measurements.

As in the Mishkan, the unit of measure of the ark, was the אמה. In this shiur I would like to explore this unit of measurement in greater depth and try to understand why the אמה *specifically* is the unit of measurement that is fitting for a structure that houses HKB"H's Shechina, like the ark, the Mishkan and the Beit Mikdash.

First of all, what is an אמה? What is the origin of the word?

An אמה is the middle finger on your hand, the longest finger of the five fingers. Each finger has a name. The אגודל/גודל/בוהן = thumb. The אצבע = index finger. The אמה = middle finger. The קמיצה = ring finger. The זרת = little/pinkie finger.

The measurement in question is called an אמה, because it is defined as "the distance from your elbow to the end of the middle finger, the אמה", around a half a meter (חזון איש = 57.6cm, חיים נאה = 48cm, רמב"ם = 45.6cm).



There is a machloket in the Mishna (כלים יז, י) as to the size of an אמה. According to R' Yehuda, there are two distinct אמה measures, the first for measuring a building structure (אמת בנין), which he specifies as six טפחים

(handbreadths), and a second for measuring the vessels of the Mikdash (אַמָּה (כָּלִים), which he specifies as five טַפָּחִים. R' Meir on the other hand says there was a standard אַמָּה measure for *all* the components of the Mikdash, of six טַפָּחִים, except for the Mizbechot (inner/outer) for which there was a separate measurement. The Rambam is posek according to R' Meir, i.e an אַמָּה is six טַפָּחִים (רמב"ם, כלים יז, י).

As we can already see, the Torah "focus" regarding the etymology and symbolism (which we will soon explore) of the word אַמָּה centers around the human arm and hand.

The English translation of the word אַמָּה is "cubit", derived from the Latin word "cubitus", meaning "elbow". While it *is* true that one endpoint of this measurement is the elbow, the English translation (derived from the Latin, derived from the Greek), as it invariably does, completely misses the *essence* of this term (the focus is not on the elbow, but the hand). This is one of the numerous reasons we commemorate the fast of the 10th Tevet, because on the 8th Tevet, Ptolemy ordered 72 Jewish chachamim to translate the Torah to Greek (מגילה ט ע"א), which Chazal say plunged the world into "darkness" for three days (מגילת תענית יג). Translation of the Torah (into any language other than Lashon HaKodesh) minimizes it and distances us from its true meaning.

Just this last week, the American secretary of state gave a keynote address in Greece applauding the contribution of the ancient Greek culture to modern civilization and Western values (obviously playing to a local audience). Although the secretary of state is a staunch supporter and friend of Israel, his speech was severely lacking. Not *once* does he mention the Bible. It was the Greek's *perversion* of the Bible (to a large degree) that has culminated in the apocalyptic mess the world is currently in.

However, it is not the "cubitists" or the Greeks, or secretaries of state that interest me, it is the Torah.

The question I would like to answer in this shiur is why the primary unit of measure in HKB"H's Beit HaMikdash, the physical structure that is capable of housing the Shechina, is the אַמָּה?

The answer to this question is hidden within the word itself. If you reorder the letters of the word אַמָּה, you get the word אִמָּה – the "mother".

It seems "counterintuitive" that the Beit HaMikdash is designed with a "feminine" unit of measure, when all who perform Avodah in it are male and the area in which women are allowed to enter is but a small fraction of the entire structure (the ramparts above the Ezrat Nashim).

However, this is *exactly* what the Ramban hints to in his introduction to sefer Shmot. The Ramban asks why sefer Shmot contains the detailed description of the Mishkan? Would this description not have been more fitting in sefer Vayikra, together with the details of the Avodah performed in it?

The Ramban answers that the purpose of sefer Shmot is to detail the Exodus of Am Yisrael from bondage in Egypt and their *redemption* as a nation. This redemption was not complete until Am Yisrael built the Mishkan and reacquired the reality that previously existed in the time of the Avot and Imahot. The Cloud of Shechina resting over the tent, the candle that remained lit perpetually and the blessing in the dough. When the Mishkan was built - the Shechina was present in the Ohel Moed, the Menorah (the מִנְרָתָהּ) remained perpetually lit, and there was blessing in the Lechem HaPanim on the Shulchan.

Who is more associated with the tent, the Avot or the Imahot? The answer is simple. When the angels asked Avram אֵתָּה שָׂרָה אִשְׁתְּךָ? What did Avraham reply - וַיֹּאמֶר הִנֵּה בָאֵהָל (בראשית יח, ט). The "tent", the equivalent of the Mishkan/Beit HaMikdash is associated with the *Imahot*, הָאִמּוֹת – the "mother", not the Avot.

The question above remains "Why then is the Beit HaMikdash on Har HaBayit predominantly a *male* domain, not a female domain?" The answer is because it is necessary for the *men* to frequent the Beit HaMikdash, not the women, because the *woman herself is a Beit Mikdash*. The Shechina more naturally resides in women than in men, the woman's *intrinsic* spiritual design is more conducive to housing the Shechina (נדה מה ע"ב; פרי צדיק, אחרי מות, ז;) (רש"י הירש ויקרא כג, מג). The man has to construct this structure artificially and *externally* to himself, to achieve the same result.

Therefore, it is not surprising that the unit of measure for defining a structure that can house the Shechina is feminine. In the "marital" relationship kiveyachol between HKB"H and Am Yisrael, HKB"H is likened to the "groom" kiveyachol and Am Yisrael to the bride, the feminine.

Shlomo HaMelech in Shir HaShirim which, in its entirety is an allegory to the Beit HaMikdash, repeatedly refers to its various components using the allegorical *feminine*.

In building the "house", the home, the active figure is the mother, not the father. Sarah was the active one in preserving the integrity of her home when she told Avraham to marry her maidservant Hagar and later to banish Hagar and Yishmael. Rivka was the active one in preserving the integrity of her home when she commanded Yaakov to get the blessing instead of Eisav and when she convinced Yitzchak to send Yaakov away to Charan to find a wife. The active ones in building and preserving the integrity of their home were Rachel and Leah – they actively "collaborated" in both marrying Yaakov and giving birth to the

Twelve Tribes, Yaakov was seemingly a "passive" participant in this. Although there appeared to be sibling rivalry between the two, both sisters made sacrifices in order to not shame the other. Rachel revealed the simanim to Leah and Leah davened to not have a seventh son in order to not embarrass Rachel that she would have only one son in the Twelve Tribes, less than the maidservants Bilha and Zilpa. Instead, Leah's seventh fetus was converted into and born a girl – Dina (ברכות ס, ע"א).

This concept of the mother figure actively building the "home" is the meaning of the passuk חֲכָמוֹת נָשִׁים בְּנִתָּהּ בֵּיתָהּ וכו' (משלי יד, א), not only their own, "private" homes, but also the "national" home, the Beit HaMikdash, using the measure of an אַמָּה.

Am Yisrael are slaves to HKB"H כִּי לִי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל עֲבָדִים עֲבָדֵי הֵם וכו' (ויקרא כה, נה) and the female version of slave is a maidservant, an אַמָּה.

Perhaps the most direct reference to the "feminine" aspect of the word אַמָּה and its association with a "hand" is when Pharaoh's daughter Bitya, stretched out her hand to retrieve Moshe from the bullrushes. וַתִּרְדָּ בֵּית פַּרְעֹה לָרַחֵץ עַל הַיָּאֵר וְנִעְרַתֶּיהָ הִלְכֹת עַל יַד הַיָּאֵר וַתִּרְא אֶת הַתֵּבָה בְּתוֹךְ הַסּוּף וַתִּשְׁלַח אֶת אֶמְתָּהּ וַתִּקְחָהּ (שמות ב, ה). Rashi quotes two possible commentaries from the Gemara (סוטה יב, ע"ב) for the phrase וַתִּשְׁלַח אֶת אֶמְתָּהּ, either Bitya sent her maidservant, or she stretched out her hand. If you are interested in dikduk, Rashi here explains how a few dots change the meaning of the same letters to mean either hand (אַמָּה) or maidservant (אֶמָּה).

The females are the ones who are active in preserving the integrity of the home and the "appendage of action" in the human body is the arm/hand. The arm/hand is synonymous with action, for example כָּחִי וְעַצְמִי יָדֵי (דברים ח, יז), or in our parsha זֶה יִנְחַמְנוּ מִמַּעֲשֵׂנוּ וּמִעֲצָבוֹ יָדֵינוּ (בראשית ה, כט). The symbolic measurement corresponding to this concept is the אַמָּה, which in effect is the length of the entire *arm*, from the elbow to the end of the longest finger in the hand.

From all of the above, one might mistakenly think that the males in Am Yisrael are "superfluous", since "everything" centers around the "female" – the active role in the home, in the structure of the Beit HaMikdash, in housing the Shechina, etc. However, this is obviously not the case.

Chava made this catastrophic mistake in Gan Eden. The נָחָשׁ duped her into thinking that she could leave Adam, the man, out of the equation completely and create new life all on her own (see shiur on [Eikev 2026](#)). Chava was הָאִם – the "mother" (בראשית ג, כ) – וַיִּקְרָא הָאָדָם שֵׁם אִשְׁתּוֹ חַוָּה כִּי הִוא הֵיְתָה אִם כָּל חַי (בראשית ג, כ).

Which brings us to the next level in deciphering the word אֶמָּה. The gematria of "אֶמָּה" is the same gematria as "אֶמָּה אֶבְיָא". In last week's [shiur](#) we explored the intermingling of the left (male) and right (female) attributes of Gvura and Chesed. The midpoint, the "combination" of the two is the attribute of Tiferet.

Avraham was Chesed and Yitzchak was Gvura. Both "passively" followed their wives' derech in maintaining the integrity of their homes – they did what their wives told them! (With Avraham, HKB"H explicitly *told him to do so* כָּל אֲשֶׁר תֹּאמַר אֵלֶיךָ שְׂרָה שָׁמַע בְּקוֹלָהּ).

Although Rachel and Leah were active in establishing their home and preserving its integrity, Yaakov was not totally the "passive" male in the equation. Unlike Avraham and Yitzchak, Yaakov took an active role in trying to preserve the integrity of his home, the unity between his sons. Yaakov is Tiferet, the balance between Gvura and Chesed – the mid-point between the two, just as the אֶמָּה is the *middle* finger in the hand. Without the counterbalancing of the male attribute Gvura (Torah), the female attribute Chesed, is not anchored.

Therefore, the אֶמָּה measurement reflects this intermingling of Chesed and Gvura in the Beit HaMikdash, which is an underlying principle of many of the components, for example the Shulchan (Chesed) and the Menora (Gvura) standing alongside one another and the Mizbeach HaKetoret (reflecting the unity of the Twelve Tribes) in between the two.

Therefore, the אֶמָּה is also a tikkun for חַוָּה, Chava.

Another gematria of אֶמָּה is לֵוִי, the tribe who performs the Avodah in the Mikdash.

So far, we have been speaking about the connection between the אֶמָּה and the Beit HaMikdash, but the first time the word אֶמָּה appears in the Torah is in our parsha, Noach, in reference to the measurements of the ark. We said above that the תֵּיבָה was a kind of floating Beit HaMikdash, which explains the use of the word אֶמָּה here. But what is the connection between תֵּיבָה and the "female"?

The first connection is that what typified the ark were "pairs", Noach and his wife, his sons, Shem, Cham and Yefet and their wives ... the animals – male and female, אֶמָּה אֶבְיָא.

The next, deeper connection was Noach's wife. The Midrash tells us that Noach's wife was named Na'ama (ג, בְּרֵאשִׁית רַבָּה כג). There is a machloket whether the Na'ama in question was the daughter of Chanoch, who never died and became the angel מט"ט (כד, עמי נח, ספר הישר נח), or the daughter of Tuval

Kayin. Accordingly, there is a machloket whether she was a positive figure or a negative one. The first opinion (R' Aba bar Kahana) says she was called Na'ama - שְׁהָיוּ מַעֲשֵׂיהָ נְעִימִים - that she was a tzaddikah. The other opinion (Rabanan) say very negative things about her (re: א, נה, חלק א, זוהר), which I will not repeat here.

I prefer to go with the positive view of Na'ama (R' Aba bar Kahana), also repeated by the Midrash Aggadah, Ramban, R' Bachyei, the Radak, the Maharal/Gur Aryeh, Sifte Chachamim and others – that she was a tzaddikah. If she was not, why would HKB"H have saved her by allowing her in the ark?

I have not found any source for this, but following the logic regarding the אָמָה above, it is highly possible that Na'ama played some active (unbeknownst to us) role in protecting the integrity of Noach's home and raising a family that were worthy of being saved from the מַבּוּל. The gematria of נְעִמָּה is לֵב בְּעֵלָה and בְּטַח בָּהּ לֵב בְּעֵלָה is נְעִמָּה and בְּלִי פָגָם.

As in many of my other shiurim, this shiur on the אָמָה measure also illustrates the *unfathomable depth* of the Torah. How *every letter* has meaning and symbolism and is ordered by Divine providence and is in no way random or superfluous.

Shabbat Shalom

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