

# טעמו וראו

A taste of the  
Rebbe's teachings

Parshat Tetzaveh

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## Archaeology vs. Tradition

The Jewish people have traditions dating back thousands of years which outline the specific form and format of our traditions.

What if archeologists find contradictory evidence? Do we change our rituals or do we not?

Dedicated in honor of  
**our dear children and grandson**

By **Mendy & Dinie Mangel**  
Cherry Hill, NJ

# Preface:

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This lesson focuses on a well-known topic: the shape of the menorah. The Rebbe spoke about it on several occasions; this lesson is just one of those sichos, where the Rebbe addresses that topic along with the topic of the *tzitz*, the headplate of the High Priest. The Rebbe focuses on a specific point: that our traditions carry more weight than archeological evidence and the like. Archeological finds cannot be explained with certainty; we don't know who created the item or who put it there. Our traditions, however, have remained constant throughout the generations.

This sicha is part of the Rebbe's general outlook regarding the purported clash between science and Torah. The Rebbe often explained that while scientific discoveries are important and valid, their theories cannot be presented as absolute fact, and therefore cannot be viewed as contradictions to Torah. An honest scientist and researcher will admit that his findings consist of some form of conjecture or assumption; they are by definition theory, and therefore cannot refute the absolute truths of Torah, handed down by tradition.

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This week's Torah portion describes the headplate of the High Priest and its engravement, "Sacred to G-d" (source 1). The Rabbis of the Mishna argued about its format; according to tradition, it was written in two lines, but Rabbi Eliezer claimed to have seen it in Rome, and it was written in one (source 2). Maimonides rules like the former, that it is to be written in two lines, (source 3), and the Me'iri explains that the rabbis of the Mishna did not retract their opinion even in the face of Rabbi Eliezer's eyewitness testimony (source 4).

The Rebbe cites these sources and explains that Judaism views tradition as stronger than the eyewitness testimony. Rabbi Eliezer's viewpoint, after all, isn't as simple as it seems. It is very likely that there were "imitation breastplates."

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The Torah describes the image of the menorah and Rashi explains that the arms were diagonal, not half-circle (source 5). This was also depicted by Maimonides and confirmed by his son, Rabbi Avraham (source 6). There are other important details of the menorah as well; for example, the Talmud says it had legs (source 7). In the writings of Josephus, we see another important fact: there were a number of menorahs besides for the official one used for the daily service in the temple (source 8).

The Rebbe presents these ideas and draws the same conclusion as before. Jewish tradition is very clear about the fact that the menorah had straight branches. The Arch of Titus, on the other hand, can be faulty for numerous reasons. Why would we go with Titus if we could go with Rashi, Maimonides, and the entirety of Jewish tradition?

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# Opening

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The menorah is the most famous Jewish symbol in Jewish history. It can be found on synagogues, logos, and all sorts of Jewish paraphernalia.

It is commonly depicted with round branches. The source of this image is the Arch of Titus. After the destruction of Jerusalem, Titus held a massive parade to celebrate his victory, and images of that day were engraved on a celebratory arch that he commissioned in Rome.

Over the course of several talks in 1983, the Rebbe addressed this topic. He noted that according to Jewish tradition, based on Maimonides and Rashi, the original sacred menorah in the Temple actually had straight branches.

What is the source of their opinion? How do we deal with the conflicting versions? When archaeology seems to contradict our traditions, what is the Jewish approach?

# A. The Headplate In Rome

## Source 1 Exodus 28:36-38

In this week's Torah portion, we read about the specific garments of the priesthood, and the special eight garments worn by the High Priest during his service in the Temple. One of those garments was the tzitz, the headplate.

You shall make a headplate of pure gold, and you shall engrave upon it, engraved like a signet ring, "Sacred to G-d." You shall place it on a cord of turquoise wool, and it shall be next to the turban. It should be worn right near the front of the turban. It shall be on Aaron's forehead, and he shall bring forgiveness for errors in the sacred offerings that the children of Israel consecrate as holy gifts. It shall be always on his forehead to bring them favor before G-d.

וְעָשִׂיתָ צִיץ זָהָב טָהוֹר  
וּפְתַחְתָּ עָלָיו פְּתוּחֵי חֹתֶם  
קֹדֶשׁ לַה'. וְשָׂמְתָּ אֹתוֹ  
עַל פְּתִיל תְּכֵלֶת וְהָיָה  
עַל הַמְצַנֶּפֶת אֶל מוֹל פְּנֵי  
הַמְצַנֶּפֶת יְהִיָּה. וְהָיָה עַל  
מִצַּח אַהֲרֹן וְנָשָׂא אַהֲרֹן אֶת  
עוֹן הַקֹּדְשִׁים אֲשֶׁר יִקְדִּישׁוּ  
בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְכָל מִתְּנַת  
קֹדְשֵׁיהֶם וְהָיָה עַל מִצְחוֹ  
תָּמִיד לְרַצוֹן לָהֶם לִפְנֵי ה'.

## Source 2 Talmud, Tractate Shabbat 63b

The verse stated that the headplate should read "Sacred to G-d." The sages of the Mishnah, who lived in the era following the Temple's destruction, argued regarding its specific format.

**It was taught: The headplate is like a smooth plate of gold; its width is two fingerbreadths, and it circles the forehead from ear to ear. It reads "Sacred to G-d" in two lines: Yud hey, G-d's name, on the upper line, and kodesh lamed, "sacred to—" on the second, in deference to G-d's name.**

וְהִתְנַיָּא: צִיץ כָּמִין טַס שְׁל  
זָהָב, וְרוּחַב שְׁתֵּי אַצְבָּעוֹת,  
וּמוֹקֵף מְאוּזָן לְאוּזָן, וְכָתוּב  
עָלָיו בְּשְׁתֵּי שִׁיטִּין: "יֹד  
הֵא" לְמַעַלָּה, וְ"קוֹדֶשׁ  
לְמֹד" לְמַטָּה.

Rabbi Eliezer ben Rabbi Yosi said: I saw it in Rome and it had “Sacred to G-d” written on one line.

וְאָמַר רַבִּי אֱלִיעֶזֶר בְּרַבִּי יוֹסִי: אֲנִי רָאִיתִיו בְּרוֹמָי וְכָתוּב עָלָיו “קֹדֶשׁ לַה'” בְּשִׁטָּה אַחַת.



G-d  
First Opinion: Sacred to

Rabbi Eliezer: Sacred to G-d



### Source 3 Maimonides, Mishneh Torah, Laws of the Temple Vessels 9:1

Maimonides rules according the first opinion, that it was written in two lines.

How is the headplate made? We make a plate of gold two fingerbreadths wide that extends over the forehead from one ear to the other, and upon it we write, “Sacred to G-d” in two lines: “Sacred to—” on the lower line and “G-d” on the upper one.

כִּיצַד מַעֲשֵׂה הַצִּיץ. עוֹשֶׂה טָס שֶׁל זָהָב רָחֵב שְׁתֵּי אַצְבָּעוֹת וּמְקִיף מֵאָזֶן לְאָזֶן וְכוֹתֵב עָלָיו שְׁנֵי שִׁטִּין קֹדֶשׁ לַה' קֹדֶשׁ מִלְמַטָּה לַה' מִלְמַעְלָה.

### Source 4 Meiri,\* Beit Habechira on Tractate Shabbat 63b

The Me'i'ri emphasizes that the ruling follows the main opinion, despite the eyewitness testimony of Rabbi Eliezer.

Although one of the greatest sages testified that he saw it in Rome written with one line, the sages did not change their opinion, even in the face of eyewitness testimony.

וְאִם עַל פִּי שְׂמַגְדוּלֵי הַחֲכָמִים הָעִידוּ אֲנִי רָאִיתִיו בְּרוֹמָי וְכָתוּב עָלָיו קוֹדֶשׁ לַה' בְּשִׁטָּה אַחַת, לֹא הִכְחִישוּ אֶת הַיְדוּעַ אֲצֵלָם אִם בַּעֲדוֹת רֵאִיָּה.

\* Beit Habechira is a work on the Talmud written in the thirteenth century by Rabbi Menachem ben Shlomo HaMe'iri, a famous Catalan Rabbinic figure, but only discovered and published in the early twentieth century.

## >> The Rebbe

### Tradition Outweighs Testimony

*Jewish law rules that the headplate engraving should be done on two lines, despite Rabbi Eliezer's personal testimony that the headplate he saw in Rome was written on one line. Because tradition cannot be disregarded, even in the face of evidence to the contrary.*

This week's Torah portion states, "You shall make a headplate of pure gold, and you shall engrave upon it, engraved like a signet ring, 'Sacred to G-d.'"

The Talmud records a discussion about how the words "Sacred to G-d" were written.

"The headplate is like a plate of gold...and it contains two lines: The first line has G-d's name, and the second line read, 'Sacred to—'". (Rashi explains that G-d's name was placed on the upper line and the words "Sacred to" on the lower line so that no word would be placed above G-d's name). "Rabbi Eliezer ben Rabbi Yosi said: I saw it in Rome and it had 'Sacred to G-d' written on one line."

Maimonides writes: "Upon it we write 'Sacred to G-d' in two lines: 'Sacred to—' on the lower line and 'G-d' on the upper one. If the words were written on one line it was valid. There were times when they were written on one line."

The Me'iri writes: "Although one of the greatest sages testified that he saw it in Rome written with one line, the sages did not change their opinion, even in the face of eyewitness testimony."

בפרשתנו נאמר: ועשית זהב טהור ופתחת עליו פיתוחי חותם קודש לה".

ישנה שקלא וטריא בנוגע לאופן כתיבת התיבות "קודש לה":

איתא בגמרא<sup>1</sup>: "תניא ציץ כמין טס של זהב . . וכתוב עליו בב' שיטין יו"ד ה"א מלמעלה, וקודש למ"ד מלמטה (השם שלם בשיטה עליונה, וקודש למ"ד בשיטה תחתונה, שלא להקדים שאר אותיות למעלה מן השם מאחר ששני שיטין היו). ואמר ר' אליעזר בר' יוסי אני ראיתו ברומי, וכתוב קודש לה' בשיטה אחת."

וברמב"ם<sup>2</sup>: וכתוב עליו שני שיטין קודש לה', קודש מלמטה לה' מלמעלה... ואם כתבו בשיטה אחת כשר, ופעמים כתבוהו בשיטה אחת."

...ובמאירי<sup>3</sup> איתא: ..ואף על פי שמגדולי החכמים העידו אני ראיתו ברומי וכתוב עליו קודש לה' בשיטה אחת, לא הכחישו את הידוע אצלם אף בעדות ראייה.

(1) שמות כה, ג-ה. י.  
(2) הל' כלי המקדש רפ"ט.  
(3) שבת שם.

In this debate about the writing on the headplate, we see something fascinating. Despite the testimony of Rabbi Eliezer, "I saw it in Rome, and 'Sacred to G-d' was written in one line," Maimonides rules according to the first opinion, that it should be written in two lines.

From the words of the Talmud itself, if we were to disregard the words of Maimonides, there would be room to believe that the sages changed their mind after Rabbi Eliezer's testimony, in light of the firsthand evidence that it had been written in one line. But Maimonides chose to follow their initial ruling, which demonstrates that they did not change their opinion after Rabbi Eliezer's testimony, and remained convinced that it is to be written with two lines.

This is also confirmed by the Me'iri, who wrote that "the sages did not change their opinion, even in the face of eyewitness testimony."

The reason the sages rejected the evidence is because they had a tradition, passed down through the generations that "Sacred to G-d" was written in two lines. They were not swayed by the fact that an eyewitness, a prominent rabbi, claimed to have seen a headplate in Rome with one line, because it was likely not the headplate of the High Priest at all (as we will explain). They were certain, based on their tradition, that the High Priest's headplate was written in two lines.

...בהמשך להמוזכר לעיל אודות אופן כתיבת התיבות "קודש לה" על גבי הציץ - רואים דבר פלא: למרות עדותו של ר' אליעזר ברי יוסי, "אני ראיתו ברומי וכתוב קודש לה' בשיטה אחת", אף על פי כן, פסק הרמב"ם להלכה כתנא קמא, ש"קודש לה" כתוב בב' שיטין.

מדברי הגמרא עצמה (לולי פסק דין הרמב"ם) היה מקום לומר שלאחרי עדותו של ר' אליעזר בר' יוסי, שינו חכמים את דעתם, מכיון שישנה עדותו של תנא שראה בעצמו (עד ראיה) ש"כתוב קודש לה' בשיטה אחת". אבל מכיון שהרמב"ם פוסק להלכה כתנא קמא, מוכח שגם לאחר עדותו של ר' אליעזר בר' יוסי, לא נשתנתה שיטתם של החכמים, דסבירא ליה שנכתב בב' שיטין.

ובפרט על פי דברי המאירי שכתב ש"לא הכחישו את הידוע אצלם אף בעדות ראיה", שמזה מובן שהלכה כתנא קמא גם בדיעבד.

וטעם הדבר: מכיון שהיה ידוע לחכמים בקבלה מדור לדור ש"קודש לה" נכתב בב' שיטין - לא הכחישו את הידוע אצלם אפילו כאשר בא עד ראיה נאמן (תנא) ואומר שראה ברומי ציץ שכתוב בו "קודש לה" בשיטה אחת, מכיון שבוודאי אין זה הציץ שלבש הכהן הגדול (אלא ציץ אחר, כדלקמן), כי בנוגע לציץ שלבש הכהן הגדול (שאודותיו מדובר בתורה) נמסר להם בקבלה מדור לדור ש"קודש לה" נכתב בב' שיטין.



In other words: In the absence of a clear tradition about the style of the headplate, there would be room to accept eyewitness evidence to determine how it was written. But if our tradition tells us that "Sacred to G-d" was written in two lines, there is no room to reject it based on the testimony of an eyewitness; clearly, he did not see the headplate described in the Torah but rather a different headplate entirely. However, Rabbi Eliezer himself believed that it was written in one line, because he had not heard the above-mentioned tradition from his teachers.

*It is likely that people fashioned similar headplates, so there is no way to prove that he saw the actual headplate of the Holy Temple.*

The possibility that Rabbi Eliezer saw a different headplate is highly plausible. Being a golden adornment, it is very likely that other people fashioned similar ones as personal jewelry (that wouldn't transgress the prohibition to create a replica of the Temple); perhaps they wrote "Sacred to G-d" on one line, unlike the headplate of the Temple. It is also possible that even non-Jews fashioned headplates for their own deities [non-Jews valued the Temple and its vessels as well, as evident from the fact that Achashverosh himself made use of them at his feast], and why would anyone tell them how to fashion it?

כלומר: אם לא היתה ביד חכמים מסורת וקבלה אודות אופן כתיבת התיבות "קודש לה" (בשיטה אחת או בב' שיטין), היה מקום לקבל את דבריו של העד ראיה, ולקבוע בהתאם לכך שהיה כתוב בשיטה אחת; אבל מכיוון שנמסר להם בקבלה ש"קודש לה" נכתב בב' שיטין - פשיטא שאין לבטל מסורת וקבלה זו אפילו על סמך עדות של עד נאמן שראה ציץ שנכתב באופן אחר, כי בודאי אין זה הציץ שאודותיו מדובר בתורה, כי אם ציץ אחר. ומה שר' אליעזר בר' יוסי סבירא ליה שהיה כתוב בשיטה אחת - הרי זה מכיוון שלא היתה בידו מסורת וקבלה באופן אחר.

...ואין כל פלא כיצד יתכן שר' אליעזר ברי יוסי ראה ציץ אחר (לא אותו הציץ שלבש הכהן הגדול) - מכיוון שהציץ היה תכשיט של זהב, יש לומר שהיו כמה וכמה שעשו ציץ דוגמתו כדי שיהיה להם תכשיט לנוי (כי בזה לא שייך האיסור דעשיית "בית תבנית היכל כו"), ולכן עשאוהו כפי שהיה נראה להם - "קודש לה" בשיטה אחת, וכיוצא בזה, ולא בדיוק ממש כהציץ שבמקדש. וכמו כן יתכן שהיו גוים שעשו דוגמת הציץ עבור עבודה זרה שלהם [שהרי גם אצלם היתה חשיבות מרובה לבית המקדש וכליו, וכדמוכח גם מזה שבסעודתו של אחשוורוש השתמשו בכלי המקדש כו'], ומי יאמר להם כיצד לעשות זאת כו'.

## B. The Menorah of Titus

### Source 5 Exodus 25:31-32

*In last week's Torah portion, the Torah describes exactly how the menorah is fashioned.*

Make a candelabra out of pure gold. It shall be formed by hammering it. Its base, stem, and decorative cups, spheres and flowers must be hammered out of a single piece of gold. Six branches extending from its sides, three branches on one side of the menorah and three branches on the other side.

וְעָשִׂיתָ מִנְרֹת זָהָב טָהוֹר  
מִקְשָׁה תַעֲשֶׂה הַמְּנוֹרָה  
יֶרֶכָה וְקִנָּה גְבִיעֵיהָ כְּפִתְרֶיהָ  
וּפְרָחֶיהָ מִמָּנָה יִהְיוּ. וְשָׁשָׂה  
קָנִים יֵצְאִים מִצְדֵיהָ שְׁלֹשָׁה  
קָנֵי מְנוֹרָה מִצְדָּה הָאֶחָד  
וְשְׁלֹשָׁה קָנֵי מְנוֹרָה מִצְדָּה  
הַשֵּׁנִי.

*Rashi explains that the branch is extended upwards diagonally, not in a half circle.*

#### Rashi

**Extending from its sides** in each direction diagonally, spreading upwards until the full height of the candelabra, i.e. its center branch. They extend outward from the center branch, one above the other; the bottom one is the longest, the one above is shorter and the top one is even shorter, because they match the height of the middle branch, the seventh, from which the six branches extended.

#### רש"י על הפסוק

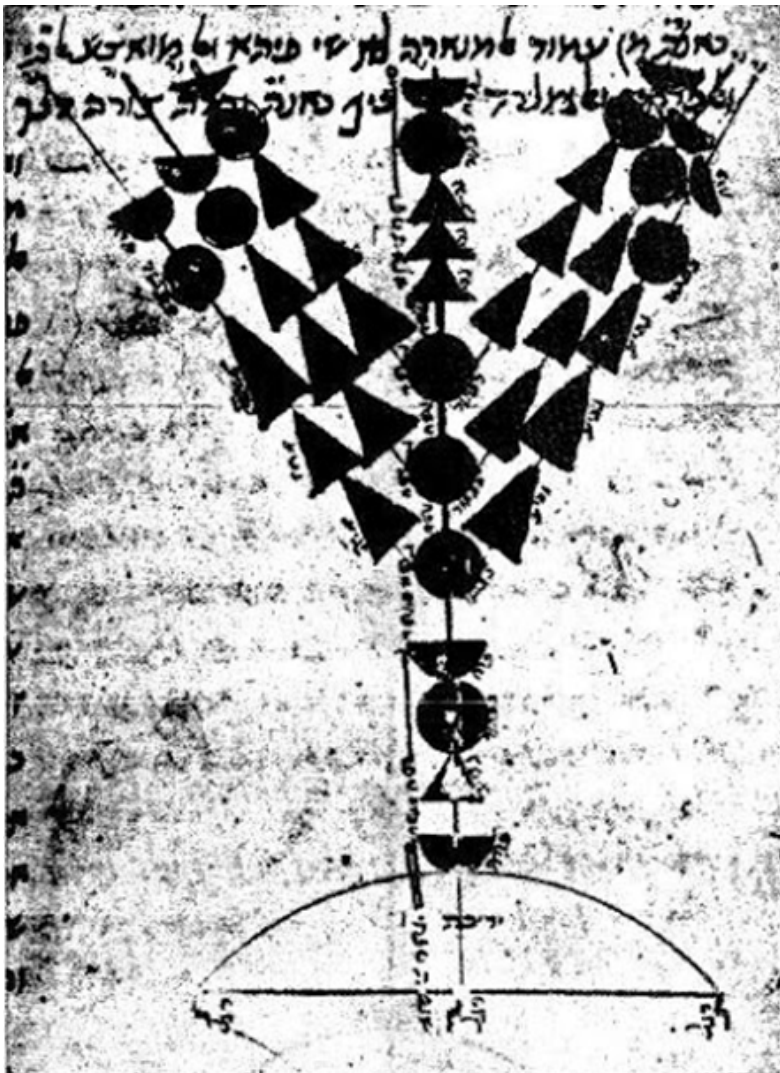
יֵצְאִים מִצְדֵיהָ. לְכָאן וּלְכָאן  
בְּאֵלְכָסוֹן, נִמְשָׁכִים וְעוֹלִיזֵי עַד  
כְּנֶגֶד גְּבוּהַ שֶׁל מְנוֹרָה שֶׁהוּא  
קִנָּה הָאֶמְצָעִי, וְיוֹצְאִין מִתּוֹךְ  
קִנָּה הָאֶמְצָעִי זֶה לְמַעַלָּה  
מִזֶּה, הַתַּחְתּוֹן אֶרֶךְ, וְשֶׁל  
מַעַלָּה קָצֵר הַיְמָנִי, וְהַעֲלִיּוֹן  
קָצֵר הַיְמָנִי, לְפִי שֶׁהֵיא גְבוּהַ  
רְאִשִׁיהֶן שׁוֹה לְגְבוּהוֹ שֶׁל קִנָּה  
הָאֶמְצָעִי, הַשְּׁבִיעִי, שֶׁמִּמֶּנּוּ  
יוֹצְאִים הַשָּׁשָׁה קָנִים

## Source 6 Rabbi Avraham, the son of Maimonides

Maimonides drew a depiction of the Menorah which had straight branches as well. Some argue that the depiction is not meant to be accurate, but his son Rabbi Avraham writes the very opposite.

**Six branches:** They were six branches extending from the body of the menorah in a straight line, as my father depicted them, not in a half-circle as others maintain.

ששה קנים: הקנים כמו ענפים  
נמשכים מגופה של מנורה לצד  
ראשה ביושר, כמו שצייר אותה  
אבא מרי ז"ל, לא בעיגול כמו  
שצייר אותה זולתו.



## Source 7 Talmud, Tractate Menachot 28b

*There is another important element to the menorah, according to the Talmud. It stood on legs.*

Shmuel says in the name of a certain elder: The height of the menorah was eighteen handbreadths. The legs and the flowers were three handbreadths, and the next two handbreadths were bare.

אמר שמואל משמיה דסבא  
גובהה של מנורה שמנה עשר  
טפחים הרגלים והפרח ג'  
טפחים וטפחיים חלק.

## Source 8 Josippon,\* chapter 95

*Close to the destruction of the Temple, Josephus describes how an enterprising priest brought Titus various vessels from the Temple.*

At this point, Joshua the son of High Priest Shabtai came to Titus, with two of the goldern menorahs that were in the Temple, with the golden tables that were in it as well...with the fine garments, the garments of the priesthood plated with gold and decorated with diamonds and precious stones, and he gave these all to Titus...

בעת ההיא, בא אל טיטוס יהושע  
הכהן בן שבתאי הכהן הגדול,  
ועמו שתי מנורות ממנורות הזהב  
אשר היו במקדש, ועמו עוד כל  
שלחנות הזהב אשר היו בו...  
וגם בגדי השרד ובגדי הקודש  
המצפים בזהב והמכותרים  
ומעוטרים באבנים ויקרות, עם  
רוב אבנים טובות, ויתן את כל  
אלה לטיטוס...

\* Josippon, or Yosifun, is an adapted version of the historical writings of Josephus Flavius, Yosef ben Matityahu, who witnessed the Churban. In this sicha, the transcribers cite Josippon, but it is interesting to note that in the original writings of Josephus, he describes these menorahs as “two golden menorahs like those of the Temple.” Likewise, in his description of the menorah at Titus’s victory parade, he says that “Its structure was *different from that which we made use of*, for its middle shaft was fixed upon a base, and small branches protruded out of it to great length, looking like a trident.” This also seems to imply that it was not the traditional menorah-i.e. the menorah of the Temple. (See The Jewish War vol. 6 chapter 8:3, and vol. 7 chapter 5:5).

## >> The Rebbe

### The Real Menorah Wasn't Round

*According to Jewish tradition, the menorah's branches were straight. The round menorah comes from the engraving on the Arch of Titus. But as we said earlier, that cannot override our tradition.*

Now, the words of the Me'iri (that eyewitnesses cannot override tradition) can apply to the features of the Menorah as well.

We've previously explained at length that the arms of the Menorah extended (not in a half circle but) in a straight, diagonal line, as evident from Maimonides' handwritten depiction. Maimonides' son too, Rabbi Avraham, notes that "six branches...extended from the body of the menorah upwards in a straight line, as my father depicted them, not in a half-circle as others maintain." Rashi concurs in his commentary on the Torah: he writes that the arms reached upwards diagonally, in a straight line.

This refutes those who say that the menorah had round arms, basing their opinion on the depiction on the Arch of Titus. They argue that the designer of the arch was an eyewitness who personally saw the menorah among the other vessels of the Temple brought to Rome. However, his depiction contradicts the writings of Maimonides and Rashi (who had received a tradition through the generations that the menorah's arms were straight). We obviously cannot

והנה, מדברי המאירי הנ"ל (שלא הכחישו את הידוע אצלם אף בעדות ראיה) - יש להוכיח גם בנוגע לצורתה של המנורה:

נתבאר בארוכה<sup>4</sup> שצורת המנורה היתה באופן שהקנים שיצאו ממנה (לא היו בצורת חצי קשת, בעיגול אלא) היו בקו ישר - כפי שרואים בציור שבכתב יד הרמב"ם, וכפי שמדגיש ר' אברהם בנו של הרמב"ם ש"ששה קנים... נמשכים מגופה של מנורה לצד ראשה ביושר, וכמו שצייר אותה אבא מרי ז"ל, לא בעיגול כמו שצייר אותה זולתו". וכמו כן מפורש בפירוש רש"י על התורה<sup>5</sup> שהקנים "באלכסון נמשכים ועולין", כלומר, בקו ישר (ולא בעיגול).

ועל פי זה - אלו שרוצים להוכיח מצד המנורה שעל גבי שער טיטוס שקני המנורה היו בעיגול, כחצי קשת, וטענתם היא שזה שצייר את המנורה על גבי שער טיטוס הוא עד ראיה, מכיון שראה את המנורה בין שאר כלי המקדש שהובאו לרומי - הרי מכיון שצייר זה הוא היפך המסורת והקבלה שהיתה בידי הרמב"ם ורש"י (שקיבלו מדור לדור שקני המנורה היו ביושר ולא בעיגול), פשיטא שאין להסתמך על ציור זה (דשער

<sup>4</sup> לקו"ש חכ"א תרומה ג.  
<sup>5</sup> תרומה כה, לב.

rely on the arch more than on our own tradition. In the words of Me'iri, "The sages did not change their opinion, even in the face of eyewitness testimony."

טיטוס) בניגוד למסורת. וכדברי המאירי:  
"לא הכחישו את הידוע אצלם אף בעדות  
ראיה".

*There are other reasons to believe that the Arch doesn't depict the real menorah. It doesn't have legs, and it has engravements that are contrary to Jewish tradition.*

This is especially true in light of the fact that many aspects of the menorah on the Arch of Titus contradict the descriptions in the Talmud (based on our tradition). For example, the Talmud clearly states that the menorah had legs, but the image on the Arch of Titus depicts no such thing.

ובפרט שישנם פרטים נוספים שבהם  
ציור המנורה שעל גבי שער טיטוס אינו  
מתאים להמבואר בגמרא (על פי המסורת  
שלנו), ולדוגמא: מפורש בגמרא<sup>6</sup>  
שלמנורה היו רגלים, ואילו בציור שעל  
גבי שער טיטוס אין רגלים למנורה.

Some have attempted to explain that being dragged around (from Jerusalem to Rome and during the victory procession itself) its legs fell off. That's indeed a nice explanation, but there are other differences as well, both in regard to the gold base of the menorah and with regard to the various illustrations (images of animals like a snake, the sun and moon, and so on)\* that are depicted on the menorah on the arch of Titus—which contradict the biblical command that forbids the engraving of celestial bodies.

ישנם כאלו שרוצים לומר שעל ידי  
טלטולה של המנורה (מירושלים לרומי,  
בתהלוכת הנצחון של טיטוס, וכיוצא  
בזה) נשברו רגליה של המנורה. - תירוץ  
זה הוא אמנם "א בעל-הבית'שער  
תירוץ", אבל: מלבד שינוי הנ"ל (אודות  
רגלי המנורה) ישנם שינויים נוספים - הן  
בנוגע למשטח הזהב שעליו נצב גופה של  
מנורה, והן בנוגע לציורים שונים (דמויות  
של חיות, נחש וכיוצא בזה, שמש וירח  
וכו') שנראים על גבי ציור המנורה דשער  
טיטוס - היפך הענין ד"לא תעשון כדמות  
שמשי המשמשין לפני כו"'.<sup>7</sup>

\* It should be noted that one of those images is a sea dragon, one of the false deities worshiped by the Romans and something that was certainly not on the Temple menorah.

*It seems that the menorah of Titus was a different menorah altogether. From the writings of Josephus it is evident that there were a number of menorahs, beyond the sacred menorah in the Holy section of the Temple.*

Clearly, the image depicted on the Arch of Titus is not the menorah of the Temple, being that it contradicts our tradition. It is probably the depiction of a similar menorah. It is very likely that other individuals fashioned candelabras which somewhat resembled the Temple menorah, for purposes of decoration etc., but were obviously not identical to the menorah in every detail.

Proof of the matter (that there were many similar candelabras) can be brought from Josephus. To preface: Despite questions about Josephus's reliability (the Tzemach Tzedek does cite him, but that is not a confirmation of everything he writes), if he describes a situation with no apparent agenda in mind, we can consider it reliable.

Josephus describes how a priest brought Titus two golden menorahs.

Seemingly, the second Temple should have had only one! [King Solomon did fashion ten menorahs but they did not exist in the Second Temple] so clearly, the two menorahs brought to Titus were not the menorahs of the Temple but imitations.

ומכל זה מוכח שציור המנורה שעל גבי שער טיטוס אינו ציור המנורה שהיתה במקדש - מכיון שציור זה הוא בניגוד למסורה, אלא ציור של מנורה דומה כו'. וכפי שמסתבר לומר שהיו כמה וכמה שעשו מנורות בעלי דמיון מסוים למנורה שבמקדש - ליופי וכו', ומובן שלא היו בדיוק ככל פרטי המנורה שבמקדש.

ויש להביא הוכחה לדבר (שהיו כמה וכמה מנורות שנעשו בדמיון מסויים למנורה שבמקדש) - מסיפור המובא ביוסיפון (כדלקמן). ובהקדמה: למרות הפקפוקים עד כמה יכולים להסתמך על מה שכתוב ביוסיפון (כי אף על פי שהביאו הצ"צ<sup>8</sup>, אין פירוש הדבר שכל דבריו הם בתכלית הדיוק כו') - הרי כאשר מדובר אודות סיפור שהוא כמסיה לפי תומו כו', יכולים להביא הוכחה מסיפור זה.

מסופר בספר יוסיפון<sup>9</sup> שאחד הכוהנים בא אל טיטוס והביא לו שתי מנורות של זהב.

והנה, מכיוון שבבית שני הייתה מנורה אחת בלבד [כי עשר המנורות שעשה שלמה לא היו בבית שני...], הרי בהכרח לומר ששתי המנורות שהביא הכהן אל טיטוס - לא היו מנורות המקדש, כי אם מנורות שנעשו כדוגמתן (בכמה שינויים).

(7) ע"ז מג, סע"א ואילך  
(8) באוה"ת יתרו ע' תשצד.  
(9) פצ"ה.

There is also no reason to believe that they fooled Titus into believing that these were the Temple menorahs (because he too, was aware that the Jews were still conducting the Temple service which included the lighting of the menorah, so these were obviously not the Temple menorahs). This priest simply wanted to find favor in Titus' eyes, so he brought him beautiful and expensive candelabras that were imitations of the menorah in the Temple. As said—not to fool him into thinking that these were the menorahs of the Temple, but simply as an expensive bribe.

Returning to our discussion: Since we have a tradition about the shape of the Menorah (passed down by Maimonides and Rashi, who received it from their teachers), no eyewitness account can change that. In the words of Me'iri, "The sages did not change their opinion, even in the face of eyewitness testimony." If the arch contradicts our tradition, it is not the actual menorah of the Temple at all, rather a depiction of a different menorah.

Shabbat Parshat Tetzave 5743 (1983)  
Toras Menachem 5743 vol. 2 pg. 1050.

ואין כל צורך לומר שניסו לרמות את טיטוס שאלו הן מנורות המקדש (כי גם הוא ידע שיהודים ממשיכים בעבודות המקדש, כולל הדלקת המנורה, ואם כן, לא יתכן שהמנורות שהובאו אליו הן המנורות שבמקדש) - אלא אותו כהן שרצה לישא חן בעיני טיטוס, הביא לו מנורות יקרות ונאות ביותר, שהיו עשויות כדוגמת המנורה שבמקדש. וכאמור - לא כדי לרמותו שיחשוב שאלו הן מנורות המקדש, כי אם נתנית מתנה יקרה ונאה כדי לישא חן בעיניו.

ונחזור לענייננו: מכיון שישנה מסורת המקובלת אצלנו אודות צורתה של המנורה (על פי דברי הרמב"ם רש"י, שקיבלו זאת מהדורות שלפניהם כו') - הרי כל עדות ראיה אינה יכולה לשנות את הדבר, ובלשון המאירי: "לא הכחישו את הידוע אצלם אף בעדות ראיה". ומה שרואים ציור באופן אחר - אין זה ציור מנורת המקדש, כי אם ציור של מנורה אחרת. ועל דרך האמור לעיל אודות הציץ כו'.



## C. Addendum

Most depictions of the round menorah come from non-Jewish sources. However, there are some commentators who also maintained that the menorah was round. The following excerpt from Chabad.org encapsulates the Rebbe's response to those opinions.

### Sources for Rounded Menorah

From Chabad.org/3523185, by Rabbi Yehuda Shurpin.

There are two 17th-century rabbis, Rabbi Yosef Shalit ben Eliezer Riqueti in *Chochmat haMishkan* and Rabbi Emmanuel Ricci in *Ma'aseh Choshev* (more famous for his kabbalistic work *Mishnat Chassidim*), who describe the branches of the menorah as being rounded.

They both write that although their descriptions differ from Rashi's, they chose to do so by virtue of the fact that Maimonides (as well as the simple reading of the Talmud) omits the word *b'alachson* (diagonal) when describing the branches, apparently implying that he thought them to be round. This nuance is highly relevant, as we shall see.

Additionally, to support the claim that the branches of the menorah were rounded, some have pointed to the opinion of one of the earlier biblical commentators, Rabbi Avraham ibn Ezra (1092-1167), who writes in the name of the "*kadmonim*" (the "ancients") that the branches of the menorah were "rounded like a crown." However, the simplest and most probable meaning of this description is that in Rabbi Avraham ibn Ezra's opinion, the branches surrounded the center candle in a half-circle, i.e., if you were to look down at the menorah from above, the candles weren't in a straight line but rather in a half-moon shape. This is in line with what Rabbi Abraham Abele Gombiner (best known for his commentary on the *Shulchan Aruch*, the *Magen Avraham*) writes in his commentary to the Midrash, which seems to be the "*kadmonim*" cited by Rabbi Avraham the Ibn Ezra.

However, as Rabbi Abraham Abele points out, this opinion contradicts the accepted, authoritative view of the Mishnah and Talmud that the branches of the menorah were aligned. As such, this third (and mostly rejected) opinion does not have much bearing on the general straight-vs.-rounded-branch debate discussed here.

While Maimonides does not describe the shape of the branches in his *Mishneh Torah*, he does address the topic in a rare manuscript of his “*Commentary to the Mishnah*,” in which he hand-draws the design of the menorah. In this drawing, the branches are depicted as straight lines from the stem to the full height of the menorah.

Lest there be any confusion, Maimonides’ son, Rabbi Abraham ben Harambam, in his commentary to Exodus, writes that the branches “extend from the stem of the menorah to the top in a straight line (*beyosher*), as my father of blessed memory drew, not in arc-shape as others have drawn.”

Maimonides’ manuscript was sold to the University of Oxford in 1693. While Rabbi Ricci, who passed away in 1743, apparently visited London on his travels, it is highly unlikely he would have visited Oxford, and even if he did, it is unlikely he would have been given permission to enter the Bodleian library, as openly practicing Jews were allowed entry into Oxford only in 1856. Additionally, even if he were to have gained entry, he probably would not have found the manuscript, since the Hebrew manuscripts only began to be catalogued in 1868, and the complete catalogue was published 18 years later in the year 1886.

Had Rabbi Ricci and Rabbi Riqueti seen this manuscript with Maimonides’ own hand-drawn illustrations, they would not have deduced that Maimonides’ omission of the word “diagonal” in describing the shape of the branches meant they were rounded. They would have concluded that, like the Talmud, Maimonides had not purposely omitted the word “diagonal”; he simply did not describe the trajectory of the branches.

In light of this, the Rebbe points out that there is really no earlier source than Rabbi Ricci and Rabbi Riqueti that describes the branches of the menorah as rounded.

