

Chapter 5

A Tour Inside the Beis Hamikdash

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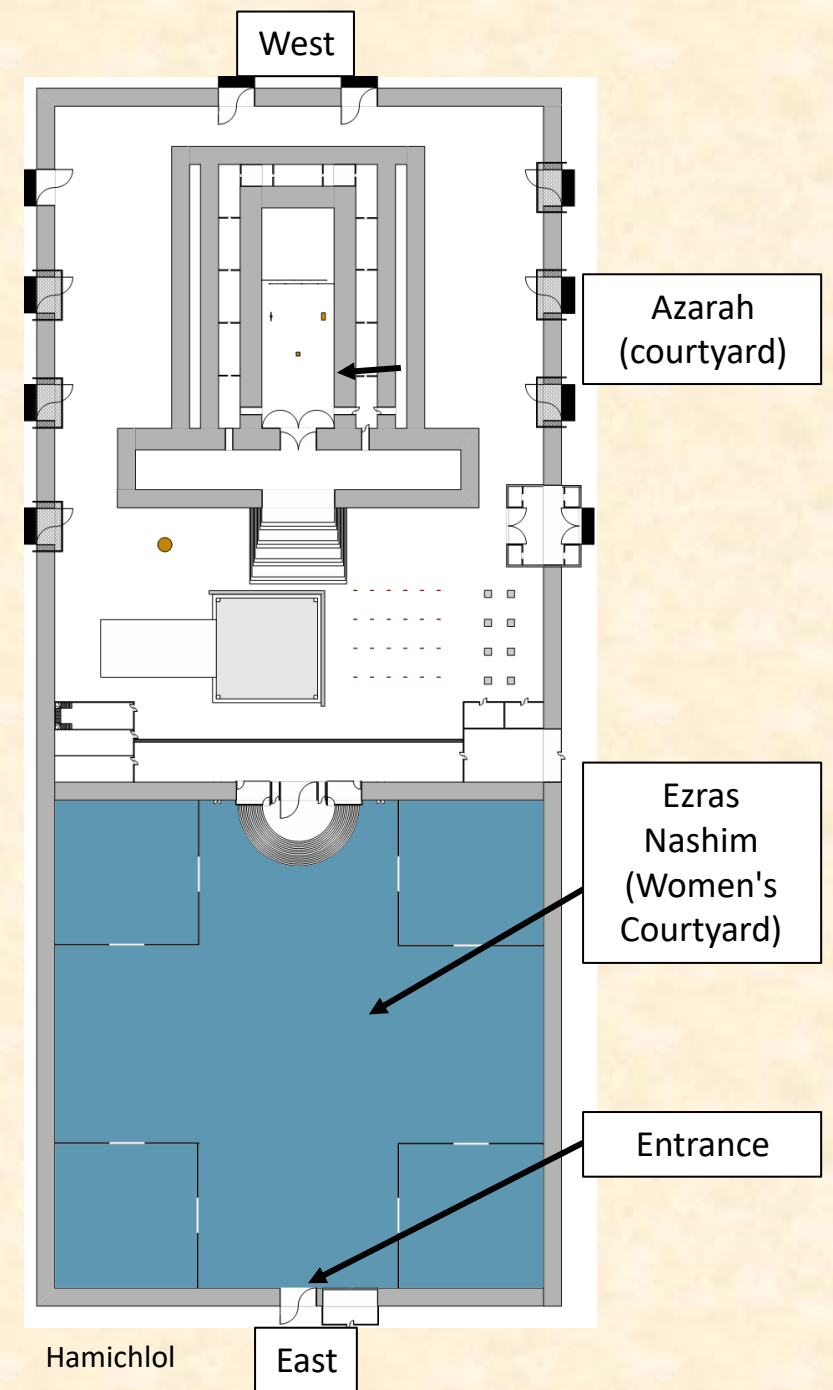
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לזכות עם ישראל בארץ הקודש, ובפרט כוחות הביטחון והחטופים
לזכות לוי יצחק בן שרה דינה ורבקה בת חנה וב”ב שיחיו, לאורך ימים ושנים טובות בבריאות והרחבה

Welcome back, it's good to see you again!

Let's continue our tour of the Beis Hamikdash. Yesterday, we moved from the Har Habayis towards the Beis Hamikdash and got acquainted with the "Soreg" (low wall) and the "Cheil". Today, for the very first time, we will enter the Beis Hamikdash itself!

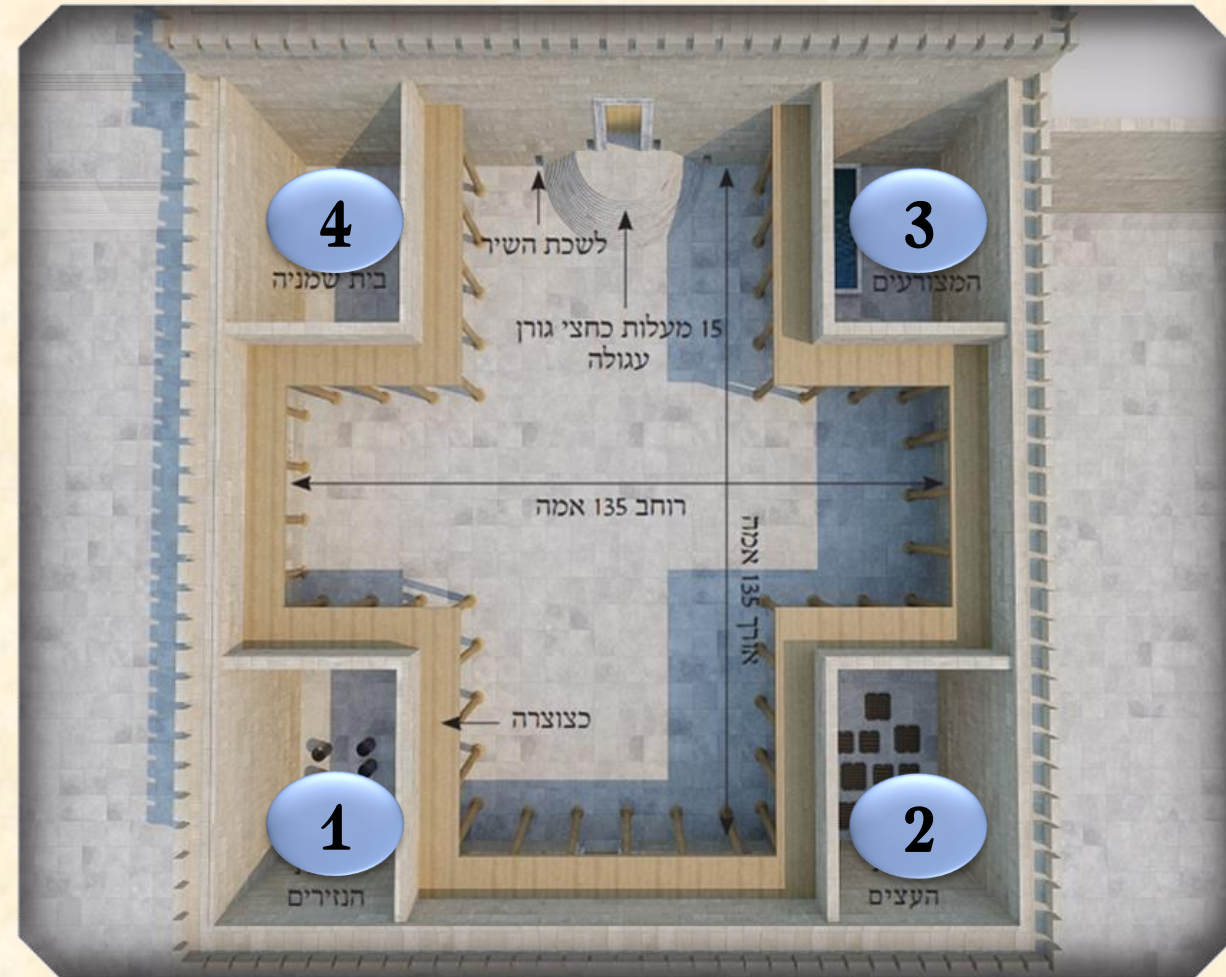
As you can see in the picture, the Heichal (sanctuary), which houses the Kodesh Hakodashim (Holy of Holies), is located on the west side. The Heichal is surrounded by the Azarah (courtyard), which is mainly on the east side of the Heichal. To the east of the Azarah is the Ezras Nashim (Women's Courtyard), which we are entering now.



We just climbed the steps and are now on the inside! The Ezras Nashim is a square area of about 45,200 square feet (approximately 213 by 213 feet). Generally, the area is a wide-open space, except for four open-air rooms located in the four corners of the Ezras Nashim.

Each of these rooms were used for a specific purpose: (1) cooking the Korbanos offered by the Nezirim; (2) checking the firewood for the Mizbeach to make sure there were no worms; (3) a mikvah; (4) storing wine and oil for Korbanos.

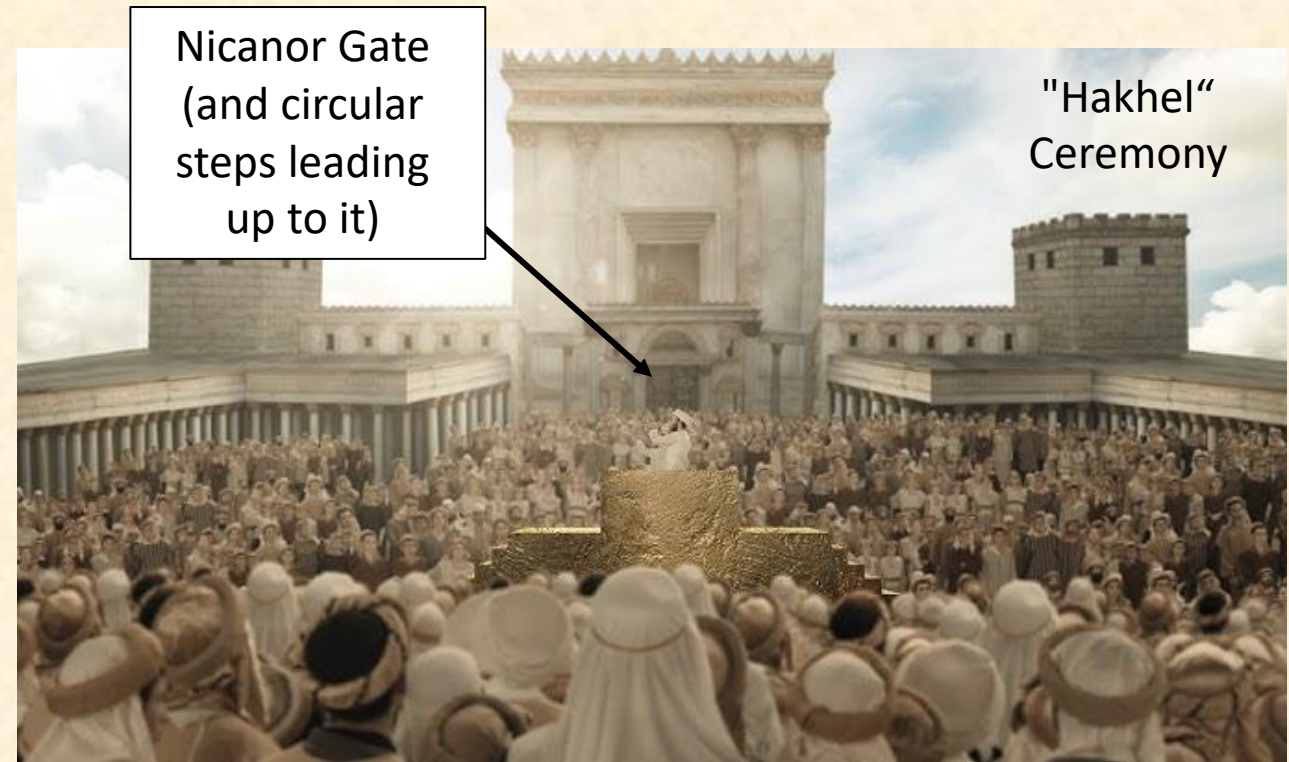
Because the Ezras Nashim was a large open space, it was used for various gatherings, as we will see shortly.



Indeed, every year during the holiday of Sukkot, the Simchas Beis Hashoeva (Water-Drawing Festival) is held here every evening. Musicians play on the circular steps in front of us, the great sages of Israel dance and celebrate the festival joyously, and the entire courtyard is filled with the people of Israel, adults and children alike, watching the holy celebration with delight.

The special "Hakhel" ceremony also takes place here: Once every seven years, during Sukkot, a special wooden platform is built here, on which the king of Israel reads selected portions from the Torah before all the people of Israel – men, women, and children.

This event leaves a lasting impression on all who attend and renews their passion in the study of Torah and the observance of mitzvot.

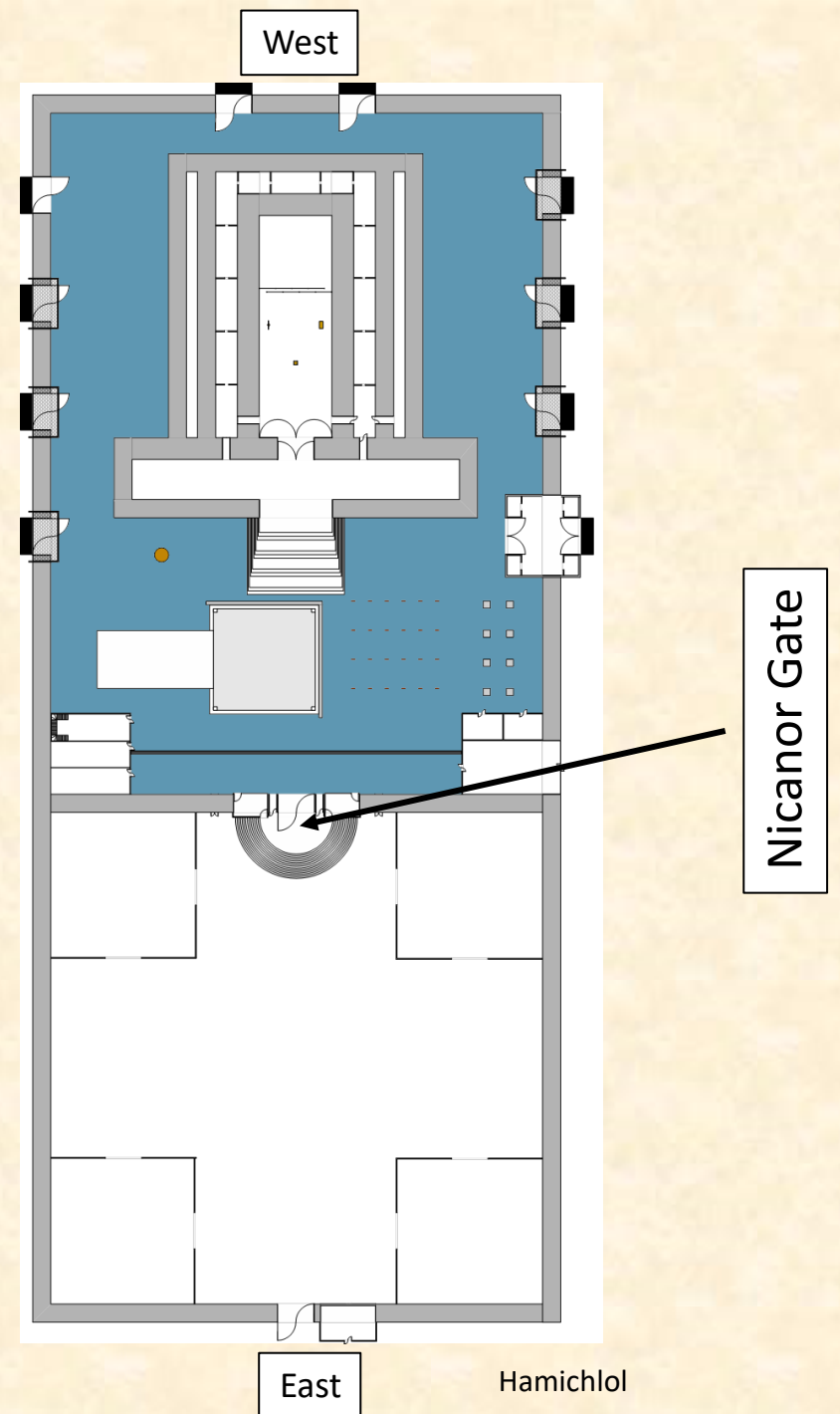


Courtesy of "Yahaduton" Channel

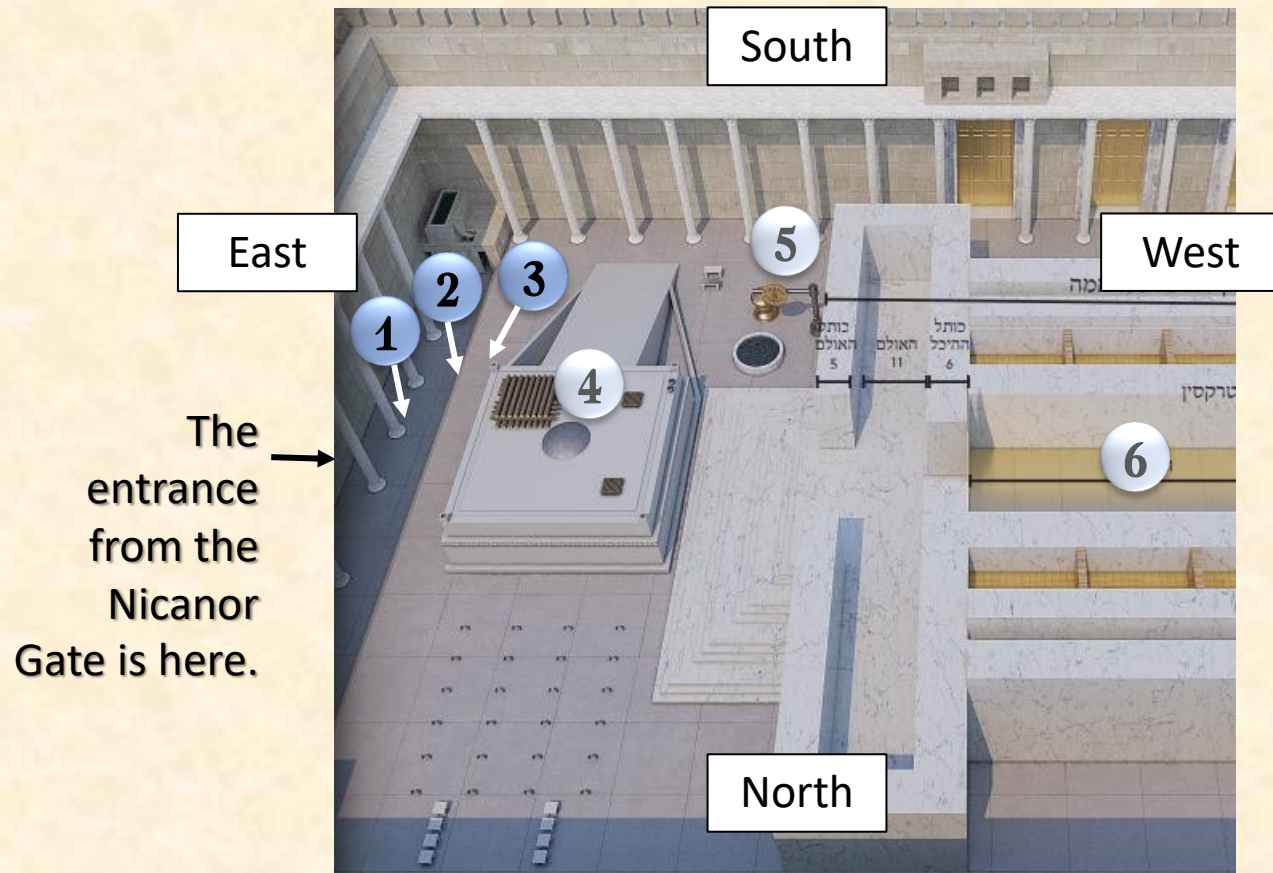
We now ascend the 15 familiar circular steps, entering the Nicanor Gate which we have already become acquainted with. Once we pass the threshold, we will find ourselves inside the Azarah.

Let's look around. The width of the Azarah, like the Ezras Nashim, is about 213ft. The length of the Azarah (from east to west) is about 295 ft totaling approximately 62,800 square ft! Besides the main entrance (Nicanor Gate), there are several other entrances on the sides of the Azarah each with a different purpose.

There were several chambers built along the Azarah for various needs.



Courtesy of the "Hareinu BeVinyano" Institute



The entrance from the Nicanor Gate is here.

1. Ezras Yisrael (Israelite Courtyard)
2. Steps (barely visible in the picture, at the border between the shadow and the sunlight)
3. Ezras Kohanim (Priests' Courtyard)
4. Mizbeach Hachitzon (outer altar)
5. Kiyor (copper laver)
6. Heichal Building

The Azara itself was segmented into several sections: Immediately after entering from the Nicanor Gate, is the Ezras Yisrael (Israelite Courtyard), where any Jew — provided that he is tahor (ritually pure) can enter without a special reason.

Beyond that, a few steps lead to the area called the Ezras Kohanim (Priests' Courtyard). Here, only the Kohanim can enter, or Israelites when they are bringing a Korban.

— Looking a bit further, we see the very large Mizbeach Hachitzon (outer altar used to burn the various Korbanos). Next, there is the Kiyor (copper laver) dwarfed in size but still visible in the picture. Finally, we see the Heichal building.

We will discuss the fascinating details of each one of these in the coming tours.

On the steps to the Ezras Kohanim, the Leviyim would stand and sing during the daily Korbanos. Their singing is a soul stirring event, featuring a unique choir which performed songs of praise and thanksgiving to Hashem, accompanied by a symphony orchestra with dozens of awe-inspiring musical instruments. The symphony of the Leviyim was one of the highlights for all who entered the Beis Hamikdash.

The symphony of the Leviyim on the stairs



illustration, as it will be in the Third Beis HaMikdash. Courtesy of 'LeShichno Tidreshu' Institute

So, what did we learn today?

- We got acquainted with the Ezras Nashim and the four open air rooms within it.
- We got to know the Azarah and its various parts (Eztras Yisrael, Ezras Kohanim) and the Keilim (holy vessels) located there (Mizbeach Kiyor).

In the next lesson: An introduction to the Mizbeach Hachitzon (outer altar).

