

They shall make an Ark of acacia wood... You shall cover it with pure gold ... and you shall make it on a gold crown. (25:10,11)

The *zer zahav*, gold crown, was an attachment which symbolized the *kesser Torah*, crown of Torah (*Yoma* 72b). *Chazal* (*Shemos Rabbah* 34:2) teach that three *kessarim*, crowns, exist: *Kesser Malchus*, crown of Monarchy; *Kesser Kehunah*, crown of Priesthood; and *Kesser Torah*. The crown of Monarchy is symbolized by the *zer*, crown, that was on the *Shulchan*, Table. The crown of *Kehunah* is symbolized by the *zer* on the *Mizbayach*, Altar. Interestingly, concerning the construction of the crown of both the *Shulchan* and *Mizbayach*, the Torah writes, *V'asissa*, "You shall make *l'misgarto*, for its molding (*Shulchan*);" *V'assisa lo*, "You shall make for it" (*Mizbayach*), while, regarding the *Aron*, it writes, *V'asissa alav*, "You shall make on it a gold crown." This indicates the elevated status of the crown of Torah over the other two crowns. A crown is a crown. Why should the crown of Torah be more significant than the other two?

Horav Baruch Dov Povarsky, Shlita, explains the distinction among *Shulchan*, *Mizbayach* and Torah. The crowns of the *Shulchan* and *Mizbayach* are attachments (so to speak) to these *keilim*, vessels, with regard to their crowns. The crown of Torah is above (and part of) the Torah. This means that it is not an added favorable asset, but rather, it is an inherent part of the Truth. He quotes *Horav Moshe Feinstein, zl* (*Igros Moshe, Yoreh Deah* 4:36,8), who derives from the *Rambam* (*Hilchos Talmud Torah* 3:6) that *Kesser Torah* is a *shiur*, defining measurement/barometer, concerning the *mitzvah* of Torah study. The *Rambam* writes: "One whose heart uplifts him to study Torah properly, and to be crowned by it, should not turn his mind away to anything else." The *Rambam* intimates that one's focus of achievement in Torah study should be to be the *Kesser Torah*. The crown of Torah is an integral component of Torah study. One does not learn to know, to hone his mind, or to achieve scholar status. One studies Torah to achieve the ultimate "degree," a testimonial that recognizes his true achievement in Torah: *Kesser Torah*.

Furthermore, the *Talmud* (*Shabbos* 88a) teaches that when *Klal Yisrael* declared *Naase V'Nishma*, "We will do and we will listen" (when they accepted the Torah unequivocally), 60,000 ministering angels descended from Heaven and attached two crowns to each Jew: one for *Naase*; and one for *Nishma*. Once the people sinned, 1,200,000 punishing angels descended and removed the two crowns. The *Maharsha* explains that these two crowns refer to *Kesser Malchus* and *Kesser Kehunah*, which are alluded to in the *pasuk*: (*Shemos* 19:6) *V'atem tiheyu li mamleches Kohanim*, "And you shall be for Me a Kingdom of Priests." The question is obvious: What happened to *Kesser Torah*? Where else, if not at *Kabbolas haTorah* when the nation received the Torah, should they have received the crown of Torah? Why did they receive the crowns of monarchy and the priesthood – and not that of Torah?

The *Rosh Yeshivah* explains that unlike the crown of a monarch, which serves no utilitarian

function other than being the symbol of one's position, the crown of Torah is intrinsic and represents the very essence of every individual who earns it. A Torah scholar, by dint of his devotion, perseverance, diligence and effort has achieved more than just knowledge – he embodies the Torah. He has subsumed the Torah into his essence to the point that he has become a “*shtick* Torah,” piece of Torah, a living *sefer* Torah. This is what is meant by “the crown of Torah.” It is not an ornament that one wears on top of his head. It defines the person and becomes a part of him; a person who is one with the Torah is one who has earned the crown of Torah.

When the members of *Klal Yisrael* prepared themselves for the Giving of the Torah, they had already, by virtue of their new consciousness, become imbued with *Kesser* Torah. Thus, when they sinned with the Golden Calf, they compromised their crown of Torah, because they were no longer Torah Jews. When they fall – it falls with them. When they rise – it rises with them, because they have earned it back. Their reattachment to the Torah brought back their crown.

I would think that in order for the crown of Torah to penetrate one's essence, he must divest himself of “himself,” to make room for the crown of Torah. He can accomplish this through total devotion, total commitment and unparalleled humility. One cannot pour a beverage into a filled glass. Something must leave the glass in order to make room for the beverage. We see this idea in Torah leadership. There are individuals who live for their flocks, devote their love entirely to Hashem. I could write copiously about our Torah leaders, about their unswerving commitment to *Am Yisrael*. I have, however, selected a few short vignettes about the saintly *Bobover Rebbe, zl*. The *Rebbe* arrived in this country a broken shard of his former self. What kept him going was his self-proclaimed mission to rebuild the world that was, the world of *Chassidus* Bobov. He did this by negating himself to the needs of his “children,” as he referred to his *chassidim*. He loved them as a father loves a child and they reciprocated. I share two vignettes from a tribute penned by Rabbi Yisroel Besser (“Warmed by Their Fire”).

Once, when the *Rebbe* was in the Catskill mountains for a few weeks of recuperation from a difficult few months, his *gabbai*, aide, in an attempt to limit the amount of people coming to petition the *Rebbe*, hung up a sign in the small *shul* where they *davened*. It was a simple sign, requesting that all those who sought an audience with the *Rebbe* call the *gabbai's* number to set up an appointment. When the *Rebbe* saw the sign, he asked the *gabbai* what it said. The *gabbai* told the *Rebbe* what was written on the sign. When the *Rebbe* heard, he became aggravated, “Does a *chassid* know what issues will present themselves? Does he know what difficulties and challenges await him? How can he make an appointment for what ‘might’ happen? When one has a problem, he goes to the *Rebbe*. You do not make appointments!”

I think the next vignette truly defines the *Rebbe* and demonstrates to us what it means to be one with Hashem. When someone bought the *Rebbe* a recliner, the *Rebbe* could not understand the reason for using it, “If one is tired, he sleeps. If he is awake, he sits and learns. When is there time to recline?” The chair that the *Rebbe* sat on day in and day out was wearing out. The stuffing was beginning to come out, and the springs were sagging. The *gabbai* said, “It is time to repair the

chair. It does not *pas*, it is unbecoming, the *Rebbe* to sit on such a chair.” The *Rebbe* disagreed, “*Chazal* teach that as long as Amalek stands in Hashem’s way, obstructing His total dominion over world, Hashem’s Throne (so to speak) is incomplete. It is lacking. It is not whole. Hashem’s chair should be lacking, and my chair should be whole?”

This is how he lived – for Hashem, for others. Never for himself. He embodied the Torah. He wore the crown.