

You shall cover it with pure gold, from inside and from outside you shall cover it, and you shall make on it a golden diadem all around. (25:11)

Rashi explains that the *zer*, diadem, was a sort of crown, going all the way around to the top of the *Aron*, above its edge... This *zer*, crown, is a symbol for the *Kesser Torah*, Crown of the Torah. In *Pirkei Avos* 4:13, Rabbi Shimon says: "There are three crowns: the crown of Torah; the crown of *Kehunah*, the Priesthood; the crown of *Malchus*, Kingship; and the crown of a *shem tov*, a good name, goes above them." The question is obvious. The *Mishnah* states that there are three crowns, and then mentions a fourth crown, the crown of a good name.

At first glance, we might say that the *Tanna* teaches that three crowns are on the bottom/below the crown of a good name, which transcends them. This is not compatible with the statement made in the *Midrash* (*Shemos Rabbah* 24) that places *Kesser Torah* above all crowns. One who merits – who is worthy of achieving – the crown of Torah is considered as if he has acquired the other crowns as well. This indicates that the crown of Torah achievement is the most prestigious of them.

The *Alshich HaKadosh* observes that the *Tanna* did not say that the *kesser shem tov* transcends over all of them; rather, he says the *kesser shem tov* is above (their backs) them." A *shem tov*, good name, is acquired by performing *maasim tovim*, good deeds. *Pirkei Avos* is teaching us that the good deeds one carries out must rest upon the crowns of Torah, *Kehunah* and *Malchus*. One who studies Torah, but does not perform good deeds; learns, but ignores the plight of those who are unfortunate; his crown of Torah is not considered to be a crown. He is unworthy of such an honor. Likewise, the coronation of an individual who has either been born into or has ascended the throne of monarchy, is of no merit if he does not act kindly to those in need. The *Kohen* who is born into the Priesthood has been cast into a distinguished, illustrious lineage. He is heir to the most prominent familial role in *Klal Yisrael* – to serve in the *Bais Hamikdash*. Without *maasim tovim*, however, he is undeserving of the crown.

Horav Reuven Karlinstein, zl, substantiates this idea with a statement made by none other than the holy Rabbi Akiva, who declared, "When I was an *am haaretz*, illiterate, I said, 'Whomever will bring me a *talmid chacham*, Torah scholar, I will bite him like a donkey'" (*Pesachim* 49b). Rabbi Akiva certainly was kind-hearted, and surely he had performed countless acts of kindness. Nonetheless, since he had not yet studied Torah, he said about himself that he despised Torah scholars. Kalba Savua's daughter sought to marry him before he had learned Torah, due to his humility. He was kind, self-effacing, unpretentious – but he hated Torah scholars? Yes, when one does not learn Torah, one does not connect with Hashem. Under such negative circumstances, anything is possible.

Alternatively, the first three *kessarim*, crowns, are transformative. A king is different in his very essence. He is royalty. A *Kohen* is different in that his bloodlines have a spiritual component which

allows him to serve in the *Bais Hamikdash*; he is a spiritual aristocrat. One who learns Torah becomes transformed into a Torah personality, a totally different person. On the other hand, one who performs good deeds garners for himself a crown *al gabeiher*, upon them/upon his head. He has transformed. He now wears a crown of *shem tov*. This is his transformation. Same person – new look.