

TALMUD TORAH 3:1

by Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

1: Yisrael were crowned with three crowns: *Keter Torah* (the crown of Torah), *Keter Kehuna* (the crown of the priesthood) and *Keter Malkhut* (the crown of royalty). *Keter Kehuna* was earned by Aharon, as it says: (Bamidbar 25:13) It shall be for him and his descendants after him a pact of priesthood for all time...; *Keter Malkhut* was earned by David, as it says: (Ps. 89:37) "His line shall continue forever, his throne, as the sun before Me; *Keter Torah* lies in wait and is accessible to all of Yisrael, as it says: (Devarim 33:4) "Moshe commanded us the Torah, as the heritage of the congregation of Yaakov." - anyone who wishes may come and take [this crown]. Perhaps you will say that the other crowns are greater than *Keter Torah*? but it says: (Pr. 8:15-16) "Through me kings reign and rulers decree just laws; through me princes rule..." - you can infer that *Keter Torah* is greater than both of them.

Q1: General question: shouldn't this chapter, which is dedicated to the general praise of Torah study and its value, be presented either at the beginning of TT or at the end? Why after 2 chapters (with 4 to go)?

LB ([Larry Budner](#)): A coronation, like a college commencement, is both a beginning and an end. It implies the mastery of basic study (and the ability to continue study independently); it also focusses one's gaze on the future accomplishments that will flow from this mastery.

YE ([Yitz Etshalom](#)): Conversely, we might view this third chapter as a conclusion (and a fitting one) to the "meat" of Hilkhos Talmud Torah. The first chapter delineates the parameters of the obligation, while the second details the method of fulfilling the primary obligation of teaching children. The third chapter is then dedicated to demonstrating the significance, stature of - and proper approach to - Torah study.

Chapters 4-7 focus on a second issue - the relationship between Hakhamim and their students (Ch. 4 - teaching; Ch. 5 - respecting your own Rebbe) and the relationship between Hakhamim and the community (6&7). Perhaps the third chapter, then, should be viewed as a bridge between the two sections - it aptly concludes the essential laws of TT, while establishing the greatness of scholars and study such that our relationships with them, in the classroom and in general, should be driven by these considerations.

Q2: The notion of the three crowns is originally found in the Gemara (BT Yoma 72b) in a slightly different wording:

"R. Yohanan said: there are three *Zeirim* (crowns) - that of the altar, that of the Ark and that of the Table [where the showbread was placed]. That of the altar was earned by Aharon - and he took it. That of the Table was earned by David - and he took it. That of the altar is still waiting; anyone who wishes to take it, may come and take it. Perhaps you will say it [the Ark] is lesser? therefore it says: "Through me kings rein..."

First of all, why did R change the *Zeir* to *Keter*? Second, the analogy is a bit difficult; if the crown which was on top of the Ark represents (as Rashi, in his commentary on the Torah, suggests) the Crown of Torah - the Ark is in the most inaccessible place - specifically in that place where only the High Priest may enter once a year. Third, why did R take the entire scheme out of the *Beit HaMiqdash* (Temple)?

EF ([Ezra Frazer](#)): The reason that R changes Zeir to Keter is probably just a matter of clarity. Keter is the simple Hebrew word for crown, so this is the word that R uses.

The reason that the Crown of Torah is on the ark is because the ark contained the 2 tablets (and perhaps the original Torah scroll, too). A better question would be to ask why the ark is placed out of reach. The answer is that the ark and the tablets, more than any of the other vessels, represent the Divine presence in the Temple. This is why, for example, Kabbalists assume that prophecy emanates from the Cherubs placed on the ark. Something which represents G-d's actual presence is too holy to be readily accessible.

YE: Perhaps R changed the wording and took the analogy out of the Beit HaMiqdash sphere in order to avoid the mixed message. By changing the *Zeir* to *Keter* and not mentioning the Table, Menorah and Ark, the original intent of the message, without being symbolically tied to the Beit HaMiqdash, remains intact.

Q3: Why would anyone think that the crown of Torah is of lesser value?

JF([Jeff Fox](#)): Perhaps one of the reasons one may question the import of Keter Torah is that "anyone who wishes may come and take the crown." This makes the Keter Torah seem less significant than the other two because they have already been claimed by great men, Aharon and David. Who are we to even try to compare ourselves with people like that?!

Q4: Conversely, how does the text from Proverbs prove that *Keter Torah* is greater?

EF: Precisely because the Torah is open to all, one may be led to think that it is of less significance. After all, usually the most valuable things in society are off limits to people from poor backgrounds. Someone from a poor background cannot generally achieve political power, wealth, honor, etc. One may be led to think that since the Torah isn't so exclusive, it is not as prestigious as the Kehunah or royalty. The explanation for why the Torah IS greater than either of those is the verse in Mishlei. Kings and Priests only rule through the Torah. In other words, the Torah isn't open to all because it's less valuable. It's open to all because it is a prerequisite to other achievements like Kehunah or

royalty. Hence, our Rabbis taught that a mamzer who knows Torah is greater than an ignorant High Priest. Similarly, we see from the Book of Kings that Kings who ruled without Torah weren't too successful.

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