

Terumah / Shabbat Shekalim  
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תרומה/שבת שקלים תשפ"ה

## The Golden Crown of Parenting

Rabbi Lilly Kaufman (RS '01, CS '98)



*And you shall cover it with pure gold, inside and outside you shall cover it,*

*and you shall make for it a crown of gold surrounding it.*

([Exod. 25:11](#))

These are architectural details of the Ark of the Covenant, the central element of the Holy of Holies, where the tablets of the Ten Commandments will be held and carried. The Ark has a covering of gold, inside and out, and a crown of gold. Four gold rings are attached to it, two to each side wall, and through these rings poles of acacia wood are inserted, which remain in place, even when the Ark is at rest. To what may this Ark be compared? To parents. How so?

The Ark provides a **home** for the precious items inside it. So too, parents provide a home for the central precious ones in their lives: their children.

The Ark provides **protection** for these items. So too, parents provide protection for their children, at least when they are young.

And the Ark is clad in **gold, inside and out**. How might this compare to parents?

The Talmud teaches, in the name of Rabbi Yohanan ([BT Yoma 72b](#)) that the detail of gold inside and out is analogous to the good student of Torah, who must be the same kind of person inside and out. In [BT Berakhot 28b](#), Rabban Gamliel declares the importance of integrity to the serious student of Torah, that one's inner life and outer life must be consistent (תוכו כבודו). Just as the Ark was covered, inside and out, with the same precious material, the good student of Torah must have integrity, and may not practice hypocrisy. As parents know only too well, children see through parental inconsistency, lack of clarity, and lack of honesty with laser-like focus.

And what about the acacia poles? The Ark was designed to travel. Even at rest, it must always be ready to go. So too, parents are instrumental in **helping their children move forward**, giving them the training to one day make an independent life for themselves. Parents offer a home, protection, and a way forward. They do so most credibly when they are honest with their children and pure in their intentions, "golden" inside and out.

The Ark of the Covenant is also said by the Rabbis (in [BT Yoma 72b](#) and [M. Avot 4:17](#)) to represent one of the three crowns of Judaism: the crown of Torah. The Ark is described in Terumah as having a **זָהָב זָהָב**, a gold crown ([Exod. 25:11](#)), which was most likely a design feature of gold molding at the top. The other two crowns are also mentioned in this week's parashah: the **מִזְבֵּחַ** (the altar, depicted with a gold crown in 30:3) and the **שֻׁלְחָן** (the table) where offerings were placed in the Holy of Holies (depicted with a gold crown in 25:24). Rabbi Shimon (in *Pirkei Avot*) analogized these three crowns to represent the crown of kingship (the table), the crown of priesthood (the altar), and the crown of Torah (the Ark).

The dimensions of these three sacred objects catch the attention of the Keli Yakar (Rabbi Shlomo Ephraim Luntschitz, 1550-1619): The altar's specifications are given in whole numbers; the table in a mix of whole numbers and fractions; and the Ark in fractions.

The Keli Yakar (commenting on 25:10) interprets whole and broken measurements symbolically, calling fractions "אמות שבורות" (broken measurements). The altar, which is measured in whole numbers, possesses inherent wholeness or perfection, which finds its most elaborate ritual expression in Judaism in the service of God through the priesthood. The table has both whole and broken measurements,

representing a mixture of wholeness and brokenness, of successes and failures, which the kings of Israel reflect. But what could it mean that the Ark, symbolizing the crown of Torah, is composed entirely of broken numbers? He answers this way:

שכל אדם ידמה בנפשו  
כאילו הוא חסר מן שלימות החכמה  
וצריך למדוד עדיין למלאת חסרונו

“Every person should imagine himself as if he is lacking some element of wholeness of wisdom and he must still measure out some more, to fill in his deficiencies . . .”

Even the wisest among us, in the view of the Keli Yakar, is an imperfect vessel seeking wholeness. His own *nom de plume*, *Keli Yakar*, means “precious vessel”. *Precious* does not necessarily mean *perfect*. He reminds us to regard our tradition with the important attitude of **humility**.

A person who is truly suited to acquire Torah is a person without pretense or guile, whose inside is like their outside: that person is a truly capable recipient of important teaching. The person best suited to preserve Torah is the person of humility: that person upholds the process of learning because they know there is much yet to learn. The person who combines integrity and humility is truly “golden,” inside and out.

Another feature of the Mishkan (the Tabernacle) is essential to all who would pass on this tradition: namely, tender, devoted **care**. In parshiyot Terumah, Tetzavveh, Vayak-hel and Pekudei, we see how much meticulous attention is lavished on every detail of the sacred space. Why? Because of its intrinsic value as an object of worship?

No! Terumah is an architectural poetics of the inner life. When we are building something as important and sacred as the place where God and people will meet, or as wondrous as the inner spiritual life of a child, care must be taken, quality cannot be short-changed, time must be spent. When God says in Terumah, וַעֲשׂוּ לִי מִקְדָּשׁ וְשָׁכְנָתִי בְּתוֹכְכֶם, “Make for Me a sanctuary, and I will dwell within *them*” ([Exod. 25:8](#)),

we can think of this verse as referring to parents and children this way:

[Parents!] Make for Me a sanctuary [in your home], and I will dwell within *them* [in your children].

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