

An Appreciation: Dr. Shlomo Sprecher, z"l

By: SHELDON EPSTEIN

הלכות תלמוד תורה ג:א בשלושה כתרים נכתרו ישראל—כתר תורה, וכתר כהונה, וכתר מלכות. כתר כהונה זכה בו אהרון שנאמר... כתר מלכות זכה בו דוד שנאמר... כתר תורה הרי הוא מונח ועומד ומוכן לכול שנאמר... ב שמא תאמר שאותן הכתרים גדולים מכתר תורה, הרי הוא אומר "בי מלכים ימלוכו ורוזנים יחוקקו צדק בי שרים ישורו" (משלי ח:טו-טז) הא למדת שכתר התורה גדול מכתר כהונה וכתר מלכות.

Three crowns were conferred upon Israel: the crown of Torah, the crown of priesthood, and the crown of royalty. Aaron merited the crown of priesthood, as it says... David merited the crown of royalty, as it says... The crown of Torah is set aside, waiting, and ready for each Jew, as it says: "The Torah which Moses commanded us is the inheritance of the congregation of Jacob." Whoever desires may come and take it.

Lest you say that the other crowns surpass the crown of Torah, it says: "By me, kings reign, princes decree justice, and nobles rule." Thus, you have learned that the crown of Torah is greater than the crown of priesthood and the crown of royalty.

The Talmudic source of this Rambam is

יומא עב: גמרא, א"ר יוחנן שלשה זירים¹ הן של מזבחה ושל ארון ושל שלחן. של מזבחה זכה אהרן ונטלו. של שלחן זכה דוד ונטלו. של ארון עדיין מונח הוא. כל הרוצה ליקח יבא ויקח. שמא תאמר פחות הוא ת"ל (משלי ח) בי מלכים ימלוכו.

Rabbi Yochanan said, there are three crowns: of the Altar, the Ark and the Table. The Altar—Aaron was fortunate and took it; the Table—David was fortunate and took it; and the Ark is still staying in its place. Whoever wants to take it, come and take it. Lest you say it is the least, it states, "With me kings reign."

¹ משכן of the ארון, שולחן, מזבחה are the crowns that adorned זירים.

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A similar but slightly different presentation of these three crowns appears in the Mishnah *Pirkei Avo*, which offers a fourth crown, שם טוב, and asserts that this surpasses the other three:

אבות ד'ז, רבי שמעון אומר שלושה כתרים הן—כתר תורה וכתר כהונה וכתר מלכות וכתר שם טוב עולה על גביהן.²

Rabbi Shimon says: 'There are three crowns—the crown of Torah, the crown of priesthood and the crown of royalty. But the crown of a good name surmounts them all.

Rambam does not mention the fourth crown in הלכות תלמוד תורה but does in הלכות סנהדרין:

ב:א אין מעמידין בסנהדרין, בין בגדולה בין בקטנה—אלא אנשים חכמים ונבונים, מופלאין בחכמת התורה, בעלי דעה מרובה, ויודעין קצת משאר חכמות, כגון רפואות, וחשבון תקופות ומזלות, ואיצטגנינות, ודרכי המעוננים והקוסמים והמכשפים והבלי עבודה זרה וכיוצא באלו, כדי שיהיו יודעין לדון אותם.

We appoint to a Sanhedrin—both to the Supreme Sanhedrin and to a minor Sanhedrin—only men of wisdom and understanding, of unique distinction in their knowledge of the Torah, and who possess a broad intellectual potential. They should also have some knowledge concerning other intellectual disciplines, e.g., medicine, mathematics, the fixation of the calendar, astronomy, astrology, and also the practices of fortune-telling, magic, sorcery, and the hollow teachings of idolatry, so that they will know how to judge them.

ב:ה כשם שבית דין מנוקין בצדק, כך צריכין להיות מנוקין מכל מומי הגוף. וצריך להשתדל ולבדוק ולחפש שיהיו כולן בעלי שיבה, בעלי קומה, בעלי מראה, נבוני לחש, ושיהיו יודעין ברוב הלשונות כדי שלא תהיה סנהדרין שומעת מפי התורגמן.

Just as the court must be on the highest level of righteousness, so, too, must they be unsullied by any physical blemishes. An effort should be made that they all be white-haired, of impressive height, of dignified appearance, men who understand whispered matters, who understand many different languages, so that the Sanhedrin will not need to hear testimony through an interpreter.

[ו] בית דין של שלושה—אף על פי שאין מדקדקין בהן בכל אלו הדברים, צריך שיהיה בכל אחד מהן שבעה דברים; ואלו הן: חכמה, ויראה, וענווה, ושנאת ממון, ואהבת האמת, ואהבת הבריות להן, ובעלי שם טוב.

² See Rambam המשניות פירוש.

ז] וכל אלו הדברים מפורשין הן בתורה: הרי הוא אומר "אנשים חכמים ונבונים" (דברים א, יג) הרי בעלי חכמה אמור. "וידועים—לשבטיכם" (שם), אלו שרוח הבריות נוחה מהם; ובמה יהיו אהובים לבריות, בזמן שיהיו בעלי עין טובה, ונפש שפלה, וחברתן טובה, ומשאן ודיבורן בנחת עם הבריות. ח] ולהלן הוא אומר "אנשי חיל" (שמות יח, כא; שמות יח, כה) אלו שהן גיבורים במצוות ומדקדקים על עצמן וכובשין את יצרן, עד שלא יהיה להן שם גנאי ולא שם רע, ויהיה פרקן נאה. ובכלל "אנשי חיל" שיהיה להן לב אמיץ להציל עשוק מיד גוזל, כעניין שנאמר "ויקם משה וישיען" (שמות ב, יז) ומה משה רבנו "עניו" (במדבר יב, ג) אף כל דין צריך להיות עניו. ט] "יראי אלוקים" (שמות יח, כא) כמשמעו. "שונאי בצע" (שם)—אפילו ממון שלהם אינן נבהלין עליו, ולא רודפין לקבץ הממון. שכל מי שהוא "נבהל להון... חסר יבואנו" (משלי כה, כב). י] "אנשי אמת" (שמות יח, כא) שיהיו רודפין אחר הצדק מחמת עצמן בדעתן, אוהבין את האמת ושונאין את החמס, ובורחין מכל מיני העוול.

Even though we do not insist that a judge for a court of three possess all these qualities, he must, however, possess seven attributes: wisdom, humility, the fear of G-d, a loathing for money, a love for truth; he must be a person who is beloved by people at large, and must have a good reputation.

All of these qualities are mentioned explicitly in the Torah. When relating Moshe's statements concerning the appointment of judges, it mentions, "Men of wisdom and understanding." This refers to wisdom. "Beloved by your tribes." This refers to those who are appreciated by people. What will make them beloved by people? Conducting themselves with a favorable eye and a humble spirit, being good company, and speaking and conducting their business with people gently.

It goes on to say, "men of power." This refers to people who are mighty in their observance of the mitzvos, who are very demanding of themselves, and who overcome their evil inclination until they possess no unfavorable qualities, no trace of an unpleasant reputation; even during their early manhood they were spoken of highly. The phrase "men of power" also implies that they should have a courageous heart to save an oppressed person from the one oppressing him, as it states: "And Moses arose and delivered them." Just as we see that Moses was humble, so too, every judge should be humble.

"God-fearing"—like the simple meaning. "Men who hate profit," i.e., people who do not become overly concerned even about their own money. They do not pursue the accumulation of money. For anyone who is overly concerned about wealth will ultimately be overcome by want.

“Men of truth,” i.e., people who pursue justice because of their own inclination. They love truth, hate crime, and flee from all forms of crookedness.

In *Halachah* 2:6 Rambam mentions a long list of attributes necessary for someone to serve on a *beis din*, three of which conclude with "יבועלי" "שם טוב". He then demonstrates that all of these attributes are enumerated in Chumash. By incorporating *shem tov* in *anshei chayil*,³ Rambam, at the end of *Halachah* 8, is emphasizing that in addition to possessing laudable attributes, a person must be willing to fight and earn a reputation (שם) as a defender of principles. While he must be modest (עניו), he must not allow this trait to deter him from visibly combating potential danger and injustice even when the advocates of those positions wrap themselves in the mantle of religiosity. People of integrity and principle, who stand up for what they believe is right, earning the grudging respect of even those who disagree with them.

Reb Shlomo possessed all the attributes enumerated by Rambam in *Halachah* 2:1, starting with רפואות and ending with שם טוב.

He was a healer and caregiver, giving freely of his time and energy to family and non-family alike. He and his devoted wife took exemplary care of their elderly parents, and when I called him for advice about my infirm father, he was often at my side in my home even before I had hung up the phone with my question.

He was a scholar and bibliophile, writing and publishing trailblazing works that used encyclopedic knowledge of history and science to explain Gemara and Halachah in novel and eye-opening ways. His erudition was supported by a personal library that was large and varied. I was once talking to someone who excitedly told me how he'd been hired to do work in a house, but had been unable to do so because he got caught up admiring and being dazzled by the homeowner's library of *sefarim*. I asked him if that homeowner was Dr. Sprecher, and, in amazement, he said: “Yes.”

Dr. Sprecher was also an editor, who guided and advised, on the boards of two respected scholarly periodicals, even though the theological bent of the readers of both journals differed significantly.

He accomplished all of this while being modest and self-effacing. He was passionate and an activist in his love of the Jewish People and Eretz Yisrael—even in situations where others feared to go. He looked for no reward in anything he did. He truly personified וכתר שם טוב עולה על גביהן



³ See G”ra, *Yoreh Deah* 7:12:45.