

# Dimensions of Prosperity

PARSHA INSIGHTS - TERUMA (5759)

## SECRETS OF THE TABLE AND ITS MEASUREMENTS

What was the profound meaning of the *Shulchan*, the special table in the *Mishkan* [Tabernacle]? Let us hear the remarks of the *Kli Yakar* on 25:23. He quotes most commentators as agreeing that this table represented a royal crown and a “table of kings”. Relevant lessons will be derived from this later in our discussion. What numerical evidence is there for this? *Kli Yakar* shows us a *gematria* [a computation of number values of Hebrew letters], which helps prove the point. If you find such equations confusing, feel free to skip over the following inset paragraph.



This might not be the type of *gematria* to which you are accustomed, so get ready! In 25:23, it says that we were to construct a “table of acacia wood”. In *Loshon Hakodesh* [Hebrew, the holy tongue], this is a “*shulchan atzei sheetim*”. These three Hebrew words begin with the letters ש *shin*, ע *ayin*, and ש *shin*. If we add these three **letters** together, they equal 670. The Hebrew number thirty is שלשים “*shloshim*”. The letters that spell this Hebrew number word are ש *shin*, ל *lamid*, ש *shin*, י *yud*, and מ *mem*. Their *gematria* is 680. But what about the discrepancy of ten? How can 670 (of the three first letters of the words) have a connection with 680 (the value of “*shloshim*”)?) The *Kli Yakar* explains that the *yud* is “swallowed up” in the word. This means that the word “*shloshim*” is pronounced the same with the *yud* or without it, so we need not be concerned regarding the *gematria*. Consequently, it is as if the word “*shloshim*” equals 670, the same as the beginnings of the words “*shulchan atzei sheetim*”. Or, the *gematria* can be done another way. Use a total of four words instead of three. The first **four** words of 25:23 are “*v’asisa shulchan atzei sheetim*” [make a table of acacia wood]. Notice that we started from the very beginning of the *pasuk* [verse] this time, encompassing a word which begins with a ו *vav*. That adds a numerical value of six to the 670, making 676. Plus, *gematria* license allows us to use the **number of words** as well. A total of **four words** added to the 676 yields 680, the exact *gematria* of the word “*shloshim*”.

Thus, in some way, the words which mean “table of acacia wood” hint to the number thirty. THIRTY HAS TO DO WITH MALCHUS [ROYALTY] BECAUSE AVOS 6:6 SAYS THAT KINGSHIP IS ACQUIRED BY THE MEANS OF THIRTY QUALITIES. Since *shloshim* - thirty - is the number of traits needed to ascend to royalty, there is an indication that the *Shulchan* has to do with “the tables of kings”.

So far, the *Kli Yakar* has brought evidence that the table in the *Mishkan* was associated with nobility and worldly success. This includes all human prosperity, which originates in Heaven, decreed by Hashem. Material wealth gushes forth from “the table on High”, satisfying the world with abundant blessings.

How do we explain the dimensions of this *Shulchan*? The *pasuk* in 25:23 requires it to be built two *amos* [cubits] long and one *ama* [cubit] wide. Its height was an *ama* and a half. Why were its length and width comprised only of full cubits, but its height one full plus one “broken” (half) cubit?

*Kli Yakar* interprets this as a hint to the nature of worldly pleasures. Remember, the *Shulchan* symbolized physical sustenance, as mentioned above. All good things of this mundane world are limited “in length and width”, the amount of time they last and the degree to which they satisfy us. One allusion to this is in *Lech L’cha* 13:17. Hashem told Avram, “Arise, walk **through the land in the length of it and in the width of it...**” In other words, “the land” - this temporary world - has limitations in length and width. Thus, the *Shulchan* had complete (closed) units of measure for its length and width, a clue to the finite nature of material enjoyment. There is “finality” and “closure” with these indulgences.

Similarly, there is a hint to the attitude of *tzadikim* [righteous people] who are content with their portions of *gashmiyus* [physical things]. They realize that they lack nothing material. Whatever Hashem has fed them from His table, whether a lot or a little, they feel like they have everything. Yaacov Avinu [Jacob our forefather] had

expressed this very idea to Aisav in *Parshas Vayishlach*: “G-d has dealt graciously with me, and...I have everything...” (33:11). That is why the *amos*, units of measure of the *Shulchan*, were whole in length and width.

Why was the height of the table one and a half *amos*? Why the “broken *ama*” in height? *Kli Yakar* suggests that height represents one’s ego. A person must never become haughty. Affluence sometimes brings one to false pride. A broken *ama* in height hints that one’s heart, his pride, needs to be “broken” - he must run away from conceitedness and unnecessary honor.

Furthermore, the half cubit reminds us not to overindulge in physical enjoyments. We who constantly benefit from the “table on High” must control our animalistic desires. Every person must “break his lust” by exercising self-discipline in areas of *gashmiyus*. True, we are obligated to eat what is necessary for our physical, emotional, and spiritual health. This can also mean partaking of delicacies at times, as long as we do not overdo it. The “broken *ama*” indicates that we must break the inclination to consume everything our bodies request. Physical satisfaction must be curbed and controlled, not enjoyed in full. A *tzadik* [righteous person] consumes what is sufficient for him to live healthily and serve his Creator enthusiastically and energetically.

An illustration of this, says the *Kli Yakar*, is found in certain places where the Torah talks about food. Do you recall the famine in the region of Canaan, when the brothers of Yosef were told by their father to journey to Egypt for sustenance? He told them, “Go back, buy us a little food.” The usual word for **buying** is not used here. Rather, the term is “*shivru*”, a word very similar to the Hebrew verb that means “to break”. The point is that in regard to bread, a person has to be willing to do with a bit less than his full desire. That is what “breaking” has to do with eating - his fulfillment should be a little “broken” rather than total. Because of this, the height of the *Shulchan* was one and ONE HALF *amos*. The half, broken *ama* symbolizes this theme.

*Kli Yakar* remarks that a person who implements this eating policy will benefit in more ways than one. The health considerations of not overeating are clear to all of us; consult a physician or nutritionist for more details. The gains for one’s spirit cannot be overemphasized either. One who overindulges in worldly pleasures becomes more and more preoccupied with them. He will discover that they can never truly satisfy him. Besides the other dangers, it will cause him to neglect Torah study, the *mitzvah* [commandment/good deed] with which he is supposed to be busy whenever he has no pressing obligations.

We have hopefully gained a more profound appreciation of the *Shulchan* today. It symbolizes the bread of physical indulgence and worldly nobility. These qualities can be beneficial to us when utilized properly. The dimensions of the table contain powerful lessons about arrogance. They also remind us to be content with the physical bounty Hashem provides for us.

*By Rabbi Moshe Heigh*

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