



ציפוי מבית ומחוץ Pure Gold Inside and Outside

■ Sincerity and Honesty

The Ark of the Covenant was also called the Ark of Testimony, because of the stone Tablets of Testimony placed inside it. It is thus appropriate that it is the first item to be discussed in the Torah's presentation of the Mishkan, the Tabernacle of Testimony.

The Ark was made of wood, but was lined with gold. That is, one golden box was placed tightly inside the wooden ark, and another golden box lined it from the outside. The Torah emphasizes:

וְצִפִּיתָ אֹתוֹ זָהָב טָהוֹר, מִבֵּית וּמְחוּץ תְּצַפְּנֶנּוּ ...

*You shall cover it with a layer of pure gold -
on the inside and the outside you shall cover it...* (Sh'mot 25,11)

The inside and the outside of the Ark, in which the Tablets of the Torah were held, were thus the same; both were covered with pure gold. From this unique design, the Gemara learns a very significant lesson for one who wants to be a “vessel” for Torah:

Rava said: Every Torah scholar whose inside is not as his outside – that is, he is not sincere – is not a Torah scholar, as is written, “on the inside and the outside you shall cover it.” (Yoma 72b)

Rava teaches us that one who studies Torah but does not have inner integrity and true fear of G-d, is not worthy of the title “Torah scholar.” He does not deserve to represent Torah or to serve as a leader and guide for the people. The Gemara continues:

R. Yannai often declared: “Woe unto one who has no house, yet he works on preparing the outer gate.”

Clearly, there is no point to working on the outer covering if there is no inner content. Furthermore: Just like testimony must be true to reality, so too, the Ark of Testimony must be true to what it represents. This concept of being sincere and consistent on both the inside and the outside is known as *tokho k'varo*.

It can be clarified by these words from the Book of Job: צָדֵק לְבִשְׁתִּי וַיִּלְבָּשֵׁנִי, “*I wore justice, and it wore me*” (29,14). Job is saying that justice was like an outer robe on his body, but at the same time, was also a very deep and intrinsic part of him, such that he enveloped it. The justice he demanded outwardly was not merely a mask for injustice inside him; rather, his outer demeanor truly reflected his inner thoughts and convictions.

What is remarkable is that the source for the entire concept of *tokho k'varo* is the above-cited verse, “*on the inside and the outside you shall cover it.*” The very concept of “covering” ostensibly reflects the opposite of what we are saying, for a covering hides something that we might not wish to reveal. In this case, gold covers up simple wood; this does not appear to be the best example of sincerity and *tokho k'varo*!

To understand the depths of this concept, let us turn to a relatively lengthy story that appears in the Talmud (B'rachot 27b) regarding Rabban Gamliel and R. Yehoshua:

It happened that a student came before R. Yehoshua and asked, “Is the Evening Prayer (Arvit) obligatory or optional?” R. Yehoshua answered, “Optional.” The student asked the same question of Rabban Gamliel, who answered, “Obligatory.” The student said, “R. Yehoshua said it was optional.” Rabban Gamliel said, “Wait for the Shield Bearers [the Torah Scholars who fight the battle of Torah] to come to the Study Hall.”

[Rabban Gamliel wished to make sure that the Halakhah determined in the Beit Medrash would be uniform for all, and not that each Sage should rule as he saw fit.]

When the Scholars arrived, the questioner arose and asked his question again. Rabban Gamliel, the President of the Court, replied, “Arvit is obligatory.” He then turned to the other Sages and asked, “Does anyone here dispute this ruling?” R. Yehoshua, the Court’s Deputy Chief, answered, “No.” Rabban Gamliel said to R. Yehoshua, “But I heard it said in your name that Arvit is not obligatory... Stand

on your feet and [let them] testify the truth against you.” R. Yehoshua admitted that he had previously said it was not obligatory.

[Rabban Gamliel, the Court President, demanded that every Sage state his opinion honestly and impartially.]

Rabban Gamliel then continued to lecture while R. Yehoshua remained standing, as a punishment. The rabbis thereupon decided to replace Rabban Gamliel, and chose R. Elazar ben Azarya to take his place. That very day, the guard at the door was removed, and all were allowed to enter - for Rabban Gamliel had said that only those students who were *tokham k'varam* were allowed to enter. Hundreds of new benches then had to be added to accommodate the throngs of new students...

Rabban Gamliel was greatly distressed at the thought that he might have prevented many students from learning Torah. He was shown in a dream white pitchers filled with black ashes, and he was comforted – but in truth, the dream was meant merely to reassure him.

That very day, no Halakhah was left unresolved, and an entire Tractate – Eduyot – was taught.

[The change in the Yeshiva's acceptance standards was a watershed event, leading to a totally different type of participation in the Beit Medrash. We also note that Rabban Gamliel was not concerned with his own personal status, but only with what was good for Israel and Torah, as we will now see:]

Even after having been deposed and relegated to a status equal to that of all the others, Rabban Gamliel did not stay away from the Beit Midrash for even an hour.

That same day, an Amonite came to the Study Hall and asked if he could convert to Judaism. Rabban Gamliel said no, and R. Yehoshua said yes. The two rabbis then debated the Halakhah on the matter, R. Yehoshua's opinion was proven right, and the Rabbis allowed the man to convert. Rabban Gamliel said to himself, “Since this is so, I must go and appease R. Yehoshua.” He went to R. Yehoshua's house, and saw that the walls were black. He said, “I see that you are a coal-maker.” R. Yehoshua said, “Woe to the generation that you are its leader, and woe to the ship whose captain you are, for you do not know the Torah scholars' hardships and how they make a living.”

■ Analysis

At first glance, it appears that the original dispute broke out over the question of whether the Evening Prayer is obligatory or not. But in truth, behind the scenes, it actually revolved around something else entirely.

Rabban Gamliel did not allow just anyone to come and study in the Beit Medrash, but rather stipulated a basic condition: they must be *tokham k'varam*, the same on the inside as on the outside. He demanded that the students display a very high level of integrity and sincerity before they begin their studies. R. Yehoshua, on the other hand, felt that the study of Torah itself would guide and direct the students, and that there was therefore no need for them to pass such a hard test before they even begin studying. R. Yehoshua's opinion was that such a test would close the door on Torah study to hundreds of potential scholars.

Rabban Gamliel wished to teach only high-quality students, while R. Yehoshua wished to teach everyone, in the hope that some of them would become Torah giants.

The true dispute, then, centered around whether or not the guard at the gate was necessary. Therefore, when Rabbe Elazar ben Azaria took over as Head of the Court in place of Rabban Gamliel, the first thing the Sages did was to remove the guard from the Beit Medrash door.

Interestingly, this was precisely Rabban Gamliel's claim against R. Yehoshua in their public dispute regarding the Evening Prayer. We can imagine Rabban Gamliel saying to him:

"I placed a guard at the entrance to keep out students who are not *tokham k'varam* – and here you, R. Yehoshua, the Av Beit Din, provide a bad example by doing exactly that. Outside you teach the students that Maariv is not obligatory, while here inside, in front of everyone, you say the opposite. You are not *tokho k'varo!*" (We will see below how R. Yehoshua can answer this claim.)

After the guard was removed, hundreds of students were added to the ranks of the Beit Medrash – and Rabban Gamliel became concerned that his demands had been too stringent and his test had produced inaccurate results; perhaps he had prevented many worthy students from coming to learn Torah! That very night, he had a dream likening the new students to white pitchers full of black ashes. He understood that they were, in fact,

not *tokham k'varam* – the whiteness of the pitchers did not reflect their blackness inside – and he was reassured. But the Gemara then quickly continued that this dream did not actually represent the truth.

The Talmud notes that Tractate Eduyot was composed that day – the very day that so many new students were accepted. It is fascinating that specifically this Tractate, exclusively comprising “testimonies” on various Halakhot accepted as law, was redacted that day. The very foundation of testimony is “reliability” – meaning that the hundreds of new students whose character had not been verified beforehand did not stop the truth from being clarified. As is written:

עֲדוּת ה' נְאֻמָּה מְחֻכֶּמֶת פְּתִי.

G-d's testimony is trustworthy, and gives wisdom to the simpleton. (Psalms 19,8)

This concept of testimony being loyal to the source is linked with *tokho k'varo*, and is also connected to the Torah that is concealed in the Ark of Testimony – which was gold-plated on both the inside and the outside. In other words, the Ark accurately represents the Torah within it.

■ The Inner Truth

When Rabban Gamliel went to appease R. Yehoshua, he saw the black walls of his home and realized that R. Yehoshua was a coal-maker. R. Yehoshua responded very sharply, lashing out at Rabban Gamliel for checking the “insides” of his students’ character traits – but ignoring the “insides” of their physical and economic conditions.

“Woe to the generation that you are its leader,” he cried out, “for you do not know the Torah scholars’ hardships. You are so careful to check the inner character of every student who wants to study. But why don’t you also check how they live and what they do to earn their bread? Why have you never been to my home, the home of the Av Beit Din, to see the poverty and difficult conditions in which I live? Why do you not visit your students to see how you can help? As a leader, this is what you should be checking!”

Despite this harsh attack, we must also note Rabban Gamliel’s greatness of soul, as shown by his behavior during this crisis. Even though he was abruptly dismissed from his high post, he continued to attend the Beit Medrash classes regularly. He took part in the discussions as if he were a mere student, and even conducted a legal debate about the Amonite convert as an equal with R. Yehoshua.

This fact shows that Rabban Gamliel's earlier behavior was not motivated by concern for his own personal honor, but rather for that of the Presidency of the Sanhedrin. This is also evidenced by his concern that perhaps, "Heaven forbid, I may have withheld Torah from Israel."

■ **The Cover: Truth and Falsehood**

We must now clarify a very basic question: Is *tokho k'varo* really an absolute ideal? Must everyone always be transparent? Must we express everything we think? Is it forbidden to keep a secret?

If there is something negative about having a covering, then what about the skin that covers our bodies – is that also a form of hypocrisy? And how can we explain that Hashem Himself made for Adam and Eve "*clothes of skin and clothed them*" (B'reshit 3,21)? Must people walk around without clothes to prove they are *tokham k'varam*?!

And what about Moshe Rabbeinu? The Torah tells us (Sh'mot 34,33-35) that his face glowed after he came down from Mount Sinai, and that he therefore covered his face with a veil. Is this not a violation of the principle of being *tokho k'varo* and keeping nothing hidden? And what shall we say about the thick cloud that covered Mt. Sinai when Hashem made Himself known there?

Clearly, we must distinguish between two types of coverings. If the outer covering is designed to protect the inner content, or to protect others from being harmed by the inner content, then it is positive and genuine, and even important. But if the covering comes to mislead and to fool others, then it is not acceptable. A beautiful outer covering must not serve to cover up ugly character traits.

In the case of the Ark and other Tabernacle utensils, the gold – a strong, time-resistant metal – is there for a few reasons, including to protect the wood from rotting. If it were there just to hide the wood and mislead us into thinking that the ark was all gold, why would it have to be placed on the inside as well? No one ever sees the inside; it was forbidden to ever open the Ark from the moment the cover was placed on it!

Similarly, our skin has several functions, including to protect our inner organs from outside germs; it is certainly not meant to deceive or create a false external impression. And the cloud covering Mt. Sinai protected the People of Israel from being harmed by the vision of G-d. Similarly, Moshe's

shining countenance was veiled in order to protect Israel from its rays of light. In short, coverings can be very positive – but not if they come to deceive.

Let us return to the story in the Talmud: R. Yehoshua did not want to publicly say that the Evening Prayer is optional, because Rabban Gamliel, the President, had already expressed the opposite opinion. R. Yehoshua “covered” his true opinion only to safeguard the honor of the Sanhedrin presidency and Rabban Gamliel.

The concept of not contradicting one’s senior is found in our legal tradition. When a court hears and decides a case involving a possible death sentence, the senior judges are always heard last. This enables the more junior judges to express their opinions freely, without fear of contradicting their elders. If Rabban Gamliel would have asked R. Yehoshua’s opinion before expressing his own, R. Yehoshua would certainly have told him the truth, namely, that he felt the Evening Prayer was not obligatory. The problem was that Rabban Gamliel had already expressed his opinion that it *was* obligatory.

Rabban Gamliel realized later that this was what happened when he saw that R. Yehoshua did not hesitate to openly contradict him regarding the would-be Amonite convert. It was because Rabban Gamliel was no longer the Head of the Sanhedrin, and could therefore be readily contradicted! He then understood that the previous time, R. Yehoshua’s response did not signal a *tokho k’varo* problem, but rather stemmed from a desire not to contradict the head of the Sanhedrin.

We now understand how the Ark can symbolize integrity, even as its own wood is covered by gold on both sides. The Ark teaches us not only that one must be sincere and consistent, but also that there are situations in which “covering” is acceptable.

■ He Who Speaks Truth in His Heart

Every morning in our prayers, we express our desire to be counted among those who are sincere on the inside as on the outside: “May a person always have fear of Heaven in secret as well as openly, and admit the truth, and speak truth in his heart.” We must not be like those whom the Prophet Yeshayahu mocks:

הַמְתַקְדְּשִׁים וְהַמְטַהְרִים אֶל הַגְּנוֹת אֲכָלֵי בֶשֶׂר הַחֲזִיר וְהַשֶּׁקֶץ וְהָעֶבֶר...

*Those who sanctify and purify themselves in the gardens [on the outside]
but eat swine and mice [on the inside]... (66,17)*

We do, however, want to be like those whom Scriptures praises for knowing how to keep a secret:

... וְנֶאֱמַן רוּחַ מְכֻסָּה דָּבָר.

... *and one who is of faithful spirit conceals a matter.* (Proverbs 11,13)

And precisely because we don't want to reveal secrets – as the above verse begins, “*One who bares tales, reveals secrets*” – we also want to stay away from tale-bearing:

לֹא תֵלֵךְ רְכִיל בְּעַמֶּיךָ...

Do not go around bearing tales amidst your people ... (Vayikra 19,16)

Keeping a secret, which is a praiseworthy act despite the importance of being sincere and truthful, is a “defensive” action, and not one that is designed to deceive.

How does all this relate to the dispute between R. Yehoshua and Rabban Gamliel regarding whether the Evening Prayer is optional or obligatory? The answer is as follows:

Daytime is revealed, open and above-board, while night is covered. The daytime prayers, Shacharit and Mincha, come at the two ends (morning and pre-evening) of the “revealed” day; they are the symbols of the external, that which can be easily seen. The Maariv prayer, on the other hand, is recited during the dark of night, symbolizing that which is internal and concealed. The question asked of Rabban Gamliel and R. Yehoshua related to the importance of *tokho k'varo*: Is the Evening Prayer to be like the obligatory Shacharit and Mincha, open and *tokho k'varo* – or is it an optional prayer, as Rabban Gamliel ruled?

■ An Age-Old Debate

The debate about the correct criteria for accepting students goes back well before the days of Rabban Gamliel and R. Yehoshua, and is actually rooted in an old dispute between Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai. In the first Mishna of Pirkei Avot, the Men of the Great Assembly taught, “Raise up many students.” How was this accomplished?

The House of Shammai says: One must teach only the wise, the humble, a son of his father [i.e., one whose descent can be reliably traced], and the wealthy.

The House of Hillel says: One should teach everyone [who is interested

in learning] - for there were many sinners in Israel who, after they began to study Torah, begat righteous and pious people. (Avot D'Rabbe

Natan 2,9)

Beit Shammai set four high-standard criteria by which to choose which students to teach. They must have the following:

1. Wisdom with which to understand the Torah,
2. humility and good character traits,
3. the merit of their forefathers, and
4. wealth so that they can sit and study without concern over making a living.

Beit Hillel blanketly disputes this approach, and holds that everyone is a potential student, as evidenced by many who were not observant and yet, via Torah study, later adopted a Torah way of life.

The essence of the debate is whether we must strive to guarantee in advance the proper character traits among our students. Beit Shammai holds that we must, while Beit Hillel's approach is that we may allow the process of Torah study itself to do the work for us and refine the character of those who engage in it. The fact that the guard in the Beit Medrash was fired in the times of Rabban Gamliel indicates clearly that the Sages of that generation held like Beit Hillel – that the Torah can refine students' character traits – and not like the more stringent approach of Beit Shammai.

