

”וצפית אותו זהב טהור מבית ומחוץ צפנו”

The Exalted Lesson Learned from the Aron— a Torah Scholar Must Be Pure Inside and Outside

This week's parsha is parshas Terumah. With immense pleasure, we will focus on the structure of the Aron, and the vital lesson it teaches us. It housed the two sets of luchos upon which HKB" H etched the Aseres HaDibros transmitted at Har Sinai. As we know, they are the foundation of the entire Torah. Here is the relevant text (Shemos 25, 10): **”יעשו ארון עצי שיטים אמתים וחצי ארכו ואמה וחצי רחבו ואמה וחצי קומתו, וצפית אותו זהב טהור מבית ומחוץ צפנו ועשית עליו זר זהב.”** **They shall make an Aron of shittim wood, two and a half cubits its length, a cubit and a half its width, and a cubit and a half its height. You shall cover it with pure gold, from inside and from outside you shall cover it; and you shall make on it a golden crown all around.**

In the Gemara (Yoma 72b), our sages of blessed memory compare the Torah to a talmid-chacham. After all, a Torah-scholar is also a receptacle for the teachings of the Torah. Rabbi Yochanan notes that with regards to the construction of the "shulchan" (ibid. 23) and the "menorah" (ibid. 31), the Torah employs the term "**זעשית**"—**you shall make**. Whereas, with regards to the Aron, the Torah employs the term "**יעשו**"—**they shall make**. He deduces from this distinction: **מכאן לתלמיד חכם שבני עירו מצוין לעשות**—**from here we learn regarding a Torah-scholar that the residents of his city are commanded to do his work for him** (i.e., the community is required to support his Torah study).

Additionally, the Aron was covered with pure gold internally and externally. From this feature of its structure, Rava deduces (ibid.): **”ב'ל תלמיד חכם שאין תוכו כבבו איןו תלמיד—חכם—any Torah-scholar whose inside is not like his outside is not a true Torah-scholar.** According to the Panim Yafos (Terumah), this means that he must resemble pure gold internally and externally. If he only appears to be learning Torah l'shma—sincerely, with good intentions—but he actually has ulterior motives, such as a desire for prestige, that is considered lo l'shma. Then, in the eyes of HKB" H, he does not resemble the Aron; he is not a true talmid-chacham. His inside must mirror his outside—“**תוcho k'varo**”!

The Wonderful Insight of the Panim Yafos

Nevertheless, the Panim Yafos raises a difficulty with Rava's deduction. As the Gemara there points out, Betzalel actually built three Arons—the middle one was made entirely of wood, while the inner and outer ones were made of gold. This is also evident from Rashi's commentary (Shemos 25, 11): **” מבית ומחוץ צפנו ”.** **Betzalel made three arons, two golden and one wooden, four walls and a bottom for each, and they were open at the top. He placed the wooden one inside the (larger) golden one, and the (smaller) golden one inside the wooden one, and overlaid its upper rim with gold. Thus, it was covered both inside and outside** (with

gold). So, how could Rava deduce from this structure that a talmid-chacham—the virtual, human receptacle of the Torah—must be pure, like gold, inside and out? After all, the Aron itself was not made entirely of gold; its middle compartment was made of wood.

In this context, the Panim Yafos interprets what we have learned in the Gemara (Pesachim 50b): **“אמר רב יהודה אמר ר' לעולם יעסוק אדם בתורה וממצוות אף על פי שלא לשם, שמתווך שלא לשם בא לשם.”** Rav Yehudah said in the name of Rav: **A person should always study Torah and perform mitzvos even though it is not l'shma (for its own sake; with pure intent), because from that which is not l'shma, he will eventually come do so l'shma.** Let us elaborate. When a person first embarks on his journey into Torah-study, before he is truly enlightened, it is almost impossible to learn l'shma. Nevertheless, he must persist and desire wholeheartedly to ultimately learn Torah l'shma.

Understood in this light, here is the rationale for HKB”H commanding Moshe to fashion three arons: The outermost aron being of pure gold, was to allude to a talmid-chacham who studies Torah l'shma only outwardly—for the sake of appearances; the middle aron made of wood alluded to the beginning of his journey, when he has not yet achieved the ideal of l'shma—as such, he cannot be compared to pure gold; yet, the innermost aron, which was made of pure gold, comes to teach us that in the merit of yearning to study Torah l'shma, one is assured that he will achieve that goal: **“שמתווך שלא לשם בא לשם”**.

The Doorkeeper Was Removed and Sent to a Higher Place

Since it is the nature of Torah to be elucidated in seventy different ways, it appears that we can explain Rava's deduction—that a talmid-chacham must exemplify the attribute of “tocho k'varo”—based on an incident described in the Gemara (Berachos 28a). The other scholars dismissed Rabban Gamliel from his post as the Nasi, because he had persistently distressed Rabbi Yehoshua. In his stead, they appointed Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah. The changes that resulted were dramatic:

”תנא אותו היום סלקוهو לשומר הפתח, וניתנה להם רשות לתלמידים ליכנס, שהיה רבנן גמליאל מכריז ואומר, כל תלמיד שאין תוכו כברו לא יכנס לבית המדרש. והוא יומא אתוספו כמה ספסלי, אמר רבי יוחנן פליגי בה בא יוסף בן דוסתאי ורבנן, חד אמר אתוספו ארבע מאות ספסלי, חד אמר שבע מאות ספסלי.”

It was taught in a Baraisa: That day they removed the doorkeeper and permission was granted to all students to enter. For Rabban Gamliel would proclaim and say: Any student whose inside is not as his outside may not enter the Beit-Midrash! That day many benches were added. Rabbi Yochanan said: Abba Yosef ben Dostai and the Rabbis disagree about the matter. One says four hundred benches were added and one says seven hundred benches.

The Imrei Yosef presents an interesting question in the name of the esteemed Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Riminov. Seeing as the doorkeeper did not actually enter the Beis Midrash, he was clearly not one of the prominent sages. So, how was he able to discern which students possessed the quality of “tocho k'varo”? He answers that as a result of Rabban Gamliel's decree, a malach was generated to act as the doorkeeper. He only allowed those scholars to enter who passed the test of “tocho k'varo.” But when Rabban Gamliel was relieved of his post and Rabbi Elazar ben Azryah was appointed Nasi in his place, the decree was annulled, and the malach was elevated to a higher realm.

The Imrei Yosef substantiates this claim—that tzaddikim possess the power to elevate a malach from one world to a higher world—based on what he was taught by his Rav, the Mahari of Zidichov, zy”a, regarding the following Gemara (Succah 28a): **“אמורו עלייו על יונתן בן עוזיאל, בשעה שישוב ועוסק בתורה כל עוף שפורח עליו מיד נשרף”**—they said of YoNasan ben Uziel that when he was sitting and learning Torah, every bird that flew over him was immediately incinerated. He explained based on the teachings of the Arizal that “seraphim” (a category of heavenly creatures/angels described as the fiery ones) are superior to “malachim.” Whereas “malachim” reside in

the world of "Yetzirah," "seraphim" reside in the world of "Beriah," which is a higher world.

Now, Shlomo HaMelech said (Koheles 10, 20): **כִּי עֹוף** —**השָׁמַיִם יְוַלֵּיךְ אֶת הַקּוֹל וַיַּעֲלֵל הַכְּנָפִים יְגִיד דָּבָר** —**for a bird of the skies may carry the sound, and some winged creature may betray the matter.** The Zohar hakadosh interprets this as a reference to the "malachim," who are called "birds." This then is the praise the sages extolled in relation to YoNasan ben Uziel. While he was studying Torah with kedushah and taharah in Olam HaZeh, the world of Asiah: "בְּלֹא עֹוף שָׁפֹורָה עַלְיוֹן" —any "malach" that flew over him in the world of Yetzirah "מִיד נְשָׁרֵךְ" —was immediately transformed to the higher level of a "seraph" and ascended to the world of Beriah. This concludes his sacred insight.

הַדָּבָר אֲבִי עַל: Atzilus, Beriah, Yetzirah, Asiah

At this point, it behooves us to explain what we have learned from the esteemed Mahari of Zidichov, zy"a, that the "malachim" reside in the world of Yetzirah, while the "seraphim" reside in the world of Beriah. Undoubtedly, these concepts are profound and related to the teachings of kabbalah, which are beyond our scope and purview. Nevertheless, since they are taught in the sefarim of Chassidut, it is worthwhile explaining several key issues to the best of our limited abilities.

We will begin to shed some light on the subject with the commentary of the Ohr HaChaim hakadosh on the first passuk in the Torah (13). He cites a teaching in the Zohar that the Creator, blessed is He, created four worlds — **Atzilus, Beriah, Asiah, and Asiah**. They are alluded to by the passuk (Yeshayah 43, 7): **כָּל הַנְּקָרָא בְשָׁמֵי וְלְכָבוֹד** —**all that is called by My name, and for My glory, I created it, I formed it, also I made it.** "כָּל הַנְּקָרָא בְשָׁמֵי" alludes to the world of **Atzilus**, which is closest to HKB" H; "וְלְכָבוֹד" —**alludes to the world of Beriah;** "יִצְרָתִי" —**alludes to the world of Yetzirah;** "אֶרְאָה" —**alludes to the world of Asiah.** He also associates these four worlds with the words (Bereishis 1, 1): **בְּרִאָתִים אֶת הַשָּׁמִים וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ**.

Despite our limited comprehension of these kabbalistic matters, we will present a brief explanation based on what we are taught in our sacred sefarim. The first and highest of the four worlds, **Atzilus**, is the most spiritual. From here, HKB" H, so to speak, oversees His universe. Clearly, HKB" H Himself is infinite, limitless, ineffable, and His essence is beyond comprehension. Notwithstanding, in order to influence His creations with His abundant good, He diminished Himself ("tzimtzum") step by step until taking form in the world of Atzilus.

The second world, **Beriah**, is called **Kisei HaKavod**, since HKB" H sits there, so to speak, on His Throne of Glory to judge the creations, in keeping with the notion of (Mishlei 29, 4): **מֶלֶךְ בָּמִשְׁפָט יְעַמֵּד אֶרְץ** —**a king upholds the land with justice.** The neshamos of Yisrael are hewn from beneath the Kisei HaKavod in this world. This is taught in the Zohar hakadosh (Tzav 29b): **כָּל הַנְּשָׁמוֹת גּוֹרֹת מִתְהַתָּה בְּסֵא הַכְּבוֹד**. This explains very nicely why the term "**beriah**" is used to describe the creation of Adam (Bereishis 1, 27): **וַיַּבְרָא אֱלֹקִים אֶת הָאָדָם בְּצֶלֶמוֹ**.

This also explains the teaching in the Midrash (B.R. 82, 2) that the image of Yaakov is etched on the Kisei HaKavod. For Yaakov Avinu is the root of all the neshamos of Yisrael; after all, he fathered the twelve shevatim, and they encompass all of Yisrael.

The third world is **Yetzirah**; it is the residence of the ministering angels, the "malachei hashareis." Thus, the source of the neshamos of Yisrael is above the world of the malachim, since they are hewn from beneath the Kisei HaKavod in the world of **Beriah**. This explains Chazal's statement (Sanhedrin 93a): **גְּדוּלִים צְדָקִים יוֹתֵר מִמְּלָאֵכִי** —**tzaddikim are superior to the ministering angels.** In a similar vein, the author of the Tanya writes in Likutei Amarim (Chapter 39): **Therefore, the level of the tzaddikim is greater than theirs** (the malachim), **since the home of the neshamos of the tzaddikim is in the world of Beriah, while the home of the malachim is in the world of Yetzirah.** Nevertheless, we mentioned above the assertion of the Arizal that the "seraphim" are on

a higher level than the “malachim,” since they exist in the world of Beriah.

The fourth and lowest world is **Asiyah**. Human beings, who are physical creatures, exist in this world along with all the material things that were created to enable Yisrael to serve Hashem. Thus, from the aspect of man’s physical body, he is lower than the malachim. Yet, from the aspect of his neshamah, man is higher and superior to the “malachim.”

The Seraphim Agreed to the Creation of Man

Following this sublime path, we will now explain a fascinating passage in the Gemara (ibid. 38b):

”אמר رب יהודה אמר רב בשעה שביקש הקב”ה לבראות את האדם, ברא כת אחת של מלאכי השרת, אמר להם רצונכם נעשה אדם בצלמנו, אמרו לפניו רבונו של עולם של עולם מה מעשיו, אמר להן כך וכך מעשיו, אמרו לפניו רבונו של עולם מה אונש כי תזכרנו ובן אדם כי תפקדנו, הושיט אצבעו קטנה בינייהן ושרפם.”

Rav Yehudah said in the name of Rav: When HKB”H sought to create man, He created a group of ministering angels, and asked them, “Is it your wish that we create man in our image?” They said before Him, “Master of the Universe, what will his deeds be?” He said to them, “Such and such will be his deeds.” They said before Him, “Master of the Universe, (Tehillim 8, 5) what is a mortal that You should remember him and the son of mortal man that You should be mindful of him?” He extended His little finger among them and consumed them (with fire).

One can only wonder what the malachim did wrong! After all, HKB”H opted to consult with them, and they merely offered their opinion. When they inquired of HKB”H about man’s deeds, and they were told that he is likely to sin, they responded, **“What is a mortal that You should remember him and the son of mortal man that You should be mindful of him?”** In other words, he is not worthy to be created. So, why did they deserve to be burned by HKB”H?

Based on what we have discussed above, we can

explain that only the “malachim,” who reside in the world of Yetzirah, were consulted. Since they reside below the world of Beriah, they were not familiar with the source of the neshamos of Yisrael. As such, they questioned man’s worthiness to be created. The “seraphim,” however, who reside in the world of Beriah, recognize the greatness of Yisrael—that their neshamos are hewn from beneath the Kisei HaKavod and that the image of Yaakov is etched on the Kisei HaKavod. Therefore, not only did they not oppose the creation of man but, on the contrary, they agreed immediately that he should be created.

Furthermore, the main objection of the malachim against the creation of man was that he is a mere mortal, physical being with a yetzer hara, who is prone to sin; as such, it is preferable that he not be created. Yet, we have learned (Yoma 86a): **“גָדוֹלָה תְשׁוּבָה שְׁמָגוּתָה עַד כְּסָא הַכָּבוֹד—the power of teshuvah is so great that it reaches all the way up to the Kisei HaKavod**—which, as we have learned, is in the world of Briah. We have also learned (Berachos 34b): **“בָּמָקוֹם שְׁבָעֵלִי—in the place where ba’alei teshuvah stand, total tzaddikim cannot stand.** Thus, even if man sins, it is still possible to for him to reach the pinnacle of righteousness in the world of Briah.

Therefore, it was only the “malachim” located in the world of Yetzirah who failed to recognize man’s greatness. This prompted their objection: **“מָה אָנוֹשׁ כִּי תִזְכְּרָנוּ”**—he is prone to sin. In contrast, the “seraphim” located in the world of Beriah were fully aware of the power of teshuvah and the status it afforded ba’alei teshuvah. Hence, not only did they not object, but they acquiesced to the creation of man and proclaimed (Tehillim 8, 2): **“הָאָדָונִינוּ מָה אֲדִיר שְׁמֶךָ—בְּכָל הָאָרֶץ”**—**Hashem, our Lord, how grand is Your name in all the earth.**

In this light, we can interpret the message Chazal conveyed to us with the statement: **“He extended His little finger among them.”** Without any effort, HKB”H elevated the “malachim” from the world of Yetzirah to the world of Beriah. In this manner, he transformed them into “seraphim”—**“וּשְׁרָפָם”**—residing in the world of

Beriah. In their new environment, they would be able to appreciate the value of teshuvah, and the esteem afforded ba'alei teshuvah. Thus, HKB" H proved to them that it is worthwhile to create man. For, even if he does sin, he can be rectified by means of teshuvah.

Explaining the Matter of the Doorkeeper

With immense pleasure and gratification, we can apply what we have learned to explain the teaching of the esteemed Rabbi of Riminov, zy"a. The Gemara stated that when Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah was appointed as the new Nasi, the doorkeeper of the Beis Midrash, who was a malach, was removed. The Rabbi of Riminov interpreted this to mean that the malach was elevated to a higher world based on the following (Berachos 17a): **רַבִּי אַלְכָנָדָרִי בְּתָר** **דְּמַצְלִי אָמַר הַכִּי, רַבּוֹן הָעוֹלָמִים גָּלוּ וַיַּדְעֻ לִפְנֵיךְ שְׁרָצָנוּ לְעַשּׂוֹת רְצָוָךְ, וְמַיְּעַכְבָּ, שָׁאוֹר שְׁבֻעִיסָה וְשַׁעֲבֹוד מַלְכִיּוֹת, יְהִי רְצֹוֹן לִפְנֵיךְ שְׁתְּצִילָנוּ מִידָּם וּנְשָׁוֹבָ**

מַעֲכָבָ, שָׁאוֹר שְׁבֻעִיסָה וְשַׁעֲבֹוד מַלְכִיּוֹת, יְהִי רְצֹוֹן לִפְנֵיךְ שְׁתְּצִילָנוּ מִידָּם וּנְשָׁוֹבָ. After Rabbi Alexandri would finish davening, he would utter the following: **“Master of the universe! It is apparent and known to you that it is our will to perform Your will. Who prevents us from doing so? The yeast in the dough (the yetzer hara) and the oppression of foreign regimes. May it be Your will to rescue us from their hands, so that we may once again obey the laws You desire with a full heart.”** This teaches us that a Jew's true, inner desire is to act in accordance with the Almighty's will; however, when he proceeds to actually make that desire a reality, the yetzer—"the yeast in the dough"—intervenes with all of its might. It interjects misleading, inappropriate thoughts, preventing a Jew from actualizing his inner desire to please the Almighty.

From this perspective, let us analyze the situation of a student who wanted to enter the Beis Midrash but lacked the quality of "tocho k'varo." In other words, he expressed a desire to enter the Beis Midrash to occupy himself with the study of Hashem's Torah, but that was only externally. Internally, in the depths of his heart, his intent was not l'shma; he actually sought recognition, honor, status, or the like—i.e., he had ulterior motives that were not l'shma.

Yet, as explained, every Jew truly desires to serve Hashem in the depths of his heart. The only thing that prevents him from making this desire a reality is the interference of the yetzer hara. It overwhelms him with improper, misguided thoughts that are not l'shma. Accordingly, when a student is determined to be not "tocho k'varo," because his inner intent is not l'shma, this assessment is not entirely accurate. For, we have just learned that that is not his true "tocho"; in the depths of his heart, he actually does want to serve Hashem l'shma.

Thus, in a certain sense, this student does qualify as "tocho k'varo," in keeping with the notion of: **גָּלוּ וַיַּדְעֻ לִפְנֵיךְ—שְׁרָצָנוּ לְעַשּׂוֹת רְצָוָךְ—it is apparent and known to You that it is our will to perform Your will.** However, somewhere between his apparent, external desire to enter the Beis Midrash to study Torah l'shma and his true, internal desire in his heart to do so, the yetzer hara tempts him and persuades him to study Torah not l'shma.

We can now comprehend the teaching of the esteemed Rabbi of Riminov, zy"a: When Rabban Gamliel decreed that **“any talmid whose inside does not mirror his outside cannot enter the Beis Midrash,”** a malach was generated. This malach was able to discern if a particular talmid was "tocho k'varo"—that all of his intentions, both inside and outside, were entirely l'shma—to study Torah exclusively for the sake of Hashem without ulterior motives. If any talmid did not qualify, the malach came and muddled up his thoughts, so that he would not enter the Beis Midrash.

Yet, when Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah was placed in charge of the Beis Midrash, every talmid was allowed to enter, even one who was not "tocho k'varo." On that day, **“they removed the doorkeeper and permission was granted to all students to enter.”** The sages elevated the heavenly doorkeeper to a higher vantage point from which he could appreciate the fact that in the depths of his heart each student truly desired to serve Hashem and learn Torah l'shma—even the ones previously judged as not "tocho k'varo."

In keeping with our current discussion, we can suggest that the malach posted as the doorkeeper had descended

from the world of Yetzirah. On that day, he was elevated to the higher world of Beriah. There, the greatness and kedushah of the neshamos of Yisrael is revealed. From the perspective of the neshamah, every Jew yearns to act in accordance with the will of Hashem, blessed is He. Consequently, permission to enter was granted to all talmidim who wished to enter the Beis Midrash.

This illuminates for us the profound words of Rava: **מִבֵּית וּמִחוֹזֶת תְּצִבָּנוּ, כָּל תַּלְמִיד חָכָם שָׁאֵן תָּכוֹן כְּבָרוּ אִינוּ תַּלְמִיד חָכָם** ". We pointed out that the Aron was not entirely "tocho k'varo," since in between the two golden compartments, there was a wooden compartment. Now, we can suggest that the holy Torah intended to teach us the crucial viewpoint of

Rabbi Elazar ben Azaryah. There are talmidei chachamim whose quality of "tocho k'varo" resembles the Aron. In the innermost depths of theirs heart, they yearn to study Torah l'shma and, outwardly, they want to enter the Beis Midrash to study l'shma. Yet, in between these inner and outer desires lies the yetzer hara muddling up his intentions. In His infinite compassion and kindness—"rachamim" and "chasadim"—HKB" H conceals those intentions in the middle that are not l'shma, that are analogous to the wooden compartment of the Aron. He covers that middle compartment with two walls of pure gold—internally and externally. Ultimately, in the merit of Torah-study not l'shma, he comes to study Torah entirely l'shma without any ulterior motives.



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