YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)

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***Bein Adam Le-chavero*: Ethics of Interpersonal Conduct**

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**Shiur #26: True to the Heart and *Tokho Ke-varo***

**The Goal of Character Development**

In last week’s lesson, we saw how the Torah’s prohibitions of *geneiva* and *gezeila* are not limited to actual acts of stealing and robbery; they are aimed at ensuring that every Jew leads a life of holiness, devoid of any deception. The commentators explain how the prohibition of *geneiva* applies even when violated to benefit another and possibly even when to retrieve one’s own object, if on done so in a deceitful, secretive manner. The verses also indicate that one little act of *geneiva* can lead, through the domino effect, to various other crimes of dishonesty.

What may be the clearest expression of the Torah’s battle against a life of deception is the prohibition of *geneivat daat*, misrepresentation. An analysis of this unique form of *geneiva* and its sources will make it clear how far the Torah goes in educating us towards a life of honesty.

Before we can fully appreciate the particulars and specifics of the prohibitions of misleading, misrepresentation and minor forms of deception included in the prohibition of *geneivat daat*, it behooves us to examine the opposite side of the coin, the positive application of honesty. The prohibition of *geneivat daat* is the basis of a series of directives aimed at producing an upright individual, one who not only lives a life devoid of hypocritical practices, but achieves a level of integrity that creates a direct link between his actions and his feelings. *Geneivat daat* involves deceptive practices, while the corresponding positive directives develop the character of the Jew, helping one become honest to the core, inside and out. We will see that beyond the directives to the greater society, God puts specific demands upon the Torah scholar, who must be not only great in wisdom, but lacking in any trace of a deceptive character.

***Echad Be-feh Ve-echad Be-lev*:**

The Talmud (*Pesachim* 113b) tells us that there are three individuals whom God “despises.” One of these individuals is “he who says one thing with his mouth while meaning another thing in his heart (*echad be-feh ve-echad be-lev).”* This refers to the practice of openly expressing things that are at odds with what one honestly feels in his heart. The Talmud elsewhere (*Bava Metzia* 49a) entertains the possibility that there is a biblical prohibition to act in any manipulative or insincere manner, *echad be-feh ve-echad be-lev*. There, Rabbi Yosei be-Rabbi Yehuda expounds the verse *Vayikra* 19:26 to mean that “Your ‘yes’ must be correct and your ‘no’ must be correct.” As Abbayei clarifies, “This means that one may not speak *echad be-feh ve-echad be-lev*.”

In context, this passage is dealing with business practices: one who makes a verbal commitment must be sincere. However, from other sources it is clear that in all contexts, insincerity is forbidden and dangerous.

A person is not judged merely by what he or she says. Granted, the Talmud (*Nedarim* 28a, *Kiddushin* 49b-50a) tells us: “Words of the heart are insignificant,” so that it is only verbally-expressed statements which are definitively binding; nevertheless, sincerity is of paramount importance. A number of early commentators stress the importance of sincerity in prayer and the tremendous dangers of disingenuously approaching God (see Rabbeinu Bachya, *Kad Ha-kemach, Yichud Hashem*; Shela, *Shaar Ha-otiyot, Lev Tov*). For this reason, it is important to clear one’s mind before prayers, ensuring that the words which the individual is about to say are in line with the feelings in his heart.

The importance of genuineness is expressed in a fascinating way in *Parashat Vayeshev.* The Torah describes that the brothers of Yosef as so upset at Yosef that they are “unable to speak to him peacefully” (*Bereishit* 37:4).

The Midrash (*Bereishit Rabba* 84:9) comments:

R. Ahava b. Zeira said: “Through the problematic actions of the brothers you see their praise… they were unable to speak any words of peace contrary to their feelings in their hearts.”

The Shela explains that the praise of the brothers lies in their unwillingness to be untruthful to their inner feelings. Though the brothers are taken to task for their inability to overcome their feelings of hostility towards Yosef, they are praised for being unable to feign love. The Shela adds that under certain circumstances, a person who bears animosity towards another might feel that honesty requires that he constantly announce his feelings of hatred for the other. However, the brothers do otherwise; they do not say anything to Yosef. This, on the one hand, shows their displeasure, but on the other hand, it allows them to avoid expressing their strong feelings openly. Having nothing nice to say, they say nothing at all.

**Fear of the Insincere**

Deceptive individuals are dangerous, and throughout our tradition we find how the righteous fear them; even the wicked, attuned to the danger of liars, run away from them. The Torah describes the prayer of Yaakov after hearing that his brother Esav is approaching with a force of 400 men. Yaakov beseeches God:

“Save me from my brother’s hand, from Esav’s hand, for I am afraid of him, lest he come and strike me.” (*Bereishit* 32:12)

The commentators are bothered by the dual language, “me from my brother’s hand, from Esav’s hand.” The Or Ha-chayim *(ad loc.)* offers an explanation that is very understandable in light of the dangers of deception.

Yaakov also had in mind that Esav might use the fact that he was his brother as a trick to attack him, feigning brotherliness, so he asked God to save him from such machinations. He also needed God’s help, however, if Esav were to proclaim his hostility openly.

Often those who feign friendship can cause the most harm. Jewish history is replete with examples of “friends” who hid their enmity towards the Jewish people. The Jews let their guards down as Trojan horses entered into their otherwise protected cities, and destruction came in its wake. The danger of those who feign brotherhood may be greater than that of those who act openly like Esav.

The Talmud even details a statement of the advice which the evil king Yannai gave to his wife. The Pharisees or *Perushim,* as the adherents of rabbinic Judaism were then known, had a reputation for piety like Pinechas, but they also had many imitators.

“Fear neither the Pharisees nor the non-Pharisees, but the hypocrites who ape the Pharisees, because their deeds are the deeds of Zimri, but they expect a reward like Pinechas.” (*Sota* 22b)

Insincere actions often seem to be very effective when it comes to getting things from others. Indeed, the Talmud (*ibid*. 22b) goes on to describe the ultimate futility of one who tries to demonstrate insincere outward piety.

Rav Nachman bar Yitzchak said: “What is hidden is hidden, and what is revealed is revealed; the Great Tribunal will exact punishment from those who wrap themselves in cloaks.” (fringed with *tzitzit* in an insincere display of piety).

Thus, “those who wrap themselves in cloaks” fringed with *tzitzit* in an insincere display of piety require a special session of the Great Tribunal. For this reason, under certain conditions, it is actually a mitzva to reveal the hypocrisy of individuals who misrepresent themselves to others, as this behavior is a defamation of God’s name. Furthermore, when difficult times befall an individual who is thought to be righteous and really is not, some may question God’s judgments, not knowing the true, evil ways of this individual. (See *Yoma* 86b, Rashi *ad loc*.) Individuals who practice duplicity in their interpersonal dealings pose such a danger to society that, at times, their hypocrisy must be made public.

The greatest danger of deviousness is the harmful effect that this can have on the perpetrator himself. In our last lesson, we saw that an act of *geneiva* can lead one down a slippery slope to a life of dishonesty. Similarly, insincerity is dangerous. One who feels successful in winning friends or extending their influence over others through disingenuous means — sweet-talking and the like — begins to lose sight of the value of honesty and genuine behavior. Often, the next step is a life of complete hypocrisy. One is liable to lose touch with one’s own feelings, guided by a constant desire to tell others what they want to hear in order to get one’s own way. From insincere praise and deceiving others, one often continues to self-deception, a complete and total loss of character. This is character bankruptcy of the first order.

Rabbeinu Bachya expresses the dual perils of deception: the harm it can cause to others and the dangers it possesses for one’s spiritual personality.

There are many people who feign friendship towards their colleagues while hiding hatred in their hearts. They make a pretense of being friends so that others will not be on guard against them. Regarding this type of person, Shelomo stated, “The hater disguises with his lips” (*Mishlei* 26:24)…

Such a person deceives others by making them think that he is sincere, but his words are of no benefit… (*Kad Ha-kemach*, *Sinat Chinnam*)

As Rabbeinu Bachya continues, he points out that this trait is not deleterious only when it comes to dealing with other people; it makes a genuine relationship with God impossible as well.

Whoever habitually conducts himself in this way towards his fellow man will ultimately do so towards God, as is written “And they beguiled Him with their mouths and lied to Him with their tongues” (*Tehillim* 78:36). The Sages, who were wise in ethics, said, “One who plants hatred reaps regret.”

In future lessons, we will see that some Rishonim maintain that the prohibition of hating a fellow Jew is only violated when the hater hides his true feelings. Though ideally one should obliterate all hatred of other Jews, and one should certainly not act on it in any case, the essence of hating one’s fellow lies in doing so while pretending to be his friend.

***Tokho Ke-varo***

The Rambam (*Hilkhot De’ot* 2:6) examines the phenomenon of “*echad be-feh ve-echad be-lev”* in the social context, along with a host of other directives from our Sages to be sincere rather than two-faced.

A person is forbidden to act in a smooth-tongued and luring manner. He should not speak one thing outwardly and think otherwise in his heart. Rather, his inner self should be like the self which he shows to the world. What he feels in his heart should be the same as the words on his lips.

It is forbidden to deceive people, even a non-Jew…

It is forbidden to utter a single word of deception or fraud. Rather, one should have truthful speech, an upright spirit and a pure heart, free from all evil and mischief.

The Rambam introduces us to this concept of *tokho ke-varo* (literally: “his inside is like his outside”), being true to the core, in the context of sincerity in one’s dealing with others. The Rambam does not limit this directive to specific individuals; he expresses it as an instruction to all society. The source of this directive is actually a rather straightforward statement of the Talmud stating that in order to be a *talmid chakham*, a Torah scholar, one must exhibit this quality. In fact, as we shall see, Rabban Gamliel is of the opinion that anyone who fails to do so should not be allowed to enter the *beit midrash*, the study hall. Analyzing the source of this directive, the opinion of Rabban Gamliel and his detractors, will enlighten us as to the necessity of this trait; at the same time, it will provide us the way to view one who strives for this character development but has not reached this level yet.

The Talmud (*Yoma* 72b) teaches that the Torah alludes to the idea of “*tokho ke-varo*” in its instructions for the manufacture of the *Aron Ha-kodesh*, the Holy Ark. In *Parashat Teruma*, God commands Moshe to construct the Tabernacle and its furnishings, beginning with the Ark. The Ark was made from acacia wood, and both its interior and exterior were overlaid with gold. This teaches us the need for sincerity, both inner and outer.

“From within and without you shall cover it” (*Shemot* 25:11) — Rava said: “This teaches us that any Torah scholar whose inside is not like his outside is not a true Torah scholar.”

Abbayei — others claim it was Rabba bar Ulla — said: “He is called loathsome…”

The Talmud goes on to chastise the scholar who studies Torah either without fear of Heaven or without the desire to uphold that which he learns. In fact, the continuation of the passage seems to indicate clearly that improper study of the Torah is much more harmful to the individual than not studying Torah at all, as the former can poison the student.

As we have noted, the Talmud introduces the discussion of the detrimental effects of studying Torah improperly with the metaphor of the Ark and the idea of “*tokho ke-varo”*. The *Aron*, which contained the Tablets given at Sinai as well as the original Torah scroll, was not just a symbol of the Tabernacle and the Temple, but at the heart of its purpose (see Ramban, *Shemot* 26:33). The *Aron* also symbolizes the Torah scholar, who contains the Torah, so-to-speak, within his being. Just as the *Aron* was plated with pure gold inside and out, the Torah scholar must be pure both inside and out – *tokho ke-varo*. His pious exterior must reflect his true essence.

Understanding the building of the Ark is of extreme importance for appreciating the importance of the idea of *tokho ke-varo*. The idea of beautifying the wooden structure of the *Aron* with a gold-plated exterior is quite understandable, but what of the interior of a vessel never meant to be opened? As the *Aron* demonstrates, in order to truly bear the Torah, its message, principles and lessons, one must inculcate its teachings. One’s character must have the sincerity of an unseen golden interior. The inner, hidden world is just as significant as the revealed one, and it must be beautified in the same manner. The penetrating, inner world of the scholar may then shine forth to the outside.

A number of modern commentators question a puzzling anomaly regarding the Talmud’s lesson derived from the building of the *Aron*. If, indeed, the *Aron* serves as a symbol of the Torah scholar, and the two levels of gold plating represent the need for both exterior and interior piety, then why not require that the Ark be made entirely of gold? As we have mentioned, the actual substance of the *Aron* was wood, and it was only overlaid with gold. If, indeed, the Ark served as a symbol of purity and Godliness, why was it not made entirely from gold, thus symbolizing the need for complete and comprehensive piety?

A number of explanations have been given (see Rav David Silverberg’s S.A.L.T. series on [*Parashat Teruma*](http://vbm-torah.org/archive/salt-shemot/19-14teruma.htm)). Rav Yehuda Leib Ginsburg, in his *Yalkut Yehuda*, offers a particularly intriguing one. He suggests that whereas gold symbolizes pure spirituality, wood represents the basic human tendencies, the physical and material drives which all mankind experiences. The Torah scholar is not expected to consist of pure gold — complete spirituality, bereft of any human qualities. He, too, should be made of wood, the standard human instincts and drives shared by everyone else, but those qualities must be overlaid with gold: they must be channeled toward lofty, spiritual goals and pursuits. Rav Ginsburg applies this approach to the apparently pragmatic answer of the Tosafists, who explain that the ark could not have been made entirely of pure gold because the Levites, who were responsible for transporting the Mishkan and its furnishings during travel, would be unable to lift such a heavy object. Rav Ginsburg explains this in light of his approach to the symbolic meaning of the gold and wood of the ark. A Torah leader who consists entirely of gold, who has no human qualities, is too "heavy," so to speak, for others to bear. He cannot guide and lead the laymen under his charge, because his demands will be simply overbearing.

One might offer another explanation as well. If the *Aron* were made of pure gold, then there could be no analogy made to the Torah scholar. By definition, the scholar, beginning at a young age, is faced with many trials and tribulations. He has character flaws that need to be corrected, and time is necessary before one can purify himself like gold. Wood comes from trees. Each tree begins as a sapling, and only after long cultivation is it capable of being strong enough to be used for a vessel. The wood is a sign of the humanity of man, and his constant growth. Money does not grow on trees but neither does gold. The gold exterior and interior reflect the high quality of those who bear the Torah, but nothing, man or Ark, can bear the Torah without a period of growth. No one can be expected to become refined inside and out overnight, but that certainly is the goal.

**Rabban Gamliel’s Opinion and its Detractors**

With this in mind, let us take a look at the educational principle of Rabban Gamliel. Rabban Gamliel was the *Nasi*, the chief of the Sanhedrin, but after a series of disputes with Rabbi Yehoshua, he was replaced, at least temporarily. The Talmud (*Berakhot* 28a) describes the vast changes that occurred on the day that Rabbi Elazar Ben Azarya replaced Rabban Gamliel as head of the Sanhedrin and dean of its study hall:

It was taught in a *beraita* that on this day, they removed the guard from the door of the study hall and granted permission for all students to enter. For Rabban Gamliel had proclaimed, “Any student whose inside is not like his outside may not enter the study hall.” On this day, many benches were added to the study hall [to accommodate the numerous new students]…

[Seeing all these new students,] Rabban Gamliel was dispirited. He said: “Perhaps, God forbid, I have withheld Torah from Israel,” so white pitchers filled with ash were shown to him in his dream.

Rabban Gamliel had limited entry to the study hall to sincere students. The sheer amount of students who entered the hall after he was deposed led him to think: had he been wrong all this time? The Maharsha explains the “white pitchers filled with ash” thusly: just as the pitchers are beautifully white on the outside, yet on the inside contain worthless ash, so too the students appeared worthy, but they were not truly so.

The Talmud continues:

However, this was not the case; it was only to put Rabban Gamliel’s mind at ease that he was shown this.

The commentators discuss the exact disagreement between Rabban Gamliel and Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya. After all, Rabban Gamliel’s push for sincerity seems to be reasonable. (See commentaries to the Rambam’s *Hilkhot Talmud Torah* 4:1)

The Iyun Yaakov (*Ein Yaakov, ad loc.*) explains the difference of opinion beautifully, in a way that can help us along the path to sincerity. The Iyun Yaakov offers a homiletic understanding of the entire passage in the Talmud. The background for deposing Rabban Gamliel and replacing him with Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya is an intriguing dispute that the former had with Rabbi Yehoshua as to whether the evening prayer, *Arvit*, is obligatory or not. He explains, that in fact, this disagreement is connected to a fundamental question regarding religious service: what is the ideal act of worship — the preparatory steps that bring one to successful actions, or the ultimate praiseworthy acts? Is *Arvit*, the end of one’s day, the ideal, as it is the culmination of the day; or is the beginning the ideal and *Arvit* simply a non-binding supplement?

He goes on to argue that this question also lies at heart of the dispute between Rabban Gamliel and Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya whether one should allow insincere students to enter the study hall. Rabban Gamliel, who views Arvit as obligatory because he always focuses on the culminating act, declares that one who is not ready to act with complete sincerity cannot be ready to study in the hall. Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya’s disputes not the need for sincerity, but rather its placement in the process. Even one who has not achieved this lofty level of sincerity should be invited to study, as long as this is his goal. The deciding factor is one’s goal. This is analogous to *Arvit*; its recitation is not binding because the culminating act is merely a result of the work put into it, and the conclusion of the day does not contain its own independent significance.

In other words, the real dispute is whether the need for sincerity applies to one who enters the *beit midrash* or to one who leaves it after overlaying the wood of basic humanity with gold inside and out, *tokho ke-varo.* All thus agree that sincerity is the necessary goal; the question is whether it is a prerequisite. Rabban Gamliel did feel this way, but Rabbi Elazar ben Azarya’s opinion was accepted. Allowances can be made for one who has not yet reached the level of *tokho ke-varo* as long as he is trying to get there, striving towards a life of honesty, devoid of deception. This in fact seems to be the concluding remark of the passage in *Sota* quoted above, which explains the extreme distaste God has for one who is insincere and deceptive.

Rav Yehuda said in the name of Rav: “A person should always (*le-olam*) study Torah and perform *mitzvot* even not for their own sake, because doing so not for their own sake will lead one to doing so for their own sake.”

The commentators (*ad loc.)* examine how this statement is to be understood, as it seemingly contradicts other statements; regardless, the bottom line is that one should not be afraid to do the right thing because one is incapable of doing it sincerely. The goal must be to reach sincerity. One may always start with the goals of reaching the stage of *tokho ke-varo*, but one should never be content with, and certainly not proud of, a deceptive way of living life. Insincerely trying to influence others and win their friendship is not only disgraceful; as Rabbeinu Bachya warns, it may lead one to lose any sense of honesty at all.