

“Any earthenware utensil into whose interior one of them will fall everything within it shall become contaminated and you shall break it.” (11:33)

An earthenware vessel can contract impurity only through internal ritually unclean contact. *Horav E. Munk, z.l., cites Rav Mendel Mi'kotzk* who distinguishes between a metallic vessel, whose intrinsic value is based upon the metal from which it is made, and an earthenware vessel, whose value is based upon what it contains. This is the reason that an earthenware vessel is contaminated only from the inside and cannot be purified by immersion in a *mikveh*, as a metallic vessel can. Consequently, an earthenware vessel which has become *tamei*, ritually contaminated, must be broken.

The vessel is like a man formed from the “*dust of the earth.*” When man expresses his penitence before Hashem, he perceives himself to be like a broken earthenware vessel. Man's value comes from what is inside him, his inner essence. A man who renders his soul unclean can effect its purity only through contrition, humility, and a broken heart.

We may advance this idea further. Man serves as a vessel whose intrinsic value is based upon what he contains within him which he shares with others. He is like a pipe which transports goods from one place to another. Man's success in this world is measured by the degree of which he has been a vessel, to serve others. As Hashem is the essence of “*chesed,*” pure altruism, so should man aspire to attain sublime heights of selfless devotion to others. Man, who was fashioned from the earth, should strive to be the ultimate vessel for service to his Creator and his fellow man.