

## **All earthen vessels into which (something contaminated) falls, all that is within it shall be unclean, and it must be destroyed. (11:33)**

Unlike wooden or metal vessels that are rendered (spiritually) unclean by virtue of being touched externally by an unclean object, *klei cheres*, earthenware vessels, become unclean only when the contaminated object is within the airspace of the vessel. External contact of a *Klei cheres* is not *mitamei*, does not render the earthenware vessel unclean. The *Kotzker Rebbe, zl*, explains this *halachah* as predicated on the notion that only something of value can be rendered unclean. Wood and metal possess intrinsic value. Thus, they can become unclean. Earth, however, has no intrinsic value, other than the fact that if it is formed into a vessel, the vessel can serve as a container. Hence, the state of *tumah*, contamination, can apply only when the contaminated object is lowered into/contained within the earthenware vessel. Its value derives from within.

Man's value also derives from within. In other words, it is not what you are, but what you do or are able to do. External value is of no consequence. A person who is able-bodied, but does nothing, does not derive much value from his physical strength. One who is endowed with a superior mind, but either does not use it or uses it for frivolous, unmeaningful pursuits, has very little added value as the result of his superior mind. On the other hand, one who devotes himself to spiritual advancement, his value elevates with his achievement. As Jews, our value system is determined by the Torah. Our Sages define the value of man by teaching us the meaning of wisdom, strength, wealth, honor, etc. It is all about moral, ethical and spiritual strength and the ability and stamina to apply them. The manner in which we act defines our perspective on what we consider significant, worthy, valuable. Our adherence to Torah values not only defines who we are, but also what we are. Our personal value is grounded in what we value. When we accept spiritually, morally and ethically correct behaviors and values, we have personal worth. When we demonstrate a lack of good judgment in defining our sense of value, focusing on the ephemeral, external and contemporary societal, culturally bankrupt standards, then we indicate a flawed perspective on values, and subsequently denigrate ourselves.

We are created with enormous spiritual potential as a result of the *neshamah kedoshah*, holy soul, for which our body serves as its container. The soul cannot function on its own. The body without the soul is, likewise, of no value. They need one another. Quite like the analogy provided by *Chazal*: Two men: one blind, and one who had no legs. One cannot see where to go and the other is unable to go. They work out a relationship whereby the blind man carries on his shoulder the one without legs. The blind man serves as the medium of conveyance, while the man without legs is the guide. Together, they are able to safely navigate their way to their destination.

Parents talk about the values they want to see adopted by their children. If we want our children to live a Torah life with Torah values of the highest ethical and moral standards, then we must show them by example how to live. If our focus in life is personal fame and the pursuit of wealth and

pleasure, what can we expect from our children? Our misguided standard of living presents them with a message: This is important to me. This is what I consider to be of value. How can we expect them to be any different?