



Talmud Tales – Session 26 – The Vessel

BT Taanit 7a-b

Said R. Hanina bar Idda, “Why are words of Torah compared to water, as it is written, ‘Lo, everyone who thirsts, come for water’ (Isa. 55:1). It is to say to you, just as water leaves a higher spot and flows to a lower spot, so words of Torah endure only for him who is humble in his knowledge.”

Said R. Oshaia, “Why are words of Torah compared to these three liquids, water, wine, and milk, in line with the verses, ‘Lo, everyone who thirsts, come for water’ (Isa. 55:1), ‘Come, buy and eat, yes, come buy wine and milk without money and without price’ (Jer. 23:29)? It is to say to you, just as these three liquids last only when kept in the least costly jugs [clay ones, but not silver], so words of Torah endure only for him who is humble in his knowledge.”

That is in line with what the daughter of Caesar said to R. Joshua b. Hananiah,

Said Caesar’s daughter to R. Joshua b. Hananiah, “Beautiful Torah in an ugly vessel!”

He said to her, “Learn from your father’s household. In what do they store wine?”

She said to him, “In clay utensils.”

He said to her, “Well, everybody stores wine in clay utensils, and you store wine in clay utensils too! You who are nobles should keep it in vessels of gold and silver.”

She went and told this to her father, and he stored wine in gold and silver utensils, and it turned sour.

They went and told him. He said to his daughter, ‘Who told you this?’

She said to him, ‘R. Joshua b. Hananiah.’

They summoned him. He said to him, ‘Why did you say this to her?’

He said to him, ‘Because this is what she said to me, so I answered her in the same way.’

‘But lo, aren’t there good-looking men who study?’

‘If they were ugly, they would learn still more.’

Another matter: Just as these three liquids spoil only through neglect, so words of Torah are forgotten only through neglect.