

# PLACING PLAQUES ON SHTENDERS AND BENCHES

*by Rabbi Yissocher Frand*

*These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape # 182 - Davening Towards Mizrach. Good Shabbos!*

---

## Placing Plaques on Shtenders and Benches -- An Idea Whose Time Has Come

There is great symbolism to real life in the vessels that existed in the Mishkan [Tabernacle]. The Menorah, for example, symbolizes wisdom. (Therefore a person who wants to become wise should tilt his head during davening [prayers] toward the position where the Menorah was placed -- namely, South). The Shulchan [Table] symbolizes one's livelihood. (Therefore if a person is seeking Parnassah, he should tilt his head during davening toward the position where the Shulchan is placed -- namely, North). So too, we are taught, the Aron [Ark], which has within it the Luchos [Tablets of the Covenant], symbolizes the Torah scholar. The Aron is that which carries the Torah. Therefore a person who is a Torah Scholar is compared to the Aron.

Rabbeinu Sadya Gaon lived in Egypt. He was asked to become the head of the Academy in Sura, Babylonia. But, like many Roshei Yeshiva, he had to begin with a building campaign to raise money for the new Yeshiva building in Sura. He solicited money from a wealthy Jew in Egypt who gave him a great sum of money. The donation was given with the condition that the Aron Kodesh in the Yeshiva in Sura be dedicated in the name of the donor.

Rabbeinu Sadya Gaon took the money and traveled to Sura. When he arrived, he discovered that there was already a plaque by the Aron Kodesh, indicating that someone else had already donated it. Rabbeinu Sadya Gaon consoled his donor with the following insight: With Jews there are two Torahs -- the Oral Torah and the Written Torah. The Written Torah's place is in the Aron, but where is the place of the Oral Torah? Each Yeshiva student who is sitting and learning is the Aron Kodesh of the Oral Torah. The chair where the Rabbi sits and the lectern on which he leans are the equivalent of the Aron Kodesh for the Oral Law. Consequently, by giving a general donation to help people learn -- the Aron Kodesh of the Oral Law would be dedicated in his honor.

## The Reason for Rabban Gamliel's Depression

The analogy of the Ark symbolizing the Torah Scholar must be carried one step further. The verse tells us concerning the Aron, "And you shall cover it with pure gold -- inside and outside" [Shemos 37:2]. The Talmud teaches from this verse "Any Torah scholar who is not the same on the inside as on the outside, is no Torah scholar" [Yoma 72b]. The Ark was sterling gold. It was gold on the inside and on the outside. If a person wants to claim the lofty title of Talmid Chochom [Torah Scholar], he must likewise be the same on the inside as on the outside. It must be a situation where "what you see is what you get". He must have a sterling character through and through.

The Talmud tells us [Brochos 27b] of the famous incident involving Rabban Gamliel and Rabbi Yehoshua which led to the appointment of Rabbi Eleazar ben Azariah as Nasi, leader of the Rabbinic community. Rabban Gamliel's approach as Nasi had been to put a guard at the door of the house of study. He said any Torah scholar whose inner commitment did not match his outer commitment should not enter the study hall. Not every "Tom, Dick, and Harry" who wanted to enter the Yeshiva was admitted! Rabban Gamliel's approach was "I'd rather have a Yeshiva with 200 quality students than have a Yeshiva with 800 students, some of whom are less than 100%."

When Rabbi Eleazar ben Azariah was appointed as the Nasi, he changed the policy, and admitted anyone who wanted to come into the Beis Medrash. There were no requirements, no tests, and no guards at the door. Everyone was welcome.

The Gemara relates that on that day, many benches had to be added to the Yeshiva. Rabban Gamliel, upon seeing this, became depressed and feared that his policy caused Torah to be withheld from Jews desirous of learning.

The Gerrer Rebbe (Chidushei haRim) wonders about Rabban Gamliel's reaction. After all, Rabban Gamliel must have known what was going on. He must have had 600 applications on his desk from students interested in enrolling into his Yeshiva. He knew all along that he could have quadrupled the enrollment, but he wanted quality, not quantity. So why now, all of a sudden, should Rabban Gamliel be depressed?

The Gerrer Rebbe answers that the reason for Rabban Gamliel's depression was that he saw that after the 600 new students (who he had refused to let into the Beis Medrash because they were not worthy enough) came into the Yeshiva, they did develop sterling character -- inside and outside. By spending the time in the Beis Medrash, learning and working on themselves, they, in fact, became "tocham k'baram".

That is what depressed Rabban Gamliel. In retrospect, he saw the influence that a place of Torah and a place of holiness had on these students. He saw with his own eyes what a place of Torah can accomplish. That was behind Rabban Gamliel's fear that "Chas v'Sholom I held back Torah from Israel".

## **The Power of A Place of Torah -- Not Just Whistling Dixie**

Recently I was in Georgia, as a Scholar in Residence for a Torah retreat sponsored by Beth Jacob Congregation of Atlanta. When one comes as a Scholar in Residence, he thinks that he will pontificate and shower the residents with his wisdom. He expects that he will do the influencing and the audience will be the ones influenced. However, it is usually a two way street. In Georgia, I hope I influenced some others, but I know that I was greatly influenced. I witnessed the affect that a place of holiness, a place of prayer, and a place of learning can have on a community.

Rabbi Emanuel Feldman left Yeshivas Ner Israel in 1952, as a 24 year old Rabbi, and went to Atlanta where he did not have even a minyan of Shomrei Shabbos, of Sabbath-observing Jews. Thirty-seven years later -- 37 years of work and patience, honesty and authenticity later -- there is a congregation that on a regular Shabbos attracts between 350 and 400 worshippers. Of this number, over 80% are people who, to some degree, have returned to religion (chozrim b'Teshuva). The influence of an authentic place of Torah can totally revolutionize a city.

This is the power of a Beis Medrash and this is the power that Rabban Gamliel saw. We are not just talking about influencing the unaffiliated to become religious. The influence that a Beis Medrash can have on any community is amazing - as long as it is sincere, honest, and authentic. As long as it is the real thing, it can remake a person and remake a city.

This, the Chidushei haRim said, is what Rabban Gamliel underestimated. He thought that he could not take those who were not 100% pure into the Beis Medrash. But, when they opened the doors and people came in and drank from the holiness of that Beis Medrash, it influenced them and transformed them into 100% pure students. Such is the power of a place of Torah.

---

## Glossary

**Parnassah** -- livelihood

**Roshei Yeshiva** -- Head of Yeshiva (Talmudical Academy)

**Tocham k'baram** -- their inside like their outside (Aramaic)

---

## Sources and Personalities

**Rabbeinu Sadya Gaon** -- (882-942) Head of famous Babylonian center of Jewish learning; authored Emunos v'Deyos.

**Chidushei haRim** -- (1799-1866) Rav Yitzchak Meir of Ger, founder of Ger Chassidism.

---

Transcribed by [David Twersky](#); Seattle, Washington.

Technical Assistance by [Dovid Hoffman](#); Yerushalayim.

---

This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah portion (#182). The corresponding halachic portion for this tape is: Davening Towards Mizrach. The other halachic portions for Parshas Terumah from the Commuter Chavrusah Series are:

- Tape # 044 - Changing Nusach: Ashkenaz vs. Sephard
- Tape # 087 - Microphone on Shabbos
- Tape # 135 - Living Above a Shul
- Tape # 228 - Selling a Shul
- Tape # 272 - Chazakah B'Mitzvos: Is This Maftir Yonah Mine?
- Tape # 318 - Taking Out Two Sifrei Torah
- Tape # 362 - The Mechitza -- How High?

Tapes or a complete catalogue can be ordered from:

[Yad Yechiel Institute](#)

PO Box 511

Owings Mills, MD 21117-0511

Call (410) 358-0416 for further information.

---

Also Available: Mesorah / Artscroll has published a collection of Rabbi Frand's essays. The book is entitled:

### **Rabbi Yissocher Frand: In Print**

and is available through your local Hebrew book store or from Project Genesis, 1-410-654-1799.

---