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Tifereth Israel Synagogue  
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## **GOLD INSIDE AND OUT**

Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav shared the following story with his *chassidim*:

There was once a king and queen who had a son who was the apple of their eye. Nothing was spared this boy, the greatest shirts and tailors and teachers, so that one day he would be a fine king.

But one day something happened to that boy just as he was becoming a man. He woke up one morning and he thought he was a rooster.

He took off all his clothes, he got under the table, ate crumbs off the floor, flapped his arms like wings, and crowed. It was a disaster.

The King tried everything, healers, doctors, wise men, and advisers. No one could help until one day, an old man with a long beard came to see the King and he said, "Let me have a week with your son, I think I can help."

The King was grateful for any advice, so the old man was brought into the banquet hall where the Prince was under the table, and the door was closed behind him.

The first thing the old man did was take off all his clothes and get under the table with the Prince. He put his arms out like wings, went around crowing and eating food off the floor. The Prince looked up and said, "Who are you?" The old man answered, "I'm a rooster, who are you?" And the Prince said, "I'm a rooster too."

He was so thrilled to have a bit of company, and they just pecked at crumbs, flapped, and crowed.

The next day the old man got up, put some clothes on, and went back under the table. The Prince looked and asked, "What are you doing? Roosters don't wear clothes."

The old man said, "That's true, but I was cold, and just because I'm wearing clothes doesn't mean I'm not a rooster". The Prince was a little cold too, so he put on his clothes.

The next day the old man was walking around the room. "What are you doing?" asked the Prince. "Roosters don't walk like that."

"That's true," said the old man, "but my back was sore, and just because I'm walking like this doesn't mean I'm not a rooster."

The next day they ate fine food at the table with a knife and fork, and by the end of the week they were dressed in fine noblemen's clothes, sitting at the table, eating beautiful food, and discussing ways of running a

kingdom, justice, ethics, and philosophy.

Halfway through the conversation the young boy asked, “But what are we doing? Roosters don’t talk like this.” The old man said, “It’s true, but I’m enjoying the conversation and just because we talk like this doesn’t mean we’re not roosters.”

And so at the end of that day, the old man stood up and he said to the Prince, “I’m going to leave you now. But let me leave you with a little advice: out there in the world there are a lot of enemies of roosters. Take my advice, don’t tell anyone that you’re a rooster.”

The Prince became a wonderful King and no one ever knew that he was really a rooster.

(<http://www.castlemaineindependent.org/2012/10/fiction-month-prince-thought-rooster/>)

At face value, the moral of this story seems to reflect the Jewish predilection to favor behavior over faith. We often say that Judaism cares more about what people do than how they think. We don’t care if a person thinks like a miser as long as he or she behaves like a philanthropist. We don’t care if a person loves ham as long as they don’t eat it. We welcome atheists into the Jewish community as long as they act in godly ways. Who

cares if a prince believes that he is a rooster as long as he is a kind, caring, and benevolent ruler?

Who cares? The Talmudic sage Rava cares, for he sees the discrepancy between outward behavior and inner belief as a character flaw, and perhaps something far worse.

When God told Moses to build the *Mishkan*, the traveling tent in which the Israelites worshiped on their journey to the Promised Land, the Holy One included specific instructions on the construction of the *Aron*, the Holy Ark in which the Ten Commandments resided.

The Ark was made of wood that was overlaid with sheets of gold:

[Heb]

וְצִפִּיתָ אֹתוֹ זָהָב טָהוֹר מִבֵּית וּמִחוּץ תִּצְפֶּנּוּ

“Overlay it [the Ark] with pure gold—overlay it [with gold] inside and out...” (Ex. 25:11)

In the Talmud, Rava said that this verse also describes the public and private qualities of a scholar. [Heb]

אמר רבא: כל תלמיד חכם שאין תוכו כברו אינו תלמיד חכם

“A scholar whose inner life does not reflect his outer life is not a real scholar.” (TB Yoma 72b)

Rabbi Maurice Lamm explained Rava's words: "The Ark or *aron*, as the repository of the Tablets of the Law, is a symbol of a *talmid chacham*, a student of the Law. The *zahav tahor*, pure gold, represents purity of character. And the requirement that this gold be placed *mi-bayit u-mi-chutz*, both within and without the Ark, indicates the principle that a true scholar must live in such a manner that he always be *tocho keboro*, alike inwardly and outwardly.

"Thus, our Rabbis saw in our verse a plea for integrity of character, a warning against a cleavage between theory and practice, against a discontinuity between inwardness and outwardness, against a clash between inner reality and outer appearance. A real Jew must always be *tokho kevero* [the same on the inside as on the outside]."

(<http://brussels.mc.yu.edu/gsd/collect/lammserm/index/assoc/HASH01d0.dir/doc.pdf>)

Rava would have strongly disagreed with the Wise Man of our story. The Wise Man told the Prince it was okay to be a rooster on the inside, as long as he acted like prince on the outside. Rava would have said absolutely not. A person whose inner and outer lives do not match lacks honesty and integrity. That person is a hypocrite, acting one way while believing another. Furthermore, is it possible for a person who lives with

such tremendous dissonance between body and soul to live a peaceful and fulfilled life? How does it affect their psyche and self-confidence?

A few weeks ago I read the story of “The Prince who thought he was a Rooster” at a study group I hold each month at La Vida Real, a senior retirement facility in Rancho San Diego. When I asked the group what they thought the story was about, I was surprised by their first answer. Several people thought that the story was about a person who is gay but still in the closet. Like the Rooster Prince, a closeted homosexual acts one way in public while at his or her core, he or she is somebody else.

This interpretation had not crossed my mind, but it certainly fits the paradigm. No matter how you feel about gay rights and gay marriage, just imagine what it must feel like to be a man who must pretend he is sexually attracted to women when he is only attracted to men, or to be a woman who must go on a date with a man when she is only sexually attracted to women. I don’t think any of us can put ourselves in those shoes, unless we own them.

In the May 6, 2013 issue of “Sports Illustrated,” Jason Collins wrote an open letter about his sexual orientation: “I’m a 34-year-old NBA center. I’m black. And I’m gay.

“When I was younger I dated women. I even got engaged. I thought I

had to live a certain way. I thought I needed to marry a woman and raise kids with her. I kept telling myself the sky was red, but I always knew it was blue.

“No one wants to live in fear. I’ve always been scared of saying the wrong thing. I don’t sleep well. I never have... It takes an enormous amount of energy to guard such a big secret. I’ve endured years of misery and gone to enormous lengths to live a lie. I was certain that my world would fall apart if anyone knew.”

Now that he out of the closet, Jason Collins is a much happier and contented man. He no longer feels that he is living a lie.

Collins resolved the dissonance between his inner life and outer life by coming out of the closet. Eighteen-year-old college student Tyler Clementi decided upon another solution.

Clementi was a freshman at Rutgers University when his roommate and another student thought it would be great fun to broadcast a sexual encounter Clementi had with another male student on the internet.

Humiliated and mortified, the next day Clementi, without saying a word to anyone, drove his car to the George Washington Bridge and leaped to his death.

The spying and bullying of his fellow students provoked this tragedy.

However, I doubt his roommate would have broadcast Clementi's sexual encounter had it been with a woman instead of a man, or even paid attention to it. I also doubt Clementi would have been so embarrassed and humiliated or felt compelled to commit suicide had he not felt so stigmatized by his homosexuality.

The conflict that Tyler Clementi felt between his inner and outer lives was extreme, as was his solution to it. But I will wager that most of us suffer from similar conflict in our lives whenever we sense that our public image does not match our inner thoughts and inclinations, when those around us think we are doing our best, but inside we know we are barely trying, when we pretend to be something or someone we are not.

Each of us has aspects of our life and character we do not care to share with others and that we keep closeted within. These can be as benign as trying to appear happy when we are sad, or as painful as hiding an alcohol, drug, or gambling addiction from our family and friends. Even if we are moderately successful in hiding our true selves from others, if we are honest we recognize the "real me" that lies within.

The Chofetz Chaim, who lived in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century was meticulous about the *mitzvah* of *lashon hara*, gossip and slander. He



was also a very humble man.

One day as he was traveling back to his village his wagon broke down. He waited by the side of the road until a passing wagoner offered him a ride.

On the journey they began to talk. The Chofetz Chaim asked the man where he was going. "To Radun," the man replied.

"Why are you going there?" asked the Chofetz Chaim.

"I am going to spend *Shabbes* in Radun," said the man. "The great rabbi, *tzaddik*, and scholar, the Chofetz Chaim lives there. I have heard that he is an eloquent speaker and a great moralist. I want to go to his *shul* to hear his sermons and bask in his presence."

The Chofetz Chaim was greatly embarrassed by the man's praise.

"Let me tell you," he said. "I know the Chofetz Chaim, and I have to tell you: he is not such a great speaker and he is definitely not a *tzaddik*. Many people are more meticulous about living their lives in accordance with God's will. And there many rabbis and scholars much more learned and capable than he."

The traveler was surprised. "How can you say such terrible things about the Chofetz Chaim?!" he asked. Everyone who has ever heard him or met him says that he is an exemplary human being, a righteous man by

any definition, and one of the greatest rabbis of our time!”

“Perhaps this is what people say” said the Chofetz Chaim, “but they don’t know him like I know him.”

At funerals I often share the following lesson from the Talmud:

"Every person has three names - *Echad shekorim lo aviv v'imo* - The first is the one that his father and mother gave him. This is the one that is given at a *brit*, on a naming in the synagogue, the one that is registered on the birth certificate, entered on school records, and given whenever a name is requested.

The second is *shekorim lo chaverav* - the one by which they are known to family, friends, and those who work with them. This is the name that he or she earns by actions, and through relations with others.

The third name is the name by which God knows him or her. This name is the sum total of a person’s life. It reflects not only the outward conduct, but the inner life. It deals with the relationships between a person’s conscience and actions. It reflects the inner soul and spiritual life of a person. (*Tanhuma, Vayakhel, 1*)

I would add to this teaching that the name by which God knows us is also the one with which we know ourselves. This name is reflected in the

still small voice that speaks to us when we are not true to ourselves. It can be found in the knot in our stomach when we lie or the gritting of our teeth when we deal falsely with others. It can be found in our discomfort and internal embarrassment when we are aware that we are not living up to our potential, or turning a blind eye to our ideals, or pretending to be someone we are not.

Our natural inclination is to ignore the tension between our inner and outer lives instead of fixing them. We build facades and barriers to hide our less noble qualities, we put up a good front, but inevitably there will be times when the real “me,” our “roosterliness,” will come through.

If, deep inside, we are not honest and forthright but pretend to be so, there will still be times when we cheat and steal. If we only pretend to be supportive of our children, there will still be times when our controlling nature comes through. If we only pretend to be faithful to our spouses, there will still be times that we will cheat and turn astray. No matter how hard we work to hide the “real me” from others, it will be these painful moments of self-revelation that our family and friends will remember. They will see right through the facade.

The following story was told by Rabbi Israel Lifshitz of Danzig:

The king of Arabia heard of the astonishing victory of Moshe over the

Egyptians and wanted to see for himself what this great warrior looked like. He sent his finest painter to the Israelite camp to secretly paint Moses' portrait. Upon his return, the king summoned his wise men to interpret the likeness. Instead of depicting a man of many virtues commensurate with his appearance, the wise men spoke of a deeply flawed character prone to arrogance, lust, cruelty, and ruthlessness.

Dismayed, the king traveled to see Moshe for himself. Granted an audience, he recounted the deep discrepancy in perception between his wise men and the painter, who in fact had captured Moshe with uncanny accuracy. Moshe responded in candor and appreciation. Both the wise men and the painter were right: Your wise men saw into my soul. What they detected was my nature at birth: selfish, acquisitive, domineering, and unscrupulous. What your artist painted is what I have become through my constant struggle to do *teshuva*. I have been able to rework my base inclinations into their very opposite. (Rabbi Ismar Shorsch: Tiferet Yisrael on Kiddushin 4: 13)

One of the overarching themes of the High Holy Days is that we cannot hide from God:

אתה זוכר מעשה עולם, ופוקד כל יצורי קדם.

“You remember the deeds of the world, and You are mindful of Your creatures since the beginning of time.

Before You stands revealed all that is hidden, and every mystery from the moment of creation.

Nothing is forgotten in Your awe-inspiring presence, nothing concealed from Your gaze;

You remember every deed, and nothing in creation can be hidden from you.” (Mahzor, Rosh Hashana, *Zichronot*)

During these holidays God also calls upon us not to hide from ourselves. On Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur we are supposed to lower our defenses and drop our armor, the falseness and pretense, with which we engage the world. We are supposed to look the “real” me in the eye and if we don’t like what we see, do the inner spiritual and psychological work necessary so that in the coming year, *tocho kevaro*, our inner life will be a reflection of our outer one.

The Wise Man of the story was content to leave the Prince a monarch on the outside but a rooster within. For us, may our spiritual work not be complete until, like the Ark of the Covenant, our inner lives and outer lives are golden.