



**Partners In Torah**

**San Diego-Los Angeles-Venutra**

**Take home Dvar Torah**

**תשפ"ד Tezaveh Parshat**

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***Hello, Welcome!***

**Partners In Torah is a community-wide, independent and inclusive adult education program focusing on understanding Jewish relevancy to our lives by studying text most interesting to each participant. Through one-on-one discussion for 1 hour each week, friendships are forged between mentors and mentees.**

***Partners in Torah has proven to be effective at reclaiming the rich legacy of wisdom, inspiration, and guidance for many who have, until now, lacked access.***

***Thank you for joining us!***

**Please encourage friends to join you in participating so that we may grow together as a community.**

Parshat Tezaveh is the second of the Torah's four portions that deal with the construction of the portable tabernacle in the desert – the *Mishkan*. Parshat *Terumah*, which we read last week, contains the instructions for the Mishkan's physical structure, including its walls, curtains, coverings, and vessels for the service. This week's portion, *Tetzaveh*, considers primarily the fabrication of the special garments that the *Cohen Gadol* (High Priest) and regular *Cohanim* (Cohens) wore when performing the service in the Mishkan. The last two portions in the book of Exodus - *Vayakhel* and *Pekudei* - describe in detail how each of the instructions was precisely carried out for the Mishkan and for the Cohanim's special garments.

There is one peculiarity. The instructions to build the incense altar – the *מזבח הקטרת* - are at the end of this week's portion instead of in the Parsha of *Teruma* where the directives for all the other vessels and Tabernacle components were given. Why did Hashem wait until after the instructions for all the other components of the Mishkan, before giving us the instructions for the incense altar? Why was this vessel set apart?

Many of the Torah's commentaries address this question, and all explain that the Incense Altar was left for last because it had a different role in the Mishkan than did the other vessels. While it is not unanimous exactly what that unique role was, all agree that the purpose of the Incense Altar was of a higher level than the other vessels.

Each of the other vessels was intended to connect us to Hashem as the source of blessing from Heaven for the necessary components of Jewish life.

The Holy Ark which housed the Tablets of the Ten Commandments along with a small Sefer Torah which sat on a shelf, was the source of Torah in the world. Through it, Hashem would channel an abundance of Torah to His people.

The Menorah was the source of wisdom in the world, including the Oral Torah. From it emanated the various channels of wisdom to the world.

The Table with the showbread was the source of sustenance to the world. Through it Hashem would channel the blessing of food and sustenance.

The altar in the courtyard upon which all the animal sacrifices were brought was the source of all the other blessings that came from Hashem to the world. The daily morning sacrifice thanked Hashem for a new day and brought to the world the endowment of blessings for the new day. The daily afternoon sacrifice at the end of the day, thanked Hashem for allowing us to enjoy another day of blessing. The portions of the sacrifices placed on the altar that burned throughout the night brought forth blessing and protection during the night.

These channels were unlocked and the blessing flowed freely through them, through the Kohanim performing the daily service relating to the vessels respectively. By doing our part, Hashem opens the floodgates and bestows abundant blessing upon His people and the world.

This was the goal of the Mishkan; to unite heaven and earth. To recognize Hashem's presence in the Mishkan through the blessings that He bestows upon us for performing the holy service with the physical vessels of the Mishkan. When we achieve that, it is now incumbent upon us to avail ourselves of the holiness there, to spiritually grow greater and greater. In turn, Hashem increases His

blessing to us. This cycle is intended to continue for a lifetime as a person who properly uses the holiness of the Mishkan, gets closer and closer to Hashem with every coming day.

The Incense Altar represents the fulfilment of the goal of the Mishkan; the convergence of the physical and the spiritual realms in one place.

These are the words of the Torah commentary the צרור המור.

ולכן חתם כל דברי המשכן במזבח הקטורת, לפי שהוא מקשר כל דברי המשכן, ומקשר הדברים התחתונים בעליונים והעליונים בתחתונים. ולכן נקרא קטורת, לשון קישור, כמו (דניאל ה, יב) שרי קטרין, לפי שמקשר כל הדברים ומחברם

*Therefore, Hashem concluded the matters of the Mishkan with the Incense Altar. Because it is what ties together all the components of the Mishkan. It ties the matters of the earth with those of the heavens and the matters of the heavens with those of the earth. That is why it is called “קטרת” which means **to tie together**; It ties everything together and unites them.*

This is why the Incense Altar was left for last. It ties together into one neat package the entire service of the Mishkan. But, how does the burning of incense on the altar accomplish this?

The Torah tells us (Genesis 2:7).

וַיִּצְרֶה יְדֹנָד אֱלֹהִים אֶת הָאָדָם עָפָר מִן הָאֲדָמָה וַיִּפַּח בְּאַפָּיו נְשָׁמַת חַיִּים וַיְהִי הָאָדָם לְנֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה

*7) And Hashem formed the man of dust from the ground, and He blew into his nostrils the soul of life; and man became a living being.*

When the lifeless form of dust received its soul, it became a living breathing organism. The place through which the “living soul” entered man, was through his nostrils. In Torah, the nose with its nostrils, is the organ of the body used for breathing whereas the mouth is used for

eating. Indeed, the Talmud says that when one wants to know if a person is still alive, he should pass something very delicate, like a feather, under his nose, and see if air is coming out. If the feather gets ruffled, he is still breathing and therefore is alive. If no air is exiting the nose, the person is no longer living. The nose is the organ through which we determine if the breath of life is still in the person.

The nose is also the organ used for smelling. Some things smell good and some smell bad. Generally speaking, things that are alive and fresh smell good, whereas things that are decaying or are dead smell bad. For example, when you shop for fruits and vegetables, you smell them to see if they are fresh. If they have a good smell, you know they are fresh and full of life. If they don't smell "fresh" it is a sign that they are old and that their "shelf life" is waning. If they smell bad, they are spoiled and life has left them completely.

It is not coincidental that the nose is the "gauge" for the amount of life left in something. Since life entered man through his nose, the nose is particularly sensitive to what is alive and what is not.

There is yet another correlation between life and smell.

The more life something had, the more it smells when life leaves it. For example, inanimate items, which have no life at all like rocks, dirt, and water, barely smell. Plants, fruits and vegetables which have a small degree of life to them, have a rotten smell, but it is tolerable. A dead animal, which had so much more life than a plant, has a very strong putrid smell. The smell of a decaying dead human being is intolerable. Once again, the nose is the measure of how much life something had when it was alive.

When Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, four of their five senses were involved in the sin. The verse tells us (Genesis 3:6).

(ו) וַתֵּרָא הָאִשָּׁה כִּי טוֹב הָעֵץ לְמֵאֲכָל וְכִי תֵאֵוָה הוּא לְעֵינַיִם וְנִחְמַד הָעֵץ לְהִשְׁכִּיל וַתִּקַּח מִפְּרִיו וַתֹּאכַל וַתִּתֵּן גַּם לְאִישָׁהּ עִמָּהּ וַיֹּאכַל

6) *And the woman **saw** that the tree was good for eating and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was desirable as a means to wisdom, and she **took** the fruit and **ate**; and she gave also to her husband with her and he ate.*

First and foremost, the ear was involved because they **listened** to the persuasion of the snake. The power of sight was involved because she **saw** that that fruit was a delight to the eye. The sense of touch was involved because they **took** the fruit. And the sense of taste was involved because they **ate** the fruit. The only sense that was not involved was the sense of smell. Therefore, the sense of smell remained pure and retained its power to discern the degree of life that remains in something.

The untainted sense of smell has another manifestation. The Talmud asks the question (Berachot 43b).

אמר רב זוטרא בר טוביה אמר רב מנין שמברכין על הריח שנאמר כל הנשמה תהלל יה איזהו דבר שהנשמה נהנית ממנו ואין הגוף נהנה ממנו הוי אומר זה הריח

*Rav Zutra bar Tuvya said in the name of Rav. How do we know that one must make a blessing when he smells a good fragrance? From the verse that says (Psalms 150:6), “Every soul shall praise Hashem.” What is something that only the soul enjoys but the body does not? This is a sweet smell.*

We see that a sweet smell gives pleasure directly to the soul.

This is because a fragrance is has a spiritual component that nourishes the spiritual soul.

This is why in the Havdalah ceremony, we make a blessing on good smelling spices, like cloves.

On Shabbat, we are blessed with an additional component to our souls, the “נשמה יתרה”. Hashem endows us with this extra element of spirituality so that we can experience the holiness of the Shabbat more acutely. When the Shabbat leaves, along with it goes the extra soul that we had, leaving us feeling letdown. To soften that feeling a little, we give our souls a direct shot of spiritual pleasure by smelling sweet spices.

This is why the incense altar is considered the merging of the two worlds. Since the incense give forth a delicious smell, something almost spiritual, which appeals to our most spiritual sense, it is like the connecting point between heaven and earth.

Another theme that emerges from many of the commentaries offering answers to this question is that the burning of the incense was for the honor of Hashem.

These are the words of the Seforno.

אבל היה ענין זה המזבח לכבד את האל יתברך אחרי בואו לקבל ברצון עבודת  
עמו בקרבנות הבקר והערב, ולשחר פניו במנחת קטרת, על דרך הבו לה' כבוד שמו,  
שאו מנחה ובאו לפניו

*Whereas, the idea behind this altar was to bring honor to Hashem. After Hashem had graciously accepted the service of his beloved nation by accepting their daily sacrifices morning and evening, we greet His Presence with an offering of incense. This is along the lines of “Bring Honor to Hashem’s name, bring forth an offering and come before him.*

The incense offering was brought twice daily, morning and evening, after the daily sacrifice was brought. The Seforno explains



that the incense offering was like a gift to Hashem for having graciously accepted our sacrifices to Him.

What is the special quality of the incense that gives it uniquely the ability to bring honor to Hashem?

There is something truly unique and unusual about the incense. There were 11 different types of spices that went into the special recipe of incense that was burned on the altar.

Hashem told Moshe Exodus (30:34).

(לד) וַיֹּאמֶר יְדֹדָאֵל מִשֶּׁה קַח לָךְ סַמִּים נְטוּף וְשִׁחֲלֹת וְחֻלְבָּנָה סַמִּים וּלְבָנָה זָכָה  
בַּד בְּבֹד יְהִיָּה

*34) Hashem said to Moshe: “Take for yourself spices – stacte, onycha, and galbanum- spices and pure frankincense. These shall be of equal weight.”*

What is most unusual about this list is that the galbanum on its own had a foul smell. Only when it was mixed with the other ten spices would its foul odor become a beneficial fragrance to the mix. Our sages learn a very powerful lesson from the fact that Hashem included the foul-smelling galbanum in the mix.

The ten sweet smelling spices represent a minyan (quorum) of righteous people. The galbanum represents someone whose actions are not so “sweet smelling”. If, however, the person whose actions are not so sweet, would join the minyan and pray with the ten righteous people, he would be transformed into a sweet smelling spice by being with the others, just like the galbanum.

Perhaps this is where the honor to Hashem comes from. Both the ten sweet smelling spices and the galbanum are sacrificing to honor Hashem. The ten righteous people might want to say to this person, “What business do you have joining us? You are not on our level! You

don't belong here!" But instead, they are welcoming and warm to this person and include him in their prayers. This not so good person is also doing something very special for Hashem. Perhaps he should say to himself, "What connection do I have with these people? I am not on their level, and they may reject me!" But this person overcomes his personal doubts and joins the minyan anyway, because he wants to pray to Hashem.

When Hashem's children join together without barriers and walls between them to praise Him, this brings Hashem the greatest honor possible. Everyone is overcoming his own personal hesitation to come and serve Hashem. This is what the incense represents, and this is why it brings honor to Hashem.

This special quality of the incense also endows the incense with the ability to stop plagues and bring peace to the world. We see this from the following story in the Torah (Numbers 17:11-13).

(יא) וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל אַהֲרֹן קַח אֶת הַמִּחֻתָּה וְתֵן עָלֶיהָ אֵשׁ מֵעַל הַמִּזְבֵּחַ וְשִׂים  
:קִטְרֶת וְהוֹלִיךְ מְהֵרָה אֶל הָעֵדָה וְכַפֵּר עֲלֵיהֶם כִּי יֵצֵא הַקֶּצֶף מִלִּפְנֵי יְדֹד הַחַל הַנֶּגֶף  
(יב) וַיִּקַּח אַהֲרֹן כְּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר מֹשֶׁה וַיֵּרָץ אֶל תּוֹךְ הַקֹּהֵל וְהִנֵּה הַחַל הַנֶּגֶף בָּעָם וַיִּתֵּן  
:אֶת הַקִּטְרֶת וַיְכַפֵּר עַל הָעָם  
(יג) וַיַּעֲמֵד בֵּין הַמֵּתִים וּבֵין הַחַיִּים וַתִּעְצַר הַמִּגַּפָּה

*11) Moshe said to Aharon, "Take a firepan and put on it fire from upon the Altar and place incense – and go quickly to the assembly and provide atonement for them, for the fury has gone out from the presence of Hashem; the plague has begun!"*

*12) Aharon took as Moshe had spoken and ran to the midst of the congregation, and behold! The plague had begun among the people.*

13) *He stood between the dead and the living, and the plague was checked.*

This secret that the incense has the power to stop a plague was given to Moshe by the Satan when he was in heaven to receive the Torah (Tractate Shabbat 88b). That is how he knew to tell Aharon what to do.

A question can be asked on this idea. There are two instances where indeed the incense was the source of death for people.

In Leviticus (10:1,2) we read.

(א) וַיִּקְחוּ בְנֵי אֶהֱרֹן נָדָב וַאֲבִיהוּא אִישׁ מִחֶתְתּוֹ וַיִּתְּנוּ בָהֶן אֵשׁ וַיִּשְׂימוּ עָלֶיהָ קִטְוֹת  
וַיִּקְרִיבוּ לִפְנֵי יְהוָה אֵשׁ זָרָה אֲשֶׁר לֹא צִוָּה אֹתָם  
(ב) וַתֵּצֵא אֵשׁ מִלִּפְנֵי יְהוָה וַתֹּאכַל אוֹתָם וַיָּמָתוּ לִפְנֵי יְהוָה

- 1) *The sons of Aharon, Nadav and Avihu, each took his firepan, they put fire in them and placed incense upon it; and they brought before Hashem an alien fire that He had not commanded them.*
- 2) *A fire came forth from before Hashem and consumed them, and they died before Hashem.*

In Numbers (16:35) we read.

(לה) וַאֲשׁ זָצָאָה מֵאֵת יְדֹד וַתֹּאכַל אֶת הַחֲמִשִּׁים וּמֵאתַיִם אִישׁ מִקְרִיבֵי הַקִּטְוֹת  
35) *A flame came forth from Hashem and consumed the two hundred and fifty men who were offering the incense.*

In these two instances, the incense served as a death penalty for the ones who brought it. How could this be? Didn't we just learn that

the incense was a peace bringing medium? Why did it not work here to save these individuals?

The answer is that the secret of the incense was its power to include all types of people and allow each of them, even the ones who did not smell so good, to contribute to the whole and become one with them. That was the lesson of the galbanum. In these two instances the incense was being used to create a separation between people, the antithesis of its special quality.

The two sons of Aharon chose the incense because it was the most spiritual way to serve Hashem. However, their goal was to show that they were above everyone else and were worthy of bringing their own offering of incense to Hashem. Because they sought to use the very medium whose special quality is to bring unity and peace between the Jewish people to separate and elevate themselves over the congregation, it backfired and became a death sentence for them.

The same is true in the case of the 250 men who joined Korach in his rebellion against Moshe. Since they attempted to use the incense as a tool to separate themselves from the congregation, and create a split in the Jewish nation, it backfired and became a death sentence for them.

We learn a very valuable lesson from the incense. Unity among the Jewish people brings peace and protection from Hashem, especially unity among Jews who are different, when they come together to serve Hashem. Disunity brings destruction and death.