

DARCHAI NOAM

Its ways are ways of pleasantness - דרכיה דרכי נעם

(Mishlei 3:17)

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How can the Parsha help us grow this week?

Tzav – a pleasing aroma

This week's Parsha of Tzav continues the discussion of the korbanot that are to be offered in the Mishkan and later the Bet Hamikdash. One unusual phrase that appears repeatedly is as follows:

'Raiach Nichoach La'Hashem' – 'a satisfying aroma to Hashem'.¹

Why does the Torah describe korbanot as a satisfying aroma to Hashem? When humans smell meat roasting on a barbecue we can certainly describe this as a 'satisfying aroma' (with apologies to any readers that are vegetarian). But why do we refer to Hashem as enjoying the smell of the korbanot?

In his work Ma'asei Hashem, Rabbi Eliezer Ashkenazi² offers a fascinating explanation. Rather than reflecting the positive quality of the sacrifice, he explains that the phrase 'satisfying aroma' is actually an indication of a possible defect in the sacrifice. Imagine someone coming home from a hard day at work. Exhausted, they open the front door of their home and immediately smell the aroma of their favourite dish cooking on the stove. Immediately their spirits are lifted and they eagerly anticipate the delicious meal that is waiting for them. But is that sufficient? Would they be satisfied with a smell alone? Of course not. The smell on its own is not sufficient. In fact, smelling something delicious without getting to taste it can actually be cruel. The food is the main event. The smell represents merely a foretaste of the meal itself.

Rabbi Ashkenazi explains that the same principle applies to a korban. A person who sinned needed to bring a korban as part of the teshuvah process. However, the person might mistakenly assume that the korban on its own is sufficient to atone for their sin. Unfortunately, this was a common problem in the time of the Bet Hamikdash. Many members of Bnei Yisrael sinned more freely, confident in the knowledge that they could bring a korban to atone for their sins and 'wipe the slate clean'. Before the destruction of the first Bet Hamikdash the prophets criticised Bnei Yisrael for this behaviour, exhorting them to mend their ways.

"For what purpose are your many sacrifices to Me? says Hashem...Wash, cleanse yourselves, remove the evil of your deeds from before My eyes, cease to do evil!"
(Yeshayahu 1:11-16)

The phrase 'satisfying aroma' comes to correct this flawed thinking. The sense of smell can detect something in advance, before it actually reaches the person. Similarly, a korban is supposed to be merely an indicator of things to come. It is a way of showing Hashem one's pure intentions for doing sincere teshuvah and mending their ways going forward. The ultimate purpose of bringing the sacrifice is to reconcile the relationship with Hashem in order to improve for the future.

The highlight of the Yom Kippur service, when Beni Yisrael's sins are forgiven, is when the Kohen Gadol would enter the Holy of Holies and offer up the sweet smelling incense to Hashem.

¹ See for example Vayikra 6:8 and 6:14.

² 1513-1585, Rabbi in Egypt, Cyprus, Italy and Poland.

In his Bnei Yisaschar, Rabbi Zvi Elimelech Shapira of Dinov points out that the sense of smell was the only one of the 5 senses that was not involved in the original sin in Gan Eden. Chava **saw** the fruit, she **listened** to the snake, she **touched** the fruit and then she **tasted** the fruit.³ It is only fitting that we use the sense of smell to reconnect with Hashem and return to the pre-sin state of Gan Eden because essentially this was the only sense not involved in the sin.

On Motzai Shabbat, as part of the Havdalah service, we smell besamim (fragrant spices) in order to comfort the soul which is saddened by the departure of the 'extra soul' that we receive on Shabbat⁴ The mystics teach us that smell is the only one of the five senses that benefits only the soul and not the body. That is why it is the appropriate method for comforting the soul when Shabbat departs. That is also why smell is the only pleasure that we are allowed to enjoy on Yom Kippur.

It is interesting to note that the two heroes of the Megillah which we read on Purim this week also have a connection with the sense of smell⁵. The Gemara⁶ explains that Mordechai's name is hinted at in the Torah in the beginning of Parshat Ki Tisa, describing the spices that were used in the anointing oil. The first spice is called 'mar dror' which Targum translates into Aramaic as "meira dachya", which sounds very similar to Mordechai. And Esther's real name was Hadassah⁷ - the sweet smelling myrtle that is used as one of the arba minim on sukkot and which some use as besamim to smell during Havdalah after Shabbat.

A powerful way to stimulate change is through our emotions. It is well known that the sense of smell is the most powerful sense for triggering very powerful memories and emotions. Scientists have noted that the olfactory bulb, which is the part of the brain that processes smells, is closely connected to the amygdala and the hippocampus – the brain regions that handle memory and emotion. We also speak of the 'smell test' - we say that something doesn't 'smell right' when we intuitively know that it isn't good. It is therefore fitting that the sense of smell is used to describe this phenomenon of reconciling our relationship with Hashem. By offering a pleasant smelling korban we are trying to trigger the positive memories and emotions that we shared with Hashem prior to our sin distancing us.

At present we do not have a Bet Hamikdash and thus no ability to offer korbanot to Hashem. This means that we cannot demonstrate our good intentions to improve via offering Him a 'satisfying aroma'. However, we can still do genuine Teshuva for our sins, plan to improve and genuinely try to reconcile with Hashem until the Third Bet Hamikdash is built when we will again be able to offer sweet smells to our G-d.

Let's try something this week:

1. In the absence of a Bet Hamikdash, the korbanot can seem very foreign to us. When we read about the korbanot in the Parsha, think about which aspects can still be relevant to us today – for example, doing teshuva for our sins, reconciling our relationship with Hashem and trying to draw closer to Him.
2. The next time that we enjoy a sweet fragrance, try to use this as a reminder of the 'satisfying aroma' that Hashem wants us to offer Him.

Shabbat shalom, Rabbi Ledder

³ Breishit 3:1-6.

⁴ Tur and Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim 297:1.

⁵ Heard from Rav Ari Kahn.

⁶ Chullin 139b.

⁷ Esther 2:7.

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About Darchai Noam

The passuk in Mishlei (3:17) describes the Torah as follows: "Its ways are ways of pleasantness (Darchai Noam) and all its paths are peace". The Torah is our guidebook for life. It is packed full of good advice as to how we should live our lives.

The aim of the Darchai Noam weekly email is to examine an idea from the weekly parashah relating to good middot (character traits). It will focus particularly on treating each other with respect and how to interact with each other in a more peaceful and pleasant manner. It will also suggest some practical tips for implementing these ideas in our daily lives.

By learning together each week, and making an effort to regularly put the ideas into practice, with Hashem's help we can all gradually improve our character traits and our observance of 'v'ahavta l're'echa kamocho' – loving one's fellow as oneself.

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