

CRAZY ABOUT YOU

by Rabbi Pinchas Winston

Every man must bring his fire pan and place incense within it, and offer it before God. (Bamidbar 16:17)

Recently I published a new book called "Deeper Perceptions," b"H, which like "Perceptions," is on the weekly Torah reading. However, as the title indicates, the *divrei Torah*, for the most part, are deeper. (Yes, this is also a plug for the new book.) Nevertheless, I am going to "borrow" a *dvar Torah* from there for this week's Perceptions, since it is an important message for everyone.

The offering of incense—*ketores*—was so primary in the Temple service that it had an altar of its own, which was actually inside the Sanctuary where only a *kohen* could enter. On Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the year, a major part of the service was the offering of the incense inside the *Kodesh Kodashim*—the Holy of Holies.

The Incense Offering figures very prominently in the Torah narrative as well. In *Parashas Shemini* it was the cause of the tragic death of Nadav and Avihu, the two oldest sons of Aharon HaKohen. In this week's *parshah* the *ketores* is used to ferret out impostors, because after Korach and his assembly demand to be *kohanim* as well, Moshe Rabbeinu tells them:

"Take for yourselves censers. Place fire into them and put incense upon them before God tomorrow, and the man whom God chooses is the holy one . . ." (Bamidbar 16:6-7)

The *ketores*, however, was not only an instrument for Divine judgment:

Moshe said to Aharon, "Take the fire pan and put on it fire from upon the Altar and place incense. Take [it] quickly to the assembly and provide atonement for them, because the wrath has gone out from the Presence of God; the plague has begun!" (Bamidbar 17:11)

Why [did Moshe have Aharon stop the plague] with incense? Because the Jewish people were jeering and complaining about the incense saying, "It is deadly poison: Nadav and Avihu died through it [and] 250 died because of it." The Holy One, Blessed is He, said, "You shall see that it stops plagues [as well], and that it is sin that kills." (*Rashi*)

What was so unique about the Incense-Offering? The answer has to do with the number of spices of which it was comprised, *eleven*, a number that represents the *tikun* of Creation:

There is a profound reason why the cycle-length of the sun and moon are not equal, but rather

that the sun's extends beyond the moon's by 11 days . . . The *Malchus* is missing 11 lights, which are from the 320, 280, and 288 Sparks, and which are continuously being rectified until the arrival of Moshiach. Thus, because of these 11 lights that are missing from the *Malchus*, there are 11 days missing from the lunar calendar with respect to the solar one. (*Drushei Olam HaTohu, Drush Miyut HaLavanah, Siman 6*)

As it turns out, everything that goes wrong in Creation has to do with the number 11, even our enemies and the evil they create:

Eleven days journey from Chorev to Kadesh Barnea by way of Mt. Seir. (Devarim 1:2)

It says in the *Sifri*: Had the Jewish people merited the 11 days they would have entered the Land, because the 11 days would have overcome the 11 *klipos*, which are the 11 chiefs of Eisav. (*Drushei Olam HaTohu, Chelek 2, Drush 5, Anaf 3, Siman 6*)

The 11 chiefs of Eisav are the ones mentioned at the end of *Parashas Vayishlach*. Their entire existence was only made possible because of the 11 lights that remained unrectified at the start of Creation, and which the Jewish people are destined to rectify. They do this either consciously or as a result of what happens to them throughout history. Performing the service of the Incense Offering was a major part of this rectification process.

The number also represents another very central Torah concept, that of *Da'as*. The word simply means "knowledge," but in Kabbalah it refers to a specific kind of knowledge, Godly knowledge:

If you want it like money and pursue it like buried treasures, then you will understand fear of God; Da'as Elokim—Godly knowledge—you will find. (Mishlei 2:4)

What is the connection between *Da'as* and the number eleven? In general there are only ten *sefiros*, but in some instances the *sefirah* of *Da'as* is also included, making it the eleventh *sefirah*, in a manner of speaking. Therefore, the eleven-spice incense also alludes to the so-called eleventh *sefirah* of *Da'as*.

There is also a conceptual reason why the incense offered as part of the Temple service alluded to the idea of *Da'as Elokim*. The process by which the incense was produced is similar to the process through which a person arrives at truth: grinding.

The incense was comprised of natural, raw elements that were often soaked in certain liquids to scent them, after which they were dried and ground into powder form. They were later combined and prepared in a special manner that was a secret tradition known only to, and protected against non-Temple use by, a particular family.

The intellectual process works in a similar manner. The world is filled with many "raw" ideas, most of which if taken at face value can be confusing and misdirect people. Just as food must be chewed to be properly digested so must information be "chewed," even "ground down" and refined to be

properly "digested" intellectually.

When this process, often referred to as the "Talmudic Process," is implemented, ideas are refined. It becomes easier for a person to discern the truth or falsehood of a concept, to determine which ideas are worthy of incorporation and which ones ought to be rejected. This is what allows a person to construct a healthy and accurate "big picture" vision of Creation and history, one that is a sweet "fragrance" to God and the person.

The Talmud states:

A person only sins when a spirit of insanity enters him. (*Sotah* 3a)

The Talmud is saying that sane people do not sin. After all, by sinning a person rejects God which by definition is insane. The only problem is that even righteous people sin at some point, as it says:

For there is no righteous man on earth who does good and does not sin. (Koheles 7:20)

The actual Hebrew is "*shtus*," which more accurately translates as "stupidity" or "nonsense." In other words, the person who sinned either did not have or lost perspective of the seriousness of their violation. Sinners are people who does not have an intellectual or emotional appreciation of the extent of their violations. Otherwise, they would see the wastefulness of their actions and abandon them.

This was Korach and his assembly, which is why Moshe Rabbeinu told him:

"Is it not enough that the God of Israel has distinguished you from the congregation of Israel to draw you near to Him, to perform the service in the Mishkan of God and to stand before the congregation to minister to them? He drew you near, and all your brothers, the sons of Levi with you, and now you seek the kehunah as well? Therefore, you and your entire company who are assembled are against God, for what is Aharon that you should complain against him?" (Bamidbar 16:9-11)

In essence, Moshe Rabbeinu was asking Korach, "Are you crazy? Do you realize who you challenge? Do you appreciate what you stand to lose?" It is also why he chose the *ketores* as the means to make his point, as if to say, "Think it through Korach. If you work it through maybe you will come to your senses and realize your nonsense and end your rebellion."

It was a valiant effort on Moshe Rabbeinu's part. The problem was that Korach was closed off from hearing his point. It was the humblest man on earth facing off against one of the most arrogant, which was another reason why the *ketores* was the "weapon" of choice against the rebellion. Being consumed by fire and then ascending as smoke Heavenward symbolized the humility that Korach did not have, and the source of his intellectual blindness.

In fact, the *gematria* of "Moshe" is 345, whereas the *gematria* of "Korach" is 308. The difference between the two is 37, the *gematria* of "*hevel*," which means "breath," something fleeting and almost nonexistent. Moshe had Korach's boldness, but it was tempered by his "*hevel*," that is, his humility.

This made him charismatic, but unlike Korach, he used his charisma on behalf of God, not against Him.

Text

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