THE SMELL OF THE ESROG IS EQUATED WITH THE "SMELL OF TORAH"

by Rabbi Yissocher Frand

Parshas Emor

The Smell of the Esrog Is Equated With The "Smell of Torah"

These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: Tape #679, Mrs. Cohen is Having a Baby. Good Shabbos!

Parshas Emor includes the Torah section relating to the Jewish holidays. Regarding the mitzvah to take the Four Species [Vayikra 23:40], the Baalei HaTosfos write that one of these four species, the esrog, has both a pleasant taste and a pleasant aroma. This fruit represents righteous Jews who have the aroma of Torah and the taste of good deeds. The palm tree, on which the lulav grows, has pleasant taste but no aroma. This symbolizes the average Jew who has the pleasant taste of doing mitzvos but does not necessarily possess the aroma of Torah scholarship. The hadas [myrtle], with aroma but no taste, symbolizes Jews who have Torah scholarship but do not possess the pleasant taste of having done good deeds. The arava [willow], with neither taste nor flavor, symbolizes the Amei Ha'Aretz [peasants] who have neither the aroma of Torah nor the taste of good deeds. The Baalei HaTosfos conclude with the well known homiletic teaching: We bind all four species together to symbolize that G-d is not pleased with the Jewish people until they bind themselves together as one unit.

Let us analyze the symbolism of the Baalei HaTosfos in equating the aroma of the esrog and hadas with the aroma of Torah. What does it mean to say that a Talmid Chochom has the "smell of Torah"? Rav Simcha Zissel makes a very interesting comment: The Moshiach is described in Yeshaya [11:1-2] as "an offspring from the great plant of Yishai upon whom will rest the Spirit of G-d, the spirit of wisdom and discernment, the spirit of counsel and strength, the spirit of knowledge and Fear of G-d." After all these accolades describing the Moshiach, the pasuk says [11:3] "and G-d will cause him to have an aroma (v'heericho) of Fear of Hashem, such that he will not need to judge by the vision of his eyes nor argue based on that which he hears with his ears."

This aroma that he will possess will give him the uncanny ability to rule not only based on his eyes and ears but even with that special quality of aroma that G-d will grant him. What is this idea of

"V'heericho"?

The Ramba"n in his Torah commentary on the pasuk "And you shall do that which is straight and proper in the Eyes of Hashem" [Devorim 6:18] explains this mitzvah as attempting to ascertain the true Will of the Almighty behind each of the 613 mitzvos. Even regarding the things which we are not explicitly commanded, we should try our hardest to do that which we feel is right and proper in His Eyes, for He Loves that which is good and straight.

Even if something does not appear in the list of mitzvos and does not appear in the Shulchan Aruch [Code of Jewish Law], we have an obligation as Jews to try to understand what the Almighty really wants from us. The Moshiach is going to be gifted with this intuitive knowledge of what the Almighty really wants. G-d will infuse him with this innate - almost instinctive knowledge of what He really wants. Therefore, there will be cases appearing before him that do not appear in Shulchan Aruch and yet he will know what to do despite the lack of any legal precedent. He will have the "aroma of the Almighty" about him. He is so permeated by the Spirit of Hashem that he will be able to smell what is right and what is wrong.

Why is smell the metaphor for knowledge?

When one walks into a room and his wife is making chicken soup for Shabbos, he does not need to taste the chicken soup to know what's cooking. He knows what's cooking. He smells the chicken soup. When there is aroma, one does not need taste to understand what is there. This is the quality that Moshiach will have.

This is what the Baalei HaTosfos mean when they speak about the aroma of Torah (in comparison to the aroma of the esrog or hadas). They mean a person who has the "sense of smell" of Torah. He can smell what is right and what is wrong. This is the concept of "Da'as Torah". One who possesses true "Da'as Torah" has the aroma of Torah such that he can intuit what is right and what is wrong, even in the absence of clear precedent. He can perceive what the Torah wants and want the Almighty wants by instinct, as if by smell.

The Indictment Of Rabbi Akiva's Students

During the period of Sefiras HaOmer, 24,000 students of Rabbi Akiva died. Our sages say it was because they did not show proper respect for one another [Yevamos 62b]. This seems to be a rather serious punishment for such a light offense. Why were they deserving of such harsh judgment?

The Talmud [Kesubos 62b] relates the story of an ignorant shepherd named Akiva, who Rochel the daughter of the wealthy Kalba Savua wished to marry. She fell in love with him according to the Gemara, because he was "modest and a good person". She knew that if he would apply himself to Torah studies, he would become a great scholar. Her father threatened that he would disown and disinherit her if she married such an ignoramus. She married him anyway. They were paupers for 24

years. We know the rest of the story.

Tosfos in Kesubos ask how it could be that the Gemara there describes Rabbi Akiva as a "good person" when the Talmud elsewhere [Pessachim 49b] says that Rabbi Akiva (when he was an ignoramus) used to hate Torah scholars and would (if he could) bite into them like a donkey. Tosfos answers that Rabbi Akiva expressed this attitude not out of hatred for Torah scholars per se, but out of resentment that they kept themselves aloof from the masses. He perceived (perhaps erroneously) haughtiness on their part and therefore could not stand such perceived arrogance.

Tosfos means that Akiva was, in fact, a good person - so good that he could not tolerate it when others put on airs and looked down on the masses. He felt that this was an affront to other (simpler) people and - good person that he was - felt an urgency to defend the honor of even simple people who were ignoramuses.

Given the fact that Rabbi Akiva was such a righteous and pious individual when it came to defending the rights of even simple ignoramuses, the critique of his students was all that much greater for not following in their master's footsteps regarding showing honor for their fellow students. For that harsh critique, they unfortunately died during the days of Sefiras haOmer.

This write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Torah Tapes on the weekly Torah Portion. The halachic topics covered for the current week's portion in this series are:

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