

# OHRNET

KI SISA, 18 ADAR, MARCH 7, 2026  
• VOL 33 NO. 22

## PARSHA INSIGHTS

by Rabbi Yaakov Asher Sinclair

### *A Rose by Any Other Name*

*“And you shall take for yourself the finest spices: pure myrrh...” (30:23)*

I remember opening a book quite recently and, just from the scent, being instantly transported back to my days in kindergarten.

Of the five human senses, the sense of smell is the most evocative, and the most intangible. There's something about fragrance which is above the other senses, more refined, more abstract. And in point of fact, Seforim (*Bnei Yissaschar etc.*) say that the sense of smell stayed in its pristine state because it was never polluted by the sin of Adam HaRishon, the first man.

When describing the forbidden fruit, the Torah says (Bereishit 3:6): “וַתֵּרָא הָאִשָּׁה...” – Chava, Eve, *saw* that it was good; “וְכִי טוֹב הָעֵץ לְמַאֲכָל” – that the fruit was good for eating; “וְכִי תְאֻנָּה” – that it was desirable to the eyes; all the senses, including the sense of hearing, appear there in the verses...but the sense of smell? The Torah never mentions that it smelled good. The sense of smell was never an accessory to that sin and thus the sense of smell was never damaged – the sense of fragrance that we have today is as strong and untainted as it was in the beginning.

When we eat a fruit for the first time in its season, we say a blessing called *Shehechyanu*, thanking Hashem for bringing us once again to a time where we can see and eat that particular fruit. We don't say *Shehechyanu*, however, when we re-experience a smell. Smell is something that the soul enjoys, not the body. Because smell was never diminished by the sin of Adam, it exists - as the soul does - above time; smell does not undergo cyclical renewal. It remains in its pristine spiritual state. *Shehechyanu* marks renewal after absence — but fragrance never truly “fell,” so there is no return to celebrate.

The Gemara in Chullin 139b asks: “המין מן התורה מנין?” Where is Haman hinted to in the Torah? And it answers:

“העץ אשר צויתוך לבלתי אכל ממנו אכלת המין” -- Did you eat from the tree which I commanded you not to eat from?” The word, ‘המין - Ha'min’ – meaning ‘from’ - has the same letters as, and can be read as, ‘Haman.’ Haman embodied that power of the primeval tempter, and thus it

was he, like the primordial Snake in the Garden, who advised Achashverosh to throw an enormous banquet where some of the Jews in attendance were tempted to commit immorality (Esther Rabbah 7:13).

All the other festivals of the Jewish calendar, with the exception of Purim, are named after redemption, after salvation: “Pesach” means to skip over - Hashem passed over the houses of the Jewish people in Egypt and spared their firstborn from death. “Chag Hamatzot” - the Torah’s name for Pesach - reminds us of the matzah which symbolizes our hasty flight from slavery to redemption. “Sukkot” celebrates miracles and salvation – recalling the sukka in the desert that gave us supernatural protection from the elements. And “Shavuot”, which literally means “weeks”, commemorates our seven weeks’ journey of anticipation to Sinai where we received the Torah, our ultimate freedom.

Purim is different.

‘Purim’ comes from the Persian word ‘*pur*,’ which means a ‘lot’. Haman cast lots to divine the most propitious time to eradicate the Jews. The lot fell on the month of Adar, the month in which Moshe died. So why do we name the festival of Purim after Haman’s attempted genocide? Of all names, why is *that* the name of this festival?

There's a mystical concept that the months of the Jewish year correspond to parts of the face: Tishrei corresponds to the skull, Marcheshvan and Kislev are the two ears, Tevet and Shevat are the eyes, and Adar, the month of Purim, represents the nose, the sense of smell.

Haman, the embodiment of the primeval serpent, made a mistake when he chose the month of Adar. He didn’t realize that Adar represented the hidden power of the sense of smell which was never compromised by the sin of Adam and Chava.

That ‘pur’ - the choice of the month of Adar- was his ruin and our success; the pristine power of Adar is what protected the Jewish People from his genocidal plans.

Ohrnet Magazine is a weekly Torah magazine published by Ohr Somayach Institutions, POB 18103, Jerusalem 91180, Israel · Tel +972-2-581-0315 · Email. [info@ohr.edu](mailto:info@ohr.edu)

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## PARSHA OVERVIEW

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Hashem tells Moshe to conduct a census by counting each silver half-shekel donated by all men age twenty and over. Moshe is commanded to make a copper laver for the Mishkan. The women donate the necessary metal. The formula of the anointing oil is specified, and Hashem instructs Moshe to use this oil only for dedicating the Mishkan, its vessels and for anointing Aharon and his sons. G-d selects Betzalel and Oholiav as master craftsmen for the Mishkan and its vessels.

The Jewish People are commanded to keep the Shabbat, an eternal sign that G-d made the world. Moshe receives the two Tablets of Testimony on which are written the Ten Commandments.

The mixed multitude who left Egypt with the Jewish People panic when Moshe's descent seems delayed, and they force Aharon to make a golden calf for them to worship. Aharon stalls, trying to delay them. Hashem tells Moshe to return to the people immediately, threatening to destroy everyone and build a new nation from Moshe. When Moshe sees the camp of idol-worship, he smashes the Tablets and destroys the golden calf. The sons of Levi volunteer to punish the transgressors, executing 3,000 men.

Moshe ascends the mountain again, to pray for forgiveness for the people; Hashem accepts his prayer, but tells Moshe that every future punishment of the Jewish People will include some small amount of retribution for the sin of the golden calf. Moshe sets up the Mishkan and G-d's clouds of glory return. Moshe asks Hashem to show him the rules by which he conducts the world but is granted only a small portion of this request. Hashem tells Moshe to hew new Tablets and reveals the text of the prayer that will invoke Divine mercy.

Idol worship, intermarriage and the combination of milk and meat are prohibited. The laws of Pesach, the first-born, the first-fruits, Shabbat, Shavuot and Succot are taught. When Moshe descends with the second set of Tablets, his face is luminous as a result of contact with the Divine.

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# Q & A

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## Questions

1. How many "*geira*" are in a shekel?
2. What was the minimum age of military service in the Jewish army?
3. What were the three different types of *terumah* donated?
4. The Jews were counted after Yom Kippur and again after Pesach. Both times they numbered the same amount. How can this be? (Didn't some 19-year olds turn 20 during that six month period?)
5. How many ingredients comprise the incense of the *Mishkan*?
6. According to Rashi, why are sailors called "*malachim*"?
7. What is the difference between *chochma* (wisdom), *bina* (understanding), and *da'at* (knowledge)?
8. Shabbat is a "sign." What does it signify?
9. When did the Jewish People begin to give contributions for the building of the *Mishkan*?
10. How many books are there in Tanach?
11. From where did the men take the earrings that they donated to make the calf?
12. Why did Aharon build the altar for the golden calf by himself?
13. Why did Moshe break the Tablets?
14. How can two brothers belong to two different tribes?
15. Why did Moshe ask that his name be erased from the Torah?
16. How has the sin of the golden calf affected the Jewish People throughout history?
17. In verse 33:2, G-d says that the inhabitants of *Eretz Canaan* would be driven out of the Land. In that verse, only six of the seven Canaanite nations are mentioned. What happened to the seventh?
18. How did G-d show that He forgave the Jewish People?
19. How did Moshe become wealthy?
20. How do the light rays shining from Moshe's face show us the powerful effect of sin?

*All references are to the verses and Rashi's commentary, unless otherwise stated.*

## Answers

1. 30:13 - Twenty.
2. 30:14 - Twenty.
3. 30:15 - For the *adanim* (sockets), for the purchase of communal sacrifices, and for the building of the Mishkan.
4. 30:16 - Their ages were calculated based on Rosh Hashana, not based on their individual birthdays. (The two counts were conducted in the same year, with no Rosh Hashana in between)
5. 30:34 - Eleven ingredients were used in making the incense.
6. 30:35 - Because they stir (*malach*) the water with their oars.
7. 31:3 - *Chochma* is knowledge acquired from others. *Bina* is the deduction of new knowledge from what one has already learned. *Da'at* is holy inspiration.
8. 31:13 - It is a sign between G-d and the Jewish People that He has chosen them and a sign to the nations of the world that He has sanctified the Jewish People.
9. 31:18 - The 11th of Tishrei.
10. 31:18 - 24.
11. 32:2,3 - From their ears.
12. 32:5 - He hoped that building it himself would take longer than if others built it, hoping that in the meantime Moshe would return.
13. 32:19 - Moshe reasoned: If the Torah forbids even a single individual who has estranged himself from the Torah to partake in even a single commandment (the Pesach sacrifice), surely the entire Torah cannot be given to an entire nation that has estranged itself from Hashem!
14. 32:27 - Half-brothers, who have the same mother.
15. 32:32 - So people shouldn't say "Moshe was unworthy to plead for mercy on behalf of the Jewish people."
16. 32:34 - Whenever G-d punishes the Jewish People, part of that punishment comes as payment for the sin of the golden calf.
17. 33:2 - The seventh nation, the Girgashites, voluntarily emigrated.
18. 33:14 - He agreed to let His *Shechina* dwell among them.
19. 34:1 - Moshe carved the Tablets out of precious stone. G-d commanded Moshe to keep the leftover fragments.
20. 34:35 - Before the sin of the golden calf, the people would not have been afraid to look at the light rays, but after the sin they were afraid.

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# COUNTING OUR BLESSINGS

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by Rabbi Reuven Lauffer

## Sheva Brachot (Part 3)

*A husband and wife are one soul, separated only through their descent to this world.  
When they are married, they are reunited again.*

### Zohar HaKadosh

The first of the *Sheva Brachot* is: **Blessed are you, Hashem, our G-d, King of the universe, Who creates the fruit of the vine – “*Borei Pri haGefen*”.**

Much emphasis is placed on wine in Judaism. As we have discussed in previous articles, wine is drunk every Shabbat and every Yom Tov, used for both Kiddush and Havdalah; Seder Night -- one of the holiest and sublime nights of the year -- revolves around four cups of wine. And we haven't even mentioned Purim! Wine is an integral part of the Jewish life-cycle as well: *Chuppah*, *Brit Milah*, and *Pidyon HaBen* [redemption of the first-born son] all require wine as an essential component of the ceremony.

Which is all somewhat perplexing, as wine is to 'blame' for many of the negative narratives found in the Torah:

Rabbi Yehuda, in identifying the Tree of Knowledge as a grapevine, states (*Brachot* 40a): “There is nothing that brings [as much] grief upon mankind as does wine.” The Midrash (*Tanchuma, Parshat Noach*) famously describes the way that overindulging in wine, glass by glass, transforms a person from a human being into someone who behaves like an animal – without their even realizing what is happening to them.

It's a little like the fellow who goes into a bar, orders five glasses of wine and drinks them down. He orders four more glasses and drinks them as well; he then orders three glasses, then two, and finally one. After drinking the last glass of wine, he says to the bartender: “I don't get it. The less wine I drink, the drunker I get!”

Drunkenness is so anathema to proper living that Rabbi Yeshayah Horowitz writes (*Shnei Luchot Habrit, Sha'ar Ha'otiyot, Kedushah*): “A person needs to beware of overindulging in drink. For drunkenness harms a person's body, destroys his mind, and causes all the woes in the world. We find this by Noach that drunkenness caused him harm and shame, and it was the reason for his children to be cursed... This teaches us that no good comes out of wine, and so too with all other intoxicating beverages.”

In effect, wine and its overindulgence represent nature controlling mankind as opposed to mankind controlling nature.

And yet, as mentioned, the most significant moments in Judaism are nearly always commemorated with wine. As King David poetically articulates, “Wine brings joy to the hearts of men” (*Tehillim* 104:15). Rabbi David Kimche explains that wine, when drunk judiciously, gladdens the heart and uplifts a person and it can enhance a person’s intellect, as well. And, as we are all aware, when wine is overindulged it has the opposite effect and brings in its wake destruction and strife.

In fact, so profound is the potential positive effect of wine on our spiritual beings that Rabbi Yehuda ben Beteira teaches (*Pesachim* 109a), “*Ein simcha eleh b’yayin*” – that the mitzvah to rejoice cannot be [totally] fulfilled without wine!

So, which is it? Is wine the primary source of all wailing in the world as it states in *Brachot*? Or, is wine, as per *Pesachim*, the source of true joy? The answer is that it is both. When used in moderation wine can bring us to a state of happiness and serenity. And when overused wine becomes the source of grief and devastation. Like everything else in this physical world that we inhabit, it is not the wine that is the source of joy or wailing. Rather, it is what we do with it. The results of drinking wine will be defined through *our* behavior! When used to enhance our *Avodat Hashem* wine is one of the most sublime mediums to draw us closer to our Father in Heaven. That is why there were wine libations offered up in the Holy Temple every day. And the same wine, when abused, is something so negative that it has the power to decimate what were once deep and meaningful relationships, leaving nothing but misery in its tracks.

Perhaps that is a reason why the first blessing recited under the *chuppah* is over a cup of wine. To remind the *Chattan* and *Kallah* that in the same way that wine has the potential to increase Hashem’s Majesty in this world or to diminish it, so, too, their marriage can be the source of unparalleled *nachat* for Hashem or, *chalilah*, it can be an immeasurable source of disappointment.

*To be continued...*

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# TAAMEI HAMITZVOS – Reasons behind the Mitzvos

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by Rabbi Shmuel Kraines

## MEAT AND MILK

*Mitzvos 92 and 113; Shemos 23:19*

The prohibition against cooking a mixture of meat and dairy products is a *chok*, a Torah decree without an apparent reason. While the commentators offer many reasons for this prohibition, the primary reason remains hidden and will only be revealed to us in future times, when we will be holy enough to understand the secrets of the Torah (*Rabbeinu Bachya*, based on a Midrash).

The Torah words this prohibition: “Do not cook a kid in its mother’s milk.” Halachically, though, it applies to all mixtures of meat and dairy products. This prohibition is mentioned three times (in *Mishpatim*, *Ki Sisa*, and *Re’eh*); firstly, to stress its importance, and secondly, to indicate that one may neither cook, nor eat, nor otherwise benefit from such a mixture.

*Ibn Ezra* explains that the Torah mentions only a kid in its mother’s milk because a kid is still soft, while a full-grown animal does not cook well in milk, and people did not used to boil any meat in milk other than this. As to the reason for this prohibition, he explains that it is cruel to cook an animal in the milk of its own mother. *Rambam* suggests that mixing milk and meat used to be an idolatrous practice. *Sefer HaChinuch* explains that meat and milk is an unnatural mixture, which the Torah prohibits just as it prohibits the interbreeding of different animal species and the sowing of a mixture of seeds. According to *Rabbeinu Bachya*, the prohibition is linked to the fact that milk forms from blood, which is spiritually harmful when consumed, and the properties of blood return when milk is mixed with meat.

On the esoteric level, *Rabbeinu Menachem HaBavli* and *Radvaz* write that meat alludes to the Attribute of Justice (‘*din*’) while milk alludes to the Attribute of Mercy (‘*rachamim*’), and mixing these two opposing forces has a negative spiritual effect. As with all impure foods, eating a mixture of meat and milk blocks the mind, not only spiritually but also intellectually. *Chida* suggests that Daniel’s unparalleled wisdom, which outshone the counsel of all the other advisors of Nevuchadnetzar, was linked to his refusal to eat from mixtures of meat and milk that were provided by the royal kitchen.

Whatever the reason, this Mitzvah brings many side benefits. By limiting our diets and abstaining from forbidden foods such as these, we train ourselves not to eat impulsively as is the way of animals. Such dietary requirements also limit our socializing with non-Jews and its harmful influence. More importantly, every time we restrain our bodily desires for the sake of Hashem, we sanctify ourselves and benefit eternally.