

### THE SENSES OF TORAH

All too often, we tend to over-intellectualize Torah, even in our symbols -- as if Jews characteristically suffered from oversized crania. We forget that the Torah addresses itself not only to man's mind, but also to inner man, not only to his intellect but also to his intuition and his instinct -- even to his very senses. Torah is concerned not only with man in the objective world, but also with the subjectivity of humans.

Two texts in this regard come to mind, one from today's Torah reading, and one from tomorrow's Haftorah, and both of these give us several insights, by use of symbols into Torah and the senses.

In the Haftorah we recite tomorrow, we read of Isaiah's description of the Messiah: **וְהָיָה בְּיָרְאָתוֹ**. The usual English translation is, "And his delight shall be in the fear of the Lord." I do not know what basis there is for this interpretation, unless it is that cited by Rashi, according to which **וְהָיָה** comes from the word **רוח**, spirit. Hence, a more accurate translation would be, "and he shall be inspired by the fear of the Lord."

Kimhi and Ibn Ezra follow the interpretation quoted by the Talmud (*Sanh.* 93b) in the name of Rava. Rava contrasts this clause with the rest of the verse (Isaiah 11:3) -- **וְלֹא לְבִרְאָה עֵינָיו יִשְׁפּוֹט וְלֹא לְמַשְׁמַע אָזְנוֹ יִזְכֶּה**, "And he shall not judge after the sight of his eyes neither decide after the hearing of his ears." The Messiah, as Judge, will not avail himself of the senses of sight and sound. These are coarse, direct, and material -- and they can also be deceived. Contrariwise, the sense of smell, **רוח** -- is less open to deception, it is more subtle, more indirect, more ethereal. Hence, says Rava, **וְהָיָה בְּיָרְאָתוֹ** means that the Messiah's God-fearing quality will endow him with a sharpened sense of smell; **וְהָיָה בְּיָרְאָתוֹ**, he will "smell and judge." The Messiah will judge not by sight or by sound, but by smell or aroma. He will have an acutely developed intuition, a highly honed instinctive ability to discern what is right and what is wrong, to distinguish between justice and injustice. Even in colloquial language, we say of someone with sharp intuition that he "has a nose" for what he is doing. So of the Messiah, according to Rava, does Isaiah say that **וְהָיָה בְּיָרְאָתוֹ**, his fear of God will endow him with a divine sense of smell, and an innate capacity to react to right and wrong.

But the Talmud records yet another opinion, that of Rabbi Alexander: **בְּמִצְוֵי שְׁמַעֲנִינוּ**, **בְּמִצְוֵי וְיִסּוּרִים כְּרִיחִים**, this verse teaches us that the Messiah was laden down with *mitzvot* and suffering as heavy as millstones. The word **וְהָיָה** comes not so much from **רוח**, smell, as from **ריחיים**, millstones. Rabbi Alexander emphasizes not the sense of odor as much as the tactile sense, the sensitivity to weight. Messiah will find that his good deeds and his suffering are both as heavy as millstones. We are here taught that Torah does not come easy even to the Messiah. So do we often refer to faith in God as **עֵל בְּיָמֵינוּ שְׁמַיִם**, "the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven," and to the commitment to Torah as **עֵל הַתּוֹרָה**, the yoke of Torah.

The Torah reading of this morning engages yet another one of the senses. After the crossing of the Red Sea and the Song of Triumph, we read that **וְלֹא יָכְלוּ לִשְׁתּוֹת מֵמַיִם**, **בְּיַם סוּפֵרָה כִּי מְרִיִם הָיָה**, "And they were not able to drink water from Marah for they were bitter." The Israelites cried and complained to Moses, and Moses was instructed by the Lord to cast a stick into the waters **וַיִּמְתֹּקוּ**, and the waters became sweet.

What is the significance of this seemingly unimportant detail? The author of **"דָּגַל בִּמְחָה אֶפְרַיִם"** tells us that water is a symbol of Torah. At times these waters of Torah taste bitter, if Torah seems restrictive and inhibiting and even repelling, we must understand that this does not reflect on Torah. Instead, it reflects upon us!

Thus, honey is sweet -- to any healthy individual. But if one is sick, even honey tastes bitter. So, if Torah appears bitter, it is a symptom of a profound malaise, a disturbing sickness that is our fault, not the fault of Torah. The sweetening of the bitter waters therefore implies the healing of man so that Torah once again tastes *ביתיקים*, sweeter than honey.

Indeed it was the Baal Shem Tov, the grandfather of this author, who commented on this very verse that the antecedent of *כי ברים הים*, "for they were bitter," is not the waters -- but the Israelites! The Israelites were bitter, and that is why the water did not taste good. Had they been loyal, faithful, sweet, the waters would have tasted sweet too!

Hence, Torah is heavy -- but never bitter! We must welcome the idea of *ריה"ם*, Torah as heavy as millstones. Only that which is heavy can be an ennobling discipline. We must be mature enough to have gotten rid of that faddist idea of three or four decades ago, "peace of mind" -- which really was peace of mindlessness.

Young people today who want easy salvation can get it very cheaply indeed on the streets of this city. They can be approached by salesmen for oriental religions or a thousand other cults who will promise them, for no effort at all, the sun and the moon -- and even the Reverend Moon...

However, serious young Jews today are *not* looking for an easy way out. Those who have any *יה"א* at all, any sense of discrimination, any refined intuition, are looking for *ריה"ם*, for millstones, for a disciplined way of life. I have found that for them the terms *מקור* and *מחמיר*, those who take a more lenient and more stringent view of Halakhah, are totally irrelevant. They are not looking for forced leniencies and not for artificial stringencies -- they want the truth, no matter how heavy it will bear down upon them. Indeed, I have found that the concern as to whether a Rabbi is more lenient or more stringent generally is restricted to those over the age of forty! Those under forty are not terribly concerned that a Rabbi may be too strict! They are willing to bear any burden, even those of those *ריה"ם*-millstones, as long as they find the results in a meaningful and ordered and purpose of life -- a life which is sweet, which is not "bitter waters."

I should like to pause for a moment of reflection on a man whose life incorporated these senses of Torah. I refer to my late, revered teacher, Dr. Samuel Belkin *ז"ל*. Of him it was true that: *הטעניו במצוות ויסורים כריח"ם*. He was laden down with good deeds and with suffering as with millstones. He bore an enormous burden of *mitzvot* for *כלל ישראל*, the congregation of Israel. His was a responsibility for leading and building the greatest Torah institution in the world, as well as a major university. In addition to much personal suffering, the *mitzvot* themselves were *ריח"ם* של *יסורים*, millstones of suffering. He had to put up with opposition, which often was harsh and cynical and unjust. His was the lot of endless worry about the survival of his beloved institution, and the great community which it served and will continue to serve.

It was also true of him that *ורוח ודא' /*, he would "smell and judge." He had a subtlety and an insight that were second to none. There was about him an aroma and atmosphere of genuine humility and greatness at the same time. He often would judge not by his enormously sharp intellect, but by his finely sharpened, intuitive sense of what was right and wrong, appropriate or inappropriate.

And above all, he made Torah sweet. I remember coming to him for the first time in May of 1944 as a young lad frightened, anxious, and nervous, to be orally examined by the President of Yeshiva College in order to determine whether I could qualify. I entered his office, awe-struck. But he engaged me in pleasant and casual conversation which lasted throughout the entire interview. As I left, I was relaxed and happy that this great man had been so easy with me. It was only a day later that I realized

that he actually had given me a thorough examination in Talmud -- but he had made it so painless for me! How sweet! During the entire time that I attended his Talmud lectures, and for years thereafter, he was to me the epitome of the sweetness of Torah: *מִתּוֹקִים מִדְּבַשׁ וְנוֹפֶת צוּפִים*, sweeter than honey and even the honeycomb.

The above is not meant as a eulogy or a panegyric of Dr. Belkin *ז"ר*. I mean this, rather, as an illustration of what Torah can and ought mean to us, both individually and collectively.

Torah is a heavy burden, especially in the modern world. But we shall bear it.

It grants to its bearers an added more ethereal quality, a more refined *רֵיחַ* - a sensitivity to right and wrong, moral and immoral.

And it is a spiritual exercise which restores health so that we can appreciate the infinite sweetness of Torah.

For it is important not only that Torah makes sense, but that all our senses be geared to Torah.

*כֹּכַּ עֲצָמוֹתַי תֹּאמַרְנָה ה' בִּי כַמוֹךְ*, "All my bones say, O Lord who is like unto Thee."