



Adapted from the sefer **במוצאי שבת** a collection of maamarim on  
given by the Tolner Rebbe shlita at Melave Malka

### Melave Malka Parshas Ki Sisa 5760

ויאמר ה' אל משה קח לך סמים נטף ושחלת וחלבנה סמים ולבונה זכה בד בבד יהיה  
(שמות ל"ד/ל"ד).

Hashem instructs Moshe Rabeinu to gather the ingredients of the **קטורת**.  
One of those, **חלבנה**, is described by Rashi as **בושם שריחו רע וקורין לו גלבנא**,  
ומנאה הכתוב בין סמני הקטורת ללמדנו שלא יקל בעינינו לצרף עמנו באגודת תעניותינו  
(a spice that smells bad...and the Torah included it among the ingredients of the **קטורת** to teach us that we  
should not undervalue the importance of including sinners of Am Yisroel  
in our gatherings of fasting and tefilla, to be counted together with us).

Rashi's description of **חלבנה** seems to contradict itself. He begins by  
describing it as a **בושם**, by definition a plant which produces a sweet,  
pleasant smell. He then explains that the smell of the **חלבנה** was  
unpleasant, **בושם שריחו רע**. How can we understand this definition? If it's  
a **בושם**, it doesn't have a bad smell, and if it has a bad smell, it's not a  
**בושם**!

When we look at the apparent source of Rashi's drasha, in **מסכת כריתות ו' :**,  
it simply says **שהרי חלבנה ריחה רע, ומנאה הכתוב עם סמני הקטורת** (The **חלבנה**  
had a bad smell, yet the Torah included it in the ingredients of the  
**קטורת**). Why did Rashi define it differently as **בושם שריחו רע**?

Also, why did Rashi elaborate that we should not underestimate the  
importance of including **פושעים**? Why didn't he simply say that the  
inclusion of **חלבנה** in the **קטורת** teaches us to include **פושעים** in our



[1]

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gatherings of tefilla and fasting? Why does he emphasize שלא יקל בעינינו, that we should not see it as something “light” or trivial?

It's clear that Rashi wanted to clarify the lesson of the Torah and teach us how to implement it in our lives. The expression בושם שריחו רע, teaches us that every Jew, even one who has sinned intentionally and prolifically, is truly a בושם, a fragrant spice. The stench of עבירות may temporarily overpower that beautiful smell. Nonetheless, beneath that odoriferous cloud, the perfume of the “pintele yid”, that unquenchable, eternal, essence of the Jewish soul, retains its beautiful fragrance. No foul odor has the power to eliminate a Jew's identity as a בושם.

Rashi also teaches us how to implement the Torah's guidance. שלא יקל בעינינו, don't take the Torah's instruction superficially and say, “fine, we have to let the פושעים join us.” We have to approach this lesson seriously, realizing that the Torah is telling us to never, chas v'sholom, look down on any Jew or to treat any Jew as unimportant. Rashi emphasizes, שלא יקל בעינינו, that if we look at that Jew who has sinned as בושם שריחו רע, we will see that in Hashem's eyes, he is not worth any less than we are. Once we internalize this, we can truly and fully include him in our fasting and tefilla. The resulting tefilla will rise up to Hashem who does not reject תפילת רבים.

The ability to activate this power of communal tefilla depends on our ability to look at our fellow Jew positively, penetrating the external until we reveal the בושם aspect of each and every individual.

If we take an honest look at our own shortcomings, at how far we are from where we should be as ovdei Hashem, it isn't that difficult to understand that there is not such a difference between us and those called פושעי ישראל. We are all far from the goal of constant דביקות in Hashem.

I often share the story that Harav Shmuel Yaakov Rubenstein זצ"ל, the Rav of Paris, brings in the introduction to his sefer, שארית מנחם.



[2]

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“A teacher in Warsaw had a student with extreme learning disabilities. The teacher tried everything he could to help the boy reach a minimal level of proficiency. One day, the boy’s father decided that he wanted the **חידושי הרי"ם זצ"ל**, the first Gerrer Rebbe, to test his son. The teacher reviewed the material with his student multiple times. He understood that if the boy failed the test, his father would look for another teacher. It seemed hopeless. However, when the Rebbe tested him, he declared that the boy did “Nishkische”, not bad (in Polish). The father was delighted to hear the Rebbe’s verdict.

Later, the teacher, who was present at the test, asked the Rebbe how he could declare that a boy who knew so little, did “not bad”. The rebbe responded that if the Torah was finite, it would be possible to rate someone’s knowledge as “good”, or “poor”. However, since the Torah is broader than the world itself, there really isn’t that much difference between a boy who knows Aleph Beis and a great Gaon. The Rebbe concluded by asking the teacher, “Can we honestly say that we “know” the Torah?”

When we look at a single-story building and a fifty-story building from the ground level, we see a huge difference between them. However, if we look down at those same buildings from a spaceship, the distance between them is barely discernable. This perspective enabled the Rebbe to view the boy as his colleague in the endeavor of Torah study. The encouragement the boy received, imbued him with a love of Torah, and enabled him to progress to the extent that he was no longer an Am Haaretz.

Harav Hachasid Rav God’l Eiszner zt”l, the Mehahel Ruchani of Yeshiva Chidushei Harim in Tel Aviv, went through the Gehinnom of Aushwitz, after having lost his wife and daughter at the beginning of the war. He never lost his strong Emuna, and worked with all his strength to encourage those around him, and to heal their broken hearts. (His



[3]

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yahrzeit is כ"ד אדר, may these words be ליעילוי נשמתו הטהורה, for he left no children (רח"ל).

He once told us that in the midst of the horror of the camps, he noticed something that helped him understand the nature of people and their ambitions. After seventeen hours of forced labor, accompanied by beatings, and executions, the inmates lay down on the wooden boards that were their "beds".

Some of the Jews worked in the uniform factory, and at the risk of their lives, they managed to steal a few, small, scraps of thin fabric. With the last of their strength, they arranged these scraps on the wooden board, in an attempt to sleep more comfortably.

R. God'l wondered, "Those scraps are small and thin, and can't possibly make that board more comfortable. Why do they risk their lives to steal them?"

He thought long and hard. Eventually, he reached the conclusion, that even though those Jews received no tangible benefit from placing those insignificant scraps on their board, they derived pleasure from the fact that other prisoners didn't have those scraps!

R. God'l told us that now, years after the war, that insight enables him to understand human nature. Behind the effort that so many people invest in attaining items or positions in this world, lies the illusion that having something that others do not have, makes them special or important. This is simply an illusion. From the true perspective of the world, no one has any reason to be arrogant or to feel superior to anyone else. Even our accomplishments in Torah, Yirah, and Avodas Hashem seem miniscule when compared to what we are capable of achieving, and what the Torah truly demands of us. They certainly provide no basis for arrogance and one-upmanship.



[4]

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As we read the Parsha that lists the ingredients of the קטורת, let us learn from the חלבנה, that בושם שריחו רע, not to belittle or look down on any Jew, even a פושע גמור who has transgressed in so many ways. The Mishna in Avos (ד"ג), instructs us אל תהי בז לכל אדם, do not scorn any person. Every Jew has some special מעלה, and there is no reason to foolishly discount him or insult him.

If we strengthen ourselves in this approach, we can merit closeness to Hashem, who declares that he cannot dwell in the same place as an arrogant person. We must create, inside ourselves, a place where Hashem can dwell, as the name of this month implies, Adar - Aleph Dar. ועל ידי זה תחזינה עינינו בשובו לציון ברחמים בקרוב אכי"ר



[5]

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