

Ki Tissa: Holy Mixtures Rabbi Emily Goldberg Winer, Class of 2022

The *Ohel Moed*, tent of meeting, requires an intricate set up. The table, its vestments, lamp, and spices like onycha, frankincense, galbanum—all play particular roles in facilitating the offerings of our people. It is one of the more subtle ingredients, however, that transforms this list from mere eclectic items into agents of holiness.

V'Asita ohto shemen m'skhat kodesh rokeakh mirkakhah ma'aseh rokeakh shemen m'skhat-kodesh yihiyeh.

Make of this a sacred anointing oil, a compound of ingredients expertly blended, to serve as sacred anointing oil (Shemot 30:25).

Rashi defines the “*rokeakh mirkakhah*” as a mixture so fine that the ingredients become one in the same, completely inseparable. This emulsion becomes the foundation on which all the other objects become holy. Each item from the litany of vessels for the *mizbeakh* (altar) must be anointed in this oil first, and then anything those vessels touch are, by extension, enveloped in that sanctity. What is so special about this mixture? What makes the anointing oil so essential to the project of building a *mizbeakh* for God? And how does it initiate *kedushah*?

Parshat Tetzaveh commands: “[*Bnei Yisrael*] should bring unto You [God] clear and beaten olive oil.” There seems to be significance to this finely grounded mixture of spices and well-beaten olives. Rabbi Mordechai Yosef Leiner of Ishbitz focuses on the first two words of this phrase:

“Unto you,” meaning to the *Chokhma* (wisdom) inherent in every soul of Israel, and all the wisdom of Israel is called in the name of Moshe *Rabeynu*. To this God commanded that every one of Israel shall take to the wisdom inside of him some pure olive oil, meaning refined wisdom, and that is that he should not turn to any side that might be tainted (Mei HaShiloach, Vol. 1, on Tetzaveh.)

For the Ishbitzer rebbe, the refinement of the oil is representative of the work we each do in order to cultivate wisdom. This process of soul refinement takes place for Moshe as he descends and re-ascends Har Sinai after the *chet ha'egel*, the sin of the golden calf. After shattering the original tablets out of anger at the betrayal of his people, Moshe has the task of rewriting them. This group of “stiff-necked people” not only tested Moshe’s patience but built a golden calf as a projection of their own fear of the unknown. *Bnei Yisrael* engaged in the work of “*rokeakh mirkakhah*,” of grinding and refining, but they chose to do so with their gold

possessions, hammering them into an idol. In doing this, *Bnei Yisrael* missed the opportunity to engage in the harder, but more rewarding, process of refining their souls.

Rather than compounding gold into an unrecognizable calf, *Bnei Yisrael* could have turned inward, leaning on one another in their distress. Their insistence on using the chisel to carve out a statue from gold distracted them from the deeper work of uncovering the hidden wisdom that comes from vulnerability.

For Moshe, the process of sharing the Ten Commandments with *Bnei Yisrael* is one of patience and a willingness to re-approach Har Sinai a second time. It is only fitting that the original *lukhot* get brought alongside the new tablets into the Ark:

...*P'sol likha shnei lukhot avanim karishonim*

...Carve for yourself two tablets of stone like the first" (Shemot 34:1).

The Ark is big enough to hold each step of the gradual process of becoming a more refined people. Rebbe Nachman of Breslov describes this phenomenon further:

...This is the aspect of "*Psolet* (carve) for yourself" (Exodus 34:1), which our Sages, of blessed memory, expounded: The *psolet* (shavings) shall be yours (Yerushalmi, Shekalim 5:2). With regard to the elementary interpretations of Torah, one must first provide introductory information before presenting an original interpretation. Afterwards, the introductions are set aside, and we arrive at the intended insight—since that is the main thing, and all the preceding material and introductions are the aspect of *psolet* that has been chiseled and carved away from around the intended insight. The same applies to the contemplation of Torah. One must first go round and round a number of times before arriving at the intended insight..." (Likutei Moharan 60:1:9).

We need to bring each iteration of our Torah, our process of cultivating wisdom, and ourselves with us in the Ark. After the second giving of the *lukhot*, Moshe stores both sets in the Ark. Ideally after years of stumbling and wandering in the wilderness, the two sets of *lukhot*—and all that they represent—have since become the ultimate "*rokeakh mirkakhat*," expertly compounded ingredients, that will sanctify and anoint us all.

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