

## Geulas Yisrael #140

### Ki Tisa: The Ketoret Challenge

The ketoret mixture of herbs and spices contained 11 different elements. One of the herbs was known as chelbanah which, by itself, had an unpleasant smell. Yet, when chelbanah was mixed with other herbs and resins it became aromatic and pleasant. Once included in the broader ketoret mixture, it enhanced the overall scent.

Chazal viewed ketoret as a metaphor for the inclusion of rogue Jews. Based on the insertion of chelbanah in ketoret, the gemara in Keritut (6b) encourages us to include sinners or reshayim, even in the special tefillah gatherings of a fast day.

An intriguing halachik debate developed about forming a minyan of exactly 10 men by including *a rasha* or a sinner. Based on the gemara's endorsement, many sanctioned the inclusion of sinners in a minyan of exactly 10. Alternatively, others (see the Mabit, Beit Elokim, Sha'ar Tefilla, chapter 13) required 10 pious Jews for the core minyan, after which, non-observant Jews could be added. After all, they claimed, the ketoret mixture itself contained 11 elements, 10 of which were aromatic. Having built a base unit of 10 *proper* elements, the foul-smelling chelbanah could be added. The Shulchan Oruch (Orach Chaim 55:11) rules that we *can* include a *rasha*, even for a minyan of exactly 10 people.

In a broader sense, beyond the halacha itself, this gemara provided a paradigm for the inclusion of errant Jews within the Jewish community. Though we generally tilted toward inclusion, there were moments in Jewish history that we were forced to adopt a harsher policy of exclusion.

### Year One vs Year Two

Within a two-year period in the desert, Moshe adopted two very different policies toward sinners. He had allowed millions of Egyptians, known as the *eirev rav* to assimilate within our nation. Even though they spearheaded the egel debacle, Moshe didn't flinch. Instead, he prayed

for teshuva and for full acquittal for the entire nation. His initial approach was inclusive.

Yet, as the first year in the desert turned into the second, Moshe began to realize the corrosive effects of sinners. Facing a raging Korach insurrection, he petitioned Hashem to, literally, remove the sinners from this Earth. Moshe's stunning reversal highlights the delicate calibration between inclusion and exclusion of sinners. Based upon the ketoret inclusion of chelbanah, we generally aspire to inclusivity but, alternatively, we sometimes are forced to expel toxic 'herbs' from the mixture of our people.

Part of what caused Moshe's reversal was the differing agendas of the sinners. The egel sin was caused by fear, insecurity, and caving to base desires. Assuming that Moshe had died, the frightened nation craved a physical interface with Hashem. Though their idolatrous revelry was repugnant, they didn't threaten the socio-religious structure. They were weak and confused, but they didn't rebel against authority.

Korach, however, seceded from the established order, looking to create a rival faction to Moshe's leadership. Since he threatened religious authority and could potentially destabilize the social structure, he had to be eliminated. Fallen sinners can be integrated into the mainstream and included within religious and communal life. Separatists badly splinter society, subvert religious authority, and must be sidelined.

#### Deniers of Torah Sheba'al Peh

One conspicuous situation in which inclusion was impossible was the split caused by the deniers of Torah sheba'al peh. During the second Mikdash era, first the Saducees and then, subsequently, the Kara'im rejected the authority of Torah sheba'al peh, thereby threatening the integrity of our masorah. As they adhered to a strict but deviant version of "halacha" they could not be referred to as classic *reshayim* who abandon observance. Still their deviances from Rabbinic Judaism were so grave that there was little room for integration. By denying the foundation of Torah sheba'al peh they committed a gross "intellectual sin" leaving little room for ketoret-style inclusion.

#### Chassidut and New Denominations

In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Chassidut asserted a bold new claim: Hashem didn't just create us "in His image", but also implanted a "part" of Himself or *חלק אלוה ממעל ממש* into every Jew. No sin, however severe, could ever spoil that inner divine endowment. No matter how far he strayed every Jew still stood in the presence of Hashem, since Hashem was, effectively, still inside of the sinner. This doctrine of Chassidut offered a new language of inclusion. Chassidut opened its arms to Jews, regardless of their level of religious performance. Unfortunately, in the next century those arms would close, as Chassidut and the rest of Orthodox Jewry faced an unprecedented challenge to Jewish peoplehood.

Enlightenment invited Jews into mainstream Gentile society, offering them full rights and citizenship. Seeking to better "fit in" in their surroundings, millions left classic orthodoxy to form new streams of Judaism. The doctrine of Chassidic inclusion was originally geared to individual Jews who veered from religious adherence. It wasn't designed for institutionalized departure from classic lifestyles of Torah and mitzvot.

As these new denominations of Judaism shared little in common with classic Orthodoxy, each branch took different paths, and it became difficult to include Jews whose religious experience was so vastly different from our own. The Jewish world split again, and ketoret-style inclusion became impossible. A new development of the 20<sup>th</sup> century would further test inclusivity, creating a split within the Orthodox world itself.

### Secular Zionism

The initial process of our return to Israel was spearheaded by secular Zionists who were also ardently anti-religious. The first generation of secular Zionists sought to replace religion with secular nationalism. Some Orthodox Jews, none the less, partnered with secular Zionists, identifying a common cause of rebuilding Jewish sovereignty. They also sensed inherent value to Jewish nationalism, if wedded properly to Jewish religion.

Other branches of Orthodox Jews could not envision a partnership with vehemently anti-religious Jews and, therefore, staunchly opposed any engagement with secular Zionism.

The situation has changed dramatically over the past 75 years. As Orthodox Jews are typically preservationist and traditionalist, sometimes we don't notice that a paradigm has shifted. Orthodox Jews are conservative by nature, and aren't always nimble enough to pivot when the situation changes.

Most of secular Israel today is no longer anti-religious. Most are deeply traditional and deeply committed to traditional Jewish values, culture, and customs. Though they do not embrace full halachik observance, most are sympathetic to religion and to Jewish destiny. Much of the classic Orthodox opposition to secular Zionism feels somewhat antiquated. The current version of secular Zionism should be easier to integrate, and it should be easier to create inclusion.

#### Appreciating Chayalim

Perhaps war will update prevailing Orthodox perspectives upon secular Israel. Perhaps, in the aftermath of the war, more Orthodox Jews will be capable of viewing secular Israelis favorably. During the war we fought shoulder-to-shoulder while heralding the bravery and commitment of our soldiers. Soldiers were roundly referred to as "kodesh" or holy and no time more so than when, unfortunately, they fell in battle defending our land and our people. Orthodox Jews from across the religious spectrum perceived inner holiness in their bravery, patriotism and self-sacrifice for Jewish history.

Will this perspective last? Will this spirit spill over? After continually referring to secular soldiers as "holy" or Kadosh will more Orthodox Jews seek inclusive approaches to non-religious Israelis? I certainly hope so.