

# Parsha Ponders

Vayikra | March 24, 2020 | 29 Adar 5780

## *The delightful smell of improvement<sup>1</sup>*

עולה אשה ריח ניחוח...

...an elevated fire offering, a pleasant smell<sup>2</sup>

As we begin the book of Leviticus, it's worthwhile to investigate the deeper meaning behind Temple offerings. Throughout the *Chumash*, offerings are referred to as a ריח ניחוח, a pleasant smell<sup>3</sup>. These verses suggest that offerings are something positive, something to be encouraged<sup>4</sup>. However, we find verses in the later prophets that discourage offerings. Hashem tells the people: "For what purpose do I need your abundant offerings?"<sup>5</sup>. Hashem sounds like He isn't interested in us bringing offerings. What changed<sup>6</sup>?

What's a smell? It's a prelude for something yet to come. Someone who comes home to the smell of freshly baked cookies will start to have their mouth salivate<sup>7</sup>. They will get really excited for what they're about to experience. If they find out that there are no cookies, it was just an artificial fragrance, they'd be very disappointed. The same principle is true for offerings.

When the Torah describes the sweet smell of Temple offerings, it's not sharing with us their intrinsic value. What it's teaching us is an offering is only the beginning. It should be an indicator of what's yet to come. Offerings are a message that we're sending to Hashem that we intend to improve. We want to do better, and this offering is the way to express that. Just like a smell, the offering is an indication of what's yet to come: improved *mitzvah* performance and sincere worship<sup>8</sup>.

In the times of the later prophets, the Jews weren't on the best level of observance. A lot of what they did was simply lip service. The prophets rebuked them for this. Furthermore, they taught the Jews that their offerings had become useless. The whole point of the offerings was to be an indicator of an intent to improve. When that didn't manifest, it was clear to all that the offerings weren't sincere. They too, were lip service. As such, Hashem saw no value in them, and rejected them outright.

Now that we can no longer bring offerings, this "pleasing smell" of an intention to improve is missing. The closest equivalent are the *kabbalos*, personal commitments, that people pledge before Yom Kippur. These can serve the same purpose, to inspire and oblige a person to improve. However, they are only effective if the intent to improve is carried out. Otherwise, the commitment is proved to have been meaningless.

Good Shabbos

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<sup>1</sup> Heard from [Rabbi Moshe Schapiro](#) of Bergenfield, NJ in 5779

<sup>2</sup> [Leviticus](#) 1:9

<sup>3</sup> For example, [Genesis](#) 8:21, [Exodus](#) 29:18, [Leviticus](#) *loc. cit.*, [Numbers](#) 15:14, to name a few

<sup>4</sup> The [Ramban](#) to [Leviticus](#) *loc. cit.* says this verse teaches us the purpose for offerings. However, read on. Also *cf.* [Moreh Nevuchim](#) 3:46 (brought by the [Ramban](#)) who says offerings aren't intrinsically valuable, just simply a means to negate idol worship. See as well the [Ramban's](#) questions on this explanation

<sup>5</sup> [Isaiah](#) 1:11

<sup>6</sup> *Cf.* [Lekach Tov](#) *parshas Ki Sisa*, which simply says it depends if we're following Hashem's Will, or not

<sup>7</sup> [Rabbi Schapiro's](#) parable

<sup>8</sup> [Chiddushei HaRim](#), brought in [Chiddushei HaRim](#) *Likkutei HaRim*, [Likkutei Yehudah](#), and [Ma'ayana shel Torah](#) to [Leviticus](#) *loc. cit.* He was preceded by the [Ma'aseh Hashem](#) 2:27, brought by [HaKesav VeHaKabbalah](#) to [Leviticus](#) *loc. cit.* and [Torah Sheleimah](#) XXV *Miluim* 1:14 (p. 278)