

Parsha Paths: Korach: Respect the Kohen

Land of Milk and Honey

Moses sent for Dathan and Abiram, sons of Eliab; but they said, “We will not come! Is it not enough that you brought us from a land flowing with milk and honey to have us die in the wilderness, that you would also lord it over us (Bamidbar 16:12-13)

I have come down to rescue them from the Egyptians and to bring them out of that land to a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey, the region of the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites (Shmot 3:8)

And he shall obtain so much milk that he shall eat curds. Thus everyone who is left in the land shall feed on curds and honey. (Isaiah 7:22)

How Do You Burn Ktoret?

זאת עשו קחו-לכם מחתות קרח וכל-עדתו:

Do this: You, Korah and all your band, take fire pans, (Bamidbar 16:6)

מחתתיו AND ITS FIRE-PANS — These had a cavity to hold things so that the coals might be taken in them from the altar in order to carry them on to the inner altar for the incense. And because of their use for raking the coals into them (חתייה) they were called מחתות. This word is of the same root and meaning as the verb in, (Isaiah 30:14) “חתייה” fire from the fire-place,” which has the meaning of drawing fire from its place. Similar is, (Proverbs 6:27) “היחתייה” “Can a man rake fire into his bosom?” (Rashi Shmot 27:3)

Not Only For Ritual

And he, [who recited the blessing over the wine], also says the blessing over the incense [mugmar], although they only bring the incense to the diners after the meal. (Mishnah Brachot 6:6)

מוגמר – they were accustomed to bring trees of spices/perfume after the meal snuff-dishes on a fire for the purposes [of providing] a good smell. (Bartenura Brachot 6:6)

They may place incense on top of coals on Erev Shabbat at dusk, (Tosefta Shabbat 1:11)

one may not place incense on burning coals on a Festival, but in the house of Rabban Gamliel they did place incense. Rabbi Eliezer bar Tzadok said: On many occasions I followed Father into Rabban Gamliel's house, and I noticed that they would not actually place incense on burning coals on a Festival, but rather they would bring perforated coal pans [*ardaska'ot*] made of iron, filled them with smoke on the eve of the Festival, and plugged their holes on the Festival eve. On the following day, when the guests entered, they opened the holes, and it turned out that the house was perfumed on its own. (Betzah 22b)

Ktoret

וַיִּקְחוּ אִישׁ מִחֲתָתוֹ וַיִּתְּנוּ עֲלֵיהֶם אֵשׁ וַיִּשִׂמוּ עֲלֵיהֶם קֹטֶרֶת וַיַּעֲמְדוּ פֶתַח אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וּמֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן:
They each took their fire pan, put fire in it, laid incense on it, and took a place at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, as did Moses and Aaron. (Bamidbar 16:18)

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל-מֹשֶׁה קַח-לָךְ סָמִים, נֹטֵף וּשְׁחֵלֶת וְחֹלְבָנָה, סָמִים, וְלִבְנָה זָפָה: בַּד בָּבַד, יְהִיָּה (שמות 30-34)
תְּנוּ רִבְנוֹן: פִּיטוּם הַקֹּטֶרֶת: הַצָּרִי, וְהַצִּיפּוֹרָן, וְהַחֲלִבָּנָה, וְהַלְּבוֹנָה – מִשְׁקַל שִׁבְעִים שֶׁל שִׁבְעִים מָנֶה. מוֹר, וְקִצִּיעָה, שִׁיבּוֹלֶת נֶרְדִּי, וְכַרְכּוֹם – מִשְׁקַל שִׁשָּׁה עֶשְׂרֵי שֶׁל שִׁשָּׁה עֶשְׂרֵי מָנֶה. הַקּוֹשֵׁט – שְׁנַיִם עֶשְׂרֵי, קִילוּפָה – שְׁלֹשָׁה, וְקִנְמוֹן – תְּשַׁעַה. בּוֹרִית כְּרִשִּׁינָה – תְּשַׁעַה קֶבִּיץ, יֵין קִפְרִיסִין – סְאִין תִּלְתָּא קֶבִּיץ תִּלְתָּא. (כריתות 6)

of the House of Avtinas did not want to teach about the secret of the preparation of the incense,. The Sages taught in a *baraita*: The members of the House of Avtinas were expert in the technique of preparing the incense, and they did not want to teach others. The Sages sent for and brought craftsmen from Alexandria in Egypt. And the Alexandrian craftsmen knew how to blend the spices like they did, but they did not know how to cause the smoke to rise like the House of Avtinas did. . . (Yoma 38a)

A woman may not go out . . . with a perfume vial; (Mishnah Shabbat 6:3)

The Secret of the Ktoret

וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל-אַהֲרֹן קַח אֶת-הַמִּחְתָּה וְתֵן-עָלֶיהָ אֵשׁ מֵעַל הַמִּזְבֵּחַ וְשִׂים קֹטֶרֶת וְהוֹלֵךְ מִהֲרָה אֶל-הָעֵדָה וְכַפֵּר עֲלֵיהֶם כִּי-יֵצֵא הַקָּצֶף מִלִּפְנֵי יְהוָה הַחַל הַגִּגִּיף: וַיִּקַּח אַהֲרֹן כַּאֲשֶׁר | דִּבֶּר מֹשֶׁה וַיֵּרָץ אֶל-תּוֹךְ הַקָּהָל וְהִנֵּה הַחַל הַגִּגִּיף בָּעַם וַיִּתֵּן אֶת-הַקֹּטֶרֶת וַיִּכַּפֵּר עַל-הָעָם: וַיַּעֲמֵד בֵּין-הַמֵּתִים וּבֵין הַחַיִּים וַתַּעֲצֵר הַמִּגֵּפָה:

Then Moses said to Aaron, "Take the fire pan, and put on it fire from the altar. Add incense and take it quickly to the community and make expiation for them. For wrath has gone forth from GOD: the plague has begun!" Aaron took it, as Moses had ordered, and ran to the midst of the congregation, where the plague had begun among the people. He put on the incense and made expiation for the people; he stood between the dead and the living until the plague was checked (Bamidbar 17:11-13)

Donkey

Moses was much aggrieved and he said to God, “Pay no regard to their oblation. I have not taken the donkey of any one of them, nor have I wronged any one of them.” Bamidbar 16:15)

If so, why are all of the above *halakhot* stated in the Torah only in reference to an ox or a donkey? Rather, the reason is that the verse speaks of a common scenario,” (Mishnah Bava Kama 5:7)

“When you see the donkey of your enemy lying under its burden and would refrain from raising it, you must nevertheless help raise it”. (Shmot 23:5)

“Lo, your king is coming to you. He is victorious, triumphant, Yet humble עני, riding on a donkey,” (Zechariah 9:9)

חזק ונתחזק הסופר לא יזק לא היום ולא לעולם עד שיעלה חמור בסולם שיעקב אבינו חלם

Earthquake or Not?

BUT IF THE ETERNAL CREATE ‘B’RIAH.’ Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra wrote:

“Some scholars say that b’riah indicates producing something from nothing. But, [continues Ibn Ezra], many countries have already been rent [by earthquakes], and their inhabitants went down alive into the pit. Rather, the meaning of b’riah is ‘cutting off,’ from [the expression] ‘u’varei’ (and they shall cut) them” [thus meaning here: “if the Eternal will ‘cut them’ down by causing the ground to open up its mouth etc.”].

The correct interpretation is that the term b’riah is [indeed] used [in the sense of] bringing forth something from nothing, for we have no other word in the Sacred Language denoting this concept [creatio ex nihilo] except for this one. The explanation of the matter is that splitting open the [crust of the] earth is [indeed] not a new creation, but that the ground should open up its mouth to swallow up [certain people] is a new event which had never occurred previously. For when the earth is split open, as happens many times during an earthquake which is called zalzalah, *The Arabic word for earthquake. See (Exodus), Vol. II, p. 324, Note 512. it remains open and the chasm becomes filled with water, like ponds; but that it should open up and close again immediately — like a person who opens his mouth to swallow and closes it after he has swallowed — this event was a new happening which occurred [only] on that day, as if it were created out of nothing. This is the meaning of the expression, and the earth closed upon them [that it closed up immediately after consuming them, and left no sign that it had opened]. It is for this reason that [when saying that] the ground did cleave asunder, Scripture says: And the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up. And according to the opinion of our Rabbis [who say] that the opening of Gehenna came near to this spot — that phenomenon too, was a new event which occurred [only] at that moment. (Ramban Bamidbar 16:30)

דְּבַרֵי עֲמוּס אֲשֶׁר-הָיָה בְּנִקְדִים מִתְקוּעַ אֲשֶׁר חָזָה עַל-יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּיָמַי | עֲזִיָּה מֶלֶךְ-יְהוּדָה וּבְיָמַי יִרְבְּעָם
בְּ-יֹאשׁ מֶלֶךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל שְׁנָתַיִם לִפְנֵי הָרַעַשׁ:

The words of Amos, a sheep breeder from Tekoa, who prophesied concerning Israel in the reigns of Kings Uzziah of Judah and Jeroboam son of Joash of Israel, two years before the earthquake. (Amos 1:1)

וְנִסְתָּם גִּיא־הָרִי כִּי־יִגִיעַ גִּי־הָרִים אֶל־אֶזַל וְנִסְתָּם כַּאֲשֶׁר נִסְתָּם מִפְּנֵי הָרָעַשׁ בַּיָּמִי עֲזַיָּה מֶלֶךְ־יְהוּדָה
וְבָא יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי כָל־קְדוֹשִׁים עִמָּךְ:

And the Valley in the Hills shall be stopped up, for the Valley of the Hills shall reach only to Azal; it shall be stopped up as it was stopped up as a result of the earthquake in the days of King Uzziah of Judah. And the Eternal my God, with all the holy beings, will come to you. (Zechariah 14:5)

צום הרעש משום שארץ ישראל רעשה ונפלו ממנה
הרבה ערים ומתו תחת החרבות חכמים
ויש לו במקראות רמז "בזעם תצעד ארץ". מזמן שחרבה
ירושלים עד הזמן שקרה (הרעש) בארץ ישראל מניין בזע"ם

From the Cairo Genizah

Rabba bar bar Hanna and Korach

Come, I will show you those who were swallowed by the earth due to the sin of Korah. I saw two rifts in the ground that were issuing smoke. The Arab took a shearing of wool, and dipped it in water, and inserted it on the head of a spear, and placed it in there. And when he removed the wool, it was scorched. He said to me: Listen to what you hear; and I heard that they were saying: Moses and his Torah are true, and they, i.e., we in the earth, are liars. (Bava Batra 74a)

Why an Almond?

The next day Moses entered the Tent of the Pact, and there the staff of Aaron of the house of Levi had sprouted: it had brought forth sprouts, produced blossoms, and borne almonds (Bamidbar 17:23)

וַיְהִי דְבַר־יְהוָה אֵלַי לֵאמֹר מֶה־אַתָּה רֹאֶה יְרֵמְיָהוּ וְאִמָּר מִקֵּל שִׁקְדֵי אֲנִי רֹאֶה:
וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֵלַי הִיטַבְתָּ לְרֹאֹת כִּי־שִׁקְדֵי אֲנִי עַל־דְּבָרִי לַעֲשׂוֹתוֹ:

The word of God came to me: What do you see, Jeremiah? I replied: I see a branch of an almond tree. God said to me: You have seen right, For I am watchful to bring My word to pass. (Jeremiah 1:11-12)

You have seen well This almond tree hastens to blossom before all other trees. I, too, hasten to perform My word. And the Midrash Aggadah (Ecc. Rabbah 12:8) explains: An almond tree takes twenty-one days from its blossoming until it is completely ripe, as the number of days between the seventeenth of Tammuz, when the city was broken into, until the ninth of Ab, when the Temple was burnt. (Rashi)

Uziah, Almonds and Earthquakes

When he was strong, he grew so arrogant he acted corruptly: he trespassed against his God by entering the Temple of GOD to offer incense on the incense altar. . . . Uziah, holding the censer and ready to burn incense, got angry; but as he got angry with the priests, leprosy broke out on his forehead in front of the priests in the House of GOD beside the incense altar (Divrei Hayamim 2 26)

But why did it bring forth almonds? Because it is a fruit that blossoms earlier than all other fruits; so, too, the punishment of him who sets himself in opposition to the constituted priesthood comes quickly, just as we find stated in the case of Uziah (II Chronicles 26:19) “And the leprosy instantly broke out in his forehead”. — Its translation in the Targum is: וכפת שגדין, meaning that it produced a kind of cluster of almonds, knotted together one upon the other (Aramaic כפת denotes “tied”). (Rashi to Bamidbar 17:23)

In the year that King Uziah died, I beheld my Sovereign seated on a high and lofty throne; and the skirts of God’s robe filled the temple
The doorposts would shake at the sound of the one who called, and the House kept filling with smoke (Isaiah 6)

In the year of the death i.e., when he was smitten with zaraath. (Rashi)