



PARSHAS KI SISA – URI SCHMULIAN

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל-מֹשֶׁה קַח-לְךָ סַמִּים, נֹטָף וּשְׁחַלֵּת וְחַלְבֹנָה, סַמִּים, וּלְבָנָה זָכָה בַד בְּבַד יִהְיֶה

G-d said to Moshe, "Take for yourself spices, balsam, onycha and galbanum, spices and pure frankincense; and they should be equal in weight." (Shemos 30:34)

Many commentators ask on this verse, why does the Torah use the word spices twice? Surely only once is sufficient!? The Baal Haturim says that the last letters of סַמִּים קַח-לְךָ spell the word חכם, a wise man. According to the Baal Haturim, the first 'spices' is referring to wine, which is said to make a man wise. There is an alternative answer, brought by the Ramban. The Ramban clarifies this question by bringing the Ibn Ezra's explanation. The Ibn Ezra says that you should translate the Posuk differently, i.e, 'Take these spices, namely balsam, onycha and galbanum, and these are the spices you should take, and pure frankincense with them.'

However, the Ramban disagrees, on the basis of syntax. Why would the Torah waste words, when it is not the style of the Torah to repeat that which has already been said? To answer this, the Ramban says what he thinks is the real explanation. He goes according to what our Sages say (in Kerisos 6b), that the two times that it says 'spices' it is referring to other spices, in addition to the spices that have already been mentioned.

To back this up, he brings Rashi, who quotes the Sages interpretation in full. Rashi says that the first 'spices' means two different spices, and when you add on the balsam, onycha and galbanum, it equals five. The second 'spices' is everything we have said so far, so if you add five, and also the pure frankincense, it equals eleven, and we have learnt that there were eleven spices used in the ketores. The reason that the Torah didn't mention all of the spices, is because only the four mentioned spices should be equal in weight, and that other spices that are good for incense should be added to them.

This is similar to what the Torah says about the anointing oil. It says that Moshe should make the oil by following the rules of perfumery, without any instructions from the Torah, but rather relying on the expertise of the perfumers. So too in this case, the Torah says to take an equal, but unspecified, weight of these four spices, add other spices to them, and to make from all of them a perfumed incense according to the method of the perfumers.

The Sages also say something similar in the gemara (Kerisos 6b). Raish Lakish said, "What are the connotations of the word 'ketores'? Something that emits smoke (koter) in a rising column. Because the Torah commanded in regards to incense only that it should be made of substances that emit smoke in a rising column, following the method of the perfumers."

This teaches us something that applies to everyone. In life, there will be times in which we have no guidance, no help, yet we have to make a choice, design something, help someone, and we just have to do what we think is right. We always have to look in the Torah, a reference book, whatever it may be, and we have to follow whatever it says, and rely on its expertise.