

Vayikra: Se'or u'Devash

- Rabbi Unterman, in this lesson, seeks to show the relevance of Vayikra with its kurbanot. Leaven and honey are prohibited on the altar. But salt is essential. They are all symbols. Leaven is the ingredient which makes us behave badly. It corrupts and blemishes. Honey symbolizes people out for a good time always choosing the good things in life. Salt is the symbol of permanence.

Vayikra: Rabbi Unterman - Seor Devash uMelach

(This is a Dvar Torah by Rav Maurice Unterman zt"l, on Parshat Vayikra. I have distilled the thought from a longer address to a Bar Mitzvah boy and two bridal couples at his congregation, the Marble Arch synagogue.. [NES])

This book (of Vayikra) is the most under-rated book in the Bible. Let me tell you why. Just because it deals largely with the sacrifices offered up in Temple times, people tend to skip over it as though it were no longer relevant and meaningful to them. ... "What have these sacrifices to do with us?" they ask. But I want to show all you who are listening this morning, how vastly mistaken they are

Hashem says, "You must on no account burn on the altar" kol seor vechal devash, Neither seor which means leaven, the substance which causes things to ferment, nor devash, nor any form of honey, whether it derives from bees, or dates or fruit of any kind. Volumes have been written on this verse, trying to discover the reasons for disqualifying both leaven and honey from God's altar.

To add to our puzzlement, the verse goes on to state that salt, by contrast, is essential, for melach brit e-ohecha, it is "God's covenant with his children". Now what is this all about? Why the taboo on honey and leaven and the insistence upon salt?

Our sages tell us that leaven, honey, salt, are all symbols.

Leaven, seor, is that ingredient within us which makes us behave badly, which cause us all of a sudden to act improperly, to do things which let us down and let our families down too. And the Rabbis used to diagnose such behavior in two words, seor shebeisa the leaven, the ferment in our make up, something which makes a good person suddenly show disrespect, suddenly neglect his work, and so you see why God says, leaven which corrupts and blemishes and harms, this has no place at My holy altar.

We come to the second ingredient, honey. This symbolizes, say our Sages, the sort of people who live only for a good time, chasing always the sweet things of life, concerned only with kicks, with having fun, ... The greatest problem among teen-agers today, nice, upright, refined, intelligent teenagers, is that sometimes they are led astray in pursuit of things which seem to them to be as sweet as honey, but in the end, it is the sting and not the honey they feel. So honey has no place on God's holy altar.

By contrast, melach brit Elokecha, salt is the “Covenant of the Almighty with His children”, because salt is the symbol of that which is unchanging, which remains unaffected by the rapid change of life.

(Written by Rabbi Maurice Uniterman zt"l. Submitted by Nisson Shulman.)