



'You Have Made Me Stink' – the Language of Smell

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OFFENSIVE ODOURS IN THE CLASSROOM

1. bSanhedrin 11a - Vilna edition

Likewise Rabbi (Yehuda HaNasi) was sitting and interpreting, and he smelled the smell of garlic. He said: whoever has eaten garlic should leave.	כי הא דיתבי רבי וקא דריש והריח ריח שום אמר מי שאכל שום יצא
Rabbi Hiyya stood up and left. They all stood and left.	עמד רבי חייה ויצא עמדו כולן ויצאו
In the morning, Rabbi Shimon son of Rabbi found R. Hiyya and said to him: Is it you who upset my father?	בשחר מצאו רבי שמעון בר' לרבי חייה אמר ליה אתה הוא שציערת לאבא
He said to him: this sort of thing should not happen in Israel.	אמר לו לא תהא כזאת בישראל

QUESTIONS:

- What does this appear to be about? What else is happening?
- How might the context of this text influence our understanding of it?

2. bBava Metzia 58b – Vilna edition

The tanna taught a baraita before Rav Nachman bar Yitzchak: Anyone who causes their fellow's face to blanch in public, it is as if he sheds blood.	תני תנא קמיה דרב נחמן בר יצחק: כל המלביץ פני חברו ברבים כאילו שופך דמים.
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3. Midrash Bereishit Rabba - Parashat Lech Lecha 41:14 - Albeck Edition

It is told of R. (E)liezer that his brothers were ploughing in the plain and he was ploughing on the hill, [when] his cow fell and was injured [<i>lit</i> broken]. It was to his benefit that his cow was injured.	מעשה בר' ליעזר שהיו אחיו חורשים במישור והוא חורש בהר, נפלה פרתו ונשברה לטובתו נשברה פרתו
He ran away and went to Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai.	ברח והלך אצל רבן יוחנן בן זכאי
He would eat lumps of earth [because he could not afford food] until his mouth gave off a foul odour	והיה אוכל קוזזות אדמה עד שעשה פיו ריח רע
They [the other students] went and said to Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai: the mouth odour of R. Eliezer is a problem.	הלכו ואמרו לרבן יוחנן בן זכאי ריח פיו שלר' אליעזר קשה
He [Yochanan] said to him: Just as the smell of your mouth became malodorous on account of Torah, so may the [favourable] aroma of your learning go out from one end of the world to the other.	אמר לו כשם שהבאיש ריח פיך על התורה כך יהיה ריח תלמודך הולך מסוף העולם ועד סופו

QUESTION:

- How might this story foreshadow later events?

'THE NOSE KNOWS...' or does it?

4. Genesis 27: 26-27

Then his father Isaac said to him [Jacob]: "Come close and kiss me, my son";	ויאמר אליו יצחק אביו גִּשָּׁה נָא וּשְׁקָה לִי בְּנִי:
So he approached and kissed him. And he smelled the scent of his clothes and he blessed him, saying: "See, the smell of my son is like the smell of a field that has blessed."	ויגש וישק לו וירח את ריח בגדיו ויברכהו ויאמר ראה ריח בני כריח שדה אשר ברכו יהוה:

QUESTIONS

- Which other Senses feature in the Isaac/Jacob story?
- How Reliable Is the Sense of Smell?

UNSAVOURY

5. Genesis 34:25-26 and 30

On the third day, when they were in pain, two of Jacob's sons, Simeon and Levi, brothers of Dinah, each took his sword, they went to the city undetected, and killed every male.	וַיְהִי בַיּוֹם הַשְּׁלִישִׁי בְהִיוֹתָם כְּאֲבִים וַיִּקְחוּ שְׁנֵי בְנֵי יַעֲקֹב שְׁמֹעוֹן וְלֵוִי אַחֵי דִינָה אִישׁ חָרְבוּ וַיָּבֵאוּ עַל הָעִיר בְּטֶחַח וַיַּהַרְגוּ כָּל זָכָר
They also killed Hamor and his son Shechem by the sword. [Then] they took Dinah from Shechem's house, and left.	וְאֵת חָמוֹר וְאֵת שָׁכֶם בְּנוֹ הָרָגוּ לְפִי חָרֵב וַיִּקְחוּ אֶת דִּינָה מִבֵּית שָׁכֶם וַיֵּצְאוּ:
Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, "You have made trouble for me by making me stink to the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites and the Perizzites. I am few in number, so that if they unite against me and attack me, I and my household will be destroyed."	וַיֹּאמֶר יַעֲקֹב אֶל-שְׁמֹעוֹן וְאֶל-לֵוִי עֲכַרְתֶּם אֹתִי לְהַבְאִישׁנִי בִישֵׁב הָאָרֶץ בְּכַנְעֲנִי וּבַפְּרִזִּי וְאֲנִי מְתִי מְסָפָר וְנֶאֱסָפוּ עָלַי וְהִכּוּנִי וְנִשְׁמַדְתִּי אֲנִי וּבֵיתִי:

Exodus 7:21

...and the fish in the Nile died. The Nile stank so that the Egyptians could not drink water from the Nile; and there was blood throughout the land of Egypt.	וַיִּהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר-בַּיָּאֵר מֵתָהּ וַיִּבְאֵשׁ הַיָּאֵר וְלֹא-יָכְלוּ מִצְרַיִם לְשָׁתוֹת מַיִם מִן-הַיָּאֵר וַיְהִי הַדָּם בְּכָל-אֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם:
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Exodus 16: 19-20

And Moses said to them, "Let no one leave any of it [the manna] over until morning."	וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֲלֵהֶם אִישׁ אֶל-יְיָוִתֵר מִמֶּנּוּ עַד-בֹּקֶר:
But they paid no attention to Moses; some of them left of it until morning, and it became infested with maggots and stank. And Moses was angry with them.	וְלֹא-שָׁמְעוּ אֶל-מֹשֶׁה וַיֹּותרוּ אֲנָשִׁים מִמֶּנּוּ עַד-בֹּקֶר וַיִּרְם תּוֹלְעִים וַיִּבְאֵשׁ וַיִּקְצַף עֲלֵהֶם מֹשֶׁה:

Exodus 5:21

... and they [the Israelite elders] said to them [Moses & Aaron], "May יהוה look upon you and judge/punish you for making us loathsome to Pharaoh and his courtiers - putting a sword in their hands to slay us."	וַיֹּאמְרוּ אֲלֵהֶם יְרֵא יְהוָה עֲלֵיכֶם וַיִּשְׁפֹּט אֲשֶׁר הִבְאִשְׁתֶּם אֶת-רֵיחֹנוּ בְעֵינֵי פַרְעֹה וּבְעֵינֵי עַבְדָּיו לְתַת־חָרֵב בְּיָדָם לְהַרְגֵנוּ:
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THE FIRST SMELL IN THE BIBLE

6. Genesis 8: 20-21

Then Noah built an altar to יהוה; he took [some] of each pure animal and of each pure bird, and offered burnt offerings on the altar.	וַיִּבֶן נֹחַ מִזְבֵּחַ לַיהוָה וַיִּקַּח מִכָּל הַבְּהֵמָה הַטְּהוֹרָה וּמִכָּל הָעוֹף הַטְּהוֹר וַיַּעַל עֹלֹת בַּמִּזְבֵּחַ:
יהוה smelled the pleasing aroma, and יהוה resolved: "I will never again doom the earth on account of humankind, since the inclination of the human heart/mind is evil from youth; nor will I ever again destroy everything that lives, as I have done."	וַיִּרַח יְהוָה אֵת רֵיחַ הַנִּיחֹחַ וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל לְבוֹ לֹא אֶסֶף לְקַלֵּל עוֹד אֶת הָאָדָמָה בְּעִבּוֹר הָאָדָם כִּי יֵצֵר לֵב הָאָדָם רַע מִנְעוּרָיו וְלֹא אֶסֶף עוֹד לְהַכּוֹת אֶת כָּל חַי כְּאֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי:

QUESTIONS

- Does God (perceive) Smell?
- What does the Noah passage imply about Smell?

7. Abraham Ibn Ezra on Genesis 8:21

Heaven forbid [that one deduce from this] that God smells, nor does [God] eat...
Rather the meaning is that he received the offering, and it was pleasing to him... just as a person smells a good aroma and hungers....

וחלילה חלילה להיות השם מריח, ולא אוכל
רק הטעם שקבל העולה, וישרה לפניו, כאדם...
שמריח ריח טוב והוא רעב.

MORE THAN LITERAL?

8. Ezekiel 20:41

I will accept you as a pleasing aroma when I bring you out from among the peoples, and gather you from the lands within which you are scattered; and I will be sanctified in the sight of the nations.

בְּרִיחַ נִיחַח אֶרְצָה אֶתְכֶם בְּהוֹצִיאִי אֶתְכֶם מִן־הָעַמִּים
וְקִבַּצְתִּי אֶתְכֶם מִן־הָאֲרָצוֹת אֲשֶׁר נִפְצַתֶם בָּם וְנִקְדַּשְׁתִּי
בְּכֶם לְעֵינֵי הַגּוֹיִם:

9. Isaiah 11:3

He shall **sniff out** [the truth]-by means of his reverence for יהוה:
He shall not judge by what his eyes behold,
Nor render decision based on what his ears hear.

וְהָרִיחוּ בִּינְיָאֵת יְהוָה
וְלֹא־לְמַרְאֵה עֵינָיו יִשְׁפֹּט
וְלֹא־לְמִשְׁמַע אָזְנוֹ יוֹכִיחַ:

10. Ibn Ezra on Isaiah 11:3

'And he will smell/sniff out...'. At times the sense of hearing (*lit.* the ear) may be mistaken into hearing a non-existent sound; likewise the eye may be mistaken in seeing something in motion which in reality is stationary...
...**only the sense of smell is not deceived**...

והריחו — פעמים טעמה הרגשת האוזן
שתשמע ואין קול,
גם העין טעמה שירא' לה הנח שהוא נע,
רק הרגשת הריח לא טעמה...

SMELL IN RELIGIOUS PRACTICE

11. bBerachot 35a

Our rabbis taught:
It is forbidden for a person to derive benefit from this world without [saying] a blessing.
Anyone who does benefit without blessing has defrauded [i.e. used something improperly].

תנו רבנן:
אסור לו לאדם שיהנה מן העולם הזה בלא ברכה
וכל הנהנה מן העולם הזה בלא ברכה - מעל.

12. bBerachot 43b

Rav Zutra bar Toviya said in the name of Rav:
From where [is it derived] that one makes a blessing over a **smell**? It says: "Let every soul praise God."
What is the thing from which the soul benefits, but the body does not benefit from it?
You must admit: it is the [sense of] smell.

אמר רב זוטרא בר טובייה אמר רב:
מנין שמברכין על הריח - שנאמר: בכל הנשמה
תהלל יה
איזהו דבר שהנשמה נהנית ממנו ואין הגוף נהנה
ממנו - הוי אומר זה הריח

13. Kitzur Shulchan Arukh 96

A blind person does not make a blessing over the candle.
One who does not smell should not make a blessing over the spices [at Havdalah].

סומא אינו מברך על הנר,
ומי שאינו מריח לא יברך על הבשמים.

14. Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chayyim 297:5

A person who cannot smell does not make a blessing over the spices,
unless their intention is to exempt [i.e. fulfil the obligation for] minors in the household who have reached [the age of] education, or to exempt someone who does not know [how to do it].

מי שאינו מריח אינו מברך על הבשמים
אא"כ נתכוין להוציא בני ביתו הקטנים שהגיעו
לחנינוך או להוציא מי שאינו יודע.

¹ Psalm 150:6