



FEDERATION

FEDERATION



# The Five Senses

Rabbi Yaakov Hamer | Finchley Central Federation/Sharei Orah

**The sense of smell is one of our five basic senses and plays an important role in our daily lives. In addition to alerting us to dangerous fumes and enabling us to enjoy a myriad of wonderful scents, smell is closely linked with the sense of taste and our ability to enjoy food and drink. With that said, it is a sense, many people feel is dispensable. In a survey of 7,000 young people around the world, about half of those between the age of 16 and 30 said that they would rather lose their sense of smell than give up access to technology like laptops or cell phones! Tell them to read on!**

Let us examine the concept of smell in Torah to gain a deeper insight into this wonderful sense. Smell or *rei'ach* as it is referred to in lashon ha'kodesh, is a fascinating idea with much depth and symbolism. Perhaps the first place where the Torah speaks about a human being smelling something is in this week's Parsha where it says, *Va'ya'rach es rei'ach begadav*, and he (Yitzchok) smelled the scent of his clothing. As Yitzchok was blind, the sense of smell was very important to discern and recognise his surroundings. It was this sense, to a great extent, he relied upon in deciding that it was, in fact, Eisav standing before him and not Yaakov.

There is a fascinating Gemara in Masseches Brochos 43b which questions the source of reciting a bracha before smelling a pleasant odour? The Gemara previously taught that one is obligated to recite a bracha before partaking in any pleasure in this world. Rav Zvi Elimelech of Dinov (*Bnei Yissoschor – Sivan – Maamar Dalet*) is bothered by the Gemara's question. Why should one think that the pleasure of *rei'ach* is any different to the pleasure of taste? The Gemara has already ruled that one must recite a blessing before deriving pleasure from this world, surely *rei'ach* is no different! (On the contrary, the commentaries struggle to understand why one does not recite a blessing

on hearing beautiful music as this is also a physical pleasure and should therefore require a bracha beforehand.)

He explains that since the time of the original sin, good and evil became enmeshed with one another. Nothing is totally good or totally bad. Everything has elements of good, as well as aspects of bad. It is our job to refine, to separate and to access the good while leaving behind the bad. We try to accomplish this, every time we eat or drink by initially reciting a bracha. Food has the capacity to give us strength to be able to function in the world and to serve Hashem properly. At the same time, it is very alluring and can cause us to indulge, become unhealthy and ultimately chase after physical pleasure. We recite a bracha in which we consciously remind ourselves that Hashem is the source of the food and it is He who has allowed us to partake of it. It should therefore be used appropriately. It follows that the mental exercise we should be engaging in every time we eat is, I am aware that You, Hashem have caused the food to come into existence and that You are the one who ultimately has given me this food to be used appropriately.

He points out that out of the five senses of sight, sound, smell, taste and touch, four of them were involved in this original sin of

Adam and Eve. The exception being the sense of smell. The sin began with, *Va'tereh ha'isha* – and the woman saw the fruit. (Sight) She took the fruit, (touch) ate from it (taste) and told Adam to eat from it also. He listened to his wife (sound) and followed her example. The one sense which remained pure was the sense of smell. It is for this reason that the sense of smell is considered to a more sublime and refined sense as it was never tainted by the original sin. It is for this reason that the Gemara questions the source of the obligation to recite a bracha on smell as one might think that a blessing is not needed. The source provided is the last passuk in Tehillim, *Kol ha'neshama tehallel Kah* – every soul shall praise Hashem. The Gemara explains, what is something that the *neshama*, the soul specifically, derives enjoyment from? This is the sense of smell and nevertheless the passuk says that the *neshama* must praise Hashem for this pleasure.

It follows that the sense of smell is associated with one's soul and is more spiritual than the other senses. Indeed, on Motsai Shabbos when our *neshama yeseira* (additional connection to our soul) departs, we revive ourselves by smelling aromatic fragrances to give the *neshama* consolation for having been diminished. The Medrash says that tribe in Klal Yisroel associated with this sense is Menashe, מנשה which shares the same letters as the word *neshama*, נשמה as it is the *neshama* which benefits from this sense.

Let us hope that our actions serve as a *ri'ach*, a pleasant aroma to Hashem and that we will merit to see the great spiritual individual, the one about whom it says, *והריחו את יראת ה'*, and he will *smell* of the fear of Hashem. He will not need to judge with his eyes nor hear with his ears as he will be endowed with a heightened *sense of smell*, namely a profound connection with his *neshama*.

THIS PAGE IS KINDLY SPONSORED BY THE FEDERATION

DO YOU HAVE A SHAILA? ASK THE FEDERATION



SHAILATEXT 07860 017 641



FEDERATION