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Grape Vines

The *Mishnah* (4:2) describes the entrance to the *Heichal* as the “great gate”. The *Tifferet Yisrael* explains that it was given this name not for its size, but rather because it was the gate to the holiest part of the *Beit Ha’Mikdash*. The *Mishnah* (3:8) also explains that a grapevine made of gold was hung above the gate. People would donate golden grapes or leaves to the *Beit Ha’Mikdash* to add to the vine. What was the purpose of the vine?

The *Tifferet Yisrael* explains that whenever funds were required for the upkeep of the *Beit Ha’Mikdash* or for supporting the *kohanim*, the funds would be collected for the vine which were donated for this purpose. Consequently it acted as a source of money when the regular more immediate sources were exhausted. However why was a vine used for this purpose?

The *Rosh* (*Tamid* 29a), citing the *Yerushalmi*, explains that in the first *Beit Ha’Mikdash*, *Shlomo* planted a golden vine that literally bore golden fruit each year from which the *kohanim* were supported. In the second *Beit Ha’Mikdash*, this vine, whose fruit were a product of donations, was constructed as a replacement.

Alternatively the *Rambam* notes that *Am Yisrael* is often compared to as a grapevine.¹ They were therefore placed above the *Heichal* in order to evoke heavenly blessings. But why are *Am Yisrael* compared to a grapevine and how would this image have such an effect?

The *Tifferet Yisrael* explains that like a grapevine, *Am Yisrael* are soft and weak, yet its fruit are sweet. *Rav Hirsch* (*Tehillim* 80:9) explains in a similar direction that a vine is only valuable when it produces fruit. The wood on its own is worthless. Similarly *Am Yisrael’s* noble worth is a function of its fruit; when it fulfills its purpose.² Based on this understanding, perhaps then the vine serves as a reminder to *Am Yisrael*, that if they fulfill their task engaging in *Torah* and *mitzvot*, then that will indeed evoke heavenly blessing.

The *Tifferet Yisrael* adds that *Torah* itself is also compared to a vine (*Gemara Chulin* 92a). He explains that just as a vine needs physical assistance and propping up to succeed, so too with those that engage in *Torah*. The association is strengthened as the *kohanim* who (aside from the few days they worked in the *Beit Ha’Mikdash*) were the teachers and disseminators of *Torah*, were supported by this vine. Is there a relationship between these two motifs that the vine represents – *Torah* and *Am Yisrael*

In the same *Gemara* cited by the *Tifferet Yisrael* as the source of the vine referring to *Torah*, the *Gemara* also mentions that the vine resembles *Am Yisrael*. One of the explanation for this association is as follows:

R’ Shimon ben Lakish says, the nation is compared to a grapevine, the branches are the *ba’alei batim* (working men), the clusters [of grapes] are the *talmidei Chachamim*, the leaves are the *amei ha’aretz* (unlearned), and the small branches are the *reikanim* (empty people). This is what [the *Chachamim* of *Eretz Yisrael* sent], the clusters must pray for the leaves for without the leaves there will be no clusters.

In *R’ Shimon ben Lakish’s* description we find that the grapevine represents *Am Yisrael* and the vital relationship between all its parts in the upkeep of *Torah* and its study.

One can perhaps draw some beautiful conclusions from this relationship. Firstly the vine served as a reminder to the *kohanim* entering the *Heichal* to pray for every part of *Am Yisrael*. Secondly, it gave great respect to those wishing to support *Torah* in that their funds would adorn the holiest gate until they were needed. Finally, the appearance of the well loaded vine at the entrance to the *Heichal*, a testament to the fulfillment of this great relationship within *Am Yisrael*, between those who teach *Torah* and the ones that support it, would certainly evoke heavenly blessing.

Yisrael-Yitzchak Bankier

¹ Some examples *Yeshaya* 5:1-7, *Yechezkel* 15, *Tehillim* 80:9, *Gemara Chulin* 92a.

² *Rav Hirsch* also provides another explanation. The grape is the most crushed and beaten of the fruit. Yet this crushing (to make

wine) only serves to strength it to the extent that it eventually overpowers the one who crushed it. The same is true with *Am Yisrael* and its enemies.

Revision Questions

מדות ג' – ב' – ד' : א'

- How many pipes were there on the bottom south-west corner of the *mizbeach* and what were they used for? (ג: ב')
- What else was near that corner? (ג: ג')
- What were the dimension of the ramp of the *mizbeach*? (ג: א')
- From where were the stones for the *mizbeach* taken? (ד: א')
- What would cause these stones to become invalid for use in the construction of the *mizbeach* and why? (ד: א')
- According to *R' Akiva* what would they do to the stones every *erev Shabbat*? (ג: ד')
- How many "rings" were in front of the *mizbeach* and what were they used for? (ג: ה')
- What was to the north of the rings? (ה: ג')
- Where was the basin located? (ו: ג')
- What was the distance between the *ulam* and *mizbeach*? (ו: ג')
- What were the dimensions of the steps leading up to the *ulam*? (ו: ג')
- What were the dimensions of the entrance to the *ulam*? (ז: ג')
- What was above the entrance? (ז: ג')
- What was between the walls of the *ulam* and *heichal*? (ח: ג')
- What was above the entrance to the *heichal*? (ח: ג')
- Describe the entrance to the *heichal*? (ח: ד')
- What are the two opinions about how the doors opened to the *heichal*? (ח: ד')
- What were the two small doors used for on either side of the entrance to the *heichal*? (ח: ב')
- What are the two opinions about how the *kohen* would open the large doors to the *heichal*? (ח: ד')
- How many "*ta'im*" were there around the *heichal* and describe them? (ט: ג')
- Which *ta* had the most openings? (ט: ד')
- What were the dimensions of the *ta'im*? (ט: ד')
- Describe the *mesibah* and what was it used for? (ט: ה')
- What would divide between the *kodesh* and *kodesh ha'kodashim* in the attic of the *heichal*? (ט: ה')
- What were the dimensions of the *heichal*? (י: ד')
- Describe the *heichal* from floor to roof? (י: ד')
- Describe the *heichal* from east to west? (י: ד')
- Describe the *heichal* from north to south? (י: ד')

Local Shiurim

Sunday -Thursday

Between mincha & ma'ariv
Mizrachi Shul

Friday & Shabbat

10 minutes before mincha
Mizrachi Shul

Next Week's Mishnayot...

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	שבת קודש
8 th February י"ד שבט	9 th February ט"ו שבט	10 th February ט"ז שבט	11 th February י"ח שבט	12 th February י"ח שבט	13 th February י"ט שבט	14 th February כ' שבט
Midot 5:1-2	Midot 5:3-4	Kinim 1:1-2	Kinim 1:3-4	Kinim 2:1-2	Kinim 2:3-4	Kinim 2:5-3:1

