

## **Double edged sword of Ketores/Incense**



*In April 1992, Vendyl Jones and his team discovered 600 kilos of “reddish-brown organic substance” in a carefully sealed rock silo in another part of the Qumran cave complex. Subsequent analysis determined that this substance contained traces of at least eight of the eleven spices that were used in the manufacture of the ketoret.*

### ***In response to COVID-19:***

*The Sefardi prayer Nusah lists to say the Incense offering three times daily: once during the morning Korbanot, once before Aleynu LeShabayah, and once before the Minhah prayer. In some of the more Kabbalistic-oriented Siddurim, a verse from our portion (43:11) is added to add extra spiritual strength and zest to the reading. What follows is the conclusion of the incense offering and the verse with the Holy Names imbedded inside.*

*“It was taught: Bar Kappara says: Once in sixty or seventy years, half [the required annual amount of ketoret] came from the accumulated surpluses [left over from the three measures set aside each year for Yom Kippur]. Bar Kappara also taught: Had even a minuscule amount of [bee or fruit] honey been added to the ketoret, no one could have resisted [the pleasantness of] its fragrance. Why, then, was no honey blended into it? Because the Torah stated: “You may not burn any leaven or honey as a fire offering to God” (Leviticus 2:11).*

*“The God of [all heavenly and terrestrial] hosts is with us—the God of Yaacov is our assurance [and inspiration] forever, selah! O God of hosts, happy is the man who trusts only in You! O God save us! O King answer us on the day we call! May the offering of Yehudah and Yerushalayim be pleasing to God as in olden days and ancient years.*

*Some then add the following verse and say it three (3) times intending the Holy Names contained in the verse. These Names are not ever pronounced, rather they are heard in one's "mind's ear" only.*

*“And their father Israel said unto them: 'If it be so now, do this: take of the choice fruits of the land in your vessels, and carry down the man a present, a little balm, and a little honey, spicery and ladanum, nuts, and almonds”*

### FIRST TIME INTEND: KAVANOT

וְהוֹרִידוּ לְאִישׁ מִנְחָה, וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲבִיהֶם, אִם-בֶּן אֶפְרַיִם זֹאת עָשׂוּ--קָחוּ מִזְמַרְת הָאָרֶץ בְּכֻלֵּיכֶם:

If one is able to always intend this Name every moment it will be very beneficial.

וּמַעֲט דְבַשׁ, נִכְאֹת וְלֵט, בְּטַנִּים וּשְׁקָדִים, מַעֲט צָרִי.

This Name totals 216 or Gevurah/severity.

### SECOND TIME INTEND: KAVANOT

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲבִיהֶם, אִם-בֶּן אֶפְרַיִם זֹאת עָשׂוּ--קָחוּ מִזְמַרְת הָאָרֶץ בְּכֻלֵּיכֶם, וְהוֹרִידוּ לְאִישׁ מִנְחָה.

בְּטַנִּים וּשְׁקָדִים, נִכְאֹת וְלֵט, מִנְחָה: מַעֲט צָרִי, וּמַעֲט דְבַשׁ.

ש"צדגלפ

ר"פגמכא These letters come before the above Name.

ת"קהסמג These letters come after the above Name.

### THIRD TIME INTEND: KAVANOT

קחו--וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲבִיהֶם, אִם-בֶּן אֶפְרַיִם זֹאת עָשׂוּ

בְּטַנִּים וּשְׁקָדִים, נִכְאֹת וְלֵט, וּמַעֲט דְבַשׁ, וְהוֹרִידוּ לְאִישׁ מִנְחָה: מַעֲט צָרִי, מִזְמַרְת הָאָרֶץ בְּכֻלֵּיכֶם.

נ"ע שט"ק This is the Name from *Anna Bekoah* related to *Gevurah/severity* and should be voweled with the *sheva* (:)<sup>1</sup>.

*Perhaps Marx wasn't too wrong when he called religion the opium of the people: morphine comes from poppies, cannabinoids from marijuana, and LSD from mushrooms; each of these has been used in one or another religious ceremony." said Gerald Weissmann, M.D., Editor-in-Chief of The FASEB Journal. "Studies of how those psychoactive drugs work have helped us understand modern neurobiology."*

<sup>1</sup> BeRahamim LeHayyim: Supplement to Parshat Miketz--Incense addition, Zoharielev

**Biblical references:**

- a. [Shemot 30](#): in the command concerning the Sanctuary, as part of the command to build the golden altar (the incense altar), the Torah states that incense must be offered on the golden altar, twice each day. Further on, the preparation of the incense is discussed.
- b. [Vayikra 9](#): On the eighth day of the inauguration of the Sanctuary, Nadav and Avihu offer incense with "foreign fire"; as a result they die.
- c. [Vayikra 16](#): As part of the order of the Yom Kippur service, the Kohen Gadol is commanded to offer incense in the Holy of Holies.
- d. [Bamidbar 7](#): At the dedication of the altar, the prince of each tribe offers various sacrifices, including a golden spoon full of incense.
- e. [Bamidbar 16](#): Korach episode as a test and later Aharon stops the plague using incense.

The foreshadowing of the power of incense to combat plague is actualized in the episode that follows the rebellion of Korach. God unleashes an unrestrained “*magefah*” (plague) upon the people of Israel. Moshe instructs Aharon to take *ketoret* from the Temple and to wave it amongst the sufferers of the plague. This rapidly brings about the cessation of the plague, “*va-tei’atzar ha-magefah.*” This may be the only direct effective treatment for plague mentioned in the Torah.

Yet this same *ketoret* which Aharon used to stave off the plague and save many lives also led to the death of his own sons, and the death of two hundred and fifty people in a dramatic display during the Korach rebellion.

The double-edged sword of *ketoret* is alluded to in a Talmudic discussion *Shabbat 89a* which addresses the question, “How did Moshe know to use the *ketoret* to abort the plague?” The Talmud answers that while he was up on the mountain receiving the Torah, Moshe was taught by the Angel of Death that the *ketoret* possessed special healing powers. The fact that it is the Angel of Death who teaches Moshe about its medicinal qualities intimates that the same substance can be an instrument of death, as well as a medical cure. (Rashi to Bamidbar 17:13).

The Vilna Gaon, in Aderet Eliyahu (*Parashat Tetzaveh*) offers a unique rationale for the difference between the altar and the incense....

*"You shall make an altar for incense" – this was not mentioned among the vessels of the Sanctuary that were to be made."*

*First God gave the details of the Sanctuary and its vessels, the garments, and the preparation of Aharon for the [service of the] altar. Thereafter He commanded the offering of the daily sacrifice, saying, "By means of this I shall dwell in your midst." Then He mentions the fashioning of the incense altar and the atonement money.*



The Talmud reveals the angelic envy of Moses who is able to even receive gifts and tricks from the angel of death in order to save the Israelites.

### Talmud Shabbat 89a

מיד כל אחד ואחד נעשה לו אוהב ומסר לו דבר שנאמר עלית למרום שבית שבי לקחת מתנות באדם בשכר שקראוך אדם לקחת מתנות אף מלאך המות מסר לו דבר שנאמר ויתן את הקטרת ויכפר על העם ואומר ויעמד בין המתים ובין החיים וגו' אי לאו דאמר ליה מי הוה ידע:

**Immediately, each and every one of the angels became an admirer of Moses and passed something to him, as it is stated: “You ascended on high, you took a captive, you took gifts on account of man, and even among the rebellious also that the Lord God might dwell there” (Psalms 68:19).**

עֲלִיתָ לְמָרוֹם, שְׁבִיתָ שְׁבִי-יָט  
-; לְקַחַת מִתְּנוּת, בְּאָדָם  
וְאֶף סוֹרְרִים, לְשֹׁכֵן יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים  
19 Thou hast ascended on high, Thou hast led captivity captive; Thou hast received gifts among men, {N} yea, among the rebellious also, that the LORD God might dwell there.

The meaning of the verse is: **In reward for the fact that they called you man, you are not an angel and the Torah is applicable to you, you took gifts from the angels. And even the Angel of Death gave him something, as Moses told Aaron how to stop the plague, as it is stated: “And he placed the incense, and he atoned for the people” (Numbers 17:12/13). And the verse says: “And he stood between the dead and the living, and the plague was stopped”**

וַיִּקַּח אַהֲרֹן כַּאֲשֶׁר דִּבֶּר מֹשֶׁה, וַיָּרֵץ יב  
וַהֲנִיחָה הַחֵל הַנִּגָּף, בָּעָם; אֶל-תוֹךְ הַקְּהָל  
עַל-הָעָם, וַיִּתֵּן, אֶת-הַקְּטֹרֶת, וַיִּכַּפֵּר  
12 And Aaron took as Moses spoke, and ran into the midst of the assembly; and, behold, the plague was begun among the people; and he put on the incense, and made atonement for the people.

וַיַּעֲמֵד בֵּין-הַמֵּתִים, וּבֵין הַחַיִּים; יג  
וַתַּעֲצֹר, הַמַּגֵּפָה  
13 And he stood between the dead and the living; and the plague was stayed.

If it were **not that** the Angel of Death **told him** this remedy, **would he have known** it?

### *The paradoxical Gift of the Angel of Death*

According to *Shabbat 89a*, when Moses went up to accept the Torah, the angels bestowed him with various presents. “*You ascended on high, taking a captive [the Torah], receiving gifts among men*” (Psalm 68:19). Even the Angel of Death presented Moses with a gift: the secret of the incense.

What is special about incense that it has the power to stay death? And why not take advantage of this capability to permanently rescind death?

The idea of the incense as bringing atonement is obviously based on the narrative in *Korach* where Aharon does indeed make atonement for Israelites by means of incense. However, in *Tetzaveh*, in the context of the golden altar and the daily offering of incense, there is no mention of atonement. The concept of atonement appears only in the context of the "blood of the sin-offering of atonement" of Yom Kippur, some of which is placed upon the golden altar on that day. And still it is not clear why the incense should serve as atonement rather than any other sacrifice.

For Rav Yehuda Rock<sup>3</sup> the incense is an expression of the *Divine Presence* as cited in a *Baraita* in *Yoma*, discussing the incense:

א"ל אביי והא איפכא תניא דתניא נתן בה עיקר מעלה עשן היה מתמר ועולה כמקל עד שמגיע לשמי קורה כיון שהגיע והבית ימלא עשן (ישעיהו ו, ד) לשמי קורה ממשמש ויורד בכותלים עד שנתמלא הבית עשן. שנאמר

*“Abaye said to Rav Yosef: Your interpretation indicates that the leaf of the smoke-raiser raises smoke better than its root, as the requirement for a root is merely considered an addition. But wasn't the opposite taught in a Baraita? As it was taught in a Baraita: He put into the incense a root of a smoke-raiser, and the smoke would rise in a column like a staff until it reached the Temple ceiling. When it reached the ceiling there was nowhere for the smoke to exit the building, and therefore it slowly descended the walls until the entire House was filled with smoke, as it is stated: “And the House was filled with smoke” (Isaiah 6:4). This Baraita indicates that the root of the smoke-raiser raises smoke better than its leaf.”*

Yoma 53a

"It would rise up like a staff, until it reached the ceiling. Once it reached the ceiling it would come down the walls, until the Sanctuary was filled with smoke, as it is written, "And the Sanctuary was full of smoke."

The verse cited in the *Baraita* is from *Isa. 6:1-4*

בשנת-מות המלך עזיהו, ונראה את-אדני ישב על- א  
כסא רם ונשא; ושוליו, מלאים את-ההיכל

**1** In the year that king Uzziah died I saw the Lord sitting upon a throne high and lifted up, and His train filled the temple.

שרפים עמדים ממעל לו, שש כנפים שש כנפים ב  
לאחד: בשתיים יכסה פניו, ובשתיים יכסה רגליו--ובשתיים  
יעופף.

**2** Above Him stood the seraphim; each one had six wings: with twain he covered his face and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly.

וקרא זה אל-זה ואמר, קדוש קדוש קדוש יהנה צבאות; ג  
מלא כל-הארץ, כבודו.

**3** And one called unto another, and said: Holy, holy, holy, is the LORD of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.etzion.org.il/en/significance-incense>

וַיִּגְעוּ אַמּוֹת הַסָּפִים, מִקּוֹל הַקּוֹרְאִים; וְהַבַּיִת, יִמְלֵא עָשָׁן ז' **4** And the posts of the door were moved at the voice of them that called, and the house was filled with smoke.

which discusses the revelation of the Divine Presence.

In two different places, the Torah stipulates that the fire – i.e. the coals – upon which the incense is placed, must be atop the altar. Thus, in the Yom Kippur service Lev 16:12.

וַיִּקַּח מִלֵּא-הַמִּזְבֵּחַ גִּזְלֵי-אֵשׁ מֵעַל יב **12** And he shall take a censer full of coals of fire from off the altar before the LORD, and his hands full of sweet incense beaten small, and bring it within the veil.

וַיָּנִחַ אֶת-הַקְטֹרֶת עַל-הָאֵשׁ, לִפְנֵי יְהוָה; יג **13** And he shall put the incense upon the fire before the LORD, that the cloud of the incense may cover the ark-cover that is upon the testimony, that he die not.

Likewise, in when Moshe sends Aharon to stop the plague, he tells him: "Take the censer and place fire on it from off the altar, and place incense...."

Rav Rock concludes: *the specific expression of the Divine Presence that is realized by means of the incense is God's closeness in the wake of the offering of sacrifices; it is an expression of favor and acceptance of the sacrifices. This is expressed in the fact that the incense "rests" upon fire (coals) taken from the altar, and thereby comes to symbolize the fire of the altar.*

The Ingredients and Amounts of the Incense were as follows:

COUNT	<u>NAME</u>	WEIGHT
1	balsam	70 maneh
2	onycha	70 maneh
3	galbanum	70 maneh
4	frankincense	70 maneh
5	myrrh	16 maneh
6	cassia	16 maneh
7	spikenard	16 maneh
8	saffron	16 maneh
9	costus	12 maneh
10	aromatic bark	3 maneh
11	cinnamon	9 maneh
		368 maneh



*(Each maneh weighed five pounds. The total weight was 368 maneh - one measure for each day (half offered in the morning, and half in the evening, plus 3 extra for Yom Kippur, or 1,840 pounds (836.36 kg). But in an ordinary lunar year there were 11 manehs over (the lunar year being 354 days); and though these 11 manehs were necessary for supplementing the incense in a leap year, they had to be bought from the new donations given on the first of Nisan. Some method had to be devised, therefore, of making the remainder of the old incense valid for the new year.*

The **Midrash** goes further by claiming God prefers the *ketoret* to all other sacrifices:

רוֹאִין עֲנֵן הַקְטֹרֶת שֶׁהִיא מִתְמַר וְעוֹלָה וְהִיוּ שְׂמֵחִים. הָיִי, שְׂמֵן וְקֹטֶרֶת יִשְׂמַח לֵב. וּמִדְּבַר בְּהַקְדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא, שְׂאָמַר הַקְדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא לְיִשְׂרָאֵל: מִכְּלַכְּמֵם אֵין לִי אֶלָּא פֶהוּ גְדוֹל שְׂנַמְשַׁח בְּשְׂמֵן הַמִּשְׁחָה, שְׂנַאָמַר: וַיִּבְדֵּל אֶהְרֹן לְהַקְדִּישׁוּ קֹדֶשׁ וְנֹאֲנִי שְׂמֵחַ בּוֹ. וְקֹטֶרֶת, אֵלּוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל אָמַר הַקְדוּשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא: מִכָּל הַקְרָבָנוֹת שְׂאֵתֶם מִקְרִיבִין, אֵין. (א כג, יגדה") קְדָשִׁים חֲבִיב עָלַי כְּקֹטֶרֶת. תִּדְעַ, שְׂכָל הַקְרָבָנוֹת כָּלָן לְצָרְכֵיהֶם שֶׁל יִשְׂרָאֵל. כִּיצַד? הַחֲטָאת הַיְתֵה בָּאָה עַל הַחֲטָא, וְהָאֲשָׁם כֵּן. הַעוֹלָה בָּאָה עַל הַרְהוּר הַלֵּב. הַשְּׂלֵמִים אֵינָן בָּאֵין אֶלָּא לְכַפֵּרָה, שֶׁהֵן בָּאֵין עַל מִצְוֹת עֲשֵׂה. אָבָל הַקְטֹרֶת, אֵינָה בָּאָה לֹא עַל הַחֲטָא וְלֹא עַל הָעוֹן וְלֹא עַל הָאֲשָׁם, אֶלָּא עַל הַשְּׂמֵחָה, הָיִי, שְׂמֵן וְקֹטֶרֶת יִשְׂמַח לֵב.

The Holy One, blessed be He, said: The sacrifices that you offer to Me are as desirable as incense. You know that all the sacrifices exist to meet the needs of Israel. How is that so? The sin-offering is brought because of sin and guilt; the burnt offering is brought because of a thought in one's heart; the peace-offerings are brought to atone for violations of a positive commandment, while incense is brought, not because of sin or transgression or guilt, but only out of sheer joy. Hence, *Ointment and incense rejoice the heart.* וְשְׂמֵן וְקֹטֶרֶת, יִשְׂמַח-לֵב; וּמִתְקַ רְעֵהוּ, מְעַצֵּת-נִפְשׁוֹ. **ט**

*The Almighty said: Of all the sacrifices you offer, there is none dearer to Me than the ketoret [incense], for it comes not for any sin or transgression or guilt, but rather for joy, as it says, 'Oil and incense gladden the heart'. See how beloved the ketoret is, for through it the plague ended. Aharon found the angel [of death] standing and destroying. He stayed opposite it and did not let it go. He said to Aharon: Let me go and carry out my mission. Aharon stopped it with the power of the ketoret.*

Tanchuma Tetzaveh 15

**Maimonides** in the Guide explains as follows:

(11) Since many beasts were daily slaughtered in the holy place, the flesh cut in pieces and the entrails and the legs burnt and washed, the smell of the place would undoubtedly have been like the smell of slaughterhouses, if nothing had been done to counteract it. They were therefore commanded to burn incense there twice every day, in the morning and in the evening (Exod. 30:7, 8), in order to give the place and the garments of those who officiated there a pleasant odor. There is a well-known saying of our Sages, "In Jericho they could smell the incense" [burnt in the Temple]. This provision likewise tended to support the dignity of the Temple. If there had not been a good smell, let alone if there had been a stench, it would have produced in the minds of the people the reverse of respect; for our heart generally feels elevated in the presence of good odor, and is attracted by it, but it abhors and avoids bad smell.



*The incense also had another great advantage. It was an enlightened remedy to purify people from sin. Whoever smelled the fragrance of the incense when it was being burned on the altar would have thoughts of repentance. His heart would be purified of all evil thoughts and from the defilement of the Evil Urge. In this respect it was very much like the forehead-plate worn by the High Priest upon which God's name was written. Whoever looked at it would experience great awe in his heart and would repent completely. The same was true of anyone who smelled the fragrance of the incense when it was being burned. This would break the power of the Other Side so that it could not speak evil against Israel.*

*This is why the incense altar was referred to as an altar, (mizbeach). [The word mizbeach comes from the Hebrew zevach, which denotes slaughter.] The incense altar was called a mizbeach even though no sacrifice was slaughtered on it because the incense had the power to break and subjugate the power of the Other Side. This place was called a mizbeach because it was a place where the **Other Side was slaughtered**.*

*Since the incense is so important, a person should be careful to read this chapter every day in the morning and the evening. He should not consider saying it difficult even though it might take a few moments since it brings great joy to God.<sup>4</sup>*

### **The Deeper Effect of the Ketoret**

***It is a ruling of the Holy One, blessed be He, that whoever looks and reads the incense-offering portion ... will not be damaged that whole day.***

*This matter is a decree issued by the Almighty, that whoever studies and reads the topic of the constitution of the ketoret every day is saved from all evil things and witchcraft in the world, and from all serious injury, from evil thoughts, from harsh judgment, and from death, and will not be harmed that entire day, for the evil force has no control over him. One must concentrate during this recitation. Rabbi Shimon said, if people would know how exalted the concept of the ketoret is before the Almighty, they would take every single word in it and wear it as a crown on their head like a golden crown. Whoever involves himself in it must delve into the concept of the ketoret. If he concentrates on it every day, he earns a portion both in this world and in the next world, and death will be eliminated from him and from the world, and he will be saved from all prosecution in this world, from impurity, from the judgment of Gehinnom and from subjugation to foreign rule.*

Zohar II 218b

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<sup>4</sup> Me'am Loez

Rabbi Shimon said: If men only knew how exalted the section dealing with] the incense-offering was in the eyes of the Holy One, blessed be He, they would take each single word and make it an ornament for their heads, like a crown of gold. And whoever, wishes to study it should examine it in every detail. And if he concentrates upon it every day, he will have a share both in this world and the world to come. Pestilence will disappear from him and from the world, and he will be delivered from all the [evil] judgments of this world, from evil powers, from the judgment of Gehinnom and from Judgment of the alien kingdom.

*Wisdom of the Zohar, Tishby, III 933*

**In Chabad Chassidus, the Alter Rebbe of Chabad notes the etymological differences between mere korban or sacrifice and Ketores:**

*Ketores represents a very deep relationship between Hashem and the Jewish people. Unlike a Korban which comes from the word קרב, suggesting an external closeness with Hashem, the word Ketores is related to the Aramaic Ketar - meaning a knot, suggesting a state of absolute oneness. Ketores represents the innermost connection which a Jew has with Hashem. This connection exists at the very core of our Neshoma - the Yechidah, which is a part of Hashem. This connection is deeper than the connection to Hashem which is forged through keeping Torah and Mitzvot. It is like the love of a parent to a child which cannot be tainted by the child's behavior, no matter what they do. This was the secret of the angel of death. Ketores arouses this deep love and causes Hashem to shower this deep love on the Jewish people, no matter what they have done. This is why the central Avodah in the Beis Hamikdosh on Yom Kippur was the offering of Ketores in Kodosh Hakodoshim. As the day of atonement, our short fallings in keeping the Mitzvot are erased when this deepest connection to Hashem is revealed.<sup>5</sup>*

**Noam Elimelech**

*Rectification of "Ketzeif" The teaching is at the beginning of the "Likutei Shoshanah," which appears at the end of the Noam Elimelech. He explains a verse in Psalms 111, an acrostic:*

צְנֵה-	--לַעֲמוֹ--	ט פְּדוּתָהּ,	שְׁלַח לַעֲמוֹ--	9 He hath sent redemption unto His people; He hath commanded
;בְּרִיתוֹ;		לְעוֹלָם	His	covenant
.שְׁמוֹ.	קְדוֹשׁ וְנוֹרָא		Holy and awful is His name.	forever; {N}

*This verse speaks of the praise of God and the Torah: פְּדוּתָהּ שְׁלַח לַעֲמוֹ צוּה לְעוֹלָם בְּרִיתוֹ קְדוֹשׁ וְנוֹרָא שְׁמוֹ 5*

*The entire verse contains three phrases beginning with the letters pei, tzaddik and kuf, according to the order of the alef bet. If we reverse those letters, we get the word **ketzeif** (wrath). This is an allusion to the sweetening of the judgments by means of the ketoret (incense): And Moses said to Aaron: 'Take the fire-pan, and put fire therein from the altar, and lay incense thereon, and carry*

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.kollelmenachem.com.au/uploads/5/6/7/2/5672093/chiddush\\_korach.pdf](http://www.kollelmenachem.com.au/uploads/5/6/7/2/5672093/chiddush_korach.pdf)

*it quickly unto the congregation, and make atonement for them; for there is wrath gone out from God: the plague is begun.' Aaron did as Moses instructed, and the ketoret stopped the plague.*

*This is the segulah to say the Pitum Haketoret **with focus when a plague, an epidemic is taking place.** The ketoret stops the epidemic. In the verse above, the plague is referred to as ketzef. In our verse from Psalms, we have the letters for ketzef in reverse. Ketzef is the reverse order, the hind side of the word, which represents judgment. The forward face represents compassion.*

*The main word here is tehilla, praise. Afterwards, the Noam Elimelech adds the words shevach (exaltation) and pe'er (beauty). It is written that tehilla, shevach, pe'er parallel the sefirot whose acronym is chede"r: chesed, din and tiferet (lovingkindness, judgement and compassion). Tehilla parallels chesed, lovingkindness, like hallel, which alludes to light<sup>8</sup>, or "Abraham (whose sefirah is lovingkindness) began to illuminate." <sup>9</sup> Shevach, is associated with might and pe'er is from the word tiferet, beauty. Pe'er (פאר) is also a permutation of rapoh (רפא), (to heal. In tiferet, the healing is revealed and sure.<sup>6</sup>*

## **Rav Kook's Torah**

### **Binding Together All Forces**

All forces in the world, even the forces of death and destruction, contribute to the development and perfection of the universe. When all the realms and their forces, both spiritual and physical, draw together, each one provides a unique function. From this standpoint, the force of death also serves as a force of life.

The unique character of the incense reflects this message of harmony and inter-connectivity. The Hebrew word for incense, *ketoret*, is related to the word *keshet*, meaning a 'bind' or 'knot.' The incense unites together the core essence of all forces — life, matter, and spirit — according to the extraordinary recipe that God prescribed in the Torah.

The ability to overcome destructive forces, at a time when they rule freely and have not yet been converted into constructive and preserving forces, was an exceptional phenomenon. This hidden knowledge was granted only to Moses. This gift from the Angel of Death demonstrated the surrender of the forces of death to the pure splendor illuminating that faithful messenger, as he revealed the light of the Torah of life.

What is the root of the incense's secret power? The *ketoret* also encompasses the forces of destruction, so that they may contribute to building and perfecting the universe. Thus, we find that the ketoret bound together many fragrances, including galbanum (*chelbenah*), which was an essential ingredient, despite its pungent, unpleasant odor. In this way, these forces fulfill their ultimate purpose, to build and complete. True realization of this transformation, however, will only occur in the distant future, as the path for sweetening the bitterness of the universe is hidden deeply within the divine secrets of Creation.

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.inner.org/chassidut/torah-healing-advice-from-the-noam-elimelech>

Only as a temporary measure for the need of that hour, the harmonious quality of the incense was able to stay the power of death. The secret given to Moses demonstrated the comprehensiveness of the Torah, and the unique splendor of those who study Torah — the source of peace, life, and rectification for all worlds and their myriad inhabitants.<sup>7</sup>

### **ADDENDUM: The House of Avtinas and the Ketores ingredients**

Parshas Ki Sisa includes the mitzvah of *Ketores* [Incense].

The *Ketores* was offered twice a day on the Golden *Mizbeach* [Altar] situated in front of the *Kodesh Hakodoshim* [Holy of Holies]. *Klal Yisrael* enjoyed tremendous benefits by virtue of offering the *Ketores*. The *Ketores* was made up of various plants, spices, and herbs which provided a pleasant aroma to the *Beis Hamikdosh*.

The Mishna [Yoma 3:11] lists certain families in less than a positive light (*v'elu l'gnai*), one of which was The House of Avtinas (*Beis Avtinas*). The House of Avtinas was in charge of producing the *Ketores* for the *Beis Hamikdosh*. However, they refused to teach anyone else the “trade secrets” involved in producing the *Ketores*. For this reason, the Mishna mentions them (together with certain other families and individuals) in a negative fashion.

The Gemara [Yoma 38a] says that the *Chachomim* tried to undercut the House of Avtinas. They brought in specialists from Alexandria in Egypt who were expert in mixing spices and herbs. They wanted to put the House of Avtinas out of business for refusing to comply with the order of the court to share their recipe for the *Ketores*. (Instead of “outsourcing” the job of making the *Ketores*, the *Chachomim* tried to “insource” the operation by bringing in competing artisans.)

The Gemara says that the Alexandrian experts were able to make a mixture that duplicated the aroma of the *Ketores*, however they did not know how to make the smoke of the burning incense rise up in a straight column as was the tradition of the *Ketores* of the House of Avtinas. The smoke from the Alexandrian *Ketores* dissipated and filled the entire *Heichal* of the *Beis Hamikdosh*, rather than rising up straight as a rod.

The *Chachomim* went back to the House of Avtinas and again demanded that they reveal the secret ingredient that made the smoke go up straight. Again, they refused and kept the secret to themselves. The Gemara says the *Chachomim* concluded, “Whatever the Holy Blessed Be He has created, He has created for His Honor as it is written ‘All the actions of Hashem are for Him’ [Mishlei 16:4]” [Yoma 38a].

The *Chachomim* had no choice but to rehire the Family of Avtinas to be in charge of the *Ketores* manufacture. The Talmud relates that the *Chachomim* sent them a message (wanting to tell them that they had their job back), but they refused to come. The Gemara says

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<sup>7</sup> Gold from the Land of Israel, pp. 256-257. Adapted from *Ein Eyah* vol. IV, p. 213

the *Chachomim* had to double their salary before they would take their job back. Originally, they were paid 12 maneh a day and now they received 24 maneh a day.

When they finally came back (at the higher wage), the *Chachomim* asked them, “Why did you refuse to teach others how to do this?” They answered “We have a tradition that the *Beis Hamikdosh* is destined to be destroyed. We are afraid that this information will fall into the hands of inappropriate people who will make such a *Ketores* to serve idols. That is why we keep the secret in our family.”<sup>8</sup>

Finally I am reminded of the novel “Parfum” . In the slums of 18th-century France, the infant Jean-Baptiste Grenouille is born with one sublime gift - an absolute sense of smell. As a boy, he lives to decipher the odors of Paris and apprentices himself to a prominent perfumer who teaches him the ancient art of mixing precious oils and herbs.

But Grenouille's genius is such that he is not satisfied to stop there, and he becomes obsessed with capturing the smells of objects such as brass doorknobs and fresh-cut wood. Then one day, he catches a hint of a scent that will drive him on an ever-more-terrifying quest to create the "ultimate perfume" - the scent of a beautiful young virgin. Told with dazzling narrative brilliance, *Perfume* is a hauntingly powerful tale of murder and sensual depravity. The angel of death had given him of his gift, but he was no Moses!<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Rav Frand: <https://torah.org/torah-portion/ravfrand-5777-ki-sisa/>

<sup>9</sup> [https://www.amazon.com/Perfume-StoryMurderer/dp/B07JJMNM4/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?crid=BBO60AZZOPE7&dchild=1&keywords=perfume+susskind&qid=1586986681&prefix=perfume+suss%2Caps%2C158&sr=8-1](https://www.amazon.com/Perfume-StoryMurderer/dp/B07JJMNM4/ref=sr_1_1?crid=BBO60AZZOPE7&dchild=1&keywords=perfume+susskind&qid=1586986681&prefix=perfume+suss%2Caps%2C158&sr=8-1)