

Ketoret Ha-Samim: Exalted Incense & Holy Scents

Exodus 30:34-38

⁽³⁴⁾ And YHVH said to Moses: Take the herbs stacte, onycha, and *galbanum*—these herbs together with pure frankincense; let there be an equal part of each. ⁽³⁵⁾ Make them into **incense**, a compound expertly blended, refined, pure, sacred. ⁽³⁶⁾ Beat some of it into powder, and put some before the Pact in the Tent of Meeting, where I will meet with you; it shall be most holy to you. ⁽³⁷⁾ But when you make this incense, you must not make any in the same proportions for yourselves; it shall be held by you sacred to YHVH. ⁽³⁸⁾ Whoever makes any like it, to smell of it, shall be cut off from his kin.

שמות ל':ל"ד-ל"ח

^(לד) וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל-מֹשֶׁה קַח-לְךָ סַמִּיִּים נָטָף | וְשַׁחֲלֹת וְחֹלְבֵנָה סַמִּים וּלְבָנָה זָכָה בַד בְּבַד יִהְיֶה: ^(לה) וַעֲשִׂיתָ אֹתָהּ קְטֹרֶת רֶקַח מֵעֵשָׂה רֹקַח מִמֶּלֶךְ טְהוֹר קֹדֶשׁ: ^(לו) וְשַׁחֲקֵתָ מִמֶּנָּה הֲדִיקָה וְנִתְתָּה מִמֶּנָּה לְפָנַי הָעֵדֻת בְּאֹהֶל מוֹעֵד אֲשֶׁר אֲוַעֵד לְךָ שָׁמָּה קֹדֶשׁ קֹדְשִׁים תִּהְיֶה לָכֶם: ^(לז) וְהִקְטַרְתָּ אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשֶׂה בְּמִתְכַנְּתָהּ לֹא תַעֲשֶׂוּ לָכֶם קֹדֶשׁ תִּהְיֶה לְךָ לֵה': ^(לח) אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר-יַעֲשֶׂה כְמוֹהָ לְהַרְיִחַ בָּהּ וּנְכַרְתָּ מֵעַמּוֹ:

- *Though it is not stated here, how might incense have been used by our Israelite ancestors during religious rituals?*
- *Have you experienced incense in other religious or spiritual contexts? How did the incense contribute to your experience?*

Rashi on Exodus 30:34:3

“...galbanum” — This is a malodorous spice which is called *galbanum*. Scripture enumerates it among the spices of the incense to teach us that we should not regard as a trivial matter the duty of associating together with Jewish transgressors when we band together for fasts and prayers — that they should be included and counted amongst us [citing Keritot 6b [next page]].

רש"י על שמות ל':ל"ד:ג'

וחלבנה. בשם שריחו רע, וקורין לו גלבנא, ומנאה הכתוב בין סמני הקטרת ללמדנו שלא יקל בעינינו לצרף עמנו באגדת תעניותינו ותפלותנו את פושעי ישראל שיהיו נמנין עמנו:

- One of the ingredients in the previously mentioned incense is this one called galbanum. Why might you add something foul-smelling or foul-tasting to something you treasure? (For example, do you enjoy the burned parts of your food found in grill marks?)
- Why should we count those who break the public's trust amongst the public? Do their actions remove from the rest of the community?
- What do we gain from including those who have transgressed our communal norms and laws? Why might this be an important value?

Keritot 6b:65-66

Rabbi Chana bar Bizna said in the name of Rabbi Shimon Chasida, Any public fast that doesn't include Jewish transgressors is not a true public fast. For behold: *galbanum* has a foul smell, and yet the Scripture includes it among the ingredients of **incense** [used in the Temple].

כריתות ו' ב:ס"ה-ס"ו

א"ר חנא בר בזנא א"ר שמעון חסידא כל תענית שאין בה מפושעי ישראל אינה תענית שהרי חלבנה ריחה רע ומנאה הכתוב עם סממני קטרת.

Ashkenazi Siddur, Havdalah

Blessed are You YHVH, our God and Sovereign of All-That-Is, Creator of types of spices.

סידור אשכנז, שבת, הַבְּדֵלָה י"ג

(יג) בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם,
בוֹרֵא מִיְּנֵי בְשָׂמִים:

- This blessing--the second of four that ceremonially bring an end to Shabbat--praises the Creator of "types of spices". Why might that be an admirable quality in one's Creator?
- How does this blessing, and the sweet spices and herbs we smell after its recitation, contribute to your experience of Shabbat?

What smells remind you of camp?

What other smells should we bless?

Where else in Jewish life should we be using our sense of smell?