

סוד הקטורת וסוד העם

The Essence of the Incense and the Secret of the People

Zevachim 88

Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi say: There are **two matters** that **we do not find for them an atonement with offerings, but we find for them an atonement from another place, and they are: Bloodshed and malicious speech.**

...with regard to **malicious speech**, its atonement comes **from incense**, as **Rav Hananya teaches** in a *baraita*: **From where** is it derived that **the incense effects atonement? As it is stated** after the Israelites spoke slanderously against Moses and Aaron and a plague was sent against them: **“And he put on the incense, and made atonement for the people”** (Numbers 17:12).

And similarly, the school of Rabbi Yishmael teaches: For what does incense effect atonement? It effects atonement **for malicious speech**, in order that **an item that** is offered **in private**, i.e., the incense, which is offered by a priest acting alone, **shall come and atone for an action** generally occurring in **private**, i.e., malicious speech.

זוהר פרשת ויקהל

Rabbi Shimon said, "If people knew how great the act of incense is before God, they would take every word of it and place it on their heads like a crown of gold. And whoever strives for it and must contemplate the act of incense, and if he reads the section of incense every day and meditates on it, He has a share in this world and the world to come, and death will depart from him and from the world, and he will be saved from all the laws of the world and from all evil and from the law of hell and the kingdoms of other kingdoms.

(שמות ל (כי תישא

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל־מֹשֶׁה קַח־לְךָ סַמִּים נָטָף | וְשִׁחֲלִיל וְחִלְבֹנָה סַמִּים וְלִבְנָה זָכָה בַד בְּבַד יְהִיָּה:

And ה' said to Moses: Take the herbs stacte, onycha, and galbanum—these herbs together with pure frankincense; let there be an equal part of each.

וַעֲשִׂיתָ אֹתָהּ קְטֹרֶת רֶקֶח מַעֲשֶׂה רֶקֶח מְמַלַּח טָהוֹר קָדָשׁ:

Make them into incense, a compound expertly blended, refined, pure, sacred.

וְשִׁחֲקִיתָ מִמֶּנָּה הִדֹּק וְנִתְתָּה מִמֶּנָּה לִפְנֵי הָעֵדֻת בְּאֵהָל מוֹעֵד אֲשֶׁר אֹנֶעַד לָךְ שִׁמָּה קָדָשׁ קְדָשִׁים תִּהְיֶה לָּכֶם:

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.

וְהִקְטַרְתָּ אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשֶׂה בְּמִתְכַנְתָּהּ לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה לָכֶם קֹדֶשׁ תְּהִיָּה לָהּ לֵאמֹר:

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 יה'.

{אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר-יַעֲשֶׂה כְּמוֹהָ לְהָרִיחַ בָּהּ וְנִכְרַת מֵעַמּוּיוֹ: }

Any party who makes any like it, to smell of it, shall be cut off from kin.

מורה נבוכים חלק ג פמ"ה

Since many beasts were daily slaughtered in the holy place... the smell of the place would undoubtedly have been like the smell of slaughter-houses, 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 odour... 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 odour, and is attracted by it, but it abhors and avoids bad smell.

ספר החינוך מצוה קג

And it is also from the roots of this commandment to aggrandize the glory of the [Temple] and to have its loftiness and awe upon the face of every person. And it is only possible to aggrandize something in the heart of people and their thoughts with things that one [associates with] greatness, and in which he will find delight and joy. And it is known that a good smell is a thing that the spirit of a person enjoys and desires and [that] it draws the heart much. And the smell of the incense was the best that can possibly be made by a man..

יומא לט במסכת

goats that were in Jericho would sneeze from smelling the fragrance of the incense that burned in the Temple; the **women that were in Jericho did not need to perfume themselves**, since they were perfumed by the **fragrance** of the **incense**, which reached there; **a bride that was in Jerusalem did not need to adorn herself** with perfumes, since she was perfumed by the **fragrance** of the **incense**, which filled the air of Jerusalem.

מסכת ברכות מג

Rav Zutra bar Toviya said that Rav said: From where is it derived that one recites a blessing over scent? As it is stated: "Let every soul praise the Lord" (Psalms 150:6). He explains the verse: What is it from which the soul derives benefit and the body does not derive benefit from it? You must say: That is scent.

מסכת כריתות דף ו

§ The Sages taught in a *baraita*: How is the blending of the incense performed?...

The Sages taught in a *baraita*: The incense was prepared from ingredients amounting to the weight of 368 *maneh*, . Of these, 365 of them correspond to the days of the solar year. The additional three *maneh* are those from which the High Priest would bring in to the Sanctuary his handful required on Yom Kippur (see Leviticus 16:12).

ויקרא טז א, יב-יג

וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל־מֹשֶׁה דַּבֵּר־אֶל־אַהֲרֹן אֶחָיֶךָ וְאֵל־יָבֹא בְכָל־עֵת אֶל־הַקֹּדֶשׁ מִבַּיִת לַפָּרֹכֶת אֶל־פְּנֵי הַכַּפֹּרֶת
אֲשֶׁר עַל־הָאָרֶן וְלֹא יָמוּת כִּי בַעֲנֹן אֶרְאֶה עַל־הַכַּפֹּרֶת:

ו' said to Moses: Tell your brother Aaron that he is not to come at will into the Shrine behind the curtain, in front of the cover that is upon the ark, lest he die; for I appear in the cloud over the cover.

וְלָקַח מִלֹּא־הַמִּחֻלָּה גִּחְלִי־אֵשׁ מֵעַל הַמִּזְבֵּחַ מִלֻּפְנֵי ה' וּמִלֹּא חֲפָנָיו קִטְרֶת סַמִּים דָּקָה וַהֲבִיא מִבַּיִת לַפָּרֹכֶת:

and he shall take a panful of glowing coals scooped from the altar before ה', and two handfuls of finely ground aromatic incense, and bring this behind the curtain.

וַיִּתֵּן אֶת־הַקִּטְרֶת עַל־הָאֵשׁ לִפְנֵי ה' וְכִסָּהּ | עַנֵּן הַקִּטְרֶת אֶת־הַכַּפֹּרֶת אֲשֶׁר עַל־הָעֵדוּת וְלֹא יָמוּת:

He shall put the incense on the fire before ה', so that the cloud from the incense screens the cover that is over [the Ark of] the Pact, lest he die.

רש"י לויקרא טז פסוק ב

וַיִּתֵּן אֶת־הַקִּטְרֶת עַל־הָאֵשׁ לִפְנֵי ה' וְכִסָּהּ | עַנֵּן הַקִּטְרֶת אֶת־הַכַּפֹּרֶת אֲשֶׁר עַל־הָעֵדוּת וְלֹא יָמוּת means, for I constantly show Myself there with My pillar of cloud, and because the revelation of My Shechinah takes place there he should take care not to make it his habit to come there. This is the literal meaning of the verse. The Halachic explanation is: He shall not come into the Holy of Holies except with a cloud of incense on the Day of Atonement. (Yoma 53a).

מסכת יומא מד עא

“And have made atonement for himself, and for his household, and for all the assembly of Israel.” Which act of atonement is the same for him, and for his household, and for his brethren, the priests, and for the entire community of Israel? You must say this is the burning of the incense.

(העמק דבר) הנצי"ב

And the main benefit of incense is to bring to mind an act of kindness. The act of kindness itself is likened to incense.

צרור המור, רבי יעקב סבע

And for this very reason we say the incense every day, morning and evening, after all the prayers, since the incense is the seal of everything and the connection of everything.

מסכת כריתות ו ב

Reish Lakish says that this *halakha* can be derived **from** the word incense **itself**: **What** is the meaning of the **term incense** [*ketoret*]? It means **an item that** produces **smoke** [*koter*] and **rises**.

הכלי יקר, שמות ל

And you shall make an altar of incense. It seems that both of these altars were made to atone for the sinful soul, because the **altar of bronze came to atone for the parts of the material and the body** that was struck by the stone of sin, and on it the animals that come in exchange are sacrificed. But the soul also needs atonement... and it is not atoned for in the soul of an animal because there is no resemblance to each other... Therefore, G-d commanded to make **an altar of incense**, raising smoke and a sweet-smelling fragrance to atone for the spirit of men, which ascends upward like the smoke of incense...

מסכת כריתות ו ב

Rav Ḥana bar Bizna says that **Rabbi Shimon Ḥasida says**: **Any fast that does not include** the participation of some **of the sinners of the Jewish people is not a fast, as the smell of galbanum is foul and yet the verse lists it with the ingredients of the incense**. **Abaye says** that this is derived **from here**: “It is He Who builds His upper chambers in the heavens **and**

has established His bundle on the earth” (Amos 9:6), i.e., when the people are united as a bundle, including their sinners, they are established upon the earth.

רש"י, שמות ל לד

וחלבנה — 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 light thing the duty of associating with ourselves when we band together for fasts and prayers Israelites who are transgressors — that they should be counted as ourselves (Keritot 6b).

(פרי צדיק לפרשת תצוה סימן יא) (רב צדוק הכהן מלובלין)

And here in this verse, we recall all of Aaron the Priest's preparation so that he could bring the souls of Israel closer by planting in their hearts the illumination of holiness for every soul, in accordance with the value of his preparation and desire to draw closer to holiness with the light of the mitzvah and the Torah... And it concludes with the altar of incense, and we mean the purpose of approaching holiness, even for souls who have already fallen into evil and whose hearts do not turn to holiness. They have hope of turning to good by joining themselves to holiness.