



BURNING OF INCENSE

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Burning of Incense (*Ketoret*)

*Leviticus 16:12-14 [On the Day of Atonement, Aaron] shall take a sensor full of burning coals of fire from the [brass] altar before the Lord, with his hands full of sweet **incense** beaten fine, and bring it inside the veil. And he shall put the **incense** on the fire before the Lord, that the **cloud** of **incense** may cover the mercy seat that is on the Testimony, lest he die.*

There was one event in Israel that represented the height in the human effort to come close to God—an event that brought together the holiest day of the year, the holiest human being on earth, and the holiest place in the universe: on *Yom Kippur* the *kohen gadol* (high priest) would enter the innermost chamber of the Holy Temple in Jerusalem, the Holy of Holies, to offer *ketoret* [incense] to God.

The offering of the *ketoret* was the most esteemed and sacred of the services in the Holy Temple. The *ketoret* was a special blend of eleven herbs and balms whose precise ingredients and manner of preparation were commanded by God to Moses. Twice a day, *ketoret* was burned on the golden altar that stood in the Temple's Holy Place. On *Yom Kippur*, in addition to the regular *ketoret* offerings, *kohen ha-gadol* (the high priest) would enter the Holy of Holies with a sensor of smoldering coals in his right hand, and a ladle filled with *ketoret* in his left; there, he would scoop the *ketoret* into his hands, place it over the coals, wait for the chamber to fill with the fragrant smoke of the burning incense, and swiftly back out of the room. The moment marked a highlight of the *Yom Kippur* service in the Holy Temple. Notwithstanding, the succeeding acts of the priest, the sacrifice of the priest's bullock, the sacrifice of the Lord's goat; the sprinkling of the blood, the release of the scapegoat were all critical and prestigious, but none of those could have taken place without the preceding offering of the incense.

Not only was incense offered in Jerusalem's Temple, yet this was just a figure of that which it typified in the heavenlies:

*Revelation 8:3,4 Then another angel, having a golden censer, came and stood at the altar. He was given much incense, that he should offer it with the **prayers** of all the saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. And the **smoke** of the incense, with the **prayers** of the saints, ascended before God from the angel's hand.*

*Revelation 15:8 The temple [in heaven] was filled with **smoke** from the glory of God and from His power.*

There was smoke from incense and smoke from presence of God's glory. Two smokes. When *elohim* (God) came down on Mount Sinai in the wilderness

*Exodus 19:18 Mount Sinai was altogether on a **smoke**.*

*Exodus 24:16-18 Now the glory of the Lord rested on Mount Sinai, and the **cloud** covered it six days. And on the seventh day He called to Moses out of the midst of the **cloud**. The sight of the glory of the Lord was like a consuming fire on the top of the mountain in the eyes of the children of Israel. So Moses went into the midst of the **cloud** and went up into the mountain.*

He was there forty days in the presence of the *shekinah* glory. He was only able to stand

this because God allowed it. But, on a later occasion,

*Exodus 40:34,35 the **cloud** covered the tabernacle of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle. And Moses was NOT able to enter the tabernacle of meeting, because the **cloud** rested above it, and the[shkinah] glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle.*

When we are told of the smoke and the cloud, it was so powerful that ordinarily to be in the *shekinah*, one would be obliterated.

When we speak of “incense” and “prayers,” they seem like nothing compared to the *shekinah*. But, they are indeed associated with the greatest power in the universe. Incense and prayers are mighty and formidable! [I want you to associate “power” and “prayer” in your thinking.]

Moses Maimonides described the function of the *ketoret* just as the vanquishing of the unpleasant odors that might otherwise have pervaded the Holy Temple (*Guide for the Perplexed* 3:45).

However, it carries a significance that extends beyond their superficial sense. In the words of (*Talmud*) *Rabbeinu Bechayei*:

God forbid that the great principle and mystery of the *ketoret* should be reduced to this mundane purpose [that is, just to make a pleasant smell].

The animal sacrifices offered in the Holy Temple represent the person’s offering of his own animal soul to God--the subjugation of one’s natural instincts and desires to the Divine Will. This is the deeper significance of the foul odor emitted by the sacrifices, which the *ketoret* did somewhat dispel.

The animal soul of man—which is the basic drive, common to every living creature, for self-preservation and self-enhancement—possesses many positive traits which can be directed toward gainful and holy ends; but it is also the source of many negative and destructive traits. When a person brings his animal-self to the Temple of God and offers what is best and finest in it upon the altar, there is still the foul odor—the selfishness, the brutality and the materiality of the animal in man—that accompanies the process. Hence the burning of the *ketoret* possessed the unique capability to purify and refine the evil odor of the animal soul within its heavenly fragrance. Therefore, this is speaking of something far more awesome and potent than merely a pleasant aroma.

Incense had other important significances. The smoke arising from it represented the prayers of Israel rising to *Elohim* (God). In the New Covenant it also has this meaning. It further was a symbol of the holy spirit; as the smoke diffused to every corner of the Temple, so does the spirit of *elohim* (God) pervade the entire universe.

The spirit was active from the foundation of the world; it is/was the active agency of *Elohim* in life and in the creation.

Sin was dealt with in the Mosaic Covenant by animal sacrifices, and in the New Covenant by the sacrifice of Christ. But, here is yet another symbolism in the incense and its smoke: The Son came, not only to deal with sin, BUT WITH THE NATURE THAT CAUSED THE SIN. Thus, the smoke symbolizes the release from your soul of its fleshly nature. Sacrifices in the old dispensation were continuously in need of being offered, because the sin-nature was never expunged. The holy spirit was always present and WITH the people of God; in the

New Covenant, the spirit comes to reside WITHIN a person. That's a major difference. The *Law* could not be kept for lack of the inward, abiding power of the Holy One.

*Jeremiah 31:32,33 Which my Covenant they broke, although I was an husband unto them, says the Lord. But this shall be the [new] covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, says the Lord, I will put My Law in their **inward** parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people.*

This is precisely what Yeshua said at the Last Supper:

*John 14:15-18 If you love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another comforter (helper), that may abide with you forever, even the spirit of truth; which the world cannot receive, because it sees Him not, neither knows Him: but you know Him; for he dwells with you, and shall be **in** you. I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you.*

*Luke 24:49 Wait in the city of Jerusalem until you are endued with **power** from on high.*

What did the Master mean by “power?” Of course, He was referring to the indwelling of the holy spirit. What is meant by “power?” Do you suppose it means “the power to perform miracles? to heal the sick?” Well, yes, but something even more momentous. It was and is the power to overcome one's carnal nature. This is what the saints of old lacked. And, they all died “having not received the promises (*Hebrews 11:18*),” and all died without the power.

But, it is now possible in the human being for a great surgery to take place: the separation of the soul from the fleshly nature. The sanctified soul remains, but the carnal disposition is incinerated. It is the result of the indwelling power of God's spirit. [Note our emphasis on “power.”]

Regarding Adam, his spirit and his soul operated together, the spirit giving guidance to the soul. The fleshly body was merely the instrument by which he moved about. The disaster of his choosing to disobey *elohim* resulted in a catastrophic transformation: his soul now functioned in tandem with his flesh, but the spirit was ignored. Thus, he and his descendants operate/operated

Ephesians 2:3 in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath.

But then, great grace was dispensed:

Ephesians 2:4-8 But God, who is rich in mercy, because of His great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in trespasses, made us alive together with Christ (by grace are you saved), and raised us up together, and made us sit together in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, that, in the ages to come, He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus. For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God.

And, it is by this grace, including this new incense within us, that we are empowered to reject the selfishness and the soulishness into which Eve first blundered to our detriment. We are enabled now to present our bodies a living sacrifice (*Romans 12:1,2*), whereby the process of becoming renewed in our minds

has enabled us to reject the world, and to actually know what God's Will for us is at all times.

The *ketoret* of the golden altar within the sanctuary had to be lighted by fire obtained from where? From the atoning brazen altar of burnt sacrifice outside; otherwise the fire was "strange fire." So Christ intercedes now inside the heavenly sanctuary as He died for us outside (Calvary); and the believer's prayer ascends from his inner heart to God within the heavenly veil, because it rests on Christ's atoning sacrifice offered once for all "without the gate" (*Hebrews* 13:12).

The altar of incense was also connected with the altar of burnt offering in that the horns of both altars being sprinkled with the blood of the sin offering on the Day of Atonement (*Leviticus* 16:16,18; *Exodus* 30:10).

Incense symbolizes not merely prayer, but prayer accepted before God **because of** atonement:

*Psalm 141:2 Let my prayer be set forth before Thee as **incense**, and the lifting up [the rising up of the incense smoke] of my hands as the [atoning] evening sacrifice.*

Prayer was offered by the pious at the times of the morning and evening sacrifices on the brazen altar of burnt sacrifice, which were followed by the *ketoret* on the golden altar of incense, thus marking this fact: prayer rests upon Christ's atoning sacrifice! Prayer without the functioning of Christ crucified in your life...is NOT prayer!!!! It's just words.

The *ketoret* is part of the beautiful Plan of *elohim* to bring His creatures to Himself. Adam and Eve, aside from not possessing the spirit inwardly [some teach they did], had not the lessons of four thousand years which their

descendants had who received the abiding incense of God.

*Malachi 1:11 From the rising of the sun even unto the going down of the same my name shall be great among the gentiles; and in every place **incense** shall be offered unto My Name, and a pure offering: for My Name shall be great among the heathen, says the Lord of hosts.*

There is coming upon the world at the end of this age such times of horror, conspiracies, and disasters that, as always before, in times of such impending calamities, the set-apart ones would be earnestly engaged in devotion. Such has always been the case in times of danger; and it may always be assumed to be true, that when danger threatens, whether it be to the church-at-large or to an individual Christian or to the world, there will be a resorting to the throne of grace. Be assured, there is in this age yet much more smoke of *ketoret* to rise to His throne. And, true prayer will be powerful! It is potent and forceful.

*Micah 3:8 I am full of **power** by the **spirit** of the Lord.*

*Ephesian 6:18 Praying always with all **prayer** and supplication in the **spirit**.*

*1 Corinthians 14:15 I will **pray** with the **spirit**, and I will also pray with the understanding.*

*James 5:16 The effectual fervent **prayer** of a righteous man availeth much.*

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