

## Nature in the Parasha

By Rebbetzin Chana Bracha Siegelbaum

### *Parashat Ki Tisa* – The Holy Anointing Oil

From all the senses, I have always treasured the sense of smell. When baking, I use my sense of smell instead of a timer, I turn off the oven when the delicious aroma of the baked goods fills my home. Sometimes being sensitive to odor can cause problems. For example, when a house doesn't smell right, it may be very difficult for sensitive people to spend any time there. Planting jasmine, roses or other great smelling flowers at the entrance of the house helps imbue our home with a delicious scent. Good smelling herbs are essential in the Torah, the Temple, the holiday of Purim and this week's *parasha*.

#### Spirituality & the Sense of Smell

This week's *parasha* includes both the sweet smelling spices of the holy anointing oil and that of the *Ketoret* (incense) burning in the Tabernacle (*Shemot* 30: 23-38; 37:29). From the five senses, the sense of smell is the most spiritual. Unlike the sense of taste for example, we cannot confine the sense of smell to one particular item, nor can we capture and hold in our hand. Rather, the scent is diffused within an entire room, garden, home or area and we cannot always determine its source. The etymology of the Hebrew word for smell ריח/*re'ach*, which is related to the word for spirit רוח/*ruach*, likewise supports the connection between the sense of smell and the spiritual realm. Both Mordechai and Esther, the holy heroes of the Purim story are connected with the sense of smell. Mordechai is associated with the free flowing myrrh as will be explained below. The righteous Esther is linked to the fragrant myrtle with its heavenly scent. Rabbi Meir said, her real name was Esther and why was she called Hadassah? In the name of the righteous people who are called *hadassim*. (*Babylonian Talmud, Megillah* 13a). This is because the righteous are associated with a good scent as the sense of smell is the most spiritual.

#### Fragrant Connection between the Physical and Spiritual Realm

In order to produce its good scent the herbs need to be crushed, and broken. This teaches us that the sense of smell denotes nullifying the physical for the sake of the spiritual. Therefore, the *chelbena* (bad smelling herb) is included in the incense, because the good fragrance exudes by means of subordinating the 'other side' to holiness. Likewise, Ya'acov subordinated Esav's exterior level to his own inherent holiness, by wrapping up his own spiritual essence within the exterior physical appearance of Esav (*Bereishit* 27:27). Ya'acov's garment exuded a heavenly scent specifically when he was subordinating the persona of Esav in this way. For the same reason, at the Revelation at Sinai, every command that emerged from the mouth of G-d filled the entire universe with fragrance (*Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat* 88b). The whole creation of the physical world was dependent upon Israel accepting the Torah (Rashi, *Bereishit* 1:31). This subservience of the physical world to the spiritual domain is what gives birth to a pleasant fragrance. The nullification of the physical to the spiritual realm is also enacted by the beating of the spices into very fine dust in the production of the holy incense (*Shemot* 30:26). When beaten to such a fine powder none of the spices retain their original separate existence. Rather, they blend and merge to become one unified entity. This represents the nullification of our ego in order to become one unified people, elevating us from physical to spiritual existence.



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## Becoming Perfumed on Purim

The mitzvah “to become perfumed on Purim” is often mistranslated as “become drunk.” The exact words of the otherwise well-known Purim mitzvah is as follows: “Raba said, a person is obligated to become perfumed on Purim until he won’t know to distinguish between cursed is Haman and blessed is Mordechai” (*Babylonian Talmud, Megillah 7b*). The mitzvah of “*l’besumei* – becoming perfumed” is actually the exact opposite of getting drunk. Rather than getting drunk in a way that lowers the stature of a person to the level of the animals, to become perfumed means to give rise to a pleasant fragrance from nullifying the matters of this world towards holiness – *kedusha*. According to Rabbi Chaim Volozhin, the sin of eating from the Tree of Knowledge implied connecting the good with the bad, as the meaning of *da’at* (knowledge) is to connect. Since then, Good and Evil is mixed in our reality. There is nothing good without a drop of evil, and no evil without a drop of good, like in the yin and yang symbol. Our task is to clarify and elevate the hidden good sparks within the evil. This clarification process takes place through the sense of smell that raises the sparks of *kedusha* hidden within the coarseness of the material. This is the meaning of “*Chayav Adam Libsume b’Puria* – A person is obligated to be perfumed on Purim.” – To raise up the fragrance of the physical matters until one does not know between “blessed and cursed;” until the good is clarified from the bad, and the sin of eating from the Tree of Knowledge Good and Evil is fixed. When bringing the matters of this world close to *kedusha*, an increased fragrance exudes. This explains why we smell sweet smelling spices at Havdala at the end of Shabbat when we bring the holiness of Shabbat into the mundane week.

## The Head of Spices

Since Purim is about elevating the uttermost physical reality towards holiness, in the greatest unity, it is no coincidence that in *Parashat Ki Tisa*, which precedes Purim, Hashem commands Moshe to make a special holy anointing oil consisting of four fragrant spices steeped in olive oil. These spices are myrrh, cinnamon, calamus and cassia. Aharon and all the Kohanim were anointed with this fragrant oil and so was the Mishkan (Tabernacle) and all of its vessels. By means of this anointing, people of flesh and blood as well as physical vessels became consecrated towards the highest holiness.

ספר שמות פרק ל (כג) וְאֵתָהּ קַח לְךָ בְּשָׂמִים רֵאשׁ מֵרְדְרֹר חֲמֵשׁ מֵאוֹת וְקִנְמֹן בְּשֵׁם מִתְּצִיטוֹ חֲמִשִּׁים וּמְאֹתָיִם וְקִנְיָהּ בְּשֵׁם חֲמִשִּׁים וּמְאֹתָיִם: (כד) וְקִדְהָ חֲמֵשׁ מֵאוֹת בְּשֵׁקֶל הַקֹּדֶשׁ וְשֶׁמֶן זַיִת הֵינּוּ: (כה) וְעֲשִׂיתָ אֹתוֹ שֶׁמֶן מִשֶּׁחַת קֹדֶשׁ רִקְחָה מִרְקֻחַת מַעֲשֵׂה רִקְחָה שֶׁמֶן מִשֶּׁחַת קֹדֶשׁ יִהְיֶה:

“Take for yourself the chief spices, of flowing myrrh five hundred shekels, and of fragrant cinnamon half so much, even two hundred and fifty, and of fragrant calamus two hundred and fifty. And of cassia five hundred, after the shekel of holiness, and of olive oil a *hin*” (*Shemot 30:23-24*).



רְדְרֹר/מֵר/ *Mor Dror* – Free Flowing Myrrh is the first spice mentioned in the holy anointing oil, as this is one of the most important spices in the Torah. Myrrh was possible a small tree with bushy branches and three-sectioned leaves, bearing a plum-like fruit, and producing a fragrant gum. Perhaps the reason why it is called “free flowing” is that when myrrh oozed out of the bark of the bush it looked like a gum resin that naturally flowed from the plant. It oozed out of the bush in the shape of a tear. Every drop is symbolic of the tears that life may bring forth. The tears that emerge from the brokenness may effect a deeper healing of soul.



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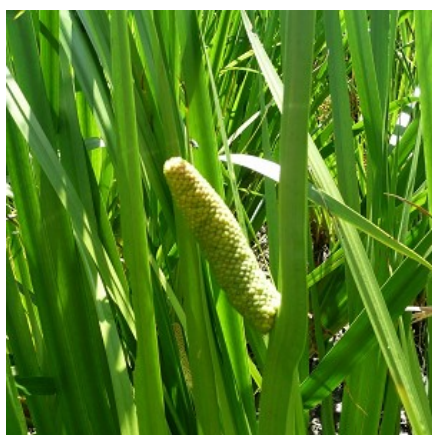
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The Hebrew word for myrrh is מֹר/*mor* means bitter. This resin is extremely bitter, and therefore has the power to eliminate germs and bacteria. Myrrh is one of the most powerful natural antibiotic substances around. "From the days of Moshe to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, myrrh has proven over and over again to be one of the finest antibacterial and antimicrobial agents on earth" (John Heineremann, *The Science of Herbal Medicine*). The emotional cleansing that myrrh promotes helps us give up all our many bitter experiences and let go of the fragments of life that hold negative emotions. Myrrh was traditionally used in ceremonial cleansing. All the maidens had to be purified in the oil of myrrh for six months before coming before the king (*Esther* 2:12). The free flowing myrrh, moreover, alludes to Mordechai in the Purim story, who facilitated the cleansing of the world from the impure Haman and his ten sons. "Where is Mordechai mentioned in the Torah. 'Pure myrrh' translated to Aramaic as '*mira dechaya*' [similar to the word Morde-chai], (*Shemot* 30:23); (*Babylonian Talmud, Chulin* 139b). Myrrh also has a wealth of additional health benefits including anticancer compounds and wound healing properties (<http://www.rjwhelan.co.nz/herbs%20A-Z/myrrh.html>).



בְּשֵׁם קִינָמוֹן/*Kinamon Bosem* – Fragrant Cinnamon has a rich full bodied aromatic energy that permeates the atmosphere. Cinnamon strengthens us and stirs up our fire to keep going no matter the pressure. Cinnamon facilitates keeping our flame and passion for Torah & mitzvot going even when we are under pressure. It is the spice of life that conveys spirited enthusiasm with courage, lion heartedness with bravery, and high-spirited excitement. Cinnamon warms and stimulates the digestive system relieving symptoms of colds and flu and has remarkable anti-fungal and anti-bacterial properties. Cinnamon has been traditionally taken as a warming herb for 'cold' conditions. The herb stimulates the circulation, especially to the fingers and toes and has been used for arthritis (<http://www.herbwisdom.com/herb-cinnamon.html>).



בְּשֵׁם קָנֶה/*Kaneh Bosem* – Fragrant Calamus – is a reed that yields a very fine aromatic smell. When reduced to powder, it forms an ingredient in the most precious perfumes. It is also known as lemongrass or ginger grass. When the wind's breeze kisses the reeds' delicate stem and foliage, it creates a beautiful fragrance carried by the wind. It is this wind that releases the secret of the reeds' fragrant nature into the air. A scent that was there all the time. This teaches us to be flexible and bendable to Hashem's every move. When we get inspired, we can release the secret fragrance hidden within us all along. Calamus is used as a tranquilizer and general 'wonder drug,' that can help ditch addictions. The oil is a sedative, hypotensive, and muscle relaxant [http://www.herbs2000.com/herbs/herbs\\_calamus.htm](http://www.herbs2000.com/herbs/herbs_calamus.htm).

קִדָּה/*Kidah* – Cassia is the fourth ingredient in the holy anointing oil. It is an aromatic bark, like cinnamon, but differing in strength and quality. Cassia bark is darker, thicker and coarser. The Hebrew word can also refer to bowing (down), or prostrating oneself. This spice teaches us of the importance of humility and bowing to Hashem in prayer. Nearly all parts of the tree have medicinal properties. The fruits are, however, most medicinal. Their pulp is a well-known laxative and a safe purgative. The root of the tree is a tonic and useful in reducing fever and heal common colds. Its leaves are useful in relieving irritation of the skin and in alleviating swellings and pains.



Their juice or paste serves as a useful dressing for ringworm and inflammation of the hands or feet caused by exposure to cold (<http://www.online-vitamins-guide.com/herbs/cassia-plant.htm>).

שֵׁמֶן זַיִת/*Shemen Zayit* – Olive oil was used as a base for the spices of the holy anointing oil since pure olive oil alludes to the Torah, which is written in the 27 letters of the Hebrew alphabet. The numerological value of 27 equals that of the word זָךְ/*zach* – pure (*Tzror Hamor, Shemot 30:20*). This purity entails imbuing the physical with Divine spirituality, which elevates it to a level beyond nature. This explains why the holy anointing oil was miraculously everlasting as it states, “the holy anointing oil shall be for me for all your generations” (*Shemot 30:31*); (*Kli Yakar, Shemot 30:23*).

### Becoming a Pleasant Fragrance to Hashem

Let us elevate the physical festivities with their eating and drinking this Purim and reveal the hidden holiness of Hashem within the physical world – the realm that can be explained away as coincidence, but in reality embodies the most hidden of miracles. Let us dance until we nullify our ego in complete unity that will disperse a good scent this Purim so the fragrance of the day may arise and become רִיחַ נְיִחוּחַ לְרֵיחוֹשׁ/*reach nichoach l'Hashem*, a pleasant fragrance to Hashem!