

לטם שעיר – Rockrose – *Cistus Creticus* or *Incanus* L.



Rockrose – A Carefree Evergreen with Spring Petals of White and Pink

Rockroses grace the bare land here in Bat Ayin around Pesach time. Large drifts of pink and white ephemeral flowers fill our borders and meadows. Of the two varieties, pink and white, the white petals have butter yellow centers and are smaller than the pink. These evergreen shrubs grow in the poor, rocky, chalky, dry soil of the low scrublands. They are very common in the Mediterranean including the mountains of the land of Israel. With their low maintenance needs and rough, gray leaves, rockroses are great edging plants. They grow in the back of my flower garden towering over the pansies, snapdragons and daisy bushes. While there are plenty of whites, I don't see any of the pink rockroses in my garden yet, although they're supposed to be most prolific bloomers. I hope not all the prior year's pink rockroses transmuted into white. Hailing back from Biblical times, rockroses are also mentioned in the Mishna, where the Rabbis discuss whether or not the laws of the Sabbatical year apply to them (*Mishna Shevi'it*, Chapter 7, Mishna 6). Although rockroses are very adaptable, they are not for everyone. Mediterranean natives, they can only be grown where winters are mild. Usually each flower lasts only until mid-afternoon before gently falling to the ground. The bush is part of the rockrose charm. Blooming for only a few weeks each spring, the shrub's characteristics as a carefree evergreen is endearing too. Yet, when the few weeks of early spring finally arrive and the melding of the millions of pastel flowers becomes a daily experience, we truly appreciate the rockrose. On a mature rockrose there are so many flowers, it is hard to see the bush.

Of the Choice Products of the Land

From biblical time, the rockrose has been popular as a perfume and aromatic. When Yosef's brothers decided to sell him as a slave, they grabbed the opportunity to have Yosef sent down to Egypt with a company of spice selling Arabs:

ספר בראשית פרק לז (כה) וישבו לאכל לחם וישאו עיניהם ויראו והנה ארחת ישמעאליים באה מגלעד וגמליהם נשאים נכאת וצרי ולט הולכים להוריד מצרימה:

"They sat down to eat bread: and they lifted up their eyes and saw, and behold, a company of Yishmaelites came from Gilead with their camels bearing spicery, balm and labdanum, going to bring it down to Egypt" (*Bereishit* 37:25).

All the plants mentioned here served both as remedies and for embalming the dead (*Da'at Mikra*). One of the aromatics mentioned in our Torah verse is לט/lot, which Targum Onkelus translates as לטום/lotum – the Hebrew word for rockrose, or more specifically, for the resin – labdanum – produced from it. Although it is generally challenging to identify most plants mentioned in the Bible, the majority of commentaries and botanists have little doubt that the biblical לט/lot refers to rockrose. Thus, לטום/lotem – labdanum mentioned in the Mishna is identified with לט/lot in Scripture (*Bereishit* 37:25). "There are those who identify it with the native bush with big nice flowers in the colors of white-yellowish or pink. It grows mainly in the mountains of the Land of Israel (*Cistus*)" (Kehati, *Mishna Shevi'it*, Chapter 7, Mishna 6). לט/Lot – labdanum is a perfume produced from plants of the rockrose (Rabbi Ya'acov, Fliks, *The Plant World of Scripture*, p. 272-273). The very same labdanum that accompanied Yosef down to Egypt is what Ya'acov intuitively chose to give as "a gift to the man" – second in charge to Pharaoh, who was no other than Yosef in disguise.

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ספר בראשית פרק מג (יא) וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יִשְׂרָאֵל אָבִיהֶם אִם כֵּן אֶפֹּא זֹאת עָשׂוּ קַחוּ מִזְמֶרֶת הָאָרֶץ בְּכֵלֵיכֶם וְהוֹרִידוּ לְאִישׁ מִנְחָה מֵעֵט צָרִי וּמֵעֵט דְּבַשׁ נְכֹאֵת וְלֵט בְּטָנִים וּשְׂקָדִים:

“Their father Israel said to them, ‘If it must be so now, do this; take the choicest fruits of the land in your vessels, and carry down the man a present, a little balm, a little (date) honey, gum, labdanum, (pistachio) nuts and almonds’” (*Bereishit* 43:11).

Rashi explains that זְמֶרֶת הָאָרֶץ/*Zimrat Ha'aretz* refers to “that which is praised in the Land, about which people sing praise when it comes into existence.” Despite the severe famine, which gripped the land of Israel at the time, Ya'acov had various choice products on hand to send to Egypt. These choice products represent the bounty of the land of Israel, similar to the Seven Species through which the Land of Israel is praised. Nevertheless, in contrast to the Seven Fruits of the Land, these crops can survive even in drought years, since they require relatively small quantities of rain. Balm, gum and labdanum are products of the sap dripping from the bark and leaves of various plants. Pistachio and almond trees flower early, fruiting before olive, grapes and pomegranate trees have even blossomed. Therefore, they do not present the worrisome agricultural problems that could lure people away to serve other gods (Noga Reuveni). It is interesting that the ‘Choice Products of the Land’ include three kinds of produce: 1. זְמֶרֶת וְלֵט/*tzori, n'chot v'lot* – ‘balm, gum and labdanum’ – plants used for their perfume. 2. דְּבַשׁ/*devash* – ‘honey’ – liquid foods. 3. בְּטָנִים וּשְׂקָדִים/*botnim u'shekdim* – ‘pistachios and almonds’ – solids (*Da'at Mikra*). Perhaps these choice products of the land allude respectively to the three garments of the soul: Thought, speech and action. The זְמֶרֶת וְלֵט/*tzori, n'chot v'lot* – balm, gum and labdanum that may represent the aspect of thought, reminded Yosef about his connection to Israel, as they were identical with the merchandise carried by the caravan that brought him down to Egypt from Israel.

Uniting Together to Become Vessels for the Sefirot from the Upper Land

The choice products of the land that Ya'acov sent to Yosef were called “*Zimrat Ha'aretz*” – the strengths and praise of Hashem because they were drawn from the upper world and had the power to transform ‘*din*’ (judgement) into ‘*rachamim*’ (mercy). These species, including rockrose, moreover, represent the unity of the *sefirot*. Before Israel went down into the Egyptian exile, they needed to be completely united. Through the power of this unity, Israel would survive the exile and emerge as a complete nation during the Exodus. When the *sefirot* are united in the Infinite (*Ein Sof*) good influences are drawn down from the upper worlds into the lower world. Of all the *sefirot* there are two *sefirot* who unite and connect the rest of the *sefirot*: *Tiferet* and *Yesod*. Ya'acov, who represents the *sefirah* of *Tiferet*, draws down the influences of the upper worlds to Yosef. Yosef, the embodiment of *Yesod*, then divides these influences into the lower world. This is the secret of Ya'acov's *Zimrat Ha'aretz*-gift, which he sent to Yosef (Maor V'Shemesh, *Parashat Miketz*). The *Zimrat Ha'aretz* were the embodiment of the *sefirot*, which must be united. When the brothers sold Yosef into slavery, the *sefirot* went down into exile. This is symbolized by the fact that the *Zimrat Ha'aretz* accompanied Yosef down to Egypt. Ya'acov sent Yosef the gift of *Zimrat Ha'aretz* with the brothers because he understood that it was time to rectify the blemish in the unity of the *sefirot* caused by the sale of Yosef. By bringing the *Zimrat Ha'aretz* to Yosef, the brothers became vessels for the *sefirot* from the upper land that united them all together.

Rockrose Perfumery

The rockrose bush likes warmth and light and grows to a meter, giving off an aromatically resinous odor. Its leaves store plenty of oil, which partly evaporates in the heat. The essential oil thus extracted is appreciated in aromatherapy. In addition, rockrose exudes a highly aromatic gum or resin, called labdanum, which has been used in incense since ancient times and is now a valuable ingredient of various perfumes. Owing to the pleasant balsamic, aroma when burned, it was

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employed by the ancients for fumigating purposes. The rich, complex and tenacious scent is described as sweet, woody, dry, musk, or leather like. The main reason why labdanum is much valued in perfumery today is because of the resemblance of its scent to ambergris, which has been banned from use in many countries, since it is produced from the sperm of the whale – an endangered species. Today, the sticky tar like labdanum resin is used in place of Ambergris. With a sweet, musky odor, labdanum oil is often blended with Citrus Oils, Clary Sage, Oakmoss, Pine, Juniper, Calamus, Lavender, Tonka, Sandalwood, and Vetiver.

Gleaning Rockrose Resin

Rockrose is useful in food, perfumes and detergents. In ancient times, the sticky resin contained in its leaves was scraped from the fur of goats and sheep that had grazed on the rockrose shrubs. It was collected by the shepherds and sold to coastal traders. The false beards worn by the pharaohs of ancient Egypt were actually the labdanum soaked hair of these goats. The resin was also collected from the branches by means of a leather instrument somewhat like a rake drawn over the branches and leaves. Then the resin was scraped off the leather.

Medicinal Properties of Rockrose

The Labdanum resin of rockrose is an expectorant, emmenagogue, diuretic and stimulant. Due to its expectorant properties, it has been used as a remedy for colds, cough with phlegm, bronchitis and leucorrhoea. Its emmenagogue properties treat inner bleeding and menstrual problems. Labdanum has also been applied in plasters against catarrh, diarrhea, hair loss, skin soars, heartburn and rheumatism. I learned from a Jewish woman who lived with Bedouins that the water in which rockrose petals have been soaked can alleviate hoarseness. Prof. Claus Peter Siegers of the University in Lübeck proved that rockrose detoxifies the body and eliminates toxic heavy metals deriving from cigarette smoke, dental fillings and environmental pollution. Dr. Vinzenz Nowak discovered that a cup of rockrose tea a day is also beneficial for the immune system. Further, Dr. Frank Petereit stated in his dissertation at the University of Münster that rockrose treats fungal infections like intestinal and vaginal mycosis. Since rockrose tea supports a healthy bacterial flora, it also combats other harmful microorganisms that cause gastritis. In addition, Petereit discovered that rockrose relieves various forms of inflammation. For inflammation of the gums, just rinse your mouth daily with rockrose tea for several minutes. It is also recommended to drink two or three cups of its tea. According to Professor Stefan Ludwig of The Institute of Molecular Virology in Münster, concentrated rockrose decoction also has a very strong antiviral effect on influenza viruses.

Rockrose for Beauty

Although the delicate pink blossoms are suitable for beauty care – internally and externally, rockrose was also thought to heal warriors wounded in battle, as it prevents bleeding, when applied to the skin. Since ancient times, rockrose was given both of these tasks: healing and beautifying. The entire plant has been used medicinally but labdanum in particular was renowned in the entire Mediterranean region as a cosmetic and aid for skin and hair problems. The plant's anti-aging properties extend to its effect on the skin. The same polyphenols, that support our inner terrain, also encourage radiant, healthy complexions by boosting cellular rejuvenation. Dab your skin with concentrated rockrose tea twice a day, for a significantly cleaner and healthier complexion. According to studies by Professor Weißling in Altenberge as well as a practical study by Dr. Reiner Wöbling in Bad Rothenfelde, it can cure even acne and neurodermatitis in just four weeks. The secret of these astonishing versatile effects of the rockrose herb is the particularly high level of vitamin P.

Rockrose Treats Internal Numbness as well as Panic and Anxiety

Rockrose is a medicinal herb for body, mind and soul. It may be a remedy for those who suffer from coldness and feelings of internal numbness. Comparable to the rockrose bloom, which is lightly creased, something delicate and very beautiful seems to have dried up or been destroyed in these people – often in relation to un-mastered experiences and emotions. The oil can produce relief: just put three to five drops of rockrose oil into an aroma lamp and breathe away the negative experiences. When added to massage oils, it can support lymphatic drainage. In Bach-flower remedies, rockrose is the chief ingredient in rescue remedy as it treats panic, stress, extreme fright or fear, and anxiety; and promotes calmness and relaxation.

Hands on Rock Rose Flower Essence

Flower essences are made from the healing vibration of the sun-steeped flower, which captures the energy imprint of the flower. Flower essences act as catalysts for change at a deep emotional level. They work by the principle of resonance in the subtle body where imbalance starts. Their action is energetic, not biochemical. All plants have a unique vibrational energy pattern, and the flower is the pinnacle of this energy. Rockrose is the chief flower in Dr. Bach's well-known rescue remedy, the emergency remedy for terror or fright that may cause a person to feel frozen and unable to move or think clearly. It even helps when there is no hope.

Rockrose Rescue Remedy

1. On a clear sunny day without clouds, take a clear glass bowl almost full of good water.
2. Pick enough rock rose petals to sprinkle on top of the water until the water surface is covered. Don't push the leaves under.
3. Leave the bowl to steep for four hours in a sunny place.
4. Let the bowl rest outside uncovered in an open field or in a place where it won't get shade. Make sure people won't pass by and cause shadows.
5. With a wooden spoon or stick flip off the petals. (Don't use metal or your fingers).
5. Pour the liquid into a clean jar with a little teaspoon of alcohol to preserve it. This is your mother tincture.
6. Take four drops of the mother tincture and place in a water bottle.
7. Fill the bottle with water and a few drops of alcohol. This is your rescue remedy.
8. Use four drops of rescue remedy under the tongue or in a glass of water. It won't harm to drink rescue remedy every day for prevention.

Rescue remedy is good against trauma, anxiety, shock and fear.