

# THE COMMUNITY PARSHA SHEET



PARSHAT TETZAVEH

London's Leading Young Professionals Platform and Jewish Communal Centre



**RABBI JONATHAN TAWIL**  
TAL Founder & Director

## THE KETORET

What was Ketoret? The Ketoret was a compound of eleven (11) different spices, which weighed approximately 1,840 pounds [836.36 kg]. From this compound an incense offering (also called Ketoret) was brought in the Beit HaMikdash (Holy Temple). This offering was brought twice daily, once as part of the morning service and once as part of the afternoon service. This happened seven days a week, every day of the year, including Shabbat and Yom Kippur. (Five pounds of Ketoret was burnt daily, half in the morning and half in the afternoon.) Preparing the Ketoret was not easy. It had to be weighed out, rubbed, soaked and well ground. It required someone to supervise the grinding process with the constant reminder: "Grind well! Grind well!" On the other hand, it didn't have to be done all at once. As long as the spices were kept in proper proportion it was permitted to do enough for every day.

Nowadays to commemorate this service we read about the Ketoret in the Shacharit and Mincha prayers. Our reading however, does not deal with the actual process of offering the Ketoret, but rather with how it was made, i.e., its ingredients and preparation. Is it so important to recite a recipe as part of a prayer service? What exactly was the idea of the Ketoret and what part

did it play in the daily Temple service? The Rambam, in his Guide for the Perplexed (3:45), suggests the following reason for this ritual:

Since many beasts were daily slaughtered in the holy place, the flesh cut in pieces and the entrails and the legs burnt and washed, the smell of the place would undoubtedly have been like the smell of the slaughterhouses, if nothing had been done to counteract it. They were therefore commanded to burn incense there twice every day... in order to give the place and the garments of those who officiated there a pleasant odor. There is a well-known saying of our Sages, "In Jericho they could smell the incense" [burnt in the Temple]. 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 odor, and is attracted by it, but it abhors and avoids bad smell.

In other words, the pleasant aroma of the Ketoret is intended to offset the stench that would otherwise fill the Mikdash due to the animal sacrifices and thus discourage pilgrimages to the Temple. The Maharam Shick, in his work on the 613 Mitzvot, claims that in light of the Rambam's understanding of this Mitzva one could explain the Gemara's comment (Yoma 26a) that the performance of this ritual is rewarded with wealth. Offering the incense in the

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**7TH ADAR 5785**

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17:36pm

**SHABBAT ENDS:**  
18:40pm

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This newsletter contains Divrei Torah and may contain Sheimot - Please dispose of accordingly

Mikdash serves to endear the Temple and its rituals to the masses, and thus draws other Jews closer to the love and service of the Almighty. People involved in this ever so important work are indeed deserving of immense reward.

The Arizal teaches that reciting the Ketoret with care and devotion is very helpful for coming back to live a proper Jewish life, even for one who was in the black hole of sin.

The ingredient that makes this possible is Chelbenah (galbanum). Even though Galbanum had a most foul smelling gum resin, it was essential for the Ketoret. If you're thinking that only a small bit of Chelbenah was contained in the Ketoret, think again. The Ketoret contained 350 pounds (just over 159 kilograms) of Chelbenah, 19% of its total weight! Why so much?

We go through life with many

desires and aspirations. However we might not always fulfil our dreams. There will be stumbling blocks along the way. Our character traits might stop us going in certain positive directions. The message from the Ketoret is that we must use all our character traits for the good, even those character traits which we think are solely bad, we have to mix them with the rest of our character and through this mix enhance our whole being. We must not negate them, leave them without action, rather we must act on them and use them for the good. Someone may have a propensity to shed blood. Wouldn't it be best if he just buried this part of his personality? No. If he does, it will surface in a negative way. He has to work this attribute into the Ketoret so that his desire for blood leads him to Mitzvot (see Shabbat 156a, where for example he can act like a Mohel or Shochet).

A further idea brought by Chazal is that the incense used in the Bet HaMikdash, relates to us the message that when the wicked as represented by the Chelbenah and righteous join together, the latter can positively impact upon the former to produce a single, "fragrant" unified community. In fact the word Ketoret comes from the root Keshet, a tie or knot. By offering up the Ketoret we tied a lasting knot so to speak with Hashem, and by enjoining all spectrums of Jewish society in to our Minyan and uniting in our servitude of Hashem we form a strong relationship (as represented by the knot) with Hashem. The Zohar Shemot, Vayakhel states that it is a ruling of the Holy One, blessed be He, that whoever looks and reads the incense-offering portion ... will not be damaged that whole day. Next time we read the Ketoret let us take an extra few seconds to contemplate its deep meaning.



## RABBI YEHONATAN SALEM

### RISING TO THE CHALLENGE

At the beginning of the perashah, the Torah instructs the high priest to light the menorah – candelabrum every evening. One of its lights would miraculously stay alight constantly, thereby giving testimony that G-d dwells amongst His people. The verse (Tetzaveh 27:20) writes that the olives would be crushed by hand, and the first drop of oil from each olive would be used for lighting the menorah.

Although the Jewish People are compared to various pleasant-tasting or smelling fruits, which symbolize the beautiful traits and

praises of our nation, the olive nevertheless, bears the strongest resemblance to us. The oil of the olive can only be extracted, when it is crushed or ground. The oil within an olive is not able to be self-extracted. Only through external pressure can its special oil be extracted. So, too, the inner essence of every Jew is beautiful, but in order for our beauty of character to shine forth, we need to exert ourselves in the learning of Torah and avodat Hashem – service of G-d, in order to bring it out.

Preferably, we should become enthused, of our own accord, with the study and application of Torah and mitzvot, thereby cultivating our potential. However, often we also need external factors to cause us to

rise to the challenge and succeed. When we as a nation are persecuted or exiled from place to place, this causes us to return to G-d and consequently, for Him to answer our prayers.

All the afflictions that we endure help to bring out our generosity, sensitivity and other exemplary character traits.

In life, most people find themselves preoccupied with a range of difficulties. Often, just having overcome one hurdle, they find themselves plunged into the next one. If not financial difficulties, they may have health problems, relationship dilemmas, or concerns about their children. In truth, however large or small a worry may be, it tends to take over a person's entire

being. Even just changing a tyre or having a dental appointment, makes a person become completely preoccupied with it. We must remember, however, that all these disturbances or difficulties are not sent by Hashem as objectives in themselves, but as a means to extract our true essential beauty, as we draw closer to G-d by "rising to the challenge."

It is common for people to "wish

away" their trials; yet, this is not the correct outlook. Trials are not pointless, they are there to be utilised as a springboard for inner growth and are, in fact, to our strongest advantage. When we use trials as opportunities for self-introspection and improvement, we come out feeling spiritually-fulfilled, having used them for their intended purpose. Recently, when giving a class to students of marriageable age, I advised them

not to be despondent about not having yet found a suitable partner. Rather, they should utilize it as an opportunity to come closer to G-d through prayer, as this situation will probably never return.

Next time we feel overwhelmed or frustrated by a problem, let us draw ourselves closer to G-d and consider how He wants us to face it, thereby maximising the opportunity of this challenge.

Shabbat shalom



## HALACHOT BY RABBI ELI MANSOUR

Reciting Birkat Ha'mazon From a Written Text, in an Audible Voice, and With Concentration

The Mishna Berura (185:1) cites the Sefer Ha'hinuch's remark that one who ensures to recite Birkat Ha'mazon properly will always be provided with a respectable livelihood, throughout his life.

In explaining the Sefer Ha'hinuch's comment, the Mishna Berura writes that this means, for one thing, making a point to recite Birkat Ha'mazon from a written text, and not from memory. Indeed, Hacham Baruch Ben-Haim would always tell us, "Otiyot Mahkimot" – "Letters make one wise." When we see the words, we are better able to concentrate on and understand their meaning. Moreover, we are less prone to forgetting the special additions for Shabbat and holidays if we recite Birkat Ha'mazon from a written text.

It is worth mentioning in this context a remarkable story told of Hacham Ovadia Yosef when he was a six-year-old student in Rabbi Natan Saleem's Yeshivat Beneh Sion in Jerusalem. The school did not have printed Birkat Ha'mazon cards like we have today, and so Hacham Ovadia sat down and wrote cards for the children in his class, so they

could all recite Birkat Ha'mazon from a written text. Already at this young age, the Hacham understood the importance of reciting Birkat Ha'mazon from a text, instead of reciting it from memory.

Additionally, one should recite Birkat Ha'mazon in an audible voice, such that he can hear the words he recites. It goes without saying that one does not fulfill the obligation if he just reads the words with his eyes and does not recite them with his mouth. But in addition, one should recite the words in an audible voice. The Shulhan Aruch rules that after the fact, if one did not recite Birkat Ha'mazon in an audible voice, he has nevertheless fulfilled the obligation. Interestingly, however, the Ben Ish Hai (Rav Yosef Haim of Baghdad, 1833-1909) writes that since some authorities ruled that one does not fulfill the obligation if he recites Birkat Ha'mazon inaudibly, one who did so should then eat more bread and recite Birkat Ha'mazon properly in order to satisfy all opinions. Halacha does not follow this view, as Hacham Ovadia writes, but the Ben Ish Hai's ruling demonstrates to us the importance of reciting Birkat Ha'mazon in an audible voice, and not silently.

And, of course, one must try to concentrate on the words of Birkat Ha'mazon as he recites them.

The Bah (Rav Yoel Sirkis, 1561-1640) observes that the Peh Sofit does not appear anywhere throughout the text of Birkat Ha'mazon. The reason, he explains, is because this letter is associated with words that refer to calamity (such as "Shesef," "Kesef," and "Af"), and reciting Birkat Ha'mazon properly protects one from harm. It is well worth our while, then, to recite Birkat Ha'mazon slowly and patiently, and with concentration, which takes just a few minutes, fulfills (in many situations) a Torah obligation, and brings us great benefits both in this world and in the next.

### Summary:

It is preferable to recite Birkat Ha'mazon from a written text, rather than from memory. Halacha requires reciting Birkat Ha'mazon in an audible voice, rather than silently, though after the fact, one who recited it silently has fulfilled his obligation (as long as he actually said the words with his mouth, and not just with his eyes). The merit of reciting Birkat Ha'mazon properly brings protection from harm as well as material blessing.

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