

# INCENSE OFFERINGS

*by Rabbi Daniel Travis*

While many of the sacrifices served as an atonement for our transgressions, the ketores (incense offering) had a different goal. Its purpose was simply to bring joy to Hashem, as the verse testifies: "Oil and incense gladden the heart" (Mishle 27). While in a state of joy, Hashem removes any traces of harsh judgment from the world (Medrash Tanchuma, Tetzaveh 15).

The Zohar adds: "If a person feels that bad things are happening in his life and nothing that he does is successful, he should meticulously recite the section of the ketores every morning and afternoon. If he does this, as well as repenting to Hashem, his situation will improve drastically" (Vayakel 219a). Saying this section is auspicious for financial prosperity, especially when written on parchment by a sofer (Seder Hayom p. 53).

The ketores contained eleven ingredients, and a Kohen who offered incense which lacked even one of them was subject to the death penalty. The Rema suggests that a person who skips a word of the verses describing the incense offering may be liable for a similar punishment. Based on this, some Jews in the Diaspora have the custom to only recite these verses on Shabbos and Yom Tov, when their schedules are more relaxed, so they can make sure that they recite these words carefully (Rema 132,2).

Others argue that the death penalty applies only to a Kohen in the Temple, and not to someone in our age who merely left out a word while reciting the ketores verses. Even a Kohen who offered incense that was missing an ingredient would be punished only if it was intentional (Beis Yosef). However, while taking time constraints into account, one should still try to say the ketores section carefully every day (Mishna Berura 132,17).

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