

פרשת
כי תשא
Parashat Ki Tisa

Shemot / Exodus 30:11-34:35, 1 Kings 18:1-39
Matthew 9:35-11:1

What the Sanctuary Incense can Teach us Today

This week's Torah Portion, Parashat Ki Tisa, speaks of the making of the sanctuary incense and its use in the service to God. We are told in the Scriptures that it is forbidden to use the sanctuary incense by the general public. The descriptions given to us in the Torah are analogous to drawing near to *"The Place"* (המקום), to the Lord God of Israel, to seek His ways, where the sanctuary incense when used by the general public is to put on the fragrance of God in the sense of doing things our own ways and not God's ways. This is illustrated by Rabbi Simon Jacobson, who said the following, *"This animalistic drive 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, which possessed the unique capability to sublimate the evil odor of the animal soul within its heavenly fragrance."* Note how Rabbi Jacobson spiritualizes the sanctuary incense as it is related to the sacrifices which were brought to the Tabernacle.

Rabbi Jacobson speaks of the manner in which we are to come before the Lord, that when one brings his base self before the Lord, it does not matter whether it is the best or the finest, our attempts at righteousness still hold a foul odor which he describes as *“the selfishness, the brutality and the materiality of the animal in man.”* He says the sanctuary incense had the capability to sublimate the evil odor of the animal soul within its fragrance. The idea is that due to the sanctuary ritual of sacrifice and blood atonement, there was a foul odor that resulted due to the burning of the flesh, the fat, and the blood of the animal upon the altar. Note that the altar (הַמִּזְבֵּחַ) comes from the root word זָבַח meaning *“slaughter”* where there was death all around, and the concept of the animal taking upon the sin of the one who brought the offering, the imagery that we receive from the Torah in the daily sacrifices give us the feeling of a horrible stench that would have surrounded the sanctuary ritual. This horrible smell was the direct result of the sins of the people, and in parallel fashion, this is how Rabbi Jacobson comes to the conclusion that the one who brings himself to the sanctuary, no matter how *“best of the best”* he may be, the inward man still reeks of a foul odor before a holy God. Because of these things, there are two sides to the sacrificial sanctuary ritual, (i) the physical (*this side, this world*) and (ii) the spiritual (*the other side, heaven*). The burning of the incense had the advantage of eliminating the awful stench of the sacrificial ritual. Therefore, when a person would bring himself to the sanctuary, he would smell the incense and it is said that this *“had the power to break and subjugate the power of the Other Side. This place was called a הַמִּזְבֵּחַ because it was a place where the Other Side was slaughtered.”* (Meam Loez) Note how even though the physical is slaughtered on *“this side”* the spiritual is also being slaughtered on *“the other side”* because the two are intimately connected. This was the point of the laying on of the hands and the transference of sin to the animal by faith. As a result, the incense has the capability to enlighten and purify people from sin. This concept is derived from the idea that whoever smelled the fragrance of the incense when it was being burned upon the altar would have had thoughts of repentance. The reason being, this incense was only burned at the Tabernacle and when one would present himself before God he would have done so in repentance. The incense effected the heart, and the heart would be purified of all the evil thoughts and

from the defilement of the evil urge which is described as the “*base animalistic drive of man.*” Because of the incense, the heart would come to a state of Teshuvah before God, and as a result, the incense is said to be able to “*break the power of the other side*” so as to cause the one bringing the offering to make his heart right before God. This is significant when we consider the prohibition on the use of the incense by the general public. If the incense was taken for general use, the effective outcome would be that it would have no power over the heart of man for Teshuvah. This week’s Torah portion regarding the sanctuary incense speaks of the necessity of sanctifying our hearts for the service of God. The Lord calls us to draw near to “*The Place*” (המקום), that sacred place, to seek His ways, where the sanctuary incense leads us to understand that our hearts and our lives are not for general use, but are sacred, and holy, and righteous. We are not to seek our own form of righteousness, but to seek the ways of God and His righteousness, recognizing that it is only by the mercy of God in His Messiah Yeshua, that we are able to come before Him, where doing so is always to be done in a state of Teshuvah (Repentance). Let’s discuss these things further in this weeks Torah portion.

This week we are looking at *Shemot / Exodus 30:22-38*.

Shemot / Exodus 30:22-38

30:22 Moreover, the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 30:23 ‘Take also for yourself the finest of spices: of flowing myrrh five hundred shekels, and of fragrant cinnamon half as much, two hundred and fifty, and of fragrant cane two hundred and fifty, 30:24 and of cassia five hundred, according to the shekel of the sanctuary, and of olive oil a hin. 30:25 ‘You shall make of these a holy anointing oil, a perfume mixture, the work of a perfumer; it shall be a holy anointing oil. 30:26 ‘With it you shall anoint the tent of meeting and the ark of the testimony, 30:27 and the table and all its utensils, and the lampstand and its utensils, and the altar of incense, 30:28 and the altar of burnt offering and all its utensils, and the laver and its stand. 30:29 ‘You shall also consecrate them, that they may be most holy; whatev-

er touches them shall be holy. 30:30 'You shall anoint Aaron and his sons, and consecrate them, that they may minister as priests to Me. 30:31 'You shall speak to the sons of Israel, saying, 'This shall be a holy anointing oil to Me throughout your generations. 30:32 'It shall not be poured on anyone's body, nor shall you make any like it in the same proportions; it is holy, and it shall be holy to you. 30:33 'Whoever shall mix any like it or whoever puts any of it on a layman shall be cut off from his people.' ' 30:34 Then the Lord said to Moses, 'Take for yourself spices, stacte and onycha and galbanum, spices with pure frankincense; there shall be an equal part of each. 30:35 'With it you shall make incense, a perfume, the work of a perfumer, salted, pure, and holy. 30:36 'You shall beat some of it very fine, and put part of it before the testimony in the tent of meeting where I will meet with you; it shall be most holy to you. 30:37 'The incense which you shall make, you shall not make in the same proportions for yourselves; it shall be holy to you for the Lord. 30:38 'Whoever shall make any like it, to use as perfume, shall be cut off from his people.'

כב וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל-מֹשֶׁה לֵאמֹר: כג וְאַתָּה קַח-לָךְ בָּשָׂם־
מִים רֵאשִׁי מֶרֶדְרוֹר חֲמִשׁ מֵאוֹת וְקֹנְמָן-בָּשָׂם מִחֲצִיתוֹ חֲמִשִּׁים
וּמֵאֲתָיִם וְקִנְיָה-בָּשָׂם חֲמִשִּׁים וּמֵאֲתָיִם: כד וְקִדְדָה חֲמִשׁ מֵאוֹת
בָּשָׂקֶל הַקֹּדֶשׁ וְשָׂמֹן זֵית הַיֵּין: כה וְעָשִׂיתָ אֹתוֹ שָׂמֹן מְשַׁחַת־
קֹדֶשׁ רֶקֶח מְרַקַּחַת מַעֲשֵׂה רֶקֶח שָׂמֹן מְשַׁחַת-קֹדֶשׁ יִהְיֶה: כו
וּמְשַׁחַת בּוֹ אֶת-אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וְאֶת אָרוֹן הָעֵדוּת: כז וְאֶת-הַשְּׁלֶחֶן
וְאֶת-כָּל-כֵּלָיו וְאֶת-הַמִּנְבֵּה וְאֶת-כֵּלָיָהּ וְאֶת מִזְבַּח הַקְּטֹרֶת:
כח וְאֶת-מִזְבַּח הָעֹלָה וְאֶת-כָּל-כֵּלָיו וְאֶת-הַכִּיֹּר וְאֶת-כַּנּוֹ:
כט וְקִדְשָׁתָם אֹתָם וְהָיוּ קֹדֶשׁ קֹדְשִׁים כָּל-הַנִּגָּע בָּהֶם יִקְדָּשׁ:
ל וְאֶת-אֹהֶרֶן וְאֶת-בָּנָיו תִּמְשַׁח וְקִדְשָׁתָם אֹתָם לְכַהֵן לִי: לא
וְאֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל תְּדַבֵּר לֵאמֹר שָׂמֹן מְשַׁחַת-קֹדֶשׁ יִהְיֶה זֶה לִי
לְדֹרֹתֵיכֶם: לב עַל-בֶּשֶׂר אָדָם לֹא יִסּוּךְ וּבִמְתַכְּנָתוֹ לֹא תַעֲשֹׂוּ
כְּמֹהוּ קֹדֶשׁ הוּא קֹדֶשׁ יִהְיֶה לָכֶם: לג אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר יֶרַחַח כְּמֹהוּ

וְאֲשֶׁר יִתֵּן מִמֶּנּוּ עַל-זֶרַח וְנִכְרַת מֵעַמּוּיוֹ: ס לַד וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה
אֶל-מֹשֶׁה קַח-לְךָ סָמִים נָטוּף | וְשַׁחֲלֹת וְחִלְבֵּנָה סָמִים וּלְבֹנָה
זָכָה בַד בְּבַד יִהְיֶה: לֵה וְעָשִׂיתָ אֹתָהּ קְטֹרֶת רִקּוּחַ מַעֲשֵׂה
רוּקּוּחַ מִמֶּלֶח טָהוֹר קֹדֶשׁ: לוּ וְשַׁחֲקֶתָ מִמֶּנּוּ הַדֶּק וְנִתְּתָהּ
מִמֶּנּוּ לְפָנֵי הָעֵדוּת בְּאֵהָל מוֹעֵד אֲשֶׁר אֹנֵעַד לְךָ שָׁמָּה קֹדֶשׁ
קֹדְשִׁים תִּהְיֶה לָכֶם: לז וְהִקְטַרְתָּ אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשֶׂה בְּמִתְכַנְּתָהּ
לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ לָכֶם קֹדֶשׁ תִּהְיֶה לְךָ לִיהוָה: לח אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר-יַעֲשֶׂה
כְּמוֹהָ לְהַרְיִיחַ בָּהּ וְנִכְרַת מֵעַמּוּיוֹ:

ל וְאֵת- אַהֲרֹן וְאֵת-בָּנָיו תִּמְשָׁח וְקִדַּשְׁתָּ אֹתָם לְכַהֵן לִי: לא וְאֶל-בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל תִּדְבָר
30:30 *'You shall anoint Aaron and his sons, and consecrate them, that they may minister as priests to Me. 30:31 'You shall speak to the sons of Israel, saying, 'This shall be a holy anointing oil to Me throughout your generations. (NASB)* The oil containing the incense was only for the use in the Temple service, and we are told the following: לב עַל-בָּשָׂר אָדָם לֹא יִיָּסַף: לג אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר יִרְקַח
וּבְמִתְכַנְּתוֹ לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ כְּמֹהוּ קֹדֶשׁ הוּא קֹדֶשׁ יִהְיֶה לָכֶם: לד אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר יִרְקַח
30:32 *'It shall not be poured on anyone's body, nor shall you make any like it in the same proportions; it is holy, and it shall be holy to you. 30:33 'Whoever shall mix any like it or whoever puts any of it on a layman shall be cut off from his people.'* (NASB) These Scriptures illustrate the significance on the use of the incense and the setting apart for the Tabernacle use only. If the rabbinic assessment is correct, where the incense has the ability to *"break the power of the other side"* so as to cause the one bringing the offering to make his heart right before God. These verses are meant to guard the incense from use by the general public. If the incense was taken for general use, the effective outcome would be that it would have no power over the heart of man for Teshuvah. The Lord calls us to draw near to *"The Place"* (הַמְקוֹם), that sacred place, to seek His ways, where the sanctuary incense leads us to understand that our hearts and our lives are not for general use, but are sacred, and holy, and righteous. This may be why the Torah commands to cut off the person who takes the incense for his own personal use. We are to seek the ways of God

and His righteousness, recognizing that it is only by the mercy of God in His Messiah Yeshua, that we are able to come before Him, where doing so is always to be done in a state of Teshuvah (Repentance).

The following references draws into context the role and the power to sanctify that is found in the burning of the incense.

Shemot / Exodus 25:1-8

25:1 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 25:2 ‘Tell the sons of Israel to raise a contribution for Me; from every man whose heart moves him you shall raise My contribution. 25:3 ‘This is the contribution which you are to raise from them: gold, silver and bronze, 25:4 blue, purple and scarlet material, fine linen, goat hair, 25:5 rams’ skins dyed red, porpoise skins, acacia wood, 25:6 oil for lighting, spices for the anointing oil and for the fragrant incense, 25:7 onyx stones and setting stones for the ephod and for the breastpiece. 25:8 ‘Let them construct a sanctuary for Me, that I may dwell among them. (NASB)

Shemot / Exodus 30:7-10

30:7 ‘Aaron shall burn fragrant incense on it; he shall burn it every morning when he trims the lamps. 30:8 ‘When Aaron trims the lamps at twilight, he shall burn incense. There shall be perpetual incense before the Lord throughout your generations. 30:9 ‘You shall not offer any strange incense on this altar, or burnt offering or meal offering; and you shall not pour out a drink offering on it. 30:10 ‘Aaron shall make atonement on its horns once a year; he shall make atonement on it with the blood of the sin offering of atonement once a year throughout your generations. It is most holy to the Lord.’ (NASB)

Shemot / Exodus 30:34-38

30:34 Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Take for yourself spices, stacte and onycha and galbanum, spices with

pure frankincense; there shall be an equal part of each. 30:35 'With it you shall make incense, a perfume, the work of a perfumer, salted, pure, and holy. 30:36 'You shall beat some of it very fine, and put part of it before the testimony in the tent of meeting where I will meet with you; it shall be most holy to you. 30:37 'The incense which you shall make, you shall not make in the same proportions for yourselves; it shall be holy to you for the Lord. 30:38 'Whoever shall make any like it, to use as perfume, shall be cut off from his people.' (NASB)

The incense was created from the Terumah (contribution) of the people. We are told that Aaron and his sons are to burn the fragrant incense each day, every morning, and that there is to be a perpetual burning of the incense before the Lord. No drink offering is to be poured out upon the altar of incense, and only once a year blood atonement is to be made on the altar by Aaron applying the blood during Yom Kippur. The Lord speaks of the sacredness and holiness of the fragrant incense. The basic idea behind the use of the incense on a practical (physical) aspect was due to the sanctuary ritual of sacrifice and blood atonement, there was a foul odor that resulted due to the burning of the flesh, the fat, and the blood of the animal upon the altar. There was however also a spiritual aspect to the fragrant incense which is related to the manner in which we come before the Lord, to consider who we are on the inside and to making the heart right before the Lord.

Rambam states the following according to His *“Guide for the Perplexed.”*

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(11) 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 slaughter-houses, if nothing had been done to counteract it. They were therefore commanded to burn incense there twice every day, in the morning and in the evening (Exod. 30:7, 8), 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.

The idea is that both the place and the clothing were to be made fragrant by the incense. Rambam brings out the idea that standing in the presence of God should not be accompanied with the odor of death. The effect of the incense was to bring a pleasant smell, which not only elevated our hearts, but also would cause us to consider the place we are approaching, and to make our hearts right before the Lord. The place (Tabernacle) and the clothing (Priests) had the smell of a foul odor due to death if it were not for the fragrant incense. Note the parallels which may be drawn to our lives. The inward self (Tabernacle) and clothing (the way we live) have the smell of a foul odor due to sin. This seems to be illustrated in the following way based upon *Bamidbar / Numbers 16:46-48*.

Bamidbar / Numbers 16:46-48

16:46 Moses said to Aaron, 'Take your censer and put in it fire from the altar, and lay incense on it; then bring it quickly to the congregation and make atonement for them, for wrath has gone forth from the Lord, the plague has begun!' 16:47 Then Aaron took it as Moses had spoken, and ran into the midst of the assembly, for behold, the plague had begun among the people. So he put on the incense and made atonement for the people. 16:48 He took his stand between the dead and the living, so that the plague was checked. (NASB)

When we consider the significance of the fragrant incense and its role in having the power over the heart of man for Teshuvah; we are given

the concept that the sin that was burning in the hearts of the people in the congregation of Israel. The sin on the inside resulted in a plague and death. Aaron run out into the midst of the congregation with the burning incense to purify and to make atonement. Aaron stood in the midst of the people burning the incense standing between the living and the dead. The incense caused the people to realize the Lord God of Israel is dwelling in their midst which led to their repenting of their evil thoughts. Note how this is what is going on in our lives, Teshuvah stands between the living works and the dead works of our lives. Remember also that this event followed the death of Korach, Datan, and Aviram according to Parashat Korach. We are told that the people were angry that these people had died.

Bamidbar / Numbers 16:41-45

16:41 But on the next day all the congregation of the sons of Israel grumbled against Moses and Aaron, saying, 'You are the ones who have caused the death of the Lord's people.' 16:42 It came about, however, when the congregation had assembled against Moses and Aaron, that they turned toward the tent of meeting, and behold, the cloud covered it and the glory of the Lord appeared. 16:43 Then Moses and Aaron came to the front of the tent of meeting, 16:44 and the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 16:45 'Get away from among this congregation, that I may consume them instantly.' Then they fell on their faces. (NASB)

These people kept sin in their hearts, and the idea was that they needed to be reminded that they are to live their lives in repentance before God because he was dwelling in their midst. This may be why it is that Aaron needed to go into the midst of the congregation with the burning incense, so the people would smell this fragrance and realize what they have done and would repent, making their hearts right before the Lord and thus stopping the plague. This seems to be the context the Torah is providing for us to understand what is meant by Aaron going and making atonement on behalf of the people by simply burning the incense. Remember how in the burning of the incense, the smell of the incense



would permeate the cloths and when one goes before the Lord and then returns home, the smell of the Tabernacle would following him, but it would eventually fade. This draws us to the understanding that the people were called to continually return to the place of the Lord. This seems to be what is being drawn out according to the rabbinic interpretations on the fragrant incense. Note what is written in the Zohar regarding these things.

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Rabbi Shimon said: If men only knew how exalted the section dealing with] the incense-offering was in the eyes of the Holy One, blessed be He, they would take each single word and make it an ornament for their heads, like a crown of gold. And whoever, wishes to study it should examine it in every detail. And if he concentrates upon it every day, he will have a share both in this world and the world to come. Pestilence will disappear from him and from the world, and he will be delivered from all the [evil] judgments of this world, from evil powers, from the judgment of Gehinnom and from Judgment of the foreign kingdom.

The idea here on making the words an ornament for our heads is analogous to putting God's Word in our hearts so that we will live by His Word. According to the Zohar, the incense offering is the most precious part of the Temple service in the eyes of the Lord which is indicated by the strict restrictions that were placed upon its use. Rashi interprets the incense in the following way.

Rashi on Shemot / Exodus 30:37

Part 1

במתכנתה means, according to the quantity of spices used by Moses.

Part 2

קדש תהיה לך לה IT SHALL BE UNTO THEE HOLINESS FOR THE LORD — This means that you must not

make it except in honor of My Name.

Rashi states that the fragrant incense was meant for use only in honor of the Name of God. Paul wrote according to *Romans 1:21*, “*For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.*” Paul also wrote in *Colossians 3:16-17* saying, that we are to be joyful telling us to sing “*with thankfulness in our hearts to God,*” and that in all things we are to give “*thanks to God the Father through him*” the Messiah Yeshua. Scripture has much to say about this duty to be thankful to the Lord, and this week’s Torah Portion (Parashat Ki Tisa) speaks to this attitude as part of what it means to honor Him in everything. It is not too difficult to see how the lack of honor for the Creator leads to sin based upon this weeks Torah Portion. The manner in which we are to come before the Lord, when one brings his base self before the Lord, it does not matter whether it is the best or the finest, our attempts at righteousness still hold a foul odor which is described as “*the selfishness, the brutality and the materiality of the animal in man.*” We were made to worship the Lord, and therefore our life’s goal is to bring honor to the Lord God our Father in heaven. If our honor is not directed to the Lord who made all that exists, then it is going to be directed towards something else. The redirection of honor due to sin makes all of us guilty of idolatry. Our lives are to be all about honoring God directly in our worship of the Lord, from a Torah context directs us to realize that honoring God comes by faith through the way we live and seek Him each day. For example, the command to respect the name of God and honor our parents are very practical examples as reminders to overcome our natural tendency to dishonor the Creator. This is significant when we consider the prohibition on the use of the incense by the general public in this week’s Torah Portion. The sanctuary incense speaks of the necessity of sanctifying our hearts for the service of God. The Lord calls us to draw near to “*The Place*” (המקום), that sacred place, to seek His ways, where the sanctuary incense leads us to understand that our hearts and our lives are not for general use, but are sacred, and holy, and righteous.

