

TETZAVEH (EXODUS 27:20-30:10)

Galbanum in Spice, so Everything's Nice!

2004 · Rabbi Yerachmiel Sepowitz

Fast of Esther

Wednesday, March 7, is a fast day. The Fast of Esther commemorates the war of the Jews of the Persian Empire against their enemies that took place on that date. In keeping with Jewish tradition, the Jews repented and fasted in hope for G-d's assistance in battling their enemies. Let us pray that He will continue to watch over us and protect us.

The fast begins Wednesday at dawn, (72 minutes before sunrise.) It ends at dusk, (25-72 minutes after sunset, depending upon local custom.) For sunrise and sunset times for your community [click here](#).

Purim

Wednesday night and Thursday will be Purim, the most festive day on the Jewish calendar.

Learn about Purim by reading this brochure. (Better still, print out copies and give it to your friends!)

“Galbanum in Spice, so Everything's Nice!”

This week's Torah Portion continues last week's topic of the Tabernacle in the desert. Last week, the Torah spoke about the building itself, as well as the “furniture.” This week's Portion focuses primarily on the Priests and some of the Services they were to perform in the Tabernacle.

The Torah reading concludes with the Mitzvah of *Ketores* – incense. The Priest was required to burn incense on a special Altar every morning and every afternoon. The sweet smell of the incense serves to endear us to our Creator. In fact, the Talmud tells us that while Moses was in Heaven receiving the Torah, the Angel of Death divulged to him that he could “assuage” G-d's anger with incense. (See Deuteronomy, 17:6-15, where Aaron ends a Divine plague by igniting incense.)

Why was the incense so special and powerful?

The incense consisted of eleven spices. Among those spices were “*Mor d'ror*” – pure myrrh, which our sages consider to be the foremost of all spices, and “*Chelbenah*” – *galbanum*. Galbanum is a foul-smelling material whose negative influence is somehow obscured by the other ingredients. When the Nation of Israel serves G-d, all must be included. In the introductory prayers of Yom Kippur, we declare that “...we permit praying together with sinners.”

We are not an elitist nation. Just as the galbanum with its repulsive smell is included in the incense, so too are all Jews, regardless of their level of observance, included in our prayers.

It is the pure myrrh that brings it all together.

“...Pure myrrh...” “**Mor d’ror**” in Hebrew; “**Mor dachi**” in Aramaic. Sound familiar? The Talmud sees the mention of this spice as allusion to **Mordechai**, of Purim fame.

It was Mordechai, with his concern for his entire nation, who appealed to G-d in Heaven to thwart Haman’s evil designs.

One of the Mitzvahs of Purim is *Mishloach Manos*, gifts of food to friends. Another Mitzvah is to send gifts to the poor.

The People of Israel have no shortage of enemies from the outside. Our obligation is to make sure we have none on the inside. When there is unity among the People of Israel, ALL the People of Israel, we can then call upon G-d for Divine Protection.

There is no sweeter smell than the holy incense known as “Shalom.”

Have a great Shabbos and a happy Purim.

Rabbi Yerachmiel Seplowitz