סדר הקטורת

נד. אחר פרשת התמיד, נוהגים לומר בכל יום פרשת סמני הקטורת ועשייתו (שמות ל, לד-לו. ושם ז-ח). [ראה ש"ע ס"ט]. ולאחריו אומרים ברייתא, תנו רבנן פטום הקטורת כיצד וכו'.

ופרשת התמיד והקטורת יאמר בכוונה גדולה, דרבו מספר מעלותיה, והקריאה במקום הקרבה. [באו"ח מקץ ה"ח]

נה. בזוהר הקדוש הפליגו במעלת אמירת הקטורת בכל יום, ואמרו שם (מדרש הנעלם וירא ק ע"ב): בזמן שארע מות בבני אדם, ברית נגזרה וכרוז עבר על כל צבא השמים, אם יכנסו לבתי כנסיות ובתי מדרשות ויאמרו בכוונת הלב את פרשת הקטורת שיתבטל המות מהם.

ועוד אמרו שם (ויקהל ריח ע"ב): מי שמסתכל וקורא בכל יום מעשה הקטורת, ינצל מכל דברי הכישוף של העולם, ומכל פגעים רעים, ומכל הרהורים רעים, וממות, ולא ינזק כל היום ההוא, וצריך שיכוין בה.

ואמר רבי שמעון, אם בני האדם היו יודעים כמה הוא עליון מעשה הקטורת לפני הקדוש ברוך הוא, היו לוקחים כל מלה ומלה ממנו, והיו מעלים אותה עטרה על ראשיהם, ככתר של זהב. ומי

Ketoret

Day 17

Passages of *ketoret*

54) Following the *parashat hatamid*, we recite the passage describing the *ketoret* incense and how it is made. The verses are followed by the *baraita* of *pitum haketoret ketzad*. It is very important to recite both *parashat hatamid* and *ketoret* with great concentration, since it brings many benefits, spiritual and physical. Reciting these passages is as meritorious as actually offering these sacrifices.

Protection from mortal dangers

55) The holy *Zohar* extols the virtue of reciting the passage of *ketoret* each day. It states (*Midrash Hane'elam parashat Vayera* page 11b): When death stalks men, there is an announcement sent to all the resident agents of the Heavens, warning them that they must cease attacking the people if they gather in the synagogues and recite the *ketoret* with proper concentration. Likewise, it promises (*parashat Vayak'hel* page 218b) that reciting *ketoret* will ward off the effects of any magic spell, any ill fortune, all evil thoughts and all forms of death or other harm throughout the day, as long as it is recited with proper concentration.

Ribbi Shim'on said, "If people would realize what high regard the Blessed Holy One has for the passage of *ketoret*, they would take each word of it and place it on their heads as if it were a golden crown. To accomplish this, one must pay attention to the passage's

שמשתדל בה צריך להסתכל במעשה הקטורת, ואם יכוין בה בכל יום, יש לו חלק בעולם הזה ובעולם הבא, ויסתלק המות ממנו ומהעולם, וינצל מכל הדינים של העולם הזה, מצדדים רעים, ומדינה של גיהנם. [ראה בהקדמה]

ואתה בן אדם פקח עיניך לכוין באמירת הקטורת, לא להנאתך כי אם לעשות נחת רוח ליוצרך, כי מתוקף מעלותיו נודע שיש נחת רוח לה' יתברך. [מחזיק ברכה סי' קלב אות ו, הו"ד בכה"ח שם אות יח]

ופשוט שמי שיודע ספר, שמצוה שילמד פירוש פטום הקטורת, כדי שיבין מה שהוא אומר, ובזה תחשב לו האמירה במקום ההקטרה. [משנ"ב סי' מח ס"ק א, ביאוה"ל סי' א סוד"ה ופרשת עולה]

נו. מנהגינו לומר קודם פטום הקטורת: "אתה הוא ה' אלהינו שהקטירו אבותינו לפניך את קטורת הסמים בזמן שבית המקדש קיים, כאשר צוית אותם על יד משה נביאך, ככתוב בתורתך". [ראה שו"ת נוב"י סי' י, מחב"ר סי' מח אות ב, כה"ח שם ס"ק א]

meaning. One who gives it the proper concentration each day will be rewarded in this world and in the World to Come. Deadly illnesses will avoid him and will avoid the world in his merit. He will be protected from all punishments in this world, from the forces of evil and from the punishment of Gehinnom."

We must train ourselves to recite *ketoret* carefully and properly. Our Sages taught that this brings much pleasure to Him. Our intentions, however, must not be for our own benefit but rather to please God. Anyone who is capable of studying the meaning of the passages of *ketoret* should invest the time necessary for it. Once he is capable of reciting it while understanding what it means, then he will be rewarded as if he had participated in offering *ketoret* on the Altar.

Atta Hu Elohenu

56) Our custom is to preface the passage of *ketoret* with this declaration: You are God our Master, to Whom our ancestors offered the *ketoret* incense during the era when the *Bet Hamikdash* existed as You commanded them through Moshe Your servant, as is written in Your Torah.[52]

52. We preface the passage of *ketoret* in this manner but there is no such introduction for the passage of *korban hatamid*. The *Aharonim* offered a number of explanations for this:

a) The responsa *Noda Bihuda* (*O.H.* #10, cited in *Sha'are Teshuva* 132:4) states that before reciting *ketoret* we recite the praise of *En k'Elohenu*, which ends with, "You are our God, You are our Master." Therefore, we continue with a similar phrase – "You are God our Master." Why do we preface it with *En k'Elohenu*? Our Sages taught (*Yoma* 26a) that the mitzvah of offering *ketoret* bestows wealth on the *kohen* performing it. By declaring *En k'Elohenu* – there is no one like our God – we affirm our belief that He is the source of our wealth and it is not a result of our own talents and intelligence. See the comment of Harav HIDA in *Mahazik Berakha* (48:2).

b) The prayer book *Otzar Hatefillot* (page 152) explains it based on the teaching of the Talmud Yerushalmi (*Yoma* 1:5) that no one may be present in the *hekhal* when the *kohen* offers the *ketoret*, and even the angels may not remain there at that moment. The *kohen* is alone with God at that time. Therefore, we preface the *ketoret* with *En k'Elohenu* – there is no one like our God.

c) Harav Yosef Hayim (*Od Yosef Hai* halakhot *parashat Miketz* halakha 7) noted that we do not ask God to consider our reciting of *ketoret* as if we had offered it. He explained that we are afraid our tongues might slip and we might omit an ingredient of the *ketoret*. If someone offers *ketoret* that is missing any of its eleven basic ingredients, he incurs a death

ואחר סדר הקטורת אומרים ג׳ פסוקים: ה׳ צבאות עמנו וכו׳, ה׳ צבאות אשרי וכו׳, ה׳ הושיעה וכו׳. ואחר כך יאמר: וערבה לה׳ וכו׳. ולא יאמר שום פסוק אחר כלל. [האר״י בשעה״כ, הובא בכה״ח שם]

נז. טוב ונכון לומר את אחד עשר הסממנים מתוך ספר, ולא בעל פה, שלא לדלג תיבות, אך אין זה **לעיכובא.** [ראה ב״י סי׳ קלב, וברמ״א שם, ובכה״ח פלאגי׳ סי׳ טו״ב אות ח״י]

At the conclusion of the *ketoret* passages, we recite four verses: **a)** ה׳ צְבָאוֹת עִמָּנוּ וכו׳; **b)** ה׳ צְבָאוֹת אַשְׁרֵי וכו׳; **c)** ה׳ הוֹשִׁיעָה וכו׳; and **d)** וְעָרְבָה לַה׳ וכו׳. No other verses should be added.

Using a written text

57) It is highly recommended to read the list of the eleven ingredients of *ketoret* from a written text rather than recite it by heart. In this way, it is far less likely that the reader will omit any of the ingredients. Nevertheless, there is no sin in reciting the list by heart.[53]

penalty. Hence, we do not state our specific intentions while reciting it. If we manage to recite it correctly, then all is well and we hope in our hearts that God will accept it as if we had offered *ketoret*. If we omitted a crucial word, no harm will befall us since we did not specify that we are substituting these words for the act of offering *ketoret*. Heaven cannot count it against us since we might be reciting it only as a review of the halakhot of *ketoret*. When studying Torah, God lovingly accepts our efforts even if we omit words mistakenly, as our Sages taught based on the words (*Shir Hashirim* 2:4), "וְדִגְלוֹ עָלַי אַהֲבָה – He waves the banner of love for me."

In order to strengthen the impression that we are only reviewing the halakhot of *ketoret*, we preface it with the declaration - You are God our Master, to Whom our ancestors offered the *ketoret*. It then appears that we are simply recounting what used to happen in our past history and that we have no intentions for it to be considered as if we actually offered *ketoret*. If we succeed in reciting it correctly without omitting any ingredients, we trust that God will count it as if we offered *ketoret* and reward us accordingly.

In some congregations, the practice is not to include the preface of "You are God our Master" during *minḥa*, but in most communities it is recited just as it is during *shaḥarit*. Those who omit it during *minḥa* rely on the fact that they recited it during *shaḥarit* to safeguard them during *minḥa* as well. Those who recite it during *minḥa* wish to make their defense crystal clear. Nowadays, the preface is added to *minḥa* in almost all communities. This is good, for it is admiral to take precautions to avoid Heaven's punishments.

53. In the *Bet Yosef* (*Siman* 133), Maran cited Rabbenu Yitzḥak Abuhab ruling that one must recite *ketoret* from a written text to ensure that one will not omit any of the ingredients and incur the death penalty. It could be, he added, that for this reason some communities refrain from reciting *ketoret* altogether. The Rama (132:2) explained that this is the reason why Ashkenazic Jews do not recite it on weekdays when people are in a hurry to go to work and are more likely to omit words.

Maran commented: If this is the tradition, I accept it. If it is his own argument, I disagree. Although the Talmud states (*Keritot* 6a) that if someone omits one of the ingredients he incurs the death penalty, Rashi explained that this refers to the *kohen gadol* on Yom Kippur who offered *ketoret* in the Holy of Holies. If he omitted an ingredient and uses incomplete *ketoret*, he has no permission to enter the Holy of Holies. He incurs the death penalty for entering it improperly as the verse states (*Vayikra* 16:2), "He may not enter the sacred place at any time so that he will not die," but he does not incur this penalty for offering incomplete *ketoret* [on the golden Altar].

Rambam (*Hilkhot Kele Hamikdash* 2:8) ruled that offering *ketoret* that is missing an ingredient is a capital sin incurring the death penalty even when offering it on the golden Altar outside the Holy of Holies. Even according to him, it may be that this punishment is for entering the *Bet Hamikdash* for an unauthorized purpose, as happened to Nadav and Avihu, the sons of Aharon. Even if one argues that the main sin is offering incomplete *ketoret*, there is no basis to say that one incurs the death penalty for reciting the passage of *ketoret* incorrectly. The punishment is for actually offering incomplete *ketoret*. Furthermore, even if it would be true that one incurs the death penalty when reciting *ketoret* and omitting an ingredient, that applies to the eleven principle ingredients only, not to the other additives listed in the *baraita*. Anyone can be careful to include the eleven principle ingredients without difficulty.

ויש נוהגים לקרוא פטום הקטורת בתפלה מתוך קלף בכתב יד אשורית, הכתוב על ידי סופר, כמו בספר תורה, והיא סגולה לפרנסה טובה ועושר, כמו שכתוב בספרים. [ראה בסדר היום ובכה"ח פלאג'י, ובכה"ח סופר סי' קלב ס"ק כג]

ומכל מקום הואיל ודעת מרן השלחן ערוך להחמיר שלא לכתוב פסוקי תורה בודדים, אין לעשות כן לכתחלה, כיון שאנו קבלנו הוראות מרן, ושב ואל תעשה עדיף. ורק סופר אשכנזי שכותב את פטום הקטורת, מפני שסומך על דעת הרי"ף שהתיר, שפיר דמי. ובדיעבד שנכתבה על ידי סופר ספרדי, רשאים לקרות את פטום הקטורת מתוכה. [יבי"א ח"ט חיו"ד סי' כג]

Handwritten on parchment

Some people observe the practice of reading *ketoret* from a handwritten text inscribed on parchment by a professional scribe. This, according to a number of *Aharonim*, is said to be an auspicious practice, bringing wealth to those who observe it.

Nevertheless, according to Maran in the *Shulhan Arukh* it is forbidden to write individual verses in this manner. Since Sefardic Jews have accepted the rulings of Maran, it is incorrect to write the passages of *ketoret* on a parchment. An Ashkenazic scribe may write them, however, since Ashkenazic Jews rely on the opinion of Rabbenu Yitzhak Alfasi who permitted it. If someone possesses such a parchment [even if] written by a Sefardic scribe, he may use it to recite *ketoret*.[54]

This is not a reason to avoid reciting *ketoret* altogether. In fact, the *Magen Avraham* (132:5) cited the *Bet Yosef* and testified that the proper custom is to recite *ketoret* every day. See the *Kaf Hahayim* Sofer (132:27).

Counting the ingredients with one's fingers

Harav HIDA (*Kesher Godel* #73) wrote that it is commendable to count the eleven principle ingredients of the *ketoret* on one's fingers while reciting them. The *Ben Ish Hai* (*parashat Miketz* halakha 8) explained that by doing this, we demonstrate the importance of these ingredients. Furthermore, this act spurs us to concentrate on the meaning of the words we recite [and ensures that none will be omitted]. He added another reason – since we hope that God will consider our reciting of *ketoret* as if we had offered it on the Altar, we wish to include some physical act other than simply speaking the words.

Fingers of the right hand

The *Ben Ish Hai* instructed us to count the eleven ingredients on the fingers of the right hand only. This is because the right hand is always favored for performing mitzvot. Furthermore, in the *Bet Hamikdash*, the *kohen* offering *ketoret* must do so with his right hand. He emphasized that one must not count them on the fingers of both hands, although there is such an opinion among the *Poskim*. Apparently, he was referring to the *Hesed La'alafim* (48:5, cited in the *Kaf Hahayim* Palachi 11:8), who wrote that one should count the ingredients using both hands so that both hands will participate in the mitzvah.

The *Kaf Hahayim* Sofer (48:4) rejected the ruling of the *Hesed La'alafim*, since we wish our reciting to be considered as if we had offered the *ketoret* and if the left hand offers *ketoret* it is invalid. Therefore, we must follow the *Ben Ish Hai's* instructions to use the fingers of the right hand only.

The *sefer Mizahav Umipaz* (page 666) defended the position of the *Hesed La'alafim*, explaining that although we hope to receive credit as if we have offered the *ketoret*, we are not actually offering it and the rules of offering it do not apply to our reciting of the passage. After all, we are not standing in the *Bet Hamikdash* and most people reciting it are not *kohanim*. Furthermore, the *kohen* must be standing when he offers *ketoret*, while we recite it seated in the synagogue. Therefore, there can be nothing wrong with counting the ingredients on the fingers of the left hand.

In conclusion, both opinions have a valid basis. One may follow either opinion.

54. Reading *ketoret* from a text handwritten on parchment

The *Kaf Hahayim* Palachi (17:18) cited the *Mishpat Tzedek* explaining that it is commendable to write the passage and *baraita* of the *ketoret* on parchment in square letters (the type used in Torah scrolls) and to read *ketoret* from the parchment each day. This practice should help to bring wealth and prosperity, just as we are taught (*Yoma* 26a) that the act of offering *ketoret* brought wealth to the