

+PORTION	DATE	HEB DATE	TORAH	NEVIIM	KETUVIM
Ki Tisa	14 Mar 2020	18 Adar 5780	Exo. 30:11-34:35	Eze 36:16-38	John 11:47-57

It is written (30:16), “You shall take the silver for the atonement from the children of Yisrael...to make atonement for yourselves.” The sages teach that Moshe was perplexed by the notion that the soul can be redeemed from such a severe sin of the Golden Calf by a mere piece of silver as silver and soul are completely opposite. The soul epitomizes the spiritual and silver epitomizes earthliness as it is taken from the earth. Silver is the lowest elements: fire, water, air, and earth. Since the soul needs to be redeemed due to sin and by sinning, our soul succumbed to earthliness, how can earthliness be cured by more earthliness?

It was for this reason that Moshe was shown a coin of “fire”, not by an angel but by Hashem Himself. Hashem demonstrated that, in the case of half-shekel, opposites can become one: silver, the lowest element (earth), becomes fire, the highest element. Hashem’s point was that even the physical half-shekel can be transformed into “fire” and thereby have the power to redeem a soul. The transformation, by virtue of the essence of our souls, which are a part of Hashem, never sins. Only the superficial aspect of the soul manifest in the body is susceptible to the deceptions of the evil inclination. If we involve the essence of our souls and our entire being in what we do, we can harmoniously blend fire and silver.

A coin given without feeling is cold and unremarkable. But a coin given with the warmth and enthusiasm of the soul’s essence is fire – live spirituality – can atone for the gravest sin. This was the coin of fire shown to Moshe. Therefore, if we perform the commandments with enthusiasm and spiritual vitality, they become coins of fire.

This does not mean that when the commandments are performed without apparent warmth are useless. The essence of every soul burns with the desire to do Hashem’s will. However, this desire can be temporarily hidden, but it is never absent. Even if we must force ourselves to do Hashem’s bidding, our act is still a “coin of fire” by virtue of the inner essence of our soul. For example, if I tell my friend not to eat shrimp because it is forbidden, my friend just does so by doing me a favor. My friend, even though he was “cold”, but by bidding to Hashem’s commandment, he is still considered a “coin of fire” by virtue of the inner essence of his soul.

As we have learned, fire, which constantly soars upward, is a metaphor for our continual yearning to transcend our limits and become one with Hashem. The silver coins which are earthly and stable, represents the recognition that we must submit to Hashem’s will and remain focused on the physical world in order to fulfill His plan for creation. Therefore, our challenge is to set our “coins” on “fire.” It is to bring His *kedushah* (holiness) into the physical world with same fiery enthusiasm we experience when yearning for Hashem. The only way we can “set our coins ablaze” is by calling upon the essence of our soul by infusing our submission to His will with fiery enthusiasm, for His desire has become one with our desire.

The rich and the poor had to give half a shekel. A half-shekel is 10 *geirah* (0.10 oz.) by weight. On a deeper level, we are to recognize that we are just halves. To be a complete shekel, we must unite with our fellow. Similarly, we are also only “half” in our relationship with Hashem. It is the ten powers of the soul, our intellect and emotions, parallel and reflect the ten powers (sefirot) that Hashem used in creating the world and continues to use in order to constantly re-create it. When we channel all ten powers of our soul, that is every nuance of our being, toward uniting with Hashem and fulfilling our Divine mission, we align our “soul-powers” with Hashem’s Attributes. Thus, our ten becomes twenty – a whole shekel.

The Laver was explained in ADB 20200312. The deeper meaning: the purpose of washing our hands and feet is to cleanse of any “dirt” that could impede our effectiveness in raising and spreading Divine consciousness. Thus, washing prepares us for the task we are about to perform, focusing our mind, hands, and feet on its importance.

The “Outer Altar” is the material world that we need to elevate, therefore, we need to “wash” to take precautions against succumbing to the bombardment of materialism. The “Inner Altar” is enhancing our connection to Hashem, it is enough to “wash” once before each entry into this realm. It is for this reason, our Messiah, Yehushua was hung on the tree. He forgave our sins, that is, “washed” our sins, so that we can enhance our connection to Him.

It is written (Exo. 30:34), “And יהוה said to Moshe, “Take sweet spices, fragrant gum and cinnamon and galbanum, and clear frankincense with these sweet spices, all in equal amounts.” There are total of eleven ingredients to make the incense. They are: myrrh, cassia, stacte, onycha, and galbanum, spikenard, saffron, costus, aromatic bark, cinnamon and pure frankincense. The four main ingredients have an equal weight of 34 kg or 74.5 lb: stacte, onycha, galbanum, and frankincense. As for others: 7.7 kg or 17 lb of myrrh, cassia, spikenard, and saffron; 5.8 kg or 12.8 lb of costus; 1.4 kg or 3.2 of aromatic bark; and 4.3 kg or 9.6 lb of cinnamon.



The incense (קְטֹרֶת, *ke-to-ret*) was offered up on the inner Altar, which expresses the inner yearnings of the heart. that will last a year. The focal point of the incense will be on galbanum which has “a peculiar, somewhat musky odor”¹ that grows on the slopes of the mountain ranges of northern Iran.

This displeasing order alludes to the wrongdoers among the Yisraelites who, despite their repugnant behavior, are still an indispensable part of the Yisrael nation, just as galbanum was an essential ingredient of the incense.

One of the ingredients, myrrh is a forbidden spice. According to Mishneh Torah, Kelei HaMikdash 1:3, the myrrh, pronounced as *mor* was actually the blood of a non-kosher wild animal from India. The etymology supports this idea. “The word myrrh corresponds with a common Semitic root *m-r-r* meaning "bitter". Its name entered the English language from the Hebrew Bible, where it is called מֹר *mor*, and later as a Semitic loanword² was used in the Greek myth of Myrrha, and later in the Septuagint; in the Ancient Greek language, the related word μύρον (*múron*) became a general term for perfume.”³ Hasagot HaRa'avad disagree with this notion.

In any case, the incense expresses the intrinsic connection between Hashem and the Yisraelites, which cannot be severed or sullied. This essential connection does not merely allow the inclusion of those who have gone astray; it demands it. If either the foul-smelling or non-kosher spice was omitted, the entire mixture was invalid.

¹ Wikipedia, Galbanum

² def. a word adopted from one language and incorporated into another language without translation

³ Wikipedia, Myrrh

The same is true of repentance. When repenting, we ask Hashem to overlook or forgive our sins in response to our efforts to tap into our deepest and most essential connection with Him. The Kabbalah calls this as *yechidah* (“single one”) when we get in touch with this aspect of our souls, we are able to rise above our past misdeeds that cause separation between Hashem and us.

Rambam said that the purpose of burning the incense was to neutralize the foul odor of the meat that was slaughtered for the sacrifices. This would seem to contradict the sublime meanings ascribed to the incense as given above. The Rabbe of Liadi explains this contradiction. When someone would bring a sacrifice to atone for a sin, he first had to repent in order for the sacrifice to effect atonement. But sometimes people did not repent fully, and then some of the foulness of their sin still remained. The incense, by manifesting the Yisraelite’s sublime level of connection to Hashem, served to neutralize this remaining foulness. So, the function of the incense is alluded to in its components as some spices were inedible, non-kosher, and foul-smelling indicates that it was intended to elevate even the lowest elements of life.

Therefore, “whoever makes any like it, to smell it, he shall be cut off from his people” (v. 38). As it was explained above, the incense expressed the intrinsic connection between Hashem and the Yisraelites. In this light, Baal Shem Tov interprets: “Whoever makes any like it” – If a person pretends to be connected to Hashem, but he is only doing so – “to smell it” in order that others should take note and admire him for it, such a person will “be cut off from his people.” Thus, our Messiah said, “And when you pray, you shall not be like the hypocrites. For they love to pray standing in the congregations and on the corners of the streets, to be seen by men.” (Matt. 6:5)