



Incense Alert!! Is Your Incense Kosher??

By Rabbi Ariel Bar Tzadok

Do you burn incense in your home, office or anywhere else? I know that we do in my home.

Yet, have you ever stopped to think: is your incense KOSHER?

Kosher incense?? Is there such a thing? We don't eat incense, so why does it have to be kosher? This good question deserves a good answer. Yet, we must first understand certain realities that govern the relationship between the spiritual (astral) planes and the physical world.

There are a number of people, who knowingly or not, perform practices, religious, spiritual and otherwise, which while intended for good, nonetheless, strengthen the demonic forces of evil and deception. Usually disguised as simple spiritual or "new age" expressions, many of these so-called spiritual acts have the opposite effect of what the individual involved with them thinks.

One of these simple and apparently innocent acts is the mere burning of incense.

In pagan and other cultures, incense is traditionally burned as a means to invite malevolent spiritual forces to come to the place where the incense is burned. Those practicing this know that by creating a potent fragrant aroma, they can attract demonic entities. They would then interact with those entities thus contaminating their souls and with or without their knowing it, become agents of evil in the world.

Yet, how and why would demonic entities, so-called non-physical creatures be attracted to something physical as fragrant aromas. The answer to this reveals to us a shocking matter about the true nature of demonic entities.

It is well known by our Sages (ref. Avot D'Rebbbe Natan 37:3) that the demonic races, unlike the more highly evolved angelic races, do very much have an attachment to physical things. Demons, unlike angels, eat and drink, sexually procreate and they die.

Granted demons are not physical. They do not eat the physical matter of food. Yet, these entities are somehow able to "eat" the "life-force" energy (i.e. shefa ruhani) within such



foods. The food for demons is anything that has within it "life force" energy. This includes any and all physical matter, as well as the non-physical human soul.

The demonic entities are able to absorb the "life force" energy from any thing that they are allowed access to. Thus when something is offered to them by name, overtly or inadvertently, they come and take their portion. Usually, however, they don't stop there. Like hungry ravenous animals, they take their prey from any vulnerable source.

Another point very important for us to understand is the relationship of the sense of smell to spiritual entities. Smell is considered the one sense that makes the greatest connection between our physical realm to the astral realm of the angles and demons. The nose is the place where G-d breathed into man the "breath of life" (ref. Gen. 2:7). Therefore, the nose and the sense of smell are very spiritual. The demons then are attracted to matters of smell more so than any other type of spiritual nourishment.

Indeed demons are attracted to fragrant aromas. These fragrances are their food. They "smell" them and thus extract the "life force" energy in them. Those individuals providing these demons this sustenance are then expected by these unholy forces to continue to provide for them. If not, they exact their revenge.

This knowledge is certainly not limited to Jewish circles. Indeed pagans and idolaters have known this for centuries prior to the giving of Torah. This attraction of demons to potent fragrant smell continues to this day. For whether or not we believe in demons, they still exist and nothing that we do or do not believe can make an objective reality disappear. Our lack of belief only serves to blind us from their devious activities.

It doesn't matter if you deny this reality. Also, ignorance, is no defense. If I were to walk into a dangerous neighborhood, not knowing that there is a mugger, a rapist or a murderer stalking me, my ignorance of his presence does not make me any more safe. On the contrary, it makes me even more vulnerable. A false sense of security is a sure first step to disaster.

Whenever we wish to arrogantly state that this or that thing is OK simply because I believe or feel it is, this attitude is the road to destruction.

Now, lets us return to the topic of burning incense in one's home. It is in light of what we have now discussed that the Shulkhan Arukh (Code of Jewish Law, Yoreh Deah 179:18) has gone so far as to mention an opinion that one should not burn any incense in one's home other than for the sake of deodorizing the premises. The author, Rabbi Yosef Karo, quoting earlier authorities writes:

"There are those (HaRashba) who forbid burning incense that has a pleasant fragrance in one's home, other than if one does so to remove a foul odor."



The Shulkhan Arukh does not spell out why "those who forbid" say what they do. Yet, the reason is not far away. The Siftei Kohanim (Shakh 21), the standard commentary to the Shulkhan Arukh explains why:

"Because it appears as if one is making a offering to a demon."

I am sure that none of you today are in any way intentionally involved with demonic activity. Yet, demonic activity is very subtle and deceptive. There are ways in which you can be fooled and thus be bringing evil entities into your environment completely without your knowledge. Unfortunately, however, it is with the same negative consequences as if you're acts were intentional.

Yes, the mere innocent act of burning incense in your home, office or elsewhere might very well be bringing into your environment unwelcome and unwanted visitors.

We can most definitely avoid this by taking some rather simple measures. All one has to do is be very very careful as to which incense one has purchased and is burning.

Traditionally, incense was produced and burned specifically by one or another religious order and dedicated for religious use. These religious orders are all by clear definition worshipping false gods, mostly of the Hindu variety. The images of these false gods are none other than the guises used by demons to deceive and thus ensnare their "life force" nourishment.

While many companies today commercially manufacture incense without any religious overtones or connections, nonetheless, there are many more companies, who to this day, still dedicate their incense production to this or that so-called "god" or guru. Therefore, when you buy incense, you must be very careful to read the label to make sure that there is no religious or spiritual association associated with the product.

Read the package carefully and you will more often than not find that the brand of incense that you use was either manufactured by a religious concern or named after a religious icon.

The burning of incense of this type, therefore, violates the laws of idolatry and invites into our environment malevolent demonic entities.

Let me give one example. In our local (Chicagoland) grocery store chain Jewel-Osco (the equivalent of Pathmark or Super Sol), they sell a brand of incense called "Gonesh." On the cover, it clearly portrays the Hindu "god" of this name, with his elephant head, calling him the "god of good luck."

While the package does not overtly say that the incense has been dedicated to this "god," the mere fact of this picture on the cover makes this incense un-kosher. Whoever



burns this brand of incense is violating the laws of idolatry and by definition is inviting into his environment the unclean spirit (or demon) associated with this false pagan entity.

This is something you must take seriously. Although you believe that you are simply making a fragrant odor in your home, nonetheless, you are doing a whole lot more. Do not underestimate the reality of the spiritual world and our interaction with it.

This is why Rabbi Yosef Karo quotes in his Shulkhan Arukh the opinion that some say incense shouldn't be burned in one's home at all. In his days, they did not have manufacturing companies. In his days all incense was home (or monastery) made. This does not mean that all incense was not kosher, nonetheless the majority of incenses were indeed defiled.

In those days, most people who burned incense did so for the dubious purposes mentioned above. While this may not be the case today for people burning incense, many manufacturers today still, dedicate their incenses to this or that god or religion.

Therefore, please be careful with what you buy and what you let into your home. Do not allow arrogance, ignorance and denial to become the opening for demonic activity to enter into your environment. Be careful, be safe.