

He shall take a shovelful of fiery coals from atop the Altar and his cupped handful of finely ground incense spices... He shall place the incense upon the fire before Hashem. (16:12,13)

The incense service performed on *Yom Kippur* was unique in that it could only be performed by the *Kohen Gadol*, who performed this service only once a year in the *Kodesh HaKodoshim*, Holy of Holies. The *Kohen Gadol* would scoop a shovelful of burning coals from the outer Altar, then fill his hands with the incense, which he then placed into a ladle. With the shovel in his right hand and the ladle in his left hand, the *Kohen Gadol* would proceed into the Holy of Holies where he would pour the incense onto the fire, after which the smoke would ascend and cover the *Aron HaKodesh*.

Clearly, this service is shrouded in deep esoteric mystery, and, as such, the *Kohen Gadol* must execute it precisely, to the letter of the law as stated in the Torah. The *Kohen Gadol* views himself as a servant of Hashem, who performs the will of his Master because it is the *ratzon Hashem*, will of Hashem. I write this as a preface towards understanding the root of the dispute between *Chazal* and the *Tzedukim*, who did everything in their power to undermine the authority of *Chazal*, and, by extension, Hashem. [They, of course, felt that they were acting appropriately. This is not uncommon among those who deny the Divine Authorship of the Torah. The *Tzedukim* purported to support the Written Law, but disputed the Oral Law. They seemed to have “forgotten” that both were given at *Har Sinai*.] The *Tzedukim* ruled that the *Kohen Gadol* should first pour the hot coals/fire over the incense and then enter the Holy of Holies. This is in direct opposition to that which is written in the Torah. Not only were they disputing *Chazal*, they were also acting against what is clearly written in the Torah. [Perhaps, if *Chazal* act in agreement with the Torah, the *Tzedukim* discard that part of the Torah.]

Chazal (*Toras Kohanim* commentary to 16:12) explain why the *Tzedukim* defied the Torah. They claimed that proper etiquette is to bring the food to the table in its completed, ready-to-eat condition. One does not bring out raw meat and cook it at the table. If one does not do so for a human, he surely should not do so for Hashem. Thus, the incense should be prepared prior to entering the Holy of Holies. The early *Tzedukim* prostrated themselves before the idol of social etiquette – rather than adhere to Hashem’s command. Indeed, to this very day, the modern-day successors to the *Tzedukim* have no problem breaching every sacred prohibition if it does not coincide with the progressive social mores of the society which they embrace.

Rav Hirsch posits that the *Tzedukim*’s ruling of *tikkun ba’chutz v’hachnasah bifnim* was to prepare the incense outside and then bring the finished product into the Holy of Holies to be the symbol of the *Tzedukim*’s dissent from *Rabbinic* authority and interpretation of the Torah. The *Kohen Gadol* may be the spiritual leader of the people, but, at the end of the day, he is nothing more than a servant bending his subjective thoughts to coincide with those of his Master. The *Kohen* listens to

Hashem. To him, the fire on the *Mizbayach*, Altar, is the flame of Torah, and only that which is pleasing to Hashem is pleasing to the *Kohen Gadol*. The fire on the *Mizbayach* is based upon the Torah, and the Torah alone guides any activity *vis-à-vis* the fire.

The *Tzedukim* manipulated the fire on the *Mizbayach* into their personal fire. It belongs to them – so they say. As a result of their original breach of skepticism toward the oral traditions, they indirectly played a role in shaping the development of liberal and secular Judaism or anti-Torah perspectives. Their rejection of rabbinic interpretation of the law, which in and of itself is part of the Torah, created a vacuum for the scourge of alternative practice and belief. The rejection of complete adherence to the interpretations the sages of the *Mishnah* and *Talmud* rendered laid the