

# FRANKINCENSE

AND MYRRH- WERE THE WISE MEN ONTO SOMETHING?



***THE ANCIENTS KNOWLEDGE  
APPLIED FOR A MODERN ERA***

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## AND MYRRH- WERE THE WISE MEN ONTO SOMETHING?

Every year around Christmas time, we hear stories about the birth of Christ. And I'm sure that we've all heard about the "Wise Men" and their gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. Have you ever wondered why they chose these gifts? Well, we all know that gold is the most precious metal, but why would they bring frankincense and myrrh?



### The History of Frankincense & Myrrh

Frankincense and myrrh are produced from closely related species of balsam trees. Frankincense is derived from the *Boswellia* tree, while myrrh is derived from the *Commiphora* tree. Both species of trees originate in the mountains of south Arabia (*Yemen and Oman*) and mountains of Somalia. Both frankincense and myrrh are considered to be oleo gum resins. This basically means that they are oily looking and are partly water soluble and partly alcohol soluble. Both frankincense and myrrh are collected as a thick liquid from natural cracks or cuts in the tree bark, which then dries into lumps. The essential oils which are distilled from these resins are typically very thick with a warm, sweet, and spicy aroma.

In ancient times, the Egyptians imported great quantities of frankincense and myrrh

from Palestine. Because of their unique aromatic fragrance, both oils were highly valued as trade commodities. The Ishmaelite travelers who purchased Joseph from his mean spirited brothers were journeying to Egypt with camels loaded with spices, balm, and myrrh (Genesis 37:25). It was believed that the Queen of Sheba brought great quantities of frankincense and myrrh and other spices from Yemen as gifts for King Solomon. As a matter of fact, the long-heralded "*balm of Gilead*" is a member of the myrrh family, known far and wide as a healing agent for wounds.

The trading of frankincense and myrrh expanded greatly around the 1100 BC, with the establishing of improved land routes and domestication of the camel. By 1000 BC, both resins were widely distributed throughout Babylon, Rome, Assyria, Egypt, Persia, Greece, and China. Frankincense and myrrh were prized possessions in the ancient world, rivaling the value of many precious gems and metals.

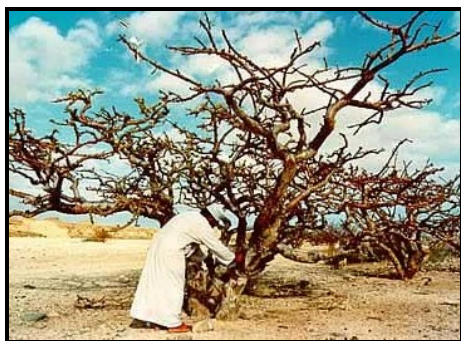
In his book *Healing Oils of the Bible*, Dr. David Stewart suggests that frankincense and myrrh (*and their uses*) were well known at the time the Bible was recorded. Although these healing oils were very valuable and not commonly used except by the wealthy, most people would have known exactly what they were and how they could be used.

### Frankincense

Frankincense is an oleo gum resin from *Boswellia* trees, of which there are over 25 species. Arabs called the milky sap of the *Boswellia* tree "*al lubn*" meaning "*milk*." *Al lubn* became anglicized to *olibanum*, which is another name for frankincense. When burned, frankincense produces a brilliant flame and produces a pleasant aroma.

Since frankincense encourages healthy growth and regeneration of skin cells, it is useful in treating cuts and wounds. Powder of the dried gum is a common ingredient in herbal plasters and pastes used to treat wounds, especially in Chinese medicine. A traditional recipe for an antiseptic wound powder is to mix the powdered resins of frankincense, myrrh, and dried aloe.

Tree sap has antibiotic and antifungal properties which protect the tree from infections. So when humans use oleo gum resins or essential oils derived from trees, we are utilizing the molecular components of the trees immune system to boost our own. Frankincense is used for treating a variety of respiratory problems such as bronchitis and laryngitis. Steam inhalation of the essential oil, combined with other respiratory oils such as eucalyptus, is highly effective.



Boswellia (*frankincense*) tree

The oleo gum resin of Indian frankincense (*Boswellia serrata*) contains four major pentacyclic triterpenic acids, referred to as boswellic acids. Studies have shown that boswellic acids have an anti-inflammatory action much like conventional non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs (*NSAIDS*). This being so, they have been found to be highly effective in such conditions as rheumatoid arthritis, osteoarthritis, colitis, Crohn's disease, and asthma. Recently, a few studies showed that boswellic acids may have anti-cancer effect on leukemia and brain tumors.



Frankincense resin

Researchers at Virginia Tech's college of veterinary medicine recently discovered that frankincense is effective at treating skin cancer in horses. Frankincense is "carrier oil" in that it penetrates membranes and cell walls. It is one of the few substances known to cross the blood barrier. A cancerous cell wall loses its ability to transfer substances across the membrane. Therefore, not all herbs or medications can effect a cancerous cell. However, "carrier" agents like frankincense, DMSO, and very alkaline minerals like cesium are highly penetrable across the membranes and have the opportunity to act on a cancerous cell or a brain tissue that is separated by the blood brain barrier.

Frankincense has been clinically researched to combat cancer and for use as an antidepressant. It is commonly used in European hospitals. Frankincense is being researched for its ability to simulate human growth hormone production and to assist in hormone balance.

When the oleo gum resin is collected exclusively for essential oil production, the fresh semi-solid material is also used. The fresh gum is chewed for strengthening the teeth and gums, to stimulate digestion, to expel congested phlegm, and to combat halitosis. Chewing of frankincense resin has the secondary benefit of cleansing the digestive system by stimulating bile flow and enzyme secretion and reducing fermentation.

Burning frankincense in churches had hygienic functions as well as spiritual importance. People of the Middle Ages lived in extremely unsanitary conditions, so the fumigation of churches helped reduce the smell from unwashed parishioners (*that slept with animals*) and reduce contagion through purifying the air.

Frankincense was used to make eyeliner. But not just any eyeliner — I mean that weird Egyptian stuff Elizabeth Taylor wore in *Cleopatra*. This was back in the days when they weren't sure whether the purpose of cosmetics was to enhance womanly beauty or scare off birds. ☺ Burning frankincense also repels mosquitoes and flies.

As you can see, the uses of frankincense are so numerous that it can accurately be described as a **panacea**, used for everything from colds to cancers. The general functions of frankincense resin and essential oil can therefore be described as immune-enhancing; antibiotic, antifungal, antiviral, and antiseptic. And as we have seen, frankincense also heals wounds and has distinct anti-inflammatory properties.

## Myrrh

Myrrh is an oleo gum resin obtained from Commiphora trees, of which there are over 50 species. These trees are very thorny trees which grow in thickets to a height of about nine feet. The name “myrrh” is derived from the Hebrew word “maror,” meaning bitter.

Myrrh is one of the oldest medicines in the world. It has been mentioned in Egyptian medical texts since 2,800 BC. It was used in embalming the Egyptian pharaohs and was also burned in temples of Greece, Babylon, India, Rome, and China. After Jesus was crucified, Joseph of Arimathea and

Nicodemus took His body and prepared it for burial using 75 pounds of myrrh and aloes (*John 19:39*). Myrrh was commonly used as perfume in the Middle East. In ancient Persia, when King Ahasuerus set about choosing a new queen to replace Vashti, the eligible girls had to complete a full year of beauty treatments, including a six-month cosmetic regimen with the oil of myrrh (*Esther 2:12*).



Myrrh tree in Somalia

Myrrh is similar to frankincense in its wound-healing and blood-vitalizing properties, and the two are often combined in salves. Like frankincense, myrrh resin is a predominant part of the immune system of the tree. Therefore, many of the therapeutic functions of myrrh are quite similar to frankincense.

Myrrh is a specific and highly effective antiseptic astringent for inflammations of the mouth, throat, and gums. It is also an effective treatment for chronic halitosis, gingivitis, and periodontal disease. It is a common ingredient of herbal toothpastes and mouthwashes, and is widely used throughout the Middle East and India for dental problems.

Myrrh was used as a perfume and was also added to cheap wine to make it more drinkable. Such a mixture was offered to condemned convicts to numb their pain before death. You might remember that the soldier offered the Lord Jesus some wine

mingled with myrrh while He hung on the cross (*Mark 15:23*).

This amazing substance has even been shown to be effective at treating step throat and tonsillitis. For these symptoms, tincture of myrrh can be combined with Echinacea and golden seal and used as a mouthwash and gargle. Myrrh is also beneficial for acne, rashes, and inflammatory skin problems. Myrrh oil can be applied directly to abrasions and wounds, and it can be made into salves for treating hemorrhoids and bed sores.



Myrrh resin

Since myrrh is very bitter, it stimulates the flow of digestive juices and improves nutrient absorption. Its antibacterial and antifungal powers help reduce candida and other pathogens in the gut. By improving digestion, myrrh clears toxins from the digestive tract and acts as a general detoxifying and anti-inflammatory remedy, thereby treating the root causes of arthritis, rheumatism, and gout. Interestingly, myrrh also has distinct anti-parasitic, anti-microbial, and antibacterial properties, and is a direct stimulant of white blood cell production. It is one of the most effective of all known disinfectants from the plant kingdom.

Researchers at Rutgers University have found two compounds in myrrh that are strong painkillers, another compound that helps lower cholesterol, and most recently, a potent anti-cancer agent. What makes myrrh such an exciting player in the anti-cancer field

is not only how well it kills cancer cells in general, but how it kills those that are resistant to other anti-cancer drugs. “*The myrrh compound definitely appears to be unique in this way; it is working where other compounds have failed,*” says Dr. Mohamed M. Rafi, an assistant professor in the department of food science at Rutgers. Myrrh has been shown to be selectively toxic against MDR (*multiple drug resistant*) tumor cells found in the breast and prostate.

Myrrh is believed to work by inactivating a protein called Bcl-2, a natural factor that is overproduced by cancer cells, particularly in the breast and prostate. When levels of this protein go too high, say experts, it not only promotes the growth of more abnormal cells, it can also make those cells resistant to anti-cancer drugs. In Dr. Rafi’s laboratory research, the myrrh compound was able to inactivate the protein in a line of breast tumor cells known as MCF-7, cells that in the past were particularly resistant to treatment.

The Greeks considered myrrh to be a sacred substance and those who could afford the resin used it as incense and to treat virtually every illness. Myrrh is the most often repeated aromatic essential oil in the Bible.

## Summary

A comparison of frankincense and myrrh reveals that myrrh is more astringent, antiseptic, and disinfectant, while frankincense is more anti-inflammatory and blood vitalizing. These resins and their essential oils were priceless medicines, worth their weight in gold to the Egyptians and Greeks, and were used to treat everything from skin disorders to viral infections, from cancer to depression and more. I guess it’s safe to say that the “wise men” may have been on to something after all. . .