



*Is
your
“sacred scent”
made of
sawdust,
perfume,
and
toxic glue?*

Raw Incense

By KERRY HUGHES

Incense is part of worship, prayer, and healing. Its use was described in Vedic literature dated at 5000 B.C.E. and on Egyptian tablets from 1500 B.C.E. By the eighteenth century, natural incense was being supplemented with artificial fragrances developed by the perfume industry. Today, incense has become so popular that in many parts of the world it no longer retains any natural substances but instead has become a synthetic imitation full of potentially unhealthy substances, such as synthetic glues, saltpeter, fragrances, ground-up sawdust (from non-incense trees), and more. Unfortunately, synthetic incense generally is not identified as such. One clue is vendors who claim to “dip it” themselves. Another is the type of incense you buy — there is no “banana” incense that is natural!

NATURAL IS BETTER

Incense is material that, when burned, imparts an odor, usually fragrant. Raw incense is usually fresh or dried plant parts that are used for smoldering — resins, dried leaves, bark, roots, wood, etc. Some incense even contains minerals, feathers, shells, or other natural materials. Raw incense contains the essence of the plant it came from, as well as its folklore and beauty. Some examples of real raw incense include:

Copal

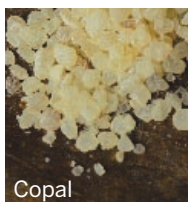
- Black, golden, and white.
- Gentle and warming, with a balsamic quality; white copal has a much lighter, brighter, fruity scent.
- Latin American indigenous traditions believe that golden copal opens the soul; white cleanses and enhances mental states; black connects us to the dead.

Frankincense

- Clear, yellowish resin that has a beadlike nature.
- Dense, bright, almost lemony scent, masculine.
- Catholics use it for sending prayers to heaven.

Myrrh

- Brownish resin.
- Earthy, almost pinelike scent.
- Arabic cultures use it to support the feminine side; often associated with death and immortality.



Copal



Frankincense



Myrrh



White Sage

White Sage

- Leaves tied in a bundle are used as a “smudge stick” or are used separately, one leaf at a time.
- Strong, pungent sagebrush scent, slightly sweet.
- Native American traditions say it chases away bad spirits; it is used to clear or purify the air or objects.

HOW YOU CAN USE INCENSE

Incense can be enjoyed in stick or cone form, but it’s important to find natural, high-quality incense — be prepared to pay more for this. You also can use it raw.

For raw sage, just light it and let it smolder. If you are using resins or some other dried materials, you’ll need to burn them on top of charcoal or some other hot surface, such as a hot rock from a campfire.

You can buy or make an “incense stove,” which will release the fragrance of resins and woods without smoke. (See organo-leptic.com for how-to tips.)

Simply enjoy the scent or atmosphere that incense imparts, or use it to enhance your religious or spiritual experience. Or, instead of trying to figure out the role incense plays in your life or spiritual practice, try sitting down and burning some good quality incense resin, and let its presence grow in your heart. **SH**

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