HATSIPOREN: The Perfume of the Sea

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The second element that was used in the preparation of the incense known as qetoret was the tsiporen (□□□□□□), called in Hebrew biblical shehelet (□□□□). There are several opinions regarding the nature of this element. One opinion says that it is a plant (Rabbi Yosef Kafih, among others) and another opinion says that it is a mollusk. We will present the second opinion, which is what Rabbi Portaleone suggests in his book on the Bet-haMiqdash, Shilte haGuibborim. The tsiporen is the shell of a mollusk, a sea-snail. Tsiporen in Hebrew means “nail”. Rabbi Portaleone says that this sea-snail, in its appearance, looks like a “lion’s nail” (shahal).

ALL THE PROPERTIES OF THE HILAZON

After an extensive analysis, the Rabbi identifies this mollusk with the famous hilazon, a sea-snail found in the coasts of the Mediterranean Sea. From the glands of the hilazon, which bears the scientific name murex brandaris or hexaplex trunculus, a dye was extracted which was used to dye the tsitsit (the fringes of the talit). It is worth clarifying that “tekhelet” was always translated by Sephardic Jews as “purple” or “violet” (I remember that □□□□ □□□□ was translated into Ladino “hilo cárdeno.” In modern Hebrew, however, tekhelet means “light blue”). Rabbi Portaleone calls this mollusk with the name that is known to this day Tyrian Purple. As Wikipedia explains here *“the ancient Phoenicians extracted the purple dye from the glands of this mollusk to dye the garments of the upper classes (emperors, kings and priests), being much appreciated in antiquity and worth more than gold.* Many Rabbis nowadays also identify the hilazon with the murex (see video below) and indicate that in our days one of the threads of the tsitsit should be dyed of this color. According to the different methods applied in the elaboration

of this dye, the final product can be violet, purple or dark blue.
Returning to the tsiporen, there is a topic that Wikipedia or other articles and publications that I have read DO NOT mention: the aromatic properties of the shell of this mollusk. Rabbi Portaleone discusses the subject extensively and concludes that the aroma of this shell, perhaps referring to the shell once it is ground and burned (□□□□□), is similar to the aroma of "castoreum" a natural substance secreted by beavers to mark their territories. It is used in the fragrances industry as connotations to leather (Chanel Antaeus, Lancôme Caractère, Givenchy III and other brands)

KARSHINA SOAP

Before being mixed into the qetoret the shell of this snail, without its flesh, had to be cleaned with a special soap called *borit karshina*. The seed of the karshina plant or Vicia Ervilia, was used in the Middle East as cattle feed. It was so common that the Hakhamim used this the shape of this seed as one halakhic measure of volume. See more details of the karshina in this article. What is not commonly known is that the husk that covers the seeds of karshina contain a high concentration of potassium, and in antiquity this husk was mixed with water to produce a "soapy" foam with which fabrics or wool were cleaned. This preparation is the "karshina soap" (□□□□□□ □□□□□) that was used to clean the tsiporen, rubbing it (□□□□□) and thus purifying the shell of any remaining mollusk-flesh that could have been inside it, and of any other sand, seaweed or other marine residue that could have been left on the outside.

KAFRISIN WINE

Once the tsiporen was totally clean it was submerged in a special preparation known as "Kafrisin wine". According to Rabbi Portaleone, it is not the wine of Cyprus (= Kafrisin, in Hebrew) and it is not the extract of the fruit of the plant known in Hebrew as kafras (capparis, see here), an herb native of Erets Israel. The Rab explains that the kafrisin wine was a special preparation made in the following way: 250 liters of grape juice were prepared and mixed with 25 kilos of kafras. This preparation was left to rest for "several years", until obtaining the necessary acidity. The clean shell (□□□) of the hilazon was then submerged in this "wine", which intensified

its aromatic properties, causing it to produce a strong (□□□) aroma, as explained by the berayta of the qetoret (• see two notes below).
Finally, the tsiporen was ground, and its powder was added to the qetoretincense , □□□□□ □□□□□□ □□□□□.

Identifying the Hilazon (Hebrew)



• *It is also possible to maintain the version of the Yerushalmi that says* □□□ □□□□ □□□□ *, which would indicate that in some way the wine made the shell more fragile. In other words, after soaking in in the kafrisin wine, the "hard" shell of the hilazon was easier to crush and grind.*

•*It also seems to me that the opinion that the tsiporen was a shell, and not a plant, makes more sense, since the process of cleaning and softening that the tsiporen was subjected to, seems appropriate for something solid, not for a vegetable.*
If you have other hiddushim on the qetoret, please share them: rabbibitton@yahoo.com