

The Art of Making Incense

The Ingredients

The main ingredients of the incense include sandalwood, clove, red sandal, elletaria cardmomum, saffron, nutmeg, aquilaria agallocha, pure honey, cane sugar, shorea robusta, nandostachys jatamansi, cinnamomum camphora and juniper powder. To these are also added a wide range of other Bhutanese herbs and plants with medicinal and fumigating power.



Blending Incense

All ingredients are first ground into powder. The powder is then mixed with water, sugar and honey. Juniper forms the main component although the amount of juniper depends on the quality. The better the quality of incense, lesser amount of juniper is used. The mixture, fused to a perfect blend, is then stored in a big container in a warm temperature. A smell emits as a sign of fermentation after about a week. Gugul, a gum resin, is added to it to act as an adhesive substance and the mixture is further mashed before it is put through the presser to turn it into incense sticks. The sticks are straightened, cut into respective sizes, and dried in the shade for four to five days.



Pictures and text: courtesy of Karma Phuntsho

སྤྱོལ་མཚོག་ཡིད་འཕྲོག་དྲི་ངད་ལྷུབ་པ་ཡི།།

བདུག་པའི་སྤྱིན་ཚོགས་རྒྱམས་ཀྱང་དཔུལ་བར་བགྱི།།

I offer the massive clouds of incense imbued with the fragrance of excellent breathtaking perfume.

-Shantideva



Our incense is produced manually according to the highest standard of traditional incense making, using entirely organic ingredients.

To answer all your needs pertaining to incense, we offer varying sizes and qualities. Please order your incense at the following address:



Nado Poizokhang

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The Bhutanese Art of Incensation

The Significance, Use and Making of Incense



NADO POIZOKHANG

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INCENSE



The burning of incense or *poe* is a very popular facet of Himalayan Buddhist culture. With its origin in Indian Buddhist rituals of offering smell (*gandhapuja*) and the ancient Bon smoke-offering (*sang*), the use of incense has a long history and deep cultural and religious significance. In its most mundane sense, incense embodies the essence of pleasant smell, one of the five objects of sensual pleasure. It is considered as a substance which stimulates the senses to bring physical pleasure and mental tranquility. In its ultimate form, incense symbolizes the purity and perfection of all objects of olfactory sense and is personified in the form of the female goddess Dugpoema. From a village shanty to a grand state temple, the offering of incense and smoke constitutes a very common and essential practice, performed daily for various purposes.



Incense as an offering

The burning of incense is generally practiced as a ritual of offering. Every morning at sunrise, billows of smoke ensue in front of every Bhutanese village house to mark the offering of incense and smoke. In all temples and shrine rooms, incense is also burnt regularly in specially designed censers and incense stick holders.



Smoke from burning incense and fresh branches also mark the reception of holy and important persons and a sacred ceremony. A ceremonial procession is led by a person bearing a censer with fragrant incense.

Incense-smoke is not only an offering of fragrant smell but it forms a medium for visualization of a much greater and multifarious offering. The incense and other substance to be burnt are first purified through a deep meditative dissolution into the state of Emptiness. Then, the billows of smoke, which illusorily arise from the expanse of Emptiness, are transformed through a meditative projection into immeasurable clouds of wonderful items offering

(བསམ་གྱིས་མི་ལྷག་པའི་མཚན་པའི་རྗེ་རྒྱ།)



The clouds of offering are then multiplied to cover the entire universe and presented to the various objects of veneration and offering. Buddhist literature classifies the recipients of the offering into four categories of guests:

1. The enlightened beings such as the Buddhas who are objects of veneration.
2. The celestial deities such as the dharma protectors who possess noble qualities.
3. The sentient beings of six realms, who are suffering in the cycle of existence and thus worthy of compassion.
4. The evil spirits who cause harm to people in order to repay the negative karmic debt accumulated in the

previous lifetimes.

The incense smoke is visualized as innumerable kinds of congenial items of enjoyment and presented to these recipients in whatever forms and shapes they wish to have. The offering of incense-smoke is thus an exercise of charity and meditative visualization.



Incense as a fumigant

Incense-burning is also a very well known technique of fumigation. The incense sticks and powder contains herbal ingredients that have fumigating qualities. In addition to the power of the substances, the smoke is invested with blessings of meditative visualization and powerful mantras. Incense smoke is then used by religious people to cense holy objects, pacify spirits, to treat ill persons and to purify negativities. It is for this reason, the Bhutanese word for censuring, *sang*, also connotes cleansing and purification. Incense is also used to placate malicious spirits and assuage the wishes of various deities.

Incense as a therapy

Composed of a wide range of herbal ingredients, incense also has a powerful therapeutic value. It can be used in aroma-therapy to relax the body and calm the mind. It helps nourish and stabilize the psycho-somatic composition of the human being. The aroma of the incense stimulates the senses to unlock the energy channels, mobilize vital air, and release internal bliss.

