

Bukhur: A Traditional Fragrance

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This paper is dedicated in the loving memory of my aunt Batul bint al Mafsuah Abdullah al Waleed, mother of Farida Qayyumi and Rashida Madrasi. May Allah shower upon her soul Rahmah, Aameen.

Abstract: *The foundation of Tibb al Nabavi or Tibb al Islami has placed great emphasis on preventative measures relating to lifestyle incorporating the spiritual, emotional, and physical aspects of a human being. All classical references of Tibb al Nabavi attribute the onset of illnesses to the disturbance of one's lifestyle. This paper aims to shed light on classical texts of Tibb al Nabavi and its practical application for the promotion of good health and prevention of diseases. People of Arabia are well-known for fumigating their homes with aromatic incenses. Their secret is Bukhur. Like most things in life, you get what you pay for. The price of the Bukhur reflects the quality of the ingredients used to create it and for how long its Aroma lasts in the environment. The best quality Bukhur uses Oud chips, other fragrances, and natural herbal ingredients. Bukhur refers to a mixture of herbs fragrance included in Oud powder and other natural aroma ingredients. Bukhur fans often value high-quality Bukhur prepared using the finest Oud.*

Bukhur is a fragrant smoke produced by burning chips of Oud or Agarwood or compounds of various aromatic ingredients bound by a sugar-syrup. Bukhur produces a more concentrated smell when burnt slowly. These chips are burnt in Bukhur burners called Mabkhara to fumigate the surrounding and clothing with fragrant aromas on special occasions. Not only Anbiya Bani Israel, but Rasulullah (S), his Ahl al-Bait (as) and Ash'ab (ra) would regularly use Bukhur especially on the day of Jumuah. Ibn Majah recorded a Hadith:

"Masjid should be perfumed with Bukhur and scented, especially on the day of Jumuah".

According to Ahmad Abu Daud, one of the wives of Rasulullah(S) reports:

"Rasulullah(S) ordered that Masajid should be built in residential areas and that they should be cleaned and perfumed regularly".

Whenever leader of the Salaat seated on Minbar, one of the prominent in the congregation would place Mabkhara and would burn Bukhur (incense). It is Sunnah to wear Attar or fragrances and burn Bukhur at home. One may use any Bukhur or oil – in fact, any scent as per choice. Fragrances have positive energy, and it attracts the Malaek and the pious Arwah. Rasulullah (S) loved fragrances and he never refused an offer for a scent to burn in his house.

Through the powerful Nabawi institution, this Sunnah was promoted mainly in every nook and corner of Arabia and afterward in the vast territory of the Muslim world. Among Arabs it's a tradition to burn some Oud or Bukhur on arrival of the guests and to offer the scented smoke to each guest, so that, they may take fragrant smoke in their cloth, handkerchief, scent their hair, hands with it, this is as integral to traditional hospitality as serving Qahwa and Dates. Moreover, People of Arabia at large acknowledged its following benefits very much for which it is also used for centuries:

- i). It dispels the nasty environment and repels negative forces*
- ii). It dispels depression and improves and enliven mode*
- iii). Enhances memory and awakens the mind*
- iv). Cleanses the atmosphere*

The original location of the Bukhur preparation for centuries is exclusively the beautiful region of Yemen. It comes from the highest peak of Yemen, Shib'am, where the famous shrine of the celebrated historian and paramount writer of esoteric literature, the 19th Ismaili Tayyabi Dai, Sayedna Idris Imaduddin (ra) is located. It may interest readers that in the noble family of Ismaili Du'at of al Waleed dynasty usage of Bukhur was essential on all occasions. During the period of pregnancy, elder ladies prepared special Bukhur to use soon after delivery, which covers the mother and child from transmitted diseases. This kind of fumigation is highly beneficial for mother and child, not only as a fragrance but from the medicinal point as well. The women in Yemen prepared large amounts of Bukhur, which consists of cardamom, different sorts of herbal fragrances, sugar, and other ingredients according to the family's recipe.

According to the valuable source of "Al Qaratis al Yemeniyyah," during the period of the Sulayhi dynasty, first from Sanaa and later Zeejiblah, a larger quantity of costly Bukhur along with other fragrances were regularly presented to the Al Haramyn al Sharifayn, Kabah and Rauzat al Nabi (S). It was illustrious Queen of Yemen, Al Sayedah Arwa bint Ahmad al Sulayhi, who sent loaded large wooden boxes of Bukhur to Al Najaf al Ashraf, Karbala al Mualla and al Muizziyat'il Qahirah, beside other Shrines of Ahl al-Bait (as) in Ramadan, Muharram and Mil'ad occasions. When it was burnt, the atmosphere of the Shrines became very pleasant, and people knew that the Gift of Yemen had reached its destination. Similarly, while learned Sulayhi Queen Sayedah Arwa bint Ahmad conducted series of Asb'aq (traditional lectures on sciences of Islam), behind the curtain, among the erudite scholars of Arabia as well as Indian Subcontinent, the Oud burner spread the fragrance, which created a pious atmosphere. Learned students enjoyed both the benefits simultaneously, spiritual knowledge with precious fragrance.

Recently aromatherapy experts of the West have discovered that the proper usage of Bukhur provides the right mood for more extended periods at a time. Regular Bukhur users burn it in the morning, to set their mood and freshen up the atmosphere. Also, after a meal, because it has a calming effect and allows people to reduce tiredness. Some 225 years ago, a distinguished Intellectual of Yemen, Sayyedi Abdulqadir bin Al Qazi Habibullah al Waleed, Wali of Yemen on behalf of the Ismaili Dawoodi Dai revealed in his treatise several benefits of Bukhur:

- i). Bukhur alters the moods to bring peaceful, tranquil, refreshing, uplifting and inspiring feelings*

- ii). Bukhur burning opens the mind to spirituality and diverts from worldly impurities
 - iii). Bukhur burning wakes up the mind and encourages it in solitude
 - iv). Bukhur burning affords the mind leisure when it is busy
 - v). Age does not affect the efficacy of Bukhur, and its frequent use causes No harm
 - vi). Burning Bukhur is a soothing and uplifting activity.
 - vii). It is a good hemostatic, antiseptic, and an excellent healing agent
 - viii). Applied on wounds, it's internally subsidies inflammation of UTI and respiratory tract infections
 - ix). It dispels malicious and distressing psychic forces
 - x). Improves memory
- (“Al Risalat al Nadirah Fil Attur al Fakhirah”, Sayyedi Abdulqadir bin Al Qazi Habibullah al Waleed, manuscript, Hir’az, Yemen).

Once transported over a thousand miles up to the Mediterranean, before it could be traded on to Europe. Bukhur was used in vast quantities by the ancient Egyptians, and also by the Romans. History is rich with accounts of use of Bukhur in Biblical literature. It was one of the fragrances presented to the infant Essa (as) and always found in used during Biblical religious ceremonies; amongst the People of the Books. After the fall of the Roman Empire, the newly established Christian Church adopted several traditions, including the ritual burning of Bukhur. It is well recorded that it was the practice of kings of England once a year to offer Bukhur on the Feast of Epiphany (Jan. 6th). Also, Bukhur was widely used for important ceremonies, such as the sanctification of churches and bishops. The Crusades brought a wide range of Arab and Berbers traditions and were adopted as they were beneficial. Then, of course, Spain was ruled for centuries under Muslims, again giving an excellent opportunity to spread the Muslim customs. Later on, the Ottomans promoted the cultural heritage of Islam in the West through their victorious military expeditions, which signs are still visible today.

Each Bukhur formula has a different cleansing, healing, or purifying effect. Using Bukhur is a strong science and art of cultivating a positive state of mind. Burning Bukhur is not just a way of masking unpleasant smells, but a way to refresh your heart and soul. Fragrant Aroma has a profound subconscious impact, bringing back positive memories, or cultivating good thoughts and feelings. The Bukhur recipes are hundreds and even centuries old created from natural plant ingredients. Oud is prized as one of the finest aromatic woods burned for Bukhur purposes. There is nothing like Oud chips. It grows and is harvested in the wild in Southeast Asia.

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