Benzoin resin is derived from various species of *Styrax* trees. These are large, tropical deciduous trees native to Southeast Asia, primarily found in Sumatra and Java. The trees can grow up to 65 feet tall and are tapped for resin seven years after planting. Incisions made on the trunk cause a fragrant resin to seep out and gather in large clumps which solidify over a short period before they are harvested and brought to the world market for trade.

**Histories and Virtues of Benzoin**

Benzoin gum is well-known throughout the Eastern world as a potent ingredient in incense and perfumery. Benzoin’s early trade from Sumatra and Java sparked much interest in religious and healing practices of Asia. Prior to its widespread popularity during and after the rise of Islam and Christianity, Benzoin resin had been used in incense, perfumery, and medicine for thousands of years in Ayurvedic, Chinese, Tibetan, and Japanese Traditional medicine, as well as many esoteric traditions of Indochina. The aroma, healing powers, and energetic effects of Benzoin were completely unique and sought after by many. It was burned alone or powdered and used as a fixative and a base for different incense blends, with the ability of extending and enhancing the aroma of other materials it was combined with.
Benzoin has long been used as incense in Buddhist and Hindu temples as it helps bring focus and sharpened awareness to those pursuing a spiritual practice where meditation and prayer are fundamental. Benzoin is also considered to have mild sedative properties which help to calm over-thinking and worried minds, promoting a rooted sense of presence and mental clarity. Gabriel Mojay writes, “Rich, sweet, and comforting, benzoin softens the mind’s ‘sharp edges,’ and gently ‘grounds’ awareness abstracted by troubled thoughts. It is particularly good for nervous anxiety and worry made worse by exhaustion.”

Around 500 B.C.E., Benzoin resin spread to ancient Greece, Rome, and other parts of the Mediterranean by Phoenician traders, where it was used as incense, incorporated into the finest perfumes, and mixed into pot-pour for its supreme fixative properties. In early history, Benzoin was often given as a lavish gift among royalty to show appreciation, affection, pay homage and respect, or to secure political ties. In the Middle Ages, the fragrant gum spread into Europe and became a common remedy for a number of illnesses. In France it was called ‘baume pulmonaire,’ pulmonary Balsam, and the resin was burned near an ill person, the fumes inhaled as a treatment (Ryman, Daniele).

Benzoin is a very popular incense resin among Arab states; many Middle Eastern and African cultures employ this natural treasure for a wide variety of purposes. This ancient resin is a common ingredient in many Christian Church incenses in the West and in some parts of Russia. Today Benzoin is used in many different goods including chewing gum, cigarettes, cosmetics, perfume, gelatin, foodstuffs, and many scented products.

There is little clinical or scientific research on storax, however, this sacred resin has been used in many medical systems around the world for thousands of years for a variety of ailments and illnesses. It was most highly regarded in Islamic medicine. In Traditional Chinese medicine, Benzoin incense resin has been used for different respiratory ailments that result from cold

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and damp states in the lungs, due to its warming and drying effects. French medical practitioners once prescribed the burning of Benzoin resin for bronchitis, coughs, asthma, hoarseness of the voice, and other respiratory complaints. Today in France you can still find ‘pastilles’ (sweet cough drops or lozenges), that contain Benzoin as their main ingredient. These are commonly taken to treat colds, flus, and other illnesses.

Magical and Metaphysical Uses

In different magical and esoteric traditions of the world, Benzoin is used during shamanic journeying for the protection of the spirit from harmful entities or energies that could attack or latch on to the traveler in the spirit realms. In an esoteric and energetic sense, Benzoin is used for purifying purposes in many traditions including Buddhism, Christianity, and Islam, to name a few. During long, extended Wicca rituals and other ceremonies of certain Magical traditions, this incense is burned to keep mental focus sharp while heightening awareness and helping one to connect more deeply to the divine.

In ancient times, Benzoin resin was often burned during the harvesting of frankincense resin as the frankincense trees were said to be guarded by poisonous flying snakes. The smoke of Styrax was said to kept the harvesters safe while driving the snakes away.

Latin Name: Styrax benzoin
Other Names: Storax, Gum Benjamin, Sumatra Benzoin, Loban, Kemenyan, Onycha
Family: Styracaceae
Planet: Venus, Saturn
Element: Earth
Chakra: Root (1st)
Parts Used: resin
Aroma: sweet, balsamic, resinous, rich, hints of vanilla

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