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By Michael Zohary

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Coriander

Coriandrum sativum L.

Now the house of Israel called its name manna; it was like coriander seed, white, and the taste of it was like wafers made with honey.

Exodus 16:31

THE Bible tells us that the famous heavenly bread of the Israelites in the desert - the manna - was like the seeds of god. To identify god as 'coriander' is difficult because of contextual and linguistic discrepancies. The Septuagint translates god as *korion*, which is a different plant. Similarly, the Arabic *gidda*, cognate with god, refers to microcystis (a fern), not coriander. Most translators were probably guided by the Puzos word for coriander, *god*, which is also cognate with god.

Coriander, moreover, is never found in the desert, and its brown grains cannot be compared with the white drops of manna, which should more appropriately be equated with any of a score of common desert plants with white round seeds or fruits, or with plants whose Arabic name is cognate with god.

The coriander is an annual herb of the Carrot family, with deeply incised leaves and umbels of white flowers. Its fruits are globose, 1-2 mm across, and are crowned by a rudimentary calyx. All parts of the plant have a strong odor. It is native to Israel and occurs as a weed among winter crops. Once widely cultivated as a condiment, its leaves are sometimes used to flavor soups, puddings, curries and wines. It also has some medicinal value.



Cambridge University Press, 1984, 223 pages, 9 3/4" x 7", hardback, \$16.95.

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