SCENTS OF SYRIA

KARAMFOUNDATION.ORG/SCENTSOFSYRIA
THE WOMEN BEHIND THE SOAPS

Adapted from the Forbes Article by Elizabeth MacBride

One Woman’s Determination
In 2011, the dire humanitarian crisis in Syria motivated Jehan T., a woman and mother in Damascus, to help people in need. Thousands of people were being displaced, moving from the outskirts of Damascus and other parts of Syria to the capital, where they were struggling to make ends meet. At first, she began to quietly collect aid to distribute. “It was exhausting. Constantly asking for assistance, and trying to figure out where the money was going to come from the next day. Every day was a struggle.”

The constant uncertainty of securing funds gave her an idea. So many of the people she met were displaced women who had lost their husbands and they were in need of more than just aid. They needed work. Many of them were unhappy being recipients of aid, feeling as though they no longer had any dignity or agency. Jehan proposed that they start a project to support themselves. “I secured the initial money needed for the project, got them together, and we brainstormed ideas. That’s when we decided to sell soaps, specifically Ghar soap.”

The Ghar Collective
Ghar soap is a traditional Syrian soap which has been produced in Aleppo, Syria for centuries. For most Syrians, the scent of these soaps represents a constant and comforting part of Syrian culture and history. For the women in the collective, the soaps represent an opportunity to reclaim their lives and dignity.

Jehan was tasked with finding a place to sell the soaps. “In Damascus, it was so hard to sell them. People were barely making enough money to cover their basic necessities that they were unable to buy luxuries like this. So I decided to go to Beirut. I would go to Beirut every week, selling the soap,” Jehan told us.

At first many of the women were unsure of how to begin, never having worked before. However, the collective partnered the experienced with the inexperienced so that they could all learn from and motivate one another. “They’re happier now,” Jehan said.

“Work is so important to live in dignity,” she told us. “Doing this work has also helped me support myself and my family, thank God.”

Jehan fled with her family from Damascus to Istanbul a few years ago. In Istanbul, she started a new collective. The idea is the same: to help these women support themselves and their families, and to provide a future for them. As in Damascus, the Istanbul arm of the collective works to secure housing and necessities for the families, going so far as to provide school transportation for their children.

“I hope that Syrian women continue to work, and to work well,” Jehan said. “This is an important outcome of the past four years.”

Spreading the Scents of Syria Across the World
In 2015, Karam Foundation connected with Jehan and fell in love with her unbreakable entrepreneurial spirit and compassionate soul. We are proud to support the women’s collective and their incredible work by selling their beautiful products on our website. By purchasing items from our Scents of Syria line, you not only support over 60 displaced women’s livelihoods, you also support the Syrian tradition of making laurel soaps.

From Aleppo to Damascus to your home, we hope you enjoy the scents of Syria that represent beauty, tradition, craft, dignity, and hope.
Laurel Soap on a Rope
This ingenious invention combines traditional Syrian Laurel soap (Ghar) hand-made in Aleppo, with an exfoliating crocheted cover and a built-in braided rope to hang in the shower. Guaranteed to give your skin a baby soft feel. It’s brilliant.

Laurel Bath Blessings
This pair of earth-toned pouches filled with crocheted soaps sit perfectly on your guest bathroom vanity and also make a thoughtful hostess gift. They are embroidered with two traditional Syrian bath sayings: “May you have a blessed bath” & “May you always be bathed with blessings.”

Scents & Soaps Basket
This ultimate set includes all of our favorite products. Experience a traditional Syrian bath, decorate a powder room and spread the Scent of Syria in your home.

Laurel & Loofah Set
This hand-crocheted Syrian style Loofah also known in Arabic as Leeteh, can be used as a washcloth with a Laurel soup inside it. It’s the traditional bath accessory in Syrian homes and will soon be your favorite product!

Honey Soap With Burlap
These beautifully hand stitched burlap pouches feature crochet embroidery and lace detailing that celebrates Syrian artisanship. Inside each pouch is a handmade honey soap infused with honey, milk, and natural oils that purifies and cleanses the skin.

Scents & Soaps Basket
This set includes 2 handmade towels filled with laurel soap shavings from Aleppo. This long-lasting product is perfect for scenting a coat or linen closet or tucked inside a drawer to spread the fragrance. Each set contains 1 white cotton and 1 burlap sachet.

Black Seed & Loofah Set
This hand-made pouch holds two laurel scented, olive oil soap. These pouches are large enough to re-use as a make up pouch, or store your favorite go-to beauty products! Pouches are available in 3 colors: Blue, green & pink.

Jasmine are perfect for floral lovers. Treat yourself to one of our new lavender soap pouches! Lavender is the traditional Syrian fragrances. Enjoy these colorful pouches carefully embroidered to replicate the famous geometric Arabesque designs seen throughout the Middle East. Each pouch includes a crocheted 5.0 oz XL-ghar soap – our traditional laurel-scented olive oil soap. These pouches are large enough to use as a make up pouch, or store your favorite go-to beauty products! Pouches are available in 3 colors: Blue, green & pink.

Lavender Soap Pouch
Treat yourself to one of our new lavender soap pouches! Lavender is a healing herb that’s been used for centuries to make soaps, teas, and sachets. Soaps made with lavender essential oils can promote a sense of relaxation and relieve stress. Our lavender soap pouch includes 1 rectangle lavender soap tucked inside a hand-made pouch with the word “lavender” embroidered onto it.

Karam Laurel Soap
Our best-selling soap pouch is embroidered and tasseled in Karam Foundation’s trademark turquoise blue. The soaps give back to the artisan community in Damascus who made them and also give the user the rare pleasure of experiencing an authentic scent of Syria - Laurel [Ghar] from Aleppo. Included: 1 pouch and a 5.0 oz XL crochet olive oil laurel soap.

Handmade Towel Set
This set includes 2 handmade towels that delicately hang over your bathroom sink. Guests will love the soft fabric and intricate detailing of the crochet embroidery along the edges. Dimensions: 13 in x 13 in

Honey Soap With Burlap
These beautifully hand stitched burlap pouches feature crochet embroidery and lace detailing that celebrates Syrian artisanship. Inside each pouch is a handmade honey soap infused with honey, milk, and natural oils that purifies and cleanses the skin.

Ghar XL
Woah baby! Our new Ghar XL pouch holds two laurel scented, olive oil based soaps. These traditional soaps hang neatly on a rope for your convenience. Just lather, use, and hang up in the shower when you’re done!

Laurel Bath Blessings
This pair of earth-toned pouches filled with crocheted soaps sit perfectly on your guest bathroom vanity and also make a thoughtful hostess gift. They are embroidered with two traditional Syrian bath sayings: “May you have a blessed bath” & “May you always be bathed with blessings.”
History & Ingredients

Said to be the oldest soap in the world, the city of Aleppo is famous for producing this traditional Syrian Laurel soap, also known as Ghar. This precious product is a hard soap that is typically handcrafted using simple ingredients: olive oil, laurel bay oil, sodium hydroxide (also known as lye) and of course, water. No colorants, preservatives, or fillers are added.

Product Origins

The soaps are made in traditional laurel soap factories in Aleppo, and transported to Damascus where the women sew, embroider, and package them in traditional Syrian styles. The finished products are sent to Beirut and shipped to Karam Foundation in Chicago courtesy of Aramex. http://www.aramex.com

After resettling in Turkey, Jehan expanded the business to Istanbul where she and several refugee artisan women design, embroider, and sew a variety of products, including the handmade towel sets and laundry and travel bags. These products are shipped directly from Istanbul to Karam Foundation in Chicago.

These are perfect for anyone looking for an all-natural, skin-rejuvenating soap.

Olive Oil Benefits:
The olive oil gives the soap a creamy consistency which makes it especially gentle and moisturizing.

Additionally, virgin olive oil contains valuable antioxidants which restores skin’s natural balance, and has a mild anti-inflammatory effect reducing redness and irritation.

Laurel Bay Oil Benefits:
Helps to heal various common skin problems such as:

• Acne, eczema, psoriasis, herpes, bacterial dermatitis, fungal infections, irritated skin, but also for scalp problems like dandruff, and seborrhoic dermatitis.

Laurel oil is also a strong antibacterial, antiviral and antifungal agent.

Top Tips

Laurel soap cleans pores as well as softens the skin. We recommend the soap for all skin types.

Laurel soap is also excellent as a shampoo for dry hair and dandruff as the oil increases circulation and thus improve the hair’s elasticity and shine.

The soap can also be used as:
• Shaving cream
• Laundry detergent
• Immersed in drawers or closets
• Room or car freshener

How To Use

Lather up with warm water on part of your body from head to toe, bask in the gorgeous aromas, and then rinse clean. Always keep the soap as dry as possible after use.

The Gift of Ghar

Our Scents of Syria products make great host gifts and stocking stuffers! We encourage you to to shop our website during the holidays for custom seasonal and holiday designs. Hosting a party? Our soap products make the perfect party favor for any occasion. Your guests will not only walk away with a favor that they can actually use, but they will leave with the scent of resilience – and we are confident that they will want more! For custom orders, email karam@karamfoundation.org.