Orchos HaAmud

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YOMA 44A BY RABBI AVIGDOR BERENSTEIN

Rabi Chananya taught a Braisa, "We have learned that ketores atones, as is said (Bamidbar 17:12), 'He placed the ketores and atoned on behalf of the people'". A Braisa was learned in Rabi Yishmael's Beis Medrash, "For what does ketores atone? For lashon hara. Let what is private atone for what is done in private." (Yoma 44a)

Rashi explains that when Bnei Yisroel complained about Korach's death (ibid. 17:6), "You killed Hashem's people!", Hashem was angry and a plague began. When Aharon offered ketores, the plague stopped. Chazal infer from this that ketores atones for lashon hara.. The logic is that ketores is offered privately, because everyone vacates the area between the altar and the building when it is offered (Keilim 1:9), so it is fitting to atone for the sin of lashon hara, which is done privately.

Rashi explains that lashon hara is usually said privately. The Maharsha (Zevachim 88b) says that Rashi is answering the obvious question that Bnei Yisroel's lashon hara was said publicly, not privately. Rashi answers that it does not matter how it was said each time, it is enough that lashon hara is usually said privately. The Maharsha adds that the same question and answer apply to Aharon's ketores, because it was offered publicly, not privately, but it is enough that ketores is usually offered privately.

All this is very unclear. What is the significance of being done privately that connects ketores and lashon hara? Why is a sin or an atonement that is usually done privately considered private even when done publicly? Why is ketores offered privately?

Let us review some basic concepts about ketores that appeared in this column some weeks ago. Michtav MeEliyahu (Vol. V p. 416) cites from the Zohar Hakadosh that the word "ketores" in Aramaic means "kesher" – "bond", alluding to the internal bond between Klal Yisroel and Hashem, symbolizing their innermost desire for good, as implied by the intangible aroma, expressing Klal Yisroel's deepest dimension that remains bonded to Hashem even when they sin. Recalling Klal Yisroel's virtue is the unique grace of ketores that enables it to atone for Klal Yisroel even when they sin grievously. It emphasizes their enduring ability to rectify their behavior. This so pleases Hashem that it can atone for them even after their sins provoked a plague.

Now our Gemara becomes clear. Although Chazal mention the external fact that the ketores is offered unseen, they really mean that ketores is called "private" because it accentuates Klal Yisroel's private greatness. Indeed, the ketores is offered unseen precisely to symbolize this exceptional quality. This is why the ketores atones even if at some time it is offered publicly.

Still, what is the connection between ketores and lashon hara? How does the fact that lashon hara is usually spoken privately define the sin and make ketores its atonement even when the lashon hara was said publicly? Also, how does ketores which is a mitzva between Man and his Creator atone for lashon hara which is a sin between Man and his fellow man?

Let us analyze the sin of lashon hara. The damage to the victim may be minimal, but Chazal say (Arachin 15b) that it is equivalent to the three cardinal sins of idolatry, incest/adultery, and murder. They also say (Yerushalmi Peah 4b) that speaking lashon hara is like denying Hashem. This is because the trait of focusing on others' defects and speaking about them clandestinely with intent to affect how the world is run, contrary to Hashem's will, implies denying in one's heart that Hashem has absolute control. This explains lashon hara's gravity.

The atonement for lashon hara, usually said in private, representing denial of Hashem in one's heart, must be through ketores, usually offered privately, representing the true, eternal bond with Hashem in the innermost part of Klal Yisroel's hearts and their everlasting loyalty to Him. Let what is private atone for what is done in private.

This amud is being learned on the day before Tisha B'Av, when Klal Yisroel cries bitterly over the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash and begs Hashem for the Final Redemption. In Mitzrayim, when Moshe Rabeinu found out that Dasan and Aviram had spoken lashon hara about him, he said that he understood why Bnei Yisroel deserved their harsh exile. (See Rashi on Shmos 2:14.) So, too, we recently saw (Yoma 9b) that the second Beis Hamikdash was destroyed because of groundless hatred, which the Chofetz Chaim says (Introduction to Sefer Chofetz Chaim) refers to the lashon hara caused by that hatred. Based on the above, we can easily understand why this defect impedes Klal Yisroel's redemption.

Let us contemplate this and seek the inner spark that bonds us with Hashem and so feel our bond with every member of Klal Yisroel. Let us see their virtues, not their flaws. May we thus soon merit the coming of Mashiach speedily and in our days, Amein.

Amud HaYomi is now two years into its inaugural cycle through Shas! This historic initiative will enable deeper comprehension of Shas. Additionally, there are optional monthly bechinos with stipends, which affords one a much greater opportunity to be koneh Shas through Dirshu's proven retention and accountability methods.

UPCOMING AMUD HAYOMI LIMUD SCHEDULE

יום	תאריך	DATE	עמוד היומי	דף היומי	דף היומי בהלכה - משנה ברורה: עמוד	סימן וסעיף
– פרשת ואתחנן –						
א	ה' אב	07/19/26	יומא מב:	חולין פ	רעו.	ת"ט ח' - י'
ב	ו' אב	07/20/26	יומא מג.	חולין פא	רעו: (552)	ת"ט י"א
ג	ז' אב	07/21/26	יומא מג:	חולין פב	רעז.	ת"ט י"ב - י"ג ת"י א'
ד	ח' אב	07/22/26	יומא מד.	חולין פג	רעז: (554)	ת"י ב' - ג'
ה	ט' אב	07/23/26	יומא מד:	חולין פד	רעח.	ת"י א ת"י ב'
ו	י' אב	07/24/26	יומא מה.	חולין פה		חזרה
ש"ק	י"א אב	07/25/26	יומא מה:	חולין פו		חזרה
– פרשת עקב –						
א	י"ב אב	07/26/26	יומא מו.	חולין פז	רעח: (556)	ת"י ג'
ב	י"ג אב	07/27/26	יומא מו:	חולין פח	רעט.	ת"י ד'
ג	י"ד אב	07/28/26	יומא מז.	חולין פט	רעט: (558)	תט"ו א' - ב'
ד	ט"ו אב	07/29/26	יומא מז:	חולין צ	רפ.	תט"ו ג' - ד' תט"ו א'
ה	ט"ז אב	07/30/26	יומא מח.	חולין צא	רפ: (560)	תט"ז ב'
ו	י"ז אב	07/31/26	יומא מח:	חולין צב		חזרה
ש"ק	י"ח אב	08/01/26	יומא מט.	חולין צג		חזרה