

“You shall make a shulchan of shittim wood”

**A Person's Table Atones for Lashon Hara Like the Ketores:
ש'חלת ל'בונה ח'לבנה נ'טף -- Stand for שלח"ן**

It states in this week's parsha, parshas Terumah (Shemos 25, 23):
“ועשית שלחן עצי שטים אמתיים ארכו ואמה רחבו ואמה וחצי קומתו, וצפית אתו זהב טהור ועשית לו זר זהב סביב, ועשית לו מסגרת טופח סביב, ועשית זר זהב למסגרתו סביב” — you shall make a shulchan of shittim wood, two cubits its length, a cubit its width, and a cubit and a half its height. You shall cover it with pure gold and you shall make for it a golden wreath all around. You shall make for it a frame of one handsbreadth all around, and you shall make a golden wreath for its frame all around.

In Chomas Anach (5), the gaon Chida cites Rabeinu Efraim, z"l, a Rishon, regarding the juxtaposition of the mitzvah to build the “shulchan” and the mitzvah to build the “aron” (Shemos 25, 10): “ועשו ארון עצי שטים” — they shall make an “aron” of shittim wood. This juxtaposition teaches us that it is imperative to speak divrei-Torah at one's meals, at one's table. In fact, we have learned this in the Mishnah (Avos 3, 3):

“רבי שמעון אומר, שלשה שאכלו על שלחן אחד ולא אמרו עליו דברי תורה, כאלו אכלו מזבחי מתים, שנאמר (ישעיה כח-ח) כי כל שלחנות מלאו קיא צואה בלי מקום, אבל שלשה שאכלו על שלחן אחד ואמרו עליו דברי תורה, כאלו אכלו משלחנו של מקום ברוך הוא, שנאמר (יחזקאל מא-כב) וידבר אלי זה השלחן אשר לפני ה'.”

Rabbi Shimon says: Three people who ate at the same table and did not speak divrei-Torah at the table, it is as if they had eaten of offerings to the dead, as it is said: “For all tables are full of vomit and filth, without the Omnipresent.” But three people who ate at the same table and did speak divrei-Torah at the table, it is as if they had eaten at the table of the Omnipresent, Blessed is He, as it is said: “And he said to me, ‘This is the table that is before Hashem.’”

**From the “Shulchan” in the Beis HaMikdash
Berachos Emanate to all Tables**

Let us enhance this notion from Rabeinu Efraim based on a statement in the Zohar hakadosh (Terumah 153b). Berachos and sustenance emanated from the “shulchan” in the Beis HaMikdash

— upon which the “lechem hapanim were placed — to all tables of Yisrael. This was on the condition, however, that they would speak divrei-Torah at the table. In this manner, they would impart a form of kedushah to their tables resembling the kedushah of the “shulchan” in the Beis HaMikdash. Here is a summary of the passage in the Zohar:

“You shall make a shulchan of shittim wood.” This shulchan was located in the Mishkan; it was imbued with blessing from above. From it, sustenance went out to all of creation. This shulchan should not be bare even for a moment; for berachah does not exist in a vacant place. Hence, bread must be on it at all times; this will insure constant blessing from above. All tables in the world that are blessed are blessed on its account.

This is how a person's table should be when he blesses HKB”H — to insure that it is imbued with blessing from above; it should not appear bare. It has been taught that a table at which divrei-Torah are not spoken is despicable; it is prohibited to recite a blessing at such a table. (This concludes the summary of the passage from the Zohar.)

We have now achieved a better understanding of Rabeinu Efraim's message — the construction of the “shulchan” was juxtaposed to the construction of the “aron” to emphasize the importance of speaking divrei-Torah at one's table during meals. In the merit of speaking divrei-Torah at one's table, it is imbued with a kedushah similar to the kedushah of the “shulchan” in the Beis HaMikdash. Berachos and sustenance are thus transmitted to one's table; consequently, it is truly akin to dining at the table of the Omnipresent — the source of all bounty and Berachos.

**“As if they had eaten of offerings to the dead”
— that Reincarnated into the Food**

Let us attempt to achieve a deeper understanding of the divine Tanna, Rabbi Shimon bar Yochai's statement: Three people who ate at the same table and did not speak divrei-Torah at the table, it is as if

they had eaten of offerings to the dead, as it is said: “For all tables are full of vomit and filth, without the Omnipresent.” But three people who ate at the same table and did speak divrei-Torah at the table, it is as if they had eaten at the table of the Omnipresent, Blessed is He, as it is said: “And he said to me, ‘This is the table that is before Hashem.’”

Let us introduce what the sefer Be’er Chaim on the Pesach Haggadah presents in the name of the holy Baal Shem Tov, zy”a. He deduces from the phraseology of the Mishnah: **“שלושה שאכלו על”** --Three people who ate at the same table and did not speak divrei-Torah at the table, it is as if they had eaten of offerings to the dead — while it is deplorable that they did not share divrei-Torah during their meal, nonetheless what justifies the description: “as if they had eaten of offerings to the dead”? He provides the following explanation:

“אמר הבעש”ט זללה”ה, שלושה שאכלו על שלחן אחד ולא אמרו עליו דברי תורה כאילו אכלו מזבחי מתים, פירוש כי המת מתגלגל במאכל אדם כדי שיאמרו עליו דברי תורה, ועל ידי זה מחיה אותו המת שהיה בגלגול זה, אבל אם לא אמרו דברי תורה, אז הוא זובח אותו המת המגולגל במאכל זה ומשליך אותו לדומם, וזהו שאמר מזבחי מתים.”

According to the Baal Shem Tov, the deceased reincarnates into human food so that words of Torah will be spoken while it is being served and consumed. This spiritually elevates the deceased; however, if words of Torah are not spoken, it is as if the deceased is being sacrificed and tossed down to the spiritual level of inanimate objects. This is the meaning of the term “offerings to the dead.”

Let us expand on this noble idea based on an elucidation found in the Gemara (Berachos 18a) of the passuk (Koheles 9, 5): **“כי החיים יודעים”** — “for the living know that they will die” refers to the tzaddikim, who even after their death are still considered as being alive. Furthermore (ibid.): **“והמתים אינם יודעים מאומה,”** — “but the dead do not know anything” refers to the wicked, who even while they are still alive are considered as if they are dead. We find that the neshamot that are tainted by sin and were reincarnated into various types of food are regarded as dead.

Thus, we can conclude that the purpose of giving over divrei-Torah during at one’s table during a meal is to rectify and provide spiritual elevation for the neshamot of the deceased that have reincarnated into the food in order to be considered alive. For, if divrei-Torah are not spoken to afford them tikun, these neshamot are doomed to remain dead within the food, without any chance of tikun. Therefore, those who consume this food, without affording them tikun are described: as if they had eaten of offerings to the dead.

A Person’s Table Atones for Him

I would like to propose an explanation regarding the classification of sinners that are reincarnated into food — obligating us to elevate them by our divrei-Torah at the table. Let us recall what we have learned in the Gemara (Berachos 55a and Chagigah 27a). Yechezkel saw in a prophesy a vision of the third Beis HaMikdash (Yechezkel 41, 22): **“המזבח עץ שלוש אמות גבוה וארכו שטים אמות... וידבר אלי זה: “השלחן אשר לפני ה”** — the “mizbeiach” was of wood, three cubits high ... He said to me, “This is the ‘shulchan’ that is before Hashem.”

The Gemara asks: **“כתיב המזבח עץ שלוש אמות גבוה, וכתיב וידבר אלי זה השלחן אשר לפני ה’, פתח במזבח וסיים בשלחן, רבי יוחנן ורבי אלעזר דאמרי תרוייהו, כל זמן שבית המקדש קיים מזבח מכפר על ישראל, ועכשיו שלחנו של אדם מכפר עליו”** — the passuk begins by calling it a “mizbeiach” and concludes by calling it a “shulchan.” Rabbi Yochanan and Rabbi Eliezer both provide the same explanation. So long as the Beis HaMikdash stood, the mizbeiach atoned for Yisrael; subsequently, a person’s table — shulchan — atones for him. This raises the question: Is a person’s table considered like the outer mizbeiach — located outside of the Heichal, where the sacrifices were offered — or is it considered like the inner mizbeiach — located within the Heichal, upon which the ketores, the incense, were burned?

It would appear as if we could resolve this issue by referring to the Rama in Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 116, 5); he brings the words of the Beis Yosef citing the Shibolei HaLeket with some amplification: **“מצוה להניח על כל שלחן מלח קודם שיבצע, כי השלחן דומה למזבח והאכילה כקרבן, ונאמר (ויקרא ב-יג) על כל קרבן תקריב מלח”** — it is a mitzvah to place salt on every table before dividing the bread; for one’s table resembles the mizbeiach and one’s consumption resembles the korban ...

Thus, it is stated explicitly that a person’s consumption at his table resembles a korban. This would seem to suggest that a person’s table is considered like the outer mizbeiach — upon which sacrifices were offered. In fact, the Panim Yafos (Bereishis 3, 4) explains why a person’s table atones for him like the mizbeiach. For, when one consumes the meat of an animal for the sake of Heaven, the resultant tikun is greater than if it had been offered on the mizbeiach. For, his consumption elevates the animal to the spiritual level of man, possessing the capacity of speech.

שׁחלת לבונה ח’לבנה נ’טף Is an Acronym for שלחן

In the sefer Kol Eliyahu (187), however, he presents an explanation of the Gemara (Berachos 55a) in the name of the Gra: **“פתח במזבח וסיים בשלחן... כל זמן שבית המקדש קיים מזבח מכפר על ישראל, ועכשיו שלחנו של אדם מכפר עליו”** — the passuk begins by calling it a “mizbeiach” and concludes by calling it a “shulchan” ... So long as the Beis HaMikdash

stood, the mizbeiach atoned for Yisrael; now, a person's table atones for him — based on the pesukim in the passage discussing the “ketores” (Shemos 30, 34): **וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה קַח לָךְ סַמִּים נָטָף וְשַׁחֲלֵת וְחִלְבֵּנָה סַמִּים:** (ויאמר ה' אל משה קח לך סמים נטף ושחלת וחלבנה סמים) **וְלִבְנֵה זָכָה בַד בַּד יִהְיֶה, וְעִשִּׂית אוֹתָהּ קְטוֹרֶת רוּקַח מַעֲשֵׂה רוּקַח מִמּוֹלַח טָהוֹר** (ולבונה זכה בד בד יהיה, ועשית אותה קטורת רוקח מעשה רוקח ממולח טהור) **— קוֹדֵשׁ** — Hashem said to Moshe: “Take yourself spices — ‘nataf,’ and ‘shecheiles,’ and ‘chelbinah’ spices and pure ‘levonah’; they shall be equal one to another. You shall make it into ‘ketores’ (incense), the work of a spice-blender, thoroughly mixed, pure and holy.”

Upon closer examination, we discover that the Torah only specifies four spices: “nataf,” “shecheiles,” “chelbinah” and “levonah.” Yet, our blessed sages derive in the Gemara (Kerisus 6b) that an additional seven spices were included in the “ketores” — as pointed out by Rashi (ibid.): **“מִכָּאן לַמְדוּ רִבּוּתֵינוּ י”א סַמִּמָּנִין נֹאמְרוּ לוֹ לַמֶּשֶׁה בְּסִינִי**” — from this passuk, our Rabbis learned that eleven spices were mentioned to Moshe at Sinai. This suggests that the four spices actually specified in the Torah represent the basis for the remaining seven spices included with them.

Based on this fact, the Gra expounds on the Gemara's statement: “So long as the Beis HaMikdash stood, the mizbeiach atoned for Yisrael; now, a person's table atones for him.” Here we learn that a person's table possesses the capacity to atone similar to the “ketores.” This is alluded to by the word for table--**שֶׁלַח”ן** — which is an acronym for **שְׁחֵלֶת לִבְנֵה חִלְבָּנָה נִטָּף** — the four spices enumerated in the Torah, which include the remaining spices of the “ketores.” Thus, we see that a person's table provides atonement like the “ketores.”

We should note that this allusion is mentioned by the Agra D’Pirka (215) in the name of the divine kabbalist Rabbi Tzvi Hirsh of Zidichov, zy”a: **“וְאָמַר לִי כְבוֹד מַחֲוֹתַי הֵרֵב הַקְדוּשׁ הַמְקוּבֵל מִוְה”ר צְבִי הִירֵשׁ [מְזִידִיטְשׁוֹב] שְׁלִיט”א, שֶׁהַסַּמִּמָּנִים הַמְפּוֹרָשִׁים בְּתוֹרָה בְּסַמִּמָּנֵי הַקְטוֹרֶת הֵם גַּם כֵּן בְּרֵאשֵׁי תִיבוֹת שֶׁלַח”ן, שְׁחֵלֶת לִבְנֵה חִלְבָּנָה נִטָּף”** — the spices specified in the Torah among the spices of the ketores, their first letters spell out the word **שֶׁלַח”ן--שְׁחֵלֶת לִבְנֵה חִלְבָּנָה נִטָּף**.

Then the Agra D’Pirka adds another wonderful allusion: **וְהִנֵּה תִשְׁכַּל וְתִדְעַ דְּרַגִּין דְּהַצְלַחַת כְּנִסַּת יִשְׂרָאֵל מְרוֹמוֹ בְּרֵאשֵׁי תִיבוֹת שֶׁלַח”ן (שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים ו-י): “מִי זֹאת הַנְּשֻׁקָפָה כְּמוֹ שַׁחַר, יִפֶּה כְּלִבְנָה, בְּרָה כַחמָה, אֵיוֹמָה כְּנִדְגָלוֹת, הִנֵּה שְׁחֵר לִבְנֵה חִמָּה נִדְגָלוֹת רֵאשֵׁי תִיבוֹת שֶׁלַח”ן”** — the passuk in Shir HaShirim (6, 10) enumerates four levels of praise describing the congregation of Yisrael: **שְׁחֵר לִבְנֵה חִמָּה נִדְגָלוֹת** (the dawn, the moon, the sun, an army with banners); the first letters of these four terms spell **שֶׁלַח”ן**. He is teaching us that HKB”H praises Yisrael with these four forms of praise that are symbolized by the word **שֶׁלַח”ן**. This alludes to Yisrael's tremendous merit; they sanctify the table that they dine upon with the kedushah of the “ketores.” Hence, the **שֶׁלַח”ן** symbolizes the four primary spices--**שְׁחֵלֶת לִבְנֵה חִלְבָּנָה נִטָּף**.

A Person's Table Atones Like the Mizbeiach of the Ketores

It turns out that the Gra is teaching us a tremendous chiddush. We learned that the passuk opens with the term “mizbeiach” and concludes with the term “shulchan.” This conveys the message that in galut a person's table provides atonement like the “mizbeiach.” This is not a reference, however, to the outer mizbeiach — upon which the sacrifices were offered — but to the inner mizbeiach — upon which the ketores was burned. This is alluded to by the term **שֶׁלַח”ן** which consists of the first letters of the four primary spices listed in the passuk.

Now, however, it is incumbent upon us to reconcile this interpretation with the seemingly contradictory words of the Rama mentioned above, citing the Shibolei HaLeket: **“מִצְוָה לְהִנִּיחַ עַל כָּל שֶׁלַחן מֶלַח קוֹדֵם שִׁיבְצֵעַ, כִּי הַשֶּׁלַחן דּוֹמֵה לְמִזְבֵּחַ וְהַאֲכִילָה כְּקָרְבָן, וְנֹאמַר עַל כָּל קָרְבָּנְךָ תִּקְרִיב מֶלַח”** — he seems to be saying that one's table resembles the mizbeiach upon which the animal sacrifices were offered.

It appears that we can reconcile the interpretation of our teacher, the Gra, with the remarks of the Rama as follows. The Gra is not saying that the table a person dines upon only resembles the mizbeiach upon which the ketores was burned. Rather, man's actual consumption is likened to the consumption of the outer mizbeiach upon which the korbanot were sacrificed; however, the table itself at which a person eats corresponds to the inner mizbeiach upon which the ketores was burned. Therefore, the four major spices of the ketores are represented by the word **שֶׁלַח”ן**.

This understanding seems to be implicit in the words of the Rama; for he writes: **“כִּי הַשֶּׁלַחן דּוֹמֵה לְמִזְבֵּחַ וְהַאֲכִילָה כְּקָרְבָן”** — because, the table resembles the mizbeiach and the consumption (the act of eating) resembles the korban. As we have just explained, the table itself is compared to the inner mizbeiach; while man's actual act of eating is compared to the consumption of the korban by the outer mizbeiach. Thus, dining at one's table resembles both mizbichos together — the outer mizbeiach and the inner mizbeiach.

We can add to the above a clear-cut proof that a person's table resembles both the outer and the inner mizbichos simultaneously. The great author of the Ben Ish Chai writes in his sefer Od Yosef Chai (Terumah) in the name of the divine kabbalist, the Rashash, Rabeinu Shalom Sharabi, zy”a:

“הַשֶּׁלַחן הוּא בְּמִקּוֹם הַמִּזְבֵּחַ כְּמוֹ שֶׁאָמְרוּ רַבּוֹתֵינוּ ז”ל, בּוֹמֵן בֵּית הַמִּקְדָּשׁ מִזְבֵּחַ מִכְפָּר וְעַכְשָׁיו שֶׁלַחנוּ שֶׁל אָדָם מִכְפָּר עֲלָיו, גַּם נֹדַע כִּי בּוֹמֵן שְׁבִית הַמִּקְדָּשׁ קִיִּים הִיָּה לָנוּ שְׁתֵּי מִזְבְּחוֹת, שֶׁהוּא פְּנִימִי לְהַקְרִיב קְטוֹרֶת, וְחִיצוֹן לְקַרְבְּנוֹת עוֹלוֹת וְתַמִּידִין וּמוֹסְפִין, וְלָכֵן הוֹרָה לָנוּ רַבֵּינוּ הַרְש”ש ז”ל, שֶׁכֵּל

אדם יהיה נזהר ללמוד על שלחנו בתוך הסעודה פרשת הקטורת ופרק איזהו מקומן, שהוא במקום שני מזבחות הנזכרים.

He writes that in the times of the Beis HaMikdash there were two mizbichos. The ketores was burned on the inner mizbeiach; the various sacrifices were offered on the outer mizbeiach. Therefore, the Rashash advises a person to learn at his table, during his meal, the passage pertaining to the ketores and the chapter of "Eizehu Mikoman" — in lieu of the two aforementioned mizbichos.

A Person's Table Atones for Lashon Hara

Continuing along this exalted path, let us examine the statement of Rabbi Yochanan and Rabbi Elazar: "So long as the Beis HaMikdash stood, the mizbeiach atoned for Yisrael; now, a person's table atones for him." Having explained that a person's table atones for him like the mizbeiach of the ketores, we must clarify what exactly this mizbeiach atoned for. Then we will know what a person's table today atones for.

We have learned in the Gemara (Yoma 44a) concerning the service of the Kohen Gadol on Yom HaKippurim (described in Vayikra 16, 17): **"וכפר בעדו ובעד ביתו ובעד כל קהל ישראל - איזהו כפרה ששוה לו ולביתו — ולאחיו הכהנים ולכל קהל ישראל, הוי אומר זה הקטרת הקטורת"** the passuk states: "and he shall atone on his behalf, and on behalf of his household, and on behalf of all the nation of Yisrael." What is an atonement that comes as one to him and to his household, to his brothers the kohanim and to all of Yisrael? You must say that this is the burning of the ketores. To which, the Gemara inquires astonishingly: **"קטורת מכפרת"** — and does the ketores actually afford atonement?

The Gemara answers: **"אין דהא תני רבי חנניא למדנו לקטורת שמכפרת, שנאמר (במדבר יז-יב) ויתן את הקטרת וכפר על העם, ותנא דבי רבי ישמעאל על מה קטורת מכפרת, על לשון הרע, יבוא דבר שבחשאי"** — yes, indeed! Rabbi Chanina taught a Baraita quoting the passuk (Bamidbar 17, 12): "and he placed the ketores and atoned for the people." And a Baraita was taught in the academy of Rabbi Yishmael: For what does the ketores atone? For the sin of lashon hara; let something that is offered in private come and atone for an act committed in private.

Thus, we are taught explicitly that the ketores atoned for the act of lashon hara. This leads us to an amazing conclusion. When they state: "now, a person's table atones for him" — they mean that it atones for lashon hara.

Let us embellish this thought — that a person's table atones specifically for lashon hara — based on the passuk concerning the admonition against speaking lashon hara (Vayikra 19, 16): **"לא תלך"**

"רכיל" — do not go around gossiping. We learn from Rashi's comment on this passuk that it was the habit of those who spoke lashon hara to do so while eating together with the receiver of the lashon hara, the listener.

Now, we have learned in the Gemara (Yoma 86b): **"היכי דמי בעל תשובה"** — in other words, what is a tell-tale sign that a baal teshuvah's efforts (repentance) have been successful? Rabbi Yehudah answers: **"באותו פרק, באותו מקום"** — if he happens to find himself once again in the same circumstances as when he transgressed in the past, and this time he withstands the test, this is a sign that he is a true baal teshuvah.

We can now appreciate why a person's table atones for him like the mizbeiach of the ketores for the sin of lashon hara. Since it is the way of those who speak lashon hara to do so while eating at the table, therefore that is specifically the appropriate time and place — the parallel circumstances — to atone for lashon hara — to refrain both from speaking and listening to lashon hara at the dinner table.

"Three who ate" Refers to a Tikun for the Sin of Lashon Hara that Kills Three

I was struck by a wonderful thought to explain, with the utmost reverence and adoration, the statement of the divine Tanna Rashby: **"שלושה שאכלו על שלחן אחד ולא אמרו עליו דברי תורה, כאלו אכלו מזבחי"** — Three people who ate at the same table and did not speak divrei-Torah at the table, it is as if they had eaten of offerings to the dead. Above, we presented the Baal Shem Tov's interpretation; this statement refers to the deceased that have reincarnated into various foods. Their only available method of tikun is by means of others' divrei-Torah.

Based on what we have discussed, we can conjecture that these deceased must have been guilty of lashon hara; for, it is the habit of those who speak lashon hara to do so while dining. Consequently, HKB"H reincarnates them into various forms of food, so that they will receive their tikun under the very same circumstances under which they transgressed. Now, their primary tikun is via occupation in Torah study — as we have learned in the Gemara (Arachin 15b): **"מה תקנתו של מספרי לשון הרע, אם תלמיד חכם הוא יעסוק בתורה"** — what is the remedy for those who speak lashon hara? If he is a Torah scholar, he should engage in Torah study.

Notwithstanding, the dead that have reincarnated into the various foods are unable to affect this remedy themselves. Therefore, in His infinite mercy, HKB"H arranges for three people to dine at the same table — three people who also require tikun for lashon

hara. For, is there any person who can claim that the following statement in the Gemara (B.B. 164b) does not apply to him: **”שלש עבירות אין אדם ניצול מהן בכל יום, הרהור עבירה, ועיון תפלה, ולשון הרע, לשון הרע סלקא דעתך, אלא אבק לשון הרע”** — there are three transgressions which every man transgresses to some extent every single day: thoughts of sin, lack of concentration while praying, and lashon hara. Do you really think that every man speaks lashon hara every day? Rather, it refers to “avak lashon hara” (something that is not explicitly lashon hara but has some aspects of lashon hara)?! HKB”H arranges all of this so that they will speak divrei-Torah at the table — that atones for lashon hara just as the mizbeiach of the ketores did. In the process, they will also rectify the deceased that were guilty of lashon hara.

It appears that we can add a nice little addendum. Rashby’s statement specifies: “Three people who ate at the same table.” Why does HKB”H arrange for precisely three individuals to rectify the deceased who committed the sin of lashon hara? We can suggest it is because Rashby is being consistent with his view in the Midrash Shochar Tov (Tehillim 12): **”אמר רבי שמעון בן יוחאי, למה נקרא לשון הרע תליתאי, שהוא הורג שלשה, האומרו, והמקבלו, והנאמר עליו”** — according to Rashby lashon hara has profound consequences for three individuals — it kills the one who speaks the lashon hara, the one who listens to it and the one about whom the lashon hara is spoken.

This is because the object of the lashon hara also requires tikun. For, he was instrumental in this act of lashon hara which led to the demise of the perpetrator of the lashon hara and the one who willingly received it. Had he not been culpable, they would not have been speaking lashon hara about him. Therefore, HKB”H arranges for three individuals to dine together at the same table in order to provide tikun for these three dead individuals that died as a result of the transgression of lashon hara — and reincarnated into the food.

A Condition of Teshuvah: Teaching Others to Repent

Let us add one last small piece to the puzzle. Rabeinu Yonah writes in Shaarei Teshuvah that one of the conditions of teshuvah is: **”להשיב רבים מעון כאשר תשיג ידו”** — to help others perform teshuvah, when

possible. He proves his point from the words of David HaMelech in his entreaty of Hashem (Tehillim 51, 3): **”חנני אלקים כחסדך כרוב רחמיך... אלמדה פושעים דרכיך מחה פשעי, הרב כבסני מעווני ומחטאתי טהרני... וחסאים אליך ישובו”** — Show me favor, O G-d, according to Your kindness; according to the vastness of Your compassion erase my transgressions. Cleanse me thoroughly of my iniquity, and from my sin purify me. . . I will teach transgressors Your ways, and sinners will return to You.

For this very reason, HKB”H arranges in His abundant mercy for three individuals, guilty of lashon hara, to dine together at the same table. In this manner, they can repent and make amends in the very place of their transgression by speaking divrei-Torah. By speaking divrei-Torah at the table, and rectifying the deceased who were guilty of lashon hara--and reincarnated into the food--they will also merit tikun for their own acts of lashon hara.

Thus, we have shed some light on Rashby’s statement: **”שלשה שאכלו על שלחן אחד, ולא אמרו עליו דברי תורה, כאלו אכלו מזבחי מתים”** — the three individuals who died as a consequence of speaking lashon hara and perforce were reincarnated into the food on the table, have no possibility of tikun if words of Torah are not spoken at the table; they are doomed to remain dead. Hence, Rashby adds the following: **”אבל שלשה שאכלו על שלחן אחד ואמרו עליו דברי תורה, כאלו אכלו משלחנו של מקום ברוך הוא, שנאמר וידבר אלי זה השלחן אשר לפני ה”** — But three people who ate at the same table and did speak divrei-Torah at the table, it is as if they had eaten at the table of the Omnipresent, Blessed is He, as it is said: “And he said to me, ‘This is the table that is before Hashem.”

He intentionally quotes the passuk from Yechezkel’s prophesy: “And he said to me, ‘This is the table that is before Hashem” — from which the Gemara learns that a person’s table atones for him like the mizbeiach. As we have shown, this refers to the inner mizbeiach upon which the ketores was burned; that is the mizbeiach that was “before Hashem.” We learned from the Gra that the word **”שלחן”** is an acronym for **”ש’חלת ל’בונה ח’לבנה נ’טף”** — the four main spices of the ketores mentioned in the Torah. This alludes to the fact that a person’s table resembles the mizbeiach upon which the ketores was burned. Seeing as the ketores atoned for lashon hara, so, too, a person’s table atones for lashon hara.

Donated by Dr. Ralph and Limor Madeb

For the Refua shelema of Refael Gavriel Simcha Chaim Ben shulamit

To receive the mamarim by email: mamarim@shvileipinchas.com