

Kinder Torah

Parashas Lech Lecha

בס"ד

The Ketores

“Abba, why do we read the parasha of Ketores (incense) every morning?”

“That is an excellent question, Avi. Our recitation corresponds to the actual compounding and offering of the Ketores in the Mishkan and Beis HaMikdash. The Torah informs us that the Ketores was burned on its own special Mizbeach (altar) in the morning and in the late afternoon when the Kohen cleaned and lit the lights of the Menorah (Shemos 30:7,8). This special part of the Avodah (service) was very dear to Hashem.”

“Why was that, Abba?”

“The Medrash Tanchuma (Parashas Tetzaveh 15) quotes the verse ‘Oil and incense gladden the heart’ (Mishlei 27:9). This refers to the Creator of the universe and His beloved nation Yisrael. Our Avodah with Ketores makes Hashem’s heart happy (so to speak). How? The Medrash cites several examples of how the Ketores are endearing to Hashem. The Kohen Gadol entered into the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur and offered Ketores. When the smoke of the Ketores billowed up, this was a sign that the Kohen Gadol was alive, his Avodah had been accepted, and Klal Yisrael received their kapora. They became filled with joy, and so did the Almighty. The Medrash continues to explain that all of the other korbonos were brought for sins or kapora. The offering of the Ketores, on the other hand was only for simcha (joy). Similarly, the korbonos that received the most praise ever in history were the korbonos of the Nesiim (Princes). Why were they so praiseworthy? Because the first portion that they offered was ketores. That brought merit to their entire offering. The Medrash then cites an awesome event that occurred after the sin of Korach. The day after Korach and his followers were swallowed up by the earth, the nation complained against Moshe and Aharon saying, ‘You have killed the people of Hashem!’ (Bamidbar 17:6). The Almighty responded to this by telling Moshe to remove himself from the assembly, for He was going to destroy them in an instant. The plague of death began and Moshe told Aharon to take a censure, place fire and Ketores in it, and go out to the na-

tion. The Angel of Death was killing every Jew in his path, just as the harvester cuts down every stalk of wheat. Aharon Ha-Kohen stood between the living and the dead, with the censure in hand, opposite the Angel of Death, and would not allow him to continue killing. What stopped the plague? The Ketores. Lastly, the Medrash speaks about the inauguration of the Mishkan. The structure was erected, the korbonos were offered, and the shulchan was arranged along with the menorah. Even after all of this exalted avodah, the Shechina (Divine Presence) still did not descend to the Mishkan. Lastly, the Ketores was burned and the Shechina filled the Mishkan.”

“That is incredible, Abba! In those days we had the zechus (merit) to offer the Ketores. How can we relate to them nowadays?”

“I will tell you Avi. Rabbeinu Bechaye, in his peirush on parashas Tetzaveh (Shemos 30:8) cites several verses from Tehillim, in which Dovid HaMelech requests that his tefillos be accepted by Hashem like the Ketores. Why does Dovid single out Ketores over all other Korbonos? The answer is as we said before – all other korbonos are brought as a result of some type of sin.

Ketores was burned solely for simcha. Additionally, the other burnt offerings took some time to begin burning and emanate a pleasing fragrance. The Ketores, on the other hand, began burning and giving off smoke immediately. Therefore it was the quickest korbon to give a rayach nichoach (pleasing aroma) to Hashem. We also can request that Hashem accept our daily prayers like Ketores.

“Additionally, many meforshim on the Siddur cite passages from the Zohar which extol the virtues of Ketores. A decree stands before the Holy One, that anyone who reads the parasha of Ketores every day will be saved from all wicked things, witchcraft, harmful occurrences, bad thoughts, evil accusations, and death. He will not be harmed the entire day, because the sitra acheres will hold no power over him. Furthermore, a special protection rests upon every locality that the people say the parasha of Ketores with kavannah (intention) and a heartfelt desire. Death and the nations of the world

can cause no damage or destruction there, because they do not reign upon that place. The verse states, ‘Ketores is constantly before Hashem’ (Shemos 30:8). The Zohar darshens that the Ketores stands before Hashem more than all of the other avodos. The act of offering the Ketores is more cherished and dear to Hashem than all of the other avodos in the world! It ties us to Him with bonds of emunah.”

“Do people know this, Abba?”

“Rebbe Shimon speaks about this, Avi. If people knew how exalted the Ketores is to Hashem, they would take each and every word of it, and place it as a crown upon their heads, and wear it like a crown of gold. We must make the proper effort to understand it and say it with kavannah every day. When we succeed, we have a portion in this world and the next world. We remove death from ourselves and the world. We will be saved from all evil decrees, traps, and even gehennom!”

“That is absolutely wonderful, Abba! You have really motivated me to learn the parasha of Ketores, understand it, and say it with kavannah every day.”

“With the Almighty’s help, you should have spectacular success!”

“Amen!”

Kinderlach . . .

The Shulchan Aruch (Rema Orach Chaim 132:2) instructs us to say the Pitom HaKetores after the daily afternoon and morning prayers. We should first say ‘Ein Keloheinu’. Why? The Shaare Teshuva (4) cites the Noda Bi’Yehuda who explains that the Pitom HaKetores brings wealth to a person. Therefore, he must first proclaim the incomparable greatness of Almighty – his G-d, King, and Savior. He then thanks Him, and blesses Him. In this way, we will not be tempted to think that ‘my power and the might of my hand got me this wealth’ (Devarim 8:17). Kinderlach, our Korbonos prayers are all that remains of the exalted service of the Beis HaMikdash. Of all the Avodos, the Ketores was the dearest to Hashem. To this very day, learning and reciting it with kavannah strengthens our emunah, provides special protection for our Holy Nation, and makes us wealthy. Say Pitom HaKetores with kavannah every day, kinderlach. Help and protect yourself and your nation. Give Hashem nachas ruach and come close to Him.