

And his cupped handful of finely ground incense-spices. (16:12)

The *Kohen Gadol* is finally prepared to appear before Hashem to implore His atonement on behalf of *Klal Yisrael*. He has said his *Vidui* and slaughtered his personal *Korban Chatas*. He is now ready to offer the *Ketores*, incense, in the *Kodesh Ha'kodoshim*. The *Kohen Gadol* enters the Holy of Holies once a year, on *Yom Kippur*. The first service he performs, the first request he makes of the Al-mighty, is to seek atonement for the sin of *lashon hora*, speaking gossip and slander.

The *Ketores* serves as the vehicle for this request. How does the offering of the finely ground incense-spices symbolize *lashon hora*? **Horav David Feinstein, Shlita**, offers an insightful explanation. He quotes *Rashi*, who, in citing the interpretation of *Chazal*, questions the need for emphasizing that the incense-spices were finely ground. *Ketores* was brought every day in the *Bais Ha'mikdash*, and it was finely ground. Why should it be different on *Yom Kippur*? *Chazal* conclude that while it is mandatory to finely grind the spices during the year, on *Yom Kippur* it is essential that they be exceptionally fine. Consequently, the spices are ground again on the day before *Yom Kippur*.

Ketores was offered twice daily, in the morning and in the afternoon. These offerings served to atone for the sin of *lashon hora*. The recurrence of this sin is noted by the twice daily offering of *Ketores*. On *Yom Kippur*, something more than the average *Ketores* was needed. On this day, when *Klal Yisrael* must receive atonement for all sins, it was essential that focus be brought on the form of *lashon hora* that is the most subtle and most common--*avak lashon hora*, dust of *lashon hora*. This "innocuous" form of *lashon hora* is like fine dust, very elusive, at times even sophisticated and well-meaning, but *lashon hora* no less. It affects the majority of people. Thus, *Klal Yisrael* must atone for it on the day when everyone stands in prayer begging for forgiveness.

Avak lashon hora is the source of most sin. Many sins begin with a simple derogatory remark about someone which becomes magnified over time. This "humble" beginning can lead to the most unspeakable forms of behavior. It is, therefore, especially appropriate that we grind up the incense a second time, so that we make it as fine as possible, symbolizing the "fine dust" of *lashon hora*.