

YOM KIPPUR

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May you focus on the Yom Kippur prayers, reading them in your native language and benefit from their truths. Ask others and God to forgive you and commit to an improved lifestyle with Torah as your focus. May God seal you for a year of health, happiness and success.

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

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Why We Sin

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

God said to Moses:

You are soon to lie with your fathers. This people will rise and go astray after the alien gods in their midst, in the land that they are about to enter; they will forsake Me and break My covenant that I made with them (Deut. 31:16)

When I bring them into the land flowing with milk and honey that I promised on oath to their fathers, and they eat their fill and grow fat and turn to other gods and serve them, spurning Me and breaking My covenant (Ibid 31:20).

God tells Moses the Jews will sin in the future and that He will hide His eyes from them. God identifies 2 reasons why the Jews will sin. The first is due to Moses' disappearance, when he "lies with his fathers." Meaning, when an authority figure passes, people's fears relax to a degree, causing them to "rise" and sin: their instinctual drives rise.

Why will they follow alien gods? This is because as man cannot not rid himself of a superego; he needs to replace his authority figure, then it was from alien societies. Similarly,

When the people saw that Moses was so long in coming down from the mountain, the people gathered against Aaron and said to him, "Come, make us a god who shall go before us, for that man Moses, who brought us from the land of Egypt—we do not know what has happened to him (Exod. 32:1).

The Jews also succumbed to Egyptian idolatry too to gain Egypt's favor, but only after the 12 sons of Jacob passed away, and not before. One authority figure was replaced by another. The Jew Moses saved informed on Moses, his savior. He had more allegiance to the Egyptian authority than to Moses. All cases express man's need to gain favor from man.

God then says the Jews will follow the gods "in their midst" as their immediate confrontation with closer

cultures arouses their need for approval sooner than from more distant cultures and their gods.

"In the land that they are about to enter" expresses the social dynamic, where the Jews revered the inhabitants and adopted their idolatrous cultures to gain acceptance.

The second cause for sin omits Moses' passing or alien gods, but mentions "other" Gods. Here, the Jews "growing fat" (success) as the verse says above, fed their egos and this successful self-image ignited a sense of independence. The Jews felt they no longer needed God. Their egos denied Israel was due to God's promise; they could not feel humbly indebted that "God brought them in to a land flowing with milk and honey." Rather, they felt arrogant and self-made, attributing their good fortune to themselves. No longer feeling dependent on God, the Jews sought something "other" than God. Why? They needed to maintain some sense of value, so they replaced Judaism with an alien religion. They needed a religious justification for their idolatrous lifestyle (Rabbi Israel Chait). Abandoning religion altogether was not tolerable, so they sought a religious practice that condoned their desires.

The Jews abandoned Moses who had passed, replacing him with alien gods in their midst. And the Jews abandoned God who gave them Israel, replacing Him with "other" gods, where nothing is mentioned of other nations in their midst. These 2 verses teach the irony of they Jews breaking off the yoke of authority (Moses and God) only to seek service to other cultures and other gods. The Jews swapped Moses for an alien people's god, and they swapped God for other deities.

God identifies the 2 methods through which man abandons religion: he replaces religious leadership (man/Moses), and he replaces God. Man must replace his leaders and God, as the void of simply living without religion evokes intolerable guilt, for man must always feel justified in his own eyes, and he must always retain some superego/authority. But these two corrupt attitudes can operate simultaneously, as God forecasted to Moses. The Jews would eventually abandon both Moses and God after they entered the land. ■

PHILOSOPHY

Yom Kippur Sacrifices

Rabbi Israel Chait

Written by a student





Rabbi Chait commenced by distinguishing the central focuses of Rosh Hashannah and Yom HaKippurim. Rosh Hashannah focuses on God's Kingship. This means we are to accept upon ourselves God's absolute rule as expressed through His creation (omnipotence). God's role as Creator defines Him as the exclusive cause for all that exists. This translates to absolute Kingship over all. Rosh Hashannah also focuses on His absolute Knowledge (omniscience): God alone knows all, and thereby (knowing our sins, merits and our repentance) He alone inscribes us for good or evil this coming year. God's omnipotence and omniscience expressed together on Rosh Hashannah teach that God reigns over all, and is knowledgeable of all. Nothing is beyond His abilities, or His knowledge. There is no other cause for the universe.

In contrast, Yom HaKippurim's distinction is "God's ineffable name": the priests would recite God's ineffable name ten times in the Temple during Yom HaKippurim. Being prohibited to enunciate God's name normally, demonstrates our lack any knowledge of God, i.e., we cannot even mention His name, which would suggest we possess some idea about Him. Any description of God—even the meaning of His name—is unknown to us. But on Yom HaKippurim, this actual name of God is mentioned ten times. This indicates that on Yom HaKippurim there is a closer relationship to God. What is this relationship?

Rabbi Chait stated that the very recognition of our ignorance about God's nature atones for our sins. How so? The answer is that our recognition that we have no concept of God entitles us to existence for another year. We thereby learn that our existence depends on obtaining correct ideas, and our admission of ignorance regarding anything related to God. We cannot know God, as the Torah says, "For man cannot know Me while alive" (Exod. 33:20). So when we admit of this ignorance, we are in fact stating a truth, and when man is in line with truth, God's providence relates to him. The more truths we accept, and

the more we realize we are ignorant of God, this proportionately increases our reality before God: our worth/life increases. In other words, as we continually grow in our realization that God is not physical, that He possesses no emotions, nor any quality existent in the universe, although we attain no positive knowledge of God, we are in fact removing false notions about Him. This act of negation, places us more in line with truth. Let us now examine the ideas obtained through the Yom HaKippurim service.

After the normal daily service, the High Priest would slaughter the ox, one of many sacrifices on Yom HaKippurim. But before enacting the central service of this sacrifice—sprinkling blood over the Kapores (the Ark's cover)—the High Priest is commanded to interrupt this ox service and offer the incense in the Temple's Holy of Holies. Why this interruption? Additionally, the priest must wait until this room is entirely filled with the smoke of the burning incense. What is the meaning behind this waiting period?

The purpose is that the smoke is to create an opaque veil between the High Priest and the rest of the room of the Holy of Holies. This veil is an admission of the "veil" that exists between God and man. Maimonides states that Revelation at Sinai too was a rainy day, also a veil of sorts. The cloud at Sinai certainly teaches this lesson, that there is an infinite distance between God and man. Even when God "reveals" Himself by creating the miracles of Sinai—a closer relationship—nonetheless, a distant relationship exists between man and God, who is far exalted from anything we mortals can fathom.

The High Priest must acknowledge that man is far removed from God, and only through this realization is the High Priest permitted to then complete his offering. There is a danger that man may think he possesses some idea about God. Not only is this false, but until the High Priest admits of his ignorance through the incense's veil, he is prohibited to continue with his worship, lest he assume he is serving his own fantasy of what is God, and not the true

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God. For if we wrongly assume that we do in fact possess some truths about God, Temple worship would then be converted to heresy and idolatry. This explains the interruption of the ox sacrifice.

In another class given by Rabbi Chait many years ago, he cited the Talmud that described the most powerful human instincts as a “fiery lion exiting the Holy of Holies in the Temple” (Yoma 69b). Rabbi Chait explained this teaches that the most powerful instinct is the “religious emotion.” It is in Temple that man is subject to forming ideas about whom he serves. Therefore, the Talmud states that from the Holy of Holies, the “fiery lion” had exited (a powerful and dangerous entity referring to the religious emotion). It is in service to God that man must be on his highest guard. For it is here that man’s religious emotions are heightened.

The next sacrifice is the goat of the people. So far there are two sacrifices: the High Priest’s ox, and the goat of the people. Why must there be two separate offerings for our sins? We derive a new insight: the priests require their own atonement. What additional atonement do they require? Why can’t they join in the nation’s goat sin sacrifice? The answer can only lie in the priests’ distinction: Temple service. Meaning, even those who serve in the Temple by God’s very command—the priests—are not immune to their instincts, which never cease to cause us to sin. As such, the priests must demonstrate that Temple service is not something that they can perform flawlessly. Therefore, they alone must be atoned through a separate animal. Had they joined the people with the nation’s goat, this lesson would not be learned.

Rabbi Chait mentioned that there is no escape from the control of our unconscious and our emotional drives. This is our nature. Other religions wish to deny this aspect of man, but Judaism does not have heroes or saints; all man’s sins are revealed in the Torah, even those of our greatest prophets. Judaism embraces the acceptance of reality, and foremost, this includes that we are instinctual by nature, that we have an unconscious, and that we possess emotional attraction towards Torah prohibitions.

We learn that Temple itself requires atonement. That is, we demonstrate through the priests’ offering that Temple service is not an area in which man escapes sin—how profound an idea. In other words, we are not worthy of Temple. We make the Temple impure by not guarding ourselves from Torah-defined impurities. And when we are in an impure state (viz. contact with the dead) and we enter the Temple without purification, we defile the Temple, its vessels and its sacrifices. These sins all require atonement. We cannot properly relate to the requirements of Temple, so in Temple law itself are the commands to offer atonements for Temple impurities that we commit.

Rabbi Chait also taught that even on the Day of Atonement itself—Yom HaKippurim—there are infractions committed by the priests and man who cannot control all their thoughts. Ironically, as we are being atoned for our sins of the year, we continue to have sinful thoughts crossing our minds, and these must be atoned for as well. This is why there are two additional sin offerings later on the day of Yom HaKippurim.

Now, although we stated that the priests must atone for their own Temple service infractions through a distinct sacrifice, yet, we are one people. Rabbi Chait stated that this is demonstrated by the command of the mixing of the blood of both offerings. The blood of the priests’ sacrifice and that of the goat of the people are intermingled as one.

Returning to the idea that man cannot escape his instinctual drives, no matter how far he progresses in his perfection, Rabbi Chait brought up the Scapegoat, the Seir HaAzazel. The priest confesses the Jews’ sins and the Torah euphemistically states that the Scapegoat “carries off” our sins to the desert, where this Scapegoat is delivered to its certain death as it is dismembered upon its fall over Mount Azazel’s razor sharp vertical slopes. Through this service, we attain recognition that man’s unconscious emotions will lead him too to a most certain, spiritual death. This service is elaborated upon in Rabbi Chait’s lecture “The Scapegoat” in this issue. ■

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Rosh Hashanah

How is God Found?

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

“Seek out God [in a manner that] He is found; call to Him when He is near” (Isaiah 55:6)

This verse commences our Torah reading on fast days. At first glance, it implies that God is not “always” approachable. However, that is impossible, for the Ashray prayer teaches us, “God is close to all who call Him, to all who call Him in truth. The will of those who fear Him He fulfills; and their cries, He hears and saves them.” These two “traits” of God are not conditional on certain times. So if God is readily accessible at all times, what does our verse above mean?

Radak cites three explanations on “call to Him when He is near.” He first quotes his father: “This means when one seeks out God with his “entire” heart, as it says, “God is close to all who call Him, to all who call Him in truth.”

Notice, that verse does not mention any idea of an “entire heart.” Rather, it refers to our need to call Him in “truth.” Radak’s father clearly equates “all one’s heart” and “truth.” Meaning, only when one seeks God earnestly, and exclusively, is he inline with truth. For when one relies on God alone, he agrees with what is true in the universe: God is the only one who can respond. To be clear, this explains “when He is near” to mean, when we call to God and no other. God is close to such a person and performs their will, as this will endorse the truth God wishes spread in the world: God alone answers man. This happens always. But if one does not feel convinced God alone can respond, and he relies on anything else, God will not respond, since that would endorse that falsehood.

If we do not value our relationship with God over all else, with our “entire heart,” then we have the wrong view of God. He must play a central role in our lives, for He created our lives, and maintains them. How can anything else take precedence? So the command to love God with all our hearts is simply stating what the facts demand. Shima says this as well: “And you shall love your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your might” (Deut. 30:6, 4:29) and Selichos repeats this crucial message.

We see from this that it’s not just New

Year’s or fast days, but this concept of approaching God with our entire heart is applicable always.

Radak then quotes the Rabbis who explain “Call to Him when He is near” as referring to “before our decree.” This means before Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Our fate is decided at this time, so we are admonished to seek out God, establish a relationship, and repent, before our decree is written.

And lastly, Radak quotes Yonasan ben Uzziel as referring to prior to death: “For one can only call to God while alive, and not after he dies. For in the grave, there are no actions, knowledge or wisdom.” On this, King Solomon said, “At all times, let your clothes be white [clean]...” (Koheles 9:8). This refers to the need to be without sin at all times (clean garments) since we do not know when God will call us to the next world. So be always ready in case it is now, in order that we are without sin as we enter the Afterlife, to escape punishment.

In fact, there is no argument among these three views. Radak’s father is advising us of what the Torah says in so many places: we can only truly relate to God when our ideas of His omnipotent and omniscient nature are obtained. For if our ideas of God are false, we are not relating to God, but to an imaginary thing, and no imaginary thing can help us. So we must strive to be accurate in our Torah understanding of what God is and what He is not. Then we will realize He alone must be the sole recipient of our prayers. This is what it means to “call to Him when He is near.” God is not physical, so one cannot be “near” God. “Near” means when we have an accurate understanding of Him, and we express it by calling Him alone.

The Rabbis, Rashi, and Yonasan ben Uzziel teach that before our decree, we are wise to act. These views focus on the “gravity” of what is at hand: our lives. They address the absolute nature of God’s decrees, not the “method of approach” described by Radak’s father.

In our verse, Isaiah is addressing this time of year, when our fate will be written. He is concerned for us all, so let us be concerned, and review our ways. Make amends with those you have wronged,

ask God’s forgiveness for sins between you and Him and resign never to repeat such actions and earnestly seek an ever-growing understanding of what God is, so your prayers reach the One who can help.

With so many conflicting views today concerning Judaism’s fundamentals, we must follow only to that which our minds see clearly. Anything less, means our mind does not agree with a notion, so what use is it to parrot the words “I agree” when we do not?

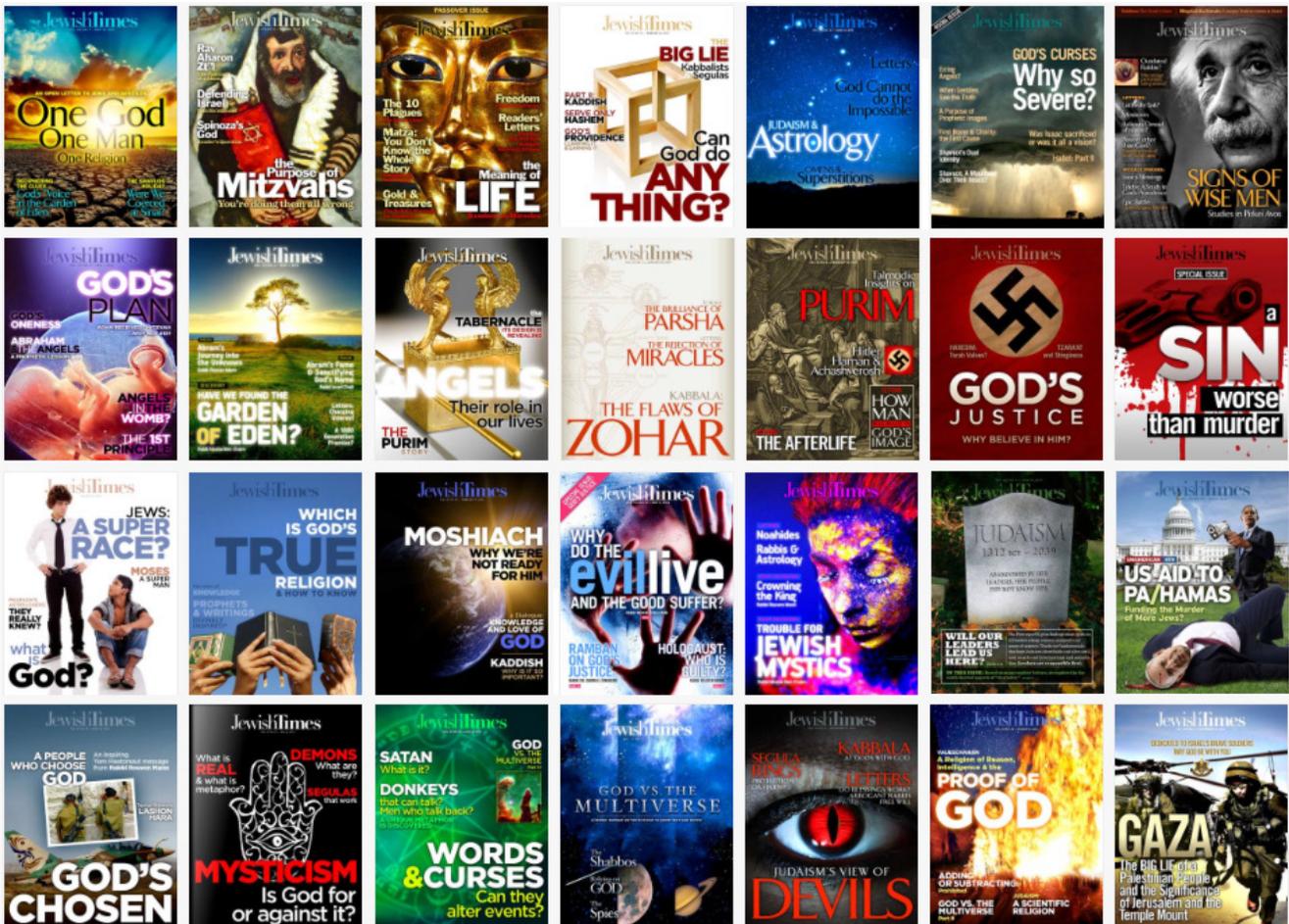
In Halacha—Jewish Law—we must follow the Rabbis of old, and of today. But in philosophy, Hashkafa, there is no such thing as a psak, a ruling (Rabbi Chait). We cannot be told by any Rabbi, or anyone, that we believe what we truly do not.

God gave us each a mind. Why? He wants each one of us to use it. If you do not use it, but follow the crowd, even the religious crowd, or Rabbis, then you violate God’s will.

I mention this, since we are discussing the need to call God “when He is near,” meaning, calling Him accurately. The most fundamental thing you can do, now before your fate is written, is to first insure you have the right idea of God. Many schools never teach this. Most adults cannot answer, “What is God?.” Many pop-Jewish groups talk about sefirot, parts of God inside man, and other inconceivable and dangerous notions. Who is correct? How do we know? Reason, our great rabbis, and Torah will tell you. Moses’ words and all the prophets never spoke of mysticism, or nonsense. Just the opposite is the case: Moses told the Jews not to forget what their eyes saw. He asked no belief whatsoever, but that each Jew accept reason to determine what is true, and what God is. No prophet ever endorsed amulets, segulas, praying to the dead, or any of today’s popular falsehoods. Moses and the prophets endorsed reason, and abiding by God’s commands, “Do not add or subtract from the Torah.” They added no new practices, and they never ran to others to bless them. They sought God “with their entire heart.” They sought God alone, and nothing else. Go back to the source, to the Torah. If you cannot find it there, don’t follow it. ■

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MUST WE ALWAYS FORGIVE?

Rabbi Reuven Mann

Judaism is very unique in its attitude to the status of evil people. To begin with it regards man as a creature who possesses free-will which means that he is responsible for his choices and his behavior. If he commits sins or crimes he cannot blame it on anyone else and must assume full responsibility.

But Judaism does not condemn the sinner to an irredeemable life. He always has the option to do Teshuva which if he chooses will obtain for him full pardon and liberation from his sinful past.

Teshuva is a very powerful tool which can be effective even for someone who has lived a long life steeped in wrongdoing. According to the Rambam if a person only did Teshuva on his deathbed it will work for him, provided it is sincere, and it will earn him a place in the world to come.

A major theme of the Yom Kippur service is that Hashem does not desire the death of the sinner but “waits” for him to return. And when he does he is immediately received in forgiveness and even “friendship”.

But are there any limits? Are there sinners whose wickedness is so egregious that they are beyond the realm of Teshuva? There is no better example to consider than the Nazis. Can they do Teshuva? Can they have any hope of being pardoned for what they have done?

Full disclosure, I am not aware of any Nazi murderers who were or are genuinely repentant. They are not knocking at our doors for forgiveness. Rather most of them upon capture were extremely

arrogant and did not display remorse. And that is not so difficult to understand once you have heard their refrain that they were just “following orders”. But the question we are asking is a purely hypothetical one: suppose an evil Nazi beast has a genuine change of heart and engages in authentic Teshuva—must we forgive him?

Since the sins of the Nazis are regarded as “between man and man” the offender would have to make amends with his victims, ie. those who survived and could be contacted. The Rambam says that if a person sins against his fellow man he cannot repent before Hashem until he has settled matters with his victim. He must apologize and make whatever restitution may be called for. And then solicit the pardon of the offended.

The victim must not be stubborn and refuse to accept the sinner’s apologies. If someone has wronged him he has a right to demand that the offender display the requisite regret and contrition and do everything he can to “make things right”. But after all that has been done the victim must be able to let go of his hurt and say, “I forgive”. Whoever adamantly refuses to forgive is regarded as cruel and, in fact, now becomes the sinner.

So the question is, if you are a survivor who lost everything in the Holocaust and one of your torturers seeks to repent and he has tracked you down and now requests your pardon must you give it? Must you forgive someone who committed atrocities beyond the scope of anyone’s imagination and moral comprehension?

Perhaps you must but before you can do so a practical problem emerges. Forgiveness requires trust that the sinner is sincere and has had a genuine change of heart. He has renounced the evil character traits that impelled him to transgress and is now, in effect, a different person.

We regard such an improvement as within the realm of the moral compass of most decent people. They subscribe to an ethical code and strive to live by it and when they violate it from time to time they feel regret and seek to repent and make amends. So when they apologize to us we have every reason to believe they are sincere and we should therefore be gracious.

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But can the same be said about those who have committed atrocities? They have cast off all restraints and have renounced all moral rules. They are, in effect, amoral beings. So how is one to know whether they are genuinely sincere in their protestations of remorse since they don't operate by the ethical code that we live by?

Perhaps a precedent for this can be found in the Torah narrative of Yosef and his brothers. Of course there is no intention to associate these righteous individuals with wicked people but we must place ourselves in Yosef's shoes. They had acted towards him with sheer cruelty first casting him into a pit to die and then selling him as a slave to the Egyptians.

These constituted "cruel and unusual punishments". Were they even forgivable? When the brothers came down to Egypt in search of food Yosef recognized them but they didn't notice him. He acted as a stranger and treated them harshly, finally forcing them to assume total responsibility for their younger brother, Binyamin, who was a carbon copy of Yosef.

In effect Yosef set it up so that the brothers had to confront their unresolved feelings toward their father Yaakov and his favorite son, Yosef. The brothers came through with flying colors and passed all the tests that Yosef had set for them. The apex of this penitential behavior was reached when Yehuda pleaded to take the place of Binyamin as a prisoner so that the "favorite son" could return to his father.

Yosef was able to see from their words and actions that the brothers had genuine regret for the crimes they had committed against him and therefore were worthy of being forgiven. And so at the conclusion of Yehuda's peroration he identified himself and tearfully reconciled with his siblings and forgave them with a full heart. This was possible because he had the opportunity to see from their actions that they had overcome the negative emotions that had impelled them to mistreat Yosef.

With regard to truly evil people the matter is more complex. How can we know if an Amalekite has done genuine Teshuva? It seems to me that there is a level of wicked behavior that causes you to lose any moral credibility in the opinion of society. And all expressions of remorse are then subject to doubt. A person in that category must turn exclusively to Hashem who alone knows our innermost thoughts. But he cannot expect mankind to forgive and forget.

If Nazis and other extreme anti-semites want to do Teshuva they must demonstrate by word and deed that they have had a genuine change of heart. To do so they must actively support Israel and Jews in an effective and meaningful manner over a long period of time. When it becomes clear to all that they are not putting on an act but are totally sincere we should not bear a grudge but accept their penitence and forgive them.

There is no Mitzvah to forgive, per se. it is only when we are convinced that the offender has mended his ways, truthfully regrets his prior actions and now contritely apologizes that we must overcome all our residual resentments and convincingly proclaim, "I forgive!" May we merit to be forgiven for all our sins and to assist all who have offended us in their quest for complete atonement.

G'mar Chatima Tova V'Tzom Kal ■



states: “They should no longer sacrifice their sacrifices unto the satyrs that lead them astray. Rashi explains the word l’saeerim to mean l’shaydim, unto the demons. The Eben Ezrah is teaching us that if one desires an insight into the Scapegoat he [sic] must recognize that adhering to this practice will lead one to the practice stated in chapter 7 verse 17. The Israelites will no longer turn astray and sacrifice to the demons as the nations of the world. We will explain this insight after we examine several salient laws with respect to the Scapegoat. It is interesting to note that the Rambam holds that the Scapegoat renders atonement without repentance for all commandments that are not punishable by kares, excision. Rabbi Yehudah HaNasi’s position in the Talmud, although we do not rule like him, is that even the “day of Yom Kippur” itself effectuates atonement. We must appreciate how atonement works, if the sinner is not repentant. Halachically, Teshuva implies that one must return to God. His relationship with the creator must be rekindled as a result of his recognizing the cause of his sin and being able to elevate himself to a higher intellectual level. The individual is a changed person, one who is no longer drawn by the temptations of the instinctual nor the frailties of the emotional components of his nature, which causes him to commit the sin. We therefore must understand how does the mere practice of the Scapegoat grant atonement to a sinner?

The last Mishna in the tractate of Yumah quotes a statement of Rabbi Akiva, which states “Happy are you Israel before whom you are purified, and who purifies you, your Father in heaven.” This is a puzzling statement. Anybody who performs Teshuva and returns to God, as a result of his own actions, is purified before God. This applies even to a Gentile. Why then does Rabbi Akiva specify a Jew; and furthermore it seems from his statement that Teshuva is extraneous to this purification process. We must try to comprehend Rabbi Akiva’s teaching.

Nachmanides comments on the Eben Ezra, explaining the service of the Scapegoat discusses a Medrash. The Medrash says that the children of Jacob give Samael, their prosecuting angel, a bribe on Yom Kippur. This bribe is the sacrificial Scapegoat. It is given so that he should not annul their sacrifices. The Scapegoat has all the sins of the Children of Israel on its head, as set out in the verses in the Torah. The Medrash continues, “as a result Samael will see that there is no sin

on Yom Kippur and will explain before God, ‘Creator of the world, there is one nation in this world which are akin to the ministering angels. Just like the ministering angels are bare footed, so too on this day the Jews are bare footed.’” Samael makes similar observations when addressing God with respect to eating, drinking, standing all day, making peace amongst themselves and being free of sin. In all these activities the Jewish people on Yom Kippur are comparable to the ministering angels. The Holy One upon hearing these testimonies from the prosecutor Samael, makes atonement for the altar, the sanctuary, the priests of Israel and for all the people of the assembly of Israel. This is the Agadah that the Rambam quotes to help us understand the Scapegoat.

This Agadah raises several questions: Who is Samael and how is he bribed? Originally the purpose of the bribe is so that the sacrifices should not be annulled, however the seeming result of the bribe is that it is responsible for the entire atonement of Yom Kippur. Maimonides, in his “Guide for the Perplexed” states that Samael is the appellation applied by our sages to Satan. The derivation of the word Samael is “Sam-El”, the blinding of God. Samael represents that part of human nature, which blinds the individual from perceiving the ultimate reality, God. The Yetzer Harah and Satan are used interchangeably by Chazal and represent man’s evil inclination which is rooted in his physical nature. Chazal use the term Satan, which implies something external to man, to signify that this part of man is not his essence. Rather the tzelem Elokim – intelligence – is man’s essence. Chazal use the term Yetzer Harah to teach us that although it is not man’s essence, we are nevertheless responsible for this part of us. The key to understanding the Scapegoat is appreciating its inexorable connection to the atonement of Yom Kippur. There were two goats, which were subject to the lottery. One was designated for God and was brought upon the altar as a sacrifice. The second goat was designated l’azazel and was the saeer ha’mishtaleyach, the goat that was sent away to meet its final destiny in the desert. The atonement of the day of Yom Kippur was really a result of the goat that was designated l’azazel and not the one that was brought as a sacrifice. The atonement of Yom Kippur is unique because it atones for many sins, kalot vechamurot, lenient and stringent sins. Whereas a korban chatas is brought for a particular maaseh aveira, act of violation, and atones for that particular sin. On Yom

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The Scapegoat

Rabbi Israel Chait
Transcribed by student

The Scapegoat is a very unique sacrifice. All other sacrifices require slaughter and blood sprinkling, which is the fulfillment of the sacrifice and reflects the presence of atonement. However, the Scapegoat is brought to a desolate place and is brutally killed by being thrown over a precipice. Chazal teach us that the nations of the world criticize the B’nai Yisroel for its practice of the Scapegoat as being solely ritualistic and ceremonial. Although the gentiles have ritualistic practices, they are symbolic and their performances engender some emotional satisfaction unlike the Scapegoat. Judaism prides itself on the fact that one’s commitment to the Torah is based upon his intellectual conviction and that its commandments are ethical and moral principles. We must therefore explain the significance of the Scapegoat and the intellectual insight the Torah is imparting to us.

The Eben Ezra gives us a clue as to the secret of the Scapegoat. He states that a basic secret of the Scapegoat is after the word “azazel” and when you are 33 years old you will know this secret. If one counts 33 verses from the word “ha’midbarah”, the word after “azazel”, which appears in Leviticus, chapter 16 verse 10, one may get a clue. The verse that is being referred to is 17:7. The verse

Kippur “lifneh Hashem tetaharu”, we are purified before God. The essential character of the day atones. This is a different type of forgiveness than a specific korban chatas, a sin offering. Yom Kippur is related to the state of the gavra, the individual. The day atones the individual. A person, who appreciates the sanctity of the day, demonstrates that he, as an individual, is worthy of forgiveness. Consequently, this new status results in the removal of the particular sins.

An understanding of the service of the Scapegoat gives us insight into the essential nature of the sanctity of Yom Kippur and its function as a purifier. The Scapegoat atoned for all the sins of the Jews. Leviticus Chapter 16, Verses 21 and 22 tells us that Aaron placed his hands on the Scapegoat and confessed all the sins of the Children of Israel and all their transgressions, and placed them on the head of the Azazel goat. How does this goat serve to forgive all the sins of the Jewish people? The Torah is teaching us that the sins of man are really separate and extraneous to his essential nature. Aaron was capable of removing all of man’s sins and placing them on the head of the goat. The Scapegoat as stated, represents the Satan, man’s evil inclination, the part of man driven by his fantasy. This service signifies that the part of man, which is based upon his emotions and fueled by his fantasy, is really not reflective of man’s true essence, his Tzelem Elokim, his intelligence. This part of man, his instinctual nature, may be severed from his true nature. However, if man follows his fantasies and his evil inclination, he is doomed as the Scapegoat, to face a brutal and lonely death.

The Midrash quoted by Nachmanides can now be understood. We bribe Samael and give him the Scapegoat. We, as Torah Jews, recognize that the pursuit of the fantasy blinds us from perceiving “chachmas haboreh”, the wisdom of our Creator. We acknowledge by the service of the Scapegoat, that there is a spiritually higher nature to man, his true essence that we value. As Torah Jews, we thereby attempt to lead our lives based upon the Tzelem Elokim. By bribing Samael, we acknowledge that there is a part of man’s nature, which is overpowering. However, we cannot deny our instinctual nature, but must acknowledge that it stems from the lower part of man’s being, and as such, must be dealt with. If we deny our instinctual nature “Samael”, it can have tragic consequences. On the contrary, we recognize the instinctual part of man’s nature but acknowledge our life long struggle as Torah Jews to separate that

part of our nature from the Tzelem Elokim. Only by “bribing” Samael and recognizing the potent powers of fantasy, can we hope to ever be successful in combating these forces and removing them from overwhelming our actions as Torah Jews. We demonstrate that ultimately if one is led astray by the powers of the fantasy, he will surely perish and be doomed to spiritual genocide.

The Scapegoat was taken to the desert by the “ish iti”, a specially prepared man. This demonstrates that the ultimate destruction of the Scapegoat is not fortuitous. Rather, it is a necessary result that the pursuits of the fantasy will lead to ones downfall. That is why the ish iti was mezuman l’kach, was prepared for this job, to ensure and guarantee that the Scapegoat would meet its eventual destruction. This recognition by Klal Yisroel that we appreciate the overwhelming force of man’s instinctual nature and constantly strive to overcome it and elevate our lives to a higher spiritual plane, makes us akin to the mal’achey hashares, ministering angels. This causes Samael to remark that on Yom Kippur the Children of Israel are like the Ministering Angels. The Ministering Angels are not under the influence of the instinctual, they are not swayed by emotions. Similarly on Yom Kippur the Jewish people demonstrate through the prohibitions of the day (eating, drinking, cohabitation, and wearing leather shoes etc.) that we abstain from these physical pleasures to demonstrate that there is a higher part to man’s existence.

This explains how the Scapegoat atones for all sins. Since man recognizes this concept and appreciates that his physical existence leads him on the path of Samael, he must strive through chachma, wisdom, to live life based upon his Tzelem Elokim, and thus become a different type of person. Yom Kippur is a day of reality whereby he recognizes the dangers in his daily existence of Samael, but elevates himself on this day to be purified before Hashem. This explains that although a person did not do teshuva on a particular maeseh aveira, act of sin, but since he recognizes the consequences of Samael and that man’s true essence is chachma, he has elevated himself to higher spiritual level and he is a being worthy of forgiveness.

We can now understand the reason why there are two goats, one for Hashem and one for azazel. This represents man’s dual nature, his intellect that is l’Hashem and his instinctual which is l’azazel. In order to have the sacrifice to Hashem, you must have the Scapegoat. One

cannot be successful in his struggle as a talmid chachom unless he recognizes the lower part of human nature. Intellectual perfection cannot be achieved if one simply represses his instinctual nature. By repressing one’s instinctual nature it still remains an influential part of his personality.

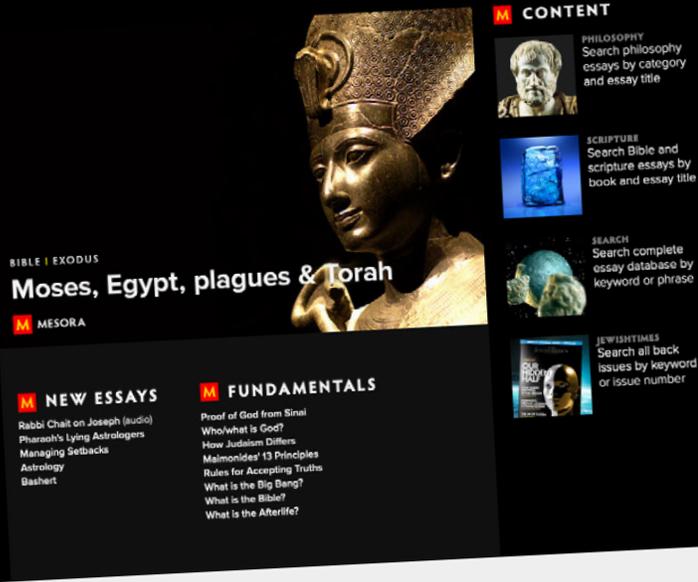
The many meticulous details with respect to the performance of the Scapegoat also evidences this concept. A person is driven to the life of the physical by many powerful forces. Each of these drives is shattered by the method of performance mandated by the Torah by bringing the Scapegoat. A person is drawn to the life of the material because of the enticements of the physical pleasures that one imagines is comforting when living an instinctual existence. This is why the Scapegoat is brutally thrown over the cliff to a torturous death. This represents that visions of physical pleasures are illusory and transitory and ultimately will result in a painful shattering of such false emotions. A person is also drawn to the life of the physical because he feels that material success garners respect and popular acceptance by the masses. Therefore the Scapegoat is sent out with one man, alone without any fanfare, to a desolate and lonely place in the desert. This demonstrates that leading a life of materialism will ultimately and invariably result in a lonely and desolate existence. Lastly, a person is fooled by the entrapments of a physical existence in order to insulate himself from the limited nature of such an existence and to cater to his fantasy of immortality. Thus the Scapegoat always meets the same destiny, a harsh and cruel termination, to help emasculate any such fantasies that a person may harbor.

We can now appreciate Rabbi Akiva’s statement quoted in the last Mishna in Tractate Yumah. “Happy are the Children of Israel because they are purified before God.” Although it might be possible in isolated cases for individuals to come to the true recognition of God, however, for a nation of people, on such a large scale, it is impossible. How fortunate are we Torah Jews who have a system of Torah and Mitzvos, (that contains the abstract and beautiful practice of the Scapegoat), a system based upon chachma that allows us to recognize man’s true nature and remove ourselves from living a purely physical existence, the life of fantasy that ultimately leads to man’s downfall. Therefore Rabbi Akiva exalts “how happy are we the nation of Israel that we are fortunate to such a blessing.” ■

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OUR PURPOSE: WISDOM & MORALITY



God created man to live by truths concerning Him, creation, others and ourselves.

We must study God's instruction about what He is, what is idolatrous or fallacy, we must study nature, psychology, philosophy and morality. This draws us closer to God and He to us, and creates societal harmony which fosters greater Torah for all.

[MORE BELOW](#)

Kindness: As equals, all humans must treat others as we wish to be treated. Charity, kindness and justice demand we rise above personal and selfish emotions and recognize that God made others as He made ourselves. Doing so creates harmony, and earns His kindness.

Racism: A Lie: Man descends from Adam. **Black/white twins** unveil the lie of racism. Bible denounces it: Moses' wife was black, our kings married Egyptians and Messiah descends from Moabites. "Better is the day of death than the day of birth" (Eccl. 7:1). Birth doesn't define us; how we live does.

Insecurity: Man's insecurities can be false, but reality is greater, as it is truth. Man seeks security about his future, accepting fallacies like astrology, amulets, omens, horoscopes and others. God prohibited such practices precisely because they are false. God is more powerful than false notions. Rely on Him alone.

Happiness: Many think wealth and success secure happiness. But Torah teaches happiness stems from study. When pursuing wisdom, one is most happy as Torah offers childlike amazement at every turn. Study offers the daily novelty necessary to retain interest and the depth that offers amazement.

Pleasing Others: Don't seek approval over truth. Torah says, "What can man do to me?" (Psalms 56:5), "Don't fear man" (Deut. 1:7), "Desist from man whose soul is in his nostrils, for what is he considered?" (Isaiah 2:22). Mortal attention is irrelevant. Following God earns all goodness.

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ASK THE RABBI



Rosh Hashanah

God Fixes Our Sustenance

RABBI MOSHE BEN-CHAIM

All of man's sustenance is decided for him between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, except for his needs for Shabbos, holidays, and his son's Torah study needs. In these 3, if man spends more there will be added to his lot, and if he spends less it will be detracted from his lot. (Beitza 16a)

What principle demands man's needs be determined by yearly intervals? Certainly this is curious, as another talmudic discussion (Rosh Hashanna 16a) offers 2 alternative views: a) man is judged daily, b) man is judged every moment. The second question is what is the unique nature of the 3 exceptions; why aren't man's expenditures on other mitzvahs like tefillin and tzitzis also exceptions? And the third question is this principle that a person receives more when he spends more, and less when he spends less.

God's determination of man's yearly sustenance means that no matter how much he labors, man's yearly sustenance has been fixed. God wishes man to depend on Him for his life, so He fixes our yearly bounty. However, if man's relationship to his produce is an expression of his attachment to Torah wisdom, i.e., he uses more food on shabbos and holidays as he wishes to honor these days and for the principles for which they stand, then he is not abusing his yearly produce, but using it properly. In this case, God replenishes what he consumed. The same applies to needs for his son's Torah study.

These 3 areas relate to man's sustenance, his food. Other matters like tefillin and tzitzis are not matters of food so they are not relevant to man subsistence. These other matters are purchased with silver or money, and do not affect man's stores of produce. Man must be wise about his rations.

Regarding the 3-way argument over when man is judged, I suggest the following. One being judged yearly and then his fate being sealed 10 days later on Yom Kippur intends to offer man novelty, which translates into value. This view considers a yearly judgment as something infrequent enough to captivate man through its novelty. This position views frequency as that which belittles man's estimation. So man's judgment must be infrequent.

The second view says man is judged daily. This is because as man has many fleeting emotions and thoughts, he requires a full day's span to allow decisions to brew, for his emotions to settle, and to consider all he has done during a full day. What he remains committed to at day's end expresses his true values, for which he is judged.

The final view says that man is judged every moment, as this view says man is responsible for all his decisions and actions, which express his values. Yes, he may sin and repent, but at the time of sinning, man has expressed a value for which he is responsible. This view is not as forgiving as the previous view that allows man slack and time to recover or rebound from various decisions throughout the day.

Regardless of the view, all agree that man requires knowledge that he is judged. For without a sense of responsibility and reward and punishment, very few people will act like Abraham our father and follow what is true and God's will for its own value. Man initially requires fear of punishment, until he follows Torah laws and engages Torah wisdom for sufficient time to recognize its inherent good, when he would ultimately follow a Torah life without concern for reward:

Antigonus a man of Socho received [the oral tradition] from Shimon the Righteous. He used to say: "Do not be like servants who serve the master in the expectation of receiving a reward, but be like servants who serve the master without the expectation of receiving a reward, and let the fear of Heaven be upon you" (Avos 1:3).



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