

AHARE MOT 1 - THE TWIN GOAT CARRIES THE SINS INTO THE WILDERNESS

In a world governed by God it might appear odd that numerous Torah sources describe the verses in Perek 16 as an act to subdue the evil forces of creation. 1 Since some might be misled into thinking this commandment advances Pagan worship of Se'irim or goats, the Torah issues a stern warning in the following chapter against sacrificing to demonic forces. 2 Rather the Creator determined that this was a necessary procedure to rid Israel of certain sins on the day of Yom Kippour. We will attempt to explain the nature of the sins that the goat is sent to carry away, the destination of the goat and why and how the transfer can be accomplished.

A WILLFUL SIN CREATES A PROSECUTOR AGAINST THE PERPETRATOR

The Ohr HaHayyim relates that a Mishna in Avot taught in the name of R. Eliezer Ben Yaakov helps break the code as to what is accomplished through these strange divinely ordained procedures. "He who commits even a single transgression gains himself one prosecutor." Namely, that a transgression brings about the creation of a prosecuting spiritual entity. 3 Though one may repent - it often is not enough to rid oneself of the destructive angels or sins. We will explain below that a willful transgression creates a potent negative force that cannot be eradicated via a standard sin offering brought in the Temple.

THE ATONEMENT OF AN INADVERTENT SIN VERSES A WILLFUL SIN

After repentance - the way to neutralize and uproot the evil forces created via an inadvertent transgression is thru a Sin Offering. The Ohr HaHayyim explains that the owner of the Sin Offering must place his weight on the animal - an act which drains him of the negative power he had absorbed by his unintentional transgression and transfers it to the sacrificial animal. 4 This act of Semikha and the other procedures including slaughter, blood collection, burning up of animal parts on the altar, are all designed to extinguish the negative forces. These procedures are to be done in the precincts of the Temple - a place where the unifying power of the Creator helps to uproot and neutralize the sin. We know that if one sins knowingly and willingly the pollutant force he creates is too potent to be eradicated via a normal sin offering. Hence these types of transgressions which create such powerful forces are subdued solely via a unique method of the scapegoat ritual. 5 On Yom Kippour a date assigned for all Israel to gain purity from all negative forces the Kohen Gadol is to transfer them to the scapegoat prior to dispatching it to the wilderness. Through his confession for all of Israel, placing his weight on the head of the scapegoat he transfer all the pollutants created by all sorts of sins of Israel onto the animal. Evidently Biblical Atonement is the removal of the negative forces which had previously contaminated man. The Torah informs us that God's appointee selected through lots to carry away these forces to the wilderness is this Se'ir or Scapegoat.

DESTINATION OF THE SCAPEGOAT - AZAZEL

The Torah proscribes that the scapegoat be sent to Azazel to the wilderness. R. Abraham Ibn Ezra writes that if one is able to understand the meaning of the word Azazel he will comprehend its mystery. He proceeds to give a coded message and writes "When you understand thirty three you will know it". 6 Ramban unlocks the code and points out that thirty three verses later the Torah discusses the cult of the Se'irim (Goats). 7 Evidently Azazel is likely the name of a wilderness "goat" demon similar to the Se'irim mentioned in chapter 17. One interpretation found in the Talmud (Yoma 67) appears to validate this approach of Ibn Ezra. "A Beraita was taught in the Academy of R. Yishmael - the term Azazel indicates that it atones for the act of Uza and Azael. 8 According to the Zohar's interpretation of Beresheet 6:2,

this refers to two angels of destruction who descended to earth in the days of Na'amah the sister of Tuval Kayin and proceeded to cohabit with the daughters of man. 9 R. B. Rosenblum sighting another Midrash gives us a bit more background into the descent of the Angels noted above. These Angels had begun to prosecute man for their sinful behavior. The Angels complained to God advocating that man not be forgiven for their transgressions. God challenged the Angel Azazel to descend to earth in the form of man to see if he can withstand temptation as a human. He failed by cohabiting illegally with the daughters of man. 10 He was thereby banished to the wilderness by God in order to testify before all the destructive Angels that would descend there 11 advocating that man should be forgiven for their transgressions. He could now based on experience as a human - personally testify that to keep away from any mishap is indeed a great challenge.

THE PROSECUTORS ARE SUBDUED BY ONE OF THEIR OWN IN THE WILDERNESS

After Atonement is requested by the Kohen Gadol for inadvertent, willful and rebellious sins - the goat is sent with a designated individual into the wilderness. The goat will thus carry all the sins away to a desolate area when it is sent to the desert. 12 The prosecuting negative forces created by the sins of Israel are to be borne by the Azazel Goat and dispatched without delay. He is sent there to the Angel Azazel; when the prosecuting Angels attempt to arouse judgement upon Israel - it is curiously Azazel who comes to their defense. He effectively asserts "You should know fellow destructive Angels who have been born through the sins of man -,that I too had once descended into the form of man. Your claims and existence are unfounded! You are not to prosecute against this people but rather you are to be neutralized here in our domain in the desert! For you too would not be able to escape the temptations of the world.

THE STRIP OF RED WOOL TURNS WHITE INDICATING A SUCCESSFUL NEUTRALIZATION

After the lots were cast and the goat to Azazel selected, a strip of red wool was tied to his head. The designee traversed the wilderness passing 10 booths from Jerusalem to the cliff. When the designee arrived at the cliff he removed the wool thread and split it into two parts. Half he would tie to a rock and the other half tied between the horns of the goat. He would then push the goat backwards off the cliff down to its death. 13 The wool would turn white indicating that Israel has received atonement. Namely that the negative forces created by the sins of Israel have been expiated. This allows Bnei Yisrael to escape the grasp of impurity and be considered as Pure - Tahor before the Creator. This idea is expressed in the verse from Yishaya - "If your sins will be like crimson they will become white as snow".

14

Shabbat Shalom

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