



## The 21 Days of Teshuvah from Rosh HaShanah to Hoshana Rabbah Are a Marvelous Tikun for the 21 Days of Teshuvah of Bein HaMetzarim

In honor of the auspiciously approaching Yom HaKippurim, I would like to focus on a sacred avodah performed by the Kohen Gadol on this holiest of days—namely, the offering of the two he-goats, one designated for Hashem and one for Azazel. Here are the pertinent pesukim (Vayikra 16, 5):

”ומאת עדת בני ישראל יקח שני שעירי עזים לחטאת... ולקח את שני השעירים והעמיד אותם לפני ה' פתח אהל מועד, ונתן אהרן על שני השעירים גורלות גורל אחד לה' וגורל אחד לעזאזל, והקריב אהרן את השעיר אשר עלה עליו הגורל לה' ועשהו חטאת, והשעיר אשר עלה עליו הגורל לעזאזל יעמד חי לפני ה' לכפר עליו לשלח אותו לעזאזל המדברה.”

**From the assembly of Bnei Yisrael, he shall take two he-goats for a “chatas” . . . He shall take the two he-goats and stand them before Hashem, at the entrance of the Ohel Moed. Aharon shall place lots upon the two he-goats—one lot “to Hashem” and one lot “to Azazel.” Aharon shall bring near the he-goat designated by lot “to Hashem,” and he shall make it a “chatas.” And the he-goat designated by lot “to Azazel” shall be stood alive before Hashem, to atone upon it, to send it to Azazel to the wilderness.**

This sacred avodah has special significance even today, even though the Beis HaMikdash is no longer extant on account of our countless transgressions. Indeed, we no longer have a Kohen Gadol who actually performs this avodah involving the two he-goats. Nevertheless, by reciting the order of the avodah in our tefilah on Yom HaKippurim, the following dictum is fulfilled (Hoshea 14, 3): “ונשלמה פרים שפתינו”—and let our lips substitute for bulls. Rashi explains this as follows: Let the Torah-portion

we recite with our lips be accepted in place of the sacrificial animals we would have offered in the Beis HaMikdash. Thus, it behooves us to explore the lesson we should learn from the offering of the two he-goats.

### ז'ה ל'עומת ז'ה ע'שה א'לקים Is an Acronym for עזאזל

Now, the purpose of the avodah of the two he-goats is to atone for the transgressions of Yisrael, as it states in the passuk above: “שני שעירי עזים לחטאת”—two he-goats for a “chatas.” Accordingly, it behooves us to explain conceptually the profound difference between these two goats. The one designated “for Hashem” is sacrificed on the mizbeiach by the Kohen Gadol, who then sprinkles its blood in the Kodesh HaKodashim, as it states (ibid. 15): “ושחט את שעיר החטאת אשר לעם והביא את דמו אל מבית לפרוכת... והזה אותו על הכפורת, וכפר על הקודש מטומאות בני ישראל ומפשעיהם לכל חטאתם.” He shall slaughter the chatas he-goat of the people and bring its blood within the Parochet (the curtain between the Kodesh and the Kodesh HaKodashim) . . . and sprinkle it upon the Kapores (the cover of the Aron) and in front of the Kapores. Thus, shall he bring atonement upon the Kodesh for the impurities of Bnei Yisrael, and for their willful sins among all of their sins.

In stark contrast, however, the he-goat designated “to Azazel” was not sacrificed at all. It was sent out of the Beis HaMikdash, accompanied by a designated person, to be pushed off a cliff in the wilderness. Here are the pertinent pesukim (ibid. 21): “וסמך אהרן את שתי ידיו על ראש השעיר החי, והתוודה עליו את כל עוונות בני ישראל ואת כל פשעיהם לכל חטאתם, ונתן אותם על ראש השעיר ושלח ביד איש עתי המדברה, ונשא השעיר עליו את כל

**Aharon shall lean his two hands upon the head of the living he-goat and confess upon it all the iniquities of Bnei Yisrael, and all their rebellious sins among all their sins, and place them upon the head of the he-goat and send it with a timely man to the midbar. The he-goat will bear upon itself all their iniquities to a cut land, and he should send away the he-goat to the midbar.**

Furthermore, we are taught in the Mishnah (Yoma 62a): שְׁנֵי שְׂעִירֵי יוֹם הַכִּפּוּרִים מְצוּוֹתָן שִׁיהִיו שְׁנֵיהֶן שׁוּוּיִן בְּמִרְאָה וּבְקוֹמָה: "regarding the two he-goats of Yom Kippur, their mitzvah is that they be alike in appearance, in height, in value, and in their simultaneous purchase. In Heichal HaBerachah (Bechukosai), the esteemed Mahari of Komarna, zy"א, presents an illuminating allusion in the name of the esteemed Rabbi Moshe Leib of Sasov, zy"א: The word עֲזָאז״ל is an acronym for (Koheles 7, 14): ז׳ה ל׳עֻמַּת ז׳ה—G-d created the world with corresponding equal and opposite forces. We will endeavor to explain the significance of the requirement that the two he-goats be equal in all aspects. Additionally, we will explain the "remez" in the name Azazel that G-d created the world with corresponding equal and opposite forces.

Lastly, it behooves us to explain the ancient minhag performed on Erev Yom HaKippurim for the sake of atonement mentioned by the Rama in the Shulchan Aruch in the name of the Geonim (O.C. 605, 1): **It is customary to take a rooster for each male, and for each female a hen is taken . . . And white chicken are chosen, in keeping with the statement (Yeshayah 1, 18): “Though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow.”**

In Sha'ar HaKavanos, Rabeinu Chaim Vital, ztz"l, writes in the name of his mentor, the acclaimed Arizal, that he was extremely diligent with regards to this minhag. Incredibly, he states that this was done in lieu of the he-goat that was sent off into the wilderness on Yom HaKippurim. He states that his mentor of blessed memory, the Arizal, performed this minhag for the sake of atonement painstakingly. **He would take one white rooster for each male in the family and one white hen for each female in the family.**

**The mystical purpose of this practice is to compel the forces of “din.”**

Notwithstanding, we will endeavor to explain this special minhag to the best of our comprehension from a non-mystical perspective. How does taking a white rooster for a male and a white hen for a female mitigate the forces of “din”? After all, we have an accepted principle that **מנהג “ישראל תורה”**—Jewish minhagim (customs) are binding and have the status of Torah law; they should be observed with the same seriousness as explicit mitzvos. Hence, we will endeavor to explain this minhag in a way that resonates with and is pertinent to each and every one of us.

## Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananiah Soundly Rebuts the Sages of Athens

We will begin to shed some light on the subject by referring to a passage in the Gemara (Bechoros 8b). The reigning Caesar compelled the divine Tanna, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananyah, recognized as **“the Jews’ outstanding sage,”** to debate the **“sages of Athens”**—a group of sixty distinguished philosophers (elders). In a battle of wits, they posed many puzzling questions aimed at mocking and disparaging the Torah and Yisrael. Time after time, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananyah outwitted them convincingly with his profound, intriguing responses. Here is one example:

**They brought him two eggs. They asked him: Which egg is from a black hen, and which is from a white hen? In response, he brought them two pieces of cheese. He asked them: Which is from a black goat, and which is from a white goat?**

What derision did the sages of Athens intend to convey with the two eggs? And how did Rabbi Yehoshua's response with the two cheeses rebut them convincingly? We find a fantastic interpretation in the Maharsha's Chiddushei Aggados (ibid.). We will expand on his incredible remarks based on the prophetic words of Yirmiyah HaNavi concerning the churban (Yirmiyah 1, 11): "וַיְהִי דְבַר ה' אֵלַי —the word of Hashem then came to me, saying, "What do you

**see Yirmiyahu?" And I said, "I see a staff made of almond wood."** Rashi comments in the name of a Midrash Aggadah that **an almond tree grows and completes its development during a twenty-one-day period—corresponding to the number of days between the seventeenth of Tamuz, on which the city was breached and divided, and the ninth of Av, on which the House was burnt down.**

This teaches us that that the period of Bein HaMetzarim is considered to be twenty-one days from the seventeenth of Tammuz until but not including Tishah B'Av. Corresponding to these 21 days of mourning related to the churban, we have 21 days of teshuvah followed by simchah from Rosh HaShanah until Hoshana Rabbah, which include Yom HaKippurim and Chag HaSuccos.

In this light, the Maharsha interprets the derisive intent of the sages of Athens—posing the absurd question to Rabbi Yehoshua about the two eggs. We learn in the Gemara (ibid. 8a): **"תרגולת לעשרים ואחד יום"—a chicken hatches after 21 days.** Rashi explains that after a hen conceives from a rooster, the egg matures inside her for 21 days until it is ready to be laid. Hence, they brought two eggs alluding to two 21-day periods—one dark and somber, one bright and happy.

They intended for the egg from the black hen to represent the 21 days of Bein HaMetzarim—a period of sorrow and "din" related to the churban. The egg from the white hen, on the other hand, was intended to represent the 21 days of teshuvah from Rosh HaShanah to Hoshana Rabbah, during which Yisrael's sins and iniquities are cleansed by means of divine favor and "rachamim." They insinuated to Rabbi Yehoshua that the two are indistinguishable. They intended to prove to him that HKB"H had abandoned Yisrael and had replaced the 21 days of teshuvah and simchah with 21 days of sorrow related to the churban. Furthermore, they implied that the 21 days of teshuvah beginning with Rosh HaShanah no longer provided Yisrael with any tikun, chas v'shalom.

In this vein, the Maharsha interprets the response of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananyah bringing the Athenians two pieces of cheese—one from a black goat and one

from a white goat. In this manner, he intimated to them that the two 21-day periods of teshuvah are akin to the he-goat "to Hashem" and the he-goat "to Azazel." The teshuvah performed during the 21 days from Rosh HaShanah until Hoshana Rabbah resembles the he-goat "to Hashem"; whereas the teshuvah performed during Bein HaMetzarim resembles the he-goat "to Azazel." They are both represented by pieces of white cheese, since both function to cleanse (whiten) Yisrael of various types of wrongdoing. Notwithstanding, it is clear that this interpretation of the Maharsha requires further clarification. How does this answer their question regarding the necessity for two such diverse periods of teshuvah? Why did HKB"H find it necessary to subject Yisrael to the 21 days of Bein HaMetzarim in addition to the days of teshuvah in Tishrei?

### **The Outstanding Insight of the Chasam Sofer Regarding a "He-Goat to Azazel" that Survives**

I was struck by a wonderful idea. I would like to provide clarification for the interpretation of the Maharsha based on a teaching in the Gemara concerning the he-goat "to Azazel" (Yoma 66b): **שאלו את רבי אליעזר, דחפו ולא מת מהו—שירד אחריו וימיתנו, אמר להם כן יאבדו כל אויביה"—they asked Rabbi Eliezer: If he pushed it (the he-goat off the cliff), but it does not die, should he go down after it and kill it? He answered them (Shoftim 5, 31): "So may all Your enemies go lost, O Hashem!"** At first glance, Rabbi Eliezer's response is unclear. Some Rishonim even explain that it was deliberately evasive.

Nevertheless, we find a marvelous explanation in the commentary of the Chasam Sofer on the Torah (Acharei Mot). He relies on the teaching in the Gemara (ibid. 86b) that teshuvah motivated by "yirah" transforms deliberate, willful sins ("zedonot") into inadvertent sins ("shegagot"), whereas teshuvah motivated by "ahavah" transforms them into merits. Accordingly, the Chasam Sofer posits that the atonement provided by the he-goat "to Azazel" is only necessary when Yisrael's teshuvah is motivated by "yirah"—fear of punishment. For, in that situation, the "zedonot" are only transformed into "shegagot", unintentional sins, i.e.,



they are still sins. As such, it is necessary for the he-goat to carry them away, since they must still be atoned for.

This is not the case when Yisrael perform teshuvah motivated by “ahavah,” which transforms their intentional sins into merits. In that situation, the atonement provided by the he-goat “to Azazel” is not necessary; the atonement provided by the he-goat “to Hashem” suffices; Yisrael resemble the Kohen Gadol who performed teshuvah motivated by his love for Hashem. Hence, in the scenario where the he-goat shoved off the cliff does not die, it indicates that Yisrael had performed teshuvah motivated by “ahavah.” In other words, they did not require the atonement provided by the second he-goat, the one “to Azazel.” This then is the message conveyed by Rabbi Eliezer’s profound response: “כן יאבדו כל אויביו.” He was alluding to sinners, who, *chav v’shalom*, resemble enemies of Hashem; may they always be lost in such a manner that they perform teshuvah motivated by “ahavah.” Thus, the sins rather than the sinners will perish, i.e., the second he-goat does not need to die.

We will now introduce another important concept gleaned from the words of the Noam Elimelech (Tzav) and the Ma’or Einayim (Vaeschanan). It is impossible to perform teshuvah motivated by “ahavah” from the outset without having first performed teshuvah from “yirah.” One must climb the spiritual ladder step by step. In the Sefas Emes (Shabbas Teshuvah 5641), he explains the matter as follows: **Since a person is sullied with sin, it is impossible to repent out of “ahavah” but only out of “yirah.”**

Thus, we see that so long as a person is yet guilty of intentional transgressions, they create a barrier between him and his Maker. Hence, it is not possible for him to perform teshuvah of “ahavah” indicative of a close attachment. To remedy this situation, it is necessary to remove this barrier by first performing teshuvah motivated by “yirah”; that will transform the intentional transgressions into unintentional transgressions; that will enable a person to ascend the spiritual ladder and ultimately perform teshuvah motivated by “ahavah” associated with closeness and attachment, which will transform the transgressions into merits.

## The Teshuvah of Bein HaMetzarim Is from “Yirah” the Teshuvah in Tishrei Is from “Ahavah”

This illuminates for us the marvelous interpretation of the Maharsha regarding the profound response of Rabbi Yehoshua ben Chananyah to the elders of Athens. Recall that he presented them with two pieces of white cheese—one from a black goat and one from a white goat. To the human eye, they are indistinguishable. This presentation was designed to illustrate to them that there are two 21-day sets of teshuvah in the Jewish calendar. The first extends from Rosh HaShanah to Hoshana Rabbah; the second is the three weeks of Bein HaMetzarim. Externally, they both perform a similar function—they cleanse and whiten the transgressions of Yisrael.

In reality, however, they are vastly different. The 21 days of Bein HaMetzarim characterized by mourning related to the churban are analogous to the he-goat designated for Azazel. It is essential when Yisrael merely performed teshuvah from “yirah”; in which case, their “zedonot” were only transformed into “shegagot.” In contrast, the 21 days of teshuvah in Tishrei—including Rosh HaShanah, Yom HaKippurim, and Chag HaSuccos until Hoshana Rabbah—are analogous to the he-goat designated for Hashem. It is associated with teshuvah of “ahavah.”

While the Beis HaMikdash was extant, Yisrael were able to accomplish both types of teshuvah during the 21-day period extending from Rosh HaShanah to Hoshana Rabbah. As we know from the Kedushas Levi, we perform teshuvah from “yirah” from Rosh HaShanah through Yom HaKippurim. Hence, on Yom HaKippurim, a he-goat was offered “to Hashem” to atone for the Kohen Gadol and all the tzaddikim whose teshuvah was motivated by “ahavah.” A second he-goat was designated “to Azazel”; it atoned for the rest of Yisrael whose teshuvah was on the lower level of “yirah.”

Unfortunately, after the Beis HaMikdash was destroyed on account of Yisrael’s transgressions, it was no longer possible to offer these korbanos. So, HKB”H gave Yisrael the additional 21 days of Bein HaMetzarim, during which

they perform teshuvah from “yirah.” This enables them to perform teshuvah from “ahavah” afterwards during the 21 days from Rosh HaShanah to Hoshana Rabbah.

According to the hypothesis of the sages of Athens, the fact that HKB”H destroyed the Beis HaMikdash and gave Yisrael the 21 days of Bein HaMetzarim proved that HKB”H is no longer interested in Yisrael’s teshuvah. Hence, the 21 days of teshuvah from Rosh HaShanah to Hoshana Rabbah were no longer effective. This meant that there was no hope for Yisrael; they would constantly remain in a state of mourning, despair, and devastation.

Rabbi Yehoshua rebutted their argument by revealing to them the truth of the matter. The two 21-day periods of teshuvah correspond to the two he-goats—the one “to Hashem” and the one “to Azazel.” On the contrary, HKB”H provided Yisrael with two 21-day periods of teshuvah with specific aim and intent. The first set of 21 days from the 17<sup>th</sup> of Tamuz until Tishah B’Av is designed for teshuvah of “yirah,” which transforms Yisrael’s “zedonot” into “shegagot.” Only afterwards, during the 21 days in Tishrei, are they then able to elevate themselves to also perform teshuvah of “ahavah” transforming all of their sins and iniquities—“zedonot” and “shegagot”—into merits. Upon accomplishing this feat and completing the teshuvah process, Yisrael will merit the complete geulah and the building of the third Beis HaMikdash. Then, the 21 days of Bein HaMetzarim will be completely abolished forever.

### **אהי”ה אשר אהי”ה Alludes to the Two Sets of 21 Days of Teshuvah**

Based on this fascinating, sacred insight of the Maharsha’s, we can begin to comprehend the deeper implication of the statement HKB”H makes to Moshe Rabeinu when he assigns him the mission of taking Yisrael out of Mitzrayim (Shemos 3, 13):

”וַיֹּאמֶר מֹשֶׁה אֶל הָאֱלֹקִים, הִנֵּה אֲנִי בָא אֶל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתִּי לָהֶם אֱלֹקֵי אֲבוֹתֵיכֶם שְׁלַחְנִי אֲלֵיכֶם, וְאָמְרוּ לִי מַה שְּׁמוֹ מֶה אֹמֵר אֲלֵיהֶם, וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹקִים אֶל מֹשֶׁה אֲהִיָּה אֲשֶׁר אֲהִיָּה, וַיֹּאמֶר כֹּה תֹאמַר לְבְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲהִיָּה שְׁלַחְנִי אֲלֵיכֶם.”

Moshe said to G-d, “Behold, when I come to Bnei Yisrael and say to them, ‘The G-d of your forefathers has sent me to you,’ and they say to me, ‘What is His name?’—what shall I say to them?” G-d answered Moshe, “אֲהִיָּה אֲשֶׁר אֲהִיָּה.” And He said, “So shall you say to Bnei Yisrael, ‘אֲהִיָּה has sent me to you.’” Rashi ponders why initially HKB”H mentions the name אֲהִיָּה twice—אֲהִיָּה “אֲשֶׁר אֲהִיָּה”—yet, subsequently, He mentions it only once—“אֲהִיָּה שְׁלַחְנִי אֲלֵיכֶם”.

Based on the insight of the Maharsha, it appears that we can reconcile the variation. The Ma’or V’Shemesh (Bereishis) writes that the holy Admor, the Rabbi of Lublin, ztz”l, taught that the name אֲהִיָּה is associated with the realm of teshuvah. It is as if a person is declaring that from now on, “I will be—אֲהִיָּה—better and serve Hashem.”

Now, the gematria of אֲהִיָּה is 21. So, we can suggest that the repetition of this name alludes magnificently to the two sets of 21 days designed to inspire Jews to perform teshuvah—one motivated by “yirah” and one motivated by “ahavah.” Hence, initially HKB”H says to Moshe Rabeinu: “אֲהִיָּה אֲשֶׁר אֲהִיָּה”—alluding to the two distinct 21-day periods of teshuvah.

This, however, is not the ideal. Ultimately, Hashem wants Yisrael to repent and perform teshuvah associated with “chesed” and “rachamim” rather than suffering and affliction. After all, HKB”H is a benevolent, loving father; He does not wish to see Yisrael suffer. Therefore, HKB”H concludes His remarks to Moshe: “So shall you say to Bnei Yisrael, ‘אֲהִיָּה has sent me to you’”—mentioning the name אֲהִיָּה only once. For, in truth, HKB”H desires that Yisrael will only require the one 21-day period of teshuvah from Rosh HaShanah to Hoshana Rabbah, during which they will perform both teshuvah from “yirah” and “ahavah” associated with divine favor and mercy.

### **The Kohen Gadol Offers the He-Goat “to Hashem” Representing Teshuvah of “Ahavah” in the Beis HaMikdash**

We have successfully shed some light on the subject of the two he-goats of Yom HaKippurim. The he-goat

“to Hashem” alluded to the teshuvah of “ahavah” of the Kohen Gadol; it transformed all willful transgressions into merits—mitzvos. As such, it was worthy to be sacrificed on the mizbeiach and having its blood sprinkled in the Kodosh HaKodashim. The he-goat “to Azazel,” on the other hand, alluded to teshuvah of “yirah”; it was only capable of transforming willful transgressions into “shegagot”—unintentional transgressions. As such, they were still transgressions and were not worthy of being sacrificed in the Beis HaMikdash. Instead, the “shegagot” were piled onto the head of the goat; it was sent off into the midbar and pushed off of a cliff.

This explains very nicely why the two he-goats had to be equal in appearance, height, and monetary value, and the wonderful remez of Rabbi Moshe Leib of Sassov, ztz”l, that the first letters of עִזָּאזֵל are an acronym for זֵה לַעֲוֹנוֹת זֵה עֲשֵׂה אֱלֹקִים. They both come to teach us that the two

he-goats represent the two varieties of teshuvah whose purpose is to purge Yisrael of their transgressions.

At this point, it gives me great pleasure to apply what we have discussed to explain a time-honored Jewish minhag. For Kaparos, a white rooster is taken for a male and a white hen for a female. This symbolizes that we are requesting atonement—“kaparah”—from HKB”H associated with divine favor and “rachamim” for the teshuvah performed during the 21 days from Rosh HaShanah to Hoshana Rabbah—alluded to by an egg that is born from a white hen after a 21-day gestation. Thus, we will not require atonement by means of teshuvah associated with suffering and distress during the 21 days of Bein HaMetzarim. In this merit, may all of our “zedonot” be transformed into merits, and may we merit a “gmar chatimah tovah” and a year of geulah and salvation—swiftly, in our times! Amen.



Our thanks and blessings are given to those who donated for the publication of our weekly dvar Torah for the merit of אֲחֵינוּ בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל

Family Madeb - לעילוי נשמת  
their dear mother  
Lea bat Virgini ע"ה

Arthur & Randi Luxenberg לזכות  
of their wonderfull parents, children and grandchildren  
לעילוי נשמת His Father ר' יצחק יהודה בן ר' אברהם ע"ה

To receive the mamarim by email: [mamarim@shvileipinchas.com](mailto:mamarim@shvileipinchas.com)