

א ביסל תורה!

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ט' תשרי תשפ"ו · יום כיפור

שעיר לעזאזל The Meaning of the

By Amira Kahan '28

יום כיפור is the only biblical fast, meaning its laws appear in the תורה. In פרשת אחרי מות, the procedure of the יום כיפור services in the משכן appears. One of the procedures discussed is that of the goat that is sent to לעזאזל: וּמֵאַתָּה יִשְׂרָאֵל יִקַּח שְׁנֵי־שְׁעִירֵי עִזִּים לַחֲטָאת וְאֵיל אֶחָד לְעֹלָה: וְהִקְרִיב אֹהֶרֶן אֶת־פֶּר הַחֲטָאת... וְלָקַח אֶת־שְׁנֵי הַשְּׁעִירִים וְהִעֲמִיד אֹתָם לִפְנֵי ה'... וְנָתַן אֹהֶרֶן עַל־שְׁנֵי הַשְּׁעִירִים גִּרְלוֹת גּוֹרֵל אֶחָד לַה' וְגּוֹרֵל אֶחָד לְעֹזֶזֶל "And from the Israelite community he shall take two he-goats for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering. Aaron is to offer his own bull of sin offering... and shall take the two he-goats and let them stand before Hashem at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting; and he shall place lots upon the two goats, one marked for Hashem and the other marked for לעזאזל (ויקרא ט"ז:ה-י). There are two goats and a lottery is performed. One is chosen as a sacrifice and the other is selected to be to "עזאזל." What is "עזאזל?"

רש"י says that עזאזל is a very tall cliff. Then, what does two goats have to do with a cliff? What exactly happens to the goat? All the תורה says is that it is sent to "עזאזל."

The משנה (ובו) יומא describes the exact process of the goat to עזאזל. The כהן גדול places his hands on the head of the goat and asks Hashem to forgive the Jews for all of the sins they have done. Everyone listening would then bow to the ground. The goat was then led out of the city with a כהן.

The next part can be found in יומא נ"ח. After the כהן גדול hands off the goat, it is sent into the wilderness, where there are guard stations the whole way so that they can

keep track of the goat. The stations would wave flags to inform the people at the בית המקדש that the goat had made it. רבי יהודה asks: 'why can they not just time the distance that the goat has to walk and then after the time had passed they would know that it had made it?' answers that they had another way of knowing if the goat had made it. They would tie a red string to the בית המקדש and when the goat made it, the string would turn white.

In יומא נ"ו the משנה continues the journey of the goat. A red string is split in half and half is tied to a rock while the other half is tied between the horns of the goat. The goat is then pushed from behind off a cliff. On its way down it dies before even making it halfway, being split into pieces. Now that we understand where the cliff comes in, we have to wonder: why do we do this?

According to the ספר החינוך, the goat symbolizes a sinner who is completely full of sin with no good inside of him. All the Jews are watching that his punishment is being completely destroyed. The Jews see this and it teaches them to improve and be better themselves.

Nowadays, we may not have any goats to throw off cliffs, but we should still seek improvement. The משנה goes into so much detail about this gruesome ritual, really stressing the severity of this moment into us. Although we no longer perform this, we recount what happens during the עבודה during מוסף of יום כיפור to remind us its importance. Just reading it helps remind us of the symbolism of this act. We should keep this story in our minds to motivate us to become our best selves throughout the year.

This month's issue is sponsored by Biblical Proportions, who are launching a 10-cubit measuring tape, a 1-log measuring cup, a kezayit/kebeitza jigger, and a book of Biblical cocktails. Scan the QR code to support their Kickstarter.



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It's the Thought That Counts and תשובה Uses Against יצר הרע

By Tobie Ostroff '27

"It is necessary to deepen our faith in תשובה...It is inevitable that after every thought of תשובה, a person will be happier and more at peace with himself than he was before" (Rav Kook).

As יום כיפור approaches, we start to self reflect on all of the actions we did in the past year. Of course, one cannot remember every single wrong action one did over the past year, so how can one repent if one does not even remember what they did wrong? This is not out of the realm of possibility, as in התרת נדרים, we talk about vows that we made, and forgot about. So, how can one possibly confess and regret if one does not know what they did?

There is a parable about a king and his son, the prince. The prince left the kingdom and wandered off to distant lands. Missing his son, the king sent out messengers to tell his son to come home. The prince replied, saying the journey was too far and he could never come back. The king told the prince to walk as far as he can, until he cannot walk anymore, and he will meet his son where he ends up. This parable shows us that Hashem (the king) will always meet us (the prince) where we are. Sometimes תשובה seems out of reach, especially when we cannot recall the specific sins we did, even so, Hashem sees every and any amount of effort we put in. If we can walk as far as we can to come home, (doing תשובה), Hashem will always meet us and take us the rest.

To show the closeness of תשובה to us, here are some examples of how our יצר הרע tries to trick us into thinking that תשובה is impossible, and the counter arguments against these thoughts:

The יצר הרע will say 'You have done way too many sins to do תשובה for, there is no point in even trying!' The רמב"ם (הלכות תשובה ז"ד) teaches that no matter how far someone has strayed, תשובה is always possible. Hashem promises that if we return to Him, He will accept us with open arms. The יצר הרע will say back 'But you will just wind up doing it again. Why bother trying?' However, תשובה is not about guaranteeing you will never sin again, it is about sincerely committing to change in the present moment. The רמב"ם (בב: תשובה ז"ב) explains that תשובה requires regret for the past, confession, and a genuine resolve to improve. It does not say you actually never will do the sin again. It is not as though all the תשובה one does falls apart if one winds up doing the sin again. It is about saying to oneself that one is committed to not doing the sin, and if one feels like they will stumble, praying to Hashem for strength to not do it again works too.

The יצר הרע will yet again say 'One of the requirements of תשובה is feeling bad about the sin, but you do not even feel that bad about it!' Imagine one is standing in front of someone one is close to. If they did something first to hurt you and then you retaliate it might feel less bad, but this case hurts even more because this person never did you any wrong, you just went and did something wrong. One sees the pain in their eyes, not because they are angry, but because they care for you so much and cannot understand why you would choose to hurt the relationship. One wishes that they could take back what one said or did and make it like it never happened. The תורה tells us that every מצוה is a connection to Hashem, and every sin creates distance. The רמב"ם (הלכות תשובה ז"ו) explains that תשובה is about recognizing this distance and wanting to repair it. If one can tap into this feeling, that is תשובה.

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