



Carnegie Shul Chatter

April 27, 2022



Acharei Mot in a Nutshell

Leviticus 16:1–18:30

Following the deaths of Nadav and Avihu, G-d warns against unauthorized entry “into the holy.” Only one person, the kohen gadol (“high priest”), may, but once a year, on Yom Kippur, enter the innermost chamber in the Sanctuary to offer the sacred ketoret to G-d.

Zoom in for Services

Shabbat services are held by Zoom, at 10am and last 60-90 minutes. A link is sent to all Shul members; if you don't receive it, contact Wendy Panizzi at panizziw@gmail.com.

In Today's World

There was a time when the last two aliyahs of this parshah were not all that controversial. They deal with prohibited sexual relationships. The list includes adultery, cohabiting with a menstruating woman, forbidden close relatives, and the prohibitions against homosexuality and bestiality. The Jews are then warned that engaging in these forbidden relationships will result in their expulsion from the Land of Israel — a holy land that cannot tolerate immoral behavior.

Well, to say that these are not controversial topics in today's world, even among many Jews, is certainly an understatement. Homosexuality and the Pride/LGBTQ movement are definitely not taboo to many Jews despite what the Torah has to say about the subject.

Now I could have easily found another topic from

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this week's parshah to write about in this sidebar, but why avoid controversy? The Torah says what it says, and that is a fact. But it is also a fact that we can discuss controversial subjects such as this, and hopefully do so in a civil manner.

There are many things in Torah that some Jews adhere to while others do not. But it is here in the parshah, and God does refer to it as an abomination unto Him. And I will leave it at that.

What do you think?



Another feature of the Day of Atonement service is the casting of lots over two goats, to determine which should be offered to G-d and which should be dispatched to carry off the sins of Israel to the wilderness.

The Parshah of Acharei also warns against bringing korbanot (animal or meal offerings) anywhere but in the Holy Temple, forbids the consumption of blood, and details the laws prohibiting incest and other deviant sexual relations.

Achrei Mot

Here is a commentary from Rabbi Jonathon Sacks about a very interesting part of this week's parshah, the scapegoat used for atonement on Yom Kippur.

The Scapegoat

The strangest and most dramatic element of the service on Yom Kippur, set out in Acharei Mot (Lev. 16:7-22), was the ritual of the two goats, one offered as a sacrifice, the other sent away into the desert "to Azazel." They were to all intents and purposes indistinguishable from one another: they were chosen to be as similar as possible in size and appearance. They were brought before the High Priest and lots were drawn, one bearing the words "to the Lord," the other, "to Azazel." The one on which the lot "To the Lord" fell was offered as a sacrifice.





Over the other the High Priest confessed the sins of the nation, and it was then taken away into the desert hills outside Jerusalem where it plunged to its death. Tradition tells us that a red thread would be attached to its horns, half of which was removed before the animal was sent away. If the rite had been effective, the red thread would turn to white.

Much is puzzling about the ritual. First, what is the meaning of “to Azazel,” to which the second goat was sent? It appears nowhere else in Scripture. Three major theories emerged as to its meaning. According to the Sages and Rashi, it meant “a steep, rocky, or hard place”. In other words, it was a description of its destination. In the plain meaning of the Torah, the goat was sent “to a desolate area” (el eretz gezerah, Lev. 16:22). According to the Sages,

this meant it was thus taken to a steep ravine where it fell to its death. That, according to the first explanation, is the meaning of Azazel.

The second, suggested cryptically by Ibn Ezra and explicitly by Nahmanides, is that Azazel was the name of a spirit or demon, one of the fallen angels referred to in Genesis 6:2, similar to the goat-spirit called ‘Pan’ in Greek mythology, ‘Faunus’ in Latin. This is a difficult idea, which is why Ibn Ezra alluded to it, as he did in similar cases, by way of a riddle, a puzzle, that only the wise would be able to decipher. He writes:

“I will reveal to you part of the secret by hint: when you reach thirty-three you will know it.”

Thirty-three verses later on, the Torah commands: “They must no longer offer any of their sacrifices to the goat idols [se’irim] after whom they go astray.” Ramban Lev. 17:7

Nahmanides reveals the secret.

Azazel, on this reading, is the name of a demon or hostile force, sometimes called Satan or Samael. The Israelites were categorically forbidden to worship such a force. Indeed, the belief that there are powers at work in the universe distinct from, or even hostile to, God, is incompatible with Judaic monotheism. Nonetheless, some Sages did believe that there were negative forces that were part of the heavenly retinue, like Satan, who brought accusations against humans or tempted them into sin. The goat sent into the wilderness to Azazel was a way of conciliating or propitiating such forces so that the prayers of Israel could rise to heaven without, as it were, any dissenting voices. This way of understanding the rite is similar to the saying on the part of the Sages that we blow shofar in a double cycle on Rosh Hashanah “to confuse Satan.” (Rosh Hashanah 16b)

The third interpretation, and the simplest, is that Azazel is a compound noun meaning “the goat [ez] that was sent away [azal].” This



led to the addition of a new word to the English language. In 1530 William Tyndale produced the first English translation of the Hebrew Bible, an act then illegal and for which he paid with his life. Seeking to translate Azazel into English, he called it “the escapegoat,” i.e. the goat that was sent away and released. In the course of time, the first letter was dropped, and the word “scapegoat” was born.



The real question, though, is: what was the ritual actually about? It was unique. Sin and guilt offerings are familiar features of the Torah and a normal part of the service of the Temple. The service of Yom Kippur was different in one salient respect: in every other case, the sin was confessed over the animal that was sacrificed. On Yom Kippur, the High Priest confessed the sins of the people over the animal that was not sacrificed, the scapegoat that was sent away, “carrying on it all their iniquities” (Lev. 16:21-22).

The simplest and most compelling answer was given by Maimonides in *The Guide for the Perplexed*:

There is no doubt that sins cannot be carried like a burden, and taken off the shoulder of one being to be laid on that of another being. But these ceremonies are of a symbolic character, and serve to impress people with a certain idea, and to induce them to repent – as if to say, we have freed ourselves of our previous deeds, have cast them behind our backs, and removed them from us as far as possible.^[1]

Expiation demands a ritual, some dramatic representation of the removal of sin and the wiping-clean of the past. That is clear. Yet Maimonides does not explain why Yom Kippur demanded a rite not used on other days of the year when sin or guilt offerings were brought. Why was the first goat, the one of which the lot “To the Lord” fell and which was offered as a sin offering (Lev. 16:9) not sufficient?

The answer lies in the dual character of the day. The Torah states:

This shall be an eternal law for you: On the tenth day of the seventh month you must fast and not do any work... This is because on this day you shall have all your sins atoned [yechaper], so that you will be cleansed [le-taher]. Before God you will be cleansed of all your sins. Lev. 16:29-30

Two quite distinct processes were involved on Yom Kippur. First there was kapparah, atonement. This is the normal function of a sin offering. Second, there was taharah, purification, something normally done in a different context altogether, namely the removal of tumah, ritual defilement, which could arise from a number of different causes, among them contact with a dead body, skin disease, or nocturnal discharge. Atonement has to do with guilt. Purification has to do with contamination or pollution. These are usually^[2] two separate worlds. On Yom Kippur they were brought together. Why?

As we discussed last week in parshat Metzora, we owe to anthropologists like Ruth Benedict the distinction between shame cultures and guilt cultures.^[3] Shame is a social phenomenon. It is what we feel when our wrongdoing is exposed to others. It may even be something we feel when we merely imagine other people knowing or seeing what we have done. Shame is the feeling of being found out, and our first instinct is to hide. That is what Adam and Eve did in the garden of Eden after they had eaten the forbidden fruit. They were ashamed of their nakedness and they hid.

Guilt is a personal phenomenon. It has nothing to do with what others might say if they knew what we have done, and everything to do with what we say to ourselves. Guilt is the voice of conscience, and it is inescapable. You may be able to avoid shame by hiding or not being found out, but you cannot avoid guilt. Guilt is self-knowledge.

There is another difference which, once understood, explains why Judaism is overwhelmingly a guilt rather than a shame culture. Shame attaches to the person. Guilt attaches to the act. It is almost impossible to remove shame once you have been publicly disgraced. It is like an indelible stain on your skin. It is the mark of Cain. Shakespeare has Lady Macbeth exclaim, after her crime, "Will these hands ne'er be clean?" In shame cultures, wrongdoers tend either to go into hiding or into exile, where no one knows their past, or to commit suicide. Playwrights in these cultures have such characters die, for there is no possible redemption.



Guilt makes a clear distinction between the act of wrongdoing and the person of the wrongdoer. The act was wrong, but the agent remains, in principle, intact. That is why guilt can be removed, "atoned for," by confession, remorse, and restitution. "Hate not the sinner but the sin," is the basic axiom of a guilt culture.

Normally, sin and guilt offerings, as their names imply, are about guilt. They atone. But Yom Kippur deals not only with our sins as individuals. It also confronts our sins as a community bound by mutual responsibility. It deals, in other words, with the social as well as the personal dimension of wrongdoing. Yom Kippur is about shame as well as guilt. Hence there has to be purification (the removal of the stain) as well as atonement.

The psychology of shame is quite different to that of guilt. We can discharge guilt by achieving forgiveness – and forgiveness can only be granted by the object of our wrongdoing, which is why Yom Kippur only atones for sins against God. Even God cannot – logically cannot – forgive sins committed against our fellow humans until they themselves have forgiven us.

Shame cannot be removed by forgiveness. The victim of our crime may have forgiven us, but we still feel defiled by the knowledge that our name has been disgraced, our reputation harmed, our standing damaged. We still feel the stigma, the dishonour, the degradation. That

is why an immensely powerful and dramatic ceremony had to take place during which people could feel and symbolically see their sins carried away to the desert, to no-man's-land. A similar ceremony took place when a leper was cleansed. The Priest took two birds, killed one, and released the other to fly away across the open fields (Lev. 14:4-7). Again the act was one of cleansing, not atoning, and had to do with shame, not guilt.

Judaism is a religion of hope, and its great rituals of repentance and atonement are part of that hope. We are not condemned to live endlessly with the mistakes and errors of our past. That is the great difference between a guilt culture and a shame culture. But Judaism also acknowledges the existence of shame. Hence the elaborate ritual of the scapegoat that seemed to carry away the tumah, the defilement that is the mark of shame. It could only be done on Yom Kippur because that was the one day of the year in which everyone shared, at least vicariously, in the process of confession, repentance, atonement, and purification. When a whole society confesses its guilt, individuals can be redeemed from shame.

[1] *The Guide for the Perplexed*, III:46.

[2] *There were, though, exceptions. A leper – or more precisely someone suffering from the skin disease known in the Torah as tsara'at – had to bring a guilt offering [asham] in addition to undergoing rites of purification (Lev. 14:12-20).*

[3] *Ruth Benedict, The Chrysanthemum and the Sword*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin) 1946.

Rabbi Schiff Coming to the South Hills



On Monday, May 9, 2022, at 7 pm., Rabbi Danny Schiff will be returning to the South Hills JCC to speak on the topic of, “Tackling Jewish Anti-Zionism from A to Z.”

According to Rabbi Schiff, “Anti-Zionism has long been a problem that frequently overlaps with anti-Semitism. Now we are seeing the emergence of an alarming new problem: anti-Zionism among our own, especially younger generations. Unlike previous younger generations that may have exhibited a detachment from Israel, what we are seeing now is active opposition and antagonism toward Israel. What is the extent of this problem, and how can we respond?”

The event, which is free and open to the public, is co-sponsored by the Carnegie Shul, along with the Jewish Federation of Greater Pittsburgh, South Hills JCC, Congregation Beth El, Temple Emanuel. You can register by going to: <https://jewishpgh.org/event/tackling-jewish-anti-zionism-from-a-to-z-rabbi-danny-schiff/>. Proof of vaccination will be required for this in person event.

Donation

The Carnegie Shul is most grateful for the following recent donation:

Paul Lederstein

In Memory of Hymam Lederstein

Yahrtzeits

This week the Carnegie Shul acknowledges the yahrtzeits of:

David Peresman

Harris Tisherman

Nettie Horowitz

Fannie Gertrude Mayer

Hyman Lederstein

Leonard Messer

Louis Isaacs

Joseph S. Peresman

Harry Steinberger

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Charles Grossman

May their memory be for a blessing.