

The Path To Follow

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The Goat For Azazel

This week's *parsha* states, "The goat destined by lot for Azazel... send it to Azazel, into the desert" (*Vayikra* 16:10). It is also written, "The goat will bear upon itself all the iniquities to a solitary land, and he should send the goat into the desert" (v.22).

The Sages have said (*Seder Olam* 6) that on Yom Kippur the Holy One, blessed be He, joyfully forgave the Children of Israel for the sin of the golden calf, telling Moshe: "I have forgiven according to your word" (*Bamidbar* 14:20). Moshe then descended from the mountain with the second set of tablets in his hands. Thus it is written, "For on this day he shall make atonement for you, to cleanse you from all your sins" (*Vayikra* 16:30). Our Sages have also said that the goat for Azazel (which was not sacrificed in the Sanctuary, but instead was sent into the desert) is meant to serve as a gift from Hashem to Esau's ministering angel, which is the evil inclination and the Angel of Death (see *Zohar* I:190a; II:237b). The goat is meant to convince it not to disrupt the sanctity of Yom Kippur by making accusations against the Jewish people. It is similar to the gift that Jacob sent to his brother to satisfy his greed and change his mind.

This explanation presents some difficulties that need to be addressed: 1) Why must a bribe be given to the ministering angel of Esau, rather than to the angel of another nation? 2) Without this bribe, would the Holy One, blessed be He, have been unable to silence Israel's accusers? 3) Why is this goat, which is a gift for Esau's ministering angel, called the "goat for Azazel"? Why does it not go by another name? 4) Finally, why did Moshe descend from the mountain on Yom Kippur? Why did he need to stay on the mountain for another forty days and forty nights in order to receive the second set of tablets, as it written: "I remained on the mountain like the first days, forty days and forty nights" (*Devarim* 10:10)? Would it not have been enough for him to ascend and then immediately descend with the second set of tablets? Moshe already knew the Torah from the first time he ascended Mount Sinai, for the Sages have said that Hashem taught him the written Torah during the day, and during the night He taught him the oral Torah (see *Shemot Rabba* 47:5). Since Moshe also reviewed what he learned, why did he have to stay for another forty days and forty nights?

We shall attempt to explain. Let us first site the teaching of the Sages on the verse, "The voice is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the hands of Esau" (*Bereshith* 27:22). Here the Sages have said, "When the voice of Jacob rings out in the synagogues, Esau has no hands [i.e., he is rendered powerless]" (*Bereshith Rabba* 65:20). On the verse, "When you are aggrieved, you may cast off his yoke from upon your neck" (*Bereshith* 27:40), the

Sages have also said that Isaac gave Esau the following blessing: "If you see your brother Jacob throwing off the yoke of Torah from upon his neck, then decree his destruction and you will become his master" (*Bereshith Rabba* 67:7). In Isaac's blessing to Jacob – on which depends the entire existence of Jacob and Israel for the generations to come – he told him that the entire universe exists only by virtue of the *Shechinah's* presence and the study of Torah. When the *Shechinah* is no longer present, the world will cease to exist. Now the presence of the *Shechinah* only comes by the merit of Torah, for it is what sustains the world. Therefore without the Torah, the world could not exist, as it is written: "If not for My covenant, I would not have appointed days and nights, the decrees of heaven and earth" (*Jeremiah* 33:25). Here the Sages explain, "If not for the Torah, heaven and earth would not endure" (*Pesachim* 68b). In the *Zohar* as well, we find the Torah described as "the foundation of the upper and the lower worlds" (*Zohar* I:185a). Even if the world could go on existing, the hand of Esau would still rule. This is what Isaac told Jacob by allusion: Either the voice of Torah will be heard, or the voice of Esau will be heard. Hence Jacob's primary weapon in his battle against Esau is the Torah, which is the goal of Creation. Through it, a person can exert an enormous influence on all the worlds. This allows us to understand why it is precisely the ministering angel of Esau (rather than some other angel) that is "bribed" on Yom Kippur. The reason behind all sins lies in a neglect of Torah, and since the voice of Jacob is not heard, this strengthens the voice and hands of Esau to do evil and make accusations on Yom Kippur, the awesome day of judgment. The voice of Esau is the voice of accusation, and Isaac's pronouncements cannot be changed, for there is a judgment and a Judge. Hence Esau's ministering angel is bribed by a goat chosen by the *Kohen Gadol*, upon which he lays his hands. He also evokes Hashem's Name over the goat, which greatly nourishes the Satan. Hence it is ready to remain silent and not bring forth the bundle of sins that it prepared for accusing the Children of Israel.

Even in our days, when there is no Temple and we no longer send a goat to Azazel, this *parsha* is still read on Yom Kippur. We are therefore considered to have enticed it through this gift, for prayer replaces offerings. We can now understand why Moshe chose to descend with the second set of tablets precisely on Yom Kippur, not some other day, for he wanted to show the Children of Israel that it is only by the power of Torah that they can silence their accusers on Yom Kippur, ensuring that Esau's ministering angel will yield before holiness. Also at that time, Moshe told the

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Children of Israel that the sin of the golden calf had been forgiven, hinting to them that by repentance and Torah, Hashem would silence their accusers.

We know what the Sages have said regarding this subject, namely: "We have learned that Israel nourishes their Father in Heaven" (Zohar III:7b). Yet with our tiny intellects, it seems difficult to understand how man, who comes from dust and returns to dust (*Bereshith* 3:19) can "nourish" Hashem, Who is omnipotent and nourishes all that lives. Yet it is G-d's will that the Children of Israel should be connected to Him at each instant through Torah. This is what, as it were, "nourishes" Hashem, Who then spreads abundance upon us and disregards the voice of our accusers. That being the case, Hashem gave the Children of Israel the responsibility of being able to "nourish" Him and silence their accusers, but only through Torah. This issue is discussed by the

Rebbe of Radomsk in his saintly book *Tiferet Shlomo*. At the end of his chapter on *Parsha Acharei Mot*, on the verse, "You shall keep My statutes and My ordinances, which a man shall carry out and by which he shall live; I am Hashem" (*Vayikra* 18:5), the Rebbe writes: "All the *mitzvot* that the Children of Israel perform are a *tikkun* for the first man, who contained every soul within himself (*Tikkunei Zohar* 56, 90b). This is the meaning of the expression, 'Which a man shall carry out and by which he shall live; I am Hashem,' as if to say that this constitutes Hashem's strength, as it is written: Israel 'nourishes' their Father in Heaven."

This is the significance of the preparations that we make on the eve of Yom Kippur, when we repent and resolve to do only good from now on. This is how we "nourish" Hashem, prompting Him to silence our accusers.

Mussar from the Parsha

As Yourself – Literally!

Rabbi Akiva said, " 'You shall love your fellow as yourself' is a great principle of the Torah."

Although this is a great principle of the Torah, it is extremely difficult to do! How can a person love another as himself? The Ramban explains this *mitzvah* for us in terms of practical conduct: "Sometimes a person will love his neighbor in certain matters, such as doing good for him in regards to material wealth, but not in regards to wisdom and similar matters. But if he loves him completely, he will want his beloved friend to gain riches, properties, honor, knowledge and wisdom. Yet...there will always be a desire in his heart that he should have more of these good things than his neighbor. Therefore Scripture commanded that this degrading jealousy should not exist in his heart, but instead a person should love to do an abundance of good for his fellow-being as he does for himself, and he should place no limitations upon his love for him" (Ramban on *Vayikra* 19:18).

These words penetrate to the heart of the matter. A person must not place limitations on doing good for his fellow. He must wish him well in every area of life, wanting him to have abundant possessions and to rejoice in all that he has – in children, wealth, honor, and wisdom – without being jealous of him. A person must not evaluate his own success with respect to his fellow, hoping in his heart of hearts that his fellow's success doesn't catch up to his own! It is impossible to fix limits with regards to loving your fellow. My friends, may what you have remain yours, and may Hashem give you a thousand times more. Are your possessions in any way affected by those of your fellow? Then why, if you are lacking, should you want your fellow to lack as well? How will it be easier for you to cope with your lack if someone else is lacking? On the contrary, it is precisely when you are lacking that you become aware of the suffering that it brings, and as a friend you want your brother not to suffer the same fate. Isn't that true?

This is a *mitzvah* that is in no way easy to perform, but who says that it has to be easy? Since it is a great principle of the Torah, it requires a great investment in Torah!

If we want to translate these things into the realm of action, then a person who is invited to the family celebration of his friend is being given an opportunity to fulfill the *mitzvah* of loving his fellow as himself in public. He is invited to see with his own eyes the joy of his fellowman, whether it be the birth of a child, a Bar Mitzvah, or a wedding, and to wholeheartedly rejoice. As the Torah states regarding Aaron, "When he sees you, he will be glad in his heart" (*Shemot* 4:14). Everyone called upon to participate!

– *Iyunim BeParasha*

A Pearl From the Rav: Planting Good Deeds

The Midrash states, "Rabbi Yehudah ben Shimon began his discourse with the text, 'After Hashem your G-d shall you walk' [*Devarim* 13:5]. Yet can a man of flesh and blood walk after the Holy One, blessed be He? ... But in truth the Holy One, blessed be He, from the very beginning of the creation of the world, was before all else occupied with plantation, as is proved by the text: 'Hashem G-d planted a garden eastward in Eden' [*Bereshith* 2:8]. So too must you, when you enter the land, occupy yourselves firstly and with nothing else but planting. Thus it is written, 'When you come into the land, then you shall plant' [*Vayikra* 19:23]" (*Vayikra Rabba* 25:3).

In the book *Chesed L'Avraham*, Rabbi Avraham HaKohen examines this passage and notes that after the Sages asked how we can cleave to the *Shechinah*, they cited many verses in formulating their response. Yet how is the issue resolved by something as trivial as planting trees? Is planting a tree enough to cleave to Hashem, and does it answer these astonishing questions? We may answer by explaining that the Holy One, blessed be He, said by allusion that just as He planted trees so that man can live, likewise He said to the Children of Israel: "When you come into the land, then you shall plant." This is because they experienced many miracles in the desert, where they were nourished by the manna, spiritual bread that was free to all. Yet now as they were about to enter Eretz Israel, they would no longer see the open miracles that they were accustomed to seeing in the desert. Hence they immediately had to start planting, a reference to good deeds and hard work. By this planting, they would continue cleaving to Hashem and merit seeing what they were accustomed to seeing in the desert.

Now the Holy One, blessed be He, planted a tree in the middle of the garden, as it is written: "The Tree of Life in the middle of the garden" (*Bereshith* 2:9). Since He had created man to live forever, why did He need to create the Tree of Life? This served as an allusion for the first man, telling him that just as the Holy One, blessed be He, was occupied with trees in order to bring life into the world (including man himself), so too must man bring life to himself by the fulfillment of the Torah and good deeds. In this way he will merit to be constantly connected to the Tree of Life, which is the Torah, and continuously cleave to G-d through good deeds.

Two Paths

It is written, "One lot for Hashem and one lot for Azazel" (*Vayikra* 16:8).

What can this be compared to? It is like two trains that are parked next to one another at a station. The two begin to move, one heading towards the west,

while the other heads towards the east. The longer they travel on their respective paths, the further they get from one another, until they are eventually separated by hundreds of miles. Although they began in exactly the same place, a slight difference in direction eventually results in a huge gap between them.

We often encounter people whose opinions are diametrically opposed, as far as east is from west. Yet if we were to examine their lifestyles, we would discover that they are almost similar in terms of their energy and diligence, their enthusiasm and affection, attributes that affect their every action. Yet one may be headed east while the other is headed west, until they are eventually worlds apart. This happens because their paths are initially influenced by small things, things that move them slightly in one way or another until they eventually become aligned in their present direction. The more they apply their skills and abilities in the direction they are headed, the further they move apart. Each is convinced that he alone is being guided by the truth, though in reality a small difference in their initial directions is what separated and distanced them so greatly.

When the Children of Israel went to the Sanctuary on Yom Kippur to accept the yoke of the Kingdom of Heaven for themselves and their offspring, that opportunity was used to teach them a lesson in education. Two goats stood next to each other in the Tent of Meeting, goats that were completely similar to one another in terms of value, appearance, size, and color. Yet one was Hashem's lot, which is why its blood was brought into the Holy of Holies, the most sacred place in the Sanctuary, while the other was Azazel's lot, being brought to a desert wasteland and thrown off a cliff. Two people may be similar, yet their fates can be entirely different.

This means that if only we were to make a child into a lot for Hashem – if we teach him Torah in the Holy of Holies of the Beit HaMidrash – then he will truly become holy for Hashem. Yet if that is not his fate, he will become a lot for Azazel. Everything depends on the education that a child first receives. Any deviation in a child's education may appear slight at first, but the results are sure to manifest themselves later on in life, results that can separate people who are otherwise very similar.

– Rabbi Moshe Mordechai Epstein

Our Father, Merciful Father

It is written, "For on this day he shall make atonement for you, to cleanse you. From all your sins before Hashem, you shall be clean" (*Vayikra* 16:30).

Rabbi Akiva said, "Happy are you, O Israel! Who is it before Whom you become clean, and Who is it that makes you clean? Your Father in Heaven" (*Mishnah in Yoma* 85b). When a doctor heals someone, he does all that he can to make him better, although he doesn't always pay attention to how his patient is feeling. However if a doctor were to heal his own child, he would look for every possible way to eliminate the discomfort that his treatment creates.

Hashem, as the Father of Israel, also looks for ways to ensure that the atonement of sin is not accompanied by excessive suffering. This is why He gave us a holy day, Yom Kippur, when all our sins are forgiven. Since it is our Father in Heaven Who purifies us, He gave us a trouble-free way of being healed.

– Ohel Yaakov

Overview of the Parsha

After the previous *parshiot* – from the middle of *Parsha Shemini* to the end of *Parsha Metzora*, which discuss the purity required by the holy people, in whose midst the holy Sanctuary stood – *Parsha Acharai Mot* deals with the purification of Israel even from the impurity of sin, with Yom Kippur atoning for the impurity of the *kohanim* and the people as a whole. Although the *Kohen Gadol* is permitted to enter the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur and to send a goat into the desert, it is still forbidden to offer sacrifices outside the Sanctuary. Jews are also forbidden to eat blood ("for the soul of the flesh is in the blood") or an animal that has not been ritually slaughtered. The *parsha* ends with warnings regarding the purity

of the soul, with the Children of Israel being told not to imitate the deeds of the nations with whom they will come into contact, as well as to preserve the sanctity of marriage by adhering to its laws.

The Deeds of the Great

The Decrees of Hashem are True

A certain man died several years before his time, and long after the anniversary of his passing he appeared in a dream to one of his relatives. His relative asked him what it was like where he was, and the man replied that he was being judged every day because he did not concentrate enough on reciting the blessing over bread and fruit, and also because he failed to concentrate during *Birkat Hamazon*. In fact the deceased had been told that all he ever focused on were his own desires! When his relative heard this, he objected: "But even the wicked are only judged for twelve months! It's already been longer for you, so why are you still being judged?" The man replied, "I am not being judged as strictly as during those twelve months."

In order to prevent dirt from getting under our nails, we must not let them grow too long. The Sages have said that dirt under the fingernails, and even on the skin, constitutes a *chatzita* (barrier) in washing the hands. Furthermore, milk or something forbidden may get stuck beneath the fingernails, which may lead to sin. A man once had a dream in which he saw a dead *tzaddik* whose face was green. He asked him why his face was like this, and the *tzaddik* replied: "My fingernails were long and milk had gotten stuck beneath them, and I ate something hot without cleaning my nails. Furthermore, I spoke between *vayechulu* and the blessing of *avoith* during *Kaddish*." Hence it is a good practice to trim our nails on the eve of Shabbat.

A pious man had ordered his son not to benefit excessively from this world, nor to go more than 30 days without fasting. When he died, he was taken from his grave and beaten. His family was very upset by this, and he appeared in a dream to explain: "It was because I saw books that were erased, torn, and with pages missing, and I didn't pick them up and put them aside."

A certain woman would spend time spinning linen on the eve of Shabbat, rather than preparing for it. After she died, someone saw in a dream that her eyes and hands were being burned with linen wicks. When he asked why she was being punished like this, he was told: "She used to occupy herself with linen on the eve of Shabbat, instead of preparing for it."

– *Sefer Chassidim* 48, 56, 97

Guard Your Tongue!

Administering Reproof

It is written, "You shall surely reprove your fellow and not bear sin because of him" (*Vayikra* 19:17).

We have been warned not to shame others in public, even if they should be reprovved, and especially if they should not be! One who shames his fellow bears a very heavy sin, as it is written: "He who publicly shames his neighbor is as if he has shed blood" (*Bava Metzia* 58b). The Gemara also states, "Better for a man to throw himself into a fiery furnace than to publicly put his neighbor to shame. From where do we know this? From Tamar, for it is written: 'As she was taken out [for execution], she sent word to her father-in-law...' [Bereshith 38:25]" (*Bava Metzia* 59a). It follows that even if the person in question is not innocent, we must still be very careful not to shame him. It also follows from the Gemara that one who usually shames others in public has no share in the World to Come. – Shmirat HaLashon

Shabbat HaGadol

It is written, "For I, Hashem, have not changed, and you, the sons of Jacob, you have not perished" (Malachi 3:6).

We may explain this verse with a parable: A man entered a store to purchase a beautiful mirror. He examined one after another, but none satisfied him. The salesman asked, "Why don't you like any of the mirrors I've shown you? They're all exquisite! Look at the workmanship that went into making them, from their frames to their delicate engravings. How could it be that of all the mirrors I've shown you, not one of them pleases you?"

The man explained quite simply, "When I looked at each mirror you showed me, I saw that my hair was all disheveled and my hat was crooked." The salesman said, "Excuse me sir, but that's not the fault of any mirror. What you saw is a reflection of yourself, a reflection of the fact that you didn't comb your hair or put your hat on properly. You're the only one to blame for that."

The lesson here is that Heaven acts with a person in the same way that he himself acts. If he acts in accordance with the Torah, then Heaven smoothes his paths and makes things easier for him. However if he does not act as he should, then Heaven looks at him in anger and complicates things for him.

This is what the verse is telling us: "For I, Hashem, have not changed" – any change has come, for better or worse, not from Me, but from "you, the sons of Jacob." Yet "you have not perished" [which can also be read as, "you have not fulfilled"] – you have not acted correctly, which is why the fault lies entirely with you.

– From *Petach HaSha'ar*

A True Story

To Prevent a Grave Sin

It is written, "The wife of your brother" (*Vayikra* 18:16).

Rav Shach *Zatzal* recounted a terrible incident that occurred to the *gaon* Rabbi Chaim Ozer Grodzinski *Zatzal*. Following the orders of his doctors, Rabbi Chaim Ozer was forced to spend the holidays of Tishri at a health spa. His sadness was impossible to describe, and he thought to himself: "How could Hashem have done this to me, separating me from my community, from the center of Judaism, and relegating me to such a distant place?" During *Mincha* of Shabbat Teshuvah, he saw a visitor in synagogue. Rabbi Chaim Ozer warmly welcomed him and asked him where he was from. The man said that he had come from America, but was now stranded on his way to St. Petersburg. His brother had died, leaving behind a widow and young orphans, and he decided that instead of letting her marry a stranger, it was better for him to marry her and raise the orphans. He had written to her and discussed the matter, and she had agreed. He was now on his way to marry her.

Rabbi Chaim Ozer began to tremble when he heard this, for the Torah forbids a man from marrying his brother's wife if she has children. He opened a Chumash and showed him the exact verse. The man replied, "No one has yet convinced me to change my mind. Maybe if the Rav of Vilna ordered me, I would listen to him!" Rabbi Chaim Ozer then said to the man, "I am the Rav of Vilna!"

Rav Shach ended his account by saying, "See just how important it was for Hashem to relegate the Rav of Israel to a distant place for the holidays of Tishri. Hashem caused him bodily pain and mental anguish in order to force him there, all so as to prevent a Jew from committing a grave sin!"

– *Lulei Toratcha*

Rabbi Ephraim Halevi Segal – Author of *Birkat Ephraim*

On his father's side, Rabbi Ephraim Halevi Segal *Zatzal* was a descendant of the Maharal of Prague, a lineage that extended back to King David and included Rashi, the *Tanna* Rabbi Yochanan Ha-Sandlar, and numerous other saints. Rabbi Ephraim Halevi was the Rav of Kolo, having received *semichah* from the Malbim. In his youth, he served as a judge in the Beit Din of Rabbi Yaakov of Lissa (the author of *Netivot Mishpat*) and Rabbi Akiva Eiger.

Rabbi Ephraim Halevi was known as one of the leading Torah figures of his time, famous for his knowledge of both the revealed and hidden Torah. In fact he was considered as one of the great men of the generation, and even Rabbi Akiva Eiger, Rabbi Yaakov of Lissa, and the author of *Chemdat Shlomo* would encourage him to employ practical Kabbalah in matters of life and death. Rabbi Ephraim Halevi's descendants possess an amulet that he made when a cholera epidemic broke out near his home. Accompanying this amulet is a letter personally written by him on how to use it.

Rabbi Ephraim Halevi was widely known for his great generosity. There remain a few accounts to the effect that he saw the prophet Eliyahu when he performed a kind deed. Even during his final days, he would go from door to door collecting money to repair the synagogue of Kolo, which was on the verge of collapsing. Rabbi Ephraim Halevi is also famous for his last will and testament, which contains seventy-one paragraphs and is often called *Birkat Ephraim*. It constitutes an entire guide for living, one in which we can find detailed advice for all areas of life. Even today, an important part of his last will and testament is carefully observed by his family, for he instructed his descendants not to marry into families whose sons were not worthy of being *talmidei chachamim*, or whose wealth was not honestly earned. He gave them two signs in this regard: 1) They obey those who make *halachic* decisions without a second thought; and 2) They do not speak about business on Shabbat, Yom Tov, or *Chol HaMoed*.

Rabbi Ephraim Halevi Segal left this world on Tammuz 14, 5591 at the age of 61. His son, Rabbi Raphael Zeev Loewenthal, had the honor of becoming the son-in-law of the author of *Chemdat Shlomo*. In fact a letter that he sent to Rabbi Akiva Eiger still exists. Rabbi Raphael Zeev left this world in the year 5616.

Eishet Chayil

Within the Heart of Man

The Rambam wrote, "Happiness does not reside in things external to the soul, in fleeting treasures that disappear. The sound of harp and lyre, of truth and justice are found within the heart of man. All that the masses consider to be pleasurable and joyful are but a fleeting shadow. The health of man's soul, and with it the health of the body, depends on this realization" (Rambam, *Medical Writings*).

Sometimes the power of habit drives us, and everything seems to occur on its own. A person closes his eyes so as not to see the immense kindnesses that Hashem is constantly doing for him. A woman gets up in the morning feeling tired and depressed. Her child was crying for several hours during the night because he wasn't feeling well. Despite her fatigue, she attends to the tasks in her home, yet sluggishly and with a heavy heart, one devoid of joy. Next she telephones her friend, who tells her that she was in the emergency room all night long with her son, while her other children had a high fever. The first woman thinks to herself, "Thank G-d I didn't have to go to the hospital last night. My child wasn't ill all night long, and none of the other children are sick." She then thanks Hashem and feels renewed strength.