**YESHIVAT HAR ETZION**

**ISRAEL KOSCHITZKY VIRTUAL BEIT MIDRASH (VBM)**

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**A River Flows from Eden:**

**The Garden of Eden**

**as the Inner Source of the Jewish Holidays**

**Rav Uriel Eitam**

**Shiur #06:**

**The Service of the Goats**

**Part I:**

**Repair of the Sin Involving the Tree of Knowledge**

**I**

**The Goats and the Repair of Adam’s Sin**

**Introduction**

Standing at the heart of Yom Kippur is a ritual involving two goats. The blood of the "inner goat" is sprinkled in the innermost chamber of the Temple, while the other is sent away to Azazel in the wilderness. This service achieves comprehensive atonement that includes all types of misdeeds (sins, transgressions and iniquities) for the entire people.[[1]](#footnote-1)

The service of the goats is characterized by features that are unique in the context of the world of the Temple.

The high priest is required to take two goats as similar to each other as possible; he must cast lots to determine which goat will be offered to God on the altar and which will be sent to Azazel in the wilderness; he must sprinkle of the blood of the goat to be offered to God on the *kaporet* (the cover of the Ark of the Covenant) in the Holy of Holies, on the *parokhet* (the curtain separating the Holy of Holies from the Sanctuary),and on the Golden Altar; and he must send the goat to Azazel in the wilderness in the hands of an appointed man, after confessing the sins of Israel over it. There the goat is pushed off the cliff, smashing it into pieces.

Why is it necessary first to take two goats that are as similar as possible and then do with them two things that are so utterly different? Based on a superficial reading of the passage dealing with the Yom Kippur service, one might conclude that the two goats are identical goats which perform the very same action, only that they achieve atonement in different places and in different realms. The inner goat atones for sins involving impurity of the Temple and the offerings: "And he shall make atonement for the holy place, because of the impurity of the children of Israel" (*Vayikra*16:16); whereas the goat that is sent to Azazel atones for the rest of the sins of the people of Israel: "And he shall confess over it all the iniquities of the children of Israel" (*Vayikra* 16:21).

Upon closer examination, however, we are left with a different impression. The fact that one goat is defined as "for the Lord," while the other is labeled "for Azazel," instead of designating both of them as goats "for the Lord," indicates that the goats stand in opposition to each other. What is more, the fact that the goat that is destined for the Lord enters the innermost chamber of the Temple, which nobody enters all year round, while the goat that is sent to Azazel is taken to the outermost place, which is unconnected to the sacrificial service over the course of the year, sets the two goats as radical opposites of each other.

**The Two Goats and Their Separation**

Taking two identical goats to two opposite extremes teaches us that the atonement achieved through the goats works differently than the ordinary sacrificial service. In the ordinary sacrificial service, a person must come before God with all the good and the evil within him or her. One enters the Temple with sins and with the sacrifice that is supposed to atone for them, confesses these sins while placing hands on the offering, then offers the sacrifice which cleanses the sinner. The sin is part of the person, and it is remedied by way of the sacrifice.

In the case of the service of the goats, on the other hand, the atonement is achieved not by bringing the sins and the offering inside the Temple, but by detaching the sins from the people and sending them away,[[2]](#footnote-2) while Israel’s representative, the high priest, enters the innermost chamber of the Temple on the nation’s behalf. What we have here is a unique format of atonement that involves absolute separation between good and evil, created by the separation of the two goats.

What is the relationship between the total similarity between the two goats and the absolute contrast regarding what is done to them? At the start, the two similar goats reflect the simple attitude toward man’s sins over the course of the year. Throughout the year, the individual and the people as a whole accumulate good and bad deeds, *mitzvot* and transgressions, merits and liabilities. At first glance, it seems that different sides and different actions are equal parts of cohesive personalities, just as the two goats that will be sent, one in and one out, are similar to each other at the outset. This is particularly evident on Rosh Hashana, when one is judged for the entirety of one’s deeds, the good and the evil.

Separating the goats on Yom Kippur reveals a deeper perspective than that of the rest of the year. According to this perspective, evil does not define identity and is not an integral part of a person. The goat that Israel offers to God and is brought in before Him expresses belonging to God, while the goat that is sent out to Azazel with the people’s sins expresses the fact that sins are not part of human identity, but rather external. As the Gemara states: "A person does not commit a transgression unless a spirit of folly enters into him [from the outside]" (*Sota* 3a).

**The Goat that is Sent to Azazel — Removal of Dung**

The separation between good and evil and the sending away of our sins, which is the meaning of the sacrificial service that is unique to Yom Kippur, receives even deeper significance in the words of the Midrash:

"Even the days that were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them" (*Tehillim* 139:16) — this is Yom Kippur for Israel, which is a great joy before Him who spoke and brought the world into being, which He gave Israel with great love. This may be likened to a king of flesh and blood whose servants and household members would remove the dung and cast it across from the king's door. When the king would come out and see the dung, he would greatly rejoice. So is Yom Kippur which the Holy One, blessed be He, gave with great love and joy. (*Tanna de-Vei Eliyahu*, chap, 1)

The image of removing dung that the Midrash uses to characterize Yom Kippur is particularly suited to the service of the goat sent to Azazel, which the high priest loads with the sins of Israel (the dung), thus removing them from the realm of the Temple of the King of Kings, which is then left in its state of purity. From this account it also follows that the palace itself is fundamentally clean and it is only the accumulation of dung that dirties it. The removal of the dung restores the palace to its former state and the king to his delight.

This principle is reflected in the difference between the offerings brought all year long and the Yom Kippur service. All year long people are occupied with atonement for the sins themselves. They appear with them before God and atone for them with their sacrifices. On Yom Kippur, on the other hand, it becomes clear that a person’s natural state is without sin, and therefore the sins are sent away, while the people enter the innermost chamber of the palace, together with the king.

The Ramban comes to this difference from the wording of the verse: "And he shall put them on the head of the goat" (*Vayikra* 16:21):

This wording is not used in connection with Aharon's bullock or the goat sin-offering to God, nor in connection with any laying of hands on a sacrifice. For the sacrifices come to find favor on the fire of God, and they appease and atone. But this animal that is not for God does not atone or appease, and merely carries away their sin.

The Ramban points out that the Torah uses special wording regarding the service of the goat that is sent to Azazel. The priest, as it were, places the sins of Israel on the head of the goat. The Ramban explains that this goat does not achieve atonement, but rather it serves a removal function. The priest loads it with sins and sends it out with them to the wilderness, leaving Israel and God's sanctuary free of sin.

**To Be Members of the King’s Household**

Let us return to the parable. The king does not evict from his palace those who are responsible for allowing dung to accumulate there, but rather he takes joy in the removal of the dung itself. The king, his servants and the members of his household are seen as belonging to the same team and seeking the same goal. This explains the joy that is felt when the dung is removed and the servants and members of the household can remain inside.

When projected onto Yom Kippur, this account teaches that the Jewish people belong to the good, and that the sins of the nation (the dung) fall into the category of refuse that has accumulated. Removing that refuse, rather than those who created it (the people) stems from fundamental belonging to the Temple, which is God's palace, and from being clean of refuse and sin in essence.

Dealing with sins by removing them from the palace deepens our understanding of the unique track of Yom Kippur, explained in the previous *shiurim.* On Yom Kippur, sin is perceived as impurity which the atonement of Yom Kippur can purify. Fundamentally, the purification process expresses return to the original and natural state, and the possibility of purification from sin indicates that our natural state is being close to God without sin. This natural state is the unique position of the Jewish people, and it is the basis for the possibility of the atonement of Yom Kippur. On this day, God governs Israel based on their unique essence, and precisely because of this they can enter the innermost chamber and their sins are taken outside.

The Maharal develops this idea further, while summarizing the matter of the two goats:

Because the souls of Israel are holy and pure in themselves, their sins do not stem from their very souls, for their souls in themselves are holy and pure. For were this not so, it would be unbefitting to bring the blood into the Holy of Holies. However, these sins do not stem from the souls of Israel, but only from Satan's incitement of Israel, from which come the sins.

Therefore, the Torah says, since Israel have pure souls and they have an offering to bring in the innermost chamber, the sins committed by Israel are from the evil inclination, which is Satan, and not from themselves — to the point that Satan, namely, the evil inclination, has a part in Israel, that is, the sins that stem from the evil inclination. Therefore, the Torah says that the high priest should put the sins of Israel on the second goat and he should send the goat into the wilderness, so that it may take that part of Israel that he has in them. (*Derasha* for *Shabbat Teshuva*, p. 83)

The atonement of Yom Kippur is designed to restore Israel to its natural state, free of sin and close to God — to stand anew before God. Standing before God is the focus of the day, as is evident from the seven-time repetition of the words "before the Lord" in the Torah section dealing with the Yom Kippur service.[[3]](#footnote-3) The last mention expresses the climax of the day: "From all your sins you shall be clean before the Lord" (*Vayikra* 16:30).

We can sharpen this point by drawing a comparison between Yom Kippur and Rosh Hashana. On Rosh Hashana the focus is on the relationship with God,[[4]](#footnote-4) while on Yom Kippur the focus is on the relationship with sin. Blowing the *shofar* on Rosh Hashana clarifies that the relationship with God is deeper than we might have thought, and therefore sins are given different weight. The service of the goats on Yom Kippur clarifies that the connection to sin is weaker than we might have thought, and therefore those sins are distanced and removed, and the Jewish people are left with their primal purity that allows them to stand in the innermost chamber before God.

**Repairing Adam’s Sin**

Let us consider once again the purpose of the service of the goats. Over the course of the year, good and evil inclinations, *mitzvot* and sins all intermingle. How does the atonement of Yom Kippur take place? The separation between the goat that is offered to God and the goat that is sent to Azazel creates a complete separation between good and evil; all of our transgressions are taken outside, and the people are left before God, clean and pure.

However, what is the basis of this unique process of removing sins, which is portrayed as a separation and removal of refuse, and not as a treatment and repair of the sins?

This process grows from ancient roots. The intermingling within man is not a phenomenon of the year just ended. Its earliest source is found in the sin of Adam and Chava, who eat from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. Before they eat from the tree, good and evil are distinguished one from the other. In the wake of the sin, good and evil intermingle in man.[[5]](#footnote-5) Before Adam and Chava sin, the voice of the evil inclination appears in an external figure, in a serpent tempting man to sin. But in the wake of the sin, this voice goes inward, and man begins to identify the temptation to sin as man’s own voice. When man becomes a mixture of good and evil, Adam and Chava are banished from the Garden of Eden into a world in which there is also an intermingling of good and evil, one with the other.

As we have already seen in previous *shiurim*, the atonement of Yom Kippur comes to deal with the foundations of sin and not with its branches. The roots of sin do not begin with the selection of the people of Israel, but rather with the sin of Adam and Chava. On Yom Kippur, God creates a renewed separation between the good and the evil that became entwined by way of Adam, and thus He purifies the people of Israel from their sins. The service of the goats separates the good and the evil from each other: the evil is sent as far away as possible, while the good is brought in as deeply as possible.

The separation between the two goats is executed in a unique manner, by way of a casting of lots. Lots hand over the decision to God. Adam and Chava in their sin wanted to know good and evil by themselves. The casting of lots that is carried out by the priest removes the decision-making process from human discretion, handing it over to Divine providence. In doing so, the priest returns the knowledge of good and evil to God, thus repairing the sin of Adam.[[6]](#footnote-6) The high priest's entry into the Holy of Holies brings us also with him into the innermost chambers, thus repairing also Adam's expulsion and bringing the people closer to God.

Both the section dealing with Adam and the section dealing with the Yom Kippur service address the issue of sin, but the way that they each address it is different. Adam is expelled from the Garden of Eden in the wake of his sin: "Therefore the Lord God **sent him forth** from the Garden of Eden to till the ground" (*Bereishit* 3:23). On Yom Kippur, on the other hand, we remain where we are and are brought into the innermost chamber, and the sins-impurities are sent away: "And he shall confess over it all the iniquities of the children of Israel… and **he shall send it away** by the hand of an appointed man into the wilderness" (*Vayikra* 16:21).[[7]](#footnote-7) In the Garden of Eden, it is the sinner who is sent away, whereas on Yom Kippur the sin-impurity that is separated from man is sent away, and man himself remains in God's garden. What is the reason for the opposite responses to sin?

**The Inner Goat**

As we saw in the previous *shiurim*, the atonement of Yom Kippur addresses the roots of sin, which, though they do not begin with the Jewish people, Israel has been assigned to repair. This atonement relates to the people of Israel as fundamentally pure, and therefore the removal of the impurity suffices to restore them to their original purity, as worthy in their uniqueness to God's closeness, and therefore destined to stand once again before God. This unique quality finds expression in the service involving the inner goat:

For this goat, whose blood is brought into the innermost chamber, indicates the virtue of the soul of Israel, which is removed from materiality, and therefore the blood is brought to atone in the innermost chamber, it being holier and more sanctified than any body. (Maharal, *Derush* for *Shabbat Teshuva*, p. 83).

The service of the inner goat reveals the original identity of the people of Israel, restores them to their purity, and renews their full and clean relationship with God. On this day, God governs the Jewish people in accordance not with their actions, but with their original essence and identity.

Such governance, however, is possible only from God's perspective; a man who judges himself according to his essence, rather than his actions, removes from his shoulders responsibility for his actions, and allows himself to fall into sin. Governing the world in accordance with Israel's unique essence, and dealing with the roots of sin rather than with the sins themselves, belongs exclusively to the Divine perspective.

Therefore, the atonement of Yom Kippur starts not with Israel, but with God. This is highlighted by the definition of the purpose of Yom Kippur: "For on this shall atonement be made for you, to cleanse you; from all your sins shall you be clean before the Lord" (*Vayikra* 16:30). On this day God atones for Israel from above, and it is He who purifies the Jewish people.

The unique atonement of Yom Kippur, which is based on the inner qualities of Israel and on the fact that the process begins with God and not with human acts of repair, finds expression in the unique form of the service that is manifested in several ways.

First of all, the service is performed "from inside outwards": the service of the inner goat precedes the service of the goat that is sent to Azazel, which carries the sins of Israel away. This expresses the fact that the Jewish people are close to God even before they have actually dealt with their sins. The movement "from inside outwards" also finds expression in standing before God, which all year long is conditioned on the purification that precedes it,[[8]](#footnote-8) whereas on Yom Kippur it itself brings about purity from sin: "You shall be clean before the Lord" (*Vayikra* 16:30).

A second unique feature of the service, which reflects the fact that the atonement of Yom Kippur begins with God, finds expression in the sprinklings of the blood of the inner goat, one above and seven below (*Yoma* 5:3-4). The service of the sprinklings is performed from top to bottom,[[9]](#footnote-9) and the "eighth" level precedes the seven.[[10]](#footnote-10)

(Translated by David Strauss)

1. We discussed the unique result of this process, atonement even for deliberate sins, in the previous two *shiurim* dealing with "atonement that purifies." [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. This is achieved by way of the goat that is sent to Azazel. We will return to the service involving the inner goat later in this *shiur.* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The expression relates to almost all of the components of the service: the setting of the two goats (*Vayikra* 16:7), the setting of the goat to be sent to Azazel (16:10), the taking of the coals (16:12), the burning of the incense (16:13), and the making of atonement for the altar (16:18). In addition, as stated, it relates to the Yom Kippur service as a whole, the entry and the purification (16:1, 30). [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See our *shiurim* dealing with Rosh Hashana. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See *Nefesh Ha-chayim* I, 1. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. In addition, in the Yom Kippur service, the priest does not know for whom he makes atonement and for what offenses. In this sense as well, the atonement transcends human knowledge, and belongs to Divine knowledge (see the beginning of Tractate *Shevuot*, which indicates that in a certain respect, the high priest makes atonement for the unknown, as does the contingent guilt-offering). This stands in contrast to the atonement offerings found at the beginning of the Book of *Vayikra*, where the type of offering that must be brought depends entirely on the identity of the sinner and the sin. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Similarly: "But the goat, on which the lot fell for Azazel, shall be set alive before the Lord, to make atonement over him, **to send it** **away** to Azazel into the wilderness." [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. In principle, purity is a prerequisite for standing before the Lord. See regarding a woman after childbirth (*Vayikra* 12:7), a *metzora* (14:11), a *zav* (15:14), and a *zava* (15:30). Here the Torah formulates a reverse process in which purity (from sin) is a result of standing before God. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Rabbeinu Bachya explains the spiritual significance of movement from above to below based on the *sefirot,* the Divine attributes or emanations of Kabbalistic teachings. See Rabbeinu Bachya, *Vayikra* 16:14. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. This stands in contrast to the dedication of the *Mishkan,* in which a period of seven days precedes the eighth day which is detached from it; and also in contrast to the offerings brought by the *metzora*, the *zav* and the *zava* on the eighth day, after a period of seven days of purity. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)