**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 #07:**

**The Service of the Goats**

**Part II**

**Repairing the Sin of Eating From the Tree of Knowledge**

**II**

**The Garden of Eden, the Wilderness, and Our True Place**

**Why is the goat sent away to the wilderness?**

in the previous *shiur*, we discussed the uniqueness of the service involving the two goats of Yom Kippur. We clarified the significance of the separation of the two goats, and we considered the service involving the inner goat in light of elements from the story of Adam and Chava and their sin of eating from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil.

The connection to the story of Adam and Chava may also help us reach a deeper understanding of the service of the goat to Azazel, which is very different from all other sacrifices. This goat is sent away to Azazel in the wilderness, instead of being offered to God on the altar in the *Mishkan*. What is the meaning of this unique service?

As mentioned, as opposed to sins, the treatment of which involves bringing sacrifices into the Temple, the treatment of human defilements is always performed outside the sacred space. In light of this, the reason for sending the goat and the sins that are "upon it" away from the *Mishkan* is that sins on Yom Kippur are regarded as impurities. Therefore, treating them involves removing them from the sacred space and sending them away on the goat, just as impure people are removed from the camp of Israel.

Still, why is it not enough to remove the impurity from the *Mishkan* or from the entire camp of Israel? It should be emphasized that the impurity is sent away to a specific destination — to Azazel, in the wilderness. Why, instead of treating the impurities in the normal manner (immersion in water), are they treated by way of killing the goat, which is also done in a manner that has no parallel anywhere in the Torah — by throwing it off the top of a cliff, with its limbs being smashed on the way down? Let us consider what this means by way of an analysis of the nature of the wilderness.

**“Who has led you through the great and dreadful wilderness… where there was no water”**

The most fundamental feature of the wilderness is the absence of water. This is also the way that the Torah defines the wilderness: "Who led you through the great and dreadful wilderness… and thirsty ground where there was no water" (*Devarim* 8:15). Because of the lack of water and man's indispensable need for water for survival, the wilderness is considered a place of death.[[1]](#footnote-1)

This allows us to better understand the meaning of sending away the goat to the wilderness on Yom Kippur. As we saw in the first *shiur*, the process of purification is fundamentally a process of returning to life, which is accomplished by immersing one's whole body in water, the source of life. According to this, the two fundamental elements of the purification process are water and life. It turns out that in its most basic features, the purification process stands in opposition to the nature of the wilderness, which lacks water and is not a place of life.

It follows from this that the treatment of impurity on Yom Kippur is done in the opposite way of the usual purification process. Usually the impure person undergoes a purification process, this being done by way of immersion in water. On Yom Kippur, the goat that bears upon it the sins of Israel, considered like impurity, does not undergo a purification process; rather, it is sent to a place that is the very opposite of the fundamental elements of the purification process — to the wilderness. This contrast between the wilderness and purity makes it an appropriate place to send impurity. The impurity leaves the human sphere and moves into the sphere that is appropriate for it. Purification by way of water comes to treat a person who has become impure, whereas purification by way of the goat sent to the wilderness moves the impurity outside the human sphere, after which the person is left without it. The impurity of sin is taken outside to the place of death, where there is no water, and the person is left inside, pure of sin.

The Mishna describes what is done with the goat in the wilderness: "And he pushed it from behind, and it went rolling down, and before it had reached half its way downhill, it was dashed to pieces" (*Yoma* 6:6). The manner of the goat's killing is also connected to the fact that the wilderness represents the expanse of death. The goat that is sent to the place of death is killed in the wilderness in a "natural" manner by the physical features of the wilderness, the place of death, and not by human tools, e.g., a slaughtering knife. The dashing of the goat to pieces can also be seen as a parallel of immersion in water: Just as with immersion, all of the person's limbs come into contact with the living water, so too with throwing the goat off the cliff and dashing it into pieces, all of the goat's limbs come into contact with the surface of the wilderness, which kills.

This is the Torah's sharp way of expressing the uniqueness of Yom Kippur. Throughout the year, sins are regarded as part of each person, requiring treatment. On Yom Kippur, sin is separate from the people, something that enters from the outside and that must be sent to a place, the nature of which stands in opposition to the living space of the nation.

**The Wilderness: The Opposite of the Garden of Eden**

We have seen that the wilderness represents the opposite of the purification process, which is done by way of water and brings a person back to life from an encounter with death. Can we also identify some representative space for the purification process itself? If we continue along the lines we have seen so far, this space should be represented by water and life. According to this, it is clear that the space that most perfectly represents the purification process and its two fundamental elements is the Garden of Eden.

The Garden of Eden is described as enjoying a boundless abundance of water. Water, which is the foundation of purity, also causes the blessed trees and fruit of the garden to grow. The garden is found in Eden, which marks an even higher place,[[2]](#footnote-2) from which the waters in the garden flow: "And a river went out of Eden" (*Bereishit* 2:10). According to this, Eden is the living wellspring of the garden’s water. This fact is of great importance for our purposes, as a spring is a place with the highest level of purity (Rambam, *Hilkhot Mikvaot* 9:8).

The second fundamental element of the purification process, life, distinguishes the Garden of Eden in an even more striking manner. The Garden of Eden is the place where life appears in its most perfect state, as potentially eternal. The Tree of Life in the center of the garden expresses the garden's power to grant eternal life to those who are worthy of living there. The term "Eden" itself expresses the power of regeneration, which overpowers the phenomenon of death. This is what Sara says after she is informed that she will be rejuvenated and create new life within her: "After I am waxed old shall I have pleasure (*edna*)" (*Bereishit* 18:12) — that is to say, the capacity to give life is renewed within her.[[3]](#footnote-3)

Thus we find that the wilderness, which represents the opposite of purity, is the expanse which stands in opposition to the Garden of Eden.[[4]](#footnote-4) We should therefore not be surprised that the serpent, which brings death and defilement into the world and causes man's expulsion from the Garden of Eden, is defined by the Torah as belonging to the wilderness: "Who led you through the great and dreadful wilderness, wherein were serpents, fiery serpents and scorpions" (*Devarim* 8:15). The goat that is sent away carries the sin to its place and point of origin, to the expanse of the serpent, which introduces sin into the world of man.

**The Difference Between the Garden of Eden and the Wilderness**

Ever since man’s expulsion from the garden, he has been found neither in the Garden of Eden nor in the wilderness, but rather in the intermediate space between them, in this world. In this expanse, where good and evil are intermingled and death and impurity are found together, he is responsible for his actions, and he is examined in accordance with his freely-made choices. However, on Yom Kippur, man is redeemed from this middle ground, the impurities are sent outside to the wilderness, and he goes inside the house of God — returning, as it were, to God's garden.[[5]](#footnote-5)

Standing on the border between settled area and wilderness characterizes life in Eretz Israel. When the *mitzvot* are observed, Eretz Israel turns into a blossoming garden, but when they are transgressed, it turns into a place of desolation, as we learn from the second paragraph of *Keriat Shema*.

Jerusalem itself and the Temple within it stand on the border between water and wilderness, and depend on water on a daily basis.[[6]](#footnote-6) A unique expression of this closeness is found in the goat's being sent out to the wilderness on Yom Kippur.

However, this contrast is not eternal, and it will eventually be repaired. We find the beginning of this repair already in the Israelite camp in the wilderness. This camp takes the form of the Garden of Eden, with the pure waters that flow through it (Miriam's well), with the Divine food that is continually being bestowed upon it (the manna), and with the *Shekhina* that is found in it.[[7]](#footnote-7) The real wilderness is located outside the camp and remains a place of death, and one who contracts impurity is removed from the camp and placed there.

Thus, when the people of Israel complain that the wilderness is a place of death: "And the people spoke against God, and against Moshe: Why have you brought us up out of Egypt to die in the wilderness" (*Bamidbar* 21:5), ignoring the fact that God has turned it for them into a Garden of Eden, it is precisely the fiery serpents that come and kill the sinners. The rejection of Divine abundance in the wilderness, filled with water and food and protected by the cloud of the *Shekhina*, is a rejection of the Garden of Eden, which returns the expanse to wilderness and brings upon Israel the killer serpent of the wilderness.

In the future, at the time of the final redemption, when the evil inclination, death and impurity will disappear from the world following a lengthy process of repair, the role of the wilderness expanse will come to an end and it will no longer be needed. This future revolution is alluded to by Yeshayahu in his prophecy of consolation: "For the Lord has comforted Zion; He has comforted all her waste places, and has made her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord" (*Yeshayahu* 51:3). The transformation of the wilderness into Eden reflects that reality has achieved its repair. A world at the heart of which stands the distinction between good and evil will turn into a world that is entirely good.[[8]](#footnote-8)

**Is everything in the hands of Heaven?**

The unique atonement of Yom Kippur manifests itself then in the removal of Israel's sins by way of the goat that is sent to Azazel and entering the innermost chamber by way of the inner goat. This is all rooted in the fact that sin does not reflect humanity’s true identity.

What does this mean for the people’s service on Yom Kippur? At first glance, the removal of sins by way of the goat that is sent to Azazel removes the stain of sin from the people without any effort on their part. Perceiving sin as impurity frees the nation of responsibility for one day of the year and liberates them from all service. The priest confesses and sends the goat off, the goat is dashed to pieces, and the people don't have to do anything.

In fact, however, the people too have a part in the service. The service that is required of the people on Yom Kippur is indeed fundamentally different from that required all year long, but not necessarily easier than it. It parallels the service performed by the High Priest with the goats. Corresponding to the sending away of the goat, each and every individual member of the people of Israel is required to delve into his or her soul, recognize that sin is foreign to it and not a part of him or her, and with that to separate oneself from it. This service constitutes a repair of the sin in the Garden of Eden, as described by Rav Kook:

This is the sin of Adam, who became alienated from his own self and turned to the opinion of the serpent, losing himself. He did not know how to give a clear answer to the question: "Where are you?" because he did not know himself, seeing that his true self became lost from him…

So the world goes on and dives in the loss of the I of each person, of the individual and of the collective…

And since there is no I, there is also no He, and all the more so there is no You…

We will search for our I, and for ourselves, and we will find it. (*Orot Ha-kodesh*, III, pp. l40-141).[[9]](#footnote-9)

The awareness that evil is not a part of us is not a refuge for the sinner, but rather the attainment of a profound recognition that while it exists, sin is far away from the world of humanity. Once a year one can discover that one’s self-identity is completely separate from sin, and that sins can be sent away.

Indeed, the words of Rabbi Akiva in the last *mishna* in Tractate *Yoma* teach us that we too have a part in the spiritual process of the atonement of Yom Kippur:

Rabbi Akiva said: Happy are you, Israel! Before Whom do you purify yourselves? And Who purifies you? Your Father who is in Heaven, as it is stated: "And I will sprinkle pure water upon you, and you shall be pure" (*Yechezkel* 16:25); and it further says: "You hope (*mikvei*) of Israel, the Lord" (*Yirmeyahu* 17:13). Just as a ritual bath (*mikve*) purifies the impure, so too the Holy One, blessed be He, purifies Israel. (*Yoma* 8:9)

Rabbi Akiva asks not only "Who purifies you?" but also "Before Whom do you purify yourselves?" The question "Who purifies you?" refers to God, Who purifies Israel on Yom Kippur; but the previous question is directed towards the nation: "Before Whom do you purify yourselves?"

The people too require internal work that will enable purity; they must once again stand before God. The Jewish nation must return to its true place, to intimacy with God, which has become concealed owing to sin. The people must choose their deeply rooted belonging to God, rather than the remoteness and alienation of branches distancing themselves from their roots.

**The Confession**

Throughout the year, confession occupies a central place in the mitzvaof repentance and in the treatment of sin. The role of confession is to bring a person to recognize responsibility for one’s sin and to commit oneself never again to return to it in the future — “He does not attain atonement, until he confesses and makes a commitment never to do such a thing again" (Rambam, *Hilkhot Teshuva* 1:1).

However, the confession pronounced on Yom Kippur on the head of the goat sent away to Azazel is of a different character: "And Aharon shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions, even all their sins; and he shall put them upon the head of the goat, and shall send it away by the hand of an appointed man into the wilderness" (*Vayikra* 16:21). The confession of the High Priest does not come to treat the sins but rather to untie the bonds between the people of Israel and their sins, in order to rest the sins on the goat to be sent to Azazel and move them outside.

The Yom Kippur prayers include many confessions, which draw from the High Priest's confession pronounced over the goat that is sent away to Azazel. These confessions reflect the separation between man himself and his sins, and seeing those sins as something foreign to his identity. In this way, Israel reveal its belonging in the innermost chamber, and the perception of its sins as unwanted refuse. The repentance and confession of Yom Kippur do not focus on commitment regarding the future.[[10]](#footnote-10) On Yom Kippur, the people of Israel deal with their deep identity that is being revealed already now, in the present, in the return to their place before God, by way of the power of the day.

We will conclude with the words of Rabbi Chayim Vital about the service of the goats and its connection to the sin of Adam and Chava:

The matter of the goat that is sent away has no apparent explanation, how the goat carries away all of Israel's sins. The wondrous mystery is alluded to in the *Zohar*, that the goats… are also the mystery of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, with which Adam and Chava were tempted. Corresponding to the good and evil that became intermingled in them, they would cast lots for the two goats, the lot of good for the Lord, and the lot of evil for Azazel. The supreme evil goat that causes man to sin,[[11]](#footnote-11) since it causes others to sin, carries their sins, since it is their cause. The people of Israel achieve atonement when they regret and confess and abandon following its counsel…

With this we can well understand the mystery of the goats and the lots and how, with simple repentance and verbal confession, all of their sins are purified and pardoned.[[12]](#footnote-12) (*Etz Ha-da'at*, *Acharei Mot*)

(Translated by David Strauss)

1. Already in their first steps in the wilderness, when they arrive in Refidim (*Shemot* 17), the Israelites encounters the threat of death in the wilderness: "And the people thirsted there for water; and the people murmured against Moshe, saying: Why have you brought us up out of Egypt, to kill us and our children and our cattle with thirst?" [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. "And the garden is one sixtieth of Eden" (*Pesachim* 94a). [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The spring in Eden, and the boundless abundance of water in the garden, is alluded to in the words of *Chazal* about one who studies Torah for its own sake, who is "made as a spring that ever gathers force, and like a stream that never ceases" (*Avot* 6:1), like the source from which one "drinks." Torah study for its own sake expresses in this world cleaving to the Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden, which grows from the spring that flows from Eden. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Another expression of this is found in the words of the prophet Yoel, who uses the Garden of Eden and the wilderness to represent two opposite spaces in his description of the calamity that will come from God in the future, turning the reality of great abundance into an extreme state of destruction: "A fire devours before them, and behind them a flame blazes; the land is as the Garden of Eden before them, and behind them desolate wilderness; and nothing escapes them" (*Yoel* 2:4). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. For the connection between the House of God and the Garden of Eden, see, for example, the verse: "They are abundantly satisfied with the fatness of Your house, and You make them drink of the river of Your pleasures" (*Tehilim* 36:9). [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Gehinom, which is the antithesis of the Garden of Eden, is named after the Ben Hinom Valley (*Gai ben Hinom*) which constitutes the border of Jerusalem and continues from there to the wilderness. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. This image of the Garden of Eden is depicted with additional strokes in *Yalkut Shimoni, Pekudei*, sec. 426. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. "And the Lord shall be king over all the earth; in that day shall the Lord be One, and His name one.” Is He then not One now? Rabbi Acha bar Chanina said: Not like this world is the future world. In this world, for good tidings one says: “He is good, and He does good,” while for evil tidings one says: “Blessed be the true Judge;” [whereas] in the future world it shall be only: “He is good, and He does good." (*Pesachim* 50a)

Already now, Yom Kippur alludes to this idea that behind the duality of good and evil in the world stands Divine unity, and even the forces of evil are subject to this control. Many of Israel's greatest sages deal with this issue. See Ramban, *Vayikra* 16:8 (regarding sending the goat to Azazel on God's command); Maharal, *Gevurot Hashem*, chapter 46; Ramchal, *Da'at Tevunot*; R. Tzadok Ha-kohen of Lublin, *Tzidkat Ha-tzaddik*, sec. 40; R. Avraham Kook, *Olat Re'aya*, II, p. 358. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. See also his remarks in *Orot Ha-teshuva* (15, 10):

When a person forgets the essence of his own soul, when he becomes distracted from examining his own inner life, everything becomes mixed up and uncertain. The primary repentance, which immediately illuminates the darkness, is that a person should return to himself, to the root of his soul, and immediately he will return to God, to the soul of all the souls. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. See also the *shiurim* on atonement and purification on Yom Kippur. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. See the words of *Chazal*: "Satan, the evil inclination, and the Angel of Death, are all one" (*Bava Batra* 16a); and the words of the *Zohar*: "It is written: 'And the serpent was more subtle' — this is the evil inclination and the Angel of Death" (*Zohar*, I, 35b). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Rabbi Chayim Vital emphasizes the disproportion between the requirement of repentance and confession and the level of the atonement. The atonement does not begin here with repentance and confession. The repentance and confession serve here merely as a slight aid. With confession and repentance, even if they are trivial, the Jewish peple integrate themselves into the Divine process that takes place on Yom Kippur, to which they are suited by their very essence. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)