his week’s parsha states, “The goat destined by lot for Azazel…send it to Azazel, into the desert” (Leviticus 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 Moses: “I have forgiven according to your word” (Numbers 14:20). Moses 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” (Leviticus 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 needs 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 Moses 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” (Deuteronomy 10:10)? Would it not have been enough for him to ascend and then immediately descend with the second set of tablets? Moses 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 Moses 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 voice of Esau is as if he has shed blood” (Bava Metzia 58b). The Gemara also states, “Better for a man to throw himself into the mouth of Esau than to bear the name of Jacob” (Bava Metzia 58a). 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

THE GOAT FOR AZAZEL
(BY RABBI DAVID HANANIA PINTO SHLITA)

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GUARD YOUR TONGUE!

Administering Reproof

It is written, “You shall surely re–
prove your fellow and not bear sin
because of him” (Leviticus 19:17). We have been warned not to shame others in public, even if they should be reproved, 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 shame his neighbor to shame. From where do we
know this? From Tamar, as it is written: ‘As she was taken out [for execution], she sent word to her father-in-law…’” (Genesis 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

THE GOAT FOR AZAZEL
(BY RABBI DAVID HANANIA PINTO SHLITA)
As Yourself – Literally!

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

Although it is a great principle of the Torah, it is extremely difficult to do! How can a person love another as himself? The Ramabn explains this mitzvah for us in terms of practical conduct: “Sometimes a person will love his neighbor in certain matters, such as doing good to him in material wealth, but not with 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 Leviticus 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 the 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” (Exodus 4:14). Everyone is invited 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 the L-RD your G-d shall you walk’ [Deuteronomy 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: ‘The L-RD G-d planted a garden eastward in Eden’ [Genesis 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’ [Leviticus 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, so too did He say 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” (Genesis 2:9). Since He had created man to live forever, why did He need to create a 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 the L-RD and one lot for Azazel” (Leviticus 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 respect 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, and 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 Midrash – then he will truly become holy for Hashem. Yet if that is not his fate, he will become a lot of 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 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.

Rabbi Akiva of Lissa is also famous for his knowledge of both the revealed and hidden Torah. 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 was well 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 Kwil, 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 Zeve 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 Zeve left this world in the year 5616.

Rabbi Ephraim Halevi Segal – The Author of Birkat Ephraim

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 the L-RD, you shall be clean” (Leviticus 16:30).

Overview of the Parsha

After Parshiot Shemini and Metzora discuss the purity required by the holy people, in whose midst the holy Sanctuary stood, Parsha Acharei Mot deals with the purification of Israel even from the impurity of sin, with Yom Kippur atoning for the impurity of the priests and the people as a whole. Although the High Priest 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 peoples with whom they will come into contact, as well as to preserve the sanctity of marriage by adhering to its laws.

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. Despite her fatigue, she attends to the tasks in her home, yet sluggishly and without joy. Her heart was crying for several hours during the night because he wasn’t feeling well. Yet she thanks Hashem and feels her strength being renewed.
From Punishment to Teshuvah

What follows is a story that occurred during the time of Rabbi Avraham Antebi Zatzal.

The Gaon Rabbi Avraham Antebi, the leader of the Jewish community of Aleppo, Syria some 170 years ago, was great in Torah and wisdom. Despite his knowledge and position as leader of the rabbanim, however, he would personally go to the market and purchase what he needed for Shabbat and the holidays, since “a mitzvah is greater if a person does it himself than if he sends his messenger to do it for him.”

Before one Shavuot he went to the market as usual, and there he encountered a group of thugs who had nothing in their mouths but abominations and nonsense. The Rav shuddered, and addressing the one who appeared to be their leader – a huge insolent man with a bad reputation by the name of Abu Shachud – he reprimanded him sharply: “Aren’t you ashamed of yourself? How can a Jew disgrace himself with his mouth and shame his soul as you are doing?” The thug was rattled and kept quiet, and the Rav went on his way to do his shopping.

These scornful insults pierced to the heart of his pride and vanity, and also harmed the blind loyalty that he demanded of his lackeys. He decided to act, to strike the Rav who was so revered, and to prove that he was not afraid of anyone. And not only to strike him, but to straight-out kill him!

He lay in wait for the Rav on the way to the Beit Midrash, and when he passed by, Abu Shachud sprung from his hiding place brandishing a dagger. Yet just as the dagger was uplifted in the air, the attacker’s hand withered. It became paralyzed and stayed upraised in the air, his fingers clenched around the knife, as if it had become a pillar of salt. The man tried to lower his arm, to move it, or to open his fingers, but it was useless. The Rav continued on his way toward the Beit Midrash, and the attacker – who did not have a choice at this point – was forced to make his way through the streets of the city with his hand in the air holding the dagger. He made it like this to the entrance of the Beit Midrash, and there he humbly asked for permission to enter. When he came before the Rav, he threw himself to his feet and wept bitterly, begging him to forgive his sin and evil intentions, and to heal his hand. The Rav cast a glance at him and asked, “Did you really think that you could kill me?” His answer consisted of nothing other than sounds of sobbing and moaning. When the Rav saw that his remorse was sincere, he approached him and grabbed his paralyzed hand, lowering it easily. And wonder of wonders, his fingers also began to move normally – at which point he shamefully concealed his dagger.

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 path 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, the L-RD, 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 Petah HaSh’ar

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 every day he was judged 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 chatzitza (barrier) in washing the hands. Furthermore, milk or something forbidden may get stuck beneath the fingernails, which grow too long. The Sages have said that dirt under the fingernails, and even on the skin, constitutes a chatzitza (barrier) in washing the hands. Furthermore, we must not let them grow too long.

A certain woman would spend time spinning linen on the eve of Shabbat, instead of preparing for it. 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.”

This story appears in the introduction to the book of the Gaon Rabbi Avraham Antebi, Chochma U’Mussar.

– Sefer Chassidim 48, 56, 97