

PORTION	DATE	HEB DATE	TORAH	NEVIIM	KETUVIM
Acharei Mot / Kedoshim	2 May 2020	8 Iyar 5780	Lev. 16:1-20:27	Amos 9:7-15	Matt. 15:10-20; Mark 12:28-34

This week's Torah portion, *acharei mot* and *kedoshim*, "After the death" of "set-apart one." The parsha begins with the death of Aharon's two sons, Avihu and Nadab. It is written, "And YHWH spoke to Moshe after the death of the two sons of Aharon, as they drew near before YHWH, and died" (Lev. 16:1). Since the Torah is concise and does not waste any characters, why did the Torah just say "Aharon's two sons" instead of saying their names? Whenever we study the Torah, we need to pay special attention to what is said, how it is being said, and also what is not being said. Then, we need to figure out the "whys".

The parashat *acharei mot* begins with the death of Aharon's sons and the Torah omits their names. We learned previously that the Hebrew word מוֹת (*mot*) means "death" in singular form when it should have been not 'mutu' (מוֹתוֹ) as in "deaths" in plural. Even though, they died on the same day and time, not all deaths are equal as their death may be shorter or longer before final *ruach* (soul) leaves the body. On the scale of Hashem, everything is precise. (See 05042019 Acharei Mot) The above verse is saying, by leaving out their names, that what they did by bringing "strange fire before Hashem," was not good. However, their actions brought about the exact opposite effect of their initial intent.

First, Avihu and Nadab were righteous. We know this because their names were specifically mentioned in the Torah. In Shemot (*lit.* Names; Exodus) 24:9-11 says, "And Moshe went up, also Aharon, Nadab and Avihu, and seventy of the elders of Yisrael, and they saw the Elohim of Yisrael... Yet He did not stretch out His hand against [them]." In Shemot 28:1, "And you, bring near Aharon your brother and his sons with him, from among the children of Yisrael, for serving as priest to Me: Aharon, Nadab and Avihu,...the sons of Aharaon."

Second, what was bad for Nadab and Avihu was to bring "strange fire." The sages explain that their action had multiple sins by encroaching on duties which devolved on their father. First, they ventured unauthorized to perform the incense service only designated for the High Priest. Second, they also engaged together in a work which was the duty only of one. And thirdly, they presumed to light the fire on the offering themselves. In this aspect, they were considered as to bringing "strange fire."

Third, the actions of Nadab and Avihu brought the opposite effect of their initial intent. After their death, Moshe told Mishael and Elzaphan to carry the bodies away from the inner Sanctuary to a place outside of the camp. He specified that they be careful to only touch Nadab and Avihu's tunics, and not their bodies (Lev. 10:4-5). The first concerns in burial were to prevent what is *kadosh* (set-apart; holy) from being defiled and the service of Hashem from being disrupted. The corpses had to be removed immediately, because to allow the uncleanness of the bodies to remain in the Sanctuary could invoke Hashem's wrath again. Therefore, their bodies were lifted up "by their tunic" to avoid direct physical contact. This this not prevent the carriers from becoming ritually unclean, but lessened the time and procedures needed to restore them to ritual purity.

Four, the death of Nadab and Avihu symbolizes the death of the ego "themselves" as burnt offering. In Hebrew the term "burnt offering" translates as "ascend" (they ascended). The Hebrew noun *olah* (עֹלָה) means "that which goes up [in smoke]". It is formed from the active participle of the Hiphil form of the verb *alah* (עָלָה), "to cause to ascend."

Sacrifice with "foreign fire" is a fire that does not burn like in the chapter 3 of the book of Daniel when Shadrak, Meyshak, and Abed-Nego (Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego) are consumed with "foreign fire" (Ruach) in the furnace, fire that doesn't burn the flesh. Being consumed by Hashem's fire means consumed with the Ruach HaKodesh (Spirit of Elohim) and so they "themselves" (the ego) died. Elohim would send His own fire (Ruach) to consume (anoint) the sacrifice. This is not a physical death of the flesh but of man's lower nature. Nadab and Avihu saw Hashem with great clarity and ate in His presence. They both received a place in Olam Haba (World to Come).

It is written (Lev. 16:7-8), "And he shall take the two goats, and set them before YHWH at the door of the tent of meeting. And Aharon shall cast lots upon the two goats: one for YHWH, and the other lot for Azazel." Verse 7 describes how Aharon was to draw lots over the two he-goats: one designated for Hashem and the other for Azazel. The he-goat designated for Hashem was brought as an offering in the *Mishkan* (Tabernacle), while the he-goat designated for Azazel was sent to an uninhabited place, where it was pushed off a mountain.

Why would Hashem command such a thing as to send off a he-goat "to Azazel"? The *pashat* (literal) meaning is that "all the sins of Yisrael" were placed on the he-goat and pushed off a mountain. The Zohar<sup>1</sup> explains that Azazel is the name of the spiritual entity that is appointed over the evil element in the world. The book of Enoch explains that Azazel was an arch-angel who was assigned to watch over the earth. However, when the "daughters were born to [men], that the sons of Elohim saw...that they were good...and took them wives for themselves" (Gen. 6:1-2).

The Hebrew word אַזַּזֵּל (*A-za-zel*) is a combination of two words:<sup>2</sup> אַז (*az*) which means "harsh," and זֵל (*el*) which means "rugged." Following this rule, "*Azazel*" describes the mountain off of which the he-goat is pushed. A deeper understanding is that the desolate wilderness is the domain of the wicked Satan,<sup>3</sup> the angel appointed over the evil element of Creation. Accordingly, this element of Creation is referred to as the "wilderness," and is also referred to as "Azazel," and is further referred to as "Uzza and Azael," the names of angels who were demoted and banished to the wilderness, where they are the guardians of certain evil forces.

Another combination of words: "*az*" which means "intense," and "*azal*" which means "departed"; meaning that the wilderness is the place of those whose intense glory departed and was taken away, i.e., the disgraced angels, Uzza and Azael. Alternatively, the word "*Azazel*" can be interpreted as follows: with the combination of "*uza*" and "*zal*" – the wilderness is the place of that lowly spiritual force, with the word "*uza*" meaning "force," and "*zal*" demoting lowliness and inferiority. This is an appropriate way of referring to the wilderness, because the wilderness is the domain of the Satan, and the Satan is the most inferior in stature of all the Heavenly ministers.

The Mishnah<sup>4</sup> says, "One who performs a single mitzvah acquires for himself a single defender in Heaven, and one who commits a single sin acquires for himself a single prosecutor in Heaven." The Zohar<sup>5</sup> explains that the very sin a person performs creates an evil entity, which itself is an embodiment of the sin that he performed, and the one who created this entity is placed under its jurisdiction to carry out the sinner's

<sup>1</sup> The Zohar, Vol. III, 63a

<sup>2</sup> BT, Yoma 67b

<sup>3</sup> The Zohar, Voll II, 157a

<sup>4</sup> Avos 4:11

<sup>5</sup> The Zohar, Vo. III, 83b

punishment as it is said, “Your own wickedness shall correct you, and your backsliding shall reprove you” (Jer. 2:19). Also, “And You melt us away at the hand of our sins” (Isa. 64:9). These verses indicate that the forces of evil created by sin are what carry out a sinner’s punishment.

When King David committed sin with Batsheva, Hashem informed David through the prophet Nassan (Nathan) that the evil force that had been created by his inappropriate act had been destroyed, as said, “YHWH also has put away your sin; you shall not die” (2Sam. 12:13). Since a person’s sin creates the entity that carries out the punishment of the one who created it, when the destructive act (the sin) disappears because the sinner has repented, the destructive force created by the sin automatically disappears, sparing the sinner from punishment. And that is what Hashem was telling King David (Isa. 64:9). That because his sin had been removed on account of his repentance, he would not die, for the evil entity that would have put him to death for his sin no longer existed.

Now, because sinful acts create evil entities that harm and distress the person who committed those sins, Hashem commanded us and told us that anyone who unintentionally does something inappropriate and commits one of the sins of man, he must bring an offering to counteract the harmful effects of the sin. Hashem further commanded that the one who brings the *korban* (offering) should perform *semichah* (סמיכה, leaning) upon the *korban* (קָרְבָּן) and confess his sin. The *semichah* is performed by pressing down on the head of a *korban* with both hands. While leaning on the *korban* in this way, the person confesses (וידוי; *vid-dui*) the sin for which he brought it. The reason is that through *viddui*, all the “forces of evil” that were created by the person’s evil actions will be transferred onto the *korban*. Since this is not a natural occurrence, and Hashem made it known that this can only be accomplished only supernaturally, by virtue of bringing one’s *korban* to the Tabernacle and performing *semichah* with it in the Presence of Hashem who is “the *Eloha* of the spirits of all flesh” (Num. 27:16), the One who creates and controls all forces. This is why Hashem commanded that *semichah* be performed with *chatas* (sin) offering. After the sinner has performed *semichah* and transferred the forces of evil to the *korban*, every destructive act that is performed to the *chatas*, such as slaughtering it and burning it, has a destructive effect on the evil element that was transferred from the person to the *korban* by performing *semichah*, and it is through this that the evil element is uprooted.

What is the difference between unintentional sin and intentional sin? The above paragraph explains “unintentional sins” and a *chatas* offering is brought only for *chatas*. Because the spiritual dirt created by “unintentional sins” are not that great. Hashem allows an animal to which this minimal degree of grime has been transferred to be offered on the *Mizbe’ach* (מִזְבֵּחַ, altar). For intentional sins, as said, “The sacrifice of the wicked is an abomination” (Prov. 21:27), because Hashem considers it an abomination to offer on His Altar something that is so abominable, there is nothing in the world as disgusting as the repulsiveness and grime of sin.

Does this mean Hashem will not forgive “intentional sins”? It is written, “And he shall make atonement for the Set-apart Place, because of the uncleanness of the children of Yisra’el, and because of their transgressions in all their sins. And so he does for the Tent of Meeting which is dwelling with them in the midst of their uncleanness.” (Lev. 16:16) This verse teaches that the he-goat of Azazel bears all the intentional sins, and even the Kohanim (Priests) attain atonement for many of their sins through the he-goat that is sent to Azazel.

In conclusion, the two he-goats would bear the dirt of all the spiritual sickness of the Yisrael. When it comes to the he-goat for Hashem, which bears only the sin of willful *tumah* of the Sanctuary and its sacred offerings, Hashem accepted it and did not reject it as repulsive. Therefore, it was brought as an offering in the

Tabernacle. But for the he-goat for Azazel, which bears the grime of all the other sins, Hashem rejected it and commanded that the sins, whether great or small, be destroyed and obliterated out side the *kadosh* (holy) place. Thus, the second he-goat was not brought as an offering in the Tabernacle.

Finally, only after having been brought for Hashem is it proven to be the he-goat that can actually bear all the abominable forces created by the Yisraelites' sin and can go off with them to an uninhabited land to be destroyed. That is why Hashem commanded that lots be cast, and through the lot, Hashem, the One Who has the ability to choose the proper goat, will designate the he-goat Hashem has chosen, that is suited for the purpose of Azazel. The Kabbalah says that there are many souls and sparks of holiness entrapped in non-speaking creatures, and only Hashem knows, which of these souls and sparks await redemption through *avodah* (service) in the Temple and which await redemption through being sent to Azazel.

It is written (Lev. 16:10), "But the goat on which the lot for Azazel fell is caused to stand alive before YHWH, to make atonement upon it, to send it into the wilderness to Azazel." The sages question why the verse says, "stand alive before YHWH." It means that Aharon should not confess the nation's sin immediately after it is being designated by lots for Azazel. Rather, it should remain "alive" for a while. Because once the sins of Yisraelites have been transferred to the he-goat, it is considered as "dead," because the evil element in the world is referred to as "dead," for a human body without a soul is considered as "dead." The element of *tumah* (ritual impurity) which is associated with the forces of evil and is referred to as "dead," gains controls over a corpse once the soul leaves the body. Thus, once the Priest confesses over the he-goat of Azazel and places all the sins, it becomes "dead," filled with all sorts of "death." Therefore, Hashem commanded that the High Priest not confess over the he-goat and thereby render it "dead" right after it is designated by lot for Azazel; rather, it shall be stood alive for a while before the High Priest confesses over it. That is why until the High Priest confess over it, it is considered as living. However, in verse 21-22, it is considered as being "dead" and not considered as living, because the forces of "death" had already descended upon it. It is for this reason that Aharon had to change into new clothing since he now became tamei and must immerse his clothing and himself in water (vv. 23-24).