

## Torah Talk – מאמרי תורה



*The Parasha Post of Milton Gottesman Jewish Day School of the Nation's Capital*

**Yom Kippur**  
**September 30, 2017**

**יום הכיפורים**  
**י' בתשרי תשע"ח**

Morning reading: *Vayikrah* (Leviticus) 16:1-34 and *Bemidbar* (Numbers) 29:7-11

Afternoon reading: *Vayikrah* (Leviticus) 18:1-30

Because of the Yom Kippur holiday, we do not read a regular *parasha* (Torah portion) this Shabbat. ([Learn more about Yom Kippur here.](#)) Instead, we recount the *Avodah* (Worship Service) that High Priest Aharon was commanded to conduct in the *Mishkan* (Tabernacle) and his descendants in the *Beit HaMikdash* (Temple). One of the most striking parts of this service is the goat sent to Azazel, which is the origin of the modern word “scapegoat.” The text says (16:7-10, 21-22):

וְלָקַח, אֶת-שְׁנֵי הַשְּׁעִירִים; וְהֶעֱמִיד אֹתָם לִפְנֵי ה', פָּתַח אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד. וְנָתַן אֶהָרֹן עַל-שְׁנֵי הַשְּׁעִירִים, גִּרְלוֹת--גֹּרֶל אֶחָד לַה', וְגֹרֶל אֶחָד לְעִזָּאֵזֶל... וְהִשְׁעִיר, אֲשֶׁר עָלָה עָלָיו הַגֹּרֶל לְעִזָּאֵזֶל, יַעֲמַד-חַי לִפְנֵי ה', לְכַפֵּר עָלָיו--לְשַׁלַּח אֹתוֹ לְעִזָּאֵזֶל, הַמִּדְבָּרָה... וְסָמַךְ אֶהָרֹן אֶת-שְׁתֵּי יָדָיו, עַל רֹאשׁ הַשְּׁעִיר הַחַי, וְהִתְנוּדָה עָלָיו אֶת-כָּל-עֲוֹנוֹת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְאֶת-כָּל-פְּשָׁעֵיהֶם לְכָל-חַטָּאתָם; וְנָתַן אֹתָם עַל-רֹאשׁ הַשְּׁעִיר, וְשַׁלַּח בְּיַד אִישׁ עֹתִי הַמִּדְבָּרָה. וְנָשָׂא הַשְּׁעִיר עָלָיו אֶת-כָּל-עֲוֹנוֹתָם, אֶל-אֶרֶץ גִּזְרָה; וְשַׁלַּח אֶת-הַשְּׁעִיר, בַּמִּדְבָּר.

He (Aharon) shall take the two goats, and set them before Hashem at the door of the tent of meeting. And Aharon shall cast lots upon the two goats: one lot for Hashem, and the other lot for Azazel... But the goat on which the lot fell for Azazel, shall be set alive before Hashem, to make atonement over him, to send him away for Azazel into the wilderness... And Aharon shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Yisrael, and all their transgressions, even all their sins, and he shall put them upon the head of the goat, and shall send him away by the hand of the appointed person into the wilderness. And the goat shall bear upon him all their iniquities to a land which is cut off, and he shall let go the goat in the wilderness.

Whether or not one believes this ritual ever actually happened, or that it happened once upon a time but never will again, or whether this practice will be reinstated when the Temple is rebuilt, the idea remains the same: the Jewish people want to remove their sins very badly, to the point of transferring them physically or metaphysically to another creature. But why go to these lengths? What is the idea behind this? Why is this ritual so central to the *Avodah*?

Sin means, in essence, offending God. It is as if someone who is really important to us has asked us to do something or not to do something and we have ignored the request or the adjuration. When we realize what we have done, we bear the pain of having hurt someone we love. We wish we could start over again and do things differently. So it is with God. If we truly have a relationship with God, we are bothered to distraction when we ignore or violate the word of Hashem. We want to do whatever we can to make up for it. We want to, as it were, transfer our culpability to something else, even a goat, and send it away where we will never have to encounter it again.

We try to repent, that is, to not repeat the same act; we try to pray; we try to treat other people, all of whom are God's children, better in order to make up for hurting God and to once again become close to God. "ותשובה ותפילה וצדקה מעבירין את רע הגזירה" – And repentance, prayer and righteous giving will avert the evilness of the decree." In this formulation, the decree is banishment from intimacy with the Creator.

May this Yom Kippur be one that brings us closer to God, to God's Torah, and to God's children.

*Shabbat Shalom and G'mar Chatimah Tovah.*

May we be sealed for a year filled with health, happiness, peace, and fulfillment for us, for the entire Jewish people, and for our brothers and sisters around the world.

For Discussion:

- Do you think the goat being sent out to the wilderness of Azazel ever really happened? Why or why not?
- How can we make up for having hurt another person this past year? How can we make up for having hurt Hashem this past year? What can we do about these things to make them right?