



TORAH ACADEMY
of Bergen County

קול תורה

Parashiyot Acharei Mot-Kedoshim

13 Iyar 5778

April 28, 2018

Vol. 27 No. 25

THE LESSON OF THE HE-GOAT

by *Rabbi Michael Hoenig*

In Parashat Acharei Mot, Hashem instructs Moshe Rabbeinu about the laws of Yom Kippur and to tell them over to Aharon. Hashem tells Moshe that at the start of Yom Kippur day, the Kohen Gadol would select two he-goats that would provide atonement for the Jewish people. One goat, the Sa'ir LaShem, would be gathered up in holy vessels and brought into the Kodesh in order to serve as a national sin offering. The other goat, the Sa'ir LaAzazeil, would not gain admission into the Kodesh; instead, it would be sent into the desert. In order to determine the status of each goat, the Kohen Gadol would place two lots in a box, one marked "LaShem" and one marked "LaAzazeil." Then, while having one goat to his left and one goat to his right, he would draw one lot with his right hand and place it on the head of the animal at his right, and take the other lot with his left hand and place it on the other goat.

Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch beautifully explains the underlying meaning and depth of this event. There were many similarities between the Sa'ir Lashem and Sa'ir LaAzazeil: The two he-goats were similar in appearance, height, and value (Shevuot 13b). Additionally, at the threshold of the Kodesh HaKodashim, they were identical creatures who ultimately proceeded on two entirely different paths. Lastly, both goats had the possibility of having either status.

Rav Samson Raphael Hirsch continues by saying that the he-goat represents the power of resistance. Each one of us is a Sa'ir that has the ability to resist and oppose the countless demands made on our willpower. Rav Hirsch explains that "it is on the way we use this power that the worthiness or worthlessness of our moral existence depends." We can use this power to attach to Hashem by resisting all external and internal temptations which deviate us from Hashem. This

positive resistance would label us a Sa'ir LaShem. Conversely, we can use our willpower to disobey Hashem and the Mitzvot which He requires us to do, thus labeling us a Sa'ir LaAzazeil.

We live in a temptation-filled world that often times causes people to become like the Sa'ir LaAzazeil. There are also some people who desperately yearn to be free of an evil inclination and have the opportunity to serve Hashem with more ease and comfort. They feel that a life without constant pitfalls would allow them to reach a more elevated existence. However, as we see from the he-goats, this should not be our way of looking at life. Rav Hirsch notes that "the whole height and dignity and worth of human beings lies just in the ability to sin, in the possibility which has been given to him to disobey the will of Hashem." The equal ability to be both a Sa'ir LaShem and a Sa'ir LaAzazeil is the very reason that man can reach exalted heights.

At each and every moment of the day and every stage of life, we have the opportunity to be LaShem or LaAzazeil. The decision to be like the Sa'ir LaShem has meaning and value only because at the same moment, we could have swayed to be like the Sa'ir LaAzazeil. Conversely, the decision to be like the Sa'ir LaAzazeil is a disgrace only because at the same moment, we could have become attached to Hashem. As we reflect on the two different he-goat offerings, we should realize that although it might be tempting to act like the Sa'ir LaAzazeil, we all have the strength and fortitude to consistently lead a life committed to Hashem.

A NAMELESS EXAMPLE

by *Yehoshua Kanarek* ('19)

This week's double Parashah begins with a famously odd opening Pasuk. Many Mefarshim try to solve the mystery of the strange context given in the first Pasuk-- a context that seems only to add salt to Aharon's wounds. His sons had just died, and the first Pasuk of the Parashah does a good job reminding us of the tragedy, when it states: "*VaYidaber Hashem El Moshe Acharei Mot Shenei Benei Aharon Bekorvatam Lifnei Hashem VaYamutu*", "And Hashem spoke to Moshe after the death of Aharon's two sons when they drew near to Hashem" (VaYikra 16:1).

In order to solve the troubling and discomfiting context of the Pasuk, Rashi (Ibid s.v. *VaYidaber*) cites an answer from the Sifri. He explains that the purpose for bringing up the death of Aharon's sons is that of an extra aspect of warning.

Kol Torah would like to thank our graduating editors-in-chief Tani Greengart and Shlomi Helfgot; publication managers Eitan Leff and Avi Roth; and editor Yaakov Zinberg, for all their hard work over the past few years. Without your efforts, Kol Torah would not exist today.

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He puts forth the following image: imagine one doctor told you not to eat cold food and to stay away from cold and moist environments. Such a warning might be successful, but it would not nearly be as successful as a second doctor, who gives the same advice, along with an example. The second doctor might mention a patient who had similar symptoms but still ate cold food against the doctor's orders, thereby resulting in something terrible. The real example justifies and supports the advice, which in turn makes it easier to follow. So too here, Rashi explains, Hashem was about to give the warning to Aharon in the very next Pasuk that he should not enter the Kodesh HaKedashim at any time lest he die. To strengthen His message, Hashem puts this command in the context of the death of Aharon's sons-- a preceding example.

While he accepts the approach of Rashi and the Sifri, the Ramban offers another interpretation. The Ramban is of the approach that the principle of Ein Mukdam UMe'uchar BaTorah is very limited in scope. He believes that almost everything in the Torah happened in the exact order it was written down unless specified otherwise. The Ramban explains that this Pasuk is one of those specified Pesukim. When Hashem commanded Moshe to tell Aharon not to go into the Kodesh HaKedashim at any time, that command was given immediately after the deaths of Aharon's sons, back in Parashat Shemini.

While there are many different approaches given by various Rishonim and Acharonim as to why this specific context is given, a question that is dealt with less often is why are Nadav and Avihu referred to as "*Shenei Bnei Aharon?*" One approach I would like to suggest has to do with the Sheim, or name of a person.

In Kohelet, Shlomo HaMelech (the author) deals extensively with the concept of a person's name, drawing an analogy between a man's name and oil. He also presents a second comparison within the same Pasuk. In addition to a Sheim Tov being better than good oil, so too "*Yom HaMavet MiYom Hivaledo*", "*the day of death more so than the day of birth*" (Kohelet 7:1). Rashi (ibid s.v. *Tov Sheim*), in addition to a few other Mefarshim, explains that the reason for this is that throughout a person's life he develops his name through good deeds and acts of kindness. As such, a person's name should be greater by the day of his death than the day he was born. A man's name is indicative of all the good or bad things that a person might stand for.

In the introductory Pasuk of Acharei Mot, the names of Nadav and Avihu are missing. Perhaps this can be used to further support the approach of Rashi in Kohelet. Had Hashem warned Aharon by using anyone else as an example, it would not have been nearly as effective as when Hashem used his sons. It is for that reason that they are simply referred to as the sons of Aharon. Had the

Torah called them by their names, it would have seemed like Hashem was using them as the examples to show that if such a tragedy could happen to such great people who did great things, then it could happen to Aharon as well. But it is not in the nature of a father to simply find meaning from his son's life simply based on merit. Aharon loved his sons simply because they were his sons. Had Hashem used their names, referencing their merits and deeds, it might have even detracted from the meaning behind Hashem's warning.

It is a shame that not too much is known about the Sheim of either Nadav or Avihu, as the most famous things about them were their deaths and their relation to Aharon. Little is known about either their merits or sins (although there is a Midrash that they told Lashon Hara against Moshe and Aharon, anticipating their deaths so that they might lead the people). Perhaps that is for the better in this context. If, as Rashi says, their deaths were brought up once again specifically to warn Aharon, then bringing up any past merits or sins written in their books would have only been counterproductive, for then Aharon, or anyone else for that matter, could say that they died for other sins, or that they died because Hashem had higher expectations of them. By simply calling them the "Bnei Aharon" and not calling down upon any of their past deeds, Hashem makes sure that others won't judge themselves against their actions, and thereby create false impressions of their own spiritual standings.

LAG BA'OMER: FESTIVITY, MOURNING, & RESPECT

by Eitan Leff ('18)

This coming week we will be celebrating the holiday of Lag Ba'Omer, a festive day situated in the seven mournful weeks, in which we count the Omer. The two main explanations for why we celebrate this unique holiday are that it is the day that Rabi Akiva's students stopped dying, and that it is the Azkarah/Yahrtzeit of Rabi Shimon Bar Yochai.

With regards to the first explanation, the Gemara Yevamot (62b) states that Rabi Akiva's students died in the weeks spanning Pesach and Shavuot, but the Gemara never mentions Lag Ba'Omer. The simple reading of the Gemara is that all of his students died by Shavuot, so why do we celebrate on Lag Ba'Omer? Furthermore, if this was such a great tragedy, why do we celebrate at all?

The Me'iri and the Ba'al HaMa'or were the earliest Halachic authorities to make any mention of Lag Ba'Omer. The Me'iri records a tradition from the Ge'onim that Rabi Akiva's students stopped dying on the thirty third day of the Omer, contrary to the simple understanding of the Gemara. The Sefer HaManhig states, citing the Ba'al HaMa'or, that one

have been a Gilgul (reincarnation) of Pharaoh¹. Torah Academy of Bergen County Talmid Moshe Papier suggests that the king of Nineveh had read of Pharaoh's experiences with Hashem in Mitzrayim and thus vicariously "was Pharaoh"² and learned a vital lesson thereby.

Da'at Mikra

The Da'at Mikra suggests that the reputation of the Jewish prophets had reached Nineveh and therefore Yonah was taken seriously. This seems to be a viable approach, as Chazal (cited by Rashi to Melachim II 9:1) present Yonah as a Talmid of Elisha. Elisha certainly made quite an impression on the leaders of neighboring Aram, such as Chaza'eil, Ben Haddad and Na'aman as is well known to readers of Melachim II. Thus, Yonah might have been riding on the coattails of Elisha's exceptional reputation in the region.

One could question this approach, though, since there was no one (according to Peshuto Shel Mikra, the plain meaning of the text) to vouch for the credibility of Yonah and Yonah had no prior interaction with Assyria and Nineveh to have established credibility with them.

Nikkarim Divrei Emet

I suggested that perhaps we can take our cue from the Gemara (Sotah 9b) which explains why Delilah believed Shimshon's explanation that cutting his hair would eliminate his great strength (Shofetim 16:18). After all, Shimshon had fooled her repeatedly with false explanations of the source of his supernatural abilities.

The Gemara explains that Nikkarim Divrei Emet, truthful words are self-evident. The Rashbam (Bereishit 40:16) takes his cue from this Gemara and uses this principle to explain why the Sar HaOfim realized that Yosef properly interpreted the dream of the Sar HaMashkim.

Similarly, Yonah was so sincere and so authentic that his words and persona made a deep impression on the people of Nineveh. Truly spiritual individuals make an impression even on those who are not tuned in to Jewish spirituality. I recall a relative who was not observant tell me of the deep impression made on him by the following deeply spiritual giants - Rav Yitzchok Cohen Shlita of Yeshiva University, Rav

¹ The more mystically inclined Torah commentaries such as Ramban and Rabbeinu Bachayei embrace the belief in Gigullim whereas the more rationally inclined authorities such as Rav Saadia Gaon and Rambam are less inclined to do so. One may question the application of the Gilgul idea to this context since it is not generally assumed that a Gilgul is actively aware of the events that occurred in his prior lives. On the other hand, perhaps the King of Nineveh might be understood as subconsciously motivated by that which transpired in a prior Gilgul.

² The power in reading lies in vicariously experiencing situations and learning lessons in a safe manner, thereby avoiding the need to repeat the mistakes of the protagonists.

Aharon Lichtenstein zt"l of Yeshivat Har Etzion and Rav Yosef Singer zt"l of the Lower East Side. Indeed, the Bnei Chet recognized Avraham Avinu as Nesi Elokim B'Tocheinu (Bereishit 23:6). Bat Pharaoh recognized that the Shechinah was with baby Moshe (Rashi to Shemot 2:6).

Abarbanel notes that Yonah 3:5 states that the people of Nineveh believed in Hashem and does not state that they believed in Yonah. This conveys the message that they grasped that Yonah was an authentic transmitter of the message of Hashem. It was the authenticity of the Godly message that convinced the people of Nineveh, not the result of a seductive and intoxicating manipulation by a gifted speaker.

A Bold Suggestion - A Manipulation from Hashem

We boldly offer a suggestion based on the approach that Yonah delivered such a short speech in order to sabotage the chances of its success. If this assumption is true then we can apply the principle of "Lamah Zeh Atem Overim Et Pi Hashem V'Hi Lo Titzlach", why are you violating the word of Hashem - it will not work! (Bemidbar 14:41). Outsmarting Hashem never works, in fact it backfires (as is also evident from Shemot 1:12). Perhaps we can explain the astounding Teshuvah of the people of Nineveh as a backfiring of Yonah's to subvert the mission on which Hashem placed him.

Conclusion

However we explain it, Nineveh's Teshuvah stands as an example of a communal Teshuvah that the Jewish people will perform which will initiate the arrival of Mashiach (Devarim 30:1-10 and Rambam Hilchot Teshuvah 7:5). Nineveh's one hundred percent participation sets a powerful example for our people, an important message year round but especially as the day of Yom Kippur draws to a close.

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