

Parashiyot Acharei Mot-Kedoshim

Leviticus 16:1–20:27

May 1, 2020



SUMMARY

The first *parasha* of the double reading, *Acharei Mot*, describes the *Yom Kippur* service performed by the *Kohen Gadol*, the High Priest. The service includes the *Kohen Gadol*'s confessing his own mistakes and harmful behavior and that of the entire Israelite nation.

To mark *Yom Kippur*, there is a lottery selection between two goats that look just like each other. One goat is chosen to be sacrificed by the *kohen* on behalf of the Israelites as a way of admitting that the community has made mistakes. Sometimes--even after we try to take responsibility for our mistakes and make things right--we still feel badly about what we did. We want to make that feeling go away. That is what the other goat is for. For the goat that wasn't sacrificed, the *kohen* put his hands on its head then sent it out into the wilderness, almost like he was sending away the bad feelings people might have had about their mistakes.

The second portion of our double reading, *Kedoshim*, begins with the command to be holy - *kedoshim tihyoo* - *you shall be holy for I, Adonai, your G'd am holy*. The portion contains many *mitzvot* which--if we follow them--can help us act in holy ways. These include respecting our parents, keeping *Shabbat*, dealing honestly with our neighbors, not gossiping, not standing by and doing nothing when someone is being hurt, and loving our neighbors as ourselves.

From Our Commentators:

R" Isaac ben Moses Arama (c. 1420 – 1494) **Akedat Yitzchak 63:1**

There is an element of chance concerning which person turns into a sinner, since natural endowments have a great deal to do with the likelihood of someone being able to overcome such strikes against him as he has been born with. Hence, if the he-goat for the *Azzazel* becomes the scapegoat by means of the lottery, we might all breathe a sigh of relief and say "here but for the grace of G'd, go I." For that reason, the *halachah*, Jewish law, requires that the two he-goats must look so totally alike, that they are indistinguishable from one another.

FOR DISCUSSION:

- 1) Why do you think the *kohen* was told to choose the fates of each goat by lot instead of just deciding for himself which goat would be sacrificed and which was sent away into the wilderness?
- 2) Why do you think the *kohen* put his hands on the head of the goat to be sent away while he described all the mistakes and bad things that he and his family and the Israelites did that year? Why not just use his words and not put his hands on the goat's head?
- 3) Why do you think that the *kohen* would hand off the goat he just put his hands on to another person and have that person take the goat out to the wilderness? Why might it not be the *kohen's* job to take the goat to *Azazel* himself?

