

May 1, 2020

Parashat Acharei Mot-Kedoshim

Leviticus 6:1-8:36

Taught By:

Eli & Jonah



SUMMARY

The first *parasha* of this week's 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 tihiyoo* - *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.



JONAH: If the 2 goats look so much alike, maybe G!d doesn't want the *kohen* to have to worry about choosing the best goat for each purpose, so G!d gives the *kohen* a clear way of deciding so that he won't have to worry about choosing.

ELI: The *Kohen* still has to pick--from all the goats available--2 goats that look alike and would be appropriate as "closeness offerings" to G!d, so the *kohen* does have some serious choosing to do. Using a lottery to help choose which goat is for which purpose could be G!d's way of partnering in the process of making things right between G!d and the Israelites on *Yom Kippur*. It might be like saying that G!d will make sure that each of the 2 goats is used in the right way.

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?

ELI: All of our actions start, first, with the ideas in our heads. Maybe the *kohen* puts his hands on the head of the goat before talking about all the mistakes so that he can imagine all these words going into the head of the goat and then being carried all throughout the goat's body.

JONAH: When my dad puts his hands on our heads on Friday night to give us a blessing it feels holy and exciting and special. It gets my attention and it makes me look forward to what is coming next. Maybe the *kohen* puts his hands on the goat's head because he is doing something holy and special and wants the goat to pay attention.



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?

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?

ELI: Maybe this is just not the *kohen's* job. It is interesting that the work of *Yom Kippur*--of making things right between the Israelites and G!d--isn't just the work of one person, but of different people with different skills.

JONAH: Yes! Also, maybe--since the *kohen* is confessing all of the sins and mistakes of his own family and of everyone in the community--he needs someone who doesn't know all of those things and isn't so connected with them to lead the goat to the right place and send the goat away.