

Seder HaAvodah

(the *Avodah* Service)

*Working out the origins and
contemporary meaning of Yom Kippur*

A 6-session study guide

By Rabbi Leon A. Morris

An Introduction

Babylonian Talmud, Menachot 110a

["See, I intend to build a House for the name of the Lord my God; I will dedicate it to Him for making incense offering of sweet spices in His honor, for the regular rows of bread, and for the morning and evening burnt offerings on Sabbaths, new moons, and festivals,] as is Israel's duty forever." (II Chronicles 2:3) But how can this be described as "Israel's duty forever"? After all, the Temple and its rites have ended in the aftermath of the Temple's destruction.

Rav Gidel said in the name of Rav: This refers to the altar built [in heaven], and Michael, the great ministering angel stands and offers a sacrifice upon it.

Rabbi Yochanan said: This refers to the students who engage in studying the laws of sacrifice. The verse regards them as though the Temple were built in their days.

The highlight of the traditional Yom Kippur liturgy is *Seder HaAvodah* (the *Avodah* service), a poetic recollection and literary recreation of the rites of Yom Kippur performed by the High Priest during the days of the First and Second Temples. Its words recall the approach of the High Priest into the **Holy of Holies** and the sending off of the scapegoat into the wilderness. With the destruction of the Temple, sacrifices ceased, and the ancient rite of Yom Kippur came to an end. The sole means for effectuating national atonement—and ensuring that God's presence would remain with the people—was suddenly gone. The Rabbis responded by building new religious paradigms: repentance (*tshuvah*), prayer (*tefilah*), and charity (*tsedakah*)—all of them dependent on human initiative—were the substitution for achieving atonement. Yet, the original ritual of Yom Kippur, with its religious drama culminating in national atonement, could not be entirely consigned to ancient history. *Seder HaAvodah* as liturgy is one example among many—of how the Rabbis adapted to their new and radically different reality, and how words came to replace the very acts they described. Drawing heavily from the Mishnah's detailed description of the Yom Kippur ritual, the editors of the *Machzor* shaped a liturgical substitution for the actual performance of the ritual.

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For about 1,500 years, the *Avodah* service of Yom Kippur has provided an historic link between the most ancient elements of Yom Kippur and our contemporary post-Temple observance. Recited in synagogues that replaced the service of the ancient Temple, the *Avodah* service provides a window into the past. It reminds worshippers of the origins of this most sacred day and serves to underscore both elements of continuity and discontinuity between that time and our contemporary practice. The creative genius of the Jewish people is evident in the various *piyutim* (liturgical poems) that were written over the centuries to frame the narrative of the High Priest's preparations and entrance into the **Holy of Holies**. These powerful ceremonies of Yom Kippur loomed large in the imagination of the Jewish people. While the experience of praying in our synagogues is vastly different from the Temple rites of Yom Kippur, this liturgy links these two experiences across time and space.

Introduction

Despite the centrality of the *Avodah* in the traditional High Holy Day liturgy, there has been a great deal of discomfort with this service since the earliest days of liturgical reform in Europe and America. This uneasy relationship is part of a larger ambivalence of liberal Jewish movements toward the sacrificial system. The attitudes regarding the *Avodah* service are an extension of some of the earliest ideological stands of the Reform movement in Europe and America—a negation of any hope of rebuilding the Temple and restoring the sacrificial system.

One of the first liturgical reforms in the 19th century was the removal of all references to the Temple and sacrifices. **Musaf** (a service specifically recalling the sacrificial system) was eliminated or significantly altered from Shabbat and festival services. On Yom Kippur—the *Avodah* service was either radically altered or excised altogether, depending on the community and its Machzor. Moreover, a substitute morning Torah reading was inserted in place of the traditional Torah reading of Leviticus 16, which describes the sacrificial service to be performed by Aaron and subsequent High Priests. More than a century later, there is little or no relationship between our contemporary observance of Yom Kippur and its historical origins. The language of Yom Kippur—terms of reference, vocabulary, concepts, and ideas—have been lost to our liberal communities. A language that could lend itself so easily to metaphor and poetry is gone.

And yet, the recent “post-modern” turn has deeply affected our religious lives. There has been for some time a renewed interest in symbols and ritual. There is a greater openness by many toward the very experiences that were now dismissed as “primitive.” There is a recognition that reason is not the sole criteria for determining what may have religious meaning.

What can be done? For many liberal Jews, reinstating the *Avodah* service is not an option. Sacrifice is an anathema. Those ancient forms of worship seem primitive and outmoded. The notion that God is to be found in one central place is objectionable. The burning of animals in service to God seems unnecessarily cruel. And yet, there is another possibility. This guide provides an alternative way of engaging the *Avodah*. What the editors of the traditional Machzor accomplished through liturgy is ours to create through study.

Why an *Avodah* Study Guide?

Reconstructing the *Avodah* service as a study experience provides a new model for rescuing those texts and parts of the tradition that have been previously rejected for ideological, philosophical or aesthetic reasons. This study guide is intended to provide one paradigm of how study can be used to reclaim those difficult texts with creativity, interpretation and an embrace of dialectic. Texts and liturgy centered on the Temple and sacrifice represent a significant degree of classical Jewish sources. Our age opens us up to new possibilities of meaning that such texts can have for us, and calls us to develop approaches and methods of interpretation that can treat such texts seriously: neither forfeiting the opportunity to learn from them, nor appropriating them uncritically.

There are many compelling reasons for introducing a study experience centered on the Avodah into our preparation for (and observance of) Yom Kippur.

Educational: There is much to be learned from the sacrificial system and particularly *Seder HaAvodah*. These ancient practices present notions of relationship, closeness and distance, gift-giving, and mystery. *Seder HaAvodah* contains a language whose terms reappear throughout much of Jewish literature.

Introduction

Historical: Many contemporary Jews lack an historical context for their observance of Yom Kippur. Yom Kippur, while perhaps personally meaningful, is devoid of Jewish memory. The recollection of the *Avodah* ritual can allow for inserting oneself into the mythic historical narrative of the Jewish people.

Communal: In addition to deepening one's personal experience of Yom Kippur, an engagement with texts about the *Avodah* can strengthen the bonds that connect individual Jews to the collective. At the heart of the *Avodah* experience is the notion of communal atonement. The purpose of the ritual was to cleanse the Temple of the sins of the entire nation that have caused the Sanctuary to become polluted. The nation waits with great anticipation to see the High Priest emerge alive from the **Holy of Holies**, and to witness the scarlet thread indicating Israel's iniquity turn white, a sign of forgiveness. By relating to a narrative in which forgiveness and renewal is mediated for the entire nation of Israel, these texts provide a counter-balance to radical individualism which predominates American life. It provides a powerful example of a spirituality that is focused not on the individual, but rather on the entire nation.

Study and Prayer

This study guide is rooted in the notion that study is the equivalent of prayer. This is hardly a new idea. The **Beit Midrash** and the Synagogue are parallel institutions of rabbinic Judaism.

Study is not only as central as prayer in Jewish life, it also parallels all mitzvot of the Torah.

While, typically, prayer is referred to as *avodah shebalev*, other rabbinic sources define study as **avodah**—"The Eternal God took the man and placed him in the garden of Eden, to till it and tend it *l'ovdah u'l'shomrah*. (Genesis 2:15). Interpreting this as the ideal instructions for all of Adam's descendents, a midrash (Yalkut Shimoni 247) explains "*l'ovdah*" refers to study, and "*l'shomrah*" refers to the performance of mitzvot.

Study is not only as central as prayer in Jewish life, it also parallels all mitzvot of the Torah. Study itself is both existential and performative. As evidenced from the passage of Menachot 110a (cited at the beginning of this introduction), the Rabbis posit a special relationship between study and performance. While this Talmudic passage addresses the topic of sacrifice—which can no longer be performed—we should be cautious in applying this notion too broadly. We are hardly prepared to say that actions themselves, and the performance of mitzvot more specifically, may be made exempt by study about those practices. Yet, this notion urges us to consider the ways in which classic Jewish study is, in itself, a kind of action, akin to prayer. Study, as the rabbis conceived of it, is not just "studying in order to do." Rather, it is a kind of doing in itself. While we think of "doing" as with our hands, there is also a kind of "doing" with our minds and with our words. Thinking and discussing are both forms of action.

Seder HaAvodah is an example of the porous boundaries that exist between prayer and study. The liturgy of *Seder HaAvodah* when recited in the synagogue is not only ritual performance, but also a study experience. Its step-by-step narrative of the High Priest's actions helps the worshipper experience the ritual of the Temple on Yom Kippur and simultaneously teaches the congregation about practices long discarded. Professor Moshe Greenberg has written about the way in which symbols enable the meaningful element of reality—the "transcendent"—to be expressed and shared with others. Such symbols include "objects, terms, stories, texts, or behaviors, whose purpose is to point to a reality beyond them." (*Visions of Jewish Education*, Cambridge University Press, 2003) Engagement in this symbolic realm is shared by both ritual as well as study. Study can be more than intellectual engagement. Through words and narrative, study has the ability to convey a sense of the transcendent.

Goals and Objectives

This study guide seeks to achieve several diverse goals:

- This guide aims to bring a wider spectrum of our community into the world of Jewish study. Many American Jews formally express their sense of belonging to the Jewish community and its institutions through experiences of communal prayer on the High Holy Days. While prayer is but one form of communal Jewish expression, it is the primary focus of these times, despite the ambivalence many of those infrequent synagogue attendees have with prayer. A meaningful experience of Jewish study on those occasions can provide a fuller and more diverse encounter with Jewish life.

It may be that for our highly intellectual and secularly knowledgeable community, study is a far more effective mode of engagement than are worship services. This guide can be used either to supplement the liturgical experience of the High Holy Days or to serve as a substitute for those experiences. It attempts to create experiences of study which are—“spiritually meaningful”—and which can address the full needs of spiritual seekers outside of the realm of prayer and ritual. The guide is designed to be accessible to students irrespective of their prior knowledge. Explanatory notes and a glossary provide the necessary tools for engagement even among those with little background.

- Second, this guide aims to elevate the meaning and significance of Yom Kippur itself. There is a great deal to be gained by providing a fuller historical context for Yom Kippur, and connecting our individual experiences to the larger collective. The rich and elaborate ceremonies of the *Avodah* in the days of the Temple may enhance our own contemporary experience of Yom Kippur, providing us with symbols and language which can help us connect more deeply to this day.
- Our sense of Jewish peoplehood is strengthened by reawakening ourselves to the ways in which Yom Kippur has always been a means for national atonement. While contemporary Jews largely think of repentance as a privatized activity, the sources within this guide highlight the communal experience of this day. In addition, the guide is structured in such a way as to build community through the act of study. While the sources within this guide could be studied by individuals, the design and optimal use is with a group of learners. The questions in each section invite participants to discuss questions with one another, to offer opinions and to share insights from their own personal life experience.
- This guide further attempts to develop a new way in which liberal Jews can relate to troubling and problematic texts. It urges us to engage such texts and champions the place of discussion, disagreement and analysis. While a wholesale rejection of such texts and their exclusion from the prayer book and study sources marked the approach of earlier times, we approach such classic sources with an awareness of the context in which they emerged, and with an openness toward asking what can be learned from them today.

*Take with you words, and turn to the Eternal; say:
Forgive all iniquity, and receive us graciously;
so will we offer the words of our lips instead of calves.*

(Hosea 14:3)

The Heart and the Mind

From an educational standpoint, this guide has both cognitive and affective objectives. The affective and experiential goals are implicit in the description above. It seeks to connect those studying it with Jewish history, Jewish imagination, and Jewish peoplehood. But this guide is designed in a way to maximize the cognitive impact as well. Each page of the guide presents words, concepts, and ideas that will enhance and deepen the Jewish lives of those who reflect and respond to them. Among the most basic examples are the notions of Temple, sacrifice, sin, and atonement. Through the study of the *Avodah*, participants will encounter key concepts that inform not only Yom Kippur, but also all of Jewish life. Beyond this, the guide shows how the language of Temple and sacrifice has a life that extends far beyond antiquity to the present day.

How to Use This Guide

As you make your way throughout the guide, you will find explanatory materials, textual quotes, and guiding questions to aid you in your study of *Seder HaAvodah*. Each chapter begins with an excerpted section of *Seder HaAvodah* from the Yom Kippur *machzor*. This text is meant to serve as a gateway into a larger area of learning, rather than to be focused on individually for intensive study. As you proceed from chapter to chapter, take a few moments to read through the introductory material and then let that text guide you through the rest of the chapter's material.

Each chapter is sub-divided into separate sections, each with a particular topic, selection of texts and guiding questions. Each section may be studied as a stand-alone lesson, or within a wider study of the entire chapter. Let the guiding questions aid you in your exploration of the materials at hand, but do not let them confine you to particular areas of discussion.

Chapter 1

Sacrifice: Why and How

1.1 **How Did We Get Here?**

1.2 **The Very First Sacrifice**

1.3 **Building a House for God**

1.4 **Which Came First: The Temple or the Calf?**

There are endless possible ways to begin telling a story. The editors of the **machzor** sought to create a liturgy that would tell the story of the ancient rites of Yom Kippur that came to an end with the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE. Although this ceremony could no longer be performed, they wanted to remember it and to reflect on its significance in the synagogue. They called this service *Avodah*, the term that had been used for the sacrificial worship in the Temple. They chose to begin the story of the Yom Kippur ritual from the very beginning, literally. They began the *Avodah* Service with a *piyut* that starts from the Creation of the world and then traces the key moments in Jewish sacred history, reaching a climax with the establishment of the rites of Yom Kippur at the time of Aaron and his sons. This *piyut* serves as a preamble to the detailed description of the Yom Kippur ritual. It is a Jewish “walk down memory lane,” providing a context for sacrifice, scapegoat, and the priestly establishment.

The oldest (and shortest) *piyut* of *Seder HaAvodah* is *Atah Barata* (“You Created”) and dates from the fourth or fifth century CE. This *piyut* serves as an introduction to our study.

The *piyut* recalls the creation of the world and God’s first interaction with humans. Just as the *piyut* locates the Yom Kippur ritual in the context of what came before it, explaining how the institution of sacrifices emerged, so too do we begin our study of the *Avodah* service exploring the origin of sacrifice itself.

Take a moment to study the text below before continuing on to the next section.

Ata Barata

ידודן מלאכיך בראותם אותו נעקר ובקומו לשחטו כלם צעקו.	אתה בראת את כל העולם כולו ברוב שכל כוננתו בחסד וברחמים.
כה יהיה זרעך לאביב ברכת ואם זה נשחט איכן היא בריכה. לאן רציתה למלטו מן האש ומן המאכלת לנינו הצלתה.	בחכמה והשכל שמים עשיתה ורקעת ארץ בתבו- נה ובדעת. גם ממנה אדם יצרתה וצאצאיו הירביתה כחול הים.
ממנו הוצאת ידיד מבטן זה יעקב שקראתו בכבוד. נחת רוח מבניו מצאתה לכן מה שבראתה כנגדים בראתה. סגולה הבדלתה מבין בניו זה לוי שלישי לבטן עיניך שמתה יריכו זה אהרון ראש קדושיך.	דור הנפיעלים מאסו דבריך וגם אמרו לך סור ממנו. האריתה אותם את רוב כעסיך ובמה שחירפוך בהם דנתם.
פרשת לו באיזה יבוא אל הקדש והודעתו לפניך מה יעשה ביום הסליחה.	ועמד מהם שריד כמעט זה נח שקראת צדיק זך וישר מצאצאיו הוצתה זה אברהם שאהבך בכל לבבו.
צדק הלבשתו בגדיו כשלג וליסוף ארבעה יתר מאחיו.	חביתך הודעת לכל באי חלד ולמאה שנה נתתה לו פרי בטן.
קדשתו כקדושת שפריך כי הוא מרצה עוונות עמך.	טרם יגדל אותו נסיתה באמרך לו העליהו לפני לעולה.
ראש עשיתו לצאצאי אב המון וקצין לשלש זרעו.	
שמות שבטיך על שתי כתפיו שמתה שבניסתו לפניך יזכרו לטובה. תמורת כפרה לבניו הודעתה שיעשו לפניך כיוצ בו.	

[TRANSLATION]

You created the entire world with great intelligence

You established it in love and mercy.

In wisdom and intelligence.

You made the heavens and spread out the earth with understanding and knowledge.

Also from it You formed Adam and You caused his descendants to thrive like the sands of the sea.

The generation for **Nephilim** rejected your word; they also said to You, "Go away from us."

You showed them the magnitude of Your anger and by that which they vilified You You dealt with them.

Then there arose among them a small remnant: this is Noah whom you called "righteous."

From his descendants You produced a pure and upright man: Abraham, who loved you with all his heart.

You announced Your devotion to all who come into the world and at one hundred years You gave him the fruit of the womb.

Before he grew up You tested him when You said to him, "Offer [Isaac] before Me as a burnt offering."

Your angels became agitated when they saw him bound; when [Abraham] arose to slaughter him, they all cried out:

"So shall you descendants be' is how You blessed his father, if this one is slaughtered how can it be a blessing?" So You decided to spare him from the fire and from the knife You saved his offspring.

From [Isaac] you produced a beloved from the womb: this is Jacob whom You called firstborn.

You found comfort in his children so You created what you created for their sake.

You distinguished a treasure from among his children: this is Levi the third from the womb

You looked favorably on those who came forth from this loins: this is Aaron the first holy man.

You specified to him with what he should enter the shrine and informed him of what he should do before You on the Day of Pardoning.

You clothed him in righteousness in garments white as snow and added four more than his brothers'.

You sanctified him as you sanctified Your seraphim for he appeases (You for) the sins of Your people.

You made him a chief for the descendants of the father of a multitude and an officer for the third seed.

The names of Your tribes You placed on this two shoulders so that when he entered before You they could be remembered for good.

As a substitute for atonement you informed his sons so that they might serve before you following his example.

In all cultures, reciprocal cycles of gift-giving establishes and strengthens the relationship between individuals. Sacrifice might be seen likewise as an attempt to achieve greater closeness to God through the presentation of gifts.

Sacrifices take many forms—flour, wine, as well as a variety of animals (rams, sheep, goats, doves, etc.). Animal sacrifice involves an aspect of violence (slaughter) dependant upon the slaughter of that animal. The blood of the animal plays a central role in the ritual, and is itself seen as a cleansing agent for sin. The elements of violence and death in sacrifice have led many to suggest that sacrifice provides a healthy sublimation for the human impulse toward violence. The impulse is directed toward higher ends that result in greater closeness between God and humanity, and by extension between human beings.

Yet, the story of the very first sacrifice does not work out well. It concludes with violence being perpetrated rather than sublimated. That story, as we shall see, raises many questions. What we know is that there is a relationship between sacrifice and our life in world of violence and death.

Sacrifice may be an attempt through the presentation of gifts to establish a sense of closeness with God in a world that is filled with violence and death.

Genesis Chapter 4

א וְהָאָדָם יָדַע אֶת-חַוָּה אִשְׁתּוֹ וַתְּהַרְל וַתֵּלֶד אֶת-קַיִן וַתֹּאמֶר קָנִיתִי אִישׁ אֶת-יְהוָה: ב וַתִּסֹּף לָלֶדֶת
אֶת-אָחִיו אֶת-הָבֶל וַיְהִי-הֶבֶל נֹעַם צֹאן וְקַיִן הָיָה עֹבֵד אֲדָמָה: ג וַיְהִי מִקֵּץ יָמִים וַיָּבֵא קַיִן מִפְּרִי
הָאֲדָמָה מִנְחָה לַיהוָה: ד וְהָבֶל הֵבִיא גַם-הוּא מִבְּכֹרוֹת צֹאנוֹ וּמִחִלְבָּהּ וַיִּשַׁע יְהוָה אֶל-הָבֶל
וְאֶל-מִנְחָתוֹ: ה וְאֶל-קַיִן וְאֶל-מִנְחָתוֹ לֹא שָׁעָה וַיַּחַר לְקַיִן מְאֹד וַיִּפְּלוּ פָּנָיו: ו וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל-קַיִן
לָמָּה חָרָה לָךְ וְלָמָּה נָפְלוּ פָּנֶיךָ: ז הֲלוֹא אִם-תֵּיטִיב שְׂאֵת וְאִם לֹא תֵיטִיב לִפְתַּח חַטָּאת רֹבֵץ
וְאֵלֶיךָ תְּשׁוּקָתוֹ וְאַתָּה תִּמְשָׁל-בּוֹ: ח וַיֹּאמֶר קַיִן אֶל-הָבֶל אָחִיו וַיְהִי בַּהֲיוֹתָם בַּשָּׂדֶה וַיִּקָּם קַיִן
אֶל-הָבֶל אָחִיו וַיַּהַרְגֵהוּ:

[TRANSLATION]

1. And the man knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bore Cain, and said, I have acquired a man from the Lord.
2. And she also bore his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground.
3. And in time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering to the Lord.
4. And Abel also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat of it. And the Lord had respect for Abel and for his offering;
5. But for Cain and for his offering he did not have respect. And Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell.
6. And the Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry and why is your countenance fallen?"
7. If you do well, shall you not be accepted? and if you do not well, sin lies at the door. And to you shall be his desire, and yet you may rule over him."
8. And Cain talked with Abel his brother; and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother, and slew him.

Comment

The midrash explains that Cain gave from the worst of his produce, while Abel gave from the best of his flock.

Sacrifice and Gift

Professor Moshe Halbertal, drawing upon the work of Marcel Mauss, explains that with the acceptance of sacrifice, one enters into a reciprocal cycle of gifts. Solidarity with God is established through this exchange.

Moshe Halbertal, An unpublished essay on sacrifice and violence.

“The first account of sacrifice has its source in spontaneous giving from the produce of each of the brothers to God. It marks a gesture, which manifests a complex mix of gratitude, acknowledgment, and more important, the expectation that the reception of the gift will establish the ongoing continuity of the bounty. The story postulates an essential connection between rejection and sacrifice; it is a risk inherent in that act. Why Cain’s offering was rejected is a mystery, and the different explanations that have been proposed for this fact in the scholarly literature are inadequate. The text doesn’t provide any substantive reason and it ought to stay this way; it is essential to this form of rejection that it is unexplainable, as if nothing could be done to either predict it or correct it.”

“In gifts offered from an inferior to superior the term “minchah” will be used, to stress the fact that the superior has the privilege of rejecting the gift. The giver, by bringing forward or laying down, is merely presenting something before the future beneficiary. His superior will take the next step, either to reject or accept what was laid before him...In the human-divine relationship the divine privilege to reject is rooted in the fact that the sacrifice is an actual act of returning rather than giving. God is entitled, as the one who gave the produce in the first place, to reject its return.”

Sacrifice and Violence: Two Views

Richard Rubenstein, in *After Auschwitz*, critiques the modern discomfort with sacrifices. The Holocaust, he says, proved that the potential for violence in the modern period is no less than it has ever been in human history. Lest we dismiss the notion of sacrifice as primitive, we may consider sacrifice as a proper channeling for the ever-present motive of violence in human life.

Richard Rubenstein, “Atonement and Sacrifice in Contemporary Jewish Liturgy,” *After Auschwitz: Radical Theology and Contemporary Judaism (1966)*

“In sacrifice, there is a tragic intersection of contradictory motives. It is a very potent though altogether non-verbal teacher of the limits of human moral possibilities. Those who object to the retention of the sacrificial mode of religious life are quite correct in pointing out that the sacrificial act, when actually committed, is a violent and bloody deed. Even when it is committed only verbally, the emotional overtones of violence are not entirely lost. Those who reject sacrifice would remove mankind from occasions for violence, especially within the domain of the sacred. The sacrificial act is one in which a life is taken away in all innocence. That it is an animal life does not make the deed less distressing, as anyone knows who has witnessed the death of an animal. Another element that makes the death of the victim so distressing is the historical knowledge that the animal is a surrogate and that the real intended victim was originally a human being of pre-eminent importance to the community. In the very act of seeking an end to guilt, the community commits a violent act which is but a thinly disguised surrogate for its real desire, which is both to end crime and to continue its commission. Promethean self-assertion and penitent submission awesomely interact. With dramatic force which no conceptualization can match, the terrible lesson is borne in on the community that it has only the choice of controlled, regulated violence or irrational and uncontrolled violence. In sacrifice, guilt is partially overcome by its dramatic limitation. It is never done away with entirely.”

Alternatively, Halbertal reads the story of Cain and Abel as a rejection of the notion that violence is properly sublimated through the institution of sacrifice.

“The source of violence is in the rejection from the sacrificial bond, the exclusion from the cycle of the gift. Because Cain’s gift was rejected, he was excluded from the most meaningful bond. He brought forward his gift showing his desire to take part, and he was slapped in the face, annihilated. Having a gift rejected is far worse than not being the recipient of a gift. The one who doesn’t receive a gift while someone else has received one, is excluded from a cycle to which he didn’t show any initial desire to belong. The rejection of a gift on the other hand is a harsher form of exclusion. It is an actual dejection, not only a form of ignoring. Cain’s way of asserting his presence is through the act of violence. He destroyed the bond which he was excluded from, and made his weight felt again. The response to being rejected from joining the cycle of bounty from what constitutes being itself might be the deepest element in violence. The first murder was not only motivated by jealousy, it came from an acute response to banishment and isolation. As a reflection on violence the following point becomes clear. *The exclusion from the possibility of giving is a deeper source of violence than the deprivation that results from not getting.*”

Discussion Questions:

1. Why introduce the notion of sacrifice with such a tragic story?
2. What do you make of God’s rejection of Cain’s sacrifice (putting aside the midrash’s explanation)?
3. Which explanation of sacrifice speaks most to you—sacrifice as gift or sacrifice as a sublimation of violence?
4. In the “debate” between Halbertal and Rubenstein, with regard to sacrifice and violence, which argument do you find convincing?
5. What is one idea that could be drawn from the notion of sacrifice that could speak to our contemporary situation?
6. Share an experience of gift-giving that deepened a relationship, and another experience of gift-giving that resulted in distance between the giver and receiver.

Architecture is the reaching out for the truth.

–Louis Kahn

For the early part of biblical history, sacrifices could be offered anywhere. Noah, Abraham and Moses offer sacrifices to God all in different places. After the revelation at Mount Sinai, God commands the people of Israel to construct a portable sanctuary—literally “a dwelling place” for God—to serve as sole locus for sacrifice. The elements of the **Mishkan** are described in great detail—the exact measurement, the building materials and the various vessels and instruments that are to be used in its ritual. With the establishment of the Mishkan, sacrifice moved from a spontaneous and unregulated act to a fixed and obligatory ritual. The Mishkan became the paradigm for the Temple in Jerusalem built by King Solomon.

Building a house for God is theologically problematic. God cannot be contained in any space. A non-corporeal God does not need a home. Furthermore, if we imagined a home for God, we might think of the heavens, a more perfect, peaceful and thereby appropriate home for God. On a personal level as well, God often seems so absent from our world. The **Mishkan** can be seen perhaps as a response to the question of how God can live in a world of violence and death.

Exodus 25:8

וַעֲשׂוּ לִי מִקְדָּשׁ וְשָׁכַנְתִּי בְתוֹכָם:

And let them make Me a Sanctuary that I may dwell among them.

Commentators note that the verse should logically read, “and I shall dwell in it” since the subject is the sanctuary. Rather the text says “among them.” What significance does this have?

[TRANSLATION]

Abравanel on Teruma (page 243)

It is explained that God's intention in the creation of the mishkan and its vessels was so that through the means of holiness and preparation the Godly presence would cling to the midst of Israel, and would not be prevented by the evil of the desert land the inferiority of its region. They benefited the service of the **Shechina** among them in order that divine providence and protection would cling to them, and so that they would not think that God abandoned the earth and so that they will not be like the rest of the nations on their lands and reject the notion that God knows and directs details and metes out to humans according to their ways and rewards the fruits of their actions. The leaders among their thinkers derived that it is not possible to claim that God is concerned with individual actions, but rather with a sense and material power and that His existence is ruled by materials and that He doesn't know details and that there is no providence. And they claim that His throne is in heaven and he is far from humanity in ideas and reality.

In order to remove these false faith claims from the hearts of the children of Israel, He commanded that they make for Him a Tabernacle holy and dedicated as though He Himself dwelled among them so that this nation would believe that God lives in their midst and that his highest providence is bound to them. And this is the matter of "and I shall dwell among the children of Israel,"

אברבנאל תרומה שמות כה

הנה התבאר שהיתה כונתו יתברך במעשה המשכן וכליו כדי שתדבק באמצעות קדושתו והכנתו השכינה האלהית בקרב ישראל ולא ימנעה רוע ארץ המידבר ופחיתות מחוזו והיו התועלת בשרות השכינה ביניהם שתדבק בהם השגחת הש"י ושמירתו, ושלא יחשבו שעזב ה את הארץ ולא יהיו כשאר העמים בארצותם לגוייהם שהיו מכחישים ידיעת הש"י בפרטים והשגחתו בהם לתת לאיש כדרכיו וכפרי מעלליו והגדולים שבחכמים גזירו שא"א שיושגו העיני הפרטיים אלא בחוש ובכח הגשמי והיתיותו ית משולל מכל גשמות לא ידע הפרטים ולא ישגיח בהם ויאמרו שבשמים כסאו הוא מרוחק מבני אדם במעלה ומציאות.

וכדי להסיר מלבבות בני ישראל האמונות הכוזבות האלה צוה שיעשי לו משכן קדש ומקודש כאלו הוא יתברך בתוכם שיאמנו עם זה כי אל חי בקרבם והשגחתו העליונה דבקה עמהם וזה עינין ושכינתי בתוך בני ישראל והתהלכתי בתוכם השוכן אתם בתוך טומאתם שהוא כולו משה ומליצה להשראת? שכינתו ולידבוק השגחתו בהם באמצעות ההכנות והקדשות אשר יהיו שמה.

(Exodus 29:45) “And I will walk among you” (Lev. 26:12) and “the One who dwells with you in the midst of your impurity.” (Leviticus 16:16) It is entirely a parable and poetic phrase for divine inspiration and to cling to His providence in them by preparatory and holy means which are there.

כִּי הָאֱמָנָם יֵשֵׁב אֱלֹהִים עַל־הָאָרֶץ הֲנֵה הַשָּׁמַיִם וְשָׁמַיִם הַשָּׁמַיִם לֹא יִכְלְכֹלֹךְ אִף כִּי־הַבַּיִת הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר בָּנִיתִי: וּפָנִיתְךָ אֶל־תְּפִלַּת עַבְדְּךָ וְאֶל־תְּחִנָּתוֹ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי לְשִׁמְעֵךָ אֶל־הַרְנָה וְאֶל־הַתְּפִלָּה אֲשֶׁר עַבְדְּךָ מִתְּפִלֵּל לְפָנֶיךָ הַיּוֹם: לִהְיוֹת עֵינֶיךָ פְּתוּחֹת אֶל־הַבַּיִת הַזֶּה לַיְלָה וַיּוֹם אֶל־הַמָּקוֹם אֲשֶׁר אָמַרְתָּ יְהוָה שְׁמִי שָׁם לְשִׁמְעֵךָ אֶל־הַתְּפִלָּה אֲשֶׁר יִתְּפִלֵּל עַבְדְּךָ אֶל־הַמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה: וְשָׁמַעְתָּ אֶל־תְּחִנָּת עַבְדְּךָ וְעַמְּךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר יִתְּפִלְלוּ אֶל־הַמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה וְאֵתָה תִשְׁמַע אֶל־מְקוֹם שְׁבִתְךָ אֶל־הַשָּׁמַיִם וְשָׁמַעְתָּ וְסָלַחְתָּ:

[TRANSLATION]

But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, the heavens and heaven of heavens cannot contain you; how much less this house that I have built? Yet have regard for the prayer of your servant, and for his supplication, O Lord my God, to listen to the cry and to the prayer, which Your servant prays before You today; That Your eyes may be open toward this house night and day, toward the place of which you have said, “My name shall be there;” that you may listen to the prayer which Your servant shall make toward this place. And listen to the supplication of your servant, and of your people Israel, when they shall pray toward this place; and hear You in heaven your dwelling place; and when You hear, forgive.

Discussion Questions:

1. What does “sacred space” mean to you? What makes it “sacred”? Is it something “real” or symbolic?
2. Abravanel states that God commanded the construction of the Tabernacle “as though He Himself dwelled among them.” What do you make of his use of the phrase “as though”? How does his explanation correspond to the description in the Torah?
3. What for you would represent the notion that God has not abandoned the earth?

In the previous section, we explored the ways in which the **Mishkan** represents the idea that God has not abandoned the world. But why would service to a God who is beyond physicality require such a overwhelmingly physical structure?

Many commentators understand there to be a direct relationship between the sin of the golden calf and the building of the **Mishkan**. Even though the Torah itself deals with the instructions for building the Mishkan prior to relaying the story of the golden calf, many midashim and biblical commentators have suggested that the actual order was the reverse: the command to construct the **Mishkan** came only after the sin of the golden calf. To imagine the **Mishkan** as God's response to the people's need for a physical sign of God's presence, and not as the proper way to serve God by design, has tremendous theological import.

וְעָשׂוּ לִי מִקְדָּשׁ וְשִׁכְנָתִי בְּתוֹכְכֶם. אֵימָתִי נֶאֱמָרָה לְמֹשֶׁה הַפָּרָשָׁה הַזֹּאת שֶׁל מִשְׁכַּן בְּיוֹם הַכַּפּוּרִים עֲצָמוֹ, אִף עַל פִּי שְׁפָרְשֵׁת הַמִּשְׁכָּן קוֹדֶמֶת לְמַעֲשֵׂה הָעֵגֶל. אָמַר רַבִּי יְהוּדָה בְּרַבֵּי שְׁלוֹם, אִין מְקַדָּם וּמֵאַחֵר בְּתוֹרָה, שְׁנֵאמַר, נָעוּ מִעֲגֻלְתֶּיהָ לֹא תִדַע, מְטַלְטְלוֹת הֵן שְׁבִילֶיהָ שֶׁל תּוֹרָה וּפְרָשִׁיּוֹתֶיהָ. הוּי, בְּיוֹם הַכַּפּוּרִים נֶאֱמַר לְמֹשֶׁה וְעָשׂוּ לִי מִקְדָּשׁ. מִנִּי? שָׁכֵן עָלֶיהָ מֹשֶׁה בְּשֵׁשׁה בְּסִיּוֹן, וְעָשָׂה אַרְבָּעִים יוֹם וְאַרְבָּעִים לַיְלָה, וְעוֹד עָשָׂה אַרְבָּעִים, וְעוֹד עָשָׂה אַרְבָּעִים, הָרִי מֵאָה וְעֶשְׂרִים. וְאַתָּה מוֹצֵא, שְׁבִיּוֹם הַכַּפּוּרִים נִתְכַּפַּר לָהֶם, וּבּוֹ בְּיוֹם אָמַר לוֹ הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא, וְעָשׂוּ לִי מִקְדָּשׁ וְשִׁכְנָתִי בְּתוֹכְכֶם, כְּדִי שֶׁיִּדְעוּ כָּל הָאֲמוֹת שֶׁנִּתְכַּפַּר לָהֶם עַל מַעֲשֵׂה הָעֵגֶל. וְלִכְךָ נִקְרָא מִשְׁכַּן הָעֵדוּת, שֶׁהוּא עֵדוּת לְכָל בְּאֵי הָעוֹלָם, שֶׁהַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא שׁוֹכֵן בְּמִקְדָּשְׁכֶם.

[TRANSLATION]

Tanchuma

“And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them.” (Exod. 25:8)

When was this instance regarding the Tabernacle related to Moses? On the Day of Atonement itself despite the fact that the episode describing the Tabernacle precedes the incident of the golden calf. R. Judah said in the name of R. Shalum: There is actually no before or after in the Torah, as is said: “Lest she should walk the even path of life, her ways wander but she knows it not.” (Prov. 5:6) This verse refers to the arrangement of the Torah and its sections. Hence it was on the Day of Atonement that Moses was told: Make me a Sanctuary.

How do we know this to be so? Moses went up Mount Sinai on the sixth day of Sivan, and remained there for forty days and forty nights. He stayed there another forty days and then a final forty days, totaling one hundred and twenty [days in all]. Thus you find that they were forgiven, and on that day the Holy One, blessed be He, said to [Moses] “Build me a sanctuary,” so that the nations might know that God had forgiven them for the incident of the golden calf. It was called the Sanctuary of the Testimony, for it bore witness to the nations of the world that the Holy One, blessed be He, dwelt within the Sanctuary.

Comment

- *Ein mukdam u’me’uchar baTorah*. One of the interpretive rules of **Midrash** is that “there is no earlier or later in the Torah.” Interpretation allows for a playful suspension of chronology that can enhance the meaning of the biblical text.

[TRANSLATION]

Seforno on Leviticus 11:2

[Speak to the Israelite people and say thus:]
These are the creatures that you may eat
from among all the land animals.

After the Israelites stripped off their “spiritual finery” [by worshipping the golden calf] which they had acquired at the giving of Torah (see Exodus 33:5) by which they were fit to have the **Shechina** rest among them without an intermediary, as it is said: “[Make for me an altar of earth and sacrifice on it your burnt offerings and your sacrifices of well-being, your peace-offering and your oxen;] in every case where I cause My name to be mentioned I will come to you and bless you.” (Exodus 20:21) This is how it will be in the future, as it is said: “I will establish My abode in your midst, and I will not spurn you.” (Lev. 26:11) Afterwards [following the sin of the golden calf], God rejected causing the **Shechina** to rest among them at all, as it is said: “But I will not go in your midst, since you are a stiffnecked people, lest I destroy you on the way.” (Exodus 33:3) Moses achieved through his prayer a repair through which the **Shechina** would rest among them by means of the Tabernacle and its vessels, those who serve it and its sacrifices, until they achieve and merit “[When they came out, they blessed the people;] and the Presence of the Eternal appeared to all the people.” (Lev. 9:23) and until the descent of the fire from heaven (Lev. 9:24)

Comment

- For Seforno, God’s original plan was to be in their presence everywhere in the land. After the sin of the golden calf, God had decided to abandon them altogether. The mishkan represented a compromise whereby God would dwell among them, but only in one place.

זאת החיה אשר תאכלו, הנה אחד תאכלו, הנה אחר שהינתנצלו ישראל את עדים הרוֹחני שקנו במתן תורה, אשר בו היו ראויים לשרות שכינה עליהם בלתי אמצעי, כאמרו "בכל המקום אשר אזכיר את שמי, אבא אליך וברכתך" (שמות כ כד) כמו שיהיה הענין לעתיד לבוא, כאמרו "ונתתי משכני בתוכם, ולא תעגל נפשי אתכם" (להלן כו יא), מאס האל יתברך אחר כך מהשרות עוד שכינתו ביניהם כלל, כאמרו "כי לא אעלה בקרבך" (שמות לג ג). והשיג משה רבינו בתפילתו איזה תיקון שתשרה השכינה באמצעות משכן וכליו ומשרתיו וזבחיו, עד שהשיגו זכו אל "וירא כבוד ה' אל כל העם" (לעיל ט כג), ואל ירדת אש מן השמים (שם כד), ובכן ראה לתקן מזגם שיהיה מוכן לאור באור החיים הנצחיים, וזה בתיקון המזונות והולדה ואסר את המאכלים המטמאים את הנפש במידות ובמושכלות, כאמרו "ונטמתם בם" (להלן פסוק מג), וכאמרו "אל תשקצו את נפשותיכם" (שם) וכאמרו "ולא תטמאו את נפשותיכם בכל השרץ... כי אני ה' המעלה אתכם מערץ מצרים להיות לכם לאלהים והתקדשתי תם והייתם קדושים" (שם מד-מה), פירוש: נצחיים, מתדמים לברוא יתברך, כאמרו "כי קדוש אני" (שם). ואסר הנדה והזבה והיוד לדת, לקדש את הזרע ולטהרו מכל טמואה, כאמרו "והזרתם את בני ישראל מטמאם, ולא בטמאתם, בטמאם את משכני אשר בתוכם" (להלן טו לא). והזכיר לשון טמואה בנבלת בהמה וחיה טמאה ובשמונה שרצים ובנבלת ובנבלת בהמה טהורה, שבכל אחד מאלו יש טומאת מגע ובקצתם טומאת משא. אמנם המטמאים את הנפש בלבד, והם דגים ועופות וחגבים ושאר שרצים שאין בהם טומאת מגע כלל, יזכור בהם שיקוץ, כאמרו "שקץ הם לכם" (להלן פסוק י), "לא יאכלו, שקץ הם" (פסוק יג), "שקץ הוא לא יאכל", "לא תאכלום, כי שקץ הם" (פסוק מא-מב).

Discussion Questions:

1. In what ways does **Seforno** say something different from the Tanhuma?
2. How is the reality of the tabernacle and sacrifices not an ideal?
3. What might concern Seforno vis a vis all the sources related to Temple and sacrifice?
4. How does this recast your understanding of temple?

Chapter 2

God is in the Details: Ritual as Theology

2.1 Practice Makes Perfect

2.2 Battle of the Verses: Rabbis verses (sic) the Sadducees

2.3 More than Words Can Express: Battle of Ideas

2.4 Viva la Difference

The renowned architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe famously stated that “God is in the details.” We have already explored the ways in which the extremely detailed plans for the construction of Tabernacle were an expression of God’s imminence. However, such painstaking detail was not confined exclusively to the building plan. Equally detailed were the specific instructions concerning the various sacrifices to be offered inside the **Mishkan**. What kind of animal should be offered? What is to be done with the blood? How is it to be offered? On weekdays, sacrifices were offered morning and afternoon. On Shabbat and festivals an additional sacrifice was offered. As the need arose, additional offerings were brought—for inadvertent sins, for the gift of a new child, for conversion to Judaism, as well as other circumstances. Of all of the various sacrifices offered in the Tabernacle (and later in the Temple), the sacrifice of Yom Kippur and its accompanying ritual was the most detailed and elaborate.

The degree of detail in the Yom Kippur ritual reflected the notion that the fate of the world was in the balance. It required much preparation and practice by the **Kohen** Gadol. Seven days prior to Yom Kippur, he would be tutored in the proper performance of the ritual.

To say that “God is in the details” in the context of Temple and sacrifice is to suggest that the order and specificity surrounding the sacrifices may represent ideas about the nature of God and our relationship to God. The power of ritual itself might be its symbolic and didactic role—it represents something important to us and it teaches us something we need to know. This excerpt from the *piyut Shivat Yamim* details the preparation ritual carried out by the High Priest in anticipation of Yom Kippur. Note the extreme detail in every act he undertook. Chapter 2 is devoted to understanding why such specificity surrounded the Temple’s ritual matters. What was the purpose of such attention? What role did it serve?

After you have finished a brief study of this *piyut*, continue on to the next section.

Shivat Yamim (Seven Days Before)

[א, א] שבעת ימים קודם ליום הכפורים מפרישין כהן גדול מביתו ללשכת פלהררין ומתקנין לו כהן אחר תחתיו שמא יארע בו פסול.
מסרוהו זקני בית דין לזקני כהונה וקורין לפניו בסדר היום ומלמדים אתו סדר יום הכפורים

[א, ג] כל שבעת הימים הוא שוחט והוא זורק את הדם ומקטיר את הקטרת ומטיב את הנרות ומקריב את הראש ואת הרגל. ואומרים לו אישי כהן גדול קרא אתה בפניך שמא שכח ושמא לא למד. ערב יום הכפורים בשחרית מעמידין אותו בשער המזרח ומעבירין לפניו פרים ואילים וכבשים כדי שיהא מכיר ורגיל בעבודה וכדי שיהא מכיר איזה מקריב ראשון ואיזה מקריב אחרון. כל שבעת הימים לא היו מונעין ממנו מאכל ומשתה.

מסרוהו זקני בית דין לזקני כהונה והוליכוהו לעליית בית אבטינס והשביעוהו ונפטרו וילכו להם. ואומרין לו אישי כהן גדול, אני שלוחי בית דין, ואתה שלוחנו ושלוח בית דין ושלוח צבור אתה. משביעין אנו עליך כמי ששיכן את שמו בבית הזה, שלא תשנה דבר מכל שאמרנו לך ושלא תחליף ותקריב ראשון אחרון ואחרון ראשון ולא תקטיר מבחוק ותכניס לפנים ולא תעשה כמעשה הצידוקים אלא ראשון ראשון ואחרון אחרון כמו שהשבענוך ועבדנו לפניך. היה פורש ובוכה והן פורשים ובוכים.

אם היה חכם דורש ואם לאו תלמידי חכמים דורשין לפניו. אם רגיל לקרות קורא ואם לאו קוראים לפניו באיוב ובעזרא ובדברי הימים. ואם עם הארץ הוא, משיחין לפניו שיחת מלכים שיחת חסידים הראשנים.

[TRANSLATION]

Shivat Yamim (*Seven Days Before*)

Seven days before Yom Kippur they would remove the high priest from his house to the Councilors' Chamber, and prepare another priest in his place in case something happened to disqualify him. The elders of the court handed him over to the elders of the priesthood, and they read to him from the order of the day.

All those seven days he would slaughter and toss the blood, offer incense, and repair the lamps and sacrifice the head and hind leg. Then they said to him: "Sir High Priest: Read, yourself," lest he forgot or did not learn. On the eve of Yom Kippur, at dawn, they stood him at the eastern gate and passed bulls, rams, and sheep before him so that he could become familiar and accustomed to the sacrifice, and so that he would know which to sacrifice first and which to sacrifice last. All those seven days they would not forbid him food and drink.

The elders of the court then handed him to the elders of the priesthood and led him to the upper chamber of the house of Avtinas. They then adjured him and departed and went their own way. **And they said to him: "Sir High Priest: We are emissaries of the court, and you are the messenger of the community. We adjure you by Him who caused His name to dwell in this house that you change nothing of all we have told you, so that you do not sacrifice the first animal last and the last first, and that you do not burn the incense outside and bring it inside, and not do as the Sadducees, but do the first first and the last last, as we have adjured you to do and demonstrated it before you."** He would turn aside and weep, and they turned aside and wept.

If he was a sage, he would lecture. If not, they would lecture before him. If he was accustomed to reading, he would read. If not, they read before him from Job, Ezra, and Chronicles. And if he was an ignoramus, they would engage him with discourse about kinds and discourse about the early pious men.

This Mishnah serves as the source for Shivat Yamim.

Mishnah Yoma 1:3

משנה. מסרוהו זקני בית דין לזקני כהונה והעלוהו בית אבטינס והשביעוהו, ונפטרו והלכו להם. ואמרו לו: אישי כהן גדול, אנו שלוחי בית דין ואתה שלוחנו ושליח בית דין, משביעין אנו עליך במי ששכן שמו בבית הזה שלא תשנה דבר מכל מה שאמרנו לך. הוא פורש ובוכה, והן פורשין ובוכין.

[TRANSLATION]

The elders of the Court delivered him to the elders of the priesthood, and they brought him up to the upper chamber of Bet Avtinah, and they adjured him, and they took their leave and departed. They said to him, "My lord High Priest, we are delegates of the Court, and you are our delegate and the delegate of the Court. We adjure you by the One Who made His Name to dwell in this House, that you shall not change anything of all that we have said to you." He would turn aside and cry, and they would turn aside and cry. The Gemarah seeks to explain the extensive warning given to the High Priest and the emotions it might have evoked.

Excerpts from Gemarah, Yoma 19b

"הוא פורש ובוכה והן פורשין ובוכין וכו'." הוא פורש ובוכה - שחשדוהו צדוקי, והם פורשין ובוכין - דאמר רבי יהושע בן לוי: כל החושד בכשרים לוקה בגופו. וכל כך למה - שלא יתקן מבחוץ ויכניס, כדרך שהצדוקין עושין. תנו רבנן: מעשה בצדוקי אחד שהתקין מבחוץ והכניס. ביציאתו היה שמח שמחה גדולה. פגע בו אביו, אמר לו: בני, אף על פי שצדוקין אנו - מתיראין אנו מן הפרושים. אמר לו: כל ימי הייתי מצטער על המקרא הזה "כי בענו ארצה על הכפרת." אמרתי, מתי יבוא לידי ואקיימנו. עכשיו שבא לידי - לא אקיימנו! אמרו: לא היו ימים מועטין עד שמת והוטל באשפה, והיו תולעין יוצאין מחוטמו. ויש אומרים: ביציאתו ניגף. דתני רבי תיאי: כמין קול נשמע בעזרה, שבא מלאך וחקטו על פניו. ונכנסו אהיו הכהנים ומצאו ככף רגל עגל בין כתפיו, שנאמר "ורגליהם רגל ישרה וכף רגליהם ככף רגל עגל."

[TRANSLATION]

"He would turn aside and cry, and they would turn aside and cry."

He would turn aside and cry because they had suspected him of being a Sadducee. They would turn aside and cry because of what Rabbi Joshua ben Levi said: "Whoever suspects innocent people will be stricken in his body." So, why did they need to do this at all? In order that the High Priest not prepare the incense outside of the **Holy of Holies** and then bring it inside, as is the manner of the **Sadducees**.

The Rabbis taught a story concerning one Sadducee (who was a High Priest) who prepared the incense outside the **Holy of Holies** and brought it in. When he went out he was extremely happy. His father met him and said to him: "My son, although we are **Sadducees**, we are afraid of the Pharisees." He replied: All my days I was troubled by this verse, "...for I appear in the cloud over the cover." (Lev. 16:2) I said to myself, "When will I have the opportunity that I may fulfill this verse?" Now that I had the opportunity, should I not have fulfilled it?" They say that it was not even a few days before he died and was thrown into the trash and worms were crawling out of his nose. There are some who say that he was smitten on his way out of the **Holy of Holies**. For Rabbi Chiya taught: Some sort of sound was heard in the Temple courtyard indicating that an angel had come and struck him on his face, and his fellow priests entered to investigate. They found that he had the mark of a calf's sole between his shoulders, as it says, "Their legs of each were fused into a single rigid leg, and the feet of each were like a single half's hoof..." (Ezekiel 1:7)

The previous Gemarah cites the calf's sole as a sign of divine punishment. Ezekiel 1:7 provides the basis for seeing such a mark as God's "calling card."

Ezekiel 1

הָיָה הַיְהוָה דְּבַר יְהוָה אֶל־יְחִזְקֵאל בְּרִבְזִי הַכֹּהֵן בְּאֶרֶץ כְּשָׁדִים עַל־נְהַר־כְּבָר וַתְּהִי עָלָיו שָׁמַיִם
 יְדִי־הַיְהוָה: וְאָרָא וְהִנֵּה רוּחַ סַעֲרָה בָּאָה מִן־הַצָּפוֹן עָנָן גָּדוֹל וְאִשׁ מִתְּלַקַּחַת וְנִגְהָ לּוֹ סָבִיב וּמִתּוֹכָהּ
 כָּעֵיִן הַחֲשֵׁמֶל מִתּוֹךְ הָאֵשׁ: וּמִתּוֹכָהּ דְמוֹת אַרְבַּע חַיּוֹת וְזֶה מֵרְאִיָּהוּן דְמוֹת אָדָם לְהִנָּה: וְאִרְבַּעַה
 פְּנֵיִם לְאַחַת וְאַרְבַּע כְּנָפֵיִם לְאַחַת לָהֶם: וְרַגְלֵיהֶם רַגְלֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְכַף רַגְלֵיהֶם כַּכַּף רַגְלֵי עֶגְלָה וְנִצְצִים
 כְּעֵיִן נְחֹשֶׁת קָלִיל:

[TRANSLATION]

- 3 The word of the Lord came to Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans, by the Kevar river; and the hand of the Lord was there upon him.
- 4 And I looked, and, behold, a stormy wind came from the north, a great cloud, and a fire flaring up, and a brightness was around it, out of its midst, as the color of amber, out of the midst of the fire.
- 5 Also out of its midst came the likeness of four living creatures. And this was their appearance: they had the likeness of a man.
- 6 And everyone had four faces, and everyone had four wings.
- 7 And their feet were straight feet; and the sole of their feet was like the sole of a calf's foot; and they sparkled like the color of burnished bronze.

In some ways, the disagreement between the Rabbis and Sadducees can be seen as a debate in which each side is emphasizing one verse of Leviticus 16 over the other.

The Sadducees who maintain that the screen of smoke from the incense needs to be created even prior to the **Kohen** Gadol entering the **Holy of Holies** is rooted in Leviticus 16:2 which states:

וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה דַּבֵּר אֶל־אַהֲרֹן אָחִיךָ וְאֵל־יָבֵא בְכָל־עֵת אֶל־הַקֹּדֶשׁ מִבַּיִת לַפְּרָכֶת אֶל־פְּנֵי
 הַכַּפֹּרֶת אֲשֶׁר עַל־הָאָרוֹן וְלֹא יָמוּת כִּי בְעֵנֹן אֲרָאָה עַל־הַכַּפֹּרֶת:

[TRANSLATION]

The Eternal said to Moses: Tell your brother Aaron that he is not to come at will into the Shrine behind the curtain, in front of the cover that is upon the ark, lest he die; for I appear in the cloud over the cover.

If God appears in the cloud over the cover, it would stand to reason that such a cloud must be obscured from view at all times. The **Sadducees** understood from the last part of this verse that the High Priest may only enter the **Holy of Holies** in a cloud of incense smoke.

On the other hand, the Rabbis emphasized verse 13 and maintained that the incense must not be placed on the fire until the Kohel Gadol is inside the **Holy of Holies**, that is “**before the Eternal.**”:

יב וְלָקַח מִלֵּא הַמִּחֻתָּה גַחְלֵי־אֵשׁ מֵעַל הַמִּזְבֵּחַ מִלִּפְנֵי יְהוָה וּמִלֵּא חֲפָנָיו קִטְרֹת
 סַמִּים דָּקָה וְהָבִיא מִבֵּית לְפָרְכָת: יג וְנָתַן אֶת־הַקִּטְרֹת עַל־הָאֵשׁ לִפְנֵי יְהוָה וְכִסָּה
 | עֵנָן הַקִּטְרֹת אֶת־הַכַּפֹּרֶת אֲשֶׁר עַל־הָעֵדוּת וְלֹא יָמוּת:

[TRANSLATION]

- 12 He shall take a panful of glowing coals scooped from the altar before the Eternal, and two handfuls of finely ground aromatic incense, and bring this behind the curtain.
- 13 **He shall put the incense on the fire before the Eternal**, so that the cloud from the incense screens the cover that is over [the Ark of] the Pact, lest he die.

Discussion Questions:

1. Comment on the crying that occurs both from the elders and from the **Kohen** Gadol. What are parallels in your own experience?
2. What is your own experience of things you feel obligated to do even though you wish you didn't have to do them?
3. Are there times when one's particular interpretation of a text should be championed over all others?
4. Are there limits to pluralism with regard to interpretation?
5. What contemporary parallels come to mind?
6. How does a group or society overcome interpretive differences?
7. How do we balance our own sense of truth with our desire to be part of a community that embraces particular ideas of what is right and wrong?

Menachem **Meiri**, a Talmudic scholar and philosopher, lived in Provence from 1249-1310. In his monumental Talmudic commentary, *Bet HaBechirah*, he explains that the Talmud's concern over the precise way in which the incense is burned is rooted in something greater than the ritual itself. According to his explanation below, there is a great theological principle at stake. According to his explanation there is a great theological principle at stake.

Beit HaBechirah

[יט ע"ב] חשש זה שהיו חוששין בכ"ג סרך הדברי' על הרוב הייתה מחמת חשש דעות הצדוקים שהיו משבשים את הדעות בכמה עניינים, והזכירו מהם אחת בעניין הקטורת שהיו מתקנין את הקטורת מבחוץ ר"ל נתינת הקטורת על הגחלי' ואחר כך מכניסין אותו בפנים, והיו דורשים "בענן אראה" כלומר שתהא הקטורת בענן ר"ל בתימורת קודם שיראה בפנים, וממה שראיתי משיבושי קצת אמונות מן המקטרים לצבא השמים יראה לי שהיה זה רמז אצלם להיות רומזים בזה לשתי הקטרות אחת מבחוץ ואחת בפנים והוא העיקר ובין זה. ועל דבר זה הייתה אזהרת הפרושים חמורה על זה. והוא שאמרו בכהן שעשה כן שמצאו רגל עגל בין כתפיו ר"ל סיבת העגל ושרש עניינו מצאו בשעה שחקרוהו ונשאו ונתנו עמו.

[TRANSLATION]

This suspicion that they suspected the High Priest clung to the words of the majority because of the suspicion of the **Sadducees** who would confound with several matters. We are reminded of one of them in the matter of the incense—that they would place the incense from outside, that is they would put it on the coals and afterwards take it inside. And they would base this on the interpretation of “I will appear in the cloud.” (Lev. 16:2) understanding that to mean that the incense should be in the cloud, that is, a pillar of smoke prior to his seeing inside. From what I saw from this confusion is the beliefs from those who offer the incense to the hosts of heaven, that this hinted at the idea of two incense offerings, one from the outside and one from the inside. And this is the central point to understand. On account of this, was the heavy warning of the Pharisees (early Rabbis) about this. It was for this reason that they said about a **Kohen** who did thus “would find the foot of a calf between his shoulders [make this translation correspond to Gemarrah’s translation], that is “on account of the calf” [that is, because of the kind of idolatry represented by the golden calf.]

The early Rabbis were particularly concerned about rooting out ideas of dualism in Jewish life. **Gnosticism** generally refers to a broad and diverse religious movement in the Mediterranean and Middle East which, among other beliefs, popularized the notion that there are two dueling gods—god the Creator (the demiurge) and a god of goodness. As such religious ideas spread throughout the region, the Rabbis attempted to combat them in legal and interpretive ways.

Meiri equates the ancient Sadducees’ anti-rabbinic views with the dualism of **Gnosticism** and reads that debate (one God versus two) into the disagreement over the fire and incense.

At the end of the Talmudic passage in Section 2.2, Rabbi Chiya brings a story of additional detail to the death of this High Priest. He is killed by an angel who leaves his business card, as it were—the mark of a footprint from the calf that stands beneath God’s throne (see Ezekiel 1). **Meiri** takes this same symbol of the calf’s footprint but brings a different association to the discussion—The Golden Calf.

Exodus 32: 1-8

אִם־בְּמַחְתָּרֹת יִמָּצֵא הַגָּנֹב וְהִכָּה וּמָת אִין לֹ דְמַיִם: אִם־זֹרְחָה הַשְּׂמֵשׁ עָלָיו דְמַיִם לֹ שְׁלָם יִשְׁלָם
אִם־אִין לֹ וְנִמְכַר בְּגִנְבָתוֹ: אִם־הִמָּצָא תִמָּצָא בְיָדוֹ הַגָּנֹבָה מִשּׁוֹר עַד־חֲמוֹר עַד־שָׁה חַיִּים שְׁנַיִם
יִשְׁלָם: כִּי־יִבְעֶר־אִישׁ שְׂדֵה אוֹ־כֶרֶם וְשָׁלַח אֶת־בְּעִירָהּ וּבְעֶר בְּשָׂדֵה אַחֵר מִיֵּטֵב שְׂדֵהוּ וּמִיֵּטֵב כְּרָמוֹ
יִשְׁלָם: כִּי־תִצֵּא אִשׁ וּמִצָּאָה קִצִּים וְנִאֲכַל גְּדִישׁ אוֹ הַקֶּמֶה אוֹ הַשְּׂדֵה שְׁלָם יִשְׁלָם הַמִּבְעֵר
אֶת־הַבְּעֵרָה: כִּי־יִתֵּן אִישׁ אֶל־רַעְהוּ כֶסֶף אוֹ־כֶלִים לְשֹׁמֵר וְגָנֹב מִבֵּית הָאִישׁ אִם־יִמָּצֵא הַגָּנֹב
יִשְׁלָם שְׁנַיִם: אִם־לֹא יִמָּצֵא הַגָּנֹב וְנִקְרַב בְּעַל־הַבַּיִת אֶל־הָאֱלֹהִים אִם־לֹא שָׁלַח יָדוֹ בְּמִלְאֲכַת
רַעְהוּ: עַל־כָּל־דְּבַר־פְּשַׁע עַל־שׁוֹר עַל־חֲמוֹר עַל־שָׁה עַל־שְׁלֵמָה עַל־כָּל־אַבְדָּה אֲשֶׁר יֹאמֵר כִּי־הוּא
זֶה עַד הָאֱלֹהִים יָבֹא דְבַר־שְׁנֵיהֶם אֲשֶׁר יִרְשִׁיעוּ אֱלֹהִים יִשְׁלָם שְׁנַיִם לְרַעְהוּ:

[TRANSLATION]

- 1 When the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him: 'Up, make us a god who shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we know not what is become of him.'
- 2 Aaron said unto them: 'Break off the golden rings, which are in the ears of your wives, of your sons, and of your daughters, and bring them unto me.'
- 3 All the people broke off the golden rings which were in their ears, and brought them unto Aaron.
- 4 And he received it at their hand, and fashioned it with a graving tool, and made it a molten calf; and they said: 'This is thy god, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.'
- 5 And when Aaron saw this, he built an altar before it; and Aaron made proclamation, and said: 'To-morrow shall be a feast to the LORD.'
- 6 And they rose up early on the morrow, and offered burnt-offerings, and brought peace-offerings; and the people sat down to eat and to drink, and rose up to make merry.
- 7 And the LORD spoke unto Moses: 'Go, get thee down; for thy people, that thou broughtest up out of the land of Egypt, have dealt corruptly;
- 8 they have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them; they have made them a molten calf, and have worshipped it, and have sacrificed unto it, and said: This is thy god, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt.'

Milgrom on ritual as theology

Like Meiri's comments, we may see the primary value of ritual in the ideas it attempts to convey through its practice. For **Meiri**, the specific ways in which the Yom Kippur ritual was enacted demonstrated a commitment to pure monotheism. Renowned biblical scholar Jacob Milgrom explains how such an approach extends throughout the book of Leviticus.

From Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus: A Book of Ritual and Ethics* (Fortress Press, 2004)

"Values are what Leviticus is all about. They pervade every chapter and almost every verse. Many may be surprised to read this, since the dominant view of Leviticus is that it consists only of rituals, such as sacrifices and impurities. This, too, is true: Leviticus does discuss rituals. However, underlying the rituals, the careful reader will find an intricate web of values that purports to model how we should relate to God and to one another.

Anthropology has taught us that when a society wishes to express and preserve its basic values, it ensconces them in rituals. How logical! Words fall from our lips like the dead leaves of autumn, but rituals endure with repetition. They are visual and participatory. They embed themselves in memory at a young age, reinforced with each enactment."

Both Meiri and Milgrom maintain that ethics and theology are imbedded in ritual. Ritual serves as a site for acting out those ideas. But how far can we take this notion? Does each and every detail of ritual practice have something to teach us? Rambam's explanation of the details of sacrifice raises some important questions for us concerning the way in which ritual functions.

Rambam, *Guide for the Perplexed*, Book 3: CHAPTER XXVI

As Theologians are divided on the question whether the actions of God are the result of His wisdom, or only of His will without being intended for any purpose whatever, so they are also divided as regards the object of the commandments which God gave us. Some of them hold that the commandments have no object at all; and are only dictated by the whim of God. Others are of opinion that all commandments and prohibitions are dictated by His wisdom and serve a certain aim; consequently there is a reason for each one of the precepts: they are enjoined because they are useful.

A more suitable instance can be cited from the detailed commandments concerning sacrifices. The law that sacrifices should be brought is evidently of great use, as will be shown by us (*infra*, chap. xlvi.): but we cannot say why one offering should be a lamb, whilst another is a ram; and why a fixed number of them should be brought. Those who trouble themselves to find a cause for any of these detailed rules, are in my eyes void of sense: they do not remove any difficulties, but rather increase them. Those who believe that these detailed rules originate in a certain cause, are as far from the truth as those who assume that the whole law is useless. You must know that Divine Wisdom demanded it — or, if you prefer, say that circumstances made it necessary—that there should be parts [of His work] which have no certain object: and as regards the Law, it appears to be impossible that it should not include some matter of this kind. That it cannot be avoided may be seen from the following instance. Note this, and understand it. The repeated assertion of our Sages that there are reasons for all commandments, and the tradition that Solomon knew them, refer to the general purpose of the commandments, and not to the object of every detail...

Discussion Questions:

1. What does it mean to link this story to the Golden Calf (as **Meiri** does)?
2. What makes this a different theological objection than the story relayed by Rabbi Chiya in Section 2.2 (from Yoma 19b)?
3. What is revealed in the theological agendas of Rabbi Chiya and **Meiri**?
4. What do you make of Rambam's comments in light of Rabbi Chiya's position in our Talmudic passage (Yoma 19b, section 2.2)? If **Rambam** were explaining the death of the High Priest in the story at the end of the Talmudic selection, what might he say?
5. Why was there so much concern about the ritual being performed properly?
6. What is your own understanding of ritual?
7. Does ritual lose its power when we are not concerned about the way it is performed?

As we saw with the debate between the Rabbis and the **Sadducees**, the difference between “proper” ritual and “improper” ritual is slight but of great consequence. Many scholars have compared Israelite religious expressions to those of the other peoples of the Ancient Near East in order to point out similarities and thereby demonstrate the ways in which Israelite religion developed and evolved from a particular cultural and historical context. Jacob Milgrom explains three basic premises of pagan religion (*Leviticus: A Book of Ritual and Ethics* (Fortress Press, 2004, 8).)

1. The gods are dependent on and influenced by a metadivine realm.
2. This meta-divine realm spawns a multitude of malevolent and benevolent entities.
3. If humans can tap into this realm, they can coerce the gods to do their will.

He contrasts these notions with three premises of Israelite theology:

1. One supreme God who has no competition.
2. There is no world of demons. There are no autonomous beings.
3. One creative power with demonic power remains—the human being.

Israel borrowed from pagans the notion of building God a temple. Whereas for them, the temple needed to be protected from incursions by demons, for Israel it is humans who can drive God out of their Temple because of sin.

“Endowed with free will, human power is greater than any attributed to humans by pagan society. Not only can one defy God but, in Priestly imagery, one can drive God out of his sanctuary. In this respect, humans have replaced demons.”

The concept of impurity becomes transformed into human wrongdoing.

“In the theology of the purification offering, Israel is so close to the beliefs of its neighbors and yet so far from them. Both hold that the sanctuary stands in need of constant purification lest it be abandoned by its resident god. But whereas the pagans hold that the source of impurity is demonic, Israel, having expunged the demons from its beliefs, attributes impurity to the rebellious and inadvertent sin of humans instead.”
(15)

Discussion Questions:

1. What do you make of the similarities between Judaism and the pagan religions it arose in opposition to? Does it change your understanding of Jewish practice to find close (but not identical) parallels in other religious expressions?
2. Milgrom’s suggestion that human sin replaced the idolatrous notion of demons is a compelling idea. What does this suggest to you about human initiative, freedom and power?
3. What are other expressions in Judaism which have a great deal in common with other religions but whose difference from them feels significant to you?

Chapter 3

What is Sin (and what do you do with it)?

3.1 **The Kohen Gadol's First Confession**

3.2 **The Words/Three Kinds of Sins**

3.3 **Oops, Sorry: Turning Deliberate Sins into Mistakes**

3.4 **Forget Jeremiah: The Exceptional Nature of Yom Kippur**

3.5 **If These Walls Could Talk: Yom Kippur and the Architecture of the Temple**

The biblical instructions for Yom Kippur in Leviticus 16 delineate a series of sacrifices and atonements to be made by the **Kohen** Gadol. Whenever the word “*v'chiper*” (“and make atonement”) appears, commentators through the ages have understood this to refer to the act of confession with words. This is a noteworthy reflection of rabbinic culture and its emphasis on the power and significance of words. Using Leviticus 16 as its basis, the Mishnah delineates a series of three separate confessions made by the **Kohen** Gadol—the first for himself and his family; the second for all the kohanim, and the third for all the people of Israel. These three confessions are practically identical in their wording with the exception for the referent of the confession. All three confessions contain three separate words to convey the idea of “sin”—*cheyt*, *avon* and *pasha*. In the final line of each confession, the **Kohen** Gadol would quote from Leviticus 16:30—“For on this day atonement shall be made for you to cleanse you of all your sins. Before Adonai (YHVH) ... you shall be pure.”

According to the Mishnah, the **Kohen** Gadol pronounced the actual 4-letter name of God when he read this verse. Yom Kippur was the only time during the year that the Name of God was pronounced. Even today, we substitute the word **Adonai** (“my Lord”) for the actual pronunciation of the Name.

When the people gathered outside heard the Name, they prostrated themselves on the ground and said “Blessed is God’s glorious Name for ever and ever.” When everyone had fallen on their faces, the **Kohen** Gadol concluded the verse with the final word: *Titharu*—you shall be pure. The focus of the following excerpt from *Shivat Yamim* is the words High Priest’s first confession. Based on the language of the confession itself we will learn much about the nature of sin. In addition, we will explore the nature of confession and forgiveness and their place within our tradition.

After reading from the *piyut*, please continue on to the following section.

Shivat Yamim (*seven days before*)

הביאו לו פר ואיל ושני שעירים לחטאת ואיל לעולה מנכסי צבור ותרומת
הלשכה, ככ' בזאת יבא אהרון וג' וככתוב: ומאת עדת בני יש' וגו'. משל
את הפר והעמידו בין האולם למזבח ומשך את השעירים והעמידן בצפון.
ואחר כך בא לו אצל פרו ופרו היה עומד בין האולם למזבח, ראשו לדרום
ופניו למערב. והכהן עומד במזרח ופניו במערב. סומך שתי ידיו עליו
ומתודה.

וכן היה אומר: אנא השם חטאתי עויתי פשעתי לפניך אני וביתי. אנא
בשם כפר נא על החטאים ועל העונות ועל הפשעים שחטאתי שעויתי
שפשעתי לפניך אני וביתי, ככ' בתורת מש' עבדך כי ביום הזה יכפר
עליכם לטהר אתכם מכל חטאיכם לפני יהוה.

והכהנים והעם העומדים בעזרה והמשרתים בהיכל בזמן ששמעו את השם המפורש שהוא יוצא מפי כהן גדול בקדושה היו כורעים ומשתחוים ונופלים על פניהם ואומרים ברוך שם כבוד מלכותו לעולם ועד.

אף הוא מתכוון לגמור את השם כנגד המברכים ואומר להם תטהרו.

[TRANSLATION]

They brought him a bull and a ram and two goats for the sin offering and a ram for the burnt offering from public property and the Temple treasury, as it is written, "With this shall Aaron enter [the Shrine: with a bull of the herd for a sin offering and a ram for the burnt offering]" (Lev 16:3), and it is written: "And from the Israelite community [he shall take two he-goats for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering]. (Lev 16:5)" He led the bull and stood it between the porch and the altar, then led the goats, and stood them in the north. Then he approached his bull, which was standing between the porch and altar, its head to the south and its face to the west. The priest was standing in the east with his face to the west. Then he laid his two hands on it and confessed.

Thus he would say: "O Lord, I have sinned, I have done wrong, I have transgressed before You, I and my household. O, by the Lord, forgive the sins and iniquities and transgressions that I have committed against You, I and my household, as it is written in the Torah of Moses, Your servant: 'For on this day [atonement shall be made for you to cleanse you of all your sins; before the Lord-'" (Lev 16:30)

And when the priests and the people standing in the court and serving in the sanctuary heard the explicit name coming forth from the mouth of the high priest in holiness, they would kneel, prostrate themselves, and fall to their faces and say: "Blessed is the name of His Majesty's glory for ever and ever."

He would also aim to finish the name while facing those saying the blessing and say to them, "You shall be pure."

Babylonian Talmud, *Yoma 36b*

תָּנוּ רַבָּנוּ: כִּיצַד מִתְוֹדֶה? "עוֹיְתֵי פְשַׁעְתֵּי וְחֻטְאֵתֵי", וְכֵן בְּשַׁעִיר הַמִּשְׁתַּלַּח הוּא אוֹמֵר "וְהִתְוֹדֶה עָלָיו אֵת כָּל עֹנֹת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֵת כָּל פְּשַׁעֵיהֶם לְכָל חֻטְאֵתָם", וְכֵן בְּמִשְׁהָ הוּא אוֹמֵר "נִשְׂא עֹן וּפְשַׁע וְחֻטְאָה", דְּבָרֵי רַבִּי מְאִיר. וְחֻכְמִים אוֹמְרִים: עֹנֹת – אֵלוֹ הַזְּדוֹנוֹת, וְכֵן הוּא אוֹמֵר "הַכֹּרֶת תִּכְרֶת הַנֶּפֶשׁ הַהִיא עֹנָה בָּהּ", פְּשָׁעִים – אֵלוֹ הַמְּרָדִים, וְכֵן הוּא אוֹמֵר "מֶלֶךְ מוֹאֵב פָּשַׁע בֵּי" וְאוֹמֵר "אִז תִּפְשַׁע לִבְנֵה בַּעַת הַהִיא", לְכָל חֻטְאֵתָם – אֵלוֹ הַשְּׂגָגוֹת, וְכֵן הוּא אוֹמֵר "נֶפֶשׁ כִּי תִחַטָּא בְּשִׁגְגָה". וּמֵאַחַר שֶׁהִתְוֹדֶה עַל הַזְּדוֹנוֹת וְעַל הַמְּרָדִים חֹזֵר וּמִתְוֹדֶה עַל הַשְּׂגָגוֹת? אֵלָּא כֵךְ הִיא מִתְוֹדֶה: חֻטְאֵתֵי וְעוֹיְתֵי וּפְשַׁעְתֵּי לְפָנֶיךָ אֲנִי וּבֵיתִי וְכו'. וְכֵן בְּדוֹד הוּא אוֹמֵר "חֻטְאֵנוּ עִם אֲבֹתֵינוּ הָעוֹיְנוּ הַרְשַׁעְנוּ" וְכֵן בְּשִׁלְמָה הוּא אוֹמֵר "חֻטְאֵנוּ וְהַרְשַׁעְנוּ וּמְרָדְנוּ" וְכֵן בְּדַנְיָאֵל הוּא אוֹמֵר "חֻטְאֵנוּ וְהָעוֹיְנוּ וְהַרְשַׁעְנוּ וּמְרָדְנוּ". אֵלָּא מֵהוּ שְׁאֵמַר מִשָּׁה "נִשְׂא עֹן וּפְשַׁע וְחֻטְאָה"? אֵמַר מִשָּׁה לְפָנֶי הַקְּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא: רַבּוֹנוּ שֶׁל עוֹלָם, בְּשַׁעָה שִׁישְׁרָאֵל חוֹטְאִין לְפָנֶיךָ וְעוֹשִׂין תְּשׁוּבָה – עֲשֵׂה לָהֶם זְדוֹנוֹת כְּשִׁגְגוֹת. אֵמַר רַבָּה בַּר שְׁמוּאֵל אָמַר רַב: הֲלָכָה כְּדַבְּרֵי חֻכְמִים. – פְּשִׁטָּא, יַחֲדֵי וְרַבִּים הֲלָכָה כְּרַבִּים! – מֵהוּ דְתִימָא: מִסְתַּבֵּר טַעְמִיָּה דְרַבִּי מְאִיר, דְקַמְסִיעַ לִיהַּ קָרָא דְמִשָּׁה, קָא מִשְׁמַע לֵו. הַהוּא דְנַחֲתִית קַמִּיָּה דְרַבָּה, וְעַבְד כְּרַבִּי מְאִיר. אָמַר לִיהַּ: שְׁבַקְתָּ רַבָּנוּ וְעַבַדְתָּ כְּרַבִּי מְאִיר? – אָמַר לִיהַּ: כְּרַבִּי מְאִיר סְבִירָא לִי, כְּדַכְתִּיב בְּסִפְרֵי אוּרִייתָא דְמִשָּׁה.

[TRANSLATION]

An early Rabbinic statement taught: How does the **Kohen** Gadol confess over his bull? He says: I have committed *avonot*, *peshaim*, and *chataim* before you. And so too does the verse state with regard to the scapegoat later in the chapter, "And he shall confess over it all the *avonot* of the children of Israel, and all their *peshaim*, among all their *chataim*. Since the verse lists the categories of sin in this order, it stands to reason that this is proper order for all the confessions that the Kohen Gadol will make. And so too did Moses have this order when God said to him "forgiving *avon*, *pesha*, and *chata*." (Exodus 34:7) These are the words of Rabbi Meir.

The Sages say: *Avonot* are deliberate sins, as demonstrated by its use with regard to one who commits adultery (a deliberate sin): "Because he has spurned the word of the Lord and violated His commandment, that person shall be cut off—he bears his sin [*avona*]." (Numbers 15:31) Therefore *avon* stands for deliberate sins.

Peshaim are rebellious sins, as demonstrated by its use with regard to the rebellion of the Moabite king: "...The king of Moab has rebelled against me..." (II Kings 3:7) and later it states: "Libnah rebelled at that time." (Ibid, 8:22)

Chataim are inadvertent sins, as demonstrated by the verse: "when a person inadvertently incurs guilt in regard to any of the Lord's commandments about things not to be done and does one of them..." (Lev. 4:2)

Having defined these three categories of sin, the Sages question the order of the **Kohen** Gadol's confession specified in the early Rabbinic statement.

They ask: Is it logical that after he confessed deliberate sins (*avonot*) and rebellious sins (*pesha'im*) he goes back and confesses inadvertent sins (*chata'im*)? [If he was granted atonement for deliberate sins, which are more severe,] than he would certainly be granted atonement for inadvertent sins which are not as severe. Rather, the **Kohen** Gadol must have confessed the sins in THIS order: *chatai*, *aviti*, *peshati*—I have committed *chataim*, *avonim* and *peshaim*—[in ascending order of severity....]

The Sages want to address Rabbi Meir's argument that the order of confession should be: *avon*, *pesha* and *chata*, since in the Torah God is called "The One who forgives *avon*, *pesha*, and *chata*."

Rabbah bar Shmuel said in the name of Rav: The halakhah follows the view of the Sages.

Moses was saying before the Holy One of Blessing, “Master of the Universe, at a time when Israel sins before you and then repents, transform for them their deliberate sins into inadvertent sins.” [In other words, treat their *avon* and *pesha* sins like their *chata* sins.]

The order of sins in the Torah comes not to teach us the order of the **Kohen** Gadol’s confession, but rather to teach that repentance has the power to transform deliberate and rebellious sins into less severe inadvertent sins.

The Torah does not explicitly mention the concept of *teshuvah* as we understand it. However, as we can see above, the Rabbis introduce the concept of *teshuvah* into their discussion of the ancient Yom Kippur ritual performed by the **Kohen** Gadol in the Temple. The Rabbis suggest that the very order of sins in the **Kohen** Gadol’s confession was an acknowledgement of the power of *teshuvah*. In the context of the Torah itself, the ancient Yom Kippur ritual is one of *kaparah* (atonement).

Teshuvah (repentance) and **Kapparah** (atonement) are not the same. Rabbi Joseph Soloveitchik, in his book *Al Teshuvah* (On Repentance) wrote that *Teshuvah* is a means for achieving **Kapparah**.

Kapparah is forgiveness or acquittal; a “withdrawal of claim” like releasing a person from a debt that is owed. “**Kapparah** removes the need for punishment.” (p. 58)

But sin affects human beings in ways that go beyond the threat of punishment. According to Rav Soloveitchik, sin causes a kind of internal impurity in a person. It stains a person’s character. “Sin, as it were, removes the divine halo from man’s head, impairing his spiritual integrity.” (p. 59) While Yom Kippur automatically grants *kapparah* regardless of whether or not the person has done *teshuvah*, one’s “personality remains contaminated.” (p. 61) The only way to become purified is through the act of *teshuvah*.

Pinchas H. Peli, *On Repentance: In the Thought and Oral Discourses of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik*

“Indeed true *teshuvah* (repentance) not only achieves *kapparah* (acquittal and erasure of penalty), it should also bring about *taharah* (purification) from *tum’ah* (spiritual pollution), liberating man from his hard-hearted ignorance and insensitivity. Such *teshuvah* restores man’s spiritual viability and rehabilitates him to his original state. And sometimes...it makes man rise to heights he never dreamt he could reach.” (60)

Discussion Questions:

1. What other ways of categorizing sin could be constructed?
2. The Sages suggest that sins be listed in ascending order of gravity:

Cheyv—inadvertent
Avon—deliberate
Pesha—rebellious

Pesha'im, or “rebellious” are those that are not only committed intentionally, but are done so as an act of rebellion against God. In other words, the motivation comes not (only) from the desire to do the forbidden act, but to do so precisely because it is a commandment one desires to break. What is a “rebellious” sin in our time?

3. What is the theology required for such a sin?
4. What exactly is the relationship between *teshuvah* and *kaparah*?

In the previous section, we introduced the notion that repentance (*teshuvah*) has the capacity to transform deliberate and rebellious sins into less serious inadvertent sins. This excerpt from the Talmud explores the exceptional nature of repentance from several perspectives. (new paragraph) As background for reading this Talmudic section, read Deut. 24:1-4 below. It establishes the prohibition for remarrying one's former spouse if they have married someone else in the interim.

Deuteronomy 24:1-4

כִּי־יִקַּח אִישׁ אִשָּׁה וּבִעַלָּהּ וְהָיָה אִם־לֹא תִמְצָא־חֹן בְּעֵינָיו כִּי־מָצָא בָּהּ עֲרוּת דָּבָר וְכָתַב לָהּ סֵפֶר כְּרִיתֹת וּנְתַן בְּיָדָהּ וְשָׁלַחָהּ מִבֵּיתוֹ: וַיֵּצֵאָהּ מִבֵּיתוֹ וְהִלְכָה וְהָיְתָה לְאִישׁ־אַחֵר: וּשְׁנֵאָהּ הָאִישׁ הָאֲחֵרוֹן וְכָתַב לָהּ סֵפֶר כְּרִיתֹת וּנְתַן בְּיָדָהּ וְשָׁלַחָהּ מִבֵּיתוֹ אוֹ כִּי יָמוּת הָאִישׁ הָאֲחֵרוֹן אֲשֶׁר־לָקַחָהּ לוֹ לְאִשָּׁה: לֹא־יִוָּכַל בְּעַלְהָ הָרִאשׁוֹן אֲשֶׁר־שָׁלַחָהּ לָשׁוּב לְקַחְתָּהּ לְהָיִית לּוֹ לְאִשָּׁה אַחֲרַי אֲשֶׁר הִשְׁמָאָה כִּי־תוֹעֵבָה הוּא לִפְנֵי יְהוָה וְלֹא תַחֲטִיאוּ אֶת־הָאָרֶץ אֲשֶׁר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיךָ נָתַן לְךָ נַחֲלָה:

[TRANSLATION]

A man takes a wife and possesses her. She fails to please him because he finds something obnoxious about her, and he writes her a bill of divorcement, hands it to her, and sends her away from his house; she leaves his household and becomes the wife of another man; then this latter man rejects her, writes her a bill of divorcement, hands it to her, and sends her away from his house; or the man who married her last dies. Then the first husband who divorced her shall not take her to wife again, since she has been defiled—for that would be abhorrent to the Lord. You must not bring sin upon the land that the Lord your God is giving you as a heritage.

Babylonian Talmud, Yoma 86b

אָמַר רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן: גְּדוּלַת תְּשׁוּבָה שְׁדוּחָה אֶת לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה שְׁבִתוּרָה, שְׁנֵאָמַר "לֹא־מֵר הוּא יִשְׁלַח אִישׁ אֶת אִשְׁתּוֹ וְהִלְכָה מֵאִתּוֹ וְהָיְתָה לְאִישׁ אַחֵר הַיְשׁוּב אֵלֶיהָ עוֹד הֲלֹא חֲנוּף תַּחֲנוּף הָאָרֶץ הִיא וְאֵת זְנִית רַעִים רַבִּים וְשׁוֹב אֵלַי נָאִם ה'". אָמַר רַבִּי יוֹנָתָן: גְּדוּלַת תְּשׁוּבָה שְׁמִקְרַבֵּת אֶת הַגְּאוּלָּה, שְׁנֵאָמַר "וּבֹא לְצִיּוֹן גּוֹאֵל וְשׁוֹב אֵלַי נָאִם ה'". מֵה טַעַם "וּבֹא לְצִיּוֹן גּוֹאֵל" – מִשׁוּם ד'שְׁבִי פֶשַׁע בִּיעֶקֶב". אָמַר רִישׁ לְקִישׁ: גְּדוּלַת תְּשׁוּבָה, שְׁדוּחָה נַעֲשׂוֹת לוֹ כְּשֶׁגִּגַּת, שְׁנֵאָמַר "שׁוּבָה יִשְׂרָאֵל עַד ה' אֱלֹהֵיךָ כִּי כְשַׁלַּתָּ בְּעוֹנֶיךָ". הֲאֵ עוֹן מִזִּיד הוּא, וְקֹא קְרִי לִיה מְכֻשׁוֹל. אִינִי?! וְהָאֵמַר רִישׁ לְקִישׁ: גְּדוּלַת תְּשׁוּבָה שְׁדוּחָה נַעֲשׂוֹת לוֹ כְּזִכִּיּוֹת, שְׁנֵאָמַר "וּבֹשׁוּב רָשָׁע מִרְשַׁעְתּוֹ וְעֲשֶׂה מִשְׁפָּט וְצָדִיקָה עֲלֵיהֶם חֵיה יַחֲיָה!" – לֹא קִשְׂיָא, כָּאֵן – מֵאֲהַבָּה, כָּאֵן – מִיִּרְאָה.

[TRANSLATION]

Rabbi Yohanan said: So great is teshuvah that it takes precedence over a negative mitzvah from the Torah, as it says, "[The word of the Lord came to me] as follows: If a man divorces his wife, and she leaves him and marries another man, can he ever back to her? Would not such a land be defiled? Now you have whored with many lovers: can you return to Me?—says the Lord." (Jeremiah 3:1) Rabbi Yohanan said: So great is teshuvah that it brings close the Redemption, as it says, "He shall come as redeemer to Zion, to those in Jacob who turn back from sin—declares the Lord." (Isaiah 59:20) What is the meaning of "He shall come as redeemer to Zion"? [He comes] because of the turning from sin among [the descendants of] Jacob. **Resh Lakish said: So great is teshuvah that deliberate sins are regarded as inadvertent sins, as it says, "Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God, for you have fallen because of your sin (pasha).** Pasha is considered a deliberate sin, and yet he (Hosea) calls it 'stumbling' (i.e. inadvertent). Is this so? Rather, did Resh Lakish not say: Great is teshuvah that intentional sins are considered merits, as it says, "And when a wicked man turns back from his wickedness and does what is just and right, it is he who shall live by virtue of these things." (Ezekiel 33:19) This is not a contradiction. Resh Lakish's former statement (that deliberate sins are regarded as inadvertent sins) applies when Teshuvah is done out of fear. Resh Lakish's latter statement (that deliberate sins are regarded as merits) applies when Teshuvah is done out of love.

Maimonides, *Laws of Repentance* 1:1

כָּל מִצְוֹת שְׁבִתוֹרָה, בֵּין עֲשָׂה בֵּין לֹא תַעֲשֶׂה, אִם עָבַר אָדָם עַל-אַחַת מֵהֶן, בֵּין בְּזָדוֹן בֵּין בְּשִׁגְגָה - כְּשִׁיעֲשֶׂה תְּשׁוּבָה וְיָשׁוּב מִחֲטָאוֹ, תֵּיב לְהִתְדוֹת לִפְנֵי הָאֵל, בְּרוּךְ הוּא, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: "אִישׁ אוֹ-אִשָּׁה כִּי יַעֲשׂוּ... וְהִתְדוּ אֶת-חַטָּאתָם אֲשֶׁר עָשׂוּ - זֶה וְדוּי דְבָרִים. וְדוּי זֶה - מִצְוֹת עֲשֵׂה. כִּי־צַד מִתּוֹדָה? אֹמֵר: "אֲנֵא, הַשֵּׁם! חַטָּאתִי, עֲוִיתִי, פָּשַׁעְתִּי לִפְנֵיךְ וְעֲשִׂיתִי כִךְ וְכִךְ, וְהִרִי נַחֲמִיתִי וּבִשְׁתִּי בְּמַעֲשֵׂי, וְלַעֲלֹם אֵינִי חוֹזֵר לְדַבֵּר זֶה" - וְזֶהוּ עֲקָרוֹ שֶׁל דְּוִי. וְכָל הַמְרֻבָּה לְהִתְדוֹת וּמְאֵרִיךְ בְּעֵינֵי זֶה - הִרִי זֶה מִשְׁבָּח. וְכֵן בְּעֲלֵי חַטָּאוֹת וְאֲשָׁמוֹת, בַּעַת שֶׁמְבִיאִים קָרְבָּנוֹתֵיהֶם עַל שִׁגְגָתָם, אוֹ עַל זְדוּנָם - אֵין מִתְכַּפֵּר לָהֶם בְּקָרְבָּנָם עַד שִׁיעֲשׂוּ תְּשׁוּבָה וְיִתְדוּ וְדוּי דְבָרִים, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: וְהִתְדוּהָ אֲשֶׁר חָטָא עָלֶיהָ. וְכֵן כָּל-מַחֲיָבֵי מִיתוֹת-בֵּית-דִּין וּמַחֲיָבֵי מַלְקוֹת - אֵין מִתְכַּפֵּר לָהֶם בְּמִיתָתָם אוֹ בְּלִקְיָתָם, עַד שִׁיעֲשׂוּ תְּשׁוּבָה וְיִתְדוּ. וְכֵן הַחוּבֵל בְּחֵבֵרוֹ וְהַמְזִיק מִמוֹנוֹ - אֵף עַל פִּי שְׁשֻׁלָם לוֹ מֵה-שֶׁהוּא תֵּיב לוֹ - אֵינוֹ מִתְכַּפֵּר עַד שִׁיתְדוּהָ וְיָשׁוּב מִלַּעֲשׂוֹת כִּזֶּה לַעֲלֹם, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: "מִכָּל-חַטָּאת הָאָדָם."

If a person violates one of the positive or negative commandments of the Torah, whether intentionally or inadvertently, when he/she does teshuvah and turns back from their sin, they are obligated to confess before God, blessed be He, as it says: "When a man or woman shall commit any sin... they shall confess their sin which they have done." (Numbers 5:6-7). This confession is one of words and is a positive mitzvah. How does one confess? He/she says: Please God, I have committed inadvertent sins, I have committed deliberate sins. I have committed rebellious sins before you. I did such and such. Now, behold I have regret and am ashamed of my deed and I will not repeat it again. This is the essence of confession. Anyone who adds to the confession and goes into greater length is praiseworthy. And so too for the one who offers a sin offering or a guilt offering: at the time they bring their sacrificial offering for their inadvertent or deliberate sin, the sacrifice does not atone for them until they do teshuvah and confess in words, as it is said, "he shall confess that he sinned." (Lev. 5:5) And likewise those who are sentenced to capital punishment by the Beit Din and those sentenced to corporal punishment, their death or lashings do not in themselves atone for them until they do teshuvah and confess. So too for anyone who injures his fellow and causes financial damages, even though he may pay him that to which he is obligated to him, this payment does not atone until he confesses and turned from such doings forever. As it says, "Any sin that men commit... they shall confess their sin which they have done." (Numbers 5:6-7)

Discussion Questions:

1. What is *Teshuvah* and how does it come to eliminate the clear and solid categories of sin established by the Torah?
2. How does Teshuvah change our understanding of sin?
3. Why would the classical categories of sin be undermined by the notion of Teshuvah?
4. What is suggested about the power of words?
5. How is God understood within this process?

In the Torah's discussion of the various sacrifices one may bring, the only sins for which one may bring a "sin offering" are those that were committed inadvertently. If the situation were otherwise, what would prevent one from committing a sin and simply offering a sacrifice to make emends? Indeed, the prophet Jeremiah spoke about this exact situation in the 8th century BCE.

Jeremiah 7:1-14

הַדָּבָר אֲשֶׁר הָיָה אֶל־יְרֵמְיָהוּ מֵאֵת יְהוָה לֵאמֹר: עֲמֹד בַּשַּׁעַר בֵּית יְהוָה וְקִרְאתָ שָׁם אֶת־הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה וְאָמַרְתָּ שְׁמֵעוּ דְבַר־יְהוָה כְּלִי־הַזֶּה הַבָּאִים בַּשַּׁעַרִּים הָאֵלֶּה לְהִשְׁתַּחֲוֹת לַיהוָה: כֹּה־אָמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל הֵיטִיבוּ דַרְכֵיכֶם וּמַעַלְלֵיכֶם וְאִשְׁכַּנְהָ אֶתְכֶם בְּמָקוֹם הַזֶּה: אֲלֹתֵיבְטַחְחוּ לָכֶם אֲל־דְּבַרֵי הַשָּׁקֵר לֵאמֹר הֵיכַל יְהוָה הֵיכַל יְהוָה הֵיכַל יְהוָה הִמָּה: כִּי אִם־הֵיטִיב תִּיטִיבוּ אֶת־דַּרְכֵיכֶם וְאֶת־מַעַלְלֵיכֶם אִם־עָשׂוּ תַעֲשׂוּ מִשְׁפָּט בֵּין אִישׁ וּבֵין רֵעֵהוּ: גֵּר יִתּוֹם וְאִלְמָנָה לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ וְדָם נָקִי אֲל־תִּשְׁפְּכוּ בְּמָקוֹם הַזֶּה וְאֲחֵרֵי אֱלֹהִים אַחֲרָיִם לֹא תִלְכוּ לְרַע לָכֶם: וְשִׁכַנְתִּי אֶתְכֶם בְּמָקוֹם הַזֶּה בְּאֶרֶץ אֲשֶׁר נָתַתִּי לְאֲבוֹתֵיכֶם לְמוֹעֵדֹלָם וְעַד־עוֹלָם: הֲנֵה אַתֶּם בְּטַחִים לָכֶם עַל־דְּבַרֵי הַשָּׁקֵר לְבַלְתִּי הוֹעִיל: הֲגִנֵּב רֹצֵחַ וְנָאֵף וְהַשְׁבַּע לַשָּׁקֵר וְקִטֵּר לְבַעַל וְהִלְךְ אַחֲרֵי אֱלֹהִים אַחֲרָיִם אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יִדְעֶתֶם: וּבְאִתְּם וְעַמְדַתֶם לִפְנֵי בַּיִת הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר נִקְרָא־שְׁמִי עָלָיו וְאָמַרְתֶּם נִצַּלְנוּ לְמַעַן עֲשׂוֹת אֶת כָּל־הַתּוֹעֵבוֹת הָאֵלֶּה: הַמְעַרְתָּ פְרָצִים הָיָה הַבַּיִת הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר־נִקְרָא־שְׁמִי עָלָיו בְּעֵינֵיכֶם גַּם אֲנֹכִי הִנֵּה רָאִיתִי נְאֻם־יְהוָה: כִּי לְכוּ־נָא אֶל־מְקוֹמִי אֲשֶׁר בְּשִׁילוֹ אֲשֶׁר שִׁכַנְתִּי שְׁמִי שָׁם בְּרֵאשׁוֹנָה וְרֵאוּ אֶת אֲשֶׁר־עָשִׂיתִי לוֹ מִפְּנֵי רָעַת עַמִּי יִשְׂרָאֵל: וְעַתָּה יַעוּ עֲשׂוֹתְכֶם אֶת־כָּל־הַמַּעֲשִׂים הָאֵלֶּה נְאֻם־יְהוָה וְאֲדַבֵּר אֲלֵיכֶם הַשֶּׁכֶם וְדַבַּר וְלֹא שָׁמַעְתֶּם וְאִקְרָא אֶתְכֶם וְלֹא עֲנִיתֶם: וְעָשִׂיתִי לְבַיִת אֲשֶׁר נִקְרָא־שְׁמִי עָלָיו אֲשֶׁר אַתֶּם בְּטַחִים בּוֹ וְלְמָקוֹם אֲשֶׁר־נָתַתִּי לָכֶם וְלְאֲבוֹתֵיכֶם כְּאֲשֶׁר עָשִׂיתִי לְשִׁלּוֹ:

[TRANSLATION]

- 1 The word that came to Jeremiah from the Lord, saying,
- 2 Stand in the gate of the Lord's house, and proclaim there this word, and say, Hear the word of the Lord, all you of Judah, who enter these gates to worship the Lord.
- 3 Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, Amend your ways and your doings, and I will make you dwell in this place.
- 4 Trust you not in lying words, saying, The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord, The temple of the Lord, are these.
- 5 For if you thoroughly amend your ways and your doings; if you thoroughly do justice between a man and his neighbor;
- 6 If you oppress not the stranger, the orphan, and the widow, and shed not innocent blood in this place, nor walk after other gods to your harm;
- 7 Then will I make you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave to your fathers, for ever and ever.
- 8 Behold, you trust in lying words, that cannot profit.
- 9 Will you steal, murder, and commit adultery, and swear falsely, and burn incense to Baal, and walk after other gods whom you know not;
- 10 And come and stand before me in this house, which is called by my name, and say, We are saved; that you may do all these abominations?
- 11 Is this house, which is called by my name, become a den of robbers in your eyes? Behold, I myself have seen it, says the Lord.
- 12 But go now to my place which was in Shiloh, where I set my name at first, and see what I did to it for the wickedness of my people Israel.
- 13 And now, because you have done all these deeds, says the Lord, and though I spoke to you, from early in the morning, but you did not listen; and I called you, but you did not answer;
- 14 Therefore will I do to this house, which is called by my name, and in which you trust, and to the place which I gave to you and to your fathers, as I have done to Shiloh.

In light of the prophet Jeremiah's critique, it seems that one of the highly unusual aspects of Yom Kippur is that atonement can be achieved even from intentional sins.

Rabbi Yoel Bin Nun, a leading teacher from the Orthodox kibbutz movement in Israel, teaches that there is much to be learned by the fact that the Torah's description of Yom Kippur in Leviticus 16 is introduced with a reference to the death of Aaron's sons, Nadav and Avihu.

Leviticus 16:1-2

א וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה אַחֲרֵי מוֹת שְׁנֵי בְנֵי אַהֲרֹן בְּקִרְבָּתָם לִפְנֵי־יְהוָה וַיִּמָּתוּ:
 ב וַיֹּאמֶר יְהוָה אֶל־מֹשֶׁה דַּבֵּר אֶל־אַהֲרֹן אַחִיךָ וְאֵל־יָבֵא בְכַל־עֵת אֶל־הַקֹּדֶשׁ מִבֵּית
 לְפָרֶכֶת אֶל־פְּנֵי הַכַּפֹּרֶת אֲשֶׁר עַל־הָאָרֶן וְלֹא יָמוּת כִּי בְעֵנֹן אֶרְאֶה עַל־הַכַּפֹּרֶת:

[TRANSLATION]

The Eternal spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron who died when they drew too close to the presence of the Eternal. The Eternal said to Moses: Tell your brother Aaron that he is not to come at will into the Shrine behind the curtain, in front of the cover that is upon the ark, lest he die; for I appear in the cloud over the cover.

Leviticus 10:1-2

א וַיִּקְחוּ בְנֵי־אַהֲרֹן נָדָב וַאֲבִיהוּא אֵשׁ מִחֻתָּתוֹ וַיִּתְּנוּ בָהֶן אֵשׁ וַיִּשְׂימוּ עָלֶיהָ קִטְרֹת
 וַיִּקְרְבוּ לִפְנֵי יְהוָה אֵשׁ זָרָה אֲשֶׁר לֹא צִוָּה אֹתָם: ב וַתֵּצֵא אֵשׁ מִלִּפְנֵי יְהוָה וַתֹּאכַל
 אוֹתָם וַיָּמָתוּ לִפְנֵי יְהוָה:

[TRANSLATION]

Now Aaron's sons Nadav and Avihu each took his fire pan, put fire in it, and laid incense on it; and they offered before the Eterna alien fire, which He had not enjoined upon them. And fire came forth from the Eternal and consumed them; thus they died at the instance of the Eternal.

Their sin of offering a strange fire can be understood as an intentional sin par excellence. They knew exactly what they were doing in offering a kind of sacrifice which had not been commanded. By recalling the death of Nadav and Avihu precisely at the moment Yom Kippur is first introduced, the Torah may have specifically wanted to present a method for gaining atonement for sins committed intentionally. The Torah's juxtaposition of the case of Nadav and Avihu with the description of Yom Kippur may therefore carry with it a radical message: On Yom Kippur, even intentional sins are forgiven. Like Jeremiah, this may run counter to all of our beliefs about justice. Yet, justice is only one part of the religious equation.

Discussion Questions:

1. If Yom Kippur is exceptional in allowing intentional sins to be forgiven what factors prevent its misuse?
2. Where else is the tension between justice and compassion played out?

The exceptional nature of Yom Kippur extends to the architecture of the Temple itself. Jacob Milgrom points out the ways in which Ancient Near Eastern religions understood that their gods could be driven out by demons to which the gods were also subject. They devised various rituals to clear these demon out of the temple. In Judaism's transformation of this basic religious notion, human sin became the "demons" that could potentially drive God out of the Temple. The purification rites of Yom Kippur therefore are aimed at cleansing the human sin that attached itself to the Temple. Blood is the purification agent which allows God to remain within the Temple.

Different categories of sin attached themselves to particular parts of the Temple. According to Milgrom, this accounts for the various ritual purifications that the Yom Kippur rites entail.

Individual inadvertent sin	outer altar
Entire community's inadvertent sin	inner altar and shrine (outer room of tent)
Deliberate sins of individuals	entire sanctuary, including Holy of Holies

Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus: A Book of Ritual and Ethics*, p. 31:

"If an individual has accidentally violated a prohibition, the priest purges the outer (sacrificial) altar with the blood of the offerer's purification offering (4:27-35). If the entire community has accidentally violated a prohibition, the priest purges the inner (incense) altar and the shrine, the outer room of the tent, with the blood of the purification offering brought by the community's representatives (4:13-21). If, however, individuals have brazenly violated prohibitions, then, once a year, on Yom Kippur, the high priest purges the entire sanctuary, beginning with the inner and holiest culprits—deliberate sinners are barred from the sanctuary—but by the high priest himself."

Leviticus 4:27-35

כז ואם־נפש אחת תחטא בשגגה מעם הארץ בעשתה אחת ממצות יהוה אשר לא־תעשינה ואשם: כח או הודע אליו חטאתו אשר חטא והביא קרבנו שעירת עזים תמימה נקבה על־חטאתו אשר חטא: כט וסמך את־ידו על ראש החטאת ושחט את־החטאת במקום העלה: ל ולקח הכהן מדמה באצבעו ונתן על־קרנת מזבח העלה ואת־כל־דמה ישפך אל־יסוד המזבח: לא ואת־כל־חלבה יסיר באשׁר הוטר חלב מעל־זבח השלמים והקטיר הכהן המזבחה לניח ניחם ליהוה וכפר עליו הכהן ונסלח לו: פ לב ואם־כפשׁ יביא קרבנו לחטאת נקבה תמימה יביאנה: לג וסמך את־ידו על ראש החטאת ושחט אתה לחטאת במקום אשר ישחט את־העלה: לד ולקח הכהן מדם החטאת באצבעו ונתן על־קרנת מזבח העלה ואת־כל־דמה ישפך אל־יסוד המזבח: לה ואת־כל־חלבה יסיר באשׁר יוטר חלב־הפשׁבׁ מזבח השלמים והקטיר הכהן אתם המזבחה על אשי יהוה וכפר עליו הכהן על־חטאתו אשר־חטא ונסלח לו:

[TRANSLATION]

If any person from among the populace unwittingly incurs guilt by doing any of the things which by the Eternal's commandments ought not to be done, and he realizes his guilt—or the sin of which he is guilty is brought to his knowledge—he shall bring a female goat without blemish as his offering for the sin of which he is guilty. He shall lay his hand upon the head of the sin offering, and the sin offering shall be slaughtered at the place of the burnt offering. The priest shall take with his finger some of its blood and put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering; and all the rest of its blood he shall pour out at the base of the altar. He shall remove all its fat, just as the fat is removed from the sacrifice of well-being; and the priest shall turn it into smoke on the altar, for a pleasing odor to the Eternal. Thus the priest shall make expiation for him, and he shall be forgiven. If the offering he brings as a sin offering is a sheep, he shall bring a female without blemish. He shall lay his hand upon the head of the sin offering, and it shall be slaughtered as a sin offering at the spot where the burnt offering is slaughtered. The priest shall take with his finger some of the blood of the sin offering and put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering, and all the rest of its blood he shall pour out at the base of the altar. And all its fat he shall remove just as the fat of the sheep of the sacrifice of well-being is removed; and this the priest shall turn into smoke on the altar, over the Eternal's offering by fire. Thus the priest shall make expiation on his behalf for the sin of which he is guilty, and he shall be forgiven.

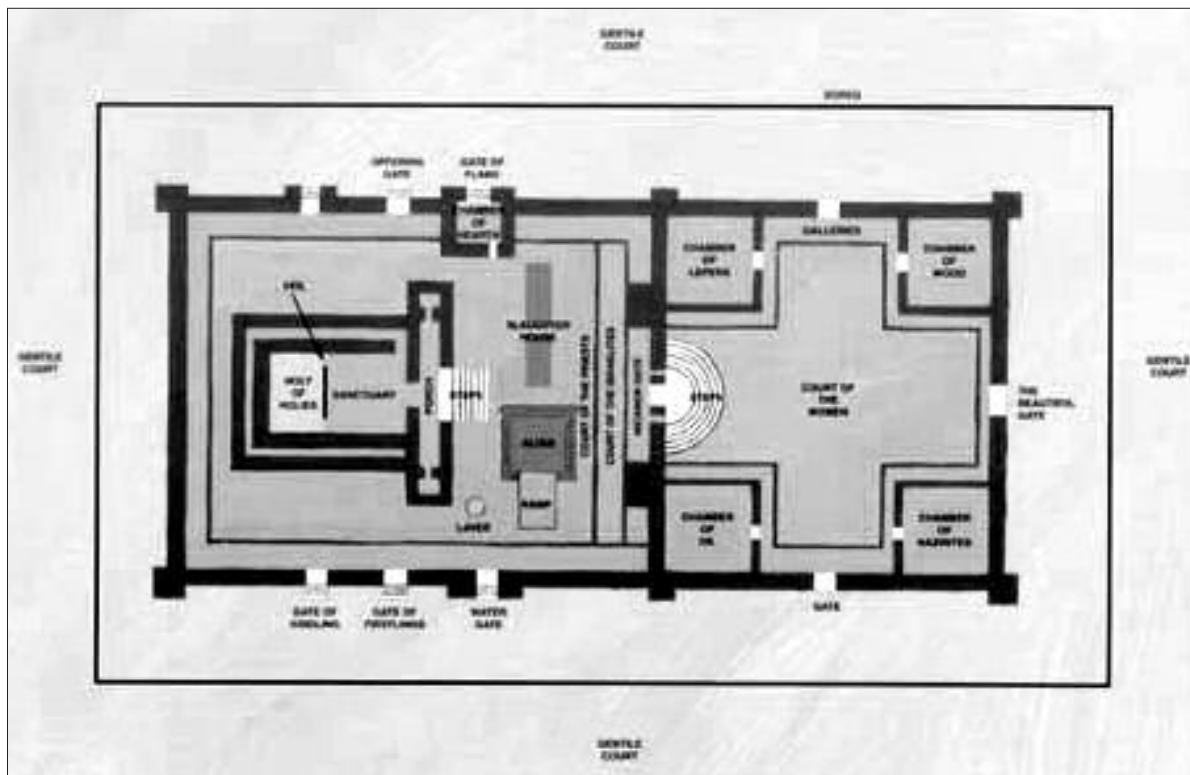
Leviticus 4:13-21

יג ואם כל־עדת ישראל ישגו ונגעלם דבר מעיני הקהל ועשו אחת מכל־מצות יהוה אשר לא־תעשינה ואשמו: יד ונדדעה החטאת אשר חטאו עליה והקריבו הקהל פר בן־בקר לחטאת והביאו אתו לפני אהל מועד: טו וסמכו זקני העדה את־ידיהם על־ראש הפר לפני יהוה ושחט את־הפר לפני יהוה: טז והביא הכהן המשוח מדם הפר אל־אהל מועד: יז וטבל הכהן אצבעו מן־הדם והזה שבע פעמים לפני יהוה את־פני הפרכת: יח ומן־הדם יתן | על־קרנת המזבח אשר לפני יהוה אשר באהל מועד ואת כל־הדם ישפך אל־יסוד מזבח העלה אשר־פתח אהל מועד: יט ואת כל־חלבו ירים ממנו והקטיר המזבחה: כ ועשה לפר כאשר עשה לפר החטאת כן יעשה־לו וכפר עליהם הכהן ונסלח להם: כא והוציא את־הפר אל־מחוץ למחנה ושרף אתו כאשר שרף את הפר הראשון חטאת הקהל הוא:

[TRANSLATION]

If it is the whole community of Israel that has erred and the matter escapes the notice of the congregation, so that they do any of the things which by the Eternal's commandments ought not to be done, and they realize their guilt—when the sin through which they incurred guilt becomes known, the congregation shall offer a bull of the herd as a sin offering, and bring it before the Tent of Meeting. The elders of the community shall lay their hands upon the head of the bull before the Eternal, and the bull shall be slaughtered before the Eternal. The anointed priest shall bring some of the blood of the bull into the Tent of Meeting, and the priest shall dip his finger in the blood and sprinkle of it seven times before the Eternal, in front of the curtain. Some of the blood he shall put on the horns of the altar which is before the Eternal in the Tent of Meeting, and all the rest of the blood he shall pour out at the base of the altar of burnt offering, which is at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting. He shall remove all its fat from it and turn it into smoke on the altar. He shall do with this bull just as is done with the [priest's] bull of sin offering; he shall do the same with it. Thus the priest shall make expiation for them, and they shall be forgiven. He shall carry the bull outside the camp and burn it as he burned the first bull; it is the sin offering of the congregation.

3.5



Discussion Questions:

1. What is the relationship between form and function in our religious lives?
2. What are the implications of imagining sin as if it is capable of attaching itself to the Temple?

Chapter 4

Distortions of Faith

4.1 **The Kohen Gadol's Second Confession**

4.2 **A Tale of Two Priests**

4.3 **What Makes a Place Holy?**

4.4 **Let's Call the Whole Thing Off (Making sense of Jeremiah 7)**

After confessing on behalf of himself and his family, the **Kohen** Gadol offered a confession for all the *Kohanim*—the entire “House of Aaron.”

The priests of Israel were just as fallible as all other individuals, and therefore in need of atonement. Often, those who represent our highest ideals are expected to live in ways that exceed the standards of average people. The priesthood, as we shall see, like most institutions, failed to live up to these ideals.

The text below details the confession of the Kohanim—read it over before continuing on to the next section.

Shivat Yamim (*seven days before*)

ואחר כן בא לי אצל פרו שניה, סומך שתי ידיו עליו ומתודה.

וכך היה אומר אנא השם חטאתי עויתי פשעתי לפניך ואני וביתי ובני אהרון עם קדושיך. אנא בשם כפר נא על החטאים ועל העונות ועל הפשעים שחטאתי שעויתי שפשעתי לפניך אני וביתי ובני.

אהרן, ככ' בתורת מש' עבדך כי ביום הזה יכפר עליכם לטהר אתכם מכל חטאתיכם לפני יהוה.

והכהנים והעם העומדים בעזרה והמשרתים בהיכל בזמן ששמעו את השם המפורש שהוא יוצא מפי כהן גדול בקדושה והיו כורעים ומשתחוים ונופלים על פניהם ואומרים ברוך שם כבוד מלכותו לעולם ועד.

[TRANSLATION]

Afterward, he approached his second bull, laid his hands on it, and confessed.

Thus he would say: “O Lord, I have sinned, I have done wrong, I have transgressed before You, and I and my household and the children of Aaron, Your holy people. O Lord, forgive the sins and iniquities and transgressions that I have committed against You, I and my household and the children of Aaron, Your holy people, as it is written in the Torah of Moses, Your servant: ‘For on this day atonement shall be made for you to cleanse you of all your sins; before the Lord-’” (Lev 16:30)

And when the priests and the people standing in the court and serving in the sanctuary heard the explicit name coming forth from the mouth of the high priest in holiness, they would kneel, prostrate themselves, and fall to their faces and say, “Blessed is the name of His Majesty’s glory for ever and ever”.

He slaughtered it and collected its blood in a basin, and gave it to the one who would stir it, on the fourth terrace in the sanctuary, so that it would not curdle. He took the fire-pan and went up to the top of the altar and cleared [some of the coals inside], and went down and put it on the fourth terrace of the court.

Discussion Questions:

1. The confession on behalf of the priestly leadership precedes the confession of the nation. In our days, leaders tend to offer blame more than personal confession. What might it mean to see confession as a responsibility of leadership?
2. What sort of role do our religious leaders in particular have in admitting personal failures?
3. Would such revelations threaten or enhance their leadership?

The Mishnah relates the following story as a way of explaining why a lottery was instituted by which kohanim would be chosen for various roles that everyone was eager to fulfill. Religious enthusiasm and a desire to serve are worthy and admirable qualities. In religious life, however, it is easy to mistake the forest for the trees. Religious life is susceptible to distortion, and the basest actions can manifest themselves in the very religious system that was shaped to counter those impulses.

Mishnah, Yoma 2:1

בְּרֵאשׁוֹנָה, כָּל מִי שֶׁרוּצֵה לְתַרֵּם אֶת הַמִּזְבֵּחַ, תּוֹרֵם. וּבְזִמְנוֹ שֶׁהוּא מְרַבֵּי, רָצוּ וְעוֹלִין בְּכַבֵּשׁ, וְכָל הַקֹּדֶם אֶת חֲבִירוֹ בְּאַרְבַּע אַמּוֹת זָכָה. וְאִם הָיוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם שְׁוִין, הַמִּמְנָה אוֹמֵר לָהֶם הַצְבִיעוּ. וְמָה הָיוּ מוֹצִיאִין, אַחַת אוֹ שְׁתֵּים, וְאִין מוֹצִיאִין אֶגְדָּל בְּמִקְדָּשׁ:

[TRANSLATION]

At first, any **Kohen** who wanted to separate out the ash from the altar separated it. And in the event that there were many Kohanim who sought this privilege, the following method was used: They ran and ascended the ramp on the altar. Whoever proceeded his fellow by a distance of four amot won the privilege. If two of them were even, the administrator would say to them: "Put out a finger." What did they put out? One of two fingers, but they did not put out a thumb in the Temple. It once occurred that two of the Kohanim were even as they ran and ascended the ramp, and one of them pushed his fellow who fell and his leg was broken. When the Court realized that the Kohanim were exposed to danger, they decreed that Kohanim should only be chosen to separate out the ashes from the altar by lottery. There were a total of four lots cast there every day, and this was the first lottery.

In its discussion of the Mishnah, the Gemarrah brings in a baraita which has a similar, but far more violent, story of rivalry among the Kohanim.

Babylonian Talmud, Yoma 23

"מַעֲשֵׂה שֶׁהָיוּ שְׁנֵיהֶן שְׁוִין וְרָצוּ וְעוֹלִין בְּכַבֵּשׁ". תָּנוּ רַבָּנָן: מַעֲשֵׂה בְּשְׁנֵי כֹהֲנִים שֶׁהָיוּ שְׁנֵיהֶן שְׁוִין וְרָצוּ וְעוֹלִין בְּכַבֵּשׁ, קָדַם אֶחָד מֵהֶן לְתוֹךְ אַרְבַּע אַמּוֹת שֶׁל חֲבִירוֹ – נִטַּל סָכִין וְתַקַּע לוֹ בְּלִבּוֹ. עָמַד רַבִּי צְדוֹק עַל מַעְלוֹת הָאוֹלָם, וְאָמַר: אַחִינוּ בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל שִׁמְעוּ! הֲרִי הוּא אוֹמֵר "כִּי יִמְצָא חָלָל בְּאַדְמָה וַיִּצְאוּ זִקְנֵיךָ וְשִׁפְטֵיךָ", אָנוּ עַל מִי לְהַבִּיא עֲגָלָה עְרוּפָה? עַל הָעִיר אוֹ עַל הָעִזְרוֹת? גָּעוּ כָּל הָעָם בְּבִכְיָה. בָּא אָבִיו שֶׁל תִּינוּק וּמְצָאוּ כִּשְׁהוּא מִפְּרָפְרוֹ. אָמַר: הֲרִי הוּא כְּפֹרְתְכֶם, וְעֵדֵיין בְּנֵי מִפְּרָפְרוֹ, וְלֹא נִטְמְאָה סָכִין. לְלַמֶּדְךָ שֶׁקִּשְׁתָּ עֲלֵיהֶם טְהוֹרֵת כְּלִים יוֹתֵר מִשְׁפִּיכוֹת דָּמִים. וְכֵן הוּא אוֹמֵר "וְגַם דָּם נָקִי שֶׁפָּךְ מִנְּשֵׂה [הַרְבֵּה מְאֹד] עַד אֲשֶׁר מֵלֵא [אֶת] יְרוּשָׁלַיִם פָּה לָפָה. הִי מַעֲשֵׂה קָדִים? אֵילִימָא דְשְׁפִיכוֹת דָּמִים – הַשְׁתָּא אֲשְׁפִיכוֹת דָּמִים לֹא תִקְיֵנוּ פְּיִיסָא, אֲנִשְׁבְּרָה רְגְלוֹ תִקְיֵנוּ? אֵלֵא דְנִשְׁבְּרָה רְגְלוֹ קָדִים. וְכֵין דְתִקְיֵנוּ פְּיִיסָא – אַרְבַּע אַמּוֹת מֵאֵי עֲבִידְתֵייהוּ? אֵלֵא, לְעוֹלָם דְשְׁפִיכוֹת דָּמִים קָדִים. וּמַעֲיָקְרָא סְבוּר: אֶקְרָאֵי בְּעֵלְמָא הוּא, כֵּין דְחִזִּי אֶפִּילוּ מִמִּילָא אֶתוּ לִידֵי סַכְנָה – תִקְיֵנוּ רַבָּנָן פְּיִיסָא.

[TRANSLATION]

The Mishnah read: "It once occurred that two of the Kohanim were even as they ran and ascended the ramp..."

The Rabbis taught: It once happened with two Kohanim who were both even as they ran and ascended the ramp. When one of them came within four amot of the Altar before his fellow did the second one took a knife and drove it into his fellow kohen's heart. Rabbi Zaddok stood on the steps of the Hall and cried: Our

brothers, O House of Israel, Listen! Behold it says, "If one is found slain in the land which the Lord your God gives you to possess, and it is not known who has slain him; Then your elders and your judges shall come forth, and they shall measure the distance to the cities which are around him who is slain..." (Deuteronomy 21) As for us, who has the responsibility to bring a heifer whose neck will be broken? Does the responsibility fall upon the residents of the city of Jerusalem or upon the kohanim who guard the Temple's courtyards? Upon hearing this, all the people burst out crying.

The father of the slain boy came and found that the boy was writhing on the floor. He said: "Behold, he is your atonement! My son is still writhing and therefore the knife did not yet become ritually impure (as a result of contact with a corpse)." This comes to teach you that they considered the purity of vessels to be more serious than murder. And so it says, "Menashe also shed very much innocent blood, until he filled Jerusalem from end to end with it." (II Kings 21)

Hearing this story, the Gemarah wants to understand it in light of the story relayed by the Mishnah.

Which happened first? If you say that the incident of the murder happened first, we are faced with this dilemma: How if on account of murder the Rabbis did not institute a lottery, then why on account in which a Kohen's leg was broken would they institute one? Therefore, you must conclude that the incident in which a Kohen's leg was broken happened first. But this too cannot be correct because once the Rabbis instituted the lottery, why would the story of the murder mention that the **Kohen** came within four amot of the altar? Rather, in fact the murder happened first. Originally, the Rabbis reasoned that this was a random occurrence. Once they say that Kohanim were continuing to become exposed to danger as a regular occurrence, they instituted a lottery.

Deuteronomy 21: 1-9

כִּי־יִמָּצָא חָלָל בְּאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ נָתַן לְךָ לְרִשְׁתָּהּ נָפֶל בַּשָּׂדֶה לֹא נֹדָע מִי הִכָּהוּ: וַיָּצְאוּ זִקְנֶיךָ וְשֹׁפְטֶיךָ וּמָדְדוּ אֶל־הָעָרִים אֲשֶׁר סְבִיבֹת הַחָלָל: וְהָיָה הָעִיר הַקְּרֹבָה אֶל־הַחָלָל וְלָקְחוּ זִקְנֵי הָעִיר הַהוּא עֵגֶל הַהוּא עֹגֶלֶת בָּקָר אֲשֶׁר לֹא־עָבַד בָּהּ אֲשֶׁר לֹא־מִשְׁכָּה בָּעַל: וְהוֹרְדוּ זִקְנֵי הָעִיר הַהוּא אֶת־הָעֵגֶל אֶל־נַחַל אִיתּוֹ אֲשֶׁר לֹא־יַעֲבֹד בוֹ וְלֹא יִזְרַע וְעָרְפוּ־שָׁם אֶת־הָעֵגֶל בְּנַחַל: וּנְגָשׁוּ הַכֹּהֲנִים בְּנֵי לֵוִי כִי בָּם בָּחַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְשָׂרְתוֹ וּלְבָרֶךְ בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה וְעַל־פִּיהֶם יִהְיֶה כָּל־רִיב וְכָל־נִגְעָה: וְכֹל זִקְנֵי הָעִיר הַהוּא הַקְּרֹבִים אֶל־הַחָלָל יִרְחֲצוּ אֶת־יְדֵיהֶם עַל־הָעֵגֶל הָעָרוּפָה בְּנַחַל: וְעָנּוּ וַאֲמָרוּ יָדֵינוּ לֹא שָׁפְכָה אֶת־הַדָּם הַזֶּה וְעֵינֵינוּ לֹא רָאוּ: כִּפּוֹר לַעֲמֹךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל אֲשֶׁר־פָּדִיתָ יְהוָה וְאַל־תִּתֵּן דָּם נָקִי בְּקֶרֶב עַמֶּךָ יִשְׂרָאֵל וּנְכַפֵּר לָהֶם הַדָּם: וְאַתָּה תִּבְעֵר הַדָּם הַנָּקִי מִקְרֶבְךָ כִּי־תַעֲשֶׂה הַיָּשָׁר בְּעֵינֵי יְהוָה:

[TRANSLATION]

If one is found slain in the land which the Lord your God gives you to possess, lying in the field, and it is not known who has slain him; Then your elders and your judges shall come forth, and they shall measure the distance to the cities which are around him who is slain; And it shall be, that the city which is nearest to the slain man, the elders of that city shall take a heifer, which has not been worked with, and which has not pulled in the yoke; And the elders of that city shall bring down the heifer to a rough ravine, which is neither plowed nor sown, and shall strike off the heifer's neck there in the ravine; And the priests, the sons of Levi, shall come near; for them the Lord your God has chosen to minister to him, and to bless in the name of the Lord; and by their word shall every controversy and every assault be tried; And all the elders of that city, which is nearest to the slain man, shall wash their hands over the heifer that is beheaded in the valley; And they shall answer and say, Our hands have not shed this blood, nor have our eyes seen it. Be merciful, O Lord, to your people Israel, whom you have redeemed, and lay not innocent blood to your people of Israel's charge. And the blood shall be forgiven them. So shall you put away the guilt of innocent blood from among you, when you shall do that which is right in the sight of the Lord.

Discussion Questions:

1. How do you explain the competitiveness between the two priests?
2. To what can this story be compared?
3. The Temple was regarded as God's house. What does this story tell us about God and about human beings? Why do you think the ancient Rabbis preserved this story?
4. What makes this a story about atonement?
5. At the end of the Talmudic sugya, the Rabbis discuss a number of questions in an attempt to reconcile the two versions of this story (Mishnah and the Baraita). What do you make of their discussions?
6. If we were to read this sugya as an attempt at reprioritizing our religious lives, what can we take away for our own lives in the 21st century?
7. What elements struck you as particularly meaningful or troubling?

Why is this mountain so special? *Legends of the Land of Israel*

Legend has it that on the site where the Temple stood, two brothers once lived. The elder did not marry, and was all alone in the world. The younger had a wife and three children. The brothers had no material possessions except a plot of land which they had inherited from their father. They did not want to divide up the land because they loved each other. Instead they worked it together and when the harvest was over they counted the sheaves and divided them equally between them, placing them in two piles, each besides his own tent.

One year, after the harvest, the elder brother lay down to sleep beside his pile. But he could not fall asleep, because the thought ran through his mind: My brother has a wife and children to care for while I am all alone in this world and I work only to feed myself. It isn't right that I should take an equal share with my brother. At midnight he got up and, took some sheaves from his pile and stealthily went to his brother's pile and placed them there. Then he returned to his place and slept peacefully.

That same night the younger brother was also unable to sleep. He thought: My brother is all alone in the world. I have sons who will look after me when I am old and unable to work. What will my brother do in his old age? It isn't right that I should take an equal share with my brother. So before daybreak, the younger brother got up, took a few sheaves from his pile, stealthily placed them on his brother's pile and returned to his place and slept.

In the morning, the brothers saw their piles were as large as ever. They wondered about this, but did not say a word to each other. The same happened the next night and the morning that followed. On the third night, as the brothers were carrying sheaves to each other's piles, they met midway, recognized each other and wept, for they realized what had been happening.

God saw what the brothers had done and He blessed the spot where they had met. Later King Solomon built the Temple on that very spot. From this spot the message of Peace, Brotherhood and Love went out to the whole world.

Moshe Halbertal, "God Doesn't Live There Anymore," *Ha'aretz*, January 5, 2001

"In recent months, when blood has flowed freely on the Temple Mount and both sides have shown a willingness to sacrifice the young people of Israel and Palestine on the altar of Moloch, Jewish and Muslim spiritual leaders should harken to the words of the Tosefta. To those who claim ownership over the Temple Mount and dream of spending their lives in the House of God, let it be known that the Shechinah, the holy spirit, has abandoned that blood-soaked place. God doesn't live there anymore."

Discussion Questions:

1. Compare the midrashic story about the two brothers from *Legends of the Land of Israel* with this contemporary op-ed piece. Are these two pieces complementary or contradictory?
2. In your opinion, what makes a place holy?

In the previous chapter, we read the beginning of Jeremiah to show how the prophet's sense of justice seems to stand in contradiction to the very concept of Yom Kippur. As one reads further in the same chapter, there is an additional difficulty raised by the text, particular in verses 22 and 23:

Jeremiah 7: 21–34

כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל עֲלוֹתֵיכֶם סָפוּ עַל־זִבְחֵיכֶם וְאָכְלוּ בָשָׂר: כִּי לֹא־דִבַּרְתִּי אֶת־אֲבוֹתֵיכֶם וְלֹא צִוִּיתִים בַּיּוֹם הוֹצִיאָ אוֹתָם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם עַל־דִּבְרֵי עוֹלָה וְזֶבַח: כִּי אִם־אֶת־הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה צִוִּיתִי אוֹתָם לֵאמֹר שְׁמְעוּ בְקוֹלִי וְהִיִּיתִי לָכֶם לֵאלֹהִים וְאַתֶּם תִּהְיוּ־לִי לְעַם וְהִלַּכְתֶּם בְּכָל־הַדֶּרֶךְ אֲשֶׁר אֶצְוֶה אֶתְכֶם לַמַּעַן יֵיטֵב לָכֶם: וְלֹא שְׁמְעוּ וְלֹא־הָטוּ אֶת־אָזְנָם וַיִּלְכוּ בְּמַעֲצוֹת בְּשׂוֹרוֹת לִבָּם הָרַע וַיִּהְיוּ לְאַחֲזֹר וְלֹא לִפְנִים: לְמַן־הַיּוֹם אֲשֶׁר יָצְאוּ אֲבוֹתֵיכֶם מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם עַד הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה וְאֲשַׁלַּח אֲלֵיכֶם אֶת־כָּל־עַבְדֵי הַנְּבִיאִים יוֹם הַשֶּׁכֶם וְשָׁלַח: וְלֹא שְׁמְעוּ אֵלַי וְלֹא הָטוּ אֶת־אָזְנָם וַיִּקְשׁוּ אֶת־עַרְפֹּם הֲרָעוּ מֵאֲבוֹתָם: וְדִבַּרְתָּ אֲלֵיהֶם אֶת־כָּל־הַדְּבָרִים הָאֵלֶּה וְלֹא יִשְׁמְעוּ אֲלֵיךְ וְקִרְאתָ אֲלֵיהֶם וְלֹא יַעֲנוּכָה: וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵיהֶם זֶה הַגּוֹי אֲשֶׁר לֹא־שְׁמְעוּ בְקוֹל יְהוָה אֱלֹהָיו וְלֹא לָקְחוּ מוֹסֵר אֲבֹדָה הַאֲמוּנָה וְנִכְרַתָּה מִפִּיהֶם: גְּזִי נִזְרָךְ וְהַשְׁלִיכִי וּשְׂאֵי עַל־שִׁפְיָם קִינָה כִּי מָאֵס יְהוָה וַיִּטֵּשׁ אֶת־דָּוָר עֲבָדָתוֹ: כִּי־עָשׂוּ בְנֵי־יְהוּדָה הָרַע בְּעֵינַי נְאוּם־יְהוָה שְׁמוֹ

[TRANSLATION]

- 21 Thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: Add your burnt-offerings unto your sacrifices, and eat ye flesh.
- 22 For I spoke not unto your fathers, nor commanded them in the day that I brought them out of the land of Egypt, concerning burnt-offerings or sacrifices;
- 23 but this thing I commanded them, saying: 'Hearken unto My voice, and I will be your God, and ye shall be My people; and walk ye in all the way that I command you, that it may be well with you.'
- 24 But they hearkened not, nor inclined their ear, but walked in their own counsels, even in the stubbornness of their evil heart, and went backward and not forward,
- 25 even since the day that your fathers came forth out of the land of Egypt unto this day; and though I have sent unto you all My servants the prophets, sending them daily betimes and often,
- 26 yet they hearkened not unto Me, nor inclined their ear, but made their neck stiff; they did worse than their fathers.
- 27 And thou shalt speak all these words unto them, but they will not hearken to thee; thou shalt also call unto them, but they will not answer thee.
- 28 Therefore thou shalt say unto them: This is the nation that hath not hearkened to the voice of the LORD their God, nor received correction; faithfulness is perished, and is cut off from their mouth. {S}
- 29 Cut off thy hair, and cast it away, and take up a lamentation on the high hills; for the LORD hath rejected and forsaken the generation of His wrath.
- 30 For the children of Judah have done that which is evil in My sight, saith the LORD; they have set their detestable things in the house whereon My name is called, to defile it.
- 31 And they have built the high places of Topheth, which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and their daughters in the fire; which I commanded not, neither came it into My mind. {P}
- 32 Therefore, behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that it shall no more be called Topheth, nor The valley of the son of Hinnom, but The valley of slaughter; for they shall bury in Topheth, for lack of room. 33 And the carcasses of this people shall be food for the fowls of the heaven, and for the beasts of the earth; and none shall frighten them away.

This is an astonishing passage. Jeremiah cannot be saying that God never commanded Israel to offer sacrifices, because the Torah itself includes numerous mitzvot related to the sacrifices that are to be offered. Rather, Rabbi Yoav Sherlov suggests that Jeremiah and the other prophets were critiquing the priority that sacrifice had taken over the ethical foundations of the Torah. Jeremiah is advocating for a restoration of ethics as the basis for all other mitzvot. He is saying, in essence, "first things first." In our own religious lives, we are prone to lose the symmetry that was established between ethics and ritual. We often define "religious" in very narrow terms.

Discussion Questions:

1. How do you relate this passage from Jeremiah to the Talmudic story of the murder in the Temple?
2. Are the Rabbis embracing Jeremiah's critique in their retelling of this story?
3. Within the story itself, what would Jeremiah have done in light of the young Kohen's murder?
4. How do we apply Jeremiah's critique to our own community?

Chapter 5

Sending Our Sins Away

5.1 **Introducing...the Scapegoat**

5.2 **Uses of Transference**

5.3 **Where (or Who) is Azazel?**

5.4 **The Scapegoat and Scapegoating**

5.5 **The Original “Red String”**

One of the most well-known aspects of the High Priest's Yom Kippur rituals surrounds the scapegoat: an animal that, rather than being sacrificed on the altar, was cast off to die in the wilderness outside of the city walls as a representation of Israel's sins. The people's transgressions were transferred to the goat, offering absolution for the masses through this physical act.

Pay particular attention to the various ritual aspects surrounding the selection and sending off of the scapegoat. After reading through the excerpts from *Shivat Yamim*, continue on to the next section.

[insert Hebrew]

He approached the east of the court north of the altar, the prefect at his right and the head of the priestly division at his left. There were two goats there, and the urn was there. He shook the urn and took up two lots. On one was written, "for the Lord" and on one was written "for Azazel." If the one for the Lord came up in his right hand, the prefect said, "Sir High Priest, raise your right hand," and if it came up in his left, the head of the priestly division said, "Sir, High Priest, raise your left hand." Then he placed them on the two goats. And he would say, "This is the *chatat* [sin offering] for the Lord," as it is written, "And Aaron shall take the two he-goats and let them stand before the Lord at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting; and he shall place lots upon the goats, [one marked for the Lord and the other marked for Azazel.] Aaron shall bring forward the goat designated by lot for the Lord, which he is to offer as a **sin offering** (Lev. 16:7-9) And he left the goat designated for Azazel standing, as it is written, "while the goat which is designated for Azazel shall be left standing alive before the Lord, to make expiation with it and to send it off to the wilderness for Azazel (Lev. 16:10) to an inaccessible region, a desolate wilderness, as it is written, "Thus the goat shall carry all their iniquities [to an inaccessible region.]" (Lev. 16:22) He tied a thread of crimson wool to the head of the scapegoat and stood it opposite the place where it was to be sent, and the one to be slaughtered toward the place of the slaughter.

That Yom Kippur is and was a day set aside to focus on the cleansing and removal of sin is clear. But just how is that sin expiated?

As we have already begun to see, in the time of the Temple absolution came by means of necessarily physical acts: animal sacrifices and the High Priest's visit into the Holy of Holies. A third ritual, the designation and casting off of a scapegoat, was a ritual intended to literally transfer the onus of sin from Israel onto this one animal. The people's wrongdoings were imparted onto another being, a goat, which was then sent out from society, into the wilderness.

This is the origin of the contemporary word "scapegoat." A goat, rather than wrongdoers, became the focus of society's ill-doing. The goat became sin incarnate, and the people saw their own transgressions manifested in the animal.

The human ability to subconsciously allow for a fluidity of attributes between one individual and another is a recognized and significant term in modern psychology.

transference – *n.* In psychoanalysis, the process by which emotions and desires originally associated with one person, such as a parent or sibling, are unconsciously shifted to another person, especially to the analyst.

The ritual of the scapegoat was then a conscious act of transference. The scapegoat became the embodiment of all Israel's transgressions. With this expiation came great relief.

The burden of transgression on the moral mind is great. Absolution from sin is an act that brings with it great relief to an individual. But it is often necessary for people to see their sins literally transferred into the hands of another being before they can accept their expiation. In modern times, we continue to observe the ritual of *tashlich*, in which a person's sins are metaphorically transferred onto bits of bread, which are cast off into flowing water. The human need remains the same; our world's context changes.

Moshe Halbertal, Unpublished essay on sacrifice

Sin is traditionally framed within different metaphors: a stain, a debt, or a burden whose weight accumulates and bends the sinner and threatens to crush him altogether. In the context of the burden metaphor, atonement is experienced as a relief, alleviating the weight of the burden. Cain proclaimed in pain "my sin is too weighty to carry."¹ If he had achieved atonement he could have passed the burden to another subject, or maybe to God himself who is called "nosse avon"—the one who carries sin, or the one who lifts it. Within this framing of sin as a burden, ritual expiation might involve yet another procedure in which a victim is not brought forward to the altar but rather sent away as the one who carries the sin. In such a case, the animal doesn't serve as a symbolic representation but rather as a vehicle of projection:

'Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat and confess over it all the iniquities and transgressions of the Israelites, whatever their sins, putting them on the head of the goat; and it shall be sent off to the wilderness through a designated man. Thus the goat shall carry on it all their iniquities to an inaccessible region; and the goat shall be set free in the wilderness.'

The laying of hands on the goat combined with the speech act of confession is the actual transfer of the burden to the goat who will carry it away. Confession in its most primary sense is not an act of disclosure or admission; it is an act of alleviating the burden and passing it on. This sense of confession is preserved

even without the assumption of the ontology of sin being passed from one subject to the other. It is felt in the experience of confession as a relief from a burden, since the burden of secrecy might at times be greater than the future fear of shame. It is an act of letting go, of separating the self from the hidden burden. In contemporary therapeutic context, which functions as a confessional practice, the metaphor of transference is not an accident. The burden of the secret is passed on to a shared carrier. In the case of the scapegoat, there is an actual designated subject who will bear the sin for the sinner.

¹ The JPS translation my punishment is too great to bear

Discussion Questions:

1. What examples of conscious transference can you think of that exist in modern Judaism?
How are they similar and different from the scapegoat ritual?
2. How do we let go of our sins on Yom Kippur today?
3. What or who are our contemporary scapegoats?

We have already mentioned (Chapter 3, Section 4) the way in which Yom Kippur is exceptional in allowing intentional sins to be atoned for within the precincts of the Temple. An additional way of making sense of the exceptional nature of Yom Kippur is through the ritual of the scapegoat. Rabbi Yoel Bin Nun teaches that the Torah, by creating the ritual of the scapegoat, provides a method to atone for intentional sin. Since the intentional sinner cannot atone within the Temple (which would cause the Temple to become impure), those intentional sins are transferred onto the goat which is sent to Azazel.

Another biblical scholar, Israel Knohl, notes in his book *The Divine Symphony* that Azazel is not mentioned elsewhere in Hebrew Bible. While the Rabbis tried to demythologize the name by linking it with geography (the place to which the goat is dispatched), the name itself was changed from עִזְזַאֵל (a mighty god) to עִזְזֹאֵל. This was the Torah's way of borrowing from the mythology of pagan culture and transforming it, while still maintaining a trace of its idolatrous origins. Azazel remains a kind of counterpart to God who carries sin away. After all, Knohl notes, one can see in the phraseology of Leviticus, "one marked for the Lord and the other marked for Azazel..." as proof of a kind of parity.

So, Knohl asks:

"One might ask why it is here, in the holiest place and at the holiest time of the year, that the foundations of biblical monotheism are thus shaken. The answer is to be found in the meaning and aim of the Azazel ritual. The purpose of the ritual is atonement – cleansing the Tabernacle and cleansing the people of Israel. In order to purge their iniquities and sins, the Israelites must find an evil persona to accept their sins. The God of Israel, who is the source of good in the created world, could not possibly play this role. An apt representative of cosmic evil had to be found. The lot fell to Azazel and he was thus lifted up from the dust of ancient times and assigned the role of the Lord's counterpart, accepting all of Israel's evils and sins." (p. 16-17)

Discussion Questions:

1. What notion of God requires the mythic Azazel to be "lifted up from the dust of ancient times"?
2. How is the Torah's conception of sin different from our own?
3. How can mythology be re-worked in ways that can comfortably be incorporated into a monotheistic religious life?
4. What is the role of the symbolic and the non-literal in religious life?

Elijah Zuta 19

אליהו זוטא (איש שלום) פרשה יט

גם אהבתם גם שנאתם גם קנאתם כבר אבדה (קהלת ט' ו'), כנגד מי אמר שלמה המקרא הזה, לא אמרו אלא כנגד יעקב ועשו, משל למה הדבר דומה, לשני בני אדם אחד שונא המלך ואחד שונא ההגמון, אמר לו מי ששונא המלך למי ששונא ההגמון, אשריך שאתה הולך למקום אחר ישר לך תקוה אבל [אותו] האיש אין לו תקוה, בכל מקום שהוא הולך רשות המלך עליו, (אבל) [אף] כך הקב"ה שונא לעשו בעצמו שנאמר ואת עשו שנאתי (מלאכי א' ג'). באותה שעה באין מלאכי השרת מבקשין [את] הקב"ה לומר שירה לפניו ואינן מוצאין אותו והולכים אצל הים ואומרים לו, הקב"ה נראה לך, שנאמר הנותן בים דרך (ישעיה מ"ג ט"ז), אומר להם מיום שיבש אותי והעביר [את] בניו בתוכי (שגם) [שוב] לא ראיתיו, הולכים אל הר סיני (אומר) [ואומרים לו] הקב"ה נראה לך, שנאמר ה' מסיני בא (דברים ל"ג ב'), אומר להם מיום שנגלה עלי ונתן תורה לעמו והוא [היה] חתן ומשה שושבין ותורה כלה שוב לא ראיתיו, הולכין אצל ציון ואומר' לה נגלה לך הקב"ה, שנאמר כי בחר ה' בציון (תהלים קל"ב י"ג) אמר' להם מיום שסילק שכינתו מתוכי והחריב את ביתו ושרף את היכלו שוב לא ראיתיו, אמר להם ישעיה את מי אתם מבקשים, אמר' לו [את] הקב"ה, אמר להם עכשיו יצא מאדום, שנאמר מי זה בא מאדום, באותה שעה באין ומוצאין להקב"ה ורואין את בגדיו [שהן] אדומים [כתולעת שני ואומרים לפניו רבש"ע מדוע אדום ללבושיך], שנאמר מדוע אדום ללבושיך (ישעיה ס"ג ב'), אמר להם (בת) [גת] קטנה היתה לי ודרכתי אותה, שנאמר פורה דרכתי לבדי (שם שם /ישעיהו ס"ג ג'), באותה שעה נוטל הקב"ה [כל] עונותיהם של ישראל ונותן [אותן] על עשו הרשע, שנאמר ונשא השעיר עליו את כל עונותם (ויקרא ט"ז כ"ב), אמר עשו לפני הקב"ה, רבש"ע וכי מה כחי שנתת לי כל עוונות יעקב, באותה שעה נוטל הקב"ה כל עוונות יעקב ונותן על בגדיו ונעשין אדומין כתולעת שני, (ומכבסין) [ומכבסין] עד שנעשין כשלג, שנאמר לבושה כתלג חור (דניאל ז' ט'), לכך נאמר מי זה בא מאדום

[TRANSLATION]

"Their loves, their hates, their jealousies have long since perished; and they have no more share till the end of time in all that goes on under the sun." (Ecclesiastes 9:6) When Solomon said this verse, to whom was he referring? He was referring to no one other than Jacob and Esau. To what can this be compared? To two human beings—one whom a king hated, and one whom a general hated. The one whom the king hated said to the one whom the general hated: You are fortunate that when you go to another region, there is hope for you [because the general has no authority there]. But I have no hope! Wherever I go, the authority of the king is still over me. So it is with Esau—the Holy One Himself hates him, as it says, "...and Esau I have hated." (Malachi 1:3)

When the Holy One wreaks vengeance upon Edom, the ministering angels will look for the Holy One in order to sing their song in His presence, but they will not find Him. So they will go to the sea and ask it: When did He "who made a way in the sea" (Isaiah 43:16) last appear to you? The sea will reply: Since the day that He had me dry up and led His children through me, I have not seen Him. They will then go to Mount Sinai and ask it: When did he of whom it is said, "The Lord came from Sinai" (Deut. 33:2), the Holy One, last appear to you, Mount Sinai will reply: Since the day that He appeared upon me and gave the Torah to His people with Himself as a groom, Moses as the bridegroom's friend and the Torah as the bride, I have not seen Him. They will go to Zion, and ask: Has He, the Holy One, of whom it is said, "For the Lord has chosen Zion" (Ps. 132:13), appeared to you? Zion will reply: Since the day He removed His presence from My midst, destroyed His house, and burned His temple, I have not seen Him. Then Isaiah will ask the ministering angels: Whom are you seeking? They will reply: The Holy One. Isaiah will say: He has just now gone forth from Edom, as is intimated in the verse: "Who is this coming from Edom, in crimsoned garments...?" (Isaiah 63:1) At once the angels [knowing it to be the Holy One] will go and find Him, and behold-

ing His garments crimson, they will ask: Master of the Universe, why are your garments crimsoned? As it says, "Why is your clothing so red?" (Isaiah 63:2) He will say: I had a small winepress and trod it Myself, as it says, "I trod out a vintage alone." (Ibid.) That is, the Holy One has taken all the sins of Israel and charged them against wicked Esau whose cruel decrees led Israel to sin, as it is said, , "Thus the goat [the one from Seir] shall carry on it all their iniquities..." (Leviticus 16:22) But when Esau spoke up to the Holy One, saying, "Master of the universe, is my strength such that I can bear all of Jacob's iniquities that You load upon me?" The Holy One took all of Jacob's sins and put them on his own garments, so that their crimson became an intense scarlet. He will wash the garments, so that their crimson became an intense scarlet. He will wash the garments, however, until they are made white as snow, as it is said, "His garment was like white snow..." (Daniel 7:9)

Isaiah 63:1-3

א מי-זה | בא מאדום חמוץ בגדים מבצרה זה הדור בלבושו צעה ברב כחו
 אני מדבר בצדקה רב להושיע: ב מדוע אדם ללבושך ובגדיך כדרך בגת:
 ג פורה | דרכתי לבדי ומעמים אין-איש אתי ואדרכם באפי וארמסם בחמתי
 ויז נצחם על-בגדי וכל-מלבושי אגאלתי:

[TRANSLATION]

Who is this coming from Edom, in crimsoned garments from Bozrah – Who is this, majestic in attire, pressing forward in His great might? "It is I, who contend victoriously, powerful to give triumph." Why is your clothing so red, your garments like his who treads grapes? I trod out a vintage alone; of the peoples no man was with Me. I trod them down in My anger, tramples them in My rage; their life-blood bespattered My garments and all My clothing was stained..."

In this midrash, Edom is punished for its treatment of Israel. It becomes the scapegoat of Israel's sins as punishment for scapegoating Israel over the years. At the end of time, however, there will be no more scapegoats. God Himself will become the scapegoat.

In our own history, the Jew has often been the most obvious scapegoat. Some, like Jean-Paul Sartre, came to see this as a defining feature of Jewish identity.

Read Sartre's words below and juxtapose them with the Rabbinic passage about Esau above.

Jean-Paul Sartre, Anti-Semite and Jew: An Exploration of the Etiology of Hatred

Jewish authenticity consists in choosing oneself as a Jew—that is, in realizing one's Jewish condition. The authentic Jew abandons the myth of the universal man; he knows himself and wills himself into history as a historic and damned creature; he ceases to run away from himself and to be ashamed of his own kind.... He knows that he is one who stands apart, untouchable, scorned, proscribed—and it is as such that he asserts his being.... He stakes everything on human grandeur, for he accepts the obligation to live in a situation that is defined precisely by the fact that it is unlivable.

Discussion Questions:

1. What does this midrash say about the act of scapegoating?
2. What does this midrash say about patterns of blame and violence?
3. What makes the elimination of a scapegoat redemptive?
4. What are we to take from this?

Skim through popular literature, magazines and tabloids these days, and you'll get a very particular image of red string: a kabalistic good luck charm worn by the likes of Madonna. Any visitor to the Western Wall is inundated with local beggars offering to tie red strings around their wrists in exchange for tzedakah. There are red-strings that are said to be blessed at the tomb of Sarah, ones that claim protection from the "Evil Eye," and even red strings that promise to allow their wearers to realize their full potential in every arena of life.

The red string did not always have such pop-culture-spirituality-infused associations.

Prior to casting the scapegoat out to the wilderness, a string (dyed red) was split in two; half of it was tied in between the goat's horns, and another to a rock nearby. This crimson thread, like the scapegoat itself, represented Israel's sins and impurity. As it was sent on its way, the rabbis record that the red string would, incredibly, turn white – signifying that Israel's transgressions had indeed been forgiven.

Yoma 67a

תָּנוּ רַבָּנוּ: עֶשֶׂר סוּכוֹת וּשְׁנַיִם עָשָׂר מִלִּין הָיוּ, דְּבָרֵי רַבִּי מֵאִיר. רַבִּי יְהוּדָה אוֹמֵר: תִּשְׁעַת סוּכוֹת וְעֶשְׂרָה מִלִּין. רַבִּי יוֹסִי אוֹמֵר: חֲמֵשׁ סוּכוֹת וְעֶשְׂרָה מִלִּין הָיוּ, וְכוּלָן עַל יְדֵי עִירוּב. אָמַר רַבִּי יוֹסִי: סַח לִי אֶלְעָזָר בְּנִי: אִם עַל יְדֵי עִירוּב – יִכּוּלְנִי לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶפִּילוּ שְׁתֵּי סוּכוֹת וְעֶשְׂרָה מִלִּין. כִּמָּאן אֶזְלָא הָא דְתַנְיָא חוּץ מֵאַחֲרוֹן שְׁבֵהֶן שְׁלֹא הִגִּיעַ עִמּוֹ לְצוּק אֲלָא עוֹמֵד מִרְחוֹק וְרוּאָה אֶת מַעֲשֵׂי? – כִּמָּאן – כְּרַבִּי מֵאִיר. "עַל כָּל סוּכָה וְסוּכָה אוֹמְרִים לוֹ הֲרֵי מְזוֹן וְהֲרֵי מִים". תָּנָא: מְעוֹלָם לֹא הוּצֵרַךְ אָדָם לְכַךְ, אֲלָא שְׂאִינוּ דוֹמָה מִי שֵׁשׁ לוֹ פֶּת בְּסֻלּוֹ לְמִי שְׂאִין לוֹ פֶּת בְּסֻלּוֹ. "מָה הָיָה עוֹשֶׂה, חוֹלֵק לְשׁוֹן שֶׁל זְהוּרִית". וְנִקְטְרִיהָ כּוֹלִיָּה בְּסַלְעַ! – כִּיּוֹן דְּמִצְוָה בְּשַׁעֲרֵי דִילְמָא קָדִים וּמִלְבָּיו, וּמִיִּתְבָּא דְעֵתִיָּה. – וְנִקְטְרִיהָ כּוֹלִיָּה בֵּין קַרְנָיו – זְמַנִּין דְּגָמִישׁ לִיהָ לְרִישֶׁיהָ, וְלֹא אֲדַעְתִּיהָ. תָּנוּ רַבָּנוּ: בְּרֵאשׁוֹנָה הָיוּ קוֹשְׁרִין לְשׁוֹן שֶׁל זְהוּרִית עַל פֶּתַח הָאוֹלָם מִבְּחוּץ, הַלְבִּין – הָיוּ שְׂמַחִין, לֹא הַלְבִּין – הָיוּ עֲצָבִין וּמִתְבִּיִישִׁין. הִתְקִינוּ שִׁיְהִיוּ קוֹשְׁרִין עַל פֶּתַח הָאוֹלָם מִבְּפָנִים, וְעַדִּין הָיוּ מְצִיצִין וְרוֹאִין: הַלְבִּין – הָיוּ שְׂמַחִין, לֹא הַלְבִּין – הָיוּ עֲצָבִין. הִתְקִינוּ שִׁיְהִיוּ קוֹשְׁרִין אוֹתוֹ חֲצִי בְּסַלְעַ וְחֲצִי בֵּין קַרְנָיו. אָמַר רַבִּי נַחוּם בַּר פֶּפְאָה מְשׁוּם רַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר הַקָּפָר: בְּרֵאשׁוֹנָה הָיוּ קוֹשְׁרִין לְשׁוֹן שֶׁל זְהוּרִית עַל פֶּתַח הָאוֹלָם מִבְּפָנִים, וְכִיּוֹן שֶׁהִגִּיעַ שַׁעֲרֵי לְמַדְבָּר – הָיָה מְלָבִין, וְיָדְעוּ שְׂנַעֲשִׂית מִצְוֹתוֹ, שְׂנֵאֵמַר "אִם־יְהִיוּ חֲטָאֵיכֶם כְּשֶׁנִּים כְּשֶׁלֶג יִלְבִּינוּ".

It has been taught: 'Originally they used to fasten the thread of scarlet on the door of the [Temple] court on the outside. If it turned white the people used to rejoice, and if it did not turn white they were sad. They therefore made a rule that it should be fastened to the door of the court on the inside. People, however, still peeped in and saw, and if it turned white they rejoiced and if it did not turn white they were sad. They therefore made a rule that half of it should be fastened to the rock and half between the horns of the goat that was sent [to the wilderness]'. Rav Nahum ben Papa said in the name of Rav Eleazar HaKafar: Originally they used to tie the thread of crimson wool to the entrance of the Temple within, and as soon as the he-goat reached the wilderness, it turned white. Then they knew that the commandment concerning it had been fulfilled, as it is said, "Be your sins like crimson, They can turn snow-white; Be they red as dyed wool, They can become like fleece." (Isaiah 1:18)

Isaiah 1:15-20

טו ובְּפָרְשֵׁכֶם כְּפִיכֶם אֶעֱלִים עֵינַי מִכֶּם גַּם כִּי־תִרְבוּ תִפְלֵה אֵינֶנִּי שֹׁמֵעַ יְדֵיכֶם דָּמִים מְלֹאוֹ:
 טז רַחֲצוּ הַזְכוּ הִסִּירוּ רַע מֵעֲלֵיכֶם מִנְגִד עֵינַי חֲדָלוּ הָרַע: יז לִמְדוּ הֵיטֵב דַּרְשׁוּ מִשְׁפָּט אֲשֶׁרוֹ
 חֲמוֹץ שִׁפְטוֹ יָתוּם רִיבוֹ אֲלֻמְנָה: יח לְכוּ־נָא וְנִכְחָה יֹאמֶר יְהוָה אִם־יִהְיֶה חֲטָאֵיכֶם כְּשָׁנִים כְּשֶׁלֶג
 יִלְבִּינוּ אִם־יֵאָדִימוּ כְּתוֹלַע כְּצֹמֶר יִהְיוּ: יט אִם־תֵּאָבֹו וּשְׁמַעְתֶּם טוֹב הָאָרֶץ תֹּאכְלוּ: כ וְאִם־תִּמְאַנּוּ
 וּמְרִיתֶם חֲרֹב תֹּאכְלוּ כִּי פִי יְהוָה דָּבָר: כא אֵיכָה הִיְתָה לְזוֹנָה קְרוּיָה נְאֻמְנָה מְלֹאֲתֵי מִשְׁפָּט צָדֵק
 יִלְיוּ בָּהּ וְעַתָּה מִרְצָחִים: כב כִּסְפֶךָ הָיָה לְסִיגִים סִבְאָךָ מְהוּל בְּמִים: כג שְׁרִיךְ סוּרְרִים וְחִבְרֵי
 גְּנָבִים כָּלוּ אֶהָב שְׁחָד וְרָדַף שְׁלֹמָנִים יָתוּם לֹא יִשְׁפֹּטוּ וְרִיב אֲלֻמְנָה לֹא־יָבֹוא אֲלֵיהֶם:

And when you lift up your hands, I will turn My eyes away from you;
 Though you pray at length, I will not listen.
 Your hands are stained with crime—
 Wash yourselves clean; Put your evil doings away from My sight.
 Cease to do evil; Learn to do good.
 Devote yourselves to justice; Aid the wronged.
 Uphold the rights of the orphan; Defend the cause of the widow.
 “Come, let us reach an understanding,”—says The Eternal.
 “Be your sins like crimson, They can turn snow-white;
 Be they red as dyed wool, They can become like fleece.”
 If, then, you agree and give heed, You will eat the good things of the earth;
 But if you refuse and disobey, You will be devoured [by] the sword.—
 For it was The Eternal who spoke.

In 70 CE, the Romans destroyed the Second Temple. Amid the crumpled stones of the once magnificent structure lay the ruins of the priesthood and its sacrificial system. The central mode of Jewish relation to the Divine was no more.

In all areas of Jewish worship, prayer came to replace the sacrifices of old. Yom Kippur is no exception. The rabbis made great effort to show the connection between the two rituals—both the old and the new. They detailed clearly how prayers filled the void left by the destroyed sacrificial system.

The following midrash is a prime example.

Song of Songs Rabbah 4:9

שיר השירים רבה (וילנא) פרשה ד

ד"א כחוט השני שפתותיך, זה לשון של זהורית, ומדברך נאווה, זה שעיר המשתלח, אמרו ישראל לפני הקב"ה רבש"ע אין לנו לשון זהורית ושעיר המשתלח, אמר להם כחוט השני שפתותיך, רחישת פיך חביבה עלי כחוט השני של זהורית, ר' אבהו אמר עלה (הושע י"ד) ונשלמה פרים שפתינו, מה נשלם תחת פרים ותחת שעיר המשתלח שפתינו, ומדברך נאווה, מדברך יאי, מדברתיך יאיא

Another explanation: Your lips are like a thread of scarlet (Song of Songs 4:3), this refers to the crimson strip. And your desert (midbarech) is lovely, this refers to the scapegoat. Israel said before the Holy One, blessed be He: “Sovereign of the Universe, we have no crimson strip nor scapegoat. God replied: Your lips are like a thread of scarlet: the utterance of your lips is as beloved to me as the strip of crimson.”

R. Abbahu cited in this connection, “So will we offer the words of our lips instead of calves” (Hosea 14:3); what shall we pay in place of bullocks and in place of the scapegoat? [The utterance of] our lips, as it says, and your utterance (midbarech) is lovely. Just as your desert is lovely, so too your utterance is lovely.

Discussion Questions:

1. What is your response to learning about the original red string? How does it differ from modern manifestations of the kabalistic luck charm?
2. In the midrash from Song of Songs Rabbah, God and R. Abbahu both offer explanations justifying prayer superseding the scapegoat. How are these two explanations similar? How do they differ in emphasis?
3. What does modern prayer have in common with the ancient ritual? In what ways does it differ? In your opinion, is one better?
4. How does prayer replicate the scapegoat ritual, and in what ways does it fail to?

Chapter 6

Achieving Atonement

6.1 **The Prayer of the Kohen Gadol**

6.2 **You Are What You Pray**

6.3 **Say More!**

6.3 **Bridging Past and Future**

6.4 **Each of Us is a Kohen Gadol**

The following two texts come from the Seder HaAvodah liturgy, immediately following Shivat Yamim. They explain the blessings offered by the High Priest immediately following his exit from the **Holy of Holies**. Despite having already confessed on his behalf, that of the Priesthood and that of all of Israel, he still took the time to offer special prayers as well upon his exit.

After reading over the two quotes below, please continue on to the following section.

יצא לו ובא לו דרך בית כניסתו ומתפלל תפילה קצרה בבית החיצון.
היה מאריך בתפילתו כדי שלא להבעית את ישראל.

He came out the way he had gone in, and said a short prayer in the outer chamber. He would not extend his prayer, so as not to frighten Israel.

וכך היה מתפלל: יהי רצון מלפניך שתהא השנה הזאת שנת שובע וכו'
ולא תכנס לפניך תפילת עוברי דרכים.

This is what he would pray: May it be Your will , that this year be a year [of abundance], and let not the prayers of travelers enter before You.

From Shivat Yamim

"ומתפלל תפלה קצרה בבית החיצון". מאי מצלי? רבא בר רב אדא ורבין בר רב אדא, תרוייהו משמיה דרב אמרי: יהי רצון מלפניך ה' אלהינו שתהא שנה זו גשומה ושחונה. - שחונה מעליותא היא?! - אלא אימא: אם שחונה - תהא גשומה. רב אחא בריה דרבא מסיים בה משמיה דרב יהודה: לא יעדי עביד שולטן מדבית יהודה, ולא יהיו עמך ישראל צריכין לפרנס זה מזה, ולא תכנס לפניך תפלת עוברי דרכים. רבי חנינא בן דוסא הוה קא אזיל באורחא, שדא מטרא עליה. אמר: רבוננו של עולם, כל העולם כולו בנחת וחנינא בצער? פסק מיטרא. כי אתא לביתיה אמר: רבוננו של עולם, כל העולם כולו בצער וחנינא בנחת. אתא מיטרא. אמר רבי יוסף: מאי אהניא ליה צלותיה דכהן גדול לגבי רבי חנינא בן דוסא. תנו רבנן: מעשה בכהן גדול אחד שהאריך בתפלתו, ונמנו אחיו הכהנים ליכנס אחריו. התחילו הם נכנסין והוא יוצא. אמרו לו: מפני מה הארכת בתפלתך? אמר להם: קשה בעיניכם שהתפללתי עליכם, ועל בית המקדש שלא יחרב. - אמרו לו: אל תהי רגיל לעשות כן, שהרי שנינו: לא היה מאריך בתפלתו, כדי שלא להבעית את ישראל.

[TRANSLATION]

The Mishnah stated: "... and the **Kohen** Gadol recited a short prayer in the outer chamber.

What would he pray? Rava bar Rav Adda and Ravin bar Rav Adda both said in the name of Rav: "May it be Your will, Eternal our God, that this year be rainy and hot." Is it an advantage that the year should be hot? Rather, say that the Kohen Gadol prayed: "If this year is hot, may it be rainy."

Rav Acha the son of Rava concluded the text of the prayer in the name of Rav Yehudah: "... May one who exercises leadership not pass from the House of Judah, may Israel not be required to receive financial support from one another, and may the prayer of wayfarers to withhold the rain not be permitted to enter before You."

Rabbi Chanina ben Dosa was once traveling along a road. Rain descended upon him. He said, "Master of the Universe, shall the entire world be in comfort and Chanina in distress? The rain stopped. When he arrived at his home he said, "Master of the Universe, shall the entire world be in distress and Chanina in comfort?" The rain came down again.

Rav Yosef asked: What good did the prayer of the **Kohen** Gadol do with regard to Chanina ben Dosa? The Rabbis taught (in an early rabbinic statement): There was once an incident with one **Kohen** Gadol who prolonged his prayer in the outer chamber, and his brethren, the Kohanim, decided to enter the sanctuary to check on him. They began to enter just as he was exiting. They said to him: Why did you prolong your prayer? He replied: Are you displeased that I prayed on your behalf and on behalf of the Temple that it not be destroyed? They told him: Do not be accustomed to do so, for we have learned (in the Mishnah): He would not prolong his prayer so as not to frighten the Jewish people.

Jerusalem Talmud, Yoma 5:2

אמר רבי שמואל בר אבדומא לבמה היה בא שלא ליתן אחוריו לקודש ומתפלל תפילה קצרה בבית החיצון וכך היתה תפילתו של כהן גדול ביום הכיפורים בצאתו בשלום מן הקודש יהי רצון מלפניך יי אלהינו ואלהי אבותינו שלא תצא עלינו גלות לא ביום הזה ולא בשנה הזאת ואם יצאה עלינו גלות ביום הזה או בשנה הזאת תהא גלותינו למקום של תורה יהי רצון מלפניך יי אלהינו ואלהי אבותינו שלא יצא עלינו חסרון לא ביום הזה ולא בשנה הזאת ואם יצא עלינו חסרון ביום הזה או בשנה הזאת יהא חסרורינו בחסרון של מצוות יהי רצון מלפניך יי אלהינו ואלהי אבותינו שתהא השנה הזאת שנת זול שנת שובע שנת משא ומתן שנת גשומה ושחונה וטלולה ושלא יצטרכו עמך ישראל אלו לאלו ואל תפנה לתפילת יוצאי דרכים רבנן דקסרין אומרין ועל עמך ישראל שלא יגבהו שררה זו על גב זו ועל אנשי השרון היה אומר יהי רצון מלפניך יי אלהינו ואלהי אבותינו שלא יעשו בתיהן קבריהן

[TRANSLATION]

Rabbi Shmuel son of Avudma said that there was a bima so that one would not leave the **Holy of Holies** and pray a short prayer out in the outer chamber. This was the prayer of the **Kohen** Gadol on Yom Kippur, when he left the Holy in one piece: May it be Your will, Eternal our God and God of our ancestors, that a decree of exile not be issued against us, not this day or this year, but if a decree of exile should be issued against us, then let it be exile to a place of Torah.

May it be Your will, Eternal our God, and God of our ancestors, that a decree of want not be issued against us, not this day or this year, but if a decree of want should be issued against us, then let it be a want for the performance of mitzvot.

May it be Your will, Eternal our God and God of our ancestors, that this year be a year of cheap food, full bellies, good business, a year in which the earth forms clods, then is parched so as to form scabs, and then moistened by dew, so that your people Israel will not be in need of the help of one another. And do not heed the prayer of travelers that it not rain.

Rabbis of Caeserea say, "And concerning Your people, Israel, that they not exercise dominion over one another. "

And for the people who live in the Sharon plain he would say this prayer: May it be Your will, Eternal our God, and God of our ancestors, that our homes not turn into our graves."

Discussion Questions:

1. Compare the **Kohen** Gadol's prayers as reflected in the Babylonian Talmud with that relayed in the Yerushalmi. What do they share in common? How do they differ? Why these special requests?
2. What does the content of these prayers tell us about their lives?
3. If you had three sentences to offer a prayer to God in the Temple, what would it be?
4. What sorts of concerns are not mentioned in these prayers?

In addition to the version of the **Kohen** Gadol's prayer relayed in the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmuds, many editions of the Machzor contain an additional extended version of the **Kohen** Gadol's prayer. Many of these take the form of an acrostic in the Hebrew.

Sephardic Prayer

ובכו, כמו ששמעת תפלת כהן גדול בהיכל, כמו כן מפינו תשמע ותושיע.

יהי רצון מלפניך יהוה אלהינו ואלהי אבותינו, שתהא השנה הזאת הבאה עלינו ועל כל עמך בית ישראל בכל מקום שהם, שנת אורה, שנת ברכה, שנת גילה, שנת דיצה, שנת הוד, שנת ועד טוב, שנת זמרה, שנת חדוה, שנת טובה, שנת טלולה, שנת גשומה, אם שחונה, שנת ישועה, שנת כלכלה, שנת למוד, שנת מנוחה, שנת נחמה, שנת ששון, שנת עלצון, שנת פדות, שנת צהלה, שנת קוממיות, שנת קבוץ גלויות, שנת קבול תפילות, שנת רצון, שנת שלום, שנת שבע, שנה שתוליכנו בה קוממיות בארצנו, שנה שתדבר בה עמים תחתנו, שנה שתכתבנו לחיים טובים, שנה שלא יצטרכו עמך בית ישראל לפרנסה זה לזה ולא לעם אחר, שנה שתעצר המגפה והמשחית מעלינו ומעל כל עמך בית ישראל, שנה שלא תפיל אשה פרי בטנה.

[TRANSLATION]

And so, just as You listened to the prayer of the **Kohen** Gadol in the Sanctuary so may You hear [it] from our mouths and help. May it be Your will, Adonai, our God, God of our forefathers that it may be—this year coming upon us and upon Your entire people Israel in any place they may be, a year of light, a year of blessing, a year of joy, a year of delight, a year of grandeur, a year of good assemblies, a year of song, a year of gladness, a year of goodness, a year of dew and rainfall for blessing, a year of salvation, a year of sustenance, a year of study, a year of tranquility, a year of consolation, a year of merriment, a year of exultation, a year of redemption, a year of rejoicing, a year of pride, a year of the ingathering of the exiles, a year of acceptance of prayers, a year of favor, a year of peace, a year of contentment, a year in which You will lead us proudly to our land, a year in which You will lead nations to be ruled by us a year [in which] You will inscribe us for a good life a year [in which] Your people, the House of Israel, will not need each other for their livelihood—nor any other nation You will withhold [any] plague or ruin from upon us, and from upon Your people, the House of Israel, a year [in which] no woman shall loose the offspring of her womb.

Ashkenazic Prayer

וכך היתה תפלתו של כהן גדול ביום הכפורים בצאתו מבית קדש הקדשים בשלום בלי פגע. יהי רצון מלפניך יהוה אלהינו ואלהי אבותינו, שתהא השנה הזאת הבאה עלינו ועל כל עמך בית ישראל, שנת אוצר הטוב תפתח לנו, שנת אסם, שנת ברכה, שנת גזרות טובות מלפניך, שנת דגן תירוש ויצהר, שנת הרוחה והצלחה וקיימים, שנת ועוד בית מקדשך, שנת זול, שנת חיים טובים מלפניך, שנה טלולה וגשומה אם שחונה, שנת ימתיקו מגדים את תגובתם, שנת כפרה על כל עונותינו, שנת לחמנו ומימנו תברך, שנת משא ומתן, שנת נבוא לבית מקדשנו, שנת שבע, שנת ענג, שנת פרי בטננו ופרי אדמתנו תברך, שנת צאתנו ובאנו תברך, שנת קהלנו תושיע, שנת רחמיך יכמרו עלינו, שנת שלום ושלוה, שנה שתוליכנו קוממיות בארצנו, שנה שלא תפיל אשה את פרי בטנה, שנה שתעלנו שמחים לארצנו, שנה שלא יצטרכו עמך בית ישראל זה לזה ולא לעם אחר, בתתך ברכה במעשה ידיהם. ועל אנשי השרון היה אומר, יהי רצון מלפניך יהוה אלהינו ואלהי אבותינו שלא יעשו בתיהם קבריהם.

[TRANSLATION]

The **Kohen Gadol** would make a holiday for all his loved ones when he entered [the Sanctuary] in peace and left in peace, without injury. And this was the Kohen Gadol's prayer on the Day of Atonement when he left the **Holy of Holies** in peace, without injury:

May it be Your will, Eternal, our God and the God of our forefathers, that this year that is coming upon us and upon all Your people, the Family of Israel, be a year in which You open Your treasury for us: a year of abundance, a year of blessing, a year of beneficial decrees from before You, a year of grain, wine, and oil, a year of expansiveness, success, and permanence, a year of assembly in Your Holy Temple, a year of affordable prices, a year of good life from before You, a year that is dewy and rainy, if it is hot, a year when choice fruits sweeten their produce, a year of atonement for all our iniquities, a year in which You will bless our food and our drink, a year of commerce, a year when we can come to our Holy Temple, a year of prosperity, a year of delight, a year in which You will bless the fruit of our womb and the fruit of our land, a year in which You will bless our going and coming, a year in which You will save our community, a year in which Your compassion will be stirred upon us, a year of peace and tranquility, a year on which You will lead us with upright pride to our land, a year in which no woman will miscarry the fruit of her womb, a year in which You will bring us up joyously to our land, a year in which your people Israel will not be dependent upon one another or upon another people, as You bestow blessing upon their handiwork.

And concerning the inhabitants of Sharon he would say: May it be Your will, Eternal, our God and the God of our forefathers, that their homes not become their graves.

Activity

- Create your own acrostic version of the **Kohen Gadol's** prayer in English.
- Share your prayer with others on Yom Kippur itself at the time of the Avodah service.

Discussion Questions:

1. Compare the Sephardic and Ashkenazic versions below. Just as we asked in response to reading the Kohen Gadol's prayer in the Babylonian and Jerusalem Talmuds, what do these prayers say about us? About our lives? What sorts of things are not mentioned?

The entrance of the Kohen Gadol into the **Holy of Holies** on Yom Kippur acts as a bridge between the past and the future. Through its resonance with what came before and with what will follow, it becomes an act of ultimate “presence” – of the here and now.

THE PAST

Pesiqta Rabbati 47

זכות אברהם מניין שנאמר בזאת יבא אהרן אל הקודש בפר בן בקר (ויקרא ט"ז ג') ואל הבקר רץ אברהם ויקח בן בקר וגו' (בראשית י"ח ז'), ואיל לעולה (ויקרא שם ט"ז ז') זכות יצחק וילך אברהם ויקח את האיל ויעלהו לעולה תחת בנו (בראשית כ"ב י"ג), ומניין שאף בזכות יעקב שנ' ומאת עדת בני ישראל יקח שני שעירי עזים (ויקרא שם ט"ז ה') אותן שאמרה לו אמו וקח לי משם שני גדיי עזים טובים (בראשית כ"ז ט

[TRANSLATION]

What was the proof that the merit of Abraham entered the Holy of Holies with the Kohen Gadol? The instructions indicate, “Thus only shall Aaron enter the Shrine: with a bull calf (par ben baker) for a sin offering...” (Leviticus 16:3) This testified to the merit of Abraham, as it says, “Then Abraham ran to the herd, took a calf, tender and choice, and gave it to a servant-boy, who hastened to prepare it.” (Gen. 18:7) The words “and a ram for a burnt offering” (Leviticus 16:3) intimate that the merit of Isaac entered with him: “So Abraham went and took the ram and offered it up as a burnt offering in place of his son.” (Genesis 22:13) From where do we know that the merit of Jacob also entered with him? Because it says, “And from the Israelite community he shall take two he-goats for a sin offering” (Leviticus 16: 5) These words allude to the he-goats of whom Jacob’s mother said, “Go to the flock and fetch me two choice goats...” (Genesis 27:9)

THE FUTURE

According to the **Midrash**, the Kohen Gadol's prayer was prompted by his ability at that moment to perceive what would occur over the course of the entire year.

Vayikra Rabbah 20:4

ויקרא רבה (וילנא) פרשה כ

(איוב לט) משם חפר אוכל משם היה (מיילל) נוטל אוכל של כל ימות השנה (שם /איוב ל"ט/) למרחוק עיניו יביטו מראש השנה היה יודע מה בסופה הא כיצד בשעה שהיה צופה ורואה עשן של מערכה עולה לדרום היה יודע שהדרום שבע עולה למערב היה יודע שהמערב שבע עולה למזרח היה יודע שהמזרח שבע וכן כולם עולה באמצע הרקיע יודע שהעולם כולו שבע אחר כל השבת הזה (איוב לט) ואפרוחיו יעלעו דם ראה אפרוחיו מגעגעין באדמה ושתק אלא ובאשר חללים נדב ואביהוא שם הוא השכינה, ר' יודן בשם ר' יהושע בן לוי ור' ברכיה בשם ר' חייא בר אבא אמרו (ויקרא י) קרבו שאו את אחיכם מאת פני הקודש מאת פני הארון אינו אומר אלא מאת פני הקודש כאדם שאומר לחבירו העבר המת הזה מאת פני האבל הזה עד מתי אבל זה מצטער הה"ד אחרי מות שני בני אהרן.

[TRANSLATION]

The Kohen Gadol is like the eagle who dwells on a rock and "from there spies out his food, from afar he sees it." (Job 39:29) From there he would receive the promise of food for all the days of the year. At the beginning of the year he knew what would happen at the end of it. How was that possible? When he watched and noticed the smoke of the altar pile rise towards the south he knew that the south would have plenty. If rose towards the west, he knew that the west would have plenty. If it rose towards the east, he knew that the east would enjoy plenty, and so with all the others. If it rose toward the middle of the sky, he knew that the whole world would enjoy plenty.

Discussion Questions:

1. According to this midrash, on Yom Kippu, the Kohen Gadol knew what the year held for various regions of Israel. Why did he offer a prayer on behalf of Israel if the ultimate outcome had been pre-determined?
2. What are the possible reasons for the Kohen Gadol's prayer and how is this similar or different from your own reasons for praying?
3. How does each of these Midrashim enhance or expand upon the Yom Kippur ritual?
4. Why does the **Midrash** from Pesiqta Rabbati wish to link the ritual of the Kohen Gadol on Yom Kippur with the life of the Patriarchs?
5. How does the **Midrash** from Vayikra Rabbah expand the role and function of the Kohel Gadol?

"...this liturgy strives to create a sense of identification with the high priest. Listeners to the *Avodah* would then follow the priest as he prepared for the sacrifice, dressed and undressed behind a sheet, slaughtered the bulls and goats for himself, his household, and Israel, entered the holy of holies, and would repeat the confessions with him. The *Avodah*, then, manages to exalt the high priest to the post of supreme emissary of Israel while at the same time allowing each congregant to participate in a kind of vicarious sacrifice."

Michael D. Swartz and Joseph Yahalom, *Avodah: Ancient Poems for Yom Kippur* (Pennsylvania State University, 2005)

S. Ansky's The Dybbuk

From *The Dybbuk and Other Writings* by S. Ansky, edited and with an Introduction by David G. Roskies.

God's world is holy and great. The holiest land in the world is Israel. The holiest city in Israel is Jerusalem. The holiest place in Jerusalem was the Temple, and the holiest spot in the Temple was the **Holy of Holies**.

There are seventy nations in the world, and among them the people of Israel is the holiest. And the tribe of Levi is the holiest of the twelve tribes of Israel, and among the Levites the holiest are the priests. And among the priests the holiest is the High Priest.

There are 354 days in the year, and among them the holy days are sacred. And the Sabbath is holier than the holy days. The holiest of all the holy days, the Sabbath of Sabbaths, is Yom Kippur which is the Day of Atonement.

There are seventy languages in the world, and the holiest among them is Hebrew. And the holiest work in the Hebrew language is the Torah, and its holiest part is the Ten Commandments, and the holiest word in the Ten Commandments is the name of God.

Once a year, on Yom Kippur, the four holiest sanctities gather together precisely when the High Priest enters the **Holy of Holies** in order to pronounce the ineffable name of God. And at this immeasurably holy and awesome moment the High Priest and the people of Israel are in the utmost peril, for even a single sinful or wayward thought in the High Priest's mind at that instant might, God forbid, destroy the entire world.

Every piece of ground on which a person stands when he raises his eyes to Heaven is a Holy of Holies; everyone created in the image of God is a High Priest; every day in a person's life is Yom Kippur; and every word which a person speaks from his heart is God's name. Therefore, every sin and every wrong committed by man brings the world to destruction.

Religion of Reason by Hermann Cohen. p. 216

"We should note, however, the significance of the singular fact that one day of the whole year is singled out for that concern that preoccupies the whole congregation and every single member of it throughout the whole year and which ought not be neglected even for a single moment in a man's life."

Discussion Questions:

1. What speaks to you about the way Ansky relates and relays the Yom Kippur ritual?
2. What troubles you?
3. Do you agree with his last stanza? How might you adapt it?
4. How is it similar and different to what Hermann Cohen wrote?
5. What might it mean to see ourselves as High Priests?
6. What is the nature of our service, of our prayer, and of confession?

Avodah – Literally, “service” or “work.” The entire sacrificial system was known by this name. The liturgical section of the Yom Kippur Musaf service became known as Seder HaAvodah (the Order of the Avodah) because it described the most important sacrificial service of the entire year, that carried out by the High Priest on Yom Kippur.

Avodah Shebalev – literally, “service of the heart.” This term refers to prayer, the form of worship which replaced sacrifice after the destruction of the Temple.

Beit HaMikdash – The Temple (first and second); literally “The Holy House.”

Beit Midrash – literally, “house of study,” it is the institution created by the rabbis as a replacement for Beit HaMikdash (the Temple).

Herman Cohen – Nineteenth century German Jewish philosopher, best known for his work in the area of neo-Kantianism. Cohen espoused a Jewish philosophy based on ethical monotheism, one of the major influences that led to the rise of classical Reform Judaism.

Ein Mukdam u’me’uchar baTorah... – One of the interpretive rules of Midrash is that “there is no earlier or later in the Torah.” Interpretation allows for a playful suspension of chronology that may enhance the meaning of the biblical text.

Gnosticism – A diverse religious system prevalent in the Near East during the second and third centuries CE. Often, Gnostic theology centered around a dual-god system, in which two deities manifested good and evil respectively. Gnostic ideas were seen by the rabbis as major ideological threats to Judaism, and their encroachment into Judaism was actively fought against.

Guide for the Perplexed – (Hebrew: *Moreh Nebukhim*) a philosophical work written by Rabbi Moses ben Maimon (Rambam) in the 12th century, CE, in the form of a three volume letter to his student, Rabbi Joseph ben Judah of Ceuta. The Guide combines Greek and Roman philosophy with traditional Jewish Biblical commentary and theology to explore the nature of God and all things spiritual. Though very controversial at the time of its inception, the Guide had a wide impact on Jewish (and non-Jewish) thinking to this day.

Holy of Holies – The innermost chamber of the Temple, this is where the Ark of the Covenant was kept. The room was seen as the most holy location within the Temple complex. The Holy of Holies was only entered once a year: by the High Priest on Yom Kippur afternoon.

Kapparah – Hebrew, from the root meaning “to atone.”

Kohen – literally, “priest,” a male descendent of Aaron, brother of Moses. The Kohanim (plural) were in charge of the duties of running the Temple and its system of sacrifices. The Kohen Gadol was the High Priest. Among his many responsibilities was the performance of the Yom Kippur Avodah ritual.

Korban – from the Hebrew meaning “to bring close” this is the term for “sacrifice.”

Machzor – special designated prayer book for the Festivals and the High Holy Days. Derived from “machzor Hashanah” – the cycle of the year.

Meiri – Famous French rabbi (1249–c. 1310). Wrote a monumental commentary on the Talmud known as “Beit HaBechirah”, in which he catalogued in digest form all prior Talmudic commentaries.

Midrash – A genre of literature by the Rabbis that expands upon biblical verses, it juxtaposes verses from different parts of the Hebrew Bible, and comes to fill in “holes” in the Biblical text. From the root meaning “to seek.” Part of the genre known as Torah She’be’al Peh (Oral Torah).

Mincha—from the verb *lehaniach* – to lay down, to place before. Refers to the afternoon prayer service, which itself is derived from the flour offering which accompanied each sacrifice in the Temple.

Mishkan – the tabernacle, built in the desert by the Israelites before entering the Land of Israel. It served as the blueprint for the Temple which would supersede it.

Musaf – (literally, “additional”) An additional service added after Shacharit on Shabbat, Holidays and Rosh Chodesh. It recalls the extra sacrifices brought in the Temple on these special days (Berachot 26b).

Nephilim – Ambiguous beings that find reference throughout the Bible, specifically in Genesis. While the Hebrew of nephilim may mean “those causing others to fall,” Ibn Ezra proposes that they were called this because men’s hearts would fail at the sight of them. They are described as the descendents of a union between “the sons of God” and the “daughters of men.”

Piyut – A liturgical poem composed in Hebrew that was inserted into the fixed liturgy of the prayer book. This liturgical genre, which includes common prayers such as “Lecha Dodi” and “Adon Olam”, are often composed as acrostics. They supplemented the liturgy as early as the first century.

Rambam – Twelfth century rabbi, born in Cordoba, Spain. Maimonides is best known for his two major works, the Mishnah Torah, and the Guide for the Perplexed.

Sadducees – A party or religious sect formed about 200 BCE to which the early Rabbis were opposed. Sadducees took a more literal understanding of Torah, rejecting the authority of the “Oral Torah” which the Rabbis claimed was also revealed to Moses at Sinai. Their primary focus was the Temple and the priesthood. They were active in political and economic life, and were primarily composed of priests, merchants and aristocrats. Scapegoat – Part of the Yom Kippur Temple ritual involved the casting of a goat by the High Priest out into the wilderness. This goat represented the sins of the people Israel, and was cast out from society as a means of cleansing the people’s sins.

Seforno – Italian Rabbi living from 1475 to 1550. He wrote a thorough commentary on the Torah that appears in this day in most printings of Torah commentaries, alongside such rabbis as Rashi, Rambam, Ibn Ezra, etc.

Shechina – the Divine Presence, from the Hebrew root meaning “to dwell.”

Shaliach Tsibur – (messenger of the community)—While here in this piyut the term is quite literal and contextual (the High Priest is the emissary for the entire community), later on it refers to the prayer leader who also represents the entire community before God. The concept of *shlichut*, or agency, is such that generally, a person who acts as a *shaliach* fulfills a mitzvah on everyone’s behalf and in so doing fulfills the Jewish legal obligation of the entire community.

Sin offering – Biblical sacrifice made as a means for *kapparah* (atonement) through the time of the Second Temple. The specific sacrifice offered depended on the offending sin.

Torah Sh’be’al Peh – Literally, “Oral Torah,” which, according to Rabbinic tradition were also transmitted to Moses on Mount Sinai. For generations these traditions were passed down orally, but were eventually collected and recorded in the forms of the Mishnah (and, later, the Talmud) and Midrash.