

# A DEAFENING SILENCE

*by Rabbi Label Lam*

And he shall take the two he goats, and place them before the Lord at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. And Aaron shall place lots upon the two he goats: one lot "For HASHEM," and the other lot, "For Azazel." (Vayikra 16:7-18)

Admittedly it's very hard for me to get my head around this "goat for Azazel" - the classic "scape goat". What's going on? Who or what's Azazel? Maybe we can get a whiff of the significance of this service with the following. It was in Chumash Shiur more than 28 years ago and our Rebbe was explaining a piece from Rabbeinu Bachya. He asked why Yaakov was told by his mother Rivka to bring two goats when preparing to receive the coveted blessings from his Yitzchok. Rabbeinu Bachya connects the two goats that Yaakov brought to the two goats brought in the Yom Kippur service. One goat was represented by his positive requirement to fulfill what his mother had commanded him to do, for the man of truth to deceive his father. That was the goat to HASHEM. The other goat, corresponding to the goat for Azazel meant that he was not to gain any personal benefit or pleasure from tricking his brother. I wonder which was more difficult!?

I remember pointing out to my Rebbe that there's another curious point to the comparison. During the times of the Beis HaMikdash there was a red thread that was hung outside the Temple and when the goat to Azazel went off the cliff the, and if the Jewish people were forgiven, the red thread turned to white. When Yaakov left the room after receiving the blessings from Yitzchok Essav entered immediately afterwards and the verse says, Ach Yotzei Yotzei---he went out out...Yotzei is the term used when one fulfills his obligation, as if Yaakov lived up to the requirements implied by both goats. It occurred to me that Yaakov then turned from Edom -a code name for Essav which means red and went to Lavan- which means white. In any case we get an idea, a small window into the notion of the goat for Azazel and what it means from Rabbeinu Bachya. It's the action that's not done! It's the word that's never said!

Years ago I had the honor and privilege to hear the following story from Rabbi Shimshon Pincus ztl. He told us about a fine young man that had earned a marvelous Shidduch-marriage match with a prominent family. This young man was an only child born to his parents after twenty-four years of marriage. Rabbi Shimshon Pincus ztl. had asked the father if he had any sense of why they merited to have a child that year. Had there been any unusual incident? This was his story: After twenty three years of childless marriage and approaching the edge of despair the husband did what amounts to an act of desperation. He had heard that on the other side of Jerusalem there was a small Chassidic

Synagogue that held out a special promise. Anyone who would attain for himself on the holy day of Yom Kippur the honor of Maftir Yonah their request would most certainly be answered in the affirmative.

So with that hope rooted firmly in his heart he migrated out of his comfort zone, his usual place in the Yeshiva, to where he would be a stranger. He arrived early enough on the eve of Yom Kippur and arranged for himself for a handsome price the coveted honor of Maftir Yonah. After Kol Nidre and all the evening prayers while exiting the synagogue he noticed a young man like himself seeming slightly out of place. He approached and asked him why he was praying here in this particular "Shteibl" for Yom Kippur. The young fellow told his tearful tale that he and his wife had been married for almost three years and they had not yet been blessed with children. He had heard that whoever would attain Maftir Yonah in this Synagogue would be granted their heart's desire and he hoped to put in a modest bid for Maftir Yonah the next day. The man just listened with astonishment. He said nothing. He then picked himself up and left. That year his wife was expecting this special child.

He felt that his deepest wish was granted that year not because he got Maftir Yonah but rather because he chose to be quiet. Those unspoken words created **a deafening silence**. DvarTorah, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and [Torah.org](https://torah.org).