

OF DEMONS AND GOATS

by Rabbi Aron Tendler

We eat as servants of G-d partaking from His table, not as mere human animals who eat because they need to feed.

The first of this week's two Parshios can be divided into four primary topics: 1. The Yom Kippur service, as performed by the Kohen Gadol in the Bais Hamikdash. 2. The prohibition against bringing a sacrifice outside of the communal Mizbeach that stood in the Bais Hamikdash. 3. The prohibition against eating or drinking blood. 4. The 15 forbidden sexual relationships. What is the connection between these four topics?

In verse 17:7 the Torah explains that the prohibition against sacrificing on a private Mizbeach was intended to stop the Bnai Yisroel from offering sacrifices to the "Seiyrim." Rashi, Rambam, and many others translate Seiyrim as "demons - shaydim" -the supernatural. Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch translates Seiyrim as "he-goats." Is there a correlation between these two translations?

The prohibition against sacrificing on a "outside Mizbeach" - a personal altar rather than the public communal one that stood in the Temple, needs to be understood. Why should the personal Mizbeach be forbidden? The communal Mizbeach was located in Yerushalayim, in the Bais Hamikdash. If an individual desired to offer a Korban of Thanksgiving on the occasion of having won the lottery, passed the Bar Exam, survived an operation or accident, the birth of a child, or any other event, he would have to travel to the Bais Hamikdash in order to satisfy his intent. For many it would take two weeks, or more, to travel to Yerushalayim, necessitating leaving family and business. Therefore, most would put off bringing their personal sacrifices until the three Yomim Tovim, Pesach, Shevout, and Succoth, when they anyway had to go to Yerushalayim. As you can imagine, it would take an exceptional sense of appreciation and devotion for someone to maintain any degree of enthusiasm for why he was bringing the Korban. The offerings would inevitably alter from a free-willed, enthusiastic outpouring of love and devotion to an imposed obligation of service and commitment. Wouldn't it have been much more intense and intimate for an individual to fulfill his desire to acknowledge G-d at the very moment when G-d's benevolent protection and guidance was revealed? Why limit the recognition of our dependency on G-d in the form of sacrifice to a single location, restricted by time and distance?

In the same vein, why is our prayer which replaces the Korbanos of the past restricted by time and

location? Why must I pray with nine other men in a closed room, rather than hiking to the top of a mountain and acknowledging my Creator surrounded by the grandeur and magnificence of His world? Why must I pray three times a day, regardless of my intent and enthusiasm, rather than those times when I truly feel the connection to G-d? The "by rote" problem that plagues the routine of prescribed daily prayer would certainly be alleviated if we prayed when we felt G-d's closeness, rather than when we are obliged to do so, regardless of how we feel.

This week's Parsha follows in the aftermath of the deaths of Aharon's two eldest sons, Nadav and Avihu. They died because they expressed their devotion and love to G-d, in a manner that had not been commanded or prescribed. Regardless of their intentions, they sinned by not taking the time to ascertain G-d's true will. Instead, they attempted to define the parameters of their relationship with G-d on the basis of their personal feelings and thoughts. In so doing, they transgressed the boundaries of that very same relationship in a manner that demanded their deaths.

On Yom Kippur, the first topic of the Parsha, the Kohen Gadol, who functions solely as a servant of the people and not as an individual, must perform the service of effecting forgiveness for his nation. He must enter the inner sanctuary of G-d's home and beseech Him to accept the nation's offerings of repentance, subservience, and dependency. The focal point of that day was the sacrificing of the two identical Seiyrim - he-goats. One he-goat would be consecrated to G-d and be part of the ceremony that effected forgiveness in the inner sanctuary. The other he-goat would be sent out into the wilderness to die.

Rav Hirsch explained that the he-goat symbolized "a sensuous animality which gratifies its instincts in complete unrestraint... typifying the unrestraint of the woods and the wilderness." (17:7)

The message of Yom Kippur is that we have a choice. We can either frame our lives within the dictates of Jewish law and Torah, thereby consecrating our animalistic selves to the service of G-d, or we can choose to disregard the Mitzvos and live like the he-goat, unfettered and unrestrained, giving license to every desire or perceived need. The difference is that the unrestricted he-goat can only survive in the wilderness, removed from the conventions and norms of a society that desires to live ethically and morally. Whenever we attempt to define ourselves and our relationship with G-d by our "sensuous animality", we become like Nadav and Avihu and are destined to die outside of G-d's sanctuary.

The prohibition of sacrificing outside of the Bais Hamikdash follows the same basic theme. Bringing Korbanos and praying three times a day are structured moments when we are supposed to acknowledge our absolute dependency upon G-d. Doing so is one of the many ways that we remain focused on our responsibilities to be G-d's Chosen People. If we would bring offerings whenever and however we wished, rather than in the manner prescribed by G-d, we would be expressing self-love and self-worship rather than subservience to G-d. If we would pray whenever and wherever we chose, rather than praying in the form and form prescribed by the Rabbis, we would be acting like

Nadav and Avihu and would be giving licensee to a more sophisticated form of our own "sensuous animality."

The concept of sacrificing to "demons" or "he-goats" is identical. In biblical times, humans expressed their animal sensuality by creating gods that served their own personal needs and desires. These "demons" manifested the sensuous animal in each of us and in their service we were able to rationalize the gratification of every urge and instinct. The he-goat is as Rav Hirsch explained the symbolic demon in each of us that we must learn to channel in the service of G-d through a lifetime of Mitzvos. Therefore the Torah prohibited offering sacrifices outside of the Bais Hamikdash. "So that they will no longer slaughter their offerings to the "demons" or "he-goats" after which straying from Me they follow...

The Torah goes so far as to say that if someone should make an offering outside the Bais Hamikdash, it would be considered as having "murdered" the animal. The permission to kill and use animals was granted to us by G-d provided we use them in the manner that He prescribed. If we should do so in the manner that we desire, He removes His permission from us to kill animals, and if we should do so we are murderers.

The integration of G-d into our lives is the theme of Acharei Mos and Kedoshim. Torah is the manual of instruction that addresses far more than our daily activities and behavior. It attempts to reach our fundamental character and mold us into ethical, moral, and devoted humans. The prohibition against eating blood is such a law. Although G-d granted us permission to use animals, He was concerned for the affect that the taking of life would have on our basic moral character. Therefore, He prohibited the eating of blood that symbolizes our basic respect for life itself - "Because the blood is the life force." Just as the soul suffuses the entire being so too does the blood provide life to the entire body. Although we are permitted to take animal life within the framework of G-d's instructions, we must always acknowledge that doing so is not an act of barbarism but a gift granted to us by the Creator of life Himself. We eat as servants of G-d, partaking from His table, not as mere human animals who eat because they need to feed. Therefore, we are forbidden to eat blood.

The final topic of Acharei Mos, the fifteen prohibited intimate relationships, is the clearest expression of this theme. It frames our most powerful desire and drive in purpose and sanctity. We are humans created in G-d's image, not animals! Our basic instincts are to gratify our sensual needs whenever and however. To rise above our animalistic selves and become G-dly is to express those sensual needs within the framework of G-d's commands. It is not for us to define the parameters of moral behavior, like Nadav and Avihu had done. Rather, it is our obligation to live within the parameters of G-d's moral code. The fifteen prohibited intimate relationships are the foundation of G-d's moral code.

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