

Acharei Mos

The Bald vs. the Hairy; Good vs. Evil

For on this day he shall provide atonement for you to cleanse you; from all your sins before Hashem shall you be cleansed.

Vaykira 16:30

Once a year, a Jew's⁵¹⁶ sins are wiped clean. It is the holy day of Yom Kippur. On that day, lots are cast to determine the roles of two identical goats. One will go to Hashem as a sacrifice, and another will be sent out to the hills and pushed off a cliff, to *Azazel*.⁵¹⁷ There is a great deal of significance to this ceremony, as with everything in Hashem's Torah. But we will focus on the fact that lots were cast. Why is a raffle part of the Temple's Yom Kippur service?

In order to gain deeper insight into what is going on here, we first need to have a proper understanding of how forgiveness works. The Midrash,⁵¹⁸ in the course of explaining how the forgiveness of Yom Kippur works, gives an example. "Yaakov said, 'I am a smooth man,'"⁵¹⁹ Rabbi Levi said that this is like a hairy person, with many curls, and a bald person, who found themselves next to a silo. When the chaff is blown on to the hairy fellow, it sticks tightly in his hair; whereas, when it touches the bald person, he just brushes his head and it falls right off of him. Esav the wicked one (who is also the hairy one⁵²⁰), makes himself filthy all year, and has no way to atone for his sins; whereas for Yaakov, things are different. Yom Kippur comes and wipes his sins away!

The Midrash teaches that chaff represents the dirt that comes from sin,⁵²¹ and

516 *Tshuva* only is effective for Jewish people. Tanchuma to Haazinu 4 says, based upon Bamidbar 6:26, "Hashem will raise His face to you" – He will raise His face, if you do *tshuva*, to you, and not to other nations." See Rema Mifano in *Assarah Maamaros*, "Chikur Din," 2:11, Mabit in *Beis Elokim*, *tshuva* 13, 14. *Bnei Yissaschar*, "Sivan," 2:5. *Arvei Nachal* to Shabbos Shuva, *drush* 2. See also R. Yosef Engel in his *Otzaros Yosef*, *drush* 3, s.v. *baikarim*. Chida (in his *Rosh David* to Emor, s.v. *ubiofen acher*) says that this is because to the Jews, Hashem is a Father, and a father can allow a son to treat him with less respect (Kiddushin 32a); whereas, to the Gentiles, He is a King, and a king may not allow anyone to treat him with less respect (Kiddushin 32b). In fact, in our Shmoneh Esrei, when asking for Hashem to bring us back to *tshuva*, we refer to Him as *Avinu*, our Father – "*Hashivenu Avinu*," etc.

517 Malbim, in his *Eretz Chamda* to Vayishalch, 14, writes that the word *Azazel* is an acronym for the first letters in the verse, "*Zeh liumas zeh asah haElokim* [this opposite that is how God made things]" (Koheles 7:14). In other words, this world is a mix of right and wrong, of good and evil. We acknowledge the goat to *Azazel* as the nearly identical, but parallel *opposite* of the goat to Hashem.

518 Bereishis Rabbah 65:15. See also Maharal's *drush* to Shabbos Shuva, and his treatment of this Midrash.

519 Bereishis 27:11

520 Ibid., and above, 25:25.

521 *Zohar*, vol. 3, 189a, teaches that in everything that grows, there is a part that is not

Yom Kippur washes that all off, as long as person is not hairy. Yaakov, who was like the smooth, bald man, was able to wash off his sins, while the hairy Esav and his descendants could not. There is another layer that we must uncover here to really get things clear. Kabbalistic tradition⁵²² has taught us that Rabbi Akiva was the archenemy of Esav. As one who came from a family of converts,⁵²³ he came from Esav,⁵²⁴ but left that way of life behind. As the Arizal puts it,⁵²⁵ when Yaakov “grabbed the ankle of Esav”⁵²⁶ on the way out of the womb, he grabbed Rabbi Akiva, who was there in the ankle of Esav, and took his soul to the Yaakov side.⁵²⁷ He was even called *kareach*⁵²⁸ and *karcha*,⁵²⁹ meaning “the bald one!”⁵³⁰ Straw, we are taught, also represents sins and non-essential things, much like chaff. They are used by the *Zohar*⁵³¹ in the same context to describe the negative things in this world. Esav would ask his father, “How does one take *maaser* from straw?”⁵³² even though one does not tithe straw. The reason that one does not tithe straw is that it cannot be made holy – it stands for the things in the world that we are to distance ourselves from, spiritually. Esav wanted to show that he had the ability to bring those things into a holy context – but it was just a game to fool his father. Conversely, we are told about Rabbi Akiva picking out the straw

connected to holiness – this is the chaff and the straw, and therefore, one does not tithe chaff or straw.

522 Arizal (*Shaar Hagilgulim* 5). See also *Dvash Lifi* of the Chida (*ayin*, 23) and *Dvash Lifi* (*ayin*, 24) quoting the *Shaarei Shomayim*, which uses the expression “*sitno*” – archenemy of Esav.

523 Rambam, in his introduction to *Mishnah Torah*, tells us that Rabbi Akiva’s father, Yosef, was a convert. He was a descendant of Sisera, according to one version (see *Menorah Hamaor*, *ner* 5, *klal* 3, ch. 3, 304) of Sanhedrin 96b: “...grandchildren of Sisera studied Torah in Yerushalyim. Who were they? R. Akiva...” [This version can already be found in R. Nissim Gaon’s commentary to Brachos 27b, where the Talmud says that R. Akiva did not have *zechus avos*, and in *Dikdukei Sofrim* to Sanhedrin there, 142:100. See also Arizal (*Shaar Hagilgulim* 36, 38, 39); *Megaleh Amukos*, Matos Maasei and *Megaleh Amukos*, *Renav Ofanim* on Veeschanan, *ofen* 88, and *Risisei Layla* (of R. Tzadok), 52. See R. Tzadok’s *Tzidkas Hatzaddik* 77, explaining why R. Akiva had to come from such a background. See the note of Radal to *Pirkei Dirabbi Eliezer* (ch. 2, Hosafas Haradal 4, p. 12, in *Zichron Aharon* ed.), quoting *Maaseh R. Chaim Vital* that R. Akiva, himself, was a convert.

524 Must find this clearly, or maybe im wrong – pretty sure I saw this

525 *Shaar Hagilgulim*, 5

526 Bereishis 25:26

527 See also *Seder Hadoros*, “*Tannaim Viamoraim*,” s.v. *Akiva*, quoting the *Kavannas Haari* that R. Akiva was a reincarnation of Yaakov. He goes on to point out that just as Yaakov was his father-in-law Lavan’s shepherd, so was R. Akiva the shepherd for his father-in-law, Kalba Savua. Just as Yaakov had two wives, Rachel and Leah, so did R. Akiva marry Rachel, and later, the beautiful ex-wife of Turnus Rufus.

528 Bechoros 58a

529 Tosafos to Shabbos 150a, s.v. *virabbi Yehoshua*, explains that R. Yehoshua ben Karcha was the son of Rabbi Akiva, who is called Karcha.

530 See *Kodshei Yechezkel* (vol. 3 to Sukkos 275, printed together with his father’s *Meir Einei Chachamin*, vol. 3) of R. Yechezkel, the son of R. Meir Yechiel of Ostrovtsa, where he explains that the reason that R. Akiva is called “bald” is because the Talmud (Menachos 29b) teaches that he derived fundamental principles from the crowns of the letters. He explains that the crown atop the letters in the Torah are like the “hair” of the Torah, and he showed that there is nothing at all extra in Torah, essentially making it “bald.” We are discovering that “removing the hair” is what Rabbi Akiva was all about.

531 *Zohar*, vol. 3, 189a

532 Rashi to Bereishis 25:27, s.v. *yodeah tzayid*

from his wife's hair.⁵³³ The straw represents foreign distractions and negative things in this world that try to stick to us, and the hair represents the parts of us that tend to cling to those negative things. Rabbi Akiva removed all that, while Esav embraced it.

There is a reason why Rabbi Akiva was the one who found his life's mission in being the opposite of Esav, and picking out straw from hair. Rabbi Akiva began as a wicked man, who claimed⁵³⁴ that he wanted not only to bite any Torah scholars that he might find, but that he wanted to bite them like a donkey, whose bite is so powerful that it breaks bones. Esav, too, tried to bite Yaakov,⁵³⁵ who, the Torah tells us, was the one who sat and studied Torah.⁵³⁶ Rabbi Akiva began as an Esav-like person, who had a hatred for Torah scholars,⁵³⁷ and then, he went and became the greatest of them all! He was the quintessential *baal tshuva* – the ultimate example of a person who figured out late in life what he was really here for, and made the most of what time he had left. In fact, our Sages tell us that when Moshe was shown a lecture of Rabbi Akiva by Hashem, he could not understand it!⁵³⁸ There were things that were not revealed to Moshe, that were revealed to Rabbi Akiva!⁵³⁹ R. Tzadok of Lublin⁵⁴⁰ explains that this is because the level of the *baal teshuva* is far greater than that of the Tzaddik.⁵⁴¹ Moshe was a Tzaddik *gamur*, a perfectly righteous man from his youth,⁵⁴² and he just couldn't connect to the level that Rabbi Akiva had reached.

The two goats of Yom Kippur are called *seirim*, which means “hairy ones”!⁵⁴³ These goats teach us that the lot of the Jewish people is to be for Hashem, that there will be atonement and that the negative things can be sent to *Azazel*. In fact, *Gali Razya*⁵⁴⁴ writes that when Yaakov sent twenty goats to Esav,⁵⁴⁵ he was doing so to make up for the twenty years that he was in Lavan's house and did not have any way to send the Yom Kippur goat to *Azazel*; for, sending the goat to *Azazel* is

533 Nedarim 50a

534 Pesachim 49b

535 Bereishis Rabbah 78:9

536 Bereishis 25:27

537 See the explanation of Maharal in *Nesivos Olam, nesiv haTorah*, chapter 15.

538 Menachos 19b

539 Bamidbar Rabbah 19:6 and Tanchuma, Chukas 8

540 *Pri Tzaddik* to Dvarim 10.

541 *Bimakom shebaalei tshuva*...see *Shaarei Zohar*.

542 *Kobeles Yitzchak* to Shemos. See also *Zohar*, vol. 1, 120b: “From the day that Moshe was born, the Shechina [Divine Presence] never departed from him.” See also the comments of R. Chaim Palagi in his *Chaim Lignfa* (“*Osiyos Gedolos*,” *Tes*) where he explains that the letter *tes* in the word *tov* is written more largely than the rest of the word in the Torah to emphasize that Moshe was perfectly good. He also explains that this is why the letter *tes* is enlarged in the first *tov* of Koheles 7:1: “*Tov shem mishemen tov*” (a good name is better than fine oil), to teach us that just as oil does not mix with any other liquid, true *tov* is completely free of anything even remotely bad. Regarding the account of the *Tiferes Yisrael* to Nezikin, which would seem to tell a different story, see our extensive treatment of that in the notes to our essay to Shemos, “Tongue Untied.”

543 Maharal, *drasha* to Shabbos Hagadol

544 Quoted in *Yalkut Reuveni* to *Acharei Mos*

545 Bereishis 32:15

really sending it to Esav in a way.⁵⁴⁶ Every Yom Kippur, we affirm that we are inherently good people. We are like the bald man, to whom nothing can stick. Esav, unfortunately, whose very name means *shav shebarasi biolami*⁵⁴⁷ – the meaningless and “extra” things in this world – chose to identify himself with the evil that exists on Earth. He is called “hairy,” for he chose not to pick the hairs clean of straw – as Rabbi Akiva did with the results of his negative behavior – but rather, to keep those pieces of chaff and straw stuck in his mane. We send all that out to *Azazel*, where perhaps it can find a place to stick, and we grow clean from the sins that we have done.

The message of Yom Kippur is that nothing touches the soul, no matter how one has sinned. As long as one is spiritually smooth and bald, then he can get past anything. We learn this from Rabbi Akiva.

We are taught that Rabbi Akiva was the very root of the Oral Torah, in the same way that Moshe was the root of the Written Torah.⁵⁴⁸ That is the part of the Torah that we engage in. The Written Torah is about revelation, while the Oral Torah is about our effort and energy. It is our chance to engage in dialogue with the Hashem,⁵⁴⁹ and that is only possible if we know that we are capable of such conversation. Only if we are in touch with the divinity that is inside of us can we truly engage in Torah study. That is what Yaakov our forefather was all about, and ultimately, it is what Rabbi Akiva embodies, and brought to the world.

The opinion of Rebbi in the Talmud⁵⁵⁰ is that even without *tshuva*, Yom Kippur cleanses a person! *Arvei Nachal*⁵⁵¹ quotes the Gemara⁵⁵² where a story about Rebbi’s death is told. It recounts how, when Rebbi died, a voice came out from Heaven and announced, “Anyone who was present at the death of Rebbi will be welcomed into life in *Olam Habah*.” He then quotes the Midrash,⁵⁵³ which teaches us that “just as Yom Kippur brings forgiveness, so does the death of the righteous bring forgiveness.” Since Rebbi understood Yom Kippur to work without *tshuva*, his death, which was like a Yom Kippur, carried the influence that he perceived Yom Kippur to have, and brought people to forgiveness without their needing to do *tshuva*. Rebbi is the title used in the Talmud to refer to Rabbi Judah the Prince;

546 See the Dinover’s *Agra Dikallah* to Vayishlach, s.v. *al ken*, that Yaakov sent exactly 580 animals to correspond to the *gematria* of the word *seir* – goat, for this was his way of sending a the goat to *Azazel*. See also his *Bnei Yissaschar*, “Shabbasos” 2:3, where he talks about this as well. See also *Ohr Hachaim* to Vayishlach, where he quotes his grandfather regarding why the number 580 was chosen. The *Zohar* (vol 1, 64a, 190a; vol. 2, 237b) makes it clear that this was a gift to appease the angel *Samael*, who is the angel of Esav.

547 Bereishis Rabbah 63:8. “Esav is the meaninglessness (*shav*) that I have created in My world.” See also *Degel Machane Efraim*, “*Likkuim*,” s.v. *hatzileni na*, regarding the name “Esav” and the word *shav*, in contrast to Yaakov, who is associated with truth.

548 R. Tzadok of Lublin, *Tzidkas Hatzaddik* 77

549 Bava Metziah 59b: “God [so to speak] laughed, and said, ‘My children have beaten Me!’”

550 Yoma 86b

551 See *Yalkut Hameiri* (Izrael) to Kesuvos 103b.

552 Kesuvos 103b

553 Vayikra Rabbah 20:12

the man who redacted the Mishnah and preserved the Oral Torah for us, as it would have been forgotten if left only to oral transmission. Perhaps now we understand why the one who had such faith in mankind, to see them as pure even without *tshuva*, was also the one who gave the Jewish people their connection to the Oral Torah for posterity.

The *gematria* of “the Satan,” who is the angel of Esav,⁵⁵⁴ is only 364, for one day a year, the 365th day, he has no sway over us at all. That day is Yom Kippur.⁵⁵⁵ It is the day that we remember that the hairy one may be our identical⁵⁵⁶ twin brother, but he is completely different from us. The two goats may look alike on the outside, in every way,⁵⁵⁷ but there is nothing more different in the world than those two goats.⁵⁵⁸ That our essence is pure and unique is what Yom Kippur teaches us, and what Rabbi Akiva’s life was all about.

Rabbi Akiva would say,⁵⁵⁹ “How fortunate you are, Israel! Before Whom do you grow pure, and Who is it that purifies you? Why, it is your Father in Heaven!...Just as a Mikvah purifies the impure, so does Hashem purify Israel!” Rabbi Akiva’s very existence teaches us that no matter what one has done here, his core remains pure; all he has to do is brush off whatever chaff has fallen on his smooth soul, and it will be clean once again!

554 *Tikkunei Zohar* 21, p. 52a

555 Nedarim 32b

556 Midrash Shocheh Tov 18:32 says that when Esav was killed by Yehuda (see our approach to Vayigash), Yehuda killed him from behind and not face to face, because Esav looked just like his father, Yaakov! See also *Midrash Talpiyos*, where he says that Yaakov and David were like twins. Now, we know that David was an *admoni*, red-headed (Shmuel I 16:12), just as Esav was (Bereishis 25:25). The Midrashim (Bereishis Rabbah 63:8, Midrash Bereishis 63:19, Midrash Shmuel 19:6) record that everyone was concerned because David looked just like Esav. In fact, the Chida, in *Dvash Lifi (dalet, 14)* goes so far as to say that really, Yaakov and David were meant to be born together, but, in fact, Esav came out instead!

557 Yoma 62a

558 See *Pachad Yitzchak*, “Purim,” *inyan* 7.

559 Yoma 85b