

Forgiveness and Purity

The Gemara (Rosh Hashanah 16b) quotes Rav Kruspadai in the name of Raban Yochanan: 3 books are opened before God on Rosh Hashanah, one each for צדיקים, righteous, בינונים, indeterminate, and רשעים, wicked¹. The righteous are immediately inscribed in the book of life, the wicked immediately in the book of death and the indeterminate are held over for judgement till Yom Kippur. If they are judged worthy at that time they are inscribed and sealed in the book of life. Otherwise, they are inscribed and sealed in the book of death. Apparently from this Gemara, there is a certain finality associated with the judgement and inscription of the righteous and wicked on Rosh Hashanah. According to Rambam, a person is classified as righteous or wicked (Hilchos Teshuva 3:1-2) based on the majority of his merits or demerits and his fate determined accordingly. What does Yom Kippur accomplish for one whose judgement has been sealed for the year to come on Rosh Hashanah or because his demerits outnumber his merits? Even though an individual's decree can be rescinded by God if he engages in תשובה, repentance, צדקה, charity, צעקה, prayer and changing his name and personality, ² שינוי השם this would appear to apply equally throughout the year without any special significance attached to Yom Kippur.

Rambam says man should constantly view himself as חצי זכאי, half acquitted, and חצי חייב, half guilty (Rambam Hilchos Teshuva 3:4) and attempt to continuously perform Mitzvot to tip the scales in his favor. While we don't know the true merit value of a Mitzvah or the demerits of a transgression, one who engages only in meritorious acts is not permitted to adopt a philosophy that differs from the half and half approach. Why not apply the concept of רוב and render null and void the transgressions, or in the case of a wicked individual, nullify any merits he might have? If his sins are wiped away on Yom Kippur, he should view himself, at least for a short time, as כולו זכאי, completely deserving. How does Rambam's half-guilty/half-worthy philosophy apply to such an individual regarding Yom Kippur?

¹ It is interesting to note that this idea of the various books is also found in Erchin 10b where it is used as the rationale for defining Rosh Hashonah as a day of fear due to the impending judgement and therefore is inconsistent with the reciting of Hallel.

² Rosh Hashonah 16b, V'amar R' Yitzchak 4 Devarim M'karin etc.

Rambam (Hilchot Teshuva 2:7) says: **יום כפורים קץ מחילה וסליחה לישראל**, the Day of Atonement is the conclusion of forgiveness to Israel. Therefore, he continues, there is an obligation on every individual as well as the community, **צבור**, to repent and confess orally, **וידוי**, on Yom Kippur. This obligation to recite **וידוי** on Yom Kippur includes even the righteous and the wicked, even though their judgement has been decreed and sealed for the coming year nine days previously on Rosh Hashanah. Apparently, there is a separate **מצוות תשובה וידוי**, an obligation to repent and confess associated with Yom Kippur independent of **גזר דין**, final judgement decree, for an individual.

Yonatan Ben Uziel (Vayikra 16:30) makes this point where he interprets the verse of **כי ביום הזה יכפר עליכם לטהר אתכם וכו'**. God grants purification. But apparently He also grants forgiveness, **כפרה**. The quid pro quo for God to cleanse the Jewish People is they must recite **וידוי** and attain forgiveness first. What is the connection between this cleansing and the Mitzvot Hayom of Yom Kippur?

The terms sin, **חטא**, and defilement, **טומאה**, are often used together and interchangeably. One without the other does not exist. Transgressing God's commandments has a dual effect:

- the act, in and of itself, demonstrates a rebellion and rejection of the path God wants us to follow
- it results in a blemish that adheres to the once-pure soul of the individual who transgresses.

This duality is found in the following verse (Vayikra 16:16) **וכפר על הקודש מטומאות** בני ישראל ומפשעיהם לכל **חטאתם**. Both aspects of transgression require atonement. Over time the blemishes from sin accumulate and overwhelm and obscure the pure soul of the individual, **ונפש כי תחטא** (Vaykra 4:2). As Ramban (ibid) notes, the act of transgression creates a blemish in the individual that prevents him from approaching God. Man may only approach God through a state of complete purity.

Let us examine the juxtaposition of several Parshiot in Sefer Vayikra. The Torah discusses the **טומאה** and the **כפרה**, the atonement process, for, among others, the **זב** and **זבה**, individuals who are afflicted with constant bleeding rendering them ritually impure. Immediately after this, we have the **יום כפור**, the order of the Yom Kippur service, as defined in **פרשת אחרי מות**. The common denominator among these topics is the aspect of **חטא**, sin, and **טומאה**, defilement, associated with the actions and the need to gain **כפרה**, atonement and **טהרה**, purification.

One of the central activities of the Yom Kippur Service, עבודת היום, was the sprinkling of blood on the altar, זריקת הדם, of the various sacrifices brought that day³. זריקת הדם is essential for the כפרה required for atonement. Without זריקת הדם we are lacking, מחוסרי כפרה, our efforts to approach God are incomplete⁴.

The זב and זבה are required to bring a sin offering, קרבן חטאת, at the time of purification. Ramban (Vayikra 15:11) notes that the חטאת is to atone for his sins that caused him to become a זב in the first place. What specific, identifiable sin was committed that should require the bringing of a קרבן חטאת? Surely the physical state associated with the זב does not equate to a transgression. Therefore, Ramban states that the physical affliction was surely the result of some previous transgression, and he is obligated to bring a קרבן חטאת⁵. However how does one simply bring a חטאת for some transgression which he cannot identify specifically?

Using the above categorization of the various aspects of sin, חטא, perhaps we can understand the requirement for the קרבן חטאת. There is a duality to the sacrifice. As with any קרבן חטאת, there is a requirement for the individual to be introspective

³ See the Rambam in Hilchos Avodas Yom Hakippurim 2:2 where he includes the Zrikas Hadom with the central parts of the Avodas Hayom immediately following the Vidduy and Hagraalla. Also See the Rambam 5:4-5 where the order of the Matnos Dom is discussed as well as the procedure when the Dom spills out.

⁴ Similarly, the Gemara (Erchin 7a. Hilchos Shegagos 3:12) notes that although Beit Din does not delay inordinately the carrying out of a death sentence, we delay the execution of a person whose קרבן חטאת or אשם is currently awaiting זריקת הדם after שחיטה. Rabbeinu Gershom explains that through the זריקת הדם man is granted the כפרה aspect of the קרבן. An individual condemned to death as punishment for his sins may not be denied כפרה for his rebellious acts. However, he is prevented from attaining the טהרה ordinarily granted by the sin offering, for such a person remains tainted by the act that led to the death penalty. Full atonement in his case can only be achieved upon carrying out the death sentence.

⁵ See Sefer Hachinuch, Mitzvot 188-189, who describes the basis for the affliction as an inordinate pursuit of food and drink and worldly pleasures. The transgression is built up over time through a pattern of immoral activity, as opposed to a single identifiable act.

and repent prior to bringing the קרבן. There is an obligation to confess, חיוב וידוי, to acknowledge the rebellious act of transgressing God's commandments.

Repentance and confession, when combined with the bringing of the sacrifice, are required to atone for the transgression. Together, they are מכפר, remove the sin (Hilchos Teshuva 1:1). However, to be allowed to approach God, one must also be pure, without a blemish or residue of sin. The Torah requires the bringing of the חטאת for the person to also attain purity, טהרה. Even if one fulfills all other obligations of atonement, the individual is considered lacking, מחוסר כפרה (Kriesus 8b, Rambam M'Chusray Kapporah 1:1) until he brings the sin offering. The term מחוסר כפרה is noteworthy. The omission of any of the requirements delays the entirety of כפרה. However, the process of purification, טהרה, as expressed through the קרבן חטאת is required to remove the blemish and bleach away the stain of the חטא to allow the individual to come close to God again. The טהרה aspect of קרבן חטאת permits the individual to partake of קרבנות again. In short, the קרבן חטאת grants both כפרה and subsequently טהרה.

The נפש אשר תחטא affects כפרה for the soul that sins. However, on Yom Kippur there was an additional aspect to the עבודה, that of the שער המשתלה which would carry the sins of the Jewish People and be cast down a mountain side and the flesh and blood of the animal would be quickly transformed into a cascading heap of white bones (Yoma 67a. Avodas Yom Hakippurim 3:7). Rabbi Nachum Bar Pappa said in the name of Rabbi Eliezer Hakaphar a red amulet was suspended in the Temple and as soon as the שער המשתלה was dispatched down the cliff the amulet changed color to white indicating that it accomplished its purpose as it is written ⁶ אם יהיו חטאיכם כשני כשלג ילבינו. The instantaneous transformation from red to pure white represented the forgiveness of sin and removal of the blemishes from the Jewish People. They once again achieved the purity necessary to reunite with God. Under normal circumstances, it is virtually impossible to completely whiten a cloth that has been dyed crimson red. Only through God's kindness do we achieve the immediate and total cleansing of our souls, to the point that it is impossible to detect there once was a stain. As Ramban comments (Vayikra 16:8) the deprivations of Yom Kippur are intended to force the prosecuting angels to state before God that they have found the Jewish People equivalent to the angels who neither require food, drink or shoes

⁶ Ibid. This is similar to the statement of the Ramban (16:21) that as Bnay Yisrael are pure from sin as Hashem has forgiven their sins therefore the red amulet turns white as the Sair transforms to bones.

and who are pure from sin on Yom Kippur. All blemishes have been removed.
עבודת יום הכפורים and so are the Jewish People after the טהורים.

The duality of a single קרבן חטאת achieving both כפרה and טהרה is sufficient for an individual. When it comes to the צבור, Knesset Yisrael, the regular sacrifice is insufficient to achieve both outcomes. Repentance and confession together with the sacrifice are required for complete כפרה, atonement for the sin. This is the purpose of the חטאת הפנימי brought on Yom Kippur by the Kohen Gadol, וכפר בעדו, ישראל. It is the שער המשתלה on Yom Hakippurim that provides the טהרה to allow the Jewish People to come close to God again.

However, what are we to do nowadays without זריקת הדם to atone and שער המשתלה to purify us? How can we possibly hope to attain purity and come close to God? We are told that there is another form of sprinkling and another form of purification, that of זריקת מים טהורים וטהרתם מכל טומאותיכם. God Himself offers to take the place of the tools we used when the Temple stood.

It is interesting to note in the Selichos of זכור לנו ברית ראשונים we first ask God to whiten our crimson souls. This is followed by the request that God sprinkle us with pure waters to purify us. We want to attain the snow-white purity we attained when the Temple stood and we had זריקת הדם in the Mikdash and the שער המשתלה, both of which combined to grant atonement and purity from sin. We then ask that purity be attained through God sprinkling us with pure waters, מים טהורים, as the vehicle to wash away the crimson stains. Finally, we note that we are incapable of fully atoning for our sins or attaining purity, so we ask God to provide both for us out of His mercy and kindness to us:

כפר חטאינו ביום הזה וטהרינו כמו שכתוב כי ביום הזה יכפר עליכם לטהר אתכם מכל חטאותיכם
לפני ד' תטהרו

This request for mercy is noted in the next phrase:

רחם עלנו וכו' כי קל רחום ד' אלקיך וכו'

We acknowledge that only through God's mercy can we hope to attain atonement and purification on this day, despite the lack of the actual עבודת יום הכפורים.

We can now understand the famous statement of Rabbi Akiva (Yoma 85b). Without the Temple and the שער המשתלה and the חטאת הפנימי, the internal sin offering brought in the Temple on Yom Kippur, how could the Jewish People contemplate attaining כפרה or טהרה? Rabbi Akiva consoled them saying that despite the absence of the Temple, טהרה can still come from God through repentance and reciting orally the service of the day, עבודת היום. God Himself,

כביכול, through the medium of the day of Yom Kippur itself, will affect purification.

Talmud Yerushalmi (Yoma 42b) quotes the disagreement between the Chachamim and Rabbi Eliezer Ben Azariah and Rabbi Yishmael as to the various stages required to wipe away sin. According to the Chachamim, in the time of the Temple the שעיר המשתלח alone provided atonement. Nowadays, the day of Yom Kippur itself atones. Through what part of יום עצומו is this atonement manifested? According to Rabbi Zeura through a "כל שהו" (a moment) at the beginning of Yom Kippur. Rabbi Chananya says at the conclusion of the day.

If the day of Yom Kippur replaces the שעיר המשתלח, which was brought during the day, either the entire day or the middle of the day should be required for כפרה. Why do both Rabbi Zeura and Rabbi Chananya identify either end of the day as the מכפר?⁷ Also, why do they mention כפרה with the שעיר המשתלח and not טהרה?

Perhaps we can answer this question by equating the actions of כפרה achieved by both יום עצומו and the שעיר. When the Temple stood, the requirement was to bring all the requisite sacrifices to attain כפרה. כפרה was a pre-requisite for טהרה. However, כפרה is a cumulative process requiring multiple acts performed throughout the day, where each step adds additional levels of forgiveness depending on the severity of the sins. However, when it comes to טהרה, there is no partial purity. It is all or nothing. When the moment arrives that the people have attained the proper atonement, full טהרה is achieved. Just like the שעיר had the ability to instantly transform crimson red to pure snow-white and achieve an immediate state of purity after all the pre-requisites for כפרה were fulfilled, יום עצומו of Yom Kippur has the same ability. Rabbi Chananya and Rabbi Zeura disagree as to what instant of Yom Kippur assumes the role of fulfilling the pre-requisite of כפרה. Rabbi Zeura says we incrementally attain כפרה throughout the day of Yom Kippur, starting with the first moments after Kol Nidrei. Rabbi Chananya says we need to go through the entire day for any part of כפרה to be granted. However, both agree that Yom Kippur, as stated by Rabbi Akiva, grants the same instantaneous טהרה that was achieved through the שעיר when the Temple

⁷ See the Pnei Moshe who takes it for granted that the Chachamim require Teshuva. Also he interprets Rabbi Zayra as Kol Shehu meaning each moment of the day achieves an incremental atonement.

stood, allowing us to reenter the company of God.⁸ This טהרה, according to both, comes through observing the day of Yom Kippur, and only at the end of the day.

One whose merits exceed his demerits, is inscribed on Rosh Hashanah in the book of life. That determination is based on the scale weighing his activities and where the preponderance of his actions falls. However, inscription does not impart forgiveness or purity. He still seeks the ultimate step of טהרה to fully reunite with God. The concept of רוב does not apply here to nullify his sins, for they have left their mark on the individual. To attain טהרה he too must first attain כפרה for his actions and wipe away his sins that may be dormant but are still there. And as part of Knesset Yisrael, he must participate in attaining communal כפרה and טהרה through וידוי and the other obligations of the day of Yom Kippur like everyone else.

In conclusion, while deviation and rebellion against God can be atoned for throughout the year, the cleansing of the blemishes occurs once a year on Yom Kippur. Man dares not miss the opportunity afforded him on that day to attain כפרה **and** טהרה and return to a level of purity that grants admission to the company of God.

Copyright 2023 by Rabbi Josh Rapps. Permission to distribute this summary for individual use, with this notice, is granted. Distribution through electronic or printed media without the author's permission is prohibited.

⁸ See Yerushalmi (יומא ח:ז): אמר רבי חונא. איתתבת קומי רבי ירמיה ואמר. תיפתר שהיה בדעתן להביא שעיר אחר ולא הביאו. רבי יוסי בירבי בון בעי. ואין הקדוש ברוך הוא רואה את הנולד וכפר מיד

If God knows that the people intended to bring the sacrifice but were prevented from doing so, He can give them credit for it immediately at the outset of Yom Kippur and need not wait till the end of the day. This should apply to us nowadays that we cannot bring the cumulative sacrifices to attain כפרה to subsequently achieve טהרה. Perhaps this is the opinion of Rabbi Zeura. Rabbi Chananya says that since Yom Kippur takes the place of the cumulative activities required for כפרה, טהרה can only be attained at the end of the day.