



Parsha Acharei Mos 2022, the lesson of Azazel

This week's Parsha Perspective is in honor of the Refuah Shlema of HaRav Amitai Ben Shoshanna and in loving memory of Edward Ben Efraim, Shlomo Ben Edward, and Yirachmiel Daniel Ben Gedalia. May their souls be uplifted!

Our Parsha begins following the death of Aaron's two sons, Nadav and Avihu. They died because they spontaneously entered the Kodesh Hakedshim, the holy of Holies.

G-d commands Moshe to tell Aaron and his two remaining sons not to go into the Holy of Holies at will, for lest they share the same consequences as Nadav and Avihu. Only Aaron and subsequent High Priests can enter the Holy of Holies on the year's holiest day, Yom Kippur.

The Torah then explains the elaborate service of the Kohen Gadol on Yom Kippur. Amongst the many rituals, he was to bring an incense offering, the Ketores in the Holy of Holies and the draw lots for the fate of two identical goats.

The first goat was designated "**for G-d**" and was sacrificed on the Altar and completely burnt. The second goat was labeled "**Azazel**" and was led to a cliff by a specific Kohen and pushed off it. The Kohen who dealt with the goat for Azazel would need to immerse himself and his clothes in a Mikva before again entering the Beis Hamikdash.

However, a question comes to mind: The term **Azazel** is found nowhere else in the Torah and does not have an actual translation.

The commonly used translation is "**scapegoat**" created by William Tyndale in 1530 when he translated the Torah into English. But what does **Azazel** mean truly mean? Why was the goat given this unusual and uncommon name?

Rashi (*Rav Shlomo Yitzchaki, the leading commentary on the Torah*) quotes from the Talmud in Yoma (67b) that the meaning of Azazel is to be strong and mighty. (עוז - strong — א-ל - mighty)

Rashi explains that the term Azazel refers to the rocks of the cliff that the Azazel was pushed from. This specific peak was dangerously high and extremely steep, and the land on the bottom was rough and rugged.

However, the Ramban (*Rav Moshe Ben Nachman, a leading scholar, philosopher, and Kabbalist*) gives a deeper and more profound explanation. Besides quoting the previous answer, he clarifies another opinion of the Talmud in Yoma. (67b) "*Rav Yishmael explains that the second goat is atoning for the sins of עוֹזָא וְעֹזָאֵל — Uzza and Azael.*"

The Ramban writes that Uzza and Azael were angels who were upset when G-d created mankind. They said to G-d, **why would You create something that can defy You?!** G-d responded to them, do you think you would be better? They said **yes!** So G-d decided to test them. He gave the human urges and placed them down here on earth.

Uzza and Azael were extremely enticed by the beauty of women and promptly sinned with them. At that moment, they defiled their purity and lost their angel status. Their unions created giants, known as the Nephilim - the fallen ones.

Their descendants were wicked and caused the **Mabul** - the great flood. According to many opinions, **Og**, the wicked King of Bashan, whom Moshe Rabbeinu killed, was one of these giants.

The Ramban explains that the Azazel was an essential part of Yom Kippur because it represents the value of every good deed we do. Since we are naturally

predisposed to do anything **to feel good at the moment** and make ourselves better than others, **every Mitzvah matters**. Because it demonstrates our G-dly soul overpowering our instinct for the sake of G-d.

The Azazel teaches us that although we may have followed our impulses during the past year, we receive angel-like heavenly status each time we beat our urges. For overcoming our desires is the highest and greatest form of actualizing and fulfilling our G-dly purpose.

This lesson is ever more prevalent as we just finished Pesach, the holiday of redemption. During Pesach, we forgo most normal foods in exchange for a spiritual experience and awakening.

In our daily life, we should realize that discipline is the bridge between thriving and achieving our goals or the opposite, heaven forbid. Because lasting success requires a disciplined approach when dealing with chaotic situations.

Obtaining such a perspective begins with overpowering our instinct and ego for a birds-eye view of our actions and conduct. This enables us to take an objective look at ourselves and identify places of improvement in our personal and spiritual lives. That understanding and an attitude of gratitude for all we have is the surest way to reach our goals!

"Discipline is choosing between what you want now and what you want most."

-Abraham Lincoln

*Have a meaningful Shabbos!
Rabbi Sholom Yemini*