

- 9 Aharon shall bring near the he-goat that was designated by lot “for God” and name it as an offering that clears of sin. ט וְהִקְרִיב אֶהָרֹן אֶת־הַשְּׂעִיר אֲשֶׁר עָלָה עָלָיו הַגּוּרָל לַיהוָה וַעֲשֵׂהוּ חַטָּאת:
- 10 But the he-goat that was designated by lot “for Azazel” shall be left standing alive before God, to effect atonement upon it, to send it away, as Azazel’s, into the wilderness. י וְהַשְּׂעִיר אֲשֶׁר עָלָה עָלָיו הַגּוּרָל לְעֹזָאֵל יַעֲמֶד־תִּי לְפָנֵי יְהוָה לְכַפֵּר עָלָיו לְשַׁלַּח אֹתוֹ לְעֹזָאֵל הַמִּדְבָּרָה:

- 9 denotes the raising of the lot out of the urn, עליית הגורל מתוך הקלפי. Only the lot raised up from the urn — and not the declaration of the כהן — designates the שׂעיר as a חטאת. The כהן must treat as a חטאת that שׂעיר which is designated by lot לה' ועשהו חטאת (ibid. 40b).
- 10 The partner, which was designated by lot לה', goes to its death as an offering; but through its very death as an offering it is accepted in God's Sanctuary and attains a new and exalted existence. By contrast, the שׂעיר that was designated by lot לעזאזל remains חי, alive and unscathed, standing at the entrance to the Sanctuary. There, with the סמיכה, the confession of all the nation's sins and transgressions will be made over its head (see below, v. 21).

לשלא אתו. Its partner gained entrance to the Sanctuary only at the price of death as an offering. The שׂעיר designated by lot לעזאזל, however, will not cross the threshold of the Sanctuary. It will be left standing, unscathed; but it will be sent away — not only from the area of the Sanctuary, but out of the whole sphere of human habitation, המדברה, into the wilderness.

The two שׂעירים described here present before us two figures. At the outset they are identical in every respect, but their ways part at the threshold of the Sanctuary.

At the outset they are alike, שוין במראה ובקומה ובדמים ובלקחתן כאחד,

(*Yoma* 62a). They stand together in the same manner *לה' פתח אהל לפני ה'* (above, v. 7). They both face the same decision — *לעזאזל* or *לה'*. The possibility of becoming the one or the other is the same for each. What is more, each of the two can become what it becomes only because it could just as well have become the other: *אין הגורל קובע אלא בראוי לשם* (*Yoma* 63b). Henceforth, their ways part in opposite directions:

The *שעיר* designated *לה'* dies through *שחיטה* by the sharp knife of the Sanctuary; but it is taken up in the vessel of the Sanctuary and is brought into the Holy of Holies, close to the holiest place, where the ideal of Torah life reaches its zenith — man becoming a bearer of godliness.

By contrast, the *שעיר* designated *לעזאזל* is not touched by the knife of the Sanctuary; it does not die by *שחיטה*, but remains *חי*, alive and unchanged. In vital egocentricity it stands unscathed before God at the Sanctuary entrance. But it is not admitted into the Sanctuary interior. Instead, it is sent away from the precincts of the Sanctuary and away from the place of human habitation, out into the wilderness. In turning its back on the Sanctuary it preserves its self-centered life, which it will end in the desolation of the wilderness.

Both these *שעירים* are *חטאות* — *חטאת* — *שני שעירי עזים לחטאת* (above, v. 5). They represent, then, the same *חטאת*-concept, in its two opposing aspects.

We therefore believe we are not mistaken in saying the following: All the other *חטאות* represent life as it should have been lived in the past and as it should be lived in the future. Here, however, the reverse side is represented — namely, life as it should never have been lived in the past, and as it shall not be lived, we vow, in the future.

Each one of us is a “*שעיר*.” Each one of us has the power to resist, the ability to firmly oppose any demands made on our will. The moral worth of our life depends on the way in which we use this power. We can use it in the service of God; we can become a “*שעיר לה'*,” resisting any enticement — from within or from without — that would lure us away from God. Or we can become a “*שעיר לעזאזל*”; we can use this power of resistance in obstinate refusal to obey the voice of God. For God has granted us the power of resistance, but we can turn this very power against God Who has granted it to us. We can surrender ourselves, without a fight, to sensuality and its allurements — even though the whole reason God gave us the power of resistance is to combat

sensual temptation. One who surrenders to the power of sensuality — in contrast with one who subordinates himself to God and His Torah — is called here “לעזאזל.”

The simplest interpretation of the word “עזאזל” is “עז אזל” — an obstinate, headstrong character (עז) who is gone, with no future (אזל); he considers himself עז (strong), and as a result expires and disappears. עזאזל represents sensuality practiced as a matter of principle; and God has denied it any place in the destiny of man.

A ברייתא in *Yoma* 67b interprets the word as עזז אל or עזזאל, which comes to the same concept: עזז (strength) that suits the nature and purpose of the אלים.

The אלים are the non-human forces of nature, to which the Creator has assigned only one possible direction, from which לא יסבו בלקחן (Yechezkel 1:17) — i.e., from which they are not permitted, and hence not able, to deviate. They obey their Creator by following the dictates of their nature, as their nature is the sole direction given them as their lot. Such is the lot and the destiny of the elemental world and of the unfree organic world.

Man, however, has a different, higher purpose; and only to the extent that he fulfills this higher purpose is he worthy of being human.

For the one, free, almighty God is exalted above the laws that govern the אלים. He created them and imposed His laws upon them, and they are bound by these laws. Their strength is in their unchanging performance of His will. Exalted above them all is the one God, in the absolute freedom of His being and will. He has breathed the breath of His spirit into an earthly creature, endowed him of His own unique, free essence, and bestowed upon him of His power that rules over these natural forces. In the midst of unfree אלים he has placed one creature as spirit of His spirit, breath of His breath, clothed him in an earthly shell and said to him:

Be “Adam”; be a likeness of Me (cf. Commentary, *Bereshis* 1:26); be a God in miniature, in and over the little world that I have assigned to you along with your physical frame. I have granted you freedom of My freedom; and I have given you power of My power to master the forces of nature. Within your frame — that part of you which is of the earthly world — powerful forces and impulses are at work, just as they prevail in the rest of the elemental and organic world, from which your frame derives. Left to themselves, these forces drive on the way that is innate

to their nature, and find satisfaction in so doing. But you are free, and I have granted you freedom of My freedom; I have given you power of My power to master the forces of nature; I have breathed into you a spirit of My spirit to hear the laws of My will; and you are to use that freedom and that power to master, with a strong hand, your own world of inner drives and impulses, subordinating them all to the laws of My will. Thus, when you subordinate to Me your drives and impulses, and through them subordinate to Me your very self, you will be close to Me and above all others, the one free being in a world of forces that have no freedom of their own.

Implicit in the concept of freedom, however, is the possibility of opposing God's will. It is absurd to say that the ability to sin and the temptations of the senses are only consequences of man's degeneration. For without the ability to sin and the alluring temptation of sensuality, man ceases to be man. For man's whole virtue is contingent upon his ability to sin; and man's whole dignity lies in his ability to disobey God's will. In the elemental and organic world there is no sin, but — precisely for this reason — neither are there moral virtues. If sensuality were not attractive to man; if man, too, were to find satisfaction only in using his faculties in accordance with God's will; if all evil were bitter to him, and all good were sweet; if he could not resist God's will, as he can resist the urges of his senses; if he were not capable of becoming a שׁעיר לעזאזל, as he is capable of becoming a שׁעיר לה' — then, he, too, would be subject to the compulsion of God's law, like all the other created things. For these never deviate from their assigned tasks; only the fulfillment of God's Will brings them satisfaction, and any deviation from it is antithetical to their nature.

We all are faced with the decision between ה' and עזאזל. We all stand at the Sanctuary entrance — to choose between God and the power of our senses. Inside, in the Holy of Holies, rests the Torah as the holiest of holies. With our eyes on the Torah, we make our decision.

We can decide לה', in favor of God. We will muster all the power of resistance at our disposal to resist anything that would tear us away from our calling; we will become close to God, belong to Him, and become like Him — in the fulfillment of His will and the performance of all that is good. Then we will enter with joy into the forecourt of His Sanctuary. With the sharp knife of God's sanctification we will renounce the animalistic life of sensuality. By doing so we will gain

acceptance into the Sanctuary; we will draw near to God even in our sensual life, by doing His holy Will on earth.

On the other hand, a person can decide לעזאזל, in favor of עזאזל. Standing at the entrance of the Sanctuary, confronted by the demands of His Torah, he will employ the power of resistance at his disposal to defy God's will. At the entrance of the Sanctuary he will refuse to give up the life of the animal in him; he will refuse to surrender sensuality to the knife of the willpower given to him; he will not be willing to offer up all of this to God's sanctification and Torah. At the entrance of the Sanctuary and in full view of His Torah he will maintain, un-subordinated, the animalistic life. But in doing so he surrenders himself to עזאזל, to the power of uncontrolled sensuality. This person has no place in the Sanctuary, and no place in the sphere of human or national life; for that life can flourish only in the light of the Torah in the surroundings of God's Sanctuary. His place is in the wilderness. There, the earthly world is not elevated into the sphere of freedom through the actions of moral man.

This choice is not predetermined for any of us. It is not determined by מראה, קומה, or דמים. Physical appearance, social standing, financial status, even the circumstances under which we decide — none of these determine our decision. Respected or scorned, great or humble, rich or poor, today or tomorrow, no matter what the extent of one's powers or possessions, and at any time — anyone can become either לה' or לעזאזל.

One's decision לה' has meaning and value only if, at the time of the decision, he could have chosen עזאזל instead. Conversely, a decision לעזאזל is unworthy of man only because he could have chosen instead to remain faithful to God. The very enticements of עזאזל should have led him to God; for without these temptations he cannot become a free son and servant of God. Sensuality has been given to man not that it should control him, but in order that he should control and guide it: ואלֵיךְ תִּשׁוּקָתוֹ וְאַתָּה תִּמְשַׁל בּוֹ (*Bereshis* 4:7; see Commentary there).

לשלח אתו לעזאזל. לשלח is not the indirect object of לשלח. The meaning here is not "to send it to עזאזל." That is the interpretation particularly of those who would make עזאזל into a demon of the wilderness to whom the goat is sent as an appeasement offering! In the overwhelming majority of the numerous places where שלח occurs in the *pi'el*, שִׁלַּח is not

- 11 *And Aharon shall again bring near his bull of the offering that clears of sin, and effect atonement for himself and for his household. And he shall slaughter the bull of the offering that clears of sin, that is his.*
- יא וְהִקְרִיב אֶת־בַּרְּ אֶת־פֶּרֶר הַחֲטָאתִי
 אֲשֶׁר־לוֹ וְכִפֵּר כִּפְּרוֹ וּבְעֵד בֵּיתוֹ
 וְשָׁחַט אֶת־פֶּרֶר הַחֲטָאתִי אֲשֶׁר־
 לוֹ:

identical with שְׁלוּחַ: The משלח does not send to someone; rather, he releases, dismisses, and sends away. משלח is commonly used in the sense of שלוח only in connection with evil decrees, as in וּשְׁחַט אֶשְׁלַח בָּם (Devarim 32:24), and the like. And there, too, the basic meaning is the unleashing of the evil. There are only a few exceptions to this rule, as in וְשָׁחַט אֶשְׁלַח (Bereshis 38:17), where אֶשְׁלַח is definitely identical with אֶשְׁלַח.

It appears, then, that the meaning of לשלח אהו in our verse is like the meaning of וְשָׁלַח אה הצפר in the parallel verse (above, 14:7) — viz., sending it away. Accordingly, לעזאזל is in apposition to אהו: to send it away, as לעזאזל's, into the wilderness.

- 11 Earlier (v. 6), it was stated: והקריב וגו' וכפר בעדו. Here, he approaches the bull a second time and again acknowledges the need for atonement for himself and for his household.

The Mishnah in *Yoma* 41b says that in this second וידוי the concept of ביתו is extended, and the כהן גדול includes in his וידוי the whole priestly tribe: אנה השם חטאתי וכו' לפניך אני וביתי ובני אהרן עם קדושך.

Yoma 43b explains the reason the confession on his own behalf precedes the confession on behalf of his tribe: He must atone for himself, through his personal confession, before he seeks atonement for his tribe, יבא זכאי וכפר על החייב ואל יבא חייב וכפר על החייב.

What remains to be explained, however, is why Scripture separates these two וידויים by the intervening הגרלה (above, vv. 7 and 8). It appears that there is a threefold reason: The כהן גדול must perform the הגרלה before שחיטת הפר, because שחיטת הפר and הזיות דם הפר are immediately followed by שחיטת השעיר and הזיות דמו (below, v. 15). And his וידוי must precede the הגרלה, because before he approaches the חטאת of the people