

# A “Hairy” Situation for Nations

PARSHA INSIGHTS - ACHARAI MOS (5760)

## HOW CAN A GOAT CARRY AWAY ALL OUR SINS?

“Aharon shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the *Bnai Yisroel* [Children of Israel], and all their transgressions in all their sins, **putting them upon the head of the goat**; and he shall send him away by the hand of an appointed man into the wilderness. **And the goat shall bear upon it all their iniquities** to a barren land, and he shall send away the goat in the wilderness” (16:21-22). How do we explain this intriguing aspect of the *Yom Kippur* service in the *Bais Hamikdosh* [Temple]? Do we claim to magically “send away all our sins” on the head of a goat? Is there a profound meaning to this ceremony?

One solution to the mystery is in the *Midrash Rabba* 65:15 on *Parshas Toldos*. The “goat” in today’s *parsha* [Torah portion], which bears our sins, is called a “*sa’ir*” [hairy animal]. There is a PERSON in *Chumash* [Five Books of the Torah] who also referred to as an “*ish sa’ir*” [a hairy man]. Rivka had suggested to her son Yaacov, that he disguise himself like his brother Aisav, in order to receive the *brachos* [blessings] from his father Yitzchok. Yaacov feared being discovered by Yitzchok, since “Aisav...is a hairy man (*ish sa’ir*), and I am a smooth man. My father perhaps will feel me, and I shall seem to him a deceiver...” (*Toldos* 27:11-12). Using this reference, the *Midrash Rabba* declares that the “*sa’ir*”, hairy one, which is marched off to the wilderness with all our sins on its head, is actually a symbol for Aisav, the hairy man. The nation of Aisav, our oppressors and persecutors throughout the centuries, will bear our iniquities on *Yom Kippur*, effecting an atonement for us!

The *Midrash* elucidates further. Recall the *psukim* [verses] we quoted from today’s *parsha*. “And the *sa’ir* shall bear upon it all THEIR INIQUITIES...” The Hebrew for “their iniquities” is “*avonosam*”. As is the style of *Chazal* [our Sages] in many places, the *Midrash* expounds the suffix, “*sam*” as a hint to “*tam*” [the plain or sincere one]. The hairy one, Aisav, will bear on him the sins of the sincere one - “*avonos tam*” - the transgressions of Yaacov and his nation. You might know that Yaacov is described as an “*ish tam*” [wholesome man] in *Toldos* 25:27.

We see that on *Yom Kippur*, we Jews are somehow able to transfer culpability for our sins onto the head of Aisav, our chief adversary. The hairy one (*sa’ir*) will carry away the wrongdoings of the sincere one (*tam*). Rav Zalman Sorotzkin is bothered by an obvious difficulty: How is such a thing possible? Aren’t we responsible for our own misdeeds?

Before we explore his answer, we must be reminded of the *Gemara* on the top of *Yoma* 20A. The *Satan* [heavenly prosecutor] does not level any accusations against *Bnai Yisroel* on *Yom Kippur*. He does not attempt to indict and condemn people for their sins on this most holy day. One reason, provided by *meforshim* [commentators], is that he himself is an angel, the *Malach Hamaves* [Angel of Death] (*Bava Basra* 16A), and WE also resemble angels on *Yom Kippur*. We approach or even rise above his status, so he does not try to convict us on this one day each year. This is an extensive discussion, which is not in the scope of today’s *d’var Torah* [lesson]. The point is, though, that *Yom Kippur* is a day free of condemnation. It is an auspicious time to plead on behalf of *Bnai Yisroel*. Consequently, the *Kohen Gadol* defends us by “blaming” Aisav for our iniquities. How so?

The gentile nations we have lived among often issued decrees banning religious observance. There is no need to get into detail; we are painfully familiar with persecution and anti-Semitism throughout the ages. This has been an unfortunate reality after the *Bais Hamikdosh* was destroyed and we were exiled. The nations of Babylonia, Persia, Greece, Rome, and their descendants and adherents - Spain, Russia, Germany... the list goes on and on. Surprisingly, however, the abuse suffered at the hands of the nations even existed, albeit in a different form, WHILE the *Bais Hamikdosh* stood. Despite our tranquility and autonomy, despite our glorious independence and prosperity, the nations surrounding us influenced us in a harmful way. The threat of assimilation has always hovered over *Bnai Yisroel*, even more so when our relationships with non-Jews are at their best. In countries with “freedom of religion”, how many missionaries still exist? How much energy and money do some religious organizations spend in their tireless efforts to convert the Jews?

These perils, generated by the nations even during our golden age of the *Bais Hamikdosh*, have always been a “*limud zechus*” [supreme defense] for *Bnai Yisroel*. The hairy one, Aisav, bears some guilt for the sins of

the sincere one, Yaacov. It is quite challenging for the Jewish people to “act like lofty angels, while the nations around them behave like vicious beasts of prey”. These are the words of Rav Zalman Sorotzkin in his conclusion.

We now understand that on *Yom Kippur*, a day of Divine favor and compassion, the transgressions of *Bnai Yisroel* can fairly be placed on the head of the *sa'ir*, the hairy one. This held true even in the years of the *Bais Hamikdosh*. It is not only our internal *yaitzer hora* [evil inclination] that persuades us to do evil. The external pressures, whether persecution or assimilation endeavors, account for many iniquities. May the world be restored to a situation of spiritual utopia, where all human beings will finally exist in harmony.

*By Rabbi Moshe Heigh*

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