

Seder Ha'avodah: A Signpost for Inner Work

Yom Kippur, 5781 – B'nai Jeshurun

Rabbi Sam Feinsmith – sam@jewishspirituality.org**I. Shem MiShmuel,¹ Yom Kippur Eve (1919)**

“יעמד חי לפני ה' לכפר עליו לשלח אותו לעזאזל המדברה” (ויקרא טז: ט-י). ואמרו ז”ל “עד מתי הוא יזקק לעמוד חי עד מתן דמו של חבירו” (בבלי יומא מ:). משמע מדכתיב “יעמד חי... לכפר עליו”, שהוא הוידוי, שמתן דמו של הפנימי זקוק להיות קודם וידוי המשתלח, וכמו שהוא בסדר העבודה.

“[Aaron shall bring forward the goat designated by lot for the LORD, which he is to offer as a sin offering; while the goat designated by lot for Azazel] **shall be left standing alive before the LORD, to make expiation with it and to send it off to the wilderness for Azazel**” (Lev. 16:9-10). And our sages of blessed memory said, “**How long must the scapegoat be left standing alive? Until the blood of its counterpart is applied [on the altar]**” (B. Tal. Yoma 40b). Since the verse writes, “**the goat... shall be left standing alive... to make expiation with it,**” referring to confession, we can infer that the application of the blood of the goat remaining in the sanctum must transpire before confessing over the scapegoat, just as described in the *Seder Ha'avodah* service.

והטעם י”ל עפ”מ שהגיד כ”ק אבי אדמו”ר זצלה”ה, ששעיר לה’ הוא להגביה חלק הטוב, והמשתלח לדחות את חלק הרע, והם “**סור מרע ועשה טוב**” (תהלים לד: טו), עכת”ד. והנה הרי כתיב סור מרע מקודם ואח”כ ועשה טוב, אך כבר הגדנו... כי להמתין עם עשה טוב עד שיסיר מקודם מהרע אי אפשר, אלא העצה להקדים את עשה טוב כמו שהוא אם אך רוצה להסיר מהרע, אף שעדיין אינו יכול, מ”מ עשיית הטוב תהי’ לעזר לו להועיל לבוא לידי סור מרע...

We can offer a reason based on what my esteemed and holy father...² stated: The goat designated for the Lord is meant to elevate the good in us while the scapegoat is meant to cast aside what is harmful in us. The goats thus correspond respectively to “**Turn from evil and do good**” (Ps. 34:15)... Now even though “**Turn from evil**” is listed before “**do good,**” we have already stated... that to wait to do good until we remove all evil is impossible. Instead, I advise that we do good in whatever state we may find ourselves. Even if we may wish to remove what is harmful in us while we are not yet able to do so, doing good will nevertheless support us to grow toward “**Turn from evil.**”

וי”ל שזה עצמו הוא ענין הקדמת מתן דמו של הפנימי לוידוי של המשתלח, כדי שהגבהת חלק הטוב תהי’ לעזר ולסעד לדיחוי חלק הרע. ונראה שענין זה סובב הולך כל הימים הקדושים, שהרי אף בסוכות עדיין אומרים הושענא, וככל שחלק הרע עודנו במציאות, ואעפ”כ הקב”ה הכניס את ישראל להסוכה, בסוד “**הביאני המלך חדריו**” (שיר השירים א: ד), וכן ענין הלולב

¹ A nine-volume collection of homiletical teachings delivered around the Torah and the Jewish holidays from 1910-1926 by Rabbi Shmuel Bornsztain, the second Rebbe of Sochatchov, a satellite of Warsaw.

² The first Sochatchover Rebbe, Rabbi Avrohom Bornsztain (1838-1910), a close disciple of the Kotzker Rebbe.

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שנתקיים "ישמח ישראל בעושי" (תהלים קמט:ב). וא"כ הרי הגבהת חלק הטוב קדומה, והמשכילים יבינו כי עדיין הגבהת חלק הטוב והסוכה והלולב אינם עוד התכלית להסתפק בו לבד, אלא כל אלה צריך לדחיית חלק הרע לגמרי, ויש לכל אדם להזהר בזה ולא יהי' כשוטה המאבד מה שנותנין לו :

We can thus say that this is the very thrust of applying the blood of the goat that remains in the sanctum before confessing over the scapegoat—so that elevating the good in us will support and sustain us in the work of casting away what is harmful in us. And it seems that this orientation encompasses and continues throughout all the holy days of this season. For even during Sukkot we still say “Hoshana” (Save us!)—as evil is still in us. Yet the Holy and Blessed One brings us into the sukkah nonetheless, in accordance with the mystical secret of “**The Majestic One has brought me to God’s chambers**” (Song. 4:1), and so too with the lulav, through which the verse “**Let Israel rejoice in its Maker**” (Ps. 149:2) is fulfilled. This being so, elevating the good comes first. Yet those who are discerning (*ha'maskilim*) will understand that elevating what is good in us, entering the sukkah, and taking up a lulav are not end goals in themselves such that we can be self-satisfied with our inner work through these alone. Instead, they are necessary means to completely cast aside what is harmful in us. And so, each of us must be exceedingly mindful, taking great care not to be like fools who waste what’s been given to us.

II. Craig and Devon Hase, *How Not to Be a Hot Mess: A Survival Guide for Modern Life* (pp. 58-60)

See the good. How many of us train our eye to see the good? How many of us train our ear to hear the good? And how often, in our daily rush of bad news, bad politics, and bad hair days, does the mind incline itself toward what’s already good?

... Negativity bias is the simple but powerful idea that we, as humans, are more likely to see what’s bad than what’s good. Why? Most likely it’s evolution. Evolution doesn’t care whether you’re happy. Evolution just cares whether you pass genes along. And so if you’re living in a jungle with a bunch of attack cats and poisonous snakes, better to be on high alert all the time, and a little stressed out, than relaxed and happy and dead at sixteen.

Maybe all that made sense ten thousand years ago. But these days, with the advent of the information age, our negativity bias is continually enforced... Which means your negativity bias is being confirmed and confirmed and confirmed, until all you see when you look out at the world is people doing bad stuff and the planet going up in flames.

But here’s the thing...most people most of the time actually treat each other pretty okay. And though we are in the midst of an ecological crisis that needs to be addressed yesterday..., we



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can still train the mind to look, right now, in this present moment, at everything that is going right. Not because we are trying to fool ourselves. But because we have *already been fooled*, and we need to reset the focus and look with fresh eyes at what is already true so that we can build the resilience we'll need to address all the things that have to get done today, tomorrow, and for all the days after that.