



# Shabbat Table Talk Page

## Overview

- **Parashah: Acharei Mot (אַחֲרֵי מוֹת, "after the death")**
- **Chapters: Leviticus 16:1-18:30**



בְּרוּךְ אַתָּה יְיָהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם, אֲשֶׁר קִדְּשָׁנוּ בְּמִצְוֹתָיו, וְצִוָּנוּ לְעֲסוֹק בְּדַבְּרֵי תוֹרָה

– Torah Study Blessing –

## Synopsis

This week's Torah portion moves from the preceding instructions regarding ritual purity (*tahora*) to recall the tragic incident of Nadab and Abihu, the two sons of Aaron who were killed when they offered "strange fire" upon the Altar of Incense during the dedication of the Tabernacle (Lev. 10:1-2). Because these priests came close to the Holy of Holies in an incorrect manner and were killed, the LORD further commanded Moses to instruct Aaron that he should enter the innermost chamber only in a carefully prescribed manner once a year - on the tenth day of the seventh month - during the sacred time called Yom Kippur (i.e., the "Day of Atonement").

On this most solemn day, Aaron was commanded to immerse himself in a mikveh and to dress in all-white linen. He then was instructed to slaughter a bull as a personal sin offering. Aaron then brought some *ketoret* (incense) to burn within the Holy of Holies before returning to sprinkle the blood of the sin offering seven times before the Ark of the Covenant (i.e., the *kapporet* or "Mercy Seat"). Aaron repeated this procedure using the blood of one of two goats that was selected (by lot) to be slaughtered as a sin offering on behalf of the people. After this, Aaron took more of the sacrificial blood and purified the Altar of Incense and the other furnishings of the Tabernacle. Later, the fat of these sacrifices was burned on the Copper Altar in the courtyard, though the hide and the flesh were to be entirely burned *outside* the camp.

After purifying the Tabernacle, Aaron went to the gate of the courtyard and laid both hands upon the head of the other goat (designated "for Azazel," a name for the accusing angel) while confessing all of the sins and transgressions of the people. This "scapegoat" was not slaughtered, however, but was driven away into the wilderness, carrying "all their iniquities unto a land not inhabited." Finally, Aaron returned to the Tent, washed and changed his clothes, and offered two burnt offerings – one for himself and one for the people – to complete the purification process.

This elaborate ritual was ordained to be a decree for Israel, and the day of Yom Kippur was to be observed every year as a time of "affliction and mourning" for all the people.

The portion ends with further instructions about making sacrifices, including the prohibition against offering sacrifices apart from the rites of the Tabernacle. The consumption of blood is explicitly forbidden, since blood was reserved for sacrificial purposes upon the altar. Finally, the portion presents a list of forbidden sexual relationships, concluding with the general prohibition against following the abhorrent practices of other nations.



## Basic Questions

1. Acharei Mot means “After the death.” Why were Aaron’s two oldest sons, Nadab and Abihu, killed when the Tabernacle was first dedicated? <sup>1</sup>
2. What does the term “Yom Kippur” mean? <sup>2</sup>
3. When is Yom Kippur observed? <sup>3</sup>
4. During the Yom Kippur *avodah* (priestly service), what animal was Aaron required to sacrifice as a sin offering, and what were the people to offer? <sup>4</sup>
5. What area of the Tabernacle was Aaron allowed to enter during Yom Kippur? <sup>5</sup>
6. Before he first entered the Holy of Holies, what was Aaron required to do? <sup>6</sup>
7. What *avodah* did Aaron do the first time he entered the Holy of Holies? <sup>7</sup>
8. What did Aaron do the *second* time he entered the Holy of Holies? <sup>8</sup>
9. During a special ceremony of Yom Kippur, Aaron selected two male goats over which lots were to be drawn. What were each of the goats used for? <sup>9</sup>
10. What was done with the blood of the sacrificed goat? <sup>10</sup>
11. What was done with the live goat? <sup>11</sup>
12. Why are we not allowed to eat blood, and how is it removed from meat? <sup>12</sup>
13. How many times did Aaron enter the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur? <sup>13</sup>
14. According to Jewish legend, what special Name of God did Aaron carefully enunciate when he prayed within the Holy of Holies? <sup>14</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Because they offered “strange fire” in the Holy Place of the Tabernacle.

<sup>2</sup> “The Day of Atonement.” The word Kippur is actually plural in the Hebrew, indicating the purification rituals. In traditional Judaism, Yom Kippur is the holiest day of the Jewish year, marked by fasting and penitential prayers.

<sup>3</sup> On the tenth day of the seventh month of the Jewish year (i.e., Tishri 10).

<sup>4</sup> Aaron was required to offer a young bull for the sins of the priests; the people were required to offer *two* male goats.

<sup>5</sup> The Holy of Holies, or the innermost chamber of the Tabernacle that contained the Ark of the Covenant. The punishment for entering this area at *any* other time was death.

<sup>6</sup> He had to immerse himself in a mikveh and change into all-white linen garments. After doing so, he had to perform vidui (confession) and slaughter a bull for a personal sin offering.

<sup>7</sup> He burned two handfuls of ketoret (incense) taken from the Golden Altar using coals taken from the Copper Altar.

<sup>8</sup> He sprinkled the blood of his sin offering before the kapporet (“Mercy Seat”) of the Ark.

<sup>9</sup> One was to be sacrificed as a sin offering and the other was to be sent into the wilderness and be released.

<sup>10</sup> It was taken into the Holy of Holies and sprinkled before the kapporet, just as was done with Aaron’s sin offering.

<sup>11</sup> Aaron was to lay both of his hands on the head of the goat and confess over him all the sins of Israel to “put them” on the head of the goat; then the goat was taken away to the wilderness and released.

<sup>12</sup> Because the *nefesh* (life/soul) is in the blood, we “kasher” meat by soaking and salting it.

<sup>13</sup> Four times: First to burn incense; second to offer the blood of the bull; third to offer the blood of the goat; and one last time to remove the censer from the inner chamber.

<sup>14</sup> The sacred Name YHVH, which was otherwise forbidden to be spoken.



## Discussion Topics

1. How do you see the High Priestly avodah of Yeshua in light of the Yom Kippur rituals, particularly in the two goats offered as a sin sacrifice? How does this compare with the rituals described for “cleansing of the leper” found earlier in parashat Metzora?
2. When William Tyndale translated the Bible into English in the 16th century, he coined the term “scapegoat” to refer to the goat that was released into the wilderness bearing the guilt of the people. What does the word “scapegoat” connote to you? Discuss the idea of substitutionary atonement and the idea that Yeshua is the “Scapegoat” for your sins....
3. The Torah is filled with various imperatives of one kind or another. The term *mitzvah* (מצוה) is a general term used to refer to any commandment given by God. Mitzvot (pl.) can be further divided into the subcategories of “mishpatim” and “chukkim.” Mishpatim are rules or “judgments” that make sense to us and that promote well-being in a society, whereas chukkim are divine decrees that often defy human reason. Provide some examples from the Scriptures. Why do you think God might ask us to obey something we cannot rationally understand?
4. The word “halachah” (הלכה) refers to Jewish law, especially as applied to daily living. In Leviticus 18:4 we read, “You shall follow my rules (mishpatim) and keep my statutes (chukkim) to walk in them” The phrase *lalechet bahem*, “to walk in them” is used to explain God’s requirement that we observe his commandments in our daily lives. As a follower of Yeshua, what are the basic principles you live by in your walk with God?
5. In Leviticus 16:21 three different Hebrew words are used to describe the sin transferred to the scapegoat: *chet* (חטא), *pasha* (פשע), and *avon* (עון), usually translated as “sin,” “transgression,” and “iniquity,” respectively. *Chet* implies “missing the mark” through oversight or ignorance; *pasha* implies willfully “going beyond the limits” of God’s law, and *avon* implies perversity and defiant rebellion. Give some examples of each type of sin...

שבת שלום

*S h a b b a t S h a l o m !*

### For Next Week:

- Read parashat **Kedoshim** (Leviticus 19:1-20:27)
- Read the Haftarah (Amos 9:7-15)
- Read the New Testament (1 Pet. 1:13-16; 1 Cor. 6:9-20)





## Addendum: The Mystery of the "Scapegoat"

This week's Torah portion focuses on the solemn time of Yom Kippur (the "Day of Atonement"), which included the mysterious rite of the *se'ir mishtale'ach* - the "sent goat." During a special ceremony, Aaron selected two male goats over which lots were to be drawn. Both goats were to be unblemished, sound, and as much alike as possible. On one lot was inscribed "for the LORD" (ליהוה) and on the other was inscribed "for Azazel" (לעזאזל). After the lot was selected, the goat designated "for the LORD" was to be slaughtered as sin offering for the people, whereas the other goat was marked with a red band around its horns and left at the gate of the Tabernacle courtyard. Later in the service, Aaron would confess the sins of the community of Israel over this goat, which would then be "sent to Azazel" in the desert (Lev. 16:5-10; 21-22). Notice that in some ways the ritual of the "two goats" of the Yom Kippur service was similar to the ritual of the "two birds" used for the cleansing of the leper we saw earlier in parashat Metzora, since in both cases the focus was on purification from uncleanness (*tumah*) secured through the mediation of a priest...

The sending away of the goat "to Azazel" is regarded as one of the central rites of the entire Yom Kippur service, though it has puzzled many of the traditional Jewish commentators. The sages ask how the idea of ritually "transferring" the sins of the people onto a goat can be reconciled with the Torah's clearly expressed commandments that each person has a duty to undergo *teshuvah* and take responsibility for his or her own actions... In light of this paradox the sages wonder why the Torah commands that on the holiest day of the year a "scapegoat" for sins should become the focal point...

While many Christian scholars think "Azazel" comes from the verb *azal* (אזל), meaning to "go away" (i.e., to banish), the Jewish sages generally regarded the name as a reference to a geographical location of some kind, perhaps to a mountainous region with precipitous cliffs (Bavli Yoma 67b). According to Jewish tradition, the "designated man" assigned to run the goat away from the camp would go to this location to push the goat off a cliff to its death (Lev. 16:21-22). But notice that the idea of killing the goat is a Rabbinical fiction, since the Torah simply states that the goat should be "sent away" (ושלח) into the wilderness. After all, if the animal was meant to be *killed* as a sacrifice for sin, why wasn't it slaughtered at the Tabernacle, as was required for all other sin offerings? Moreover, it is clear that the goat was not intended to be regarded as a sacrifice offered to "Azazel" or some other angelic being, since the Torah repeatedly forbids such acts of idolatry (e.g., Lev. 17:7).

According to Maimonides, "Azazel" symbolically represented the "extreme" point of being "outside of the camp," and the goat's exile was intended to instill fear that the same fate awaited those who refused to repent. Other commentators have said that since some of the Israelites made offerings to demons (i.e., *se'irim* [שעירים], the same word for "goats"), the rite of the "sent goat" was intended to destroy the idolatrous impulse of the people (Lev. 17:7). Still others have suggested that the two goats represented the struggle between Jacob and Esau, who were similar in appearance but had very different destinies. Jacob represented holy sacrifice (i.e., the goat "for the LORD" at Zion) whereas Esau represented exile (i.e., Mount Seir, the "mountain of goat").



The midrash states that the “sons of god” who intermarried with human women (Gen. 6:1-2) were actually two angels - Aza and Azael - who originally asked God to allow them to enter human history to prove their loyalty. These two angels rebelled, however, and introduced gross perversions into the human family, and the “sent goat” was therefore offered to atone for the sins of gross sexual perversions and other horrendous evils. Most of the sages regard this midrash as an allegory intended to warn against sexual sin, and therefore the description of the Yom Kippur service is immediately followed by a list of forbidden sexual relationships (Lev. 18).

Finally, a few commentators have suggested that the ritual of the sent goat was a sort of “concession” made to the devil. They argue that the name “Azazel” refers to a name of a particular *demon* (perhaps even of the devil himself) that was associated with the wilderness regions (see Matt. 4:1). Instead of allowing illegitimate sacrifices made to the “goat demons” (Lev. 17:7), the ritual of “banishing the goat” acknowledged the power of spiritual darkness, and constituted a repudiation of “the force that rules desolate places, whose power is revealed in bloodshed, war, destruction, and under whose authority are the demons, the *se'irim*, the he-goats” (Nachmanides, *Moreh Nevuchim*). “Azazel” therefore represents the dread of sin and evil, which is regarded as essential to genuine *teshuvah*, and the “banishing of the goat” is symbolic of the need to resist the power of the devil... The ritual of the sent goat is therefore not intended to “appease the devil” but is meant to banish impurity and perversity from the community in order to avoid offending the LORD. After all, the goat was not *sacrificed* but rather *sent away* from the Presence of God...

The author of the Book of Hebrews writes, “When the Messiah appeared as *Kohen Gadol* (high priest) of the good things to come, then, through the greater and more perfect Tabernacle which is not made with human hands (that is, not of this creation), he entered into the *Kodesh Kodashim* (Holy of Holies) once and for all - not by means of the blood of goats and calves but by means of his own blood, thus securing for us eternal redemption” (Heb. 9:11-12). The Levitical system of worship was a shadow of a greater reality to come, since “it is impossible (ἀδύνατος) for the blood of bulls and goats to “take away” (i.e., ἀφαιρέω, the Greek word used to translate the Hebrew כרת, to “cut off”) sins” (Heb. 10:4).

In light of the ministry of Yeshua as our great High Priest of the New Covenant, we understand the blood of the sin offering “to the LORD” to represent the blood of atonement that was shed upon the cross for our purification from sin, whereas the offering made “to Azazel” represents the additional aspect of removing of our sins far “outside the camp.” Just as both of the goats of the Yom Kippur ritual constituted a *single* offering made to God (i.e., Lev. 16:5 states “he [Aaron] shall take ... two male goats for a (singular) sin offering”), so the sacrifice of Yeshua represents two aspects of a *single* offering before God. The blood of the first goat was given “to the LORD” for atonement, but the exile of the second goat was given to banish sins from the Divine Presence. Likewise Yeshua served as both our atoning sacrifice before the Father and as our “scapegoat” who “carries away our sins” (Isa. 53:4, 5; Matt. 8:17; 1 Pet. 2:24). The “sent away goat” represents the separation from God that Yeshua experienced on our behalf as He bore the wrath of God in our place... Because of the Messiah’s sacrifice, our sins are now put away “as far as the east is from the west” and are forever buried in the bottom of the sea, never to be remembered again (Psalm 103:12; Mic. 7:19; Isa. 38:17; Jer 31:34). Yeshua is both our Sin Offering whose blood cleanses us from sin as well as our “Scapegoat” who forever banishes our sins from God’s holy Presence. Bless His Holy Name...