

Parashat Acharei Mot 5779, 2019:

*Yom Kippur, the Torah and Time*

Rabbi David Etengoff

Dedicated to the sacred memories of my mother, Miriam Tovah bat Aharon Hakohen, father-in-law, Levi ben Yitzhak, sister-in-law, Ruchama Rivka Sondra bat Yeziel, sister, Shulamit bat Menachem, Yehonatan Binyamin ben Mordechai Meir Halevi, Shoshana Elka bat Avraham, Tikvah bat Rivka Perel, Peretz ben Chaim, the *Kedoshim* of Har Nof and Pittsburgh, and the *refuah shlaimah* of Yakir Ephraim ben Rachel Devorah, Mordechai ben Miriam Tovah, and the safety of our brothers and sisters in Israel and around the world.

Parashat Acharei Mot, known as the *parasha* of Yom Kippur, focuses upon the manner of observing this *Yom Tov* in the *Mishkan* and *Beit HaMikdash*. One of the many constitutive elements of a *Beit HaMikdash*-based Yom Kippur is the *mitzvah* of the *Sa'ir Hamish'talai'ach* (the Scapegoat) that plays a crucial role in the day's *kapparah* (atonement) process:

And the male goat upon which the lot "For Azazel" came up, shall be placed while still alive, before the L-rd, to [initiate] atonement upon it, and to send it away to Azazel, [that is, into the desert]...And Aaron shall lean both of his hands [forcefully] upon the live male goat's head and confess upon it all the willful transgressions of the children of Israel, all their rebellions, and all their unintentional sins, and he shall place them on the male goat's head, and send it off to the desert with a man, a prepared individual (*ish itti*). The male goat shall thus carry upon itself all their sins to a desolate land, and he [the *ish itti*] shall send off the male goat into the desert. (*Sefer Vayikra* 16: 10, 21-22, these and all Torah and Rashi translations, *The Judaica Press Complete Tanach*, with my emendations, underlining and brackets)

The *mitzvah* of the *Sa'ir Hamish'talai'ach*, like all *Chukim* (*mitzvot* whose rationales currently elude us), contains many mysterious elements that are difficult to understand. One of these is the meaning of the expression, "*ish itti*," which may be translated as "a man, a prepared individual." (See *Talmud Bavli, Yoma* 66b) The key word in this phrase is "*itti*," a noun similar in kind to "*tzaddik*" (righteous one) or "*chacham*" (wise individual). From a grammatical perspective, each of these stands on their own without the word "*ish*" preceding them; therefore, why does the Torah

combine *ish* and *itti* in our verse? (Analysis based upon the exegesis of our term by the Torah Temimah and the Malbim.)

Our question appears to be the driving force behind a Mishnaic period statement found in *Talmud Bavli, Yoma* 66a-b: “Our Rabbis taught: [Why does the Torah write] ‘*ish*’ — To teach us that even a non-*kohane* [that is, any Jewish male, can fulfill the obligations of the *itti*.]” (Translation and brackets my own) In other words, even though the *Sa’ir Hamish’talai’ach* is central to effectuating *kapparah*, and a *kohane* is necessary throughout the remainder of the atonement process, the *itti* that brings the Scapegoat to the desert wasteland need not be a *kohane*. Based upon this approach, *itti* does not modify *ish*; rather, the word “*itti*,” itself, is the essential term.

In his article entitled, *Sacred and Profane*, my *rebbe* and mentor, Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik *zatzal*, known as “the Rav” by his students and followers, understands the expression *ish itti* in a very different manner. He maintains that it is actually a compound noun wherein *itti* modifies the word *ish* and, therefore, connotes the idea of the “man of the moment,” since the Hebrew root letters of *itti* are *ayin* followed by *taf*, and spell the word “time.”

In the course of his explication of *ish itti*, the Rav notes that there were significant contrasts between the *Kohane Gadol* in the *Beit HaMikdash*, who offered the *S’air la’Shem* (male goat to Hashem) as part of the *kapparah* process, and the *ish itti* who transported the *Sa’ir Hamish’talai’ach* to the cliffs of the desert wasteland. The former, like his sacrificial offering on behalf of the entire Jewish people, was a “symbol of tradition and eternity, of qualitative time,” whereas the latter, like the animal under his charge that was removed from the holiness of the *Beit HaMikdash*, was a mere “man of the moment, symbol of temporality and quantitative time.”

In his posthumous work, *The Lord is Righteous in All His Ways*, the Rav expands upon the differences between quantitative and qualitative time in a profound manner. He states that for Kant and other philosophers:

...a day is nothing. Time is nothing more than a frame of reference, part of a coordinate system. For them, an event is registered in the context of space as well as time. You locate or localize an event, separate it, and study it. That is all. But there is no essence, no substance to time...It is a number, nothing whatsoever but a number. (Page 210, underlining my own)

In stark contrast to the philosophic view of time, the Rav asserts that Judaism views this dimension of existence as a precious entity with potential value unto itself:

In *Yahadut* (Judaism), time is something substantive. It has attributes. There is a “good time,” *Yom Tov*. There is something called *yom kadosh*, “holy time.” Indeed, the whole concept of *kedushat ha-yom* (holiness of the day) is reflective of our approach. It indicates that there is substance to the day that can be filled with sanctity. Days and hours are endowed or saturated with holiness...The day is not just a number. It is a creation in and of itself. (Page 211, parentheses and underlining my own)

Based upon the Rav’s analyses of the *ish itti*, *Kohane Gadol* and Judaism’s concept of time, we are in a much better position to understand a life choice that we face on Yom Kippur and, perhaps, each and every day. The Torah, I believe, is subtly asking us to choose between engaging in the ephemeral and fleeting life of the *ish itti*, for which time is a mere number, or, with the *Kohane Gadol*, as our model, living in a manner that sanctifies and endows life with meaning and the potential of unlimited possibilities. The choice is truly within our grasp, for if we choose to keep Hashem’s Torah, our entire people can ultimately serve Him as “a kingdom of *Kohanim* and a holy nation.” (*Sefer Shemot* 19:6) With the Almighty’s help and our heartfelt desire, may this be so. *V’chane yihi ratzon.*

Shabbat Shalom

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They may also be found on <http://www.yutorah.org/> using the search criteria Etengoff and the parasha's name.

The email list, *b'chasdei Hashem*, has expanded to hundreds of people. I am always happy to add more members to the list. If you have family or friends you would like to have added, please do not hesitate to contact me via email <mailto:rdbe718@gmail.com>.

\*\*\* My audio *shiurim* for Women on the topics of *Tefilah* and *Tanach* may be found at: [\*\*http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpd\*\*](http://tinyurl.com/8hsdpd)

\*\*\* I have posted 164 of **Rabbi Soloveitchik's** English language audio *shiurim* (MP3 format) spanning the years 1958-1984. Please click on the highlighted link.