

Parashat Acharei Mot

וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה אַחֲרֵי מוֹת שְׁנֵי בְנֵי אַהֲרֹן בְּקִרְבָּתָם לִפְנֵי יְהוָה וַיָּמָתוּ.
וַיֹּאמֶר ה' אֶל מֹשֶׁה....

G-d spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron, when they approached G-d and died. And G-d said to Moses....¹

Parashat Acharei Mot opens with the description of the rituals of Yom Kippur practiced in the Holy Temple. Usually, G-d's commandments are prefaced by the introduction, "And G-d spoke to Moses, saying...." In this instance, however, a time frame is given for this communication, "after the death of the two sons of Aaron." This refers to the incident described in *parashat Shemini*² in which Nadav and Avihu, the two elder sons of Aaron, were killed by a flame of fire that burst forth from the Holy of Holies and entered their nostrils when they offered incense that G-d had not commanded them to. In the following passage, the Arizal discusses why the two sons of Aaron died.

ספר הלקוטים, פרשת אחרי
ענין נדב ואביהוא. דע, כי אותיות נד"ב, הוא ב"ן ד'. רמז כנגד ארבעה בנים דברה תורה, שהם אדה"ר ושלשת בניו,

Sefer HaLikutim, parashat Acharei Mot

Regarding Nadav and Avihu, let us note that the letters that spell the name Nadav (*nun-dalet-veit*) may be rearranged to spell "four sons" (*ben dalet*; the letter *dalet* also signifies the number four). Thus, his name alludes to the "four sons of which the Torah spoke": Adam and his three sons Cain, Abel, and Seth.

In the course of its discussion of the commandment to retell the story of the exodus, the Passover Haggadah points out that this commandment is phrased in the Torah four different ways. The four ways are seen as responses to four different types of Jewish children; the story must be retold to each child in accordance with his level of understanding and approach to Judaism.

Here, the Arizal uses the phrase from the Haggadah "The Torah spoke of four sons" to refer to the four male members of Adam's immediate family mentioned in the Torah. (We are told that Adam had more sons besides these three, but they are not mentioned by name and are therefore not considered spiritual archetypes.)

שכלם נכללו בנדב ואביהוא, ששניהם היו אחד להיותם בלתי נשים,

All four were included in Nadav and Avihu, for the two of them were considered one person inasmuch as they were not married.

Since Adam and his sons sinned, their souls needed to be reincarnated so their sins could be rectified in their next lifetime. Nadav and Avihu were the collective embodiment of these four primordial souls. The sages of the Talmud say that an unmarried individual is only half a person, so since these two were not married, they together were counted as one individual.

1. Leviticus 16:1-2.

2. Ibid. 10:1-2.

ואותיות אב דאביהוא רמוז לאדה"ר, אבי"י הו"א.

The name Avihu also alludes to Adam, since it may be split into the two words "he is my father" (*avi hu*); i.e., my first progenitor.

ומה שפגם אדה"ר פגמוו אלו. והפגם היה באש זרה, שהיא אשה נכריה, היינו חוה ראשונה שהיא לילי"ת, שנזדווג עמה אדה"ר קודם חוה, ולזה אמר לזאת יקרא אשה, ולא לאחרת.

These two committed the same sin that Adam committed. This blemish was that of "strange fire," i.e., a foreign woman. This refers to the first Eve, Lilith, who copulated with Adam before the real Eve. This is why Adam said about Eve: "this one shall be called 'woman'"³—"this one," and not the other one.

Instead of rectifying the sin of Adam and his sons, Nadav and Avihu repeated it. A sin causes a "blemish" or imperfection in the spiritual worlds. This imperfection has repercussions throughout all creation and must therefore be rectified.

The Torah refers to the incense that Nadav and Avihu offered as a "strange fire." The linguistic and thematic connected between "fire" and "woman" will be explained presently.

Lilith⁴ is a female demon. Just as an angel is the personification of some holy emotion, a demon is the personification of some evil emotion. In this case, Lilith (whose name is related to the Hebrew word for "night," *lailah*) is the personification of man's sexual lust as divorced from any context of true love or desire to increase G-dliness in this world. In other words: raw, self-indulgent, self-serving sensual pleasure. Man is intended to indulge in sexual pleasure as a spiritual pursuit that gives pleasure to his wife, makes him into a more holy person, and increases the Divine image on earth (ideally by resulting in children). When instead, he engages in sexual release simply for the "high" he enjoys from it, he is said to be copulating with Lilith. Although he does not intend to procreate by this union, he does so anyway, for every act of man has its repercussions on some level. The semen he expels "impregnates" Lilith, and she "bears" for him "demon-children," i.e., negative, abusive, and evil energy, which spreads evil throughout the world.

According to the Midrash,⁵ Lilith was Adam's first wife, created out of the earth just as he was. She insisted on lying on top of Adam during intercourse, and when he refused, insisting that it was more proper for him to lay on her, she left him and was transmuted into a demon.

We mentioned previously that the dichotimization of mankind into male and female was G-d's way of assuring proper balance between the male drive to retreat into abstract unity with the Divine and female drive to manifest G-dliness in this world. The glue which holds these two opposite drives together, enabling them to rectify reality properly, is the attraction or passion they have for each other, each one sensing that the other one is its true complement and completion. Allegorically, then, Lilith's insistence on lying on top of Adam would be the tendency for this attraction to seek to become an end in itself. Sexuality and sexual passion can promote and actualize a man's or woman's innate Divine potential as nothing else can, but the fascination with its very power can divert a person's focus from its true purpose and cause him to focus instead on the ecstatic experience itself.

Although Lilith is not mentioned explicitly in the Bible, she is alluded to by the way Adam reacts to Eve when he first sees her. Calling Eve "this one" implies that there had been another one who had not been worthy of being called "woman."

3. Genesis 2:23.

4. Isaiah 34:14; *Eiruvin* 100b; *Shabbat* 151b; *Bava Batra* 73b; *Nidah* 24b.

5. *Alfa Beita d'Ben Sira*.

ולזה רמזו רז"ל באמרם אדה"ר מושך בערלתו היה, ר"ל מזדווג עם חוה ראשונה, ולכן הוליד כמה רוחין ושדין,

Our sages alluded to this when they said that Adam stretched his membrane in order to cover his reproductive organ.⁶ This is a euphemism meaning that he copulated with his first "Eve," i.e., Lilith, and sired many evil spirits and demons through her.

As we have explained previously, the purpose of circumcision is to reduce the raw, sensual titillation of intercourse and increase the sensitivity to the organ to that of the person's partner. In this way, copulation becomes less of an exercise in self-indulgence and more an expression of true love and bonding (which, of course, serves ultimately to enhance the sensual side of intercourse far beyond what is possible when it is treated as a selfish, epicurean thrill). Stretching the membrane over the glans, then, indicates the individual's rejection of this higher vision of sexual relations in favor of the base, selfish, sensual high it can provide. Again, this is the sort of sexuality symbolized by Lilith.

וזהו האש זרה של אדה"ר, שהאיש והאשה הם איש, איש בלתי י"ה.

This was Adam's "strange fire." For both man and woman are essentially fire when they lack the Divine Name *Kah* (*yud-hei*).

"Fire" here means desire or passion. The Hebrew words for "man" [*alef-yud-shin*] and "woman" [*alef-shin-hei*] are grammatically based on the word for "fire" [*alef-shin*]; the word for "man" includes an added *yud* and the word for "woman" an added *hei*. The two added letters, *yud* and *hei*, together spell the Divine Name *Kah* [*yud-hei*, pronounced "yah," as in "hallelujah"].

In other words, man and woman are fully man and woman only when together they manifest the Divine Presence. Without this, they remain nothing but two separate cauldrons of unbridled passion.

וכאשר שם י"ה ביניהם, שהוא הזווג האמיתי, הוא אש אמיתי.

When, however, the Divine Name *Kah* is amongst them, this is their true union and true fire.

When the G-d is present in the couple's sexual relations, their union is not superficial, ephemeral, and merely physical, but a true spiritual bond that forges them into one, complete person. As we said, the fire of passion in this proper union between husband and wife enhances their physical passion for each other far beyond what is possible in the lack of this spiritual dimension.

וכשתסיר שם י"ה מביניהם, נשאר אש זרה, והוא שהחזיק בו אדה"ר.

However, when the Divine Name *Kah* is removed, all that remains is the "strange fire."⁷ This is what Adam originally preferred.

ועתה נדב ואביהוא חזרו וקלקלו בזה עצמו, שלא היה בכל הדור כמותם:

Nadav and Avihu committed this same error, and it was very grave since there were none in their generation that could compare to them.

Witnessing the profound revelations of G-d that accompanied the instillation rites of the Tabernacle,

6. *Sanhedrin* 38b.

7. *Sotah* 17a.

Nadav and Avihu, like the rest of the Jewish people, were overcome with emotions of holy ecstasy. As it is written: "And Moses and Aaron went into the Tent of Meeting, and came out and blessed the people. And the glory of G-d appeared to all the people. And a fire went forth from before G-d and devoured the burnt offering and fat parts that had been placed on the altar, and all the people saw it, and they sang in ecstasy, and fell on their faces."⁸

Inspiration, upliftment, and ecstasy are, of course, essential ingredients in a person's spiritual life. They are, however, only half of the story. Their true fulfillment comes when the person uses his inspiration to make the world a better, holier place. Instead of viewing this ecstasy as only one side of the coin of Divine service, however, Nadav and Avihu sought to remain in it. To use the idiom of Ezekiel 1:14, they wanted to "run" but not "return." The sacrifice they chose to express this, incense, is the most "spiritual" of all the sacrifices.

On a somewhat more refined level, this is essentially the same mistake (or "sin") that Adam made when he opted originally for Lilith. Self-indulgent sexuality has its own ecstasy, and it could even be called a "spiritual" ecstasy. But because it is ecstasy for its own sake, it is ultimately egocentric and "evil." Therefore, Nadav and Avihu were punished just as Adam was punished. Their punishment, like all Divine punishments, was not a mere chastisement or vengeance but a direct result and outcome of their misdeed: They sought the ecstasy of the soul and shunned the experience of life in the body, so their souls left their bodies to rejoin their Divine origin, leaving their bodies lifeless corpses.

ועוד חטאו, שהיו שתויי יין,

They also sinned by offering sacrifices while drunk.

Immediately after their death, G-d commanded Aaron not to enter the sanctuary precincts while drunk.⁹ This, our sages state, alludes to the fact that his two sons died because they were performing the sanctuary service while drunk.

ג"כ חטא אדה"ר היה זה, כי חוה סחטה ענבים ונתנה לו עם השמרים, שהם עץ הדעת טוב ורע.

Adam sinned this way, also, for, as our sages say, Eve squeezed grapes and gave him the juice to drink together with its dregs.¹⁰ The juice and its dregs were the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

The primordial sin – partaking of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil – is seen in the eyes of our sages not as one, specific act, but a conglomerate of several. The common denominator of these is the aggrandizement of the ego, the transformation of man from a pure channel of Divinity into the world into a self-oriented agent with his own egocentric agenda.

There are four opinions as to what the tree of knowledge of good and evil was (interestingly, there is no opinion that it was an apple, although the Garden of Eden is spoken of as being an apple orchard). According to one opinion, it was a vine, and Eve squeezed wine out of the grapes to give to Adam.

The dregs of the wine are the elements of ego within the experience of ecstasy, which poison the experience and make it self-serving. The tree of knowledge of good and evil is the admixture of pure experience with that of ego. In everything he does, man may choose either to seek his own self-gratification or selfless dedication to elevating the world. By choosing self-gratification, man increases the opaqueness of the world to G-dliness; by choosing pure experience, he renders reality

8. Leviticus 9:23-24.

9. Ibid. 10:8-11.

10. *Bereishit Rabbah* 19:5.

more transparent, revealing more of its innate Divinity.

אבל היין הטוב בלי שמרים, אשר משמח אלהים ואנשים הניח אותו, ולכן אמר אלהים מדת הדין נהפך לשמחה, והיין האחר, כוס חמר מלא מסך ישתו רשעים שמריהם.

He chose not to drink the good wine, which has no dregs, and “gladdens G-d and man.”¹¹ This wine is spoken of as “gladdening G-d,” for the Name here used for G-d (*Elokim*) signifies severe judgement, and drinking good wine transforms it into gladness. The other, impure wine, is called “a cup...of wine fully mixed...the wicked ones of the world will drink and suck its dregs.”¹²

Choosing to relate to reality not through the clouded lens of ego renders the world more fit to receive Divine blessing. It thus figuratively transforms G-d's attribute of judgment and limitation to that of benevolence and happiness.

ועוד חטא אדה"ר, שרצה להקריב כל האומות תחת כנפי השכינה, וגרם לו כל הרעה הבאה עליו ועלינו בזה הגלות. וגם מרע"ה נכשל בזה, ומת במדבר. גם שלמה המלך ע"ה, חטא גם הוא בהקרבת הגרים:

Adam sinned additionally in wanting to draw all the nations under the wings of the Divine Presence. This caused all the suffering that befell him and has befallen us throughout our exile. Moses also erred this way, and therefore had to die in the desert. King Solomon also erred by encouraging conversion.

As we have explained previously, the psychology and innate orientation of the non-Jew is that of sustaining perfecting the functioning of the world. This is their role in the big picture of making the world into a home for G-d. The problem is that they, too, suffered a fall in the wake of the primordial sin, and this altruistic drive is manifest in most people as the drive for a more material and comfortable standard of living.

Adam, Moses, and King Solomon all erred in thinking that if the non-Jews were converted to Judaism, the Jewish drive for spirituality would combine with the non-Jewish drive for physical perfection. This would, they thought, have the double effect of objectifying the Jewish spiritual drive, keeping it from degenerating into egocentric ecstasy, and spiritualizing the non-Jewish physical drive, keeping it from degenerating into egocentric materialism. However, they each erred in their own way, not realizing that for this to work the non-Jew must initiate the process by himself.

ונחזור לענין. כי אדה"ר חטא באש זרה, ובשתיית השמרים, שהם הגוים אשר הדביקו בו.

Let us return now to our original discussion. As we said, Adam sinned with his “strange fire” and by drinking the wine with the dregs. These dregs were personified by the fallen non-Jews who sought to cling to him.

As we said, the non-Jewish psyche suffered a fall with the primordial sin as well, becoming overtly egocentric. In this state, they are symbolized by the dregs of egocentricity that spoil the wine of pure experience as well as by Lilith, the demon of egocentric sexual thrill.

וגם נדב ואביהוא שתויי יין היו, ונרמזו זה בפסוק השני חטאות, 'אחרי מות 'שני, ר"ת מא"ש. שני בני אהרן, ס"ת י"ן, מו"ת 'שני בהפוך אותיות. שת"ו. א"כ נרמז בפסוק השני חטאות.

11. An elision of Judges 9:13 and Proverbs 3:4.

12. Psalms 75:9.

Nadav and Avihu were also drunk. These two sins “strange fire” and inebriation are alluded to in the first verse of this Torah-reading. The initials of the words for “after the death of the two” (*acharei mot shenei, alef-mem-shin*) may be rearranged to spell “from fire” (*mei-eish, mem-alef-shin*). The final letters of the three words, “the two sons of Aaron” (*shenei benei Aharon, yud-yud-nun*) spell “wine” (*yayin*). If the two words “death of the two” (*mot shenei*) are read backwards (*yud-nun-shin-tav-vav-mem*), they contain the word for “they drank” (*shatu, shin-tav-vav*). This verse thus alludes to both sins.

ונמצא, שבאו לתקן חטא אד"הר, והחזיקו בו ומתו, כי שניהם תרי פלגא גופא הוו מאדם, ומיתו שני מיתות.

It follows that they attempted to rectify the sin of Adam, but they instead made the same mistake as he, and therefore died. They were each half of Adam’s body, so to speak, and they effectively died two deaths: their own and his again.

אחרי מות, ר"ל עתה, ובקרבתם לפני ה' מקודם, וימותו בזמן אדה"ר.

This, too, is alluded to in this verse. “...after the death of the two sons of Aaron”—this refers to their death in their present incarnation. “...when they approached G-d”—i.e., aforesaid, “...and they died”—in the time of Adam.

ולכן אמר משה לאהרן, הם גדולים ממני וממך, כי הם באו מהאב ואנו מהבל.

This is also why Moses comforted Aaron by saying that Nadav and Avihu were greater than either of them. For they were incarnations of the father Adam, while Moses and Aaron were incarnations of Abel Adam’s son.

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וְלָקַח אֶת שְׁנֵי הַשְּׂעִירִים וְהֵעִמִּיד אֹתָם לִפְנֵי ה' פְּתַח אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד. וְנָתַן אֶהָרִן
עַל שְׁנֵי הַשְּׂעִירִים גִּרְלוֹת גּוֹרֵל אֶחָד לַה' וְגּוֹרֵל אֶחָד לְעִזָּאֵזֶל. וְהִקְרִיב אֶהָרִן
אֶת הַשְּׂעִיר אֲשֶׁר עָלָה עָלָיו הַגּוֹרֵל לַה' וְעָשָׂהוּ חַטָּאת. וְהַשְּׂעִיר אֲשֶׁר
עָלָה עָלָיו הַגּוֹרֵל לְעִזָּאֵזֶל יַעֲמֹד חַי לִפְנֵי ה' לְכַפֵּר עָלָיו לְשַׁלַּח אֹתוֹ לְעִזָּאֵזֶל
הַכּוֹדֵבָרָה.

“[Aaron] shall take two goats and place them before G-d at the entrance of the tent of meeting. Aaron will place lots on the two goats, one lot for G-d and one lot for Azazel. Aaron will take the goat on whom the lot fell for G-d and make it a sin-offering. The goat on whom fell the lot for Azazel will be positioned live before G-d to make atonement on it [and] to send it to Azazel into the desert.”¹³

These procedures are part of the Yom Kippur sacrificial ritual in the Tabernacle/Temple. The plain

13. Leviticus 16:7-10.

meaning of Azazel is a cliff; the goat sent to Azazel was thrown of a desert cliff to its death.¹⁴

לקוטי תורה, פרשת אחרי

סוד עזאזל, שהוא סוד סמאל ונוקבא דנוגה שנותנים לו השעיר, ונקרא מצולת ים, שיורי בירורי סיגי המלכים והם צלמות דוכרא ונוקי

Sefer HaLikutim, parashat Acharei Mot

The mystical significance of Azazel is Samael¹⁵ and the *Nukva* of the luminous shell, to whom the goat is given. They (Samael and the evil *Nukva*), the male and female principles of evil, are also called “the depths of the sea”—what remains after the dross of the kings of Edom are purified—and “the shadow of death.”

Samael is the name given to the evil *partzuf* of *Z'eir Anpin*. Just as the *partzufim* exist in each of the four holy worlds, so do they exist in each of the four realms of evil. The four realms of evil are called “shells,” contrasting with the fruit or meat of the nut within the shell that signifies the holy realms. The significance of this imagery is that just as the shell obscures the fruit within it, is inedible and must be discarded, so does evil obscure the power of holiness in the world; we must break through it and reject it in order to reveal goodness. On the other hand, just as the shell protects the fruit within it until it is ripe, so does evil (i.e., egocentricity) serve the purpose of protecting the good within it until it is ripe.

Three of the four realms of evil are totally unable to be assimilated. The fourth realm is neutral, meaning that although it is *a priori* evil, it is evil only inasmuch as it is not oriented by nature toward G-d. If it is used for holy purposes, however, it can be absorbed and elevated into holiness. Conversely, if it is used for evil purposes, it descends into and becomes part of the three unholy realms. This neutral realm of evil is called the “luminous shell.”

These four realms of evil are all alluded to in the vision of Ezekiel: “I saw, and behold, there was [1] a stormy wind coming from the north, [2] a great cloud, and [3] a flashing fire, and [4] a luminescence surrounding it...”¹⁶

The “depths of the sea” refers to the verse, “He will return, He will have mercy on us; He will conquer our iniquities and cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.”¹⁷ The phrase “the shadow of depth” refers (among others) to the verse, “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; Your rod and Your staff comfort me.”¹⁸ As we will see, the Hebrew for these two phrases consists of the same letters.

The “kings of Edom” refers, as we have seen previously, to the *sefirot* of the world of *Tohu*, which collapsed. The portions of these *sefirot* that were refined enough to be assimilated into holiness in the subsequently constructed world of *Tikun* became the *sefirot* of that world, while those elements that were too crass to be so assimilated became the realms of evil.

ולכן אתהפך למלפא סניגורא שזו מצד הטוב שבו כנז' בזהר פרשת אמור דף ק"א,

This evil is transformed into the defending counsel for the Jews on *Yom Kippur* by virtue of the good present within it, as explained in the *Zohar*.¹⁹

This process will be explained here shortly.

14. Rashi on 16:8, 10.

15. It is customary not to pronounce the names of the powers of evil.

16. Ezekiel 1:4.

17. Micah 7:19.

18. Psalms 23:4.

19. 3:101.

והנה שני שעירים הם סוד שני אנשים מרגלים ח"ב דועיר דקליפת נוגה דאצילות כנזכי שם

Now, these two goats are mystically the equivalent of the two spies, *chochmah* and *binah* of the evil *Z'eir Anpin* of *Atzilut*, as mentioned there.²⁰

The two spies Joshua sent to spy out the land of Israel correspond to *chochmah* and *binah* of the evil *Z'eir Anpin* (i.e., Samael).²¹

ואותה של חכמה הוא ממותק יותר ולכן נשאר גורל אחד לה' אך השני דמוח דבינה דועיר

The goat/spy of *chochmah* is *a priori* more sweetened; this is why one lot is for G-d. In contrast, the second goat/spy, which is sent to die, manifests *binah* of the evil *Z'eir Anpin*.

Since the experience of *chochmah* is selflessness, there is some good in it even in a non-holy context. For example, if a person is laboring over some mathematical problem and is totally absorbed in thought over it, he is not focused on G-d, but neither is he focused on himself. The very fact that he is at that moment not focused on himself makes the experience one that can be transformed into holiness, if, say, the individual remembers or realizes that mathematics is, after all, our way of describing G-d's wisdom as it has been imprinted in nature.

Binah, in contrast, is the experience of self. The insight of *chochmah* is evaluated and analyzed in the context of the individual's personal world-view he has developed during his life. If this is done in an evil context, there is no redeeming element that could make the experience holy.

לעזאזל הוא סמאל ונוקי דנוגה שהם כנגד זוי"נ דבי"ע ולפיכך שמחים

Azazel signifies Samael and the *Nukva* of the luminous shell, which are positioned opposite *Z'eir Anpin* and *Nukva* of the worlds of *Beirah*, *Yetzirah*, and *Asiyah*. Since they receive the *binah*-goat, they are happy.

Samael and *Nukva* of the three lower worlds receive the evil *binah* of the level of *Atzilut*.

ולפי שנקראו עזים כנזכר בזוהר תרומה דף ק"ה ב' לכן זוי"נ דנוגה דבי"ע ולפיכך שמחים ולפי שנקראו עזים כנזכר בזוהר תרומה דף ק"ה ב' לכן זוי"נ דנוגה דבי"ע בנים שלהם נקראים עזא ועזאל

Since *chochmah* and *binah* of the evil *Z'eir Anpin* of *Atzilut* are called "goats"—as mentioned in the *Zohar*²²—*Z'eir Anpin* and *Nukva* of the luminous shells of *Beriah*, *Yetzirah*, and *Asiyah*, their children, are called *Aza* and *Azel*.

The word for goat is *eiz* (*ayin-zayin*). The "children" of the goats of *Atzilut* are called *Aza* (*ayin-zayin-alef*), a derivative, Aramaic form of "goat" and *Azel* (*ayin-zayin-alef-lamed*), meaning "goat-god."

וכללות שניהם נקרא עזאזל דוגמת צלמצות ומצלות שהוא כללית שניהם צל דכר ונוקבא מות.

Together, these two goat-offspring are called *Azazel*, just like the words for "the shadow of death" and "the depths" comprise both of them, "shadow" referring to the male and "death" to the female.

Azazel can thus be seen as a contraction of *Aza* and *Azel*.

20. See also *Zohar* 2:178b, 3:60b.

21. See on *parashat Metzora*.

22. 2:108b.

The word for “the shadow of death” is *tzalmavet*, itself a contraction of the words for “shadow” (*tzeil*) and “death” (*mavet*). The letters that form this word (*tzadik-lamed-mem-vav-tav*) can be permuted to spell “depths” (*metzilot: mem-tzadik-lamet-vav-tav*).

The “shadow” or lack of light is the active side of evil, the obstruction of holy light, and “death” is the result or expression of this evil, i.e., being cut off from holiness, the source of life. Thus it is written, “The feet [of a forbidden woman] descend unto death.”²³

וכשניתן השעיר לעזאזל אז נאמר ותשליך במצלות ים כל חטאתם כנזכר בזוהר אחרי מות דף ס”ג

Thus, when the goat is sent to Azazel, “G-d casts all their sins into the depths of the sea,”²⁴ as is stated in the Zohar.²⁵

This is so since Azael and the “depths of the sea” are mystically synonymous, as stated.

יען הם מציאות נוקבא דקדושה ושיריה ולכן אלו העוים הם דין חזק כנזכר בזוהר פרשת שמיני דף מ”א ע”ש

Since these goats derive from the holy *Nukva* and her leftovers, they manifest strong judgment, as stated in the Zohar.²⁶

We have explained previously that *Nukva* must evince strict judgment in order to differentiate between holiness and evil. When this judgment is exercised in an entirely evil context, however, it becomes prejudicial judgment.

והנה כבר ידעת שקליפת נוגה חציו טוב וחציו רע והיא מפסקת בין קודש לחול וכשאדם עובר לא תעשה אז היא משלמת השלשה קליפות הרעות של היצה”ר שלו שהוא (וגבורה) סוד הגבורות ונעשה רע גמור וזהו עונש על העובר על מצות לא תעשה.

Now, you know that the luminous shell is half good and half evil, and separates the holy realm from the evil realm. When a person transgresses a prohibition, this neutral realm serves to complete the three evil shells of his evil inclination, and becomes completely evil itself. This is his punishment for transgressing a prohibition.

When an element of the luminous shell is given over to the three completely evil shells, it “completes” them into a unit of four, mirroring the four worlds of holiness. This reinforcement of his inner evil, making it a power more difficult to reckon with, is the truest punishment for evil behavior. As the sages say, “One *mitzva* leads to another *mitzva*, and one sin leads to another sin.”²⁷

והנה ביום הכפורים צוה השי”ת וברשותו וברצונו אנו עושין לשלוח לסמאל שעיר אחד שהוא טוב ורע כנ”ל ואז הוא שמח על שלשה קליפות רעות כי כבר קבל שפע וחיות בהטוב שבאותו השעיר כנודע כי הסיבה שהם רודפים אחר הקדושה הוא להחיות עצמן כי זולתה הם מתים וזהו שמחה גדולה שמקבל סמאל ע”י שעיר עזאזל ובפרט כשנותן לו מדעתו דעת גמורה שלא ביגיעה ובלא עמל

Now, on *Yom Kippur*, G-d commanded us and permitted us through His good will to send Samael one goat, which comprises good and bad elements, as stated above. Samael then rejoices over the additional power granted to the three wholly

23. Proverbs 5:5.

24. Micah 7:19.

25. 3:63.

26. 3:41.

27. *Avot* 4:2.

evil shells, for by receiving the goat he has received the Divine beneficence and life-force present in the goodness of that goat. As is known, the reason the forces of evil pursue holiness is so that they can enliven themselves; without the life-force siphoned off holiness they would die. Hence the great joy Samael derives from this goat sent to Azazel, especially in light of the fact that G-d gives it to him knowingly and Samael does not have to toil or exert himself for it.

ואז כהן גדול היה מתודה על ראש השעיר וכח התשובה ההיא שאז מתברר חלק היצירה ונפרד הטוב שבו מהרע כי א"א שיהיו כבתחילה קודם שיחטא שיהיו ביחד מעורבים כי ע"י עבירה נתבשם וגבר הרע וחזר והיה הטוב כפוף תחליו למקומו

After casting the lots over the goats, **the high priest would then confess the sins of the Jewish people over the goat's head. The power of this repentance would refine the portion of the goat associated with the world of *Yetzirah*, separating the good in it from the evil. This is necessary for it is impossible for good and evil to be intermixed as they were before the sin, for through sin the power of evil increased, and the good would just be subdued before it.**

As was stated above, good and evil are mixed together equally in the luminous shell. Once a person sins, however, the evil is strengthened and the balance is upset. Repentance cannot be merely an attempt to return to the state of affairs that existed before the sin; it is too late. The initial innocence has been lost, and the only avenue open is to align the potential good with actual good, i.e., holiness, and let the evil that has been actualized assume its position with true evil.

For example, a kosher chocolate cake is in the realm of the luminous shell. It is neither holy nor evil; what it will become depends on how it is used. If someone eats it for holy purposes, e.g., to add to the enjoyment of the Sabbath, or to give himself a needed, temporary lift, or in order to experience the goodness of G-d in having made delicious food, then the cake existentially enters the realm of holiness. If it is eaten for coarse purposes, e.g., to indulge in sensual pleasure, it descends into the realm of evil. The person who eats it will most likely be able to measure the purity of his intentions by the way he feels after eating the cake. To the extent that he feels uplifted or holier after eating, he succeeded in keeping his intentions pure. To the extent he feels coarser, he didn't.

As long as he eats chocolate cake for the right reasons, the person retains a certain innocence about it. The potentials for good and evil in the cake are both there, but the evil is not so threatening. He can go on happily eating the cake whenever he needs to, always stopping before his sensual lust gets the upper hand. Once he sins, however, he can never look at chocolate cake again the same way. If he's serious about his spiritual life, chocolate cake will forevermore represent for him an existential challenge, a spiritual minefield he must negotiate with extreme care. He has no choice but to consciously differentiate between and identify the good and the evil potentials in the cake, choose the good and reject the evil.

The positive outcome of this process is that through his conscious determination, the evil in the cake will be sundered from the good in a much more profound way than would have been possible before the sin. There was a certain advantage in innocence—namely, that the person had not experienced the evil depths the cake was capable of bringing him to—but there was a disadvantage, too—namely, that this innocence exposed him to the danger of sin. Once he has lost his innocence, he fortifies his commitment to and consciousness of good, and although no longer innocent, he is now immune to the egomaniacal machinations of sensual cake-lust. He is older, but wiser.

וזהו פירוש תשובה ואז נמצא שנפרדים זה מזה ע"י כך ואמנם מחוברים בלקיפת הנוגה אמנם הרע שבו שכבר

נגמר היה נדבק בשעיר ויוצא לגמרי אל הקליפות גמורים והטוב חוזר לקדושה העליונה ולא לקליפת נוגה

This is the meaning of repentance. Evil and good are separated through this. Although they existed originally together in the luminous shell, the evil has now been identified; it clings to the goat and disappears into the realms of complete evil. The good, meanwhile, returns to the realm of supernal holiness, no longer part of the luminous shell.

וזהו סוד שמחת סמאל כי ראה שנתתקף עתה ובכל דעתו להדב עמו והוא שוטה וטועה בדעתו כי אדרבא גחלים הוא חותה על ראשו פי' כי בתחילה היתה הרע בקליפת נוגה מעורבת עם הטוב הי' הלו אחיזה גדולה כי ההכרח קדושה עליונה משפעת לאותו הטוב שהוא מחלק לה כי זהו סוד גלות ישראל בין העובדי כוכבים

This is why Samael rejoices. He sees that he has now been fortified by this additional measure of energy from the luminous shell, and he accepts it with full consciousness. But he is a fool and makes a fatal mistake, for on the contrary, "he will be heaping coals on his own head,"²⁸ meaning that evil was initially intermixed with good in the luminous shell and he had a strong foothold. Supernal holiness was forced to grant beneficence to the good with which this evil shared the luminous shell. This is the mystical significance of Israel's exiles amongst the idolaters.

When evil shares the luminous shell with good, it can more easily seduce man into sin, since it does not have to entice him into an explicit prohibition, only into using a neutral aspect of reality for egotistic purposes.

ועתה שנפרד הטוב מהרע אבד סמאל אותו החלק שהיה נשפע מבחי' אותו הטוב ונמצא כי זה הסח הדעת של סמאל והפסד גדול ואדרבא מה שהיה הוא תחילה נשלם עתה להיפך כי ישלם ישלימנו לך פי' כי טוב נשלם ומתחבר עם נפש הקדושה של האדם ואז נשלם אדם וסמאל יאבד הטוב ההוא ממנו לגמרי.

But now that evil has been separated from the good, Samael has lost that portion of Divine beneficence that was granted to it via the good of the luminous shell. It follows that Samael has been tricked and has suffered a great loss. On the contrary, a situation that was originally complete for him is now the opposite. For, as the verse paraphrased above continues: "G-d will surely reward you," meaning that the goodness of the luminous shell attaches to and completes the holy soul of the person, while Samael loses this good altogether.

This illustrates the tremendous power of repentance.

28. Par. Proverbs 25:22.