

Aharon shall place lots upon the two he-goats: one lot “for Hashem”; and one lot “for Azazel.” (16:8)

The two goats are identical in every way; yet, one becomes a *korban*, sacrifice, to Hashem, while the other is sent to Azazel. Apparently, the goats had no say in the matter. We assume that this also happens to people. Two people both do all of the right things (or at least they thought so), but one makes it, while the other does not fare as well. What happened? What about *bechirah chafshis*, freedom of choice? It almost seems that regardless of past choices, one's future is determined for him.

Clearly, this is not true. If we are taught that we have freedom of choice, then unquestionably we have the ability to choose and determine our own destinies. What, then, should we derive from the two identical goats that seem to have no choice? I think the Torah is teaching us that we have a lifetime in which to choose, but, at a certain point in time, it becomes too late. Judgment Day is the time in which all the choices have to be in. This is the time when consequences are rendered, and the choices that we have made come to light. Choice is no longer an option. It is payback time.

We have an entire year to choose the path that we want to travel. Are we traveling *l'Hashem*, to G-d, or have we deviated, made poor choices, and are on a destination course towards Azazel? We are afforded an entire year to choose, to do it right, or – if we err – do *teshuvah*, repent and change course with new and positive choices. This extends throughout the year all the way up until *Yom Kippur*, when the option for choice is removed. At this time, Hashem chooses either to grant us a good year – or not. He has been very patient with us, allowing us every opportunity to make the change, to make the correct choice. Now, however, it is *Yom Kippur*, Judgment Day, a day of unparalleled *kedushah*, holiness, a day when all of us – the entire world – stands before Hashem to receive our fate. Hashem is now making the decisions based upon our choices. We no longer have the option of choice, unless we do last minute *teshuvah*. If a person has not earned the coveted designation of being considered a *tzaddik*, righteous person, he must plead his case to Hashem, beg for mercy. Otherwise, he is likely to have a humbling experience.

Two identical goats: one is a sacrifice to Hashem; one meets Azazel in the wilderness. No choices; it is not fair. It is *Yom Kippur*. Choices should have been made earlier. On *Yom Kippur*, we stand in judgment – just like the two goats. No choices anymore; it is Judgment Day.