

"One lot for Hashem and one lot for Azazel." (16:8)

One of the least understood and most fascinating services performed in the *Bais Ha'Mikdash* was the *Yom Kippur* service involving the two he-goats. These two goats were both holy *korbanos* which expiated the sins of *Klal Yisrael*. That, however, is the point at which their similarities ended, for, the manner in which each was sacrificed was disparate to the extreme. One goat's blood was sprinkled in the *Kodesh Ha'Kodoshim*, while the other one entered the *Kodesh* only momentarily during its lifetime, immediately prior to being sent to a terrible and desolate death.

The commentators, each in their own inimitable way, derive pedagogical lessons from the ritual of the two goats. *Horav S.R. Hirsch, z.l.*, suggests that the two identical he-goats impart the lesson that there can be no neutrality in *Torah* and *mitzvah* observance. One is either "in" or he is "out." If he does not choose to move closer to Hashem, he is unavoidably distancing himself from Him, relegating himself to a barren and wasted spiritual existence.

Horav Moshe Mordechai Epstein, z.l., uses the two he-goats as a metaphor for two people who, at first glance seem to be the same. Due to a slight deviation in spirit or perspective, however, they grow further and further apart. He says that this is also analogous to two trains which start out on two parallel tracks. There is but a slight deviation -- one faces to the east, while the other faces to the west. As they begin their journey, they seem to be going the same way, their deviation hardly noticeable. It is only after a while that the slight change of direction turns into a distance of many miles and two extremely far apart locations. Indeed, one small change in direction, after a while, becomes a completely new destination.

The same idea can be applied to children as they grow up. Yaakov and Eisav, *Chazal* teach, were very similar as small boys. It was only after *ohrgbv uksdhu*, when "the boys grew up," that Eisav become a hunter and a man of the field, while Yaakov focused upon his spiritual perfection. When they were young their differences were minor. No one paid any attention to the disparities in their personalities. When Yaakov was yet a lad, his proclivity for *Torah* study and spiritual excellence was latent. Likewise, Eisav was driven by the latent impulse of the hunter who challenges the forces of nature, seeking to overcome anything or anyone who stands in his way. Moral refinement was the farthest thing from his mind. Their dissimilar tendencies were not manifest by the brothers until much later when, upon maturity, they each took their own distinct path.

Jewish assimilation began in a similar manner. The earliest attempts at assimilation were veiled as a synthesis of two cultures which seemingly would not challenge one's ability to remain a devout Jew. To paraphrase *Horav Shimon Schwab, z.l.*, it was our *gedolim* who clearly saw that before long the trickle of assimilation would swell into a raging torrent, overflow its banks and undermine the very foundation of *Klal Yisrael*. This "synthesis" implied a life threatening separation of doctrine from law and a freedom for philosophic thought in regard to *Torah* ideas. All this was seen from the perspective of a slight deviation on the part of a few people, who sought to relax some of the

Jewish restrictions against cultural integration.

When all of *Klal Yisrael* visited the *Bais Ha'Mikdash* on *Yom Kippur*, they were taught this important pedagogical lesson. The two he-goats were identical in every way, except that one was to go to Hashem, while the other was to head to *Azazel*. Two "friends" with a similar background, in the same school, even in the same class, but their future was to be different. This should teach us not to ignore even the slightest descent in one's spiritual development, but instead respond to it immediately. Waiting might make the ultimate difference between serving Hashem or u"j being relegated to *Azazel*.