

And Aharon shall place lots on the two goats – one lot “for Hashem” and one “for Azazel.” (16:8)

We all find excuses to justify our chosen way of life. We blame it on an accident of fate – anything to absolve ourselves of our erroneous decisions. *Horav S. R. Hirsch, zl*, applies this idea to the diverse fate experienced by the two *Seirei Yom Kippurim*, goats used to atone for *Klal Yisrael* on *Yom Kippur*: one being used *l'Hashem* as a sacrifice; and one for *Azazel*. They were two completely identical goats. Why does one end up as a sacrifice for Hashem, while the other goes to *Azazel*? Likewise, two people are identical in spiritual background, family lineage, economics and personal acumen; yet, one “makes it,” remains observant and raises an observant family which serves as a credit to *Klal Yisrael*, while the other does not. No external factors affected their individual lives. It all boils down to personal choice. One cannot contend that the life he has chosen for himself is an accident of fate, or that he had been compelled to do what he did due to the manner in which he was raised. This is just as the goat that was dedicated to Hashem was no different than the goat that ended up being sacrificed to *Azazel*, it could have happened in the reverse, with each goat having the other one’s present lot. How one ends up has nothing to do with his being different. He made a choice.

While *Rav Hirsch*’s teaching certainly has merit, one cannot deny that the child that hails from a messed up home -- a home that is challenged physically, morally, spiritually and/or ethically -- will have a much greater challenge to overcome than his counterpart who has been raised in a “perfect” (if that really exists) environment. It does not mean that he cannot make it as high, or even higher. He will have to work harder to make the grade. On the other hand, his background affords him a more powerful perspective on life, so that he can show greater sensitivity towards those who would benefit from it, those who would probably not receive it from others who had a more fortunate upbringing.

Furthermore, as *Horav Nissan Alpert, zl*, points out, the reason one goat went to *Azazel*, while the other goat was sacrificed to Hashem, had nothing to do with free choice; rather, it was all how Hashem wanted it to happen. The animals had no input into determining where they would end up. The *Rosh Yeshivah* presents another understanding of the phenomenon of the two he-goats and their disparate endings.

The *tefillos* which we recite on *Yom Kippur (Mussaf)* provide insight into the outcome of these two identical he-goats. The *Torah She’b’Ksav*, Written Law (*Parashas Acharei Mos*), presents the *halachos* of the two goats. Our *Tefillos* on *Yom Kippur*, which detail the entire *Yom Kippur avodah* service, serve as the *Torah She’b’aal Peh*, Oral Law, of this service. We are all quite aware of the theme of *Yom Kippur: Yom HaDin*, Day of Judgment. This is the day on which the decisions concerning life: suffering versus tranquility; wealth versus poverty; success vs. failure (and everything in between). The criterion for a positive judgment is achieving *tzaddik* status. Throughout the previous year, the individual either has earned this status, or, through the vehicle of

teshuvah, he has the opportunity for repentance to repair his past actions. If he arrives at *Yom Kippur* not having earned *tzaddik* status, he is in a serious bind. He will have to do something very quickly, or he will suffer the consequences. *Yom Kippur* is crunch time.

Is the situation any different concerning the two goats? The goats are identical, and, if no one does anything, their fate is sealed when the lots are drawn. They have no power to alter the outcome. It is what it is (or what it will be). Very much like *Yom Kippur*, nothing is in our -- or, their -- hands on that day. If a person has reached *Yom Kippur* and not yet achieved *tzaddik* status, his only hope is to pray for Hashem's mercy. Everything is in the hands of Hashem. He sees everything; nothing eludes Him. As the ultimate righteous Judge, His judgment is always perfect, righteous and merciful. We may not understand His decision – but we have no say once we pass the boundary line of *Yom Kippur*. If we do not prepare for this awesome day, our fate will be decided like that of the two he-goats of *Yom Kippur*. Why would anyone want to take that risk?