COMMUNITY KOLLEL DIVREI TORAH

April 13, 2021 - July 10, 2021

א’ איר - א’ אב תשפ”א
With gratitude to Hashem, our rabbis, teachers,

and fellow Kollel participants,

for the last three months we have completed Mesechet Yoma,

studied Penini Halacha, daf b’Iyun, and Machshava,

and engaged in Torah study:

"בשנת בבריה ובלכת בךך
ובשכבים ובﮑים
While we sit in our home, while we walk on the way,
when we lie down and when we wake up."

May the Kollel continue to go mechayil l’chayil!

We will return to you, Tractate Yoma, and you will return to us.

Special thanks to:
Rabbi Shmuel Herzfeld, Maharat Ruth Friedman
Rav Shaul Weinreb and Rav Betzalel Jacobs
The Daf Yomi cycle continued with *Mesechta Yoma* this past Tuesday. The first question that comes to mind is why is the *mesechta* simply called "*Yoma*" ("day")? Isn't there a better way to refer to Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the year? The Maharsha (Rabbi Shmuel Eliezer Eidels) answers in his work *Chidushei Agadot* that all you have to say is "the day" and it can be understood to mean Yom Kippur as this is the holiest day of the year. He goes on to state that the *mesechta* starts off on Yoma 2a with the phrase "*Shivas Yamim*" because the *kedusha* is always associated with the number seven. This notion of *kedusha* is similar to that of the seventh day, Shabbas, because Yom Kippur is referred to as "*Shabbat Shabbaton*". The seven days can also be an allusion to the seven *yontifs* from the Torah, which include two days of Succos, two days of Pesach, one day of Shavuot, one day of Rosh Hashanah, and one day of Yom Kippur.

The mishna continues as follows: "Seven days prior to Yom Kippur the Sages would remove the High Priest, who performs the entire Yom Kippur service, from his house to the Chamber of *Parhedrin*...". What else could the seven day waiting period represent? The *gemara* compares it to the seven days that a kohen must leave his house prior to the burning of the *para aduma*. An additional answer is brought down by Rav Minyomi bar Hilkiya who states it is derived from the seven days prior to the consecration of the *Mishkan* which was held on the eighth day as described in *Parshat Shimini*.

Lowell B
Discipline in Tazria: The Approach of Shame and Deterrance

by Josie Silverberg

Leviticus 13:1-3

(1) The LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying: (2) When a person has on the skin of his body a swelling, a rash, or a discoloration, and it develops into a scaly affection on the skin of his body, it shall be reported to Aaron the priest or to one of his sons, the priests. (3) The priest shall examine the affection on the skin of his body: if hair in the affected patch has turned white and the affection appears to be deeper than the skin of his body, it is a leprous affection; when the priest sees it, he shall pronounce him unclean.

Why might an external disease prevent someone from wanting to commit a crime?
Was the goal of Tzaraat to humiliate someone into not wanting to transgress, or was it just an illness that renders you unclean?

Leviticus 13:4
(4) But if it is a white discoloration on the skin of his body which does not appear to be deeper than the skin and the hair in it has not turned white, the priest shall isolate the affected person for seven days.

How would isolation (quarantine if you will) affect the punishment? Is it sparing the person from further embarrassment or just drawing more attention to their situation?

Numbers 12:9-11
(9) Still incensed with them, the LORD departed. (10) As the cloud withdrew from the Tent, there was Miriam stricken with snow-white scales! When Aaron turned toward Miriam, he saw that she was stricken with scales. (11) And Aaron said to Moses, “O my lord,
account not to us the sin which we committed in our folly.

In this case, Tzaraat was given as a punishment. Does that also apply to the Tzaraat we see in Tazria?

Deuteronomy 28:58-59
(58) If you fail to observe faithfully all the terms of this Teaching that are written in this book, to reverence this honored and awesome Name, the LORD your God, (59) the LORD will inflict extraordinary plagues upon you and your offspring, strange and lasting plagues, malignant and chronic diseases.

Does Tzaraat fit into the categories above? Should it be seen as a punishment because of these pesukim?

Deuteronomy 25:1-3
(1) When there is a dispute between men and they go to law, and a decision is rendered declaring
This is another example of public punishment whose goal is to discourage someone to sin against Hashem or against one's fellow. In your opinion, is lashes or Tzaraat a worse punishment? (You might think the answer is be obvious, but think about how someone in either of these cases might feel. Also you are seen as ritually impure and have to isolate when you have Tzaraat. The same does not go for lashes.)

Being ritually impure says a lot about Tzaraat, and how we can relate it to our own lives. When someone is affected by the disease, they are ritually impure. When someone has done something wrong, they feel that way. They feel guilty. We can see the isolation time away from everybody and everything as a time for reflection. How can you be better? Taking the time to ask yourself this can help you improve in the future and might have been what Hashem was trying to accomplish here. This is something to think about next time we do something
wrong or offend somebody. We can take time to contemplate about what we did and how we can make amends.
“Kach Lecha”

The first Mishna in Yoma on 2a introduces us to the idea that seven days prior to Yom Kippur the sages would remove the Kohen Gadol from his house to be sequestered in a room of the Temple designated specifically for the purpose of preparing him for the services he will perform in the Temple on Yom Kippur. The goal of the sequestration is to make sure the Kohen Gadol doesn’t become tamei, which would disqualify him from performing his unique role of achieving atonement for both himself and the nation. Immediately we are invited to contemplate the concepts of purity, sanctity and ultimately holiness, with the Kohen Gadol being the human embodiment of both the nation’s and his/our personal aspirations of achieving those lofty goals via atonement, on Yom Kippur.

Considering that an overarching goal of Judaism is a striving for Kedusha, and that Yom Kippur inhabits a special time of holiness in the Jewish calendar, it is instructive to try view the preparation and actions of the Kohen Gadol on Yom Kippur through that lens. What emerges is the fascinating theme and unique convergence of sanctity of time (Yom Kippur), place (the Holy of Holies), and person (The Kohen Gadol). Additionally, the holiness of collective vs. individual is a fascinating differentiator explaining the rituals performed by the Kohen Gadol in the Temple on Yom Kippur.

Following the first Mishna, the subsequent Gemara discussion on Daf 3a, analyses the source(s) for the seven day Kohen Gadol sequestration. Rabbi Yohanan contends that the model we base the Kohen Gadol’s actions on, is the miluim preparations performed by Aharon and his sons before the inauguration of the Mishkan in the desert. Of the various challenges to Rabbi Yohanan’s position, the one that caught my attention was when the Gemara attempts to show that the Kohen brings many sacrifices at all the major festivals, implying that there is nothing especially unique about the sacrifice Aharon brought as part of the miluim, and hence one cannot make any special connection to the miluim ceremony and Yom Kippur. Rabbi Yohanan’s rebuttal is striking: the sacrifice that the Kohen Gadol on Yom Kippur brings is uniquely connected to those from the miluim, because like Aharon in the desert, here too what makes Yom Kippur especially comparable is the Kohen Gadol must bring a bull and ram from his own property. This is based on the verses in the Torah describing the miluim, where it uses the phrase "kach lecha", for Aharon’s sacrifice preparations.

But why is it critical that the sacrifice of the Kohen Gadol on Yom Kippur be from his own possessions and not from those sacrifices brought by the nation? It is even more incongruous when you consider that the Kohen Gadol on Yom Kippur is representing the entire nation for atonement in probably the most publicly scrutinized ceremony of the year, where the fate of the nation rests upon the success of his petition to Hashem. So wouldn’t it make more sense that he sacrifice communal owned animals on the nation’s behalf much like the half-Shekel donations by the nation to the building of the Mishkan materially demonstrated community buy-in?

At this point, it’s instructive to understand Kedusha. The first mention of Kadosh in the Torah is holiness of time. In Bereishit, when creation is described, it culminates in the “Shabbat of time”: “God blessed the 7th day and made it Holy”. It’s no coincidence that the first Mitzvah in the Torah is the commandment to sanctify the new moon (i.e. elevate time with holiness). After creating the physical world, you might have thought the next creation would be a suitably impressive holy temple (place) in it, to manifest Hashem’s glory. But in fact, the next time holiness is mentioned is at mount Sinai (a non-descript unglamorous place), when before giving the Torah, Hashem says “be unto me a Holy People”. Pointedly, this is only after the people craved and demanded a holy object (place) in the episode of the golden calf, to express their (misguided) spiritual aspirations. The construction of the Mishkan in the desert was thus a concession from Hashem to the people’s baser needs for a more tangible manifestation in physical space, of their spiritual expression – they needed a less ephemeral holiness than time, that was more relatable. And as we know from the famous verse inscribed on the Ohev Shplom shul, “Veasu Li Mikdash Veshanchanti Betocham” - holiness is desired by Hashem in the person, not the place. It follows that hierarchically, holiness in time is superior to holiness in place/space. We can also infer that once you are stepping down in holiness to express spirituality in the physical dimension, via sacrifices and other "place" manifestations, you need to perform that service in a very prescribed way so it doesn’t lead to the equivalent of a misguided golden calf,
or as in the case of Nadav and Avihu in the dedication of the Mishkan, taking too much unscripted initiative, however well intended. The lower the level of holiness, the more prescribed it has to be to ensure proper performance of the service.

So where does the Kohen Gadol and his personal yet communal sacrifice on Yom Kippur fit into this hierarchical conception of holiness? To achieve personal atonement, which in his capacity as Kohen Gadol will scale up to include the nation’s – a mandatory milestone on the path to holiness that can be achieved only on Yom Kippur - the Kohen Gadol’s role at this potent nexus of sanctity of specific time and sanctity of specific place, is to be an avatar for each individual member of the holy-aspiring nation. He is after all an individual member of that nation too, and in that capacity his actions should mirror what any individual in that role would do, for his personal atonement. He is much more than a representative or an advocate, he is the embodiment of the people, in that time and location. And as such, he represents the fundamental dual nature of a person – a hybrid creation with an intangible soul, contained in a physical body, coexisting by design, in constant tension. In order to help resolve this tension and avoid punishment by death Torat Kohanim is characterized by complete and detailed prescribed ritual – no room for innovation or personal expression.

Now you can see how via the rituals on the day of Yom Kippur, wherein the pinnacle of holiness of time, person and place converge, this inherent tension of an individual soul (in this case it happens to be the Kohen Gadol’s) housed in a body, is manifest. Masechet Yoma discusses at length how the Kohen Gadol is separated from his community, his family, and his home, and taken to a spiritually sanitized place in the Temple, where he is separated physically and mentally from normal day to day activity, and for seven days prepares and meditates for Yom Kippur. The Gemara says he doesn’t eat during this time, to completely cleanse his body. On Yom Kippur itself he wears special clothes to further distinguish the occasion. At that point the Kohen Gadol is metaphorically a distilled-to-the-essence embodiment of all of the nation’s aspirations for Kedusha. Like a “holy puppet”, all his actions are completely scripted, prescribed and regimented in his isolated Temple location, to minimize his individual expression, and eliminate any chances of Tuma interceding.

And yet, despite being an avatar for the people with all these actions of separation at the various layers of connection to the world and community and family, all designed to maximize the Kedusha of the ritual, when it comes to the ultimate act of atonement, i.e. the sacrificing of the animal (a representative of the unholy elements of self?), the surprising commandment we learn from the Gemara, is it has to be the Kohen Gadol’s own personal sacrifice that is brought to the Mizbeach.

The proverbial “last mile” of person-holiness is - and can only be - achieved by drawing from one’s own, most intimate resources. With all the propping up and fine-grained setting of just the right holy conditions of time and space, these are all extrinsic to one’s self:

To achieve intrinsic personal Kedusha, you must “kach lecha”.

Steve Sacho
Mezuzot

Deborah Kopp

They are artwork.
They are old – 2500 BCE
They are new. We buy them for our parents and our children.

Do we really know and embrace the words that are embodied on the mezuzah scroll? Do we connect to them on a deep and personal level? We likboah, attach, them to our doorposts, we may touch them on our way in and out of our homes and synagogues, but have we thought about what the words mean to our lives and to the lives of our children and to Klal Yisrael, the entire Jewish community. When a large community of people, regardless of their religious practice or denominational affiliation, perform the same mitzvah they connect and bond to each other – hitkashrut – and to the hidden ties we have to Hashem.

In Masekhet Yoma , 10b-11a, there is a discussion about which doorposts require a mezuzah and which do not. This argument occurs while examining the sequestration of the High Priest (Kohen Gadol) in the Parhedrin chamber during the seven days before Yom Kippur. Since it is a temporary dwelling for the Priest, the question is whether or not there is a requirement to affix a mezuzah. The Kohen Gadol is only there seven days of the year, but the chamber itself is permanently in place, different from a sukkah that is a temporary structure and therefore there is no obligation to affix a mezuzah. Some say that the blessing, “…al likboah mezuzuah,” implies that the mezuzuah is to be permanently in place as the shores, koof - vet - ayin, implies a fixing and setting of something not to be moved. And in Mesechet Yoma, 10b it states that a “permanent” residence is obligated in the mitzvah of mezuzah. The Rabbis conclude that since the Kohen Gadol is sequestering to fulfill a mitzvah, and the residence is a permanent structure, there is an obligation to place a mezuzah. The Rabbis say that the mezuzah also signals to people that the Kohen Gadol is not imprisoned, and that his accommodations qualify as a proper residence.

Next in the Mesechta the Rabbis ponder the biblical decree that we are to place mezuzot on our “…houses and upon [y]our gates,” (Devarim, 6:9). Do we place mezuzot on city gates, on the gates of forts where there is a residence for a prison guard, or on a synagogue where there is a residence for the synagogue attendant? All yes, but maybe no. For example, when the city gates only encompass a minority of Jewish residents it is considered dangerous to affix a mezuzah because it might be thought that Jews were practicing witchcraft or espionage, (R. Abaye).

Another discussion in the Mesechta addresses the obligation for examining a mezuzah to make sure it is in kosher condition, whole and not damaged. “The mezuzah belonging to an individual is examined twice every seven years to determine whether it was stolen or became disqualified. And in order to avoid excessive burden to the community, the mezuzah belonging to the public is examined twice in a fifty-year Jubilee period,” (Yoma 11a v. 5). This caught my attention as it seemed to me that communal mezuzot should be examined as often if not more that private scrolls. Rabbi Yehuda explains that once an artavin (examiner) was fined by a Roman official while checking (doing a mitzvah) a communal mezuzah.

But didn’t Rabbi Elazar say that those on the path to perform a mitzva are not susceptible to harm throughout the process of performing the mitzva? The Gemara responds: In a place where...
danger is permanent it is different, as one should not rely on a miracle, as it is written with regard to God’s command to Samuel to anoint David as king in place of Saul: “And Samuel said: How will I go, and Saul will hear and kill me; and God said: Take in your hand a calf and say: I have come to offer a sacrifice to God” (I Samuel 16:2). Even when God Himself issues the command, there is concern with regard to a clear and present danger. -Yoma 11a

Rabbi Elazar provided counseling that the mezuzah connects us and binds us to the words that are written inside on the scroll, but not to forget that we must fortify ourselves with actions that make us partners with Hashem.

What is inside a mezuzah case?

“Hear, O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One.
You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might. And these words, which I command you today shall be upon your heart. You shall teach them thoroughly to your children, and you shall speak of them when you sit in your house and when you walk on the road, when you lie down and when you rise. You shall bind them as a sign upon your arm, and they shall be as a reminder between your eyes. And you shall write them upon the doorposts of your house and upon your gates.”

—Deuteronomy 6:4-9

“And it will be, if you will diligently obey My commandments which I command you this day, to love the Lord Your God and to serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul, I will give rain for your land at the proper time, the early rain and the late rain, and you will gather in your grain, your wine and your oil. And I will give grass in your fields for your cattle, and you will eat and be sated. Take care lest your heart be lured away, and you turn astray and worship alien gods and bow down to them. For then the Lord’s wrath will flare up against you, and He will close the heavens so that there will be no rain and the earth will not yield its produce, and you will swiftly perish from the good land which the Lord gives you. Therefore, place these words of Mine upon your heart and upon your soul, and bind them for a sign on your hand, and they shall be a reminder between your eyes. You shall teach them to your children, to speak of them when you sit in your house and when you walk on the road, when you lie down and when you rise. And you shall inscribe them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates—so that your days and the days of your children may be prolonged on the land which the Lord swore to your fathers to give to them for as long as the heavens are above the earth.”

—Deuteronomy 11:13-21

These are the words that bind us to each other and provide the foundation for making a permanent connection to Hashem. As the Rabbis show us, it is not an easy or straightforward path to make this connection. There are many contingencies to be considered when considering how to perform this mitzvah. Hitkashrut - connecting to spiritual ideas and other people - is a goal. My questions remain: How did Jews of all persuasions come to embrace this practice of affixing, connecting, and owning this mitzvah? And what is our continuing obligation to bond with the words?
Apropos" (the arugula plant), the Gemara cites a verse: “And one of them went out into the fields to collect orot” (II Kings 4:39). It was taught in the name of Rabbi Meir with regard to orot in this verse: This is the plant called arugula. Rabbi Yoḥanan said: Why are these arugula plants called orot? It is because they enlighten [me’irōt] the eyes. Rav Huna said: With regard to one who finds arugula, if he can eat it, he eats it, and if not, he passes it over his eyes, as that too is beneficial. Rav Pappa said: Arugula is most effective when it grows on the border of the field, where it is unadulterated by other plants.

Parshat Behar (Leviticus 25: 3-4)

Six years you may sow your field and six years you may prune your vineyard and gather in the yield.

But in the seventh year the land shall have a sabbath of complete rest, a sabbath of the LORD: you shall not sow your field or prune your vineyard.

When the Talmud goes out on a botanical tangent, do we recognize it as “Torah mi’Sinai”, as a teaching that were passed down to the sages directly from Moses? Sometimes these asides can seem quirky and out of place but is it really fair to treat them as secondary when we believe that the Talmud was divinely inspired?

In Yoma 18b we come across a few lines on Rav Huna’s and Rabbi Yochanan’s opinions that wild arugula is beneficial for vision and that one should either eat it or pass it over their eyes if they come across it growing along the edges of a field. Arugula, particularly the wild cultivars, contain high levels of Vitamin A and C, which are both indeed beneficial for the eyes. Though wild arugula (Diplotaxis tenuifolia) has recently regained popularity as a nutrient dense “superfood”, the overwhelming trend in agriculture over the last millennia has been to move away from wild varieties and breed or genetically modify crops for yield, appearance, uniformity, and pesticide resistance rather than nutritional benefits and soil health.
In this week’s parshiot Behar and Bechukotai we come across the concepts of Shmita and Yovel- the jubilees of the 7th and 50th years where there will be complete agricultural rest for the land. During this year the wild things take over- such as the beneficial wild arugula mentioned in Yoma 18b. Without our interference the wild ecosystems and the corners of the field can balance themselves and we can step back and appreciate our presence in the perfect order of G-d’s creation. If a little, unassuming weed can spark a discussion amongst multiple sages, perhaps we should hold in higher regard the lessons that the wild spaces can teach us- and the lessons we have yet to uncover.

-Hannah Tsimmerman
Avraham is the first monotheist, the first man who befriended Hashem, and the forefather of our Torah and Halacha. Therefore, the question is how can we look at Avraham as a role model for our Torah learning today? The Talmud teaches us that Avraham was a man of Torah even before the giving of the Torah. How is it possible that he had the knowledge of the sages, well before they had arrived?

It is said that Avraham's very being was in connection to the mitzvot and he had an innate understanding of the laws that allowed him to keep them even generations before the Torah was given to the Jewish people. Yoma 28b teaches us, “Abraham was different because he was an Elder and sat and studied Torah in a yeshiva, where the Divine Presence rests. There he developed the expertise to determine the precise hour. As Rabbi Ḥama, son of Rabbi Ḥanina, said: From the days of our ancestors, yeshiva never left them.” This quote is discussing how Avraham was a learned man, who studied in yeshiva all day. Yet, the term yeshiva in ancient Israel is not the same as we imagine today. In the times of the prophets, yeshiva was not a physical location, it was a mindset and environment created when like minded torah loving individuals sat together to engage in learning and teaching of Hashem's words. Yeshiva comes from the Hebrew word “shev” meaning sit, demonstrating that a yeshiva was created, when the prophets sat together to study torah.

This differs in today's world where a yeshiva is typically a physical center of higher learning. No longer does the yeshiva come to you, but you come to the yeshiva. I believe that physical yeshivot can sometimes be difficult to attend, individuals may face barriers such as cost, time, distance, etc. Yet, in this new age of the COVID-19 pandemic, one blessing that we have been granted is the advancement of technology, which has allowed us to return to bringing the yeshiva to the person, and not vice versa. As we can see in our own kollel, we have created access to Torah to many individuals who may not have had such opportunities in the past. This is what our forefathers envisioned when they sat in their “yeshivot.” So let us remember and move forward in continuing to create spaces of Jewish learning accessible to all.

-Amin Yakov Abtahi-Shalom
In Rabbi Herzfeld’s Facebook pre-Shabbos d’var Torah on Bamidbar, he spoke of Rav Yaakov Golynsky, who went to Navardik to learn Torah. While there, Golynsky heard a young man studying Gemara who cried out “the world is a wedding feast... grab and eat, grab and eat.” Rav Golynsky was encouraged to study Torah and he eventually became a great rabbi. Our Community Kollel is an opportunity for all to “grab and eat” while we’re in the wilderness.

I immediately thought of the Daf we studied with our chevruta partners this past Tuesday night. Yoma 35B relates a story from the Gemara that was taught by the sages: “A poor person, a wealthy person, and a wicked person come to face judgment before the Heavenly court for their conduct in this world.”

The story goes on to tell the story of Hillel who was so poor that one time he did not have the half-dinar needed to enter the study hall, but climbed on the roof of the hall and peered through the skylight to hear the words of Torah taught by Shemaya and Avtalyon. During the night, snow fell and he was buried in 3 cubits of snow. The next day was Shabbos, so Shemaya and Avtalyon desecrated Shabbos in order to save Hillel’s life, by cleaning him up, rubbing him with oil, and warming him by a fire.

The wealthy man, Rabbi Elazar ben Harsum, who owned 1000 ships and 1000 villages, traveled daily “from city to city and state to state to study with the Torah scholars in each of those places.”

The Rambam says “All Jews, poor and wealthy, ill and healthy, are obligated to study Torah. Even the poor, who depend on charity to survive must devote time to study Torah.” (Rambam, Sefer HaMadda, Hilkhot Talmud Torah 1:8)

The Gemara further explains that Rabbi Elazar ben Harsum “…never went and saw all his possessions and property; rather, he would sit and engage in the study of Torah all day and all night.” (Yoma 35B)

As we observe Shavuos this week, we spend the first night studying Torah. The reason for this study comes from a Midrash according to Rabbi Dovid Rosenfeld. In his article, Staying Up Shavuot Night, on Aish.com, he writes “There is a Midrash which states that on the morning of the Revelation at Sinai the Jewish people overslept. God descended upon Mount Sinai to give the Torah to Israel, and we hadn’t even arrived yet! Moses had to rouse us and hurry us over to the mountain for this earth-shattering event. To make up for this, we stay up the entire night of Shavuot – in order to be absolutely certain we will be awake Shavuot morning…” He writes, “We must therefore see Torah study as an exhilarating experience, as a means of getting closer to God and strengthening the love between us and Him. To me, staying up all night studying is an expression of that love. We show God that we are crazy about the wonderful gift of His Torah.”

Rabbi Herzfeld encouraged us all to take regular time each day, or even during a week in order to study Torah or Talmud. This regular study increases our love of Torah and mitzvot, but it unites us to the rest of the Jewish world that is studying every day, and it also unites us to G-d. “…do not say: ‘When I will have free time I will study,’ for perhaps you will never have free time” (Pirkei Avot 2:4)

Most of you don’t know my story of returning to Judaism. It’s a long story that I’m happy to share with anyone, but the short version is that I was raised Catholic in an Italian family, went to college to study music, and served as the music director in a variety of Protestant churches. However, I started to have a crisis of faith and was searching for something more. It was during this time that I was hired by a large Conservative synagogue to be the Music Director and eventually also the Membership/Outreach Director. The more that I studied privately with the rabbi, I was drawn in more and more. This ultimately led me to the decision to return to Judaism—I say return because my neshama was trying to return to Har Sinai.

I had known that there were Jewish members in my family several generations back, but not sure of what it meant to me. I began to do some genealogy and found that my Great-grandmother was Jewish, and, as I did further study, found that both sides of my family were Conversos, originally from Spain, and forced to convert during the Inquisition. My love of Torah, Judaism, and Israel is for the over 500 years’ worth of family members who were not allowed to study their texts. When I travel to Israel and pray at the Western Wall, it’s for the generations of ancestors who were not able to return to our ancestral homeland.
My participation in the Kollel has strengthened my love of Torah and gives me energy each day. I feel more connected to the rest of the Jewish people. I feel more connected to Hashem. While I had several years of study, and even became an adult Bar Mitzvah, I am a beginner in the study of Talmud. At first, I was scared. I didn’t know what to expect, but with the support of the Rabbi and Maharat, they gave me the gentle push and lots of support I needed to take the first step. At times I feel like Nachshon stepping into the Red Sea, not knowing what I was getting myself into.

Several years ago, on Yom Kippur afternoon, I had the honor of giving a d’var Torah to go along with the reading of Yonah at the synagogue I used to attend in Charlotte, NC. I felt a nagging to study, but ignored it. Several of my Christian friends were going to seminaries, but I kept telling myself that I wasn’t ready to study on that level, because I didn’t have a strong enough Jewish education. Then Rabbi Herzfeld announced the Community Kollel and I was interested. Out of the blue, the rabbi texted me and told me that I should consider participating and to be at the first Zoom meeting. As they say, “the rest is history…”

The more that I study, the more I want to study. I have always loved learning. I love school. Being part of the Kollel has awakened my neshama in ways I could never have imagined. When I attend an evening class, after having worked all day, I am not tired, I’m energized. There are some days when I wake up early and can’t wait to attend one of the 7:00 AM Daf Yomi shiurs. Just as Reb Golynsky heard the young bochur at the yeshiva, I feel like I’m at a wedding banquet and the Torah and Talmud are part of a big buffet and I can’t get enough.

If I can do it, you can do it. Take regular time each week (or every day if possible!) and study Torah or another Jewish text. When you’re busy or stressed from life, it will relax you. When you’re tired and don’t feel like studying, it reenergizes you. The study of Torah is unlike any other study. It’s not work, it’s fun. I can’t thank Ohev Sholom and our amazing clergy and teachers enough for making this possible.

I thought that when I returned and made my first trip to Israel, a 500 year journey in the wilderness was complete and that I had returned home. Little did I know what Hashem had in store. “Man plans and G-d laughs” according to the old Yiddish proverb. That was just the appetizer and now I’m at the wedding feast grabbing and eating. Come and join me on this journey…whether we’re as poor as Hillel or as rich as Rabbi Elazar, we all need the Torah and the joy it brings to our lives.

-Monty Bennett
The Gemara in Yoma 41b discusses the case of poor and wealthy lepers who must bring offerings because of their leprosy. In Temple times, the required offerings for a leper differed depending on one's wealth. A poor person brought two birds, and a wealthy person brought two lambs. We can see the reason why this was established, in order that the poor would not have to afflict themselves to do a religious duty and the wealthy would not be stingy.

The Gemara brings a Mishnah from Negaim 14:12: "A poor leper who brought the offering of a wealthy person has fulfilled his obligation. But a wealthy leper who brought the offering of a poor person has not fulfilled his obligation."

Regarding the poor man who brings a wealthy man's offering, the commentators say that not only is his obligation fulfilled, but it is commendable for him to go above and beyond his means to bring the wealthy man's offering.

This brings up a question. Is the poor person who brings two birds as he is required less praiseworthy than the poor person who somehow manages to bring two lambs?

For a long time I found myself struggling with a similar question when it comes to religious duty. I was raised non-denominational, choosing to become Orthodox as an adult. When I first started becoming observant, I often compared myself to others. I worried that my practice wasn't enough or that I wasn't doing things the right way. With work and college and my family, I often struggled (and still do!) to make regular minyan or to keep up with Talmud study or to remember to put tape over my refrigerator light switch before Shabbos. I felt inadequate. Was my observance good enough?

I found comfort in three things:
1. Pirkei Avos 1:15, Shammai says, "Make your study a fixed practice." He doesn't tell us we must study as much Torah as possible, he simply says we must make it a fixed practice. Some of us may fulfill this by studying for an hour a day, and some of us may fulfill this by studying for five minutes a day. We all must do what we are able. We don't have to burden ourselves to take on more than we can handle.
2. There is a legend that Hashem had to go around to all the other nations asking each of them if they would accept the Torah and nobody said yes until he asked the Jews. If observing commandments was easy, then surely everyone would be eager to embrace them! But no, only we did, the people descended from Yisroel, whose name means "wrestles with G-d." It is okay to struggle with this, as our ancestors did before us.
3. The Sages did not make a distinction between the religious and the secular. The Talmud speaks of prayer and Temple service just as it speaks of mundane things like human interaction and taxes. So it is with our daily lives. Everything we do, every action, is a spiritual act. The act of eating a meal is just as much in praise of Hashem as the blessings we say before and after it. Teaching our children how to put on their own shoes is a mitzvah just as is teaching them Torah. Every action we take can bring light into the world, whether indirectly or directly.
Returning to the topic of the offerings, surely we can say that although one offers birds and one offers lambs they are both praiseworthy. Both of them achieve the same goal and both of them fulfill their religious duty.

We must not afflict ourselves in service of Hashem. We can push ourselves, yes, and we can give ourselves high ambitions, but in the end we should not force ourselves to do more than we are able. Someone once said to me: Diamonds form under pressure, but bread only rises with rest.

May those of us who must settle for offering birds continue to grow and flourish so that one day, with the help of Hashem, we may offer lambs.

-Aryeh Leib Reynolds
As a (now-licensed) architect I can’t help but be attracted to passages of the Gemara that give dimensions for certain parts of the Temple or of the Mishnaic world. Stairs in particular are tightly regulated parts of a building since people tend to fall or trip if the steps don’t match up with a person’s natural stride. Also, in the commercial world, stairs are most often used as part of an egress system, raising the stakes even higher.

Yoma 16A states:

\textit{In addition, fifteen stairs ascend from within the women’s courtyard and descend from the Israelite courtyard to the women’s courtyard. Each stair was half a cubit high and half a cubit deep, for an additional ascent of seven and a half cubits. The total height of both staircases together was thirteen and a half cubits. And we learned in that mishna: The area between the Entrance Hall and the altar was twenty-two cubits wide, and there were twelve stairs in that area. Each stair was half a cubit high and half a cubit deep, for an additional ascent of six cubits and a total height of nineteen and a half cubits.}

If we assume cubits of about 18 inches (from the Gemara-Card!), that means that these steps were “huge”, possibly 9” rise and 9” run (100% slope), compared to the modern everyday world (~63% maximum slope). The Mishna in Middot, which our Gemara seems to challenge, describes the steps this way:

\textit{There were twelve steps there, each step being half a cubit high and a cubit broad.}

This is better, but it’s still a little odd: 4.5 inch rise and 9 inch run (50% slope). Sometimes having too little slope is just as bad as too much.

A very quick survey of some important buildings contemporary to Herod’s Temple: the steps of the Parthenon (432 BCE, Athens) are about 12 inches tall and the steps of the Roman Temple to Fortuna Virilis (80 BCE, Rome) are between 10 and 11 inches tall.

Modern building codes limit step heights to a maximum of 7 inches and treads are supposed to be a minimum of 11 inches, which is supposed to correspond to modern strides and the size of people. I find that this is a minimum – if you’ve ever worn shoes that aren’t like tennis shoes, your feet will still poke off the edge of the step.

As we consider including people of all ages and sizes, we might consider tweaking those dimensions a little bit in our synagogues, public buildings, and ultimately, the Third Temple, to make sure physical access to our sacred spaces are as open as possible. Shemot / Exodus 20:23 (at the end of Parshat Yitro) commands:

\textit{עָלָֽיו} 
\textit{עֶרְוָתְָ} 
\textit{לֹֽא־תִגָּלֶ} 
\textit{ר} 
\textit{אֲשֶׁ} 
\textit{עַֽל־מִזְבְּחِ} 
\textit{ת֖} 
\textit{בְמַעֲלֹ} 
\textit{ה} 
\textit{וְלֹֽא־תַעֲלֶ} 

\begin{quote}Do not ascend My altar by steps, that your nakedness may not be exposed upon it.\end{quote}
A Rashi to that verse mentions:

the taking of large paces is near enough to uncovering one’s nakedness that it may be described as such, and you would then be treating them (the stones of the altar) in a manner that implies disrespect...How is it in the case of stones which have no sense (feeling) to be particular about any disrespect shown to them? Scripture ordains that since they serve some useful purpose you should not treat them in a manner that implies disrespect! Then in the case of your fellow-man who is made in the image of your Creator and who is particular about any disrespect shown to him, how much more certain is it that you should not treat him disrespectfully! (Mekhila d'Rabbi Yishmael 20:23:1)

Let’s sing our fifteen pilgrim songs this and every Shabbat, while we carefully, comfortably and safely ascend to more holiness.

-Daniel Alhadeff
The Gemarra in *Yoma 53 b* notes:

This is analogous to a student who takes leave of his teacher. If [after stepping away from the teacher, the student] returns immediately, [the student] is like a dog that returns to its vomit [i.e., the student has defeated his initial gesture of respect.] Artscroll, *Yoma 53.*

Artscroll has some footnotes focusing on the imagery of dog vomit as a lack of respect that the student shows the teacher. The imagery of dog vomit is rather repulsive, but *Yoma* is not the first instance of its use. Note *Proverbs,* 26: 1-12 presents sayings on fools. *Proverbs* 26: 11-12 is particularly insightful for our purposes:

As a dog that returneth to his vomit,  
So is a fool that repeateth his folly.  

Seest thou a man wise in his own eyes?  
There is more hope of a fool than of him.  


The verses from *Proverbs* use the imagery not for disrespect but for repeated foolishness. The concept, medically accurate or not, is that the dog vomits because it has eaten something noxious. Rather than avoid the vomit as in avoiding something noxious, the dog eats it again. It is the repetition of something harmful to oneself—again, this may not be medically accurate but appears to be the intent of Proverbs—that is the characteristic of a fool. (The Christian Bible in the book of Peter cites the dog vomit in Proverbs.)

Disrespect has an element of intent. A baby cannot possibly disrespect a wise person because a baby has no sense of propriety or respect, much less intent. So too, a dog has no sense of propriety with respect to food. The disrespect of the student goes to conscious willfulness. Contrast with the story of Rava and Rav Yosef and the profound and conscious respect the former had for the latter.

But *Proverbs* expands on the concept of a fool, one not willfully disrespectful, but rather self-absorbed and haughty, as in Proverbs 26:12. Such a person holds himself as “wise in his own eyes.” *Proverbs* holds such a person as lower than a fool. If prayer is a recognition of one’s own humility and lack of self-importance, then the failure to end a prayer with a humble gesture is according to *Yoma 53b* a sign of disrespect, and possibly according to *Proverbs* even worse than being a fool. The compilers of the Gemarra would have been quite familiar with the image in *Proverbs.* Such, ironically, is the lesson of dog’s vomit, an image as far removed from prayer as possibly imaginable.

I chuckled when I first read *Yoma 53* because I had at least one economics professor who repeatedly used the image of dog’s vomit to indicate a stupid idea in general and Marxism in
particular. For these professors, dog vomit did not represent either disrespect or foolishness but rather quite simply bad ideas. For decades, I had assumed that the image was developed in the perverse environments of economics graduate programs in the 1950s and 1960s. Now I know that the image has been around for at least 2500 years, with successive generations of scholars finding new interpretations.

-Harold Furchtgott-Roth
Purity, Life, and Light

In the Daf we’ve been studying Meschata Yoma that features detailed descriptions of the Yom Kippur services in the Bet Hamikdash (the Temple). Most of us are aware that the service included the slaughter and offering of a bull and a goat and the collecting, sprinkling, and pouring the blood on the altar based upon the verses in Leviticus.

Leviticus 16:19 that states

שֵׁלְהוּ וְקָדָּשְׁוּ שְׁמֵאֱלָהָלָה: וַחֲצֵי תְּלוֹי מִכָּרִים מִמִּשָּׁפִּים

(...v’tiharo vkadesho mi’tumaos ...) and the rest of the blood he shall sprinkle on it [the altar] with his finger seven times. Thus, he shall purify it of the impurity of the Israelites and consecrate it.¹

Amid this discussion of the sprinkling and pouring of the blood the Mishnah on Daf 58b begins a sugya (passage), that centers around three main points: 1) What does the word taharo come to mean?; 2) What exactly was being sprinkled where?; and, 3) What becomes of the blood that was used for the mitzvot upon the mizbeyach (altar)? For the purpose of this d’var Torah lets focus on points one and three.

The Mishnah states

... (He [the Kohen Gadol] sprinkled blood on pure [taharo] of the altar...).

Thus begins the discussion of point one about taharo (purity). So, what is the “purity” of which the Tanna of the Mishnah speaks? We, like the Gemara, will come back to this question shortly.

The Mishnah goes on to discuss that the blood that was sprinkled and poured would then collect in the canal that ran through the courtyard of the temple and the blood-laden water flowed from the Temple’s canal into the valley where it was sold as fertilizer. It goes on to note if one were to misuse that laden water without first purchasing it, that individual is guilty of me’ila (trespass/theft/misappropriation of consecrated property). While it might be thought of a simply wastewater, it was not because it contained the blood from the karbanos it contained elements of kodshim (holiness).

Commenting on their guilt, Rashi notes that the reason they were considered guilty of trespass because it was still consecrated property of the Temple. But once someone paid for it [they acquired it] and as Rashi explains this effectively de-consecrates the property such that it may used for private purposes.

The Talmud on Daf 59b goes on to restate the verse from the Mishnah, albeit with slightly different language,

הֲשֹׁרֵה מַעֲשֵׂה עַל שְׁדוּרְו שֵׂלְהָה (he sprinkled blood on pure [tohoro] of the altar)².

This references back to Lev 16:19, discussing that it was necessary to purify the Altar with the blood. So how does blood purify? The answer can be found in the next chapter of Lev (17:11)

כִּי הָעֵצֶם מַעֲשֵׂה עַל הָאֵיבָּה וַאֲרוֹא בָּאָלָה בָּאָל: בַּתְּלָה הַמַּעֲשֵׂה לַיָּרָה שֵׁלְהָה: יִרְוֲא יִרְוֲא עַל בָּאָלָה עַל מַעֲשֵׂה כְּפֵר: For the life of the flesh is in the blood, and I have assigned it to you for making expiation for your lives upon the altar; it is the blood, as life, that effects expiation³.

¹ Translation adapted from Sefaria https://www.sefaria.org/Leviticus.16.19?lang=bi&aliyot=0
² Translation adapted from Sefaria https://www.sefaria.org/Yoma.58b.9?lang=bi&with=all&lang2=en
³ Translation from Sefaria https://www.sefaria.org/Leviticus.17.11?lang=bi&aliyot=0
From this we learn that the blood, the life essence of the animal that was being offered would be the purifying agent for the Altar upon which that very animal would be offered. Thereby transforming the altar into a state of purity for the purpose of the sacrifice. The discussion now moves on to try to understand what part of the Altar the Mishnah is to be purified. Rabbah bar Rav Shila said, purity is the midpoint of the Altar, which might be understood as him saying the mid-part of the altar is what would need to be purified.

Rashi notes R. Shila’s statement is based on a linguistic analogy with the brightest portion of the day, i.e., mid-day.

4 As people commonly say: brightness [tehar] has brightened [tihara], the light of noon shines and it is the middle of the day.

As amplified in Shas and Torah, tahara (purity) is not absolute, but rather refers to purity for a specific purpose – e.g., pure enough to offer a sacrifice or other service. Adding this all-up results in a tautology between purification coming from blood, blood being the life essence (nefesh), and life essence being like bright light. When he was challenged with this understanding, Rav Shila responded by saying that purification was an act of “pushing aside” through a reference of the clarity of the heavens at Matan Torah at Har Sinai. If we then go to Jastrow we find that tehar can also mean “to be cleared away, be gone.” In that vein, purity can be understood as the removal of obfuscations or interpositions.

Aligning this with Yom Kippur, the subject of the meshechta Yoma, perhaps we can learn from this that our ability to remove other obfuscations in our lives can help us to find and bring light. As Leonard Cohen wrote – “There is a crack in everything. That’s how the light gets in.” Well, that same crack allows the light to shine out. This is true for each of us as well. May we each be able to recognize and amplify the light in this world.

David Schwartz
10-June-2021

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4 Translation based upon Artscroll
5 Shas is an acronym for shisha sedarim, "six orders" based upon the six order of the Mishnah that is the overarching structure for Talmud
In a case that there isn’t a sufficient amount of water (revi’it) for two or more people to properly wash their hands before eating bread, what should they do?

The Shulchan Aruch - Orach Chayim Siman 160, Sa’eef 13 says the following: There needs to be a revi’is of water for one person to wash his hands. But if two people wash their hands as one, the second person doesn’t require a second revi’is, even if they wash in sequence, as long as there is no interruption of the flow of water.

How? If there was a revi’is of water in a vessel and one person stretched out his hands under it and it pours on his hands, and a second person stretches forth his hands under and near the hands of the first person, and the stream flows on the hands of the first onto the hands of the second that is underneath- both of their hands are pure. This is even though that there is less than a revi’is that will reach the second person’s hands, since it came from a vessel that had a revi’is- the hands are all pure. Some permit this even if it is one after the other since when the first one started, there was a revi’is in the cup, that full volume works for the second person as well to purify him. In this way, with two revi’is volume of water you can wash three or four peoples hands, or with four revi’is volume you could wash many people’s hands, as long as there is enough water to pour three times on each person’s hands. By the same reasoning, you could put four or five hands next to each other or on top of each other and wash them all together as long as they are loose enough that the water will get to all of them.

The Mishnah Berurah (מ”ש פר”ס) adds that both people must have the proper intent to be washing together, otherwise it will be considered as if the second person had washed with “dirty (used) water”! And, in Halacha Berurah (הלכה פר”, he adds that the water, especially if there are four or five people washing from the same water, should reach their knuckles at minimum!

Shaylot U’Teshuvot Shaol Sha’al She’elah (Responsa from Kollel members of Giv’at Ezer in Ashdod, Israel) 84 adds in the name of the Beit Yosef and the RaShBa (Rabbi Solomon Ben Abraham Aderet) that the entire basis for this yeter (permission) is that since the water is flowing from one to the other, it is likened to the Mishna Masechet Yadayim Chapter 1 Mishnah 1 where it says that you can even wash four or five pairs of hands with a small amount of water. Maimonides and others held the opinion that this is allowed only for the second pouring – when we wash the second time on our hands. Additionally, it is very clear from the Bei’ur Halacha on Mishna Brura 160:13 (בר”א משנה ברורה) that bedieved (acceptable after the fact) and b’sha’at ha’da’cha (in extenuating circumstances) we can definitely rely on the opinion of those who allow it.

How do we determine which opinion is the one that we follow, if the Shulchan Arukh brings two opposing opinions. Like in the Talmud, the rule is that the opinion that has the “last word” is the one we follow!

In conclusion, if there isn’t enough water for everyone, we don’t have to have a lottery to see who the “lucky one” is, but, rather, they should group up and make sure that the flow of water doesn’t stop!

-Yosef Goldman
During our Daf Yomi class we were recently studying how the various sacrifices were to be carried out including how the lottery was to be conducted to determine which animal is to be sacrificed and which will have another fate. If the lottery is flawed, one of the animals is “left to die”. The wording seemed very strange when we are instructed to be caretakers for our animals.

I texted the Rabbi because I wasn’t sure what “left to die” means. He explained that the animal is locked in a small room and left to die on its own.

After an additional query, the Rabbi said “Indeed. It’s a very difficult law.”

I still found myself searching for a way to resolve the discomfort I was feeling about this procedure. I could not be a caretaker for our animals with this law. After a lot of research, the only thing I could come up with to resolve a very troubling law is as follows:

Once an animal is taken to the Temple with the intent of being sacrificed; that animal is no longer our animal but Hashem’s animal – regardless of the outcome. Once I accepted this proposition, I was able to rationalize that man could not affect the way the animal is treated – we are in a hands-off situation.

Placing the animal in a small, locked room seems to be the minimum we could do short of simply turning our backs on the situation and ignoring the doomed animal completely.

I am still wrestling with this more than the thread count on each white garments worn during the Yom Kipper service.

-Peter
Azazel: Thoughts and Sources

The story of Azazel, as we have heard every year on Yom Kippur, always meant to us that one of the two goats brought before the High Priest was selected to wander aimlessly in the wilderness of Azazel to carry the sins of the Jewish people. Not until studying the story in tractate Yoma, did we know the difficult and complex details of this process.

In Parashat Acharei Mot, the Torah’s fullest description of the Yom Kippur ritual regarding the goat for Azazel appears (Leviticus 16:2-34). But Holy Days, holidays, and festivals develop and evolve as human life changes. The Yom Kippur we celebrate in the 21st century is considerably different from the ritual and ceremony described in Leviticus 16.

One of the most remarkable elements of Yom Kippur in ancient times, when the central Holy Temple stood in Jerusalem, was the ritual of “the two goats.” Two indistinguishable members of that species were brought before the High Priest, who placed a randomly-pulled lot on the head of each animal. One lot read “to G-d” and the other "to Azazel" – the name of a steep cliff in the Judaean desert. (Leviticus 16:10)

At the Temple in Jerusalem, the first goat was sacrificed in solemn ceremony in the Temple, the second was taken from the Temple to the cliff called Azazel and thrown off the cliff backwards, dying unceremoniously before it even reached the bottom.

Prior to the existence of the Temple in Jerusalem, the fate of the goat “to Azazel” is succinctly covered in Leviticus 16:21-22. A designated man will take the goat to the wilderness … to an uninhabited land and presumable release it there. The Torah does not state that the designated man kills the goat or pushes it off a cliff.

Two goats were brought before the High Priest, who cast lots to decide which of the goats was to be designated “for God” and which “for Azazel.” Laying his hands upon the head of the goat designated “for Azazel,” the High Priest confessed the sins of the entire congregation. In Temple times, this goat was then led forth to a high, rugged cliff in the wilderness, from which it was cast down as atonement for the sins of Israel.

He [Aaron] shall take the two he-goats and stand them before Hashem, at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting. Aaron shall place lots upon the two he-goats: one lot “for Hashem” and one lot “for Azalel.” Aaron shall bring near the he-goat designated by lot for Hashem, and make it a sin offering. And the he-goat designated by lot for Azazel shall be stood alive before Hashem to provide atonement through it, to send it to Azazel, to the wilderness. (Leviticus 16: 7-10)

The Crimson Thread

What is the purpose of the crimson thread? The Talmud suggests that it was intended to distinguish the sent-away animal from the slaughtered animal (Yoma 41b). In the
Temple, the High Priest would tie a strip of crimson wool to the head of the goat designated for Azazel. And this goat was positioned near the site from where it would be sent off to the wilderness and its final destination.

According to the Mishnah’s account, the thread was tied to the scapegoat twice. First, it was tied immediately following the casting of the lot for the two goats (m. Yoma 4:2). He bound a thread of crimson wool on the head of the scapegoat and he turned it towards the way by which it was to be sent out. It was tied on the animal again after it had been sent into the wilderness, immediately before it was pushed off a cliff (Yoma 6:6):

He divided the thread of crimson wool and tied one half to the rock, and the other half between its horns.

After the high priest had performed several other rituals he returned to the goat, placed his hands on it and confessed: "O God, Thy people, the house of Israel, has sinned and transgressed before Thee...." He then handed the goat over to the person who was going to take it, called Iʾsh ʾitti (Lev. 16:21), i.e., the man who had been prepared for that time (et). Although any Jew was qualified to fulfill this function, the high priests did not allow non-priests to do it (Yoma 6:3). When the Iʾsh ʾitti reached the cliff, he pushed the goat over it backward and it hardly reached the halfway mark in its descent before it was completely dismembered (Yoma 6:2–6).

It seems that even in the time of the Second Temple when they used to kill the goat, its actual death was not considered indispensable since, as soon as the goat reached the desert, the high priest was permitted to continue with the divine service and was not required to wait until the goat was killed. It is possible that the goat was killed in order to ensure that it would not return – laden with the sins – to inhabited places.

The goat which was dispatched to Azazel was not a sacrifice since it was not slaughtered. From the actual verses themselves it is not even certain whether the goat was killed. The goat was dispatched in order to carry the sins of Israel into the wilderness, i.e., to cleanse the people of their sins. This is also the reason why the ritual took place on the Day of Atonement.

Does the practice of tashlich, the casting away of our sins in the water during Rosh Hashana, relate to the goat of Azazel who carries away the sins of the people of Israel? In both cases, it is not the casting away that cleanses the people, but the confession that precedes it. This is something we can bear in mind each year during the High Holidays, and keep an ancient and unique ritual with us today as we seek atonement and redemption.

-Michael and Avril Weisman
Yoma 82a states:

Rav Huna said: One trains a healthy child of eight years and nine years to fast for several hours; at ten years and eleven years, they complete the fast by rabbinic law; at twelve years they complete the fast by Torah law. This applies to girls who reach maturity and become obligated in mitzvot at age twelve. And Rav Nahman said: At nine years and ten years one trains them to fast for several hours; at eleven and twelve years they complete the fast by rabbinic law; at thirteen years they complete the fast by Torah law. This applies to boys. And Rabbi Yoḥanan said: There is no obligation with regard to children completing the fast by rabbinic law. Rather, at ten and eleven years, one trains them to fast for several hours; and at twelve years girls are obligated to complete their fast by Torah law.

From here we learn that boys starting at 13 and girls starting at 12 are obligated to complete a fast. This mitzvah, as well as many others, are reserved for those who are considered Jewish adults. This occasion and transition into Jewish adulthood is now celebrated with a coming-of-age ceremony called a Bar or Bat Mitzvah, literally meaning son or daughter of the commandments. But what is the origin of the term and the ceremony?

There is no direct mention of a Bar or Bat Mitzvah in the Tanach. The term “Bar Mitzvah” is first found in Bava Metzia 96a, however it is merely used to indicate someone who is subject to the law, rather than a coming-of-age ceremony. However, there are some allusions to children beginning to take on communal and personal obligations in the Torah, which would indicate they are considered an adult. In Bereisheit 34:25, Yaakov’s son Levi was estimated to be 13 years old according to the Tosfos Yom Tov to Avos 5:21. In the same passuk, he is referred to as an ish (man), implying he is a Jewish adult. Bereisheit Rabba 63:10 brings another example of alluding to thirteen years old being a marker of taking on responsibility. It states, “Up to thirteen year Yaakov and Esav went to school together. After thirteen, one went to the Beit Midrash to study and one to the house idols.” Rabbi Eleazar adds, “Until thirteen, it is the father’s job to train his son. After, the father must state, “Blessed be He who has taken from me the responsibility for this boy”, which is similar to the Baruch Sh’p’tarani blessing recited nowadays.

We also learn from various Mishna’s regarding the significance of this age. Pirkei Avot 5:21 states, “…at thirteen, there is an obligation to observe the mitzvot” and similarly in Mishnah Niddah 5:6 we learn that a girl’s vow is only binding at twelve years and a day and boy’s at thirteen and a day.

Bar Mitzvah began to take shape as early as the 3rd or 4th century. In Talmudic era, mitzvot that were once permissible for any minor deemed fit, suddenly became reserved for thirteen-year-olds to differentiate a Jewish minor from a Jewish adult. The term Bar Mitzvah was first used as a coming-of-age ceremony and is credited to 15th century Rabbi Menahem Ziyony. Similarly, Bat
Mitzvah is first found in *Ben Ish Chai*, a legal code by Joseph Chayim ben Elijah in the 19th century.

During the 17th century, Bar Mitzvahs began to be structured with three components. Being called up to the Torah for an aliyah, a public *dvar Torah*, and a festive meal. As a result of the integration of newly emancipated Jews during the Enlightenment Period, communities began to emphasize the importance the Bar Mitzvah, as it was the last life-cycle event they could control before the child decided whether to carry on the faith and religion into adulthood.

In the 20th century, Bar Mitzvahs became formulaic as they became center-stage at synagogues in North America. They typically included the reading of the Torah and Haftarah, a speech, and a lavish party. While there were always versions of a Jewish coming-of-age for girls, the first public Bat Mitzvah in the United States was in 1922 by Judith Kaplan. This laid the groundwork as women began to gain equal access and equal responsibilities in many Jewish communities in the mid-to-late 20th century, with the eventual shift and egalitarianization of Jewish communal life. Therefore, Bar and Bat Mitzvahs in liberal spaces began to look identical from the learning done in preparation to the ceremony itself.

The evolution of Bar and Bat Mitzvahs continues into the 21st century. As technology has allowed new ways to learn and pray together, Jewish institutions began to integrate them into these ceremonies. As synagogues and party venues were forced to close during the novel COVID pandemic in 2020 and 2021, this coming-of-age ceremony had to reinvent itself again. Many began to host “Zoom-Mitzvahs”. While the pomp and circus of a traditional affair was not present, suddenly these ceremonies became more accessible for people to attend, participate, and have access to ADA features.

Regardless of what the Bar or Bat Mitzvah looks like, the most important part is that it marks the beginning of a child’s Jewish journey into adulthood and the first of many opportunities to participate and engage in both individual and communal aspects of Judaism.

-Ben Miller

Sources:

https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/history-of-bar-mitzvah/
From this week's Daf Yomi, Yoma 87a:

It is stated in the mishna that if one says: I will sin and Yom Kippur will atone for my sins, Yom Kippur does not atone for his sins. The Gemara comments: Let us say that the mishna is not in accordance with the opinion of Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi, as it was taught in a baraita that Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi says: Yom Kippur atones for all transgressions of the Torah, whether one repented or did not repent. The Gemara answers: Even if you say that the mishna is in accordance with the opinion of Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi, it is different when it is on the basis of being permitted to sin. Even Rabbi Yehuda HaNasi agrees that Yom Kippur does not atone for the transgressions one commits only because he knows that Yom Kippur will atone for them.

Our intentions matter and affect who we are and who we become. It would seem from the above that the individual in question is out of luck since he won't be able to atone for his sin. However, Teshuvah is always available. The individual who thinks he has gamed the system and states "I will sin and I can always use the ultimate get out of jail free card, Yom Kippur, to atone for my sin," is not without hope. He will be able to return. However, he may have a harder time doing so since his mindset is wrong.

While Yom Kippur is a holy day, simply being present and accounted for is not enough without the difficult work of teshuvah which can start now. We can use our time before Yom Kippur (and throughout the year) to reflect on our lives and always consider ourselves as on the border between good and evil, such that one more good deed will push us towards a life of righteousness, G-d willing.

Rabbi Akiva said a single hour of teshuvah and good deeds in this world is better than all the world to come.

May the year ahead be one of insight so that we can number our days and achieve a heart of wisdom. My prayer for all of us this year is that we increase our commitment to learning, come together as a kehillah, a holy community, and be able to count our blessings and feel gratitude to Hashem for all the good in our lives.

-Bill Jaffe