

Genesis, Chapter 37

ספר בראשית פרק לז

31 And they took Joseph's coat, and killed a he-goat, and dipped (לא) ויקחו את כתנת יוסף וישחטו שעיר עזים the coat in the blood; ויטבילו את הכתנת בדם:

Maimonides' Guide III:46

Our Sages say that the offering for the eighth day of dedication was "a calf, a young bullock, for a sin-offering" (Lev. xi. 2), in order to atone for the sin of the Israelites in making a golden calf. The sin-offering, which was brought on the Day of Atonement (ibid. xvi. 3), was likewise explained as being an atonement for that sin. From this argument of our Sages I deduce that he-goats were always brought as sin-offerings, by individual persons and also by the whole congregation, viz., on the Festivals, New-moon, Day of Atonement, and for idolatry, because most of the transgressions and sins of the Israelites were sacrifices to spirits (se'irim, lit., goats), as is clearly stated, "They shall no more offer their sacrifices unto spirits" (Lev. xvii. 7).

Our Sages, however, explained the fact that goats were always the sin-offerings of the congregation, as an allusion to the sin of the whole congregation of Israel: for in the account of the selling of the pious Joseph we read, "And they killed a kid of the goats" (Gen. xxxvii. 31). Do not consider this as a weak argument; for it is the object of all these ceremonies to impress on the mind of every sinner and transgressor the necessity of continually remembering and mentioning his sins. Thus the Psalmist says, "And my sin is ever before me" (Ps. li. 3).

The above-mentioned sin-offerings further show us that when we commit a sin, we, our children, and the children of our children, require atonement for that sin by some kind of service analogous to the sin committed. If a person has sinned in respect to property he must liberally spend his property in the service of God; if he indulged in sinful bodily enjoyments he must weary his body and trouble it by a service of privation and fasting, and rising early before daybreak. If he went astray in respect to his moral conduct he must oppose his failings by keeping to the opposite extreme, as we have pointed out in Mishneh-torah Hilkot De'ot (chap. ii.) et passim.

If his intellectual faculties have been concerned in the sin, if he has believed something false on account of the insufficiency of his intellect, and his neglect of research and proper study, he must remedy his fault by turning his thoughts entirely away from worldly affairs, and directing them exclusively to intellectual exercise, and by carefully reflecting on that which ought to form the subject of his belief. Comp. "And my heart hath been secretly enticed, but my hand touched my mouth" (Job xxxi. 27). These words express figuratively the lesson that we should pause and stop at that which appears doubtful, as has been pointed out by us in the beginning of this treatise.

The same we notice in the case of Aaron. He had his share in the sin of the golden calf, and therefore a bullock and a calf were brought by him and his successors as an offering. Similarly, the sin connected with a kid of goats was atoned for by a kid of goats. When this theory has been well established in the minds of the people, they must certainly be led by it to consider disobedience to God as a disgraceful thing. Everyone will then be careful that he should not sin, and require a protracted and burdensome atonement; he will be afraid he might not be able to complete it, and will therefore altogether abstain from sinning, and avoid it.

This object [of the laws under discussion] is very clear, and note it likewise...But these ceremonies are of a symbolic character, and serve to impress men with a certain idea, and to induce them to repent; as if to say, we have freed ourselves of our previous deeds, have cast them behind our backs, and removed them from us as far as possible.

Book of Jubilees, Chapter XXXII

11. And they dealt treacherously with him, and formed a plot against him to slay him, but changing their minds, they sold him to Ishmaelite merchants, and they brought him down into Egypt, and they sold him to Potiphar, the eunuch of Pharaoh, the chief of the cooks, priest of the city of 'Elew.
12. And the sons of Jacob slaughtered a kid, and dipped the coat of Joseph in the blood, and sent (it) to Jacob their father on the tenth of the seventh month.
13. And he mourned all that night, for they had brought it to him in the evening, and he became feverish with mourning for his death, and he said: 'An evil beast hath devoured Joseph'; and all the members of his house [mourned with him that day, and they] were grieving and mourning with him all that day.
14. And his sons and his daughter rose up to comfort him, but he refused to be comforted for his son.
15. And on that day Bilhah heard that Joseph had perished, and she died mourning him, and she was living in Qafratef, and Dinah also, his daughter, died after Joseph had perished.
16. And there came these three mournings upon Israel in one month. And they buried Bilhah over against the tomb of Rachel, and Dinah also. his daughter, they buried there.
17. And he mourned for Joseph one year, and did not cease, for he said 'Let me go down to the grave mourning for my son'.
18. For this reason it is ordained for the children of Israel that they should afflict themselves on the tenth of the seventh month -on the day that the news which made him weep for Joseph came to Jacob his father- that they should make atonement for themselves thereon with a young goat on the tenth of the seventh month, once a year, for their sins; for they had grieved the affection of their father regarding Joseph his son.
19. And this day has been ordained that they should grieve thereon for their sins, and for all their transgressions and for all their errors, so that they might cleanse themselves on that day once a year.