



## **Around the Shabbat Table**

**Shabbat Acharei Mot 5765  
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**Shalom!**

### **Introduction**

After the death of the High Priest Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, God spoke to Moses and told him to tell his brother that he was no longer to visit to the altar of the Temple in Jerusalem at will. Only on the 10th day of the seventh month, the Day of Atonement, was he to enter. On that day, he was only to wear simple linen robes and must bring with him two male goats for a sin offering, one ram for a burnt offering, and his own bull with which to make expiation for himself and his household. One goat was to be slaughtered as a sin offering to God, and its blood used to clean the altar, the Tent of Meeting, and the Holy of Holies of the sins of the people. Aaron must confess all of the sins of the Israelites upon the second goat, and then set it free in the wilderness.

Also in this portion is the commandment to slaughter all meat in a ritual way before the Tent of Meeting. The Israelites are reminded not to consume the blood however, for blood represents life itself, and not to eat of any animal that has died or been torn by wild beasts.



## **Questions for your Family's Discussion**

On Yom Kippur it has become the custom for people, particularly Rabbis and Cantors, to wear white. This tradition stems from this parasha, as the priests in the Holy Temple wore white linen robes on Yom Kippur, but otherwise wore quite ornate and decorative garments in their work.

1. Why do you think that white was the color chosen for the dress on this day?
2. How can we continue to make Yom Kippur - the Day of Atonement - our holiest day, though the Temple in Jerusalem no longer stands? When we pause for our prayers and our fast, from what else do we refrain? How does this practice enhance such a significant day?
3. On Yom Kippur, we are asked to atone for the sins we have committed against God. How can we atone for the sins we commit against one another?

As the biblical text explains, the goat for *Azazel* would bear the sins of the Israelites symbolized by red wool tied between its horns. The goat would be led by a specially chosen man into a desolate area. The goat was then allowed to escape into the wilderness, and henceforth the concept of "scapegoat" – an escaping goat who bears the sins of others.

1. Have you ever let someone else be blamed for your wrongdoing?
2. Have you ever mistakenly blamed another?
3. When have Jews been used as scapegoats in our history?
4. What lesson can and should we learn from those experiences?

## **Texts to Wrestle With**

The text of the parasha tells us

In the seventh month, on the tenth day of the month, you shall practice self-denial; and you shall do no manner of work...For on this day atonement shall be made for you to cleanse you of all your sins;...It shall be a Sabbath of complete rest for you...This shall be to you a law for all time: to make atonement for the Israelites for all their sins once a year.

-Leviticus 16:29-34

It is traditional for Jews, once they have become a Bar or Bat Mitzvah, to fast on Yom Kippur unless it would be unhealthy for them to do so.

- How does fasting help to sanctify the holiness of the day?

Isaiah 58:3-9, the passage read as the *Haftarah* on Yom Kippur, the type of fast God desires of the Jewish people is as follows:

To unlock the fetters of wickedness,  
And untie the cords of the yoke  
To let the oppressed go free;  
To break off every yoke.  
It is to share your bread with the hungry,  
And to take the wretched poor into your home;  
When you see the naked, to clothe him,  
And not to ignore your own kin.

- Based on this text from Isaiah, what can we learn about what we can do to elevate this practice of self-denial and help others during the High Holy Days?

In verse 17:15 the words *neva'alah* and *terayfah* are used to describe meat the Israelites were not permitted to consume. *Neva'alah* referred to animals who died of natural causes or who were slaughtered in an unkosher way. *Terayfah* referred to an animal that was slaughtered according to kosher law but was then found to be defective. Today, the word *treif* refers to any food that is not kosher.

1. Does your family keep kosher?
2. Do you keep kosher for Passover (do you avoid the consumption of leavened products)?
3. Do you believe that keeping kosher, either generally or during Pesach, makes Jewish practice more personally meaningful? Why or why not?
4. Are there other ways in which food can be elevated to serve a higher purpose, or can be used to help us to attain a higher level of holiness?
5. On Pesach, how do we use food to help tell the story of the Israelites' journey from slavery to freedom?



## **Towards an Action Agenda**

During the Shoah, the Jews were used as scapegoats for the downturn in Germany's economic crisis, and were subsequently targeted by Hitler's plans for destruction and annihilation. For those who survived, and later generations, we became the living remnant – the Jews who were descendants of those lucky enough to have survived such atrocities, and vowed “never again” would such genocide appear on the earth.

However, Since February 2003, the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) Sudanese government forces and government-backed ethnic militias known as “Janjaweed” have committed war crimes, crimes against humanity and “ethnic cleansing” in the Darfur region of Sudan.

To date, all parties continue to violate the April 8, 2004 humanitarian ceasefire agreement. The government in particular has continued bombing attacks on civilian objects. Fighting and displacement continue, particularly in South Darfur. The large-scale ground and air attacks on civilian villages by Sudan government forces and militias that marked the early phases of the conflict have diminished. It does not mean that security and protection for civilians has improved-it is a sign that ethnic cleansing has largely been completed in Darfur. Protection for the civilian population in rural areas and outside the displaced camps remains almost non-existent due to the continuing presence of the government-backed Janjaweed militias. The police are too poorly armed, trained, and equipped to defend from Janjaweed or other military attacks, too few to protect farmlands or more than isolated clusters of homes, and in some cases are hostile to returnees.

Neither the government nor the international community has an adequate plan to reverse the ethnic cleansing or to assist those few who have voluntarily returned home. Unless and until displaced persons can voluntarily return in safety to their farms and plant crops, particularly by spring 2005, the economy of Darfur and the region will continue in a downward spiral. This could result in food shortages on a much greater scale than yet seen in Darfur, and international agencies are already forecasting greatly increased need for food in 2005.

The UN Security Council passed two resolutions regarding Darfur. These sanctions threaten Sudan's government if it does not take action against those responsible for these heinous crimes. Unfortunately, these resolutions have had little effect in either restraining the Sudanese government, its allied militias or in improving security and protection for civilians. Unless the Security Council backs up its ultimatums with meaningful and strong action, abuses against civilians will continue and ethnic cleansing in

Darfur will be consolidated in full view of the international community, and with hundreds of U.N. and other international personnel present on the ground while it happens.

As Jews, it is our obligation to participate in *tikkun olam*. Let us “never again” let the genocide, like the Shoah, be perpetrated against others. For more information on this issue, to learn about the connection between Darfur and the Pesach Seder, and to learn how you can help in the crisis in Darfur, visit the website for the Religious Action Center of the Union for Reform Judaism at

[Religious Action Center](#)

or to the website of the Human Rights Watch

[Human Rights Watch](#)



## **Shabbat Shalom and Best Wishes for an Enjoyable Pesach!**

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