

# Philosophy of Yom HaKippurim's Temple Service

Rabbi Yisroel Chait

Written by a Student

Rosh Hashanah focuses on God's Kingship. This means we are to accept upon ourselves God's absolute rule as expressed through His Creation (omnipotence). God's role as Creator defines Him as the Exclusive Cause for all that exists. This translates to absolute Kingship over all.

Rosh Hashanah also focuses on His Absolute Knowledge (omniscience). God alone Knows all, and thereby He alone inscribes us for good or evil this coming year. God's omnipotence and omniscience expressed together on Rosh Hashanah teach that God Reigns over all, and is knowledgeable of all. Nothing is beyond His abilities, or His knowledge. There is no other cause for the universe and all that fills it.

In contrast, Yom HaKippurim's distinction is "God's Ineffable Name": the priests would recite God's ineffable name ten times in the Temple during Yom HaKippurim. Being prohibited to enunciate God's name normally, demonstrates our lack any knowledge of God, i.e., we cannot even mention His name, which would suggest we possess some idea about Him.

Any description of God—even the meaning of His name—is unknown to us. But on Yom HaKippurim, this actual name of God is mentioned ten times. This indicates that on Yom HaKippurim there is a closer relationship to God. What is this relationship?

The very recognition of our ignorance about God's "nature" atones for our sins. How so? The answer is that our recognition that we have no concept of God, entitles us to existence for another year. We thereby learn that our existence depends entirely on obtaining correct ideas, and our admission of ignorance regarding anything related to God.

We cannot know God, as the Torah says, "For man cannot know Me while alive." So when we admit this ignorance, we are in fact stating a truth, and when man is in line with truth, God's Providence relates to him. The more knowledge we attain of truths, and the more we realize we are ignorant of God proportionately increases our reality before God...our "worthiness" of existence.

In other words, as we continually grow in our realization that God is not physical, that He possesses no emotions, nor any quality existent in the universe, although we attain no positive knowledge of God, we are in fact removing our false notions about Him. This act of negation, places us more inline with truth.

What the ideas obtained through the Yom HaKippurim service? After the normal daily service, the High Priest would slaughter the ox, one of many sacrifices on Yom HaKippurim. But before enacting

the central service of this sacrifice—sprinkling blood over the *Kapores* (the Ark's cover)—the High Priest is commanded to interrupt this ox's service and offer the incense in the Temple's Holy-of-Holies.

Why this interruption? Additionally, the High Priest must wait until this room is entirely filled with the smoke of the burning incense. What is the meaning behind this waiting period?

The purpose is that the smoke is to create an opaque veil between the High Priest and the rest of the room of the Holy-of-Holies. This veil is an acknowledgment of the "veil" that exists between God and man.

Maimonides states that Revelation at Sinai was a rainy day, also a veil of sorts. The cloud at Sinai certainly teaches this lesson, that there is an infinite distance between God and man. Even when God "reveals" Himself by creating the miracles of Sinai—demonstrating a closer relationship—nonetheless, a distant relationship exists between man and God, who is far exalted from anything we mortals can fathom.

The High Priest must understand and accept that man is far removed from God, and only through this realization is the High Priest permitted to then complete his offering. There is a serious danger that he may incorrectly assume he possesses some idea about God.

Not only is this false, but until the High Priest admits his ignorance through creating the incense's veil, he is prohibited from continuing with his service, lest he foolishly presume he is serving a product of his own projection of God, and not the true God. For if we wrongly presume that we do in fact possess some truths about God, the Temple worship would then be converted to heresy and idolatry. This explains the interruption of the ox sacrifice.

The Talmud describes the most powerful human instinct as a "fiery lion exiting the Holy-of-Holies in the Temple." This teaches us that the most powerful instinct in man is the "religious emotion." While man is in the Temple he is subject to the desire to form positive ideas about whom he is serving.

The Talmudic statement teaches us that from the Holy-of-Holies, the "fiery lion" had exited (a powerful and dangerous entity referring to the religious emotion). It is in service to God that man must be on his highest guard. For it is in this environment that man's religious emotions are heightened.

The next sacrifice is the goat of the people. So far there are two sacrifices: the High Priest's ox, and the peoples' goat. Why must there be two separate offerings for our sins? We derive a new insight: the priests require their own atonement.

What additional atonement do they require? Why can't they join in the nation's goat sin-sacrifice? The answer can only lie in the priests' distinction: The Temple Service. Even those who serve in the Temple by God's very command—the priests—are not immune to their religious instincts, which never cease to cause man to sin.

As such, the priests must demonstrate that the Temple service is not something that they can perform flawlessly. Therefore, they alone must seek atonement through a separate animal. Had they joined the people with the nation's goat, this lesson would not be learned.

There is ultimately no escape from the control of our unconscious and our emotional drives. This is our nature. Other religions wish to deny this aspect of man, but Judaism does not have heroes or saints; all man's sins are revealed in the Torah, even those of our greatest prophets.

Judaism embraces the acceptance of truth and reality, and foremost, this includes that we are instinctual by nature, that we have an unconscious, and that we possess emotional attraction towards Torah prohibitions.

The Temple itself also requires atonement. We demonstrate through the priests' offering that counter-intuitively the Temple Service is not an area from which man escapes sin. In other words, we are not worthy of Temple.

We make the Temple impure by not guarding ourselves from Torah-defined impurities. And when we are in an impure state (viz. contact with the dead) and we enter the Temple without purification, we defile the Temple, its vessels and its sacrifices. These sins all require atonement. We cannot properly relate to the requirements of the Temple, so in the Laws of the Temple Service themselves are the commands to offer atonement for the transgressions of desecration of the Temple that we commit.

Even on the Day of Atonement itself—Yom HaKippurim—there are infractions committed by the priests and all of mankind who cannot control all their thoughts. Ironically, as we are seeking atonement for our sins of the year, we continue to have sinful thoughts crossing our minds, and these must be atoned for as well. This is why there are two additional sin offerings later on in the day of Yom HaKippurim.

Although we stated that the priests must atone for their own Temple Service infractions through a distinct sacrifice, nonetheless, we are all one people. This is demonstrated by the command for the mixing of the blood of both offerings. The priests' animal blood and that of the goat of the people are intermingled as one.

Returning to the idea that man cannot escape his instinctual drives, no matter how far he progresses in his perfection, we have the Scapegoat, the *Sahir LeAzazel*. The High Priest makes a confession of the sins of the people and the Torah euphemistically states that the animal "carries off" our sins to the desert, where this Scapegoat is delivered to its certain death as it is dismembered upon its fall on Mount Azazel's razor sharp vertical slopes.

Through this service, we attain recognition that man's primitive, unexamined and inadvertent emotions will lead him to a most certain, spiritual death.