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In Memory of Rabbi Abraham Leibtag
Shiurim in Chumash & Navi by Menachem Leibtag

YOM KIPPUR – The Biblical Meaning of “kippurim”

Is the 'Day of ATONEMENT' a precise translation for YOM KIPPUR? In English, the word 'atonement' implies amends for a certain wrongdoing. In this sense, the 'Day of Atonement' implies expiation for transgressions that may have been committed over the course of the previous year. However, in Chumash we find numerous instances in which the word "kippurim" is used in a very different context.

In the following shiur, we examine the Torah's use of the word "kapara" in various contexts, in order to arrive at a deeper understanding of its meaning in relation to Yom Kippur.

THE SHORESH K.P.R. --- A PROTECTIVE COATING!

We begin our shiur by examining the Torah's very first use of the shoresh k.p.r. [chaf peyh reish] - as found in Parshat Noach:

"And God said to Noach: Make an ARK out of gopher wood... -V'CHAFARTA alav - and you shall COAT IT from within in and from without with - KOFER - pitch (a PROTECTIVE COATING)." (see Breishit 6:14)

To protect ark from the mighty waters of the flood, Noach is commanded to coat the gopher wood with a protective covering. To describe this 'coating procedure', the Torah uses the verb "v'chafarta" and the noun "kofer"! Note how both words stem from the same "shoresh" [root] of "k.p.r.".

Hence, the very first usage of "k.p.r." already indicates that this shoresh relates to some sort of a 'protective covering'.

*** A PROTECTION GIFT**

Later on in Sefer Breishit (in Parshat Va'yishlach), when Yaakov Avinu sends a gift to appease his brother Esav, the Torah uses this same shoresh ["k.p.r."] to describe yet another form of protection. Review Breishit 32:20-21, noting how Yaakov explains the reason for sending this gift:

"Maybe, - A'CHA'PRA pa'nav - I can APPEASE him - with this gift that I am sending..." (Br. 32:21)

In this narrative, Yaakov is not asking Esav for forgiveness; rather he hopes that this gift will deter Esav from attacking him. One could suggest that this gift is intended to PROTECT Yaakov from Esav's anger.

*** A COVERING OF THE GROUND**

In Sefer Shmot, the Torah employs the shoresh "k.p.r." to describe the manner in which the 'manna' covered the ground:

"And behold it was on the face of the wilderness thin and flaky - K'FOR - like 'frost' on the land." (Shmot 16:14)

Even though the precise Biblical meaning of "kfor" is not quite clear, it undoubtedly relates to some type of covering, such as the frost which covers the ground. [See also Tehilim 147:16 - "kfor k'efer y'fazer" (from daily davening).]

*** PROTECTION MONEY**

In Parshat Mishpatim (see Shmot 21:30), the word "kofer" is used to describe a payment which can be made in lieu of punishment. This payment can be understood as PROTECTION from the actual punishment that is due.

Similarly, in Bamidbar 35:31 we find the prohibition of accepting "kofer nefesh" - payment in lieu of capital punishment. In essence, this 'ransom money' [if accepted] would have served as 'protection' from the death penalty.

SHORESH K.P.R. AND THE MISHKAN

Later on in Sefer Shmot (in Parshiot Trumah/Tzaveh), in relation to the vessels of the Mishkan and its dedication ceremony; we find several additional words that stem from this same shoresh - "k.p.r." .

We begin our study with the word "kaporet", for this vessel is not only located in the "kodesh kedoshim" [holy of holies], but it also later becomes the focal point of the Yom Kippur "avoda" ritual. [See Vayikra 16:13-16!]

*** THE KA'PORET**

Recall that the "aron" (the holy ark) was an open, gold-plated wooden box that contained the LUCHOT (see Shmot 25:10-11 & 25:21). To cover this "aron" [and as we will suggest - to 'protect' it], Moshe is commanded to make a KAPORET (see 25:17-22). But this KAPORET (again note shoresh k.p.r.) was not merely a lid - rather it was an elaborate golden cover with two "keruvim" [cherubs] standing upon it.

If the purpose of this "kaporet" was simply to cover the "aron" - then it should have been called a "michseh" - as the Torah uses that word to describe the cover of Noah's ark in Breishit 8:13 and the cover for the Mishkan in Shmot 26:14. The very fact that the Torah refers to this cover as a KAPORET (shoresh k.p.r.) already suggests that there may be something 'protective' about it.

However, the placement specifically of "keruvim" on the kaporet - provides us with an excellent proof as to the 'protective' nature of this covering. To understand why, recall that first (and only other) time that we find "keruvim" in Chumash was in regard to the "keruvim" whose purpose was to PROTECT the path to Gan Eden (see Breishit 3:24). Just as those "keruvim" protect the path to the "etz ha'chayim", the "keruvim" on the kaporet serve to protect the "luchot".

[See Mishlei 3:18! Recall as well our shiur on Parshat Nitza'avim where we used this parallel to explain how the Mishkan, and possibly the entire land of Israel become a 'Gan Eden' type environment, where God's Presence becomes more intense.]

Hence we conclude that its very name - the "kaporet" - relates to the fact that it serves as a protective cover for the "aron"!

[Note also that the PA'ROCHET (a related shoresh p.r.k) - the curtain which protects the "kodesh ha'kadoshim" - is also embroidered with "keruvim" (see Shmot 26:31). Symbolically, they also stand guard, protecting the "kodesh kedoshim".]

KIPPURIM & THE SEVEN DAY MILUIM CEREMONY

The first use of the actual word "kippurim" itself is found in the commandment to perform a seven day dedication ceremony for the Mishkan (better known as the MILUIM).

On each of those seven days, God instructs Moshe to offer a special korban "chatat", whose blood was sprinkled on the "mizbayach" (see Shmot 29:1,12) - yet the purpose for this offering remains unclear. Note however, the concluding verses of that commandment, paying attention to how the Torah summarizes this daily offering, while referring to this entire procedure as "kippurim" :

"And each day [of the MILUIM] you shall bring a PAR CHATAT for the KIPPURIM... (Shmot 29:36)

In that same description, we find that the "kohanim" also required KAPARA during this seven day ceremony - for the Torah uses the word "kapara" to describe the process of sprinkling the blood of the "ayil" offering on their earlobes, thumbs, and toes (see Shmot 29:1,19-21). Note how the Torah refers to this procedure is referred to as KAPARA:

"This [meat of the korban] shall be eaten only by [the kohanim] - asher KUPAR bahen - who had KAPARA from them [from the blood of this animal]..." (see Shmot 29:33)

[See also parallel account in Vayikra 8:1-36, noting 8:34]

Thus we find that the primary purpose of the seven day MILUIM ceremony was to perform KAPARA on the MIZBAYACH and on the KOHANIM.

But what was the purpose of this "kapara"? Was it necessary for the atonement of any specific sin?

Some commentators suggest that the kohanim require "kapara" as atonement for "chet ha'egel" (the sin of the Golden Calf see Rashi 29:1). However, that interpretation would force us to accept the opinion that the commandment to build the Mishkan (in Teruma/Tezave) was given after the events of "chet ha'egel" (and hence not in chronological order). Yet that very topic is a major controversy among commentators.

Furthermore, even if we do accept that opinion, surely the "mizbayach" did nothing wrong. Why then would it require a KIPPURIM procedure?

Based on our understanding of the shoresh k.p.r. above, one could suggest an alternate reason for this "kapara" procedure - possibly, both the "mizbayach" and the kohanim require some sort of special 'protection'!

But what would they need protection from?

PROTECTION FROM THE SHCHINA

Recall from our shiurim on Sefer Shmot that the primary purpose of the Mishkan was to create a site where the SHCHINA [God's Divine Presence] could dwell:

"And they shall make for Me a sanctuary - v'SHACHANTI b'tocham"- that I may dwell among them." (Shmot 25:8)

[See also Shmot 29:45-46]

Furthermore, the MISHKAN was supposed to create an environment similar to MA'AMAD HAR SINAI (see Ramban on Shmot 25:2) - and hence perpetuate that event.

However, as was the case at Har Sinai, the presence of the SHCHINA carried its consequences. As we saw in our study of the 'Ten Commandments' - the very presence of God's SHCHINA creates an environment where we find immediate and severe punishment for any transgression.

[For example, on the very next day, Nadav and Avihu made one small mistake and they received immediate punishment! See also earlier shiur in regard to the 13 midot ha'rachamim.]

One could suggest that it is specifically because the Mishkan will be the site of God's SHCHINA, both the "kohanim" and the "mizbayach" will require PROTECTION - and hence "kapara". The "kohanim" - for they will need to officiate in the Mishkan; and the "mizbayach" - for it is designated to become the site where God's "korbanot" will be consumed (see Vayikra 9:24).

Thus, this entire KIPPURIM ceremony could be understood as symbolic, for it reflects the nature of the Divine encounter which takes place in the Mishkan. Performing this procedure teaches Bnei Yisrael that encountering the SHCHINA requires not only preparation and readiness, but also protection from its consequences.

To support this interpretation, let's examine yet another vessel in the Mishkan that requires yearly "kapara" - the "mizbach ha'ketoret"!

THE MIZBACH KETORET

The word KIPPURIM is mentioned once again at the end of Parshat Tzaveh, when the MIZBACH KETORET [the incense alter] is first introduced (see Shmot 30:1-10). Here, to our surprise, we find the first reference in Chumash to the day of YOM KIPPUR itself!:

"v'CHI'PER Aharon al kar'no'tav - Aharon must KAPARA [sprinkle blood] on its corners ONCE A YEAR from the blood of the CHATAT HA'KIPURIM. Once a year y'CHA'PER a'lav - he must do KAPARA on it..." (Shmot 30:10)

Even though the Torah (here) only tells us that this special procedure must be performed once a year, later on, in Parshat

Acharei Mot (see Vayikra 16:1-34) we find the complete details of this CHATAT HA'KIPURIM, including the precise date when this procedure must be performed - i.e. the tenth day of the SEVENTH month. [See also Bamidbar 29:11.]

In our study of Parshiot Trumah/Tzaveh, we noted two aspects are unique to this MIZBACH KETORET:

- 1) It is the only vessel which requires this special CHATAT KIPPURIM.

[Note: In Acharei Mot we see that also the PAROCHET and KAPORET need to be sprinkled with the blood of the CHATAT HA'KIPURIM, however it is not mentioned in Sefer Shmot.]

- 2) It is LEFT OUT of the primary presentation of the Mishkan and its vessels.

[Scan Shmot chapters 25->29/ note that 25:8 and 29:44 form 'bookends' which include almost all the vessels of the Mishkan, except for the mizbach ktoret which is left out until the very end (30:1-10/ note that this ends the "dibur" which began in 25:1). See previous shiur on Parshat Tzaveh.]

Once again, the meaning of the shoresh k.p.r. as protection can help us understand why. The ANAN KTORET (cloud of smoke created when burning the ktoret) in the Ohel Moed acts as a BUFFER between the SHCHINA in the Kodesh Kadoshim and the MIZBAYACH in the AZARA (courtyard), thus protecting Bnei Yisrael. [Note parallel to the ANAN on Har Sinai. Note "vayered Hashem b'ANAN..." (see Shmot 34:5)]

Because the MIZBACH KETORET protects Bnei Yisrael each day when the ktoret is offered, it requires a yearly CHATAT HA'KIPURIM!

YOM HA'SHMINI - THE 8th Day DEDICATION CEREMONY

An additional link between Yom Kippur and our interpretation of "kapara" can be found by examining the korbanot of the YOM HA'SHMINI ceremony (the eighth day/ read Vayikra 9:1-24), the first day in which the MISHKAN began to function.

Once again, special korbanot are offered for the purpose of "kapara". From the psukim describing these korbanot, one could suggest that this KAPARA is necessary to protect Bnei Yisrael from the SHCHINA which is to appear on this day:

"This is the procedure which you must do, and God's glory (KVOD HASHEM) will appear unto you... Go near the mizbayach and offer you chatat and olah - v'CHA'PER - on your behalf and on the behalf of the people..." (9:6-7)

It should come as no surprise that the korbanot offered at that inauguration ceremony are almost identical to the korbanot offered yearly on YOM KIPPUR. In each ceremony, there is a special chatat & olah offered both by AHARON and by the PEOPLE. The following table summarizes this parallel between Vayikra 9:1-3 and 16:1-5:

YOM HA'SHMINI YOM KIPPUR NOTE

AHARON

Chatat	Egel*	Par	[An EGEL is a baby PAR]
Olah	Ayil	Ayil	

AM YISRAEL

Chatat	Seir	Seir
Olah	Egel + Keves	Ayil [A Keves is baby Ayil]

In each case Aharon offers a PAR CHATAT and AYIL OLAH (an EGEL is simply a baby PAR/ this change most probably relates to chet ha'egel). Likewise, Am Yisrael offers a SEIR CHATAT and AYIL OLAH (a keves is a baby ayil). Despite these minor differences, they are basically the same type of korban.

[See article by Rav Yoel Bin Nun in Megadim Vol. #8]

YOM KIPPUR - A YEARLY "YOM HA'SHMINI"

The above parallel indicates that Yom Kippur can be considered as a 'yearly repetition of the korbanot of the Mishkan's inauguration ceremony on YOM HA'SHMINI.

This parallel underscores the very nature of YOM KIPPUR. It suggests that the primary purpose of the "avodat Kohen Gadol" is to PREPARE the Mikdash for the FORTHCOMING year, just as the korbanot of YOM HA'SHMINI prepared the Mishkan for its original use.

Likewise, the "kapara" can be understood in a similar fashion. Once a year, it is necessary to perform a procedure that will PROTECT Am Yisrael from the consequences of HITGALUT SHCHINA. This KAPARA process, which enables Bnei Yisrael's encounter with the SHCHINA in the MISHKAN, must be 'renewed' once a year.

In fact, Parshat Acharei Mot may allude to this very concept in the pasuk which completes the commandment to sprinkle the blood on the KAPORET:

"v'CHI'PER - And he [the kohen] shall do KAPARA [sprinkling the blood] on the KODESH, from the uncleanness of Bnei Yisrael... and thus he must do to the Ohel Moed - ha'SHOCHEN iy'tam - He who dwells among them, EVEN WHILE THEY ARE 'TAMEY' [spiritually unclean]..." (Vayikra 16:16)

EVEN THOUGH Am Yisrael may become TAMEY (due to their sins), the SHCHINAH can remain in their midst! However, Bnei Yisrael still require KAPARA - to PROTECT them from the SHCHINA and its consequences.

[Note: See Vayikra 18:24-27 in regard to the relationship between TUMAH & sin.]

ATONEMENT or PROTECTION

In Sefer Shmot we find an additional use of the shoresh k.p.r. when Moshe ascends Har Sinai to ask God to forgive Bnei Yisrael for their sin at chet ha'egel:

"And Moshe told the people, you have committed a terrible sin, and now I will go up to God, possibly - A'CHAPRA [I can achieve KAPARA] - for your sins." (Shmot 32:30)

When reading this pasuk, we usually understand A'CHAPRA as asking for forgiveness. However, one could understand that Moshe is asking God to PROTECT Bnei Yisrael from the punishment which they deserve. Undoubtedly, this protection from punishment leads to ultimate forgiveness. This explains why later in Chumash, the word "chapara" may actually imply forgiveness.

The classic example is found in Parshat Vayikra in relation to the korban CHATAT & ASHAM (4:1-5:26). Note that each type of korban concludes with the phrase:

"v'CHI'PER alav ha'Kohen, v'NIS'LACH lo..."

(see Vayikra 4:20,26,31,35; 5:10,13,18,26)

Based on our understanding of k.p.r. one could suggest that the sprinkling of the blood (the technical "kapara") by the kohen PROTECTS the owner of the korban from his due punishment for his transgression (the conceptual "kapara"). Then - v'NISLACH lo - God forgives him for that sin. Thus, the KAPARA 'process' enables the SLICHA 'effect'.

WHY ON THE 10th of TISHREI

Although we have explained the necessity of offering a yearly CHATAT KIPPURIM in the Mishkan, we have not explained why it must be performed on the tenth of Tishrei. In fact, based on the parallel to YOM HA'SHMINI, the first of Nisan would seem to be a more logical date!

Most probably this date was chosen for a historical reason. On the tenth of Tishrei, Bnei Yisrael received the SECOND LUCHOT and were thus forgiven for chet ha'egel. Due to God's attributes of Mercy - the 13 MIDOT HA'RACHAMIM, God agreed to allow His SHCHINA to remain with Am Yisrael, EVEN

THOUGH they may not be worthy. [See Shmot 34:9, and shiur on the 13 MIDOT.]

On the anniversary of this event, the day on which Bnei Yisrael received the Torah at the level which they can maintain, we re-enact Ma'amad Har Sinai for it is a day of HITGALUT SHCHINA. Just like Moshe Rabeinu, we can neither eat nor drink (Dvarim 9:9), nor wear shoes (see Shmot 3:5). In this manner, we also prepare ourselves for this awesome day (See Yoma 2a).

However, specifically BECAUSE this is a day of HITGALUT, Bnei Yisrael require PROTECTION from the SHCHINA. Therefore, the CHATAT HA'KIPPURIM must be offered, for we are privy to a relationship which we may not deserve. It is this HITGALUT which enables the forgiveness of our sins on this day, just as it enabled the forgiveness of chet ha'egel several thousand years ago.

YOM KIPPUR

True atonement is accomplished only by teshuva. However, YOM KIPPUR allows for the special relationship between God and Am Yisrael to continue. By understanding the protective nature of the AVODAT YOM KIPPUR by the Kohen Gadol, we can better appreciate God's CHESED (kindness) in allowing us this special relationship, even though we may not deserve it. That understanding should encourage us not only to take advantage of the opportunity for atonement on this special day, but also to grasp any opportunity for spiritual growth during the course of the year to come.

"Yhi ratzon" that God should enact His MIDOT HA'RACHAMIM on this Yom Kippur, and enable us to meet the many challenges that face our Nation this coming year.

gemar chatima tova,
menachem

FOR FURTHER IYUN

A. Note that the parsha describing YOM KIPPUR in Chumash is presented in relation to the death of Nadav an Avihu which took place during that inauguration ceremony on YOM HA'SHMINI/ See 10:1-4, and relate to 16:1.

1. Based on the above shiur, why do you think Nadav and Avihu thought it necessary to offer specifically ktoret, and specifically when they saw HITGALUT?
2. Were they wrong? If not, why were they punished?
3. Is there any other case in Chumash where ktoret is offered to protect Bnei Yisrael from punishment?

B. Note that on Yom HaShmini, also a Korban Shlamim was offered (see Vayikra 9:3-4)

1. Why is this korban not offered on Yom Kippur?
2. Can you relate this question to why the tzibur brings a korban shlamim davka, and only, on Shavuot (see shtei ha'lechem in Parshat Emor /see also previous shiur on Shavuot!)

C. Based on our shiur on Rosh Hashana, one could suggest an additional reason why this procedure is necessary in the SEVENTH month. After we request that God show His Providence over us on Rosh Hashana. If we ask for His special HASHGACHA on the land and the rainfall, we must be ready for its consequences.

1. Relate this to last week's shiur on Rosh Hashana and the nature of all CHAGEI TISHREI.

D. Sefer Shmot never states the specific day in which the SECOND LUCHOT were given. Read Devarim 9:8-10:11 to understand how Chazal reach the conclusion that it took place on 10 Tishrei.