

“PREPARATIONS FOR THE DAY OF ATONEMENT”

The Temple Institute

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The High Priest Bears Full Responsibility for the Service

As opposed to other ceremonies throughout the year, all of the sacred tasks performed on Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement - tasks which bring about atonement for Israel - must be done exclusively by the High Priest himself. As the Bible states a number of times in the book of Leviticus, chapter 16: "and he shall make atonement for himself and for his household;" "until he comes out, and have made atonement for himself, and for his household, and for all the congregation of Israel," etc. He alone is responsible for every aspect of the Divine service on this most holy and awesome day: a total of fifteen separate sacrifices which are offered, as well as the menorah, incense, and other services.

INTENSE PRACTICE, REVIEW AND STUDY

Throughout that week, the High Priest diligently studies the laws relating to the tasks which he must undertake on the upcoming sacred day, and he also conducts certain aspects of the daily service himself (even though it is not his exclusive duty) in order to familiarize himself with these actions. For example, during these days he himself tosses the blood of the daily sacrifice onto the altar in the morning and evenings; he offers up the incense on the golden incense altar; he attends to the service of the menorah (cleaning the used oil and wicks, adjusting new wicks and adding the proper measure of oil to each flame).

This is a period of intense preparation and review. Each day, the elders of the sanhedrin (the supreme rabbinical court) read aloud before him from the biblical portion that relates to the service (Lev. 16).

SEPARATION SEVEN DAYS IN ADVANCE

There is much to be done in order to prepare the High Priest for this momentous and fateful day. Just as the first High Priest, Aaron, separated himself away from others during the seven days of inauguration ("And do not leave the entrance of the Communion Tent for seven days, until your period of inauguration is complete" - Lev. 8:33), so too the High Priest leaves his own home and family a full week before the advent of Yom Kippur, and withdraws to his chamber in the Holy Temple.

Meanwhile, at the same time another priest is designated as the High Priest's replacement, in the event that he inadvertently becomes defiled and cannot purify himself in time to conduct the service. An extra High Priest's uniform (the "golden garments") was prepared according for this substitute as well, according to his size and measurements.

"READ ALOUD YOURSELF"

The elders would declare: "Master! High Priest! Please read aloud likewise yourself; perhaps there is something you have forgotten, or some detail you have not learned." This is because one who reads aloud himself is less prone to forget than someone who has merely heard the words from another's lips, and the purpose of this entire process was for the High Priest to be absolutely familiar with these details.

Additionally, the exhortation to "read aloud yourself" was necessary during part of the Second Temple era. For whereas the High Priests of the First Temple were chosen for their wisdom and good standing, this was not always the case during the days of the Second Temple. Many High Priests of that period were corrupt individuals who bought their positions through wealth and

influence with the foreign government; some of these men were far from being proper scholars. Thus the elders had grounds to suspect that they were less than adequately familiar with the holy texts and principles of worship

THE EVE OF THE DAY OF ATONEMENT - THE CLIMAX DRAWS NEAR

Yom Kippur is approaching, and tension mounts as all of Israel anticipates the arrival of the great day when atonement is granted for sin and the true nature of man's relationship with his Creator is revealed.

All eyes are turned to the High Priest, who, on that holiest day of the year, will enter into the holiest place on earth - the Holy of Holies - to make atonement for Israel and seek to rectify the imbalances in her spiritual connection to her Father in heaven.

On the morning preceding the Day of Atonement, the High Priest stands in the Eastern Gate. There, cows, rams and sheep are marched before him, and he watches them intently while reviewing in his mind all of the precepts he has learned regarding the order of their sacrifice, and other facets of the service he will be conducting tomorrow

THE ELDERS OF THE PRIESTHOOD

Until today, the High Priest had been under the supervision of the court elders, who daily read aloud in his presence. Now, on the eve of the holy day, these sages present him to the elders of the priesthood, in order for him to receive instruction in the incense service - a most difficult task. He will need to learn from the benefit of their experience, in order to execute this important duty properly. He is escorted by the elders of the Sanhedrin to the Chamber of Avtinas, where the incense is prepared by the priestly Avtinas family (according to their secret tradition). It is here that he will receive his instruction in the incense service from the senior priests.#

AN OATH BEFORE PARTING

Before the members of the Sanhedrin relinquish the High Priest from their custody, a most poignant exchange takes place between them and their charge: they require that he swear he is not a member of the sect of Sadducees, and does not subscribe to [Sadducean](#) belief.

THE IMMERSION OF THE HIGH PRIEST

On the morning of Yom Kippur, the High Priest ascends the stairway above the Water Gate, in order to perform his first of five required immersions into the ritual bath on Yom Kippur.

The remaining four immersions that take place during the day are done in a ritual bath atop the Parvha Chamber. A white lined sheet is held up separating the High Priest from the onlookers. This is done as a reminder to all onlookers that the High Priest will administer the Atonement service wearing white garments only.

THE HIGH PRIEST SANCTIFIES HIS HANDS AND FEET

Before entering the ritual bath, the High Priest first sanctifies his hands and feet, pouring water on them from a golden vessel. Upon emerging from the ritual bath, he would again sanctify his hands and feet in the same manner.

SANCTIFYING THE HANDS AND FEET

On all other days of the year, the High Priest would sanctify his hands and feet using a copper vessel. Only on Yom Kippur would he use a gold vessel for this purpose

THE DAILY INCENSE OFFERING

On Yom Kippur The High Priest would make three separate offerings of incense. The first two offerings were done upon the golden incense altar located in the Kodesh, (the Sanctuary). Facing north, the High Priest pours the incense onto the altar, as the column of smoke rises.

THE COURTYARD FILLS WITH PEOPLE

At dawn the gates are opened, and the people begin to pour in.

THE YOM KIPPUR OFFERINGS

"You shall present a burnt offering for an appeasing fragrance to G-d: one young bull, one ram, and seven yearling sheep, making sure that all are devoid of blemish... There shall also be one goat for a sin offering..." (Numbers 29:11)

THE YOM KIPPUR SERVICE

"And God spoke to Moses after the death of Aaron's two sons, who brought an (unauthorized) offering before the Lord and died. And God said to Moses: Speak to your brother Aaron, and let him not enter the holy place that is beyond the partition concealing the ark at any time, so that he may not die, since I appear over the ark cover in a cloud."

"Only thusly shall Aaron enter into the holy place: with a young bullock for a sin offering, and a ram for a burnt offering. He shall put on the sanctified white linen tunic, and have linen pants on his flesh. He shall gird himself with a linen sash, and bind his head with a linen turban. These are sacred vestments; before putting them on, he must immerse himself. And he shall take from the congregation of the children of Israel two goats for a sin offering, and one ram for a burnt offering. And Aaron shall offer the bullock of the sin offering which is for himself, and he shall make atonement for himself and for his family..." (Leviticus 16)

THE HIGH PRIEST'S ORAL CONFESSION

The High Priest drew near to the animal. Facing the sanctuary, he placed his two hands on the bullock's head, between its horns, and confessed. This was in keeping the directives of the verse (ibid.): "And Aaron shall offer the bullock of the sin offering which is for himself, and he shall make atonement for himself and for his family..." The sages of Israel received a tradition that these words refer to oral confession.

And this was the wording of the High Priest's confession:

"I beseech You, O Lord;
I have sinned, rebelled, and transgressed against You,
I, and my household;
I beseech You, O Lord,
Grant atonement for the sins,
and for the iniquities and transgressions
which I have committed against You,
I, and my household.
As it is written in the Torah
of Your servant, Moses:
'For on this day
atonement shall be made for you,
to purify you from all your sins
- before the Lord you shall be purified'."

THE INEFFABLE NAME OF G-D

During these prayers on this awesome day, the High Priest would utter the Ineffable Name of G-d known as the Tetragrammaton. In Hebrew, this is known as G-d's "proper name" (Shem HaMeforash) and denotes the Holy One as the ultimate source of all existence. This most holy name is ordinarily not pronounced as it is written, and is not used at all outside of the Holy Temple. Even in the Temple it is used infrequently. During the course of the services on the Day of Atonement, the High Priest will have occasion to utter it 10 times.

THE PEOPLE'S RESPONSE

In this confession, the High Priest pronounces this name 3 times. When the congregation who are assembled in the court hear the holy name of G-d from the lips of the High Priest, they collectively respond "Blessed be the Name of His glorious kingdom, for ever and ever," and prostrate themselves on the ground.

This response is based on the verse in Moses' song, (Deut. 32:3), "When I call upon the name of the Lord, give greatness to our G-d." The sages explain this to mean that Moses told Israel, "Whenever I mention the Holy One's name, you should ascribe greatness to our G-d."

THE SCAPEGOAT

Though all of the moving service on the Day of Atonement is fraught with poignancy, tense anticipation and deep personal stirrings of repentance, surely one of the most dramatic moments of the day is the lottery which the High Priest conducts... for this is the process that will determine the scapegoat, which will be cast off as an atonement for Israel's sins.

After confessing over his bullock, the High Priest walks to the eastern section of the court, facing the entrance. He is accompanied by two men: at his right, the "assistant," who is actually none other than the replacement priest who was designated as a stand-in for the High Priest, should he be rendered unfit. At his left, the head of the family clan who is responsible for the service in the Temple on that day of the week.

THE TWO GOATS AND THE LOTTERY BOX

There in the eastern sector of the court, to the north of the altar, stand two goats in preparation for the lottery:

"And he shall take from the congregation of the children of Israel two goats for a sin offering, and one ram for a burnt offering... and he shall take the two goats, and present them before the Lord at the door of the Tent of Meeting. And Aaron shall cast lots upon the two goats; one lot for the Lord, and the other lot for Azazel..." (Lev. 16)

A wooden lottery box was kept there as well, and within it were the two lots, in accordance with the verses above. This box was just large enough to hold the two lots, and for the priest to put both his hands inside. On one lot the two Hebrew words meaning "For the Lord" were written, and the other was inscribed with single word "For Azazel."

Azazel is actually the name of a place; it was to this location that the scapegoat was sent. Azazel was a high, rocky precipice in the Judean desert. The goat was sent off this point to its death.

These lots were originally made of wood. This was probably what we know today as boxwood; some have written that a wood resembling mahogany was used. Later, the lots were prepared from gold by the High Priest, Yehoshua ben Gamla, during his term of office. He was praised by the sages for this initiative, which was done to increase the honor of the holy day.

DRAWING THE LOTS

Flanked by the two men on either side of him, the High Priest thrusts his hands into the lottery box and stirs the two lots within, in order to ascertain that he has no notion of which is inscribed "For the Lord." It was considered an auspicious sign from Heaven if that lot were to drawn by his right hand; thus he mixes the lots about so that he will not recognize them, and thereby raise that lot in his right hand. Tradition does in fact record that for a period of many years, it actually transpired that the High Priest's right hand did arbitrarily come up holding the lot marked "For the Lord." This phenomena ceased a number of years before the Temple's destruction.

Other opinions maintain that he drew the lots very quickly from their box, demonstrating that he acts without forethought or hesitation as to which lot he is raising.

In this manner, the High Priest raised up the two lots from the box, one in his right hand and one in his left. Only once he held them up did he learn which hand held each lot:

"RAISE UP YOUR RIGHT HAND!"

If his right hand held the lot of "For the Lord," the assistant would declare "Master! High Priest! Raise up your right hand!" And hearing this cry, all those assembled would receive the tiding, and know that this favorable sign has indeed transpired.

But if his left hand was seen to contain this lot, the head of the family clan cried out "Master! High Priest! Raise up your left hand!" And thus the deed would be known.

THE FATEFUL LOTTERY

Great anticipation and feelings of repentance mark the entire Yom Kippur service. One of the most dramatic moments is the lottery selecting the scapegoat which acts as an atonement for Israel's sins. This High Priest is seen above, flanked by the Deputy High Priest on his right, and the head of the family on duty, on his left.

PLACING THE LOTS

The High Priest then places these lots upon the heads of the goats, between their horns: that which he raised up in his right hand is placed upon the animal to his right, and of the left, to his left. When placing the lot of "For the Lord" upon the sacrifice, he recites aloud the words "For the Lord, a sin offering," once again pronouncing the holy Ineffable Name of God. All the priests and Israelites present who hear this name repeat the verse "Blessed is the name...," as above.

A "TONGUE OF CRIMSON WOOL"

After placing the lots upon the goats, the High Priest ties a length of crimson-dyed wool between the horns of the scapegoat, and stands the goat facing the Temple's eastern gate, through which it will be led off. He also ties a similar length of wool around the neck of the goat which will be sacrificed. This elongated skein of wool is called a "tongue" in the language of the Mishna, on account of its shape. They were tied around the goats in order to prevent them from being mixed up with other animals, and each was tied in a distinctive manner so that they should not be confused with each other.

THE MIRACLE OF THE CRIMSON WOOL

These lengths of wool were specifically dyed crimson on account of the verse which reads, "Though your sins are as scarlet, they shall whiten as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be white as wool" (Isaiah 1:18). It is related that a great miracle occurred concerning this crimson-colored wool: For in addition to the piece which was tied to the scapegoat, a similar length was tied to the entrance of the Sanctuary where all could behold it, high up like a banner. The sage Rabbi Yishmael taught (Yoma 6, 8) that when the scapegoat reached its destination in the desert, this wool miraculously turned white before the eyes of all Israel, in keeping with the words of the prophet - and thus providing a Heavenly sign that the sins of the people had been atoned for.

The two goats thus prepared, the High Priest will now leave them be and proceed with other aspects of this singular day's ceremonies. He will return to the sacrifice and the Azazel only later, after the services of the bullock and the incense are completed. All the various components and aspects of the Yom Kippur service must be done according to a specific order.

THE SECOND ORAL CONFESSION

Now the High Priest once again draws near to his own offering, the bullock. At this time he will again confess over the animal; the first time he did this, his confession was on behalf of himself and his family. This time he confesses on behalf of all his fellow priests. Once again he places his hands on the animal's head, between its horns, and pronouncing the Ineffable Name he recites his plea:

"I beseech You, O Lord; I have sinned, rebelled, and transgressed against You, I and my household, And the sons of Aaron, Your holy people; I beseech You, O Lord, Grant atonement for the sins, and for the iniquities and transgressions which I have committed against You, I and my household, And the sons of Aaron Your holy people - . As it is written in the Torah of Your servant, Moses: 'For on this day atonement shall be made for you, to purify you from all your sins - before the Lord you shall be purified'."

"BLESSED BE THE NAME OF HIS GLORIOUS KINGDOM, FOR EVER AND EVER."

As above, the congregation responds with the words "Blessed be the Name of His glorious kingdom, for ever and ever."

The Talmud explains that first the High Priest atones for his own sins and those of his family, and only afterwards does he make atonement for his colleagues... for it is better for an innocent man to make rectification for those who are liable.

THE BULLOCK IS SLAUGHTERED

At the conclusion of his second confession, the High Priest slaughters the bullock. He receives the offering's blood in the mizrak vessel, and then gives this vessel to another priest. The former immediately goes to prepare for the incense service, and the latter must stand outside the entrance to the Sanctuary and hold this vessel, continuously moving it with a stirring motion. This is done in order to prevent its contents from beginning to harden - since this would invalidate it to be dashed upon the altar.

The second priest, thus occupied with the mizrak, waits in this spot for the return of the High Priest, who will bring the mizrak into the Sanctuary. In the meantime, the High Priest ascends to the top of the altar in the court, carrying a golden shovel equipped with a specially long handle - designed to aid him in performing the particularly difficult movements he will require to conduct the incense service alone on this holy day.

COALS FOR THE INCENSE

Atop the altar, the High Priest uses the shovel to stir the fire, and he gathers some of the burning coals from the midst of the fire into this vessel. When he descends the ramp, he will return to where the priest waits with the mizrak, and he will place the shovel and its coals on the floor, next to where his colleague stands.

THE HIGH PRIEST'S STEPS BEAR WITNESS TO THE GREATNESS OF THE DAY

Every aspect of the Divine service on this awesome day reflected the special status and sanctity which is inseparable from the very nature of the day itself; a day of sublime communion with the Creator; a day of resolve and repentance; a day of both great inner peace and national unity.

Thus every movement made during the service and literally every step taken by the High Priest was imbued with great significance and meaning. Even his very steps along the altar ramp marked the special character of the moment and rang out the words "This is the Day of Atonement!" For all year long, the priests would go to and fro the altar by walking along the periphery of the ramp; ascending along the eastern side and descending on the west. Their strong sense of reverence and awe for the Holy One had a humbling effect on their number, and they would have considered it a brazen act to walk right up the center of the ramp.

Yet today, on Yom Kippur, the High Priest (accompanied by the assistant, on his right side) walks right along the middle of the ramp. The symbolism of this action is clear: Today, let all take note of Israel's honor, and her fondness in the Holy One's eyes. So much does He cherish Israel, that today - on this day when all her sins are forgiven - Israel can behave like a child in her father's house, openly declaring their love and affection.

THE INCENSE SERVICE

"He shall take a shovelful of burning coals from the altar that is before the Lord, and a double handful of finely ground incense, and he will bring them (into the inner sanctuary) beyond the curtain" (Lev. 16:12).

A "DOUBLE HANDFUL"

After having placed the shovelful of burning coals on the floor near the Sanctuary, other priests now bring their senior the two other items he will use to conduct the incense service:

a large golden spoon (empty) which was brought from the Chamber of Vessels, and a golden shovel, filled with finely ground incense, brought from the Chamber of the Avtinas Family where the incense is prepared.

From the verse above, the sages deduced that the High Priest must remove the incense from the shovel directly into his two palms, without the aid of a vessel; this is the Bible's requirement - "a double handful of finely ground incense." Thus, there was no set measurement of how much incense was to be brought. It was literally the amount which fitted into each High Priest's palms; the amount therefore differed for each man depending on the size of his hands.

ENTERING INTO THE SANCTUARY

He then places the incense in his hands into the golden spoon and holds it with his left hand. In his right hand, he picks up the shovelful of burning coals from the floor before him. In this manner, carrying the spoonful of incense and the shovel of coals, he enters into the Sanctuary until he comes to the two curtains which separate between the Holy (the Sanctuary, which housed the menorah, table and incense altar) and the Holy of Holies.

In the First Temple, a wall the thickness of one amah (app. 48 or 60 centimeters) separated between these two areas. However, in the Second Temple the two curtains once again formed this distinction, as in the days of the Tabernacle. The two curtains themselves were separated by an empty space measuring one amah wide, like that wall which stood in Solomon's Temple.

BETWEEN THE CURTAINS

One end of each of these two curtains was folded over on the outside and pinned up by a golden clasp; the outer curtain was pinned on the southern side, and the inner, on the northern side. Thus an aisle was formed which provided an open passageway between the two curtains. Carrying the implements, the High Priest walked between the curtains until he reached the northern side of the inner curtain - the spot where it was held up.

IN THE HOLY OF HOLIES

Here the High Priest stood at the opening of the Holy of Holies. He now turns and faces the south with his left side along the length of the curtain, so that he may walk to the center of the room to stand in the place known as "between the poles" - between the two poles of the Ark of the Testimony. However, the Holy of Holies was empty... for the Ark of the Testimony did not stand in the Second Temple.

PLACING THE COALS DOWN: FIRST TEMPLE

When the Tabernacle and First Temple stood, the High Priest faced the holy Ark of the Testimony and placed the shovel of coals down, directly between the two poles of the ark.

Placing the Coals Down: Second Temple

But in the face of the ark's absence in the Second Temple era, he would place the shovel down on the foundation stone itself, in the place where the poles would be extending had the ark been there.

THE MOST DIFFICULT TASK OF ALL

Once the High Priest put down the shovel, he must then return the fine incense powder from the spoon and back into his palms - for when he places the incense on the coals, it must be directly from his palms, the "double handful." This was the most difficult task ever done by one person in the Holy Temple; it required great expertise. It would appear to be a nearly impossible feat for someone who had not practiced and been totally prepared. It was done in the following manner: The High Priest takes the spoon full of incense and slowly pulls it with his two thumbs against his arms and body, with the handle resting against him (some maintain that he actually held the top of the handle in his teeth). He balances the body of the spoon itself until it is level with his hands. Then he gently leans the spoon into his palms, turning and rocking it back and forth so that the contents are emptied into his palms.

NOT EVEN ONE GRAIN MAY FALL

As we have described it, this process is difficult enough to accomplish. But what makes the exercise even more formidable - enough to merit the appellation of "the most difficult task of all" - is the requirement that the High Priest must not allow even one tiny grain to fall. The entire contents within the spoon must be completely transferred to his hands, to the very last drop. For if even a negligible measure is missing, then the amount he will be placing on the coals is no longer a double handful, for something fell from his hands. Thus he would not be fulfilling God's requirement.

PLACING THE INCENSE ON THE COALS

From his palms the High Priest places the incense onto the coals in the shovel, on the side of the shovel away from where he is standing, so that he will not be burned as the flames ignite. He stands there and waits momentarily, until the entire chamber is filled with smoke.

The Yom Kippur incense offering completed, he then exits the Holy of Holies with extreme reverence - backwards, entering through the two curtains back into the Sanctuary without once having turned his back on the holy place.

THE HIGH PRIEST'S "SHORT" PRAYER

Standing alone in the Sanctuary, the High Priest has successfully entered and exited the holiest place on earth - the center of creation and of God's glory. He has made atonement for his people in the manner which God has prescribed for this holy day. Thus it would be most natural for him to reflect upon this rarefied moment of Divine communion by offering his own heartfelt prayer.

Yet this prayer, recorded by the Talmud, is remarkably short and concise:

"May it be Your will, Lord our God, that if this coming year be hot, that it also be rainy; and may the sceptre not depart from the house of Judah (see Gen. 49:10); and may Your people Israel not be dependent on each other for their livelihood; and do not pay heed to the prayers of wayfarers (who pray that it should not rain, so that they will not be inconvenienced in their journey)."

A TIME FOR BREVITY

There was good reason for the High Priest's decision not to elongate his prayer at this particular time: many a High Priest was struck down dead while in the Holy of Holies. Although the First Temple stood for 410 years, in all there were only 12 High Priests during that entire period; because they were very righteous, they were blessed with longevity. However the Second Temple, which stood for a total of 420 years, was presided over by more than 300 High Priests. This is because in the spiritual decline of those days, many of these men were corrupted, and bought their office through influence.

Additionally, if he would change any detail of the incense service within the Holy of Holies (as we mentioned with regard to the Sadducees), he would also die. With this in mind, it is understandable that the eyes of all Israel awaited the exit of the High Priest with bated breath. Being aware of his

people's agitation, the High Priest's first concern was that he should not cause them any unnecessary anxiety... and the longer he stayed within, the more Israel's apprehension grew. Thus the High Priest saw fit to forego the opportunity to engage in a long personal prayer, and recited the shorter version so as to exit the Sanctuary with reasonable speed.

EXITING - AND REENTERING

In the next stage of the Yom Kippur service, after the High Priest concluded the incense service, uttered his prayer and exits the Sanctuary, he returns to the priest who is waiting for him outside the entrance. This priest has been waiting here since the bullock was slaughtered, holding the mizrak and moving it about so that its contents will not harden.

The High Priest now receives this vessel from his colleague and returns back into the Holy of Holies a second time, exactly as he did previously. Walking through the two curtains and carrying the vessel holding the blood of his offering, he comes back to spot "between the poles" where he placed the incense on the coals atop the foundation stone.

Sprinkling the Blood of the Bullock

There, he sprinkles in the air with his finger from the contents of the mizrak, towards the spot of the ark-cover. This is as specified by the verse (Lev. 16:14), "He shall take some of the bullock's blood, and with his forefinger he shall sprinkle it above the east side of the ark cover. He shall then sprinkle with his forefinger seven times directly towards the ark cover."

Afterwards he leaves the Holy of Holies (in the same manner we have discussed above), and places the vessel on a golden stand within the Sanctuary.

Sprinkling the Blood of the Bullock (continued)

The verse refers to small drops flung from the tip of the finger. As in the incense service, when the ark was not present the High Priest sprinkled in the direction of the place of the ark. He sprinkles with an upwards motion once...

SPRINKLING THE BLOOD OF THE BULLOCK (CONTINUED)

... followed by seven times down.

Afterwards he leaves the Holy of Holies (in the same manner we have discussed above), and places the vessel on a golden stand within the Sanctuary.

Slaughtering the Goat Designated "For God"

Entering the Holy of Holies Again

Outside in the court, the goat which had been designated as "For God" by the lottery is now brought to the High Priest. He slaughters the animal and gathers its blood into another mizrak vessel.

He then enters into the Holy of Holies for the third time, this time carrying the vessel with the blood of the goat. He enters into the chamber exactly as he did the previous times, and again walks to the same precise spot. Here, "between the poles," he sprinkles from the blood as before and then exits, placing this vessel on a second golden stand pre-positioned within the Sanctuary.

SPRINKLING AGAINST THE CURTAIN

Now the High Priest does not leave the Sanctuary, but takes up the first mizrak, containing the blood of the bullock, from the first stand where he had originally placed it. Facing the curtains that separate between the Holy (where he now stands) and the Holy of Holies, he stands opposite that same spot that he has entered unto three times - "between the poles" of the ark.

This time, he dashes from the blood of the bullock outside the curtain but towards the same spot, in the same manner we have described. Next, he places this mizrak down on its stand, once again

takes up the second vessel containing the blood of the sacrificial goat, and repeats his action against the curtain.

MIXING THE TWO TOGETHER

Finally, while still in the Sanctuary, the High Priest mixes the contents of both vessels together. He pours the mizrak containing the bullock's blood into that of the goat, and then pours from this full vessel back into the empty one (of the bullock) so that they will blend completely together. All this is on account of the verse (Lev. 16:18) "He shall then go out to the altar that is before God and make atonement on it. He shall take some of the bullock's blood and some of the goat's blood, and place the mixture on the horns of the altar all around." We shall now look at the portion of the service, referred to by this verse.

"THE ALTAR THAT IS BEFORE GOD"

The High Priest has completed the sprinkling inside the Holy of Holies and within the Sanctuary. The Bible instructs us that he is now to sprinkle on the corners of "the altar that is before God" from the mixture of both vessels. This expression refers only to the golden incense altar within the Sanctuary, because of its proximity to the holy place - the outer altar that stands in the court is never referred to as being "before God." As to the Bible's instructions that he is now to "go out," this indicates that he is to go out from the place where he had been standing by the curtain, and serve on the outer side of the altar.

The High Priest walks around the incense altar and sprinkles on each of its four corners. Afterwards, he clears away some of the coals on top and exposes some of the gold surface of the altar. On this area, the "floor" of the small incense altar, he sprinkles an additional seven times, as per the verse (ibid. 19): "He shall sprinkle the blood on it seven times with his forefinger." Whatever was left in the mizrak when he concluded, he poured out onto the western side of the outer altar's foundation, in keeping with the instructions (ibid. 4:7): "He shall then spill out all the rest of the bull's blood at the base of the sacrificial altar, which is in front of the Communion Tent's entrance."

DISPATCHING THE SCAPEGOAT & CONFESSING FOR ALL OF ISRAEL

The High Priest now returns to the place where the scapegoat is waiting, opposite the gate through which it will be led off into the desert - the Eastern Gate.

Placing his two hands on the animal's head between its horns, the High Priest now offers his confession for the entire nation of Israel, as Scripture states (ibid. 20-21): "And when he has made an end of atoning for the holy place, and the Tent of Meeting, and the altar, he shall present the live goat. And Aaron shall lay both his hands on the head of the live goat, and confess over it all the iniquities of the Children of Israel, and all their transgressions in all their sins, putting them upon the head of the goat... "

THE CONFESSION

"I beseech You, O Lord;
Grant atonement for the sins,
and for the iniquities and transgressions
which the entire house of Israel
has committed against You,
As it is written in the Torah
of Your servant, Moses:
'For on this day
atonement shall be made for you,
to purify you from all your sins
- before the Lord you shall be purified'."

As above, the congregation responds with the words "Blessed be the Name of His glorious kingdom, for ever and ever."

ACROSS THE BRIDGE

After confessing for Israel, the High Priest gives the scapegoat into hands of the individual who had been designated to lead it into the desert. This, too, was considered a great privilege. Even though it is not an intrinsic part of the service and therefore could even be done by an Israelite, it was customarily safeguarded within the priestly ranks.

"TAKE OUR SINS AND GO!"

A special bridge led directly from the Temple court to the outskirts of the city. This bridge connected the Temple Mount complex with the Mount of Anointment, and the scapegoat was led over this bridge and out into the desert. On the way, groups of people called "Babylonians" (but actually identified as Alexandrians) attempted to get at the scapegoat. The Mishna (Yoma 6, 4) describes that they were an annoyance: "They pulled at the goat's hair and cried Ô take our sins and be off with you! Take our sins and go!" They were eager to urge the priest who led the scapegoat, that he should not tarry or hesitate in the least.

TEN BOOTHS

All along the way between Jerusalem and the cliff - the scapegoat's destination, a series of waystations had been manned since before the onset of the Yom Kippur. This was a system that had been devised to insure that the mission was indeed carried out; men had been pre-positioned at equidistant locations to render the scapegoat's warden any assistance that he may require, and to accompany him along the way. The Mishna records that the distance between Jerusalem and the desert cliff was 90 ris - 12 mil. The distance between each station was one mil, or 2,000 amot (with the exception of the distance between the last station and the cliff, which was 2 mil).

These "stations" were actually booths, and food and drink were kept there in the event that the priest leading the scapegoat should feel physically unable to continue without breaking his fast. In such a case, he would be permitted to eat and drink - as the priest passed by each booth, they would call out to him: "There is food and water here!" Yet despite the distance and the heat, the Talmud records that no priest ever had to break his fast; the psychological advantage for the priests of knowing that the food and water were there should the need arise was enough. Distinguished citizens of Jerusalem accompanied the priest until the first booth; afterwards, men from each booth accompanied him as far as the next station.

TO THE CLIFF

However, the men of the last station could not accompany him all the way to the cliff, since this was a greater distance and one is not permitted to walk more than 2,000 amot in any direction on the Sabbath or holidays. Therefore, they stood and watched from their position, to make certain that the scapegoat was sent off in the prescribed manner.

THE SCAPEGOAT DIES

Arriving at the cliff, the priest removes the crimson wool that the High Priest had tied to the scapegoat's horns. He divides it into two pieces; one piece he re-ties once again to the animal's horns, and the second, to a rock. This is so that he will also be able to see when the crimson color has turned white, and know that atonement has been made for Israel's sins. Then he pushes the goat backward with his two hands.

After he has accomplished his task, the priest who led the scapegoat walks back to the last booth, and waits there until dark before he returns to Jerusalem - for it has only been permitted for him to travel this distance in order to fulfill the duty of the scapegoat. However once that has been done, he must wait until the conclusion of the Day of Atonement before he returns.

THE SCOUTS' SIGNALS

Back inside the Holy Temple, after having delivered the scapegoat into the hands of his colleague, the High Priest must wait to receive word that the scapegoat has reached the desert, for he is not permitted to begin the next stage of the day's service until then.

In addition to the miracle of the crimson wool on the Sanctuary turning white, this information reached the Temple another way as well: scouts were positioned at high points all along the route to the cliff. As the goat was led from one station to the next, these scouts would signal each other by waving cloths. When the scapegoat had been sent off, the news was relayed back to the Temple through the scouts' signals.

READING FROM THE TORAH

Once this news has been received, the High Priest descends to the Women's Court and reads aloud from the book of Leviticus (chapter 16, the reading for Yom Kippur) before the congregation. This is done with great ceremony. In the words of the Mishna (Yoma 7, 1): "The synagogue assistant takes the Torah scroll from the synagogue, and gives it to the synagogue head. He, in turn, hands the Torah to the assistant priest. The latter delivers it into the hands of the High Priest." All of this was done out of honor for the High Priest, who is served by such a large staff.

THE BURNING OF THE BULL AND GOAT

"The bull and goat presented as sin-offerings, the blood of which was brought into the Sanctuary to make atonement, shall be taken outside the camp." (leviticus 16:27)

The two offerings are taken out the northern gate of Jerusalem to the site known as "the Place of the Ashes."

DISPOSING OF THE WHITE VESTMENTS

At the conclusion of the service, the High Priest gives the two sets of white vestments he has worn for the morning and afternoon services, over to his assistants, who dispose of them in the Chamber of Pinchas, a storeroom for priestly garments.

A CELEBRATION OF THANKS

At the conclusion of this awesome day, after all the service was completed and the day had waned, the High Priest was accompanied by the entire multitude of worshippers back to his own home.

"When the High Priest exited from the holy place unharmed, he made a celebration for his loved ones" (ibid., 4) at the conclusion of Yom Kippur - to give thanks to God that he successfully guided the service, and was neither rendered unfit nor adversely affected.

As we read in the High Holiday Prayer Book for the Day of Atonement,

"How radiant was the appearance of the High Priest,
when he exited in peace from the holy place!
Like flashes of light that emanate
from the splendor of the angels -
such was the appearance of the High Priest."

Ne'ilah: The Closing of the Gates

Just before the setting of the sun, the Levite gatekeepers push shut the gates of the Sanctuary and the Courtyard.

IN CONCLUSION

"Whoever says, 'I will sin, and then I will repent afterwards' is denied the opportunity to repent. And one who says, 'I will sin, and Yom Kippur will grant me atonement' - for such an individual, Yom Kippur does not atone.

The Day of Atonement only functions to grant atonement for sins committed between man and G-d. But for sins committed between man and his fellow, even Yom Kippur cannot atone... until the wronged man has been asked forgiveness and appeased.

Rabbi Akiva taught: 'Happy is your lot, Israel! For before whom do you purify yourselves, and who purifies you? Your Father in heaven, as the verse states (Ez. 36:25) I will sprinkle on you pure waters, and you shall be cleansed'." (Yoma 8, 9).