

Einstein and the Two Goats

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1 Einstein and God

Einstein has a famous quote about God

“The LORD God doesn’t play dice.”

Translating it back to German we get

“Der Herrgott nicht würfelt”.

I like wordplay, and I like multi-lingual word play. And I like to identify connections that are really there, that are not easily visible and then, when once made visible, remain visible forever.

“The LORD God doesn’t play dice.”

“Der Herrgott nicht würfelt”.

Or, as I hear it (in fractured English),

“The Hairy Goat (Der Herrgott) does not play dice.”

On Yom Kippur we read about the LORD God (YHWH) and dice (lots, *goral*) and goats (*Sa’ir*): “The High Priest Aharon shall place lots upon two goats, one marked for the LORD (YHWH) and the other marked for Azazel.”

While the Hairy Goat (*der Herrgott*, the LORD God) does not play dice, the High Priest Aharon is commanded to play dice about the goats.

Let us look first at all the individual pieces of this story: the High Priest, the dice, the goats, Azazel, YHWH. Following that we shall put the pieces together for today (today, meaning all of 5779/2018, not just Yom Kippur).

1.1 Aharon, the High Priest

Aharon, the High Priest, the *Cohen Gadol* is the officiant, the agent representing the people before God. The *Cohen Gadol* represents us, the People *Yisrael*—a Nation of Cohanim (*Mamlechet Cohanim*). His Yom Kippur task was an ancient holy shamanic work, a complex and highly choreographed theatrical procedure. It involves blood, coals, fire, incense and

smoke, bulls, ..., and of course the goats.

1.2 The Dice

Where do Dice fit in to this puzzle?

In fact, dice show up quite frequently in Biblical stories. And not always for the same reason.

This afternoon (in Jonah (*Yona*)) the sailors use dice to decide which of the passengers in the boat is the cause of the storm. In that story the die is cast and points to Jonah. Here the function of casting lots is to identify the truth.

On Purim, the die is cast to determine the day of the massacre, and—surprise—it lands on the Full Moon. In Jewish practice the Full Moon is always the date of celebratory festivals. On Purim we win. Here the attempt at random selection of a date looks like just one more part of the elaborate joke that is the book of Esther.

Today, it is not clear to us that it matters which goat gets which function (for the LORD or for Azazel). Thus, the use of the die for distinguishing the two goats is essentially a way of specifying what is in reality an irrelevant and arbitrary decision. It doesn't matter which goat which gets which function. We will come back to this.

1.3 The Goats

What are the purposes of the goats that we read about today? Goat 1 is for the LORD. Goat 2 is for Azazel.

1.3.1 Goat 1

Goat 1, for the LORD, is used for two purposes:

1. to **“make expiation”** for the High Priest himself—to make amends or reparation: atonement. We read “He shall then slaughter the people’s goat of sin offering,”
2. and to **cleanse the shrine**—“Thus he shall purge the Shrine of the uncleanness and transgression of the Israelites, whatever their sins;”

Both of these steps are necessary for the remainder of the ceremony to be effective.

1.3.2 Goat 2

Goat 2, for Azazel, takes on the iniquities of the Israelites and carries them away. The iniquities of the people Israel are

1. reified (made into a thing) and physically **transferred** (*samach*) onto the head of a messenger (Goat 2)—“Aharon shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat and confess over it all the iniquities and transgressions of the Israelites, whatever their sins, putting them on the head of the goat;”
2. and physically **sent away** from the site of the Israelite encampment—“and it shall be sent off to the wilderness”

1.4 Azazel

The identity of Azazel, may have been clear 3500 years ago. It is very mysterious for us today. Perhaps Azazel could once have been a wilderness god, morphed into a secondary function in a monotheistic setting. Azazel perhaps was already an abstract concept meaning “somewhere else, not here”. In Yiddish that is called *dorten* “out there—away from here”. Perhaps we can think of Azazel as an early version of a Black Hole, something with gravitational attraction so strong, that nothing, not even light, and certainly not sins and iniquities, could ever return.

1.5 YHWH

So we’ve learned about the puzzle pieces of the story: the High Priest, the Dice, and the 2 Goats. The last, but certainly not least, is YHWH.

All of us here today, of course, know who YHWH is.

2 Goats for Today

The **question** for us today, we who no longer have easy access to goats and who have no access at all to the Shrine—the Temple (*Beit HaMikdash*) which was destroyed 2000 years ago, sounds simple:

Are the two tasks met by the goats

1. expiation/atonement for the High Priest, and purging the shrine; and
2. taking away the iniquities and transgressions

still tasks that we need? And if yes (most likely since we are still talking about them), how are these tasks met today?

2.1 Goat 1. Expiation for the High Priest

Expiation is a recognized step used today by healers of all kinds. To do their healing work well, they recognize that they must have a personal regular focusing or clearing practice. They must clear their mind of their own personal issues so that they may be fully prepared to focus their attention entirely on the one they need to help. If the clutter of their own triggers and their own issues gets in the way, the healer will not be a clear open channel. Today's clearing or expiation might look like mindful meditation, or processing with a colleague, or some personal ritual before each encounter, to clear the space and clear the mind.

2.1.1 Expiation 3500 years ago

3500 years ago the technology was *korbanot*—slaughtering an animal (in this case Goat 1) to “bring it near”. By eating of the food for the god, the priest achieved communion with the god, and in that state was prepared to act on behalf of the people in relation to the god.

2.1.2 Expiation—a Modern Equivalent

The Sages of Talmudic times began to modernize the *korbanot* for us. With the *Beit HaMikdash* in ruins, the rabbis taught us that sacrificial service should be replaced by three things:

1. *tzedakah*

2. eating our meals in a sacred way at our table
3. prayer

All three are included in today's Yom Kippur practice.

1. We began last night with formal *tzedakah* offerings, acting to correct economic and social injustice with collections of money for several organizations.
2. We often have a structured pre-fast meal prior to Erev Yom Kippur, and we end with a communal post-havdalah Break Fast.
3. And the body of the day is devoted to our *Avodah*, a formal prayer service.

Both the service leader and the congregants participate in all three functions. The ancient rigid distinction between the Priest who did the rites and the People for whom the rites were done is no longer important. Any of us can, and do, take on each of those functions at various times.

2.2 Goat 2. Taking Away Iniquities and Transgressions of the Israelites

Finding the modern equivalent of Goat 2 is harder. There are two steps:

1. **Transfer** the iniquities to the goat.
2. **Send** the goat to the wilderness.

2.2.1 Iniquities—3500 years ago

3500 years ago the technology was sympathetic magic. The priest transferred the sins and iniquities to the second goat, and the second goat was sent away.

2.2.2 Iniquities—Modern Equivalent

I think this function does exist in our practice of the Al Chet cards we fill out on Erev Yom Kippur.

In this adaptation, we write out the ways we missed the mark this past year. Our individually identified, and personally meaningful, transgressions are anonymously made public. The transfer from each of us of our own transgressions to the deck of Goat-Cards was done by each of us who was here last night for Kol Nidre. By the end of today the transgressions, but not the individual who identified them, will all have been revealed to the Kahal. We are each purged of the internal hiding. After Havdalah, as in yore, our Goat-Cards will be sent to the wilderness of a supervised burning by a designated person. We are free of the weight of carrying them ourselves. Our new year can now begin afresh.

2.3 The Entangled Goats of Today

Let me end with these thoughts on Entanglement.

In ancient times the two goats were indistinguishable, except by the lot with which they were assigned to two different functions. The first goat was used for the first function: to help prepare the Shrine and the High Priest for the task. The second goat was used for the second function: to take the iniquities and transgressions of the Israelites away.

Perhaps the importance of the randomness of the lots is an illusion. Perhaps there really is no difference between the goats. The functions of the goats, and therefore the goats themselves, are completely entangled. Send one away to a great distance and anything that happens to it will be instantly reflected in the other. “Spooky action at a distance” is Einstein’s phrase for this type of situation. Perhaps 3500 years ago, the lots were just part of the appearance of magic.

Today also the two functions are entangled. Without mindful meditation followed by identification of the transgressions—filling out the Goat-Cards—the *tzedakah* and prayer components of the Yom Kippur liturgy would be but noise.

Without the deliberate rectification of *tzedakah*, and without the meditation and prayer on intended behavior changes, the identification of transgressions in the Goat-Cards would be an empty gesture.

The two functions are distinct functions, and totally entangled. Now, as then, both are important, and neither works without the other.

Should you now be thinking that you didn’t identify something that should be on your Goat-Card, it is not too late to make a behavioral change.

Should you now be thinking that you didn’t give enough *tzedakah*, feel free to expand on your offering after *ne’ilah*.

3 Aliyot

Today we will call three Aliyot.

Feel free to come up if you feel called by the theme, or stand in your place if that is simpler.

3.1 Aliyah 1: Expiation

For this aliyah the focus is on clearing yourself of voices in your head that interfere with functioning, of voices that persevere and replay long after their appropriateness has faded.

If there is a particular way in which you hope or need to push back and say “Thanks for the role I once played but I do not need this message any more.”, come up. If you long to free yourself to be a more clear channel for blessing to the world, then come up or stand for this aliyah.

Misheberach

May He who blessed our forefathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and our four mothers, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah bless those who have come up for the honor of God, for the honor of the Torah and for the honor of Yom Kippur.

May they free themselves from blockages that are no longer relevant, from internal conversations whose time is past, and from fears to step forward.

May they now become clear channels to bring blessing to themselves, their friends and neighbors and the world.

3.2 Aliyah 2: Taking Away Iniquities

For this aliyah the focus is on identifying, and removing from your activity-set, those habitual actions or behaviors that no longer serve you.

If you have newly identified any unfortunate or unhelpful behavior that was not fully acknowledged in the weeks before the High HolyDays, and you want to rectify that and make amends to start the new year with a clean slate, then come up or stand for this aliyah.

Misheberach

May He who blessed our forefathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and our four mothers, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah bless those who have come up for the honor of God, for the honor of the Torah and for the honor of Yom Kippur.

May they cease from no-longer-necessary habitual actions.

May their interactions with friends and neighbors be fresh and new.

May they see actuality and potentiality and base their actions on their now clear vision.

3.3 Aliyah 3: Entanglement

For this aliyah the focus is on the mystery of Entanglement. You wonder: how do these rituals, these thousands-of-years-old entangled concepts, apply to you today.

If you are entranced by the mystery of entanglement, if you wonder how your personal clearing and sending off of iniquities can have a global effect on human and divine response to the needs of the world in which we live, then come up or stand for this aliyah.

Misheberach

May He who blessed our forefathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and our four mothers, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah bless those who have come up for the honor of God, for the honor of the Torah and for the honor of Yom Kippur.

May they gain vision and understanding of the universe.

May their clear vision give them direction and strength to respond to the needs of the world in which we all live.