

Parashat Shemini: Who Must Forgive Aharon?

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1. God?

Vayikra 9:2	
וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל-אַהֲרֹן קַח-לָךְ עֵגֶל בֶּן-בָּקָר לְחֹטֵאת וְאֵיל לְעֹלָה תַמִּימִם וְהִקְרַב לִפְנֵי יְהוָה:	He said to Aaron: "Take a calf of the herd for a purgation offering and a ram for a burnt offering, without blemish, and bring them before GOD.

Midrash Tanhuma, Shemini 4:1	
וַיֹּאמֶר אֶל אַהֲרֹן קַח לָךְ עֵגֶל בֶּן בָּקָר. וְלִמָּה לֹא אָמַר לוֹ פֶּר אֲלֵא עֵגֶל. לְפִי שֶׁעַל יְדֵי הָעֵגֶל נִתְפָּקְדָה הַכֹּהֲנָה בִּידָךְ, וּבְעֵגֶל הִיא מִתְבַּסֶּסֶת בִּידָךְ. וְלֹא עוֹד, אֲלֵא שֶׁלֹּא יְהוּ יִשְׂרָאֵל אוֹמְרִים: יֵשׁ לָהֶם עֲוֹנוֹת מִמַּעֲשֵׂה הָעֵגֶל. לְפִיכָךְ אָמַר לוֹ הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא, אִפְּהֵם יִקְרִיבוּ עֵגֶל. וְאֵל בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל תִּדְבֹּר לֵאמֹר קָחוּ שְׁעִיר עִזִּים לְחֹטֵאת וְעֵגֶל, שִׂידְעוּ הַכֹּל שֶׁנִּתְכַּפֵּר לָהֶם עַל מַעֲשֵׂה הָעֵגֶל. אָמַר הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא, בְּעוֹלָם הַזֶּה נִתְכַּפֵּר לָהֶם עַל יְדֵי קָרְבָּן. וְלְעוֹלָם הַבָּא אֲנִי מוֹחָה עֲוֹנוֹתֵיהֶם שֶׁלֹּא בִּקְרָבָן, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: אֲנֹכִי אֲנֹכִי הוּא מוֹחָה פְּשָׁעֵיךְ לְמַעַנִּי (ישעיה מג, כו).	"Then he said unto Aaron, 'Take a calf [of the herd for a sin offering].'" Why was it not told him [to take] a bull instead of a calf? He said to him, "Because through the calf (of Exod. 32) the priesthood was shaken in your hand, through a calf it is being established in your hand." And not only that, but lest Israel say there are sins [clinging] to them from the deed of the calf, for that reason He said they should offer a calf [for a sin offering]. Thus it is stated (in Lev. 9:3), "And you shall speak unto the Children of Israel, saying, 'Take a male goat for a sin offering and a calf....'" [These things were said] so that they would know that they had been forgiven for the deed of the calf. The Holy One, blessed be He, said to them, "In this world, they have been forgiven through offerings, but in the world to come I will wipe away their sins without an offering." It is so stated (in Is. 43:25), "I, even I, will pardon your transgressions for My own sake and will not remember your sins."

Maimonides, <i>Guide for the Perplexed</i> , 3:46	
הַחֲכָמִים ז"ל אָמְרוּ שֶׁהַטֵּעַם לָכָךְ שֶׁהִקְרַב בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁמִינִי שְׁלֹמֹאִים "עֵגֶל בֶּן בָּקָר לְחֹטֵאת" (וַיִּקְרָא ט, ב) – לְכַפֵּר עַל מַעֲשֵׂה הָעֵגֶל (סְפָרָא מְלֹאִים א, ב), וְכֵן חֲטָאתוֹ שְׁלֹמֹה הַכְּפוּרִים "פֶּר בֶּן בָּקָר לְחֹטֵאת" (וַיִּקְרָא טז, ג) – לְכַפֵּר עַל מַעֲשֵׂה הָעֵגֶל (לֹא מִצְוָנוּ מְקוּרוֹ)...כִּי תִכְלִיתֶן שֶׁל כָּל הַפְּעֻלוֹת הָאֵלֶּה הִיא שִׁיתִּקְבֹּעַ בְּנַפְשׁוֹ שֶׁל כָּל חוֹטֵא שֶׁעָלִיו לְזָכֹר וּלְהִזְכִּיר תָּמִיד אֶת חֲטָאוֹ, כְּמוֹ שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: "וְחֹטְאִי נִגְדִי תָמִיד" (תְּהִלִּים נא, ה), וְשֶׁהוּא צָרִיךְ	Our Sages say that the offering for the eighth day of dedication was "a calf, a young bullock, for a sin-offering" (Lev. 11:2), in order to atone for the sin of the Israelites in making a golden calf. The sin-offering, which was brought on the Day of Atonement (ibid. 16:3), was likewise explained as being an atonement for that sin...for it is the object of all these ceremonies to impress on the mind of every sinner and transgressor the necessity of continually remembering and mentioning his sins. Thus, the Psalmist says, "And my sin is ever before me" (Ps. 51:3). The above-mentioned sin-offerings further show us that when we commit a sin, we, our children, and the children of our children,

¹ All translations are from Sefaria, unless otherwise noted.

כַּפָּרָה עַל אוֹתוֹ חָטָא, הוּא וְזָרְעוֹ וְזָרַע זָרְעוֹ, עַל יָדֵי מִצְוָה שֶׁתִּהְיֶה מִמִּינֶה שֶׁל אוֹתָהּ עֲבִירָה.	require atonement for that sin by some kind of service analogous to the sin committed.
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2. Aharon?

Vayikra 9:23	
וַיָּבֹא מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן אֶל-אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וַיֵּצְאוּ וַיְבָרְכוּ אֶת-הָעָם וַיֵּרָא כְבוֹד-יְהוָה אֶל-כָּל-הָעָם:	Moses and Aaron then went inside the Tent of Meeting. When they came out, they blessed the people; and the Presence of GOD appeared to all the people.

Sifra, Parashat Shemini, Mekhiltah D'Meluim 2:19	
[ט] "וַיָּבֹא מֹשֶׁה וְאַהֲרֹן אֶל אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד". כִּינּוּ שֶׁרָאָה אַהֲרֹן שֶׁקָּרְבוּ כָל הַקֹּרְבָּנוֹת וְנַעֲשׂוּ כָל הַמַּעֲשִׂים וְלֹא יָרְדָה שְׁכִינָה לְיִשְׂרָאֵל הִיָּה עוֹמֵד וּמִצְטַעֵר. אָמַר "יֹדַע אֲנִי שֶׁכַּעַס עָלַי הַמָּקוֹם. בְּשִׁבְלִי לֹא יָרְדָה שְׁכִינָה לְיִשְׂרָאֵל". אָמַר לוֹ "מֹשֶׁה אַחִי כָּךְ עָשִׂיתָ לִּי, שֶׁנִּכְנַסְתִּי וְנִתְבַּיֵּשְׁתִּי וְלֹא יָרְדָה שְׁכִינָה לְיִשְׂרָאֵל". מִיָּד נִכְנַס מֹשֶׁה עִמּוֹ וּבִקְשׁוּ רַחֲמִים וַיָּרְדָה שְׁכִינָה לְיִשְׂרָאֵל. לָכֵן נֶאֱמַר "וַיָּבֹא מֹשֶ�ה וְאַהֲרֹן אֶל אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד".	"And Moses and Aaron went into the tent of meeting": When Aaron saw that all the offerings had been sacrificed and all the services had been performed and the shechinah had not descended upon Israel, he stood and grieved: I know that the Lord is wroth with me. Because of me, the Shekhinah has not descended upon Israel. This is what my brother Moses has done to me: I entered and was put to shame and the shekhinah did not descend upon Israel — whereupon Moses entered with him, they implored mercy, and the shechinah descended upon Israel. This is the intent of "And Moses and Aaron went into the tent of meeting."

Vayikra 9:23	
קָרַב אֶל הַמִּזְבֵּחַ. שֶׁהִ' הִשְׁטִין מֶרֶא' לִפְנֵי דְמוּת עֵגֶל וְהִ' יָרָא שֶׁלֹּא יִהְיֶה רָאוּי לַעֲבֹדָה אָמַר לוֹ מֹשֶׁה קָרַב אֶל הַמִּזְבֵּחַ וְאַל תִּירָא כִּי בָךְ בָּחַר ה':	קָרַב אֶל הַמִּזְבֵּחַ, Because Ha-Satan appeared before him in the form of a calf, and he was afraid that he might not be fit to perform the service, Moses said to him: "Come near to the altar and do not be afraid, for the Lord has chosen you."

3. Both?

Byron Williston, "The Importance of Self-Forgiveness," <i>American Philosophical Quarterly</i> (2012)	
...It is because the experience of moral shame is such a deep moral and psychological burden on the wrongdoer that she is required to go through it in order to merit her victim's forgiveness. It also follows that when interpersonal forgiveness is not forthcoming—either because the victim is dead or otherwise unavailable or because he is hard-hearted—self-forgiveness is not a mere consolation prize...Indeed, where this has happened, and the victim has refused his benediction out of sheer hard-heartedness, we might even say—though this would require careful spelling out—that victim and wrongdoer have reversed roles.	

Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg, <i>The Hidden Order of Intimacy</i> , 86	
...there exists, between the lines of the biblical account, a repressed narrative of loss and return. The sin of the Golden Calf transforms the structure of Israelite experience. What had preceded it had been a state of hakafah: of being enveloped, protected, contained by luminous clouds. This state abandons them as they turn to the Golden Calf. When they begin work on the Tabernacle, this encompassed state returns. Functionally, these clouds are said to safeguard the people on all sides; to protect them from heat, snakes, uneven ground, perhaps even to give them wings. But beyond their pragmatic uses, the clouds come to represent a condition of enveloping love...	