

Parashat Aharei Mot/Kedoshim: Purge and Purify

Rabbi Joshua Rabin, Astoria Center of Israel, Astoria, New York¹

Vayikra 16:33	
<p>כִּי־בַיּוֹם הַזֶּה יִכָּפֹר עֲלֵיכֶם לְטַהֵר אֶתְכֶם מִכָּל חַטֹּאתֵיכֶם לִפְנֵי יְהוָה תִּטְהָרוּ... וְכִפֹּר אֶת־מִקְדָּשׁ הַקֹּדֶשׁ וְאֶת־אֹהֶל מוֹעֵד וְאֶת־הַמִּזְבֵּחַ יִכָּפֹר וְעַל הַכֹּהֲנִים וְעַל־כָּל־עַם הַקֵּהֶל יִכָּפֹר:</p>	<p>For on this day atonement shall be made for you to purify you of all your sins; you shall be pure before GOD...He shall purge the innermost Shrine; he shall purge the Tent of Meeting and the altar; and he shall make expiation for the priests and for all the people of the congregation.</p>

1. God Getting Dirty

Bavli Menahot 27b	
<p>אָמַר רַבָּה בַּר עוּלָא, אָמַר קָרָא: "וְכִפֹּר אֶת מִקְדָּשׁ הַקֹּדֶשׁ" – מִקּוֹם הַמִּקְדָּשׁ לְקוֹדֶשׁ.</p>	<p>Rabba bar Ulla said in response: The verse states with regard to the Yom Kippur service: "And he shall make atonement for the most holy place [mikdash hakodesh]" (Leviticus 16:33), which is interpreted as follows: He will sprinkle the blood to make atonement not specifically on the Ark [hakodesh], but even on the place that is dedicated [hamkudash] for the Ark [lakodesh].</p>

Midrash Shemot Rabbah 15:5	
<p>אָמַר רַבִּי שִׁמְעוֹן, גְּדוּלָה חֲבֵתָן שֶׁל יִשְׂרָאֵל שֶׁנִּגְלָה הַקֹּדֶשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא בְּמִקּוֹם עֲבוֹדַת כּוֹכָבִים וּבְמִקּוֹם טִנְפוֹת וּבְמִקּוֹם טְמֵאָה בְּשִׁבִּיל לְגֹאֲלָן, מִשָּׁל לְכַהֵן שֶׁנִּפְלָה תְּרוּמָתוֹ לְבֵית הַקְּבָרוֹת, אוֹמֵר מָה אֶעֱשֶׂה, לְטַמֵּא אֶת עֲצָמֵי אִי אֶפְשָׁר, וְלִהְיוֹת תְּרוּמָתִי אִי אֶפְשָׁר, מוֹטֵב לִי לְטַמֵּא אֶת עֲצָמֵי פֶעַם אַחַת וְחֹזֵר וּמִטְהַר, וְלֹא אֶאֱבֹד אֶת תְּרוּמָתִי. כֵּן אֲבוֹתֵינוּ הָיוּ תְּרוּמָתוֹ שֶׁל הַקֹּדֶשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (יִרְמְיָה ב, ג'): קֹדֶשׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל לַיהוָה וְגו', הָיוּ בֵּין הַקְּבָרוֹת, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (שְׁמוֹת יב, ל'): כִּי אֵין בֵּית אִשָּׁר אֵין שֵׁם מֵת, וְאוֹמֵר (בְּמִדְבָר ל, ד'): וּמִצָּרִים מְקַבְּרִים, אָמַר הַקֹּדֶשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא הֵיכָּא אֲנִי גּוֹאֲלָן, לְהַנִּיחַ אִי אֶפְשָׁר, מוֹטֵב לִירֹד וּלְהַצִּילָן, שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר (שְׁמוֹת ג, ח'): וְאֵרֹד לְהַצִּילוֹ מִיַּד מִצְרַיִם, כְּשֶׁהוֹצִיא קָרָא לְאַהֲרֹן וְטַהֵר</p>	<p>Rabbi Shimon said: Great is the love for Israel, as the Holy One blessed be He revealed Himself in a place of idol worship [Egypt], a place of filth, and a place of impurity in order to redeem them. This is analogous to a priest whose <i>teruma</i> fell into a cemetery. He says: What shall I do? To impurify myself is impossible, and to leave my <i>teruma</i> there is impossible. It is preferable that I render myself impure one time and then purify myself, and [thus] I will not lose my <i>teruma</i>. So, our ancestors were the <i>teruma</i> of the Holy One blessed be He, as it is stated: "Israel is holy to the Lord, [the first of His crop]" (Jeremiah 2:3). They were among the graves, as it is stated: "As there was no house in which there were none dead" (Exodus 12:30), and it says: "And Egypt was burying [those whom the Lord had smote]" (Numbers 33:4). The Holy One blessed be He said: How do I redeem them? To leave them there is impossible. It is preferable to come down and redeem them, as it is stated: "I came down to deliver them from the hand of Egypt" (Exodus 3:8). When He took them</p>

¹ All translations are from Sefaria, unless otherwise noted.

אותו, שְׁנֵאֵמַר (ויקרא טז, לג): וְכָפַר אֶת מִקְדָּשׁ הַקֹּדֶשׁ, (ויקרא טז, טז): וְכָפַר עַל הַקֹּדֶשׁ.

out, He summoned Aaron, and he purified Him, as it is stated: "He shall atone for the Holy of Holies [*mikdash hakodesh*]" (Leviticus 16:33), "He shall atone for the Sanctuary [*hakodesh*]" (Leviticus 16:16).

2. Purge and Purify

Yerushalmi Sanhedrin 10:1

שָׂאֵל רַבִּי מַתִּיָּה בֶן חֲרָשׁ אֶת רַבִּי אֱלֵעָזָר בֶּן עֲזַרְיָה בִּישִׁיבָה אָמַר לוֹ. שְׁמַעְתָּה אֲרַבְעָה חֲלוּקֵי כִפָּרָה שֶׁהָיָה רַבִּי יִשְׁמַעְאֵל דּוֹרָשׁ. אָמַר לוֹ. שְׁלֹשָׁה הֵן חוּץ מִן הַתְּשׁוּבָה. כְּתוּב אֶחָד אוֹמֵר שׁוּבוּ בָנִים שׁוֹבְבִים אֲרַפָּא מִשׁוּבוֹתֵיכֶם. וְכְתוּב אַחֵר אוֹמֵר כִּי בַיּוֹם הַזֶּה יִכָּפֵר עֲלֵיכֶם לְטַהֵר אֶתְכֶם וּגו'. וְכְתוּב אַחֵר וּפְקַדְתִּי בְּשִׁבְט פְּשָׁעִים וּבִגְנָעִים עִוְנִים. וְכְתוּב אַחֵר אוֹמֵר אִם יִכּוּפֵר הָעוֹן הַזֶּה לָכֶם עַד תָּמוּתוֹן וּגו'. כִּיצַד. הָעוֹבֵר עַל מִצְוֹת עֲשֵׂה וְשֹׁב מִיָּד אֵינוֹ זָז מִמְקוֹמוֹ עַד שִׁימְחֹל לוֹ הַקָּדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא. וְעָלִיו הוּא אוֹמֵר שׁוּבוּ בָנִים שׁוֹבְבִים אֲרַפָּא מִשׁוּבוֹתֵיכֶם. הָעוֹבֵר עַל מִצְוֹת בְּלֹא תַעֲשֶׂה הַתְּשׁוּבָה תוֹלָה וְיוֹם הַכִּיפּוּרִים מְכַפֵּר. וְעָלִיו הוּא אוֹמֵר כִּי בַיּוֹם הַזֶּה יִכָּפֵר עֲלֵיכֶם וּגו'. הָעוֹבֵר עַל הַכְּרִיתוֹת וּמִיתוֹת בֵּית דִּין בְּמִזִּיד הַתְּשׁוּבָה וְיוֹם הַכִּיפּוּרִים מְכַפְּרִין מִחֻצָּה וְהַיְּיִסּוּרִין מְכַפְּרִין מִחֻצָּה. וְעָלִיו הוּא אוֹמֵר וּפְקַדְתִּי בְּשִׁבְט פְּשָׁעִים וּגו'. אֲבָל מִי שֶׁנִּתְחַלֵּל בּוֹ שֵׁם שְׁמַיִם אֵין כַּח בְּתִשְׁבּוּהָ לְתוֹלָה וְלֹא יוֹם הַכִּיפּוּרִים לְכַפֵּר וְלֹא הַיְּיִסּוּרִין לְמַרְקָא. אֲלֵא הַתְּשׁוּבָה וְיוֹם הַכִּיפּוּרִים מְכַפְּרִין שְׁלִישׁ וַיְיִסּוּרִין שְׁלִישׁ וּמִיתָה מְמַרְקָת שְׁלִישׁ. וְעָלִיו הוּא אוֹמֵר אִם יִכּוּפֵר הָעוֹן הַזֶּה לָכֶם עַד תָּמוּתוֹן. הָא לְמַדְנֵה שֶׁהַמִּיתָה מְמַרְקָת.

Rebbi Matthew ben Harash asked Rebbi Eleazar ben Azariah in the Academy. He told him, "Did you hear the four types of Atonement that Rebbi Ismael explained?"

He answered him, there are three in addition to repentance. One verse says, *return, naughty children, I shall heal your waywardness*. But another verse says, *for on that day, He shall pardon you, to cleanse you*. And another verse says, *I shall visit their crime with the rod, and their iniquity with plagues*. And another verse says, *the iniquity of this people shall not be atoned for until you die*. How is this? If somebody violates a positive commandment and repents, immediately before he moves from there the Holy One, praise to Him, would forgive him. About this one it says, *return, naughty children, I shall heal your waywardness*. If one transgresses a prohibition, repentance suspends judgment, and the Day of Atonement pardons. About this one it says, *for on that day, He shall pardon you*, etc. If one intentionally transgressed [sins punishable by] extirpations or death penalties, repentance and the Day of Atonement pardon half, and sufferings pardon half. About this one it says, *I shall visit their crime with the rod*, etc. But by whom the Name of Heaven was desecrated, there is no power in repentance to suspend judgment, nor in the Day of Atonement to pardon, nor in sufferings to scour; but repentance and the Day of Atonement pardon a third, and suffering a third, and death scours a third. About this one it says, *the iniquity of this people shall not be atoned for until you die*. From this we learn that death scours.

Jacob Milgrom, "Israel's Sanctuary: The Priestly 'Picture of Dorian Gray'" (1976), 397-399

This is one of the major contributions of the priestly theology: man is demonized. True, man falls short of being a demon, but he is capable of the demonic. He alone is the cause of the world's ills. He alone can contaminate the sanctuary and force God out...On the analogy of Oscar Wilde's novel, the priestly writers would claim: sin may not leave its mark on the face of the sinner, but it is certain to mark the face of the sanctuary, and unless it is quickly expunged, God's presence will depart...Only man can evict God from his earthly abode and destroy himself.

Amy-Jill Levine and Marc Zvi Brettler, *The Bible With and Without Jesus*, 232

...in other words, the *chata't* cleanses not only the sinner but the impurities that various sins created, impurities that now reside at the sanctuary, the tent of meeting, and the altar...Milgrom also coined the brilliant term "ritual detergent" to explain the function of the sacrificial blood of the *chata't*. Just as real detergent cleanses dirt from clothes, so blood- properly applied- cleanses (or purges) sin from the sanctuary.