

## Scapegoating the Fear-of-Shame

Every year on Yom Kippur we read about, *davven* through, and at some level ritually enact, or at least participate in, the annual scapegoat ritual. This ritual is explicated in some detail in the Torah (Lev. 16:6-10), and in much greater detail in the Talmud (*Yoma* Chaps 1-7).

The high priest, the *Kohen Gadol*, is brought to the north of the altar where two goats and a wooden box containing two lots are waiting. One lot says on it "For God," the other, "For Azazel." The *Kohen Gadol* picks up both lots with both hands at the same time. If, in the right hand, the lot comes up "For God," the goat on the right is sacrificed in the Temple, and the other is sent to *Azazel*, and their destinations are reversed if the lot comes up in the opposite hand.

### *Azazel*

*Azazel* has been variously interpreted as: the goat-god of pre-Hebraic tribespeople; a fallen angel or demon connected to erotic or aggressive instinctuality; the shadow or angry, impulsive side of God; in any event, a kind of transpersonal power.

Some maintain that *Azazel* psychologically stands for the supercritical, condemning judge who holds others to an unrealistic standard of behavior that he/she cannot live up to. *Azazel* is the accuser inside of us in the sadistic form of raw contempt. This is indicated by *Azazel's* living alone in the wilderness, away from fallible community. According to this interpretation the goat which is thrown to *Azazel* represents the victim in us, the helpless or rejected child (our aggressive, dependency or sexual needs) whose energy has been scattered or hidden, the part of us that has been wasted through neglect or given (or thrown) away without respect. The atonement ritual of *Yom Kippur* shows us in clear relief in an external show how neglectfully we may have treated ourselves and urges us to go on anyhow, illustrating that such self-scattering is just one scene of a longer play. We can thus let go of (or conversely, find, reclaim, and nurture) the layers of hidden, victim feeling that each of us carries inside.

Others maintain *Azazel* to be simply a rough, rocky place. The goat that is to be sent to *Azazel* is marked by a red piece of wool which is tied to its head. The high priest somehow transfers the sins of the people of Israel to the poor (or noble, depending on how you look at it) thing which is taken to a high rocky place and let go (or thrown down). The other goat is sacrificed in the Temple in a more ceremonious manner, atoning for only the imperfections of the Temple and the deficiencies of the priests.

### Negative Scapegoating

In the Western World, the scapegoat role in a negative form has often fallen onto Jews and other minorities, as well as onto women. Sometimes an individual within one family is singled out to be the "black sheep" of the family and carry the negative projections of being wrong, ugly, or bad, and is made the

scapegoat for rejection. The scapegoat thus can stand for the repressed instinctual energies that threaten the family.

### Shamanic Scapegoating

Ceremonies of riddance-of-evil, sin and guilt, disease, violence, physical and psychic sufferings, etc., are found in many societies and such rituals are meant to renew contact with the guiding spirit of the people. The evil is pre-consciously split off from our own energy field and magically transferred onto other persons, animals, plants, or inanimate objects which are then disposed of. For example, the Babylonian *kuppuru* ritual involved purification of priests, confession, and a human sacrifice. In the ancient world the especially ugly or strong individual (sometimes the king) was chosen to be the human sacrifice. The Yom Kippur scapegoat rite may have evolved from such rituals, teaching ethical sensitivity (by avoiding human sacrifice) as well as purging evil in a shamanic ritual that worked for them and must have been awesome, if hard on the goats. Scapegoating the "Fear of Shame"

It seems that part of the scapegoat task is to symbolically transfer our fears and sense of lack onto some thing. Assuming that there is some benefit in preserving this ancient ritual, which "thing" can we Aquarian Minyan Jewish Renewal Jews choose to place in the scapegoat slot? I suggest that to make this annual ritual meaningful, each person be asked to suggest their own candidate. The scapegoat object might be simply a quality or an energy. Some may choose inequality, sexism, oppression, pollution, neglect of the planet, and so on. I suggest that Fear of Shame be the scapegoat for the year 5754.

I often feel the fear of being shamed and also the fear of shaming. Fear-of-Shame-based formalities kill the heart and spirit of a group. It is a slippery quality, and I wish it were more easily externalized.

If only we could transfer Fear of Shame onto (a . . . feather? or) something, perhaps tie a red ribbon around it and throw it off Inspiration Point, and be done with it. We could then be closer and appropriately affectionate with each other, and our eyes would lose the look of fear.

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*with  
thanks to  
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