



An Explanation of Yom Kippur Avodah by Rabbi A.Z. Saunders



The main focal point of Yom Kippur was the 'avodah' (service) performed by the Kohain Gadol in the temple. The order of service is detailed in Leviticus chapter 16 which we read on Yom Kippur morning. As we don't have the temple nowadays we read about it instead. This is in place of offering the sacrifices as it says in Hosea (chapter 12 verse 3) 'And we shall make up for the sacrifices with our lips'. Therefore, it is important, to understand what is being said. The 'Avodah begins with the poem AMITZ COAH' (standard edition Artscroll machzor page 554)

Summary

The avodah comprised;

1 bull,

2 he goats,

2 rams,

44 sprinklings of blood (16 on the ark, 16 on the curtain of the Holy of Holies and 12 on the golden Altar),

4 changes of clothes from gold to white and vice versa,

4 entries into the Holy of Holies,

And 10 utterances of the Holy Name of G-d.

Detail

After the normal daily sacrifices were offered, the Kohain Gadol changed into his special white linen clothes and started the 'AVODAH'.

He approached the bull, which was standing between the Altar and the Sanctuary, and confessed his own personal sins and that of his family ('vchach' middle of Artscroll p 560). He would use the Holy name of G-d 3 times during the confession. Those who heard the Holy name would prostrate themselves and say 'baruch sheim' ('Vhacohanim' bottom of page 560). We should also prostrate ourselves when we read this paragraph.

Next, He would then stride over to the two he-goats which were located in the eastern side of the courtyard. He drew lots to see which would be offered and which would be pushed down the mountain later on. He would say out loud using the Holy name, which one had been drawn 'lahashem' (lit for Hashem) and which one would be for 'Laazazel' (the name of the cliff it would be pushed off). (Top of page 562)

Thereupon he crossed over to his bull and confessed the malodorous sins of his tribe, the Levites. He once again uttered the Holy name 3 times in his confession. (bottom of page 562) He then slaughtered the bull (p.565) and caught the blood in a vessel to be used later for sprinkling.

The Kohain Gadol entered the Kodosh Hakodoshim (Holy of Holies) with a spoonful of Ketoret (incense) in his left hand and a pan of hot coals in his right. He placed the pan on the floor between the poles in front the Aron Hakodesh (Ark of the Covenant). Then, in a rehearsed feat, he transferred the Ketoret from the spoon into his two hands.

This is how it was done:

The Cohain Gadol placed the handle of the spoon under his right arm, bent over, and spilt the contents into his cupped hands. Next, he poured the incense from his hands onto the coals. The smoke from the pan rose straight up to the ceiling. If the smoke filled the entire Kodesh Hakodoshim then the Cohain Gadol knew that Hashem has forgiven the sins of The Jewish People.

The Cohain Gadol then left the Kodesh Hakodoshim slowly, walking backwards. As he entered the Kodesh area he stopped to daven (pray) for a year of plentiful food for all the Jewish People.

He then took the blood of the bull and sprinkled it in front of the ark 8 times, once pointed upwards and another 7 times pointed down. ('vchach' p.564)

He then slaughtered the He- goat which won the lottery for 'Hashem' and sprinkled its blood in front of the ark 8 times like that of the bull. (foot of page 564)

Subsequently he sprinkled the blood of the bull and the he- goat 8 times on the curtain that separated the Kodesh Hakadoshim (Holy of Holies) from the rest of the temple. He then mixed the bloods together and sprinkled 8 times on the golden Altar and on each of its 4 corners.

Now for all our sins-

The Cohain Gadol returned to the other he -goat and confessed all the sins of the Jewish people (p566). One should have proper concentration when reading this bit as it has powers in the worlds above to atone for our sins. One should have in mind when saying the confession along with the chazzan that he is in fact confessing his own personal sins.

The he goats were then sent to a far away desert and pushed down a steep rocky cliff. The Kabbalistic Rabbis (not Madonna's ones) explain that this was a gift to Satan. Hashem allows us to do this so he can leave us alone for a bit whilst he is enjoying his gift. Moreover, Satan even comes to praise the Jews for this wonderful present. Little does he know it contains all our sins! This allows Hashem to enjoy a few minutes of peace with us before the end of Yom Kippur. This is when He utters the word 'SOLACHTI' (I HAVE FORGIVEN THEM).

The he -goat would arrive at its destination and be pushed down the cliff shortly before the end of Yom Kippur. If the 'avodah' was successful then a red string placed above the door of the temple changed to white, showing Hashem forgave the Jews.

After this the Cohain Gadol returned to the Kodesh Hakadoshim (Holy of Holies) and removed the incense. He changed back to his gold clothes and offered up the two rams as an 'OLAH' ('burnt offerings') and read from the law.

In the Temple times there were no Synagogues as such. Therefore, the 'Avodah' together with private confession is all that took place on Yom Kippur. It is only following the destruction of our Holy Temple that the Rabbis saw fit to introduce formal prayer in Synagogues. Let us hope that in the merit of understanding the Avodah we will merit to actually see it next year for real in Jerusalem. AMEN!!!!!!!!!!

