

Bribing your way to God (Acharei Mot)

When I go to hell, I mean to carry a bribe: for look you, good gifts evermore make way for the worst persons. -John Webster

Rabbi Shlomo Ephraim of Prague, the Kli Yakar (1550-1619) claims that a way to get to God is to bribe the evil angel 'Samael,' an angel considered the guardian angel of the evil Esau and his descendants.

The account in the Book of Genesis tells us how our forefather Jacob masqueraded as his brother Esau in order to snatch the blessings intended for Esau from their blind father Isaac who was bestowing the blessing. The Kli Yakar (Leviticus 16:8) quotes a tradition that the day of the ruse and the blessings occurred on the day of the Passover Seder. There were two animals that were instrumental for the ploy of tricking Isaac: two goats.

The Kli Yakar states that these goats are mirrored in perhaps one of the most sacred sacrifices of the year, the goats of Yom Kippur. On Yom Kippur, two goats were chosen by the High Priest for wildly different endings. One was walked to the desert and pushed down a cliff to its death in one of the most unusual sacrifices described in the Torah. The other goat was sacrificed in the more conventional fashion in the Temple.

The Kli Yakar explains that both the desert goat and one of Jacob's were meant as a bribe to the materialistic angel Samael. By appeasing this evil spirit, one is then free to sacrifice the second Passover animal to God. Jacob (and us, his descendants) are then able to receive the plethora of blessings that have a special force and power of reception on the day of the Seder, as well as the unique forgiveness that we are able to achieve solely on Yom Kippur.

May we know how to bribe whatever evil spirits we need to, in order to receive both the forgiveness of Yom Kippur and the great blessings of Passover.

Shabbat Shalom

Ben-Tzion

Dedication

To the memory of Sheldon Schaffel z"l. May his family be comforted amongst the mourners of Zion and Jerusalem.