

Support for this sequence is found in the prescriptions for the altar's consecration (Exod 29:36–37): first it is purged (*hiṭṭē*, *kipper*) and then it is consecrated (*māšaḥ*, *qiddēš*). Further corroboration is supplied in the text of the priestly consecration, where not only are the identical verbs used but even the objects to which the sacrificial blood is applied also correspond. The extremities of the priests, namely, their right ear lobes, thumbs, and big toes, are daubed (*nātan*; 8:24), whereas they and their clothing are sprinkled (*hizzâ*; 8:30). The only distinction is the nature of the sacrificial blood: the blood for the altar stems from the purification offering, which, by definition, is applied solely to objects (see chap. 4, COMMENT B) whereas the blood used on the priests stems from 'ēl *hammillu im*, the consecration ram (8:22–24). Another distinction is that the blood used for consecrating the priest is taken from the altar. The consecrating power of the blood is generated by its contact with the sacred altar. The priests are then consecrated with the anointing oil, which, holy from its inception, transmits its consecrating power directly. (For details, see the NOTES on 8:15, 23 and chap. 8, COMMENT D). Those minor differences apart, there are striking similarities between these two rites, not just in form but in purpose; priests and altar require purgation and consecration.

Yet a number of questions remain regarding the altar blood rite: (1) Why does the blood sprinkled in the adytum and shrine have a purgative effect, but on the altar its function is consecratory? It can be answered that the sprinkling on the altar was preceded by its daubing. The purpose of the second application cannot be the same as the first. The text tells us: it is for consecration. (2) If the altar needs to be sanctified, why not use the anointment oil, whose very purpose is to consecrate and indeed was so used on the altar for its consecration (8:15)? The answer may be that this time the altar is not consecrated but reconsecrated. It first needs to be purged of “the pollution of the Israelites” (v 19). The blood that purges is available again, this time for sanctification. Its sanctifying power derives from being brought inside the Tent—indeed, inside the adytum itself (so the explicit statement concerning the blood of the goat, v 15). (3) Why is the altar the only sanctum that requires purgation and consecration whereas the Ark and incense altar need only to be purged? Here the answer points to the singular function of the altar: it is the medium of God's salvific expiation of the sins of Israel. Therefore, not only does it have to be purged of Israel's sins; it must be a fit instrument for effecting expiation for Israel when sacrifices are offered upon it. This is precisely what the text states when the purification offering is sacrificed upon the newly consecrated altar: *wayēqaddēšēhû lēkapp ēr 'ālāyw* ‘and he (Moses) consecrated it to effect atonement upon it” (8:15).<sup>1</sup>

20. *purging the adytum* (*mikkappēr 'et-haqqōdeš*). Things but not persons can be the direct object of the verb *kipper* (chap. 4, COMMENT B below). The purpose of v 20a is to stress the fact that the purging of the sanctuary must be complete before beginning the Azazel rite. This precaution is well advised: all of the sanctuary's impurities must first be released by the blood rite before the high priest can transfer them onto the head of the live goat. Most likely, it is this special warning that prompted the author of the Temple Scroll to prescribe that the entire sacrificial ritual of the purification offerings must be completed, including the burning of their suet (v 20) and carcasses (v 27), before the rite with the Azazel goat can begin (see COMMENT A below).

---

<sup>1</sup> Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16: a New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (vol. 3; Anchor Yale Bible; New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 1037–1038.

*he shall bring forward (wēhiqrīb).* While the sacrificial goat had been “brought forward” to be offered on the altar (v 9), the Azazel goat had been “stationed alive before the Lord” (v 10). Now it is the latter’s turn to be “brought forward” for its peculiar ritual. Ordinarily, it is the offerer himself who “brings forward” his sacrifice (e.g., 1:2, 3, 10, 14). In this case the offerer is the people or their representatives (v 5), whose iniquities and transgressions—that is to say, whose brazen and presumptuous sins—are to be carried away by the goat. But as the brazen, presumptuous sinner is barred from the sanctuary, there is no other alternative but that the high priest should act on behalf of the people (see the NOTES on vv 5, 9 and chap. 4, COMMENT B).

21. *both of his hands (Štē yādāw).* The fact that the text stresses that the hand-leaning rite is executed with both hands is the key to understanding the function of the Azazel goat. It is not a sacrifice, else the hand-leaning would have been performed with one hand (see the NOTE on 1:4). The two-handed ceremonial instead serves a transference function: to convey, by confession, the sins of Israel onto the head of the goat (see the NOTE on “iniquities” below and COMMENT E).<sup>2</sup>

...

*confess over it (wēhitwaddā ‘ālāyw).* Confession is only required of brazen, presumptuous sins (see the NOTE on 5:5 and the COMMENT on 5:20–26). The Azazel rite, according to Levine (1974: 82), epitomizes the demonic character of the Day of Atonement. The high priest compels the demon Azazel to admit the goat into his domain by entering the adytum to be “invested with its numinous power” and infusing the goat with it by leaning his hands on it. The purpose of the confession is “to trap the sins by exposing them, by calling them by their name, and thus preventing their escape or concealment.” Three comments are in order. First of all, confession would release sins, not entrap them, to judge by the operation of any utterance containing the divine Name, be it a vow, blessing, or curse. Its function, moreover, is judicial and not magical: to reduce the gravity of a nonexpiable wanton sin to an inadvertency expiable by sacrifice (see the NOTE on 5:5). Second, instead of fulfilling the magical objective of infusing the scapegoat with the adytum’s sacred power, the hand-leaning rite simply transfers the sins of the people onto the goat, as expressly indicated by the text (v 21). Finally, and more significantly, the requirement of two *ḥaṭṭā’*t goats for the people reveals how Israel transformed an ancient exorcism. Demonic impurity was exorcised in three ways: curse, destruction, or banishment. The last was often used; instead of evil being annihilated by curse of fire, it was banished to its place of origin (e.g., netherworld, wilderness) or to some other place where its malefic powers could either work in the interests of the sender (e.g., enemy territory) or do no harm at all (e.g., mountains, wilderness). Thus the scapegoat was sent to the wilderness, which was considered to be uninhabited except by the satyr-demon Azazel. The best-known example of this type of temple purgation is the Babylonian New Year festival, when the officiant literally wipes the sanctuary walls with the carcass of a ram and then throws it in the river. Thus the same animal that purges the temple impurities carries them off (see COMMENTS C and E below).

The hand-leaning, according to Levine, serves a different function: “perhaps one may see in the hand-leaning the activation of divine power. The priest is girded with divine power when he stands in the Deity’s chamber, and with this power, he compels the goat and arouses it to action

---

<sup>2</sup> Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16: a New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (vol. 3; Anchor Yale Bible; New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 1040–1041.

against the second goat-demon Azazel” (1969: 94). Besides the unsupportable notion that entering the adytum invests the high priest with divine power, this interpretation is unacceptable because it attributes discrete functions to the hand-leaning and confession, whereas they clearly complement and reinforce one another: the imposition of the hands simply designates the destination of the confessed sins. The hand-leaning, so to speak, is the vehicle that conveys the verbal pronouncement of the people’s sins onto the head of the goat. A transfer thus takes place—not from the high priest, who is personally immune from the contamination produced by the sins he confesses—but from Israel itself; its sins, exorcised by the high priest’s confession, are transferred to the body of the goat, just as the sanctuary’s impurities, absorbed by the purgation blood, are (originally) conveyed to the goat (see COMMENT A below for details).<sup>3</sup>

....

COMMENT B

### ***B. The Function***

The rendering of *ḥaṭṭā*’*t* as a purification offering leads automatically to the question: Whom or what does it purge? Herein lies the first surprise: it is not the offerer of the sacrifice. It must be remembered that the *ḥaṭṭā*’*t* is brought by an individual under two circumstances: severe physical impurity, such as that of the parturient, *mēšōrā*’, or *zāb* (chaps. 12–15), or because of the commission of certain inadvertent sins (e.g., chap. 4). Clearly, physical impurity is removed by ablution: “he shall launder his clothes [and] bathe in water” (15:8 *inter alia*). Spiritual impurity, conversely, which is caused by inadvertent violation of prohibitive commandments (4:2), requires no purificatory rite. The fact that his sin is inadvertent (*bišēgāgā*) and that he feels guilt (*wē’āšēm*) means that he has undergone inner purification.

The contention that the *ḥaṭṭā*’*t* never purifies its offerer is supported by the use of its blood: “Moses took the *ḥaṭṭā*’*t* blood and with his finger put [some] on the horns around the altar, decontaminating (*wayēḥāṭṭē*) the altar” (Lev 8:15). The *ḥaṭṭā*’*t* blood, then, is the purging element, the ritual detergent. Blood as a purgative is attested in Hittite ritual: “They smear with blood the golden god, the wall, the utensils of the entirely new god. The new god and the temple become clean” (Ulippi 4.38–40, cited in Wright 1987: 36 n. 67). Still, the rationale for blood in Israel is *sui generis* (see chap. 11, COMMENT C).

Moreover, its use is confined to the sanctuary, but *it is never applied to a person* (Milgrom 1970c). For example, the rites for the healed *mēšōrā*’ and the priests’ consecration call for both the *ḥaṭṭā*’*t* and the blood daubing, but the latter ritual stems from other sacrificial animals and not from the *ḥaṭṭā*’*t* (14:14, 25; 8:22–24; Exod 29:20). Recently, Rodriguez has taken issue with this view. Conceding that the *ḥaṭṭā*’*t* purges the sanctuary on Yom Kippur because the text says so explicitly (16:16–20), he therefore concludes that the absence of such a statement from all other attestations of this sacrifice means that in these cases it purifies not the sanctuary but the persons offering it (1979: 128–30). The only evidence he can muster is indirect: when the altar is purged, the *ḥaṭṭā*’*t* blood is put on the altar’s horns *sābīb* ‘all around’ (8:15; 16:18); whenever

---

<sup>3</sup> Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16: a New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (vol. 3; Anchor Yale Bible; New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 1042–1043.

this latter term is missing, the blood is simply put on the horns and something else must be intended (1979: 136–38). If the designation *sābīb* were critically significant, however, it would not be missing from the prescriptive directive concerning the daubing of the altar in Exod 29:12. Furthermore, the latter chapter does not hesitate to use *sābīb* in describing the blood manipulation of the *’ōlā* (Exod 29:16) and *millu ’im* (Exod 29:20), which clearly demonstrates that its absence in the *ḥaṭṭā ’t* pericope is of no consequence. Finally, the occurrence of *sābīb* in the procedures for the *’ōlā* (1:5, 11), *šēlāmīm* (3:2, 8, 13), and *’āšām* (7:2) is meant simply to specify the four sides of the altar, and this is its meaning for the *ḥaṭṭā ’t* as well. The conclusion is inescapable that, just as the *ḥaṭṭā ’t* blood acts as a purgative on Yom Kippur, it acts likewise every time it is brought into contact with the sanctuary sancta.

Finally, a study of the *kipper* prepositions is decisive (Milgrom 1970b). In the context of the *ḥaṭṭā ’t*, *kipper* means “purge” and nothing else, as indicated by its synonyms *ḥiṭṭē’* and *ṭihar* (e.g., 14:51; cf. chap. 16, COMMENT F; Ezek 43:20, 26). When the object is nonhuman, *kipper* takes the preposition *’al* or *b* or a direct object. For example, all three usages are attested in the purging of the adytum on the Day of Purgation (16:16, 20), and they must be understood literally, for the *kipper* rite takes place on (*’al*) the *kappōret* and on the floor before it, in (*b*) the adytum, or it can be said that the entire room (*’et*) is purged (*kipper*; cf. also 6:23; 16:10, 33; Exod 30:10), (Janowski 1982: 185 n. 5, who claims that *kipper ’al* always means “expiate for,” must entertain the absurd idea that sancta [and the scapegoat, 16:10] are capable of sinning [see Milgrom 1985d: 302–4].) When the object of *kipper* is a person, however, it is never expressed as a direct object but requires the prepositions *’al* or *be ’ad*. Both signify “on behalf of” (16:6, 24, 30, 33; Num 8:12, 21), but they are not entirely synonymous. The difference is that *’al* can only refer to persons other than the subject, but when the subject wishes to refer to himself he must use *bē ’ad* (e.g., 9:7; 16:6, 11, 24; Ezek 45:22). This distinction is confirmed by Job 42:8: “Offer a burnt offering for yourselves (*bē ’adkem*) and Job, my servant, will intercede *on your behalf* (*’ālēkem*)” (Milgrom 1970b). This means the purgation rite of the *ḥaṭṭā ’t* is not carried out on the offerer but only on his behalf.

If not the offerer, what then is the object of the *ḥaṭṭā ’t* purgation? The above considerations lead to only one answer: that which receives the purgative blood: the sanctuary and its sancta. By daubing the altar with the *ḥaṭṭā ’t* blood or by bringing it inside the sanctuary (e.g., 16:14–19), the priest purges the most sacred objects and areas of the sanctuary on behalf of the person who caused their contamination by his physical impurity or inadvertent offense.

This conclusion enables us to understand the distinction between the *ḥaṭṭā ’t* for impurities and that for inadvertencies. The inadvertent offender is never called “impure” and hence requires no ablutions. In his case the concluding formula reads, *wēkipper hakkōhēn ... wēnislāḥ lô* ‘the priest shall perform the purgation rite ... that he may be forgiven’ (4:20, 26, 31, 35) whereas for the impure person the formula reads, *wēkipper hakkōhēn ... wēṭāhēr(āh)* ‘the priest shall perform the purgation rite ... and he (she) shall be clean’ (12:6, 8; 14:9, 20). Thus the impure person needs purification and the sinner needs forgiveness. Ostensibly, this distinction breaks down in the case of the corpse-contaminated Nazirite who brings a purification offering because *ḥāṭā’ ’al-hannāpeš* ‘he erred in regard to the corpse’ (Num 6:11). This leads a recent scholar to declare that “ritual impurity could be considered a sin” (Rodriguez 1979: 104); but he has overlooked the exceptional nature of the Nazirite. He is “holy” (Num 6:5, 8), and the contamination of holiness is a serious sin. Note the wording of the warning to priests in this regard: “Lest they incur *ḥēṭ’* and die thereby” (Lev 22:9; cf. Kiuchi 1987: 72 and for details, see chap. 15, COMMENT E).

The inadvertent offender needs forgiveness not because of his act per se—as indicated above, his act is forgiven because of the offender’s inadvertence and remorse—but because of the consequence of his act. His inadvertence has contaminated the sanctuary, and it is his responsibility to purge it with a (*ḥaṭṭā`t*). Confirmation of this thesis is provided by the Tannaites: “All of the (*ḥaṭṭā`t*) goats purge the pollution of the Temple and its sancta” (*m. Šebu.* 1:4–5; cf. *t. Šebu.* 1:3). This rabbinic tradition has preserved the postulate that the *ḥaṭṭā`t* blood is the ritual detergent employed by the priest to purge the sanctuary of the impurities inflicted upon it by the offerer of the sacrifice.

The *ḥaṭṭā`t* as the authorized purgative of the sanctuary echoes with a familiar ring for students of ancient Near Eastern cults in which temple purifications play so dominant a role. Impurity was feared because it was considered demonic. It was an unending threat to the gods themselves and especially to their temples, as exemplified by the images of protector gods set before temple entrances (e.g., the *šēdu* and *lamassu* in Mesopotamia and the lion-gargoyles in Egypt) and, above all, by the elaborate cathartic and apotropaic rites to rid buildings of demons and prevent their return. Let examples from *ANET*<sup>3</sup> suffice: Egypt, 325, 329–30; Hattia, 346, 351–53, 357, 358; Mesopotamia, 331–34, 334–38, 338–39. Thus for both Israel and her neighbors impurity was a physical substance, an aerial miasma that possessed magnetic attraction for the realm of the sacred. As will be shown below, Israel thoroughly overhauled this concept of impurity in adapting it to its monotheistic system, but the notion of its dynamic and malefic power, especially in regard to the sancta, was not completely expunged from P. Thus Molech worship is forbidden because it contaminates “my sanctuary” (20:3). Whoever is contaminated by a corpse and fails to purify himself “has contaminated the Lord’s sanctuary” (Num 19:20, 13). Those afflicted with pelvic discharges also need purification “lest they die through their impurity by contaminating my Tabernacle which is among them” (15:31). The two latter offenders are banished with the *mēṣōrā`* “that they do not contaminate the camp in whose midst I dwell” (Num 5:2b). True, the rabbis interpreted each of these passages on the assumption that impurity came into direct contact with the holy, specifically that the offender while in an impure state entered the sanctuary or ate of sacred food (*t. Šebu.* 1:8; *Sipra*, *Hobah* 13:10). It is patently clear, however, that these texts are grounded in the axiom, common to all ancient Near Eastern culture, that impurity is the implacable foe of holiness wherever it exists; it assaults the sacred realm even from afar.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>4</sup> Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16: a New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (vol. 3; Anchor Yale Bible; New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2008), 254–257.