

Parshat Acharei Mot, *Mah Nishma*, Leffell School Newsletter

What kind of person walks a goat into a ravine?

In the ritual for Yom Kippur described in *Acharei Mot*, two goats are chosen; one “wins”-- is sacrificed to God-- and one “loses” and becomes the scapegoat, carrying the sins of the people into the wilderness, to be thrown off a ravine and die. The Torah describes the ritual, assigning an *ish iti* the job of taking the goat into the wilderness. The term *Ish Iti* is translated in several ways: a timely man, a man of the moment, or a man with limited time. What exactly is a “timely man?”

Rashi understands this in a beautiful way. In his words, an *Ish Iti* had to be *muchan l'kach miyom etmol*, ready for it from the day before. He had to be someone who prepared, who understood that it would make sense to look ahead and prepare. It takes a particularly wise person to actually look ahead and prepare our actions from day to day. This is not just about packing lunch; in a spiritual sense, life requires us to think about how our words and actions will be received by those around us.

It is far more common to consider our actions only in hindsight. As Rabbi Shmuel Goldin writes, we spend our time with “if only’s”... *If only I had been more aware... If only I could have known where my words or my actions would lead... I would certainly have spoken more carefully.*

If we could somehow perceive the potential future results of our words or actions, we [would] be more able to carefully calibrate our current reactions and interactions, sparing ourselves and those around us untold measures of pain.

The *ish iti*, the person with awareness of how his or her actions might fall on the world, is the person best suited to carry out the sins of the people, to walk into the wilderness with steady footing.

The world is a narrow ravine and we are all moving tenderly along, feeling at moments like the vulnerable goat. When we walk with awareness that time is limited, when we consider how our future actions might affect others, we can move forward with stability and balance. It is an *ish iti*, a person who looks ahead to tomorrow, that is able to show the courage to keep going. *Shabbat shalom.*