

*Acharei Mot*

May 7, 2016

### This Week's Text

וְסִמָּד אֶהְרֹן אֶת-שְׁתֵּי יָדָיו, עַל רֹאשׁ הַשְּׂעִיר הַחַי, וְהִתְנַדָּה עָלָיו אֶת-כָּל-עֲוֹנוֹת בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל, וְאֶת-כָּל-פְּשָׁעֵיהֶם לְכָל-חַטָּאתָם; וְנָתַן אֹתָם עַל-רֹאשׁ הַשְּׂעִיר, וְשָׁלַח בְּיַד-אִישׁ עֵתִי הַמִּדְבָּרָה.

Leviticus 16:8 *And Aaron shall lay both his hands upon the head of the live goat, and confess over him all the iniquities of the children of Israel, and all their transgressions, even all their sins; and he shall put them upon the head of the goat, and shall send him away by the hand of an appointed man into the wilderness.*

### Linking Our Text to Modern Israel

It is difficult to relate to many of the chapters in Leviticus, replete with ancient Israel's rituals and sacrifices. However, this week's portion mentions *Azazel*, the scapegoat - a concept familiar in this modern day. Though scholarship shows that *Azazel* was more likely the name of an ancient Canaanite demon the Israelites wanted out of their midst, William Tyndale, the 16th century Protestant who translated the Bible into English, rendered *Azazel* as an "escaped goat." Now, the term scapegoat is commonly understood as one who is blamed and or punished for the misdeeds of others.

Throughout history the Jewish people and the State of Israel in particular have been the scapegoat of many an accuser. Some allegations have come from neighboring Middle East nations and others from the global community, which tends to scrutinize Israel with an intensity reserved only for it. Without a doubt, Israel as a nation has room for growth and improvement. However, assigning blame for all manner of offenses that are loosely, if at all, the responsibility of Israel portrays a one-sided perspective, expresses offensive stereotypes, and reflects an unjust narrative rather than fact.

In an interview in 2015, Jon Stewart asked Jimmy Carter to comment on connections of religion to the murder of Charlie Hebdo and his staff in their Paris offices. Carter responded, "One of the origins for it is the Palestinian problem. And this aggravates people who are affiliated in any way with the Arab people who live in the West Bank and Gaza, what they are doing - what's being done to them." Carter continued on, expressing dismay at the time that had elapsed since the 1993 Oslo accords and the lack of progress toward a resolution in the Palestinian-Israeli



#### Additional References:

Rabbi David H. Auerbach, "[The Scapegoat of History](#)"

Ben-Dror Yemini, "[Who needs facts? We have Israel as a scapegoat](#)," November 19, 2015

conflict. This attitude obfuscates responsibility for the act of terrorism in Paris. Instead of assigning responsibility to hatred or radicalism, Carter pointed to Israeli control over the West Bank as a cause for the terrorist attacks in Paris. By coupling this terrorist attack with what's "being done" to the Palestinians in Israel, Carter "scape-goated" the Jewish people and placed responsibility for the casualties in Paris at Israel's doorstep.

The ritual of symbolically placing the sins of the people on a goat and sending it into the wilderness is just that - a symbolic gesture that wishes away the perceived negative elements of society. Facing contemporary realities and assuming responsibility for words and actions that inspire xenophobia and brutality will bring Israel and the region closer to a more favorable chapter of life for all its citizens.

### **Discussion Questions:**

"Scapegoating" is putting erroneous blame on an individual or entity for something for which they are not responsible. How does that occur in the political arena? What is the effect of ignoring the complex realities that surround any political or personal situation like this?

Adolf Hitler was the most notorious person to scapegoat Jews. Consider this article on the scapegoating of Jews penned by Amil Imani, "[The Scapegoating of Jews](#)," March 28, 2010, found in the American Thinker.