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The Crossroads of Life

Two identical goats awaited the High Priest in the Temple courtyard on Yom Kippur. The multitudinous spectators watched with bated breath as the High Priest was presented with a box that contained two slips of paper, the lots that would determine the respective fates of the two goats. He reached into the box, drew the lots and placed them on the heads of the goats. One goat was now designated "for God," the other for Azazel.

The High Priest proceeded to ritually slaughter the goat that was "for God." He collected its blood, sprinkled it on the holy altar and offered up the goat as a sanctified sacrifice to God. The other goat was led out of the courtyard into the open country to a distant mountainside covered with jagged rocks. The goat was pushed over the precipice, and as it tumbled down the mountainside it was torn to pieces by the sharp rocky protrusions.

What was the significance of this ritual? Why was it considered one of the highlights of the Yom Kippur service, the holiest day of the year?

The commentators explain that the two goats symbolize the two divergent roads along which a person can travel through his lifetime on this earth—the road of spirituality and the road of materialism.

The road to spiritual growth is arduous and difficult. It requires much sacrifice. But in the end, perseverance brings fulfillment and eternal rewards as the exalted spirit connects with the Above. Most of us have felt at one time or another a moment of spiritual transcendence and remember the profound exhilaration as it resonated in their hearts and souls. This is the greatest pleasure a human being can experience, and it is represented by the goat that is designated "for God" and sacrificed on the altar.

The road to material success, on the other hand, is more accessible. It provides constant gratification for the body's physical needs and lulls us into a false sense of security. But this road ultimately leads to destruction, to a life wasted on the pleasures of the moment and deprived of the supreme and enduring pleasures of the spirit. At the end, it falls off the final precipice and disintegrates into nothingness..

Yom Kippur is the day when these two roads intersect. It is a defining moment in a person's life. Once again, he stands at the crossroads. Once, he must make the hard choices that will affect not

only his life on this earth but the eternal condition of his indestructible soul.

A weary traveler, thirsty and covered with dust, sat by the side of the highway in the broiling sun. Suddenly, he heard a rumble in the distance. He looked up and saw a cloud of dust approaching. As it drew near, he saw that it was a beautiful carriage drawn by four handsome white horses. As the carriage drew nearer, it came to a halt, and a rich man stepped out.

“My good fellow,” he said to the weary traveler, “can I offer you a ride? It is much too hot to walk when you can ride in comfort.”

“Thank you, sir,” said the traveler, “but I must decline your kind offer.”

“But why?” said the rich man. “I am not asking you for anything. I’m just offering to help a man in obvious distress.”

“And I thank you for it,” said the traveler. “But you see, we are not traveling in the same direction. You are traveling south, but I am headed north. We have different destinations.”

In our own lives, we need to ask ourselves if we are headed north or south. We need to ask ourselves if spiritual aspirations are our ultimate goal or if we are completely focused on material accomplishments. We need to ask ourselves if we are really content to take the easy way, the point of least resistance, or if we are prepared to make hard choices and sacrifices. Let us remember that the road to materialism ends in disappointment, while the road to spiritual growth ultimately delivers everlasting reward.