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## INTRODUCTION TO TRACT YOMAH, OR THE DAY OF ATONEMENT.

THE first seven chapters treat of the manner in which the Day of Atonement was celebrated in the second Temple: the different sacrifices brought on that day, the preparation of the high-priest for his ministry, and the order of service as he performed it, entering fully into minute details of every circumstance connected therewith. Although all this has an historical value only, we cannot refrain from giving an introduction to this tract, on account of that day being so different from all the holidays of Israel.

All the festivals, although they were not observed all the time during the first Temple, were nevertheless observed by some of the kings, who invoked the people to celebrate them some of the time; *e.g.*, the Feast of Passover, with all its sacrifices, in the reigns of Hezekiah and Josiah [2 Chron. xxx.; xxxv.]. There is also related [ibid. xxxv. 18], that in the days of the prophet Samuel, Passover was held. The Feast of Tabernacles was celebrated in the days of Solomon [1 Kings viii. 2], and although the children of Israel did not dwell in the booths since the days of Joshua b. Nun [Neh. viii. 17] nevertheless the feast was celebrated with all its appertaining sacrifices; and also the Pentecost they have kept [2 Chron. viii. 13]. The Day of Atonement, however, is not mentioned in the entire Scriptures, with the exception of Lev. xvi., and among the prescription of the various sacrifices; but even then we see something unusual among the commandments of the Scriptures; namely, the remark that he (Aaron) did as the Lord had commanded Moses. [1](#)

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Moreover, we can plainly see from the Scriptures, that at the time of King Solomon the Day of Atonement was one of the seven days of rejoicing, at the dedication of the Temple [1 Kings viii.; 2 Chron. vii. 8, 9]; and although it is said in the Talmud that the decision not to keep the Day of Atonement was only a temporary one (as it will be explained in Tract Moed Katan), still we cannot rely upon an individual opinion in the Talmud. The facts are that the Day of Atonement was not observed, not only during the first Temple, but at the beginning of the second as well, for even in Nehemiah the Feast of Tabernacles is mentioned, but the Day of Atonement is not. And even during the middle period of the second Temple the Talmud states that the Day of Atonement was one of the holidays for the people, in which the daughters of Israel, all dressed in white, went forth to dance in the vineyards, as will be explained in Tract Taanith. It would be ridiculous to believe that, while observing the five afflictions of the day (see chapter viii. of this tract), they nevertheless danced and sang, trying to captivate the youths.

Ewald, in speaking of that day, also remarks that it is different in its respect from all the holidays; but even he does not explain the reason. He only indicates that it may be a remnant of the pre-Mosaic time. In order to give the reader an opportunity of forming his own opinion, we herewith give an extract from Ewald concerning the Day of Atonement:

"The preparatory celebration in the autumn, which took place on the tenth day of the seventh month, was essentially distinguished from that of the spring in not being a terror-stricken celebration at the commencement of the year, which sought to avert the perils of the dim future and, as it were, the wrath of a new coming God, but in being rather a pure feast of penance which endeavored to expiate all the human and national transgressions and impurities which had occurred during the year, For although the searching stringency of Jahveism, already described, required that every, even the smallest, impurity and defilement which had been contracted should be immediately expiated, yet the higher religion was well aware how little all the

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secret and slowly advancing desecrations were actually removed from the entire community. Hence this universal festival of penance and expiation was established in order that even all these might be expiated as far as human labor could avail, and that the community, as free as possible from all guilt, might celebrate with joyous feelings the great happy festival of the year which immediately followed. Both this origin and purpose, and also its name, *feast of expiation*, show its genuine Mosaic character. Here, more than in any other, the entire purpose and the absolute stringency of the higher religion found expression, and it was certainly this religion which first founded the festival. Only in one of its rites, which, strictly speaking, is hardly essential, do we find a remnant of pre-Mosaic belief and life. The festival, then, was by no means to be principally of a domestic character, like the Passover; rather, in contradistinction to the latter, was it to become a thoroughly public festival. Accordingly, the people were not to offer any of the regular sacrifices, but a new one, which should go deeper and reach a more sensitive point in taming man's sensuous nature than the regular offerings. This was to be a rigid fast from the evening of the ninth to that of the tenth; the solitary fast which Jahveism annually required. The whole structure of Jahveism did indeed require that a sacrifice of the ordinary kind should be offered on this day, as its peculiar importance demanded; but this continued to be purely sacerdotal. It was a great expiatory offering, to be made by the high-priest or his representative. Not only the human members of the community, including the priests, were now deemed impure and in need of expiation, but even the visible sanctuary as well, as though, like a wall between the nation and its God, it received all the stains of impiety which were incurred in the realm. Hence the high-priest employed expiatory offerings of two kinds: one, purely sacerdotal and serving especially for the atonement of the sanctuary, and another, which had special reference to the share of the community, and must therefore also proceed from it. The latter bore quite a national stamp, and evidently forms that portion of the usages which was derived from a pre-Mosaic time, and still retained subsequently." ("The Antiquities of Israel," by H. Ewald, pages 361 to 364, which see.)

It seems to us that Ewald's opinion is not altogether right. We do not agree that this festival shows more of the Mosaic character than any other festival, nor with his opinion about the he-goat destined for Azazel, which he considers a pre-Mosaic rite. He is also not correct in saying that there were no regular sacrifices on that day, only new ones [vide Num. xxix. 7, 8], for the simple reason, if such was the case it would have been observed at the beginning of the second Temple, at least, when the entire Law, as we now have it, was discovered by Ezra; but, as stated above, the observance of that day with pomp and celebration (see Appendix) was begun some time during the middle period of the second Temple.

On the contrary, from the great preparations and parade of

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the high-priest to and from the Temple, and from other matters, which took place during the

service itself, we would be inclined to believe that the Hellenism which crept into Judaism has served a great deal towards their origination; and also concerning the he-goat destined for Azazel we have something to say, but as we do not like to lay before our readers the grounds for our supposition, we refrain from making our statement. We content ourselves with referring the reader to the book "Daath Elohim ba-Arez" ("The Knowledge of God in the Land"), by Abraham Krochmal, where he will find some hints concerning the Azazel of the Scripture and the Tsuk (rock of its destination) of the Mishna, and leave to him to form an opinion of the time of its origin.

Concerning the services proper at the Temple, we have to translate here for our English readers what we have already written in our Hebrew commentary to Tract Shekalim, chapter iv., Mishna D: "From this Mishna we can see that during the time of the Temple the leaders of the priests kept everything secret, and their customs were not known to any one else; otherwise there could not have been a dispute concerning the services there immediately after the destruction of the Temple. Moreover, R. Ishmael, himself a priest, and his forefathers, Elisha and Ishmael, were prominent priests during the time of the Temple; also R. Hanina the Segan was one of the prominent priests, still they knew not exactly the ceremonies and the manner of their performance, and differed in their opinions greatly. This must be borne in mind by the readers of the tracts treating the services and sacrifices."

We have added to this volume the Tract Hagiga, as it relates to the sacrifices of the festivals, and is also of great historical value. Although in the old edition the Tract Hagiga is next to Moed Katan, the last of section Moed, still in our new edition we could not keep up the old rotation, as we have divided the volumes of the above section in approximately uniform size, and each part contains a complete tract. Nevertheless we number the pages of each tract separately, in order that if any one wishes to bind the volumes in the old order, there should be no hindrance.

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## Footnotes

[xiii:1](#) Reading the Scriptures critically, we deem that Lev. xvi. is merely a continuation of Lev. x., where the death of the two sons of Aaron is related when they entered the sanctuary; and after that Aaron is instructed as to the manner in which he can enter the sanctuary *so he shall not die*. In the entire chapter xvi. no mention is made of the Day of Atonement, except that from verse 29 to the end of the chapter, we find the command that it shall be a statute forever for all the Israelites, that on the tenth day of the seventh month the high-priest shall make an atonement [p. xiii](#) for his brother priests, for the sanctuary, and for the people of Israel; but there is no command that he, on that day, shall perform all the ceremonies prescribed in the same chapter, for that concerns only the entrance of Aaron into the sanctuary. Also Ewald has considered this point; and it is possible that the sages, during the first Temple, interpreted this passage in the same manner, and all the sages after them, until the middle period of the second Temple, since when the learned priests, for a reason unknown to us, decided that the entire chapter relates to the Day of Atonement; and the sages of the Talmud, on account of this, afterwards deduced from the scriptural passages the elaborate manner of the service on that day to be found in the Talmud.

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