

Leviticus 16 – Day of Atonement

**a comparison between biblical and African concepts of
atonement and reconciliation**

by

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Abstract

The journey towards healing and transformation in Africa is a continual process, which calls all sectors of society to continually commit towards creating avenues of healing. Rituals have been identified and introduced as a guiding framework for the study as they are widely accepted as a strategy to provide healing and transformation. The study assumes that these rituals can be used as vehicles to tell our stories in order to recreate a community of hope. As such the study has attempted to establish this relationship and assess if these rituals of atonement can be used creatively by the church to bring healing and transformation. In order to elucidate the inherent similarities between biblical and African concepts of atonement the study used theological and exegetical tools to analyse these concepts.

The study established that the rituals of the Day of Atonement described in Leviticus 16 have certain similarities with some African rituals of atonement and reconciliation. The Leviticus rituals of atonement provide deep ethical and theological foundations that can positively inform the work of reconciliation in our social, economic, religious and political scene in Africa. The study then concludes that a constructive use of the Bible and the concept of atonement in the Old Testament will benefit Africa in its endeavour to bring about reconciliation.

However, in the background lies the assumption that the relationship between Africa and the Bible is not an innocent one. It is then recommended that our approach towards the Bible embraces and treats with sensitivity the fact that the same Bible has been used previously in Africa to shape ideologies like apartheid and liberation ideologies and as well as demonising some of the traditional African cultures and religious expressions. Nevertheless, both the biblical and African views of life indicate that the primary goal of rituals is a community of peace, friendship, purity and creative harmony. In view of the resemblances between the Day of Atonement rituals and the African rituals that have been explored we can safely use the Bible in order to contribute to the continual work of reconciliation in Southern Africa. (Key words: Day of Atonement, reconciliation, healing, Leviticus 16, harmony, rituals, Africa, Bible, similarities, ethics)

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 Background

The biblical story of creation begins with a perceived reality of peace whereby humanity is given a specific place within creation. Both the Priestly (Gn 1:1–2:4a) and the Yahwist (Gn 2:4b–25) stories present a worldview of relationship and harmonious co-existence. The expected reality in these stories is a relationship of love and harmony - between God, people and creation. Immediately after the creation stories, we are introduced to the notion of sin which begins to estrange God from creation. According to biblical tradition sin makes people ritually and morally impure and as a result they abuse the rest of creation. The whole of biblical tradition is set against this background and Yahweh is presented as calling people and all of creation to a relationship of love. This restoration of such a relationship is, according to Scripture, called atonement or reconciliation.

The need for reconciliation between God, people and creation permeates all of scripture. In the development of biblical faith in the Old Testament (OT) Yahweh is always seeking to renew, restore and reconcile with people (Gn 4:1-15; Ex 20:1–21; Lv 16; Dt 6:3-9; Is 1:10–20; Is 6:1-10). When we read the stories of the Patriarchs (Gn 12-50) we are confronted with the need for reconciliation or atonement between God and the people. This concept develops through the exodus and Sinai traditions where God continually called people to perform specific rituals in order to strengthen and develop a relationship of trust between Yahweh and the people.

In the biblical tradition these practices about purification and reconciliation are contained in the book of Leviticus. In this book (Lv) atonement between God, people and creation happens within a cultic context. There are rituals that the people had to perform in order to remove the sin that creates tension between God and people and these rituals happened within a day called the Day of Atonement (Venter 2005:275). The Day of Atonement festival is a very important ritual within biblical tradition because it defines the process in ancient Israel through which people are reconciled with

God. This ritual not only restored the relationship between Yahweh and the people but also offered a hopeful future for the people because Yahweh was believed to be acting in their favor.

This study seeks to assess the relationship between the biblical and African concepts of atonement, giving particular attention to the cosmology of atonement within the rituals used in these two concepts of reconciliation. The study further analyzes the Day of Atonement (Leviticus 16) within its biblical tradition and relates it with the African concepts of reconciliation and atonement.

1.2 Actuality and relevance

At the heart of the biblical story “Yahweh, who is the God of Israel, is in charge of human history and aims human well-being from start to finish, that is, at all times” (Nürnberg 2004:228). However, all the notions of creation presuppose that the experienced reality of life reflects a sense of brokenness in the relationship between God, humanity and creation. The brokenness of humanity is not limited to the Bible. The world we live in also exhibits human and natural evils that sets all of creation out of balance and subverts the creation purpose. It is out of this struggle that God always works towards reconciliation and atonement between God’s creative purpose and the imperfection of creation.

The power of evil seems to be continually breaking the seams of God’s creative purpose of peace and harmony within creation. The presence of unjust social structures, political conflicts, droughts, famine, family feuds and death creates a chaotic atmosphere (Nürnberg 2004:228). Southern Africa, like the rest of the world is faced with a lot of social, economic and political challenges. In the last ten years, for example, South Africa has gone through a lot of changes. In 1994 when democracy became a reality most South Africans thought that political change marked the end of their woes. However, the past still has its bearing as the country is still faced with racial issues, poverty and unemployment. The dawning of the new era is not without challenges. This has seen an emergence of new social issues such as the HIV/AIDS pandemic as well as the challenge of change.

In 1996 when the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was set up, there was a huge expectation that healing would be automatic dawn at all levels of society. People expected it would redress the inequalities of the past and create an atmosphere of everlasting peace. It was only after the process that people realized that reconciliation is a long process and all that the TRC did was to scratch the surface of the pain, anger, guilt and humiliation that lies at the heart of the country. This pain and loss of human dignity due to these varying issues seems to be creating a new culture of cynicism, withdrawal and loss of hope in the future. It is against this historical background that Villa – Vicencio (1999:49-50) suggests that theologians and storytellers can become instruments in bringing new birth out of the ambiguities of the past.

Having been involved in anti-bias and healing work within the Methodist Church of Southern Africa (MCSA) I have continually grown to appreciate that the church has an important role to play in bringing about atonement in society. The church has very rich rituals, which can provide the means through which sin, guilt, anger and shame can be transformed into a new life. These atonement rituals cannot only be used to deal with the past but also to restore the dignity of communities that have been affected by social issues such as HIV/Aids and those who have no hope of ever being employed.

The journey towards healing and transformation is a continual process, which calls all sectors of society to continually commit towards creating avenues of healing. This study seeks to contribute towards the ongoing process of bringing about reconciliation in society. Towards achieving this goal, the church in Africa has a rich heritage of both biblical and African concepts and rituals of atonement that can be creatively used to cleanse the nation from perpetual guilt, anger and shame.

1.3 Problem statement

In most African traditional cultures the Bible is still viewed with suspicion because it is foreign to their cultural way of life. According to Gerald West (1997:99) the relationship between the Bible and Africa is not an innocent transaction. In his argument he calls this relationship a ‘transaction’, with the economic and legal

connotations of a transaction, to signify that the introduction of the Bible to Africa was not entirely innocent. This means that there are obvious negative and positive effects of the presence of the Bible in Africa, which the study will highlight.

To be specific, the last fifty years of South African religious history shows how the Bible was hermeneutically manipulated to shape the apartheid and liberation ideologies. The proponents of the apartheid ideology saw themselves as the chosen 'Israel' with the mandate to create and protect God's territory in Africa. In 1944 a quasi-cultural group called Broederbond (started in 1918) declared "the Broederbond is born out of a deep conviction that the Afrikaner nation has been placed in this country by God's hand" (Serfontein 1982:206). Some of these notions found their way into the life of the Dutch Reformed Church in 1951, which produced a synod report on scriptural basis for racial apartheid (Adonis 1994:254). The reverse is true for those who were oppressed as they saw themselves as the same 'Israel' in the Egyptian bondage and its activists as the Moses' and Joshua's of the struggle. According to Mosala (1989:30) biblical texts used to oppress people can be equally used by the oppressed as they are by the oppressor. Mofokeng (1988:34-38) concurs with Mosala's view and further urges the younger generation not to simply treat the Bible as a book of liberation as those who were fighting for liberation used it.

Although Africa's history with the Bible may not be a holy transaction, the Bible has made its home in Africa and can be used constructively to bring about atonement and reconciliation in society. The study sets out to determine this relationship by exploring the following:

- can the biblical and African concepts of atonement be used in the African context to bring reconciliation?
- what are the biblical and African cosmologies of atonement and how do they function?
- does the development of Jewish *Yom Kippur* (Day of Atonement) have some resemblances to African rituals of atonement?

- can these rituals of atonement be used creatively in the church to bring healing and transformation?

1.4 Aims and objectives

The following are the aims and objectives of the study:

1.4.1 Aim

The main focus in this study is to compare and contrast the Jewish Day of Atonement (Lv 16) with African rituals and concepts of atonement in order to contribute to the continual work of reconciliation in Southern Africa.

1.4.2 Specific objectives

The following are the main objectives of the study:

- to identify the characteristic features of atonement in biblical and African traditions;
- to compare biblical and African concepts of atonement;
- to elucidate the understanding of atonement inherent in both concepts of atonement;
- to do an exegetical analysis of Leviticus 16 by taking historical and literary issues of the text into consideration;
- to isolate theological and ethical issues in the ritual of atonement;
- to contextualize these concepts in real life situations in our southern Africa context.

1.5 Methodology

This section describes the methodology that has been adopted in order to achieve the research objectives of this study. Since the research is primarily qualitative in nature it analyses the relationship between the biblical concepts of atonement and compare them with African concepts of atonement. This comparison takes an exegetical and a

theological format respectively. The data collection process was therefore based on three methods: a review of related literature, informal discussions and personal assessments.

Since I am involved in the healing and transformation work within MCSA I had the opportunity to attend some of the various community programmes such as the Sakha Ukuthula Peace Education Programme and Anti-bias Training Programme. These helped in gaining insights into some of the issues of pain, withdrawal, fear and uncertainty about the future. It is from such engagement that I learned more about the community and its ventures, and this helped to enrich this research.

Many people were consulted, in order to get a broad base of input into the research. Informal discussions with friends, colleagues and professionals in the field of Biblical Studies, like professor Human, my supervisor from the University of Pretoria, were included at various stages of the study. This experience helped to formulate the basic concepts and relevance of the study.

For the purposes of the study a vast review of literature was done. This literature includes the works of renowned biblical scholars such as Milgrom (1991), Gerstenberger (1996), Hartley (1992) and Kaiser (1994) who explore the literary and historical development of the biblical rituals and concepts of atonement. Furthermore the study has included biblical and theological scholars who have done an analysis of the African religious scenario and these include scholars such as Mosala (1989), West (1997) and Mofokeng (1988). All the above-mentioned scholars have contributed to the formulation of this study either with a hermeneutical, historical or cultural perspective.

1.6 Hypothesis

The study was developed by following the contributions of biblical and theological scholars in exploring the relevance of the Bible in the African context. Although scholars such as Maluleke (1996) and West (1997) question the relationship between Bible and Africa they agree that the Bible has made its home on the continent. It is against this background that this study compares the biblical and African concepts of

atonement. As such, the main assumption of the study is that the rituals of the Day of Atonement (Lv 16) have similarities with some African rituals of reconciliation. It further assumes that the rituals of atonement in Leviticus provide some deep ethical and theological foundations. Like biblical rituals African rituals of atonement bring about social, religious, economic and political reconciliation in Africa.

This study assesses rituals, like the TRC of South Africa, as a model for many other rituals that can be developed by the church and society to create a new culture of reconciliation. According to Omi (1998:135) rituals are important because, “When we are unable to move, rituals give gestures. When we are unable to think rituals put words into our mouths. When we are unable to journey, rituals carry us”. This statement expresses the core of this study. This study assumes that rituals can be used as vehicles to tell stories of pain, joy and recreate a community of hope. The fundamental issue is the proclamation of hope in the places of brokenness in our society.

1.7 Chapter outline

The contents of the study will be discussed and presented in four chapters. The first chapter has set out the relevance, background and methodological issues of the study. In the second chapter I will begin by defining the concept of atonement. I will then compare the biblical and African concept of atonement. Furthermore I will end with a cosmology of atonement. In the third chapter I will expose Leviticus 16 and isolate theological and ethical issues. This will include an analysis of the rituals involved in the Day of Atonement festival. The final chapter will then be an application of the concepts to African and South African conditions and will end with suggestions for a way forward.

1.8 Orthography and terminology

The following terms and definitions have been used in the study. The stud also uses the adjusted Harvard reference system. For biblical references the New International Version Bible has been used.

1.8.1 Abbreviations

TRC – Truth and Reconciliation Commission

OT - Old Testament

NT – New Testament

MCSA – Methodist Church of Southern Africa

SACC – South African Council of Churches

ATR – African Traditional Religions

1.8.2 Concepts

The following concepts and terminology need a short description:

- *Atonement*- this is a process through which a relationship between estranged parties can be restored. In biblical traditional the relationship between God and people can be defiled by moral and ritual sin. To restore this relationship the sin that has come between God and people needs to be expiated and appropriated usually through the specific rituals that included the use of a sacrificial animal.
- *Reconciliation* – a process that results in a restored relationship between God and people, people with people and people with the land, thus a peaceful harmonious relationship.
- *Rituals* – symbolic biblical and African actions that are intended to act as mediums, through which people can express emotions, learn and find healing and hope for the future. Examples can be Holy Communion, liturgies and church services, the process of the TRC, poetry, counselling and worship.
- *Cosmology* – this refers to an assumed worldview that characterizes a particular people and shapes their relationship.
- *African* – the use of African in the study is a much-generalized way which views the African worldview characterized by the African indigenous way of

life. The study recognizes that this is not the only worldview that characterizes life in the African continent.

Chapter 2

Atonement - biblical and African concepts

2.1 Introduction

The concept of atonement lies at the centre of biblical traditions. It is deeply embedded in the history of Israel, which is relayed in the Old Testament. In our biblical heritage, the annual celebration of the Day of Atonement (*Yom Kippur*) in the book of Leviticus provides a comprehensive view of the rituals and process of restoring relationships. The goal of this atonement festival is not only the celebration of God's creation, but also the hope for the renewal of creation through the Day of Atonement. Through the celebrations of this day the Israelites could experience a new beginning by being cleansed from their sins and restored to fellowship with their God and creation.

Over a long time scholars such as Milgrom (1991), Hartly (1992), Venter (2005), Gerstenberger (1996), Setiloane (1986), Maimela (1982), Thorpe (1991) have analysed different religions and cultures around the world and found that the biblical concept of atonement is not uniquely an Israelite tradition. Throughout the world there are different rituals and religious practices used to bring about reconciliation between God and people. These rituals assist each person to develop a relationship with God and with other people. At the centre of these rituals there are ethics that help to guide participants towards the goal and process of atonement.

After a wide review of related literature Africa presented an interesting situation, as it was discovered that throughout the African continent there are different religious and cultural groups who practice specific rituals comparable to those presented in the Old Testament. In all these traditions the goal is to bring about harmony between estranged parties. For the purposes of this study the African situation will be used as a basis of comparison. This chapter, therefore, will comparatively discuss both the African and biblical concepts of atonement. It will also examine how they function within their respective traditions and also elucidate a cosmology of atonement either implied or explicit within these traditions.

This chapter is divided into four sections. The first section discusses the definition of atonement and its elements. The second section defines the African concept of atonement and outlines its main elements along with their significance in bringing about healing and restoration. The third section presents and discusses in more detail the concept of atonement and its development in the history of Israel or rather in biblical terms as presented in the Old Testament. The last section of the chapter analyses the characteristic features of both the African and biblical contexts relative to atonement, and discusses the different approaches in which atonement is achieved in a quest to compare and contrast these approaches in order to establish a relationship between these contexts.

2.2 Atonement – a definition

In its general usage the word ‘atonement’ means the act of reconciling with another person or group. It has its roots in the word ‘atone’, which is derived from the phrase ‘at one’. Being ‘at one’ with someone is to be in a harmonious personal relationship with the concerned individual (Mitton 1962:309). In its religious usage the word atonement refers to the process through which the hindrances to reconciliation between God and creation are removed. In many religious traditions this process may involve particular actions, a declaration of faith, a ritual sacrifice of an animal or the performance of some other ritual. In all religious traditions the heart of atonement is the restoration of mutual, unadorned, unpolluted divine/human relationships (Ryken et. al 1998:54–55).

The biblical understanding of atonement carries two basic viewpoints: the first view is based on the definition of the verb *kipper*, which has Arabic roots meaning, “to cover” (Kaiser 1994:998). This view gives the impression that atonement is a means of expiation rather than cleansing. The second view held by Milgrom (1991:1045) and Kiuchi (1987:144–145) is based on the theory of transference of the sin and power to defile as a propitiatory means to appease divine wrath. The two latter scholars argue that atonement has to do with the purgation of sin and reconciling people with God. In order to understand atonement and reconciliation in the OT both notions are essential because there is a need to propitiate relationships as well as remove the hindrance in the relationship. This concept is evident when one analyses the rituals of atonement in the OT (Mitton 1962:310). At another level one can argue that most of what is regarded as true worship in the OT exists within the context of rituals.

2.3 Biblical concept of atonement

2.3.1 Introduction

The concept of atonement in the Old Testament can be understood in different ways. In an article Zulu (1998:189) cites Wurzburger and gives the following ways in which the word atonement can be understood within biblical traditions. It could indicate:

- a process of covering up sins to forestall retribution;
- a form of catharsis that decontaminates individuals from impurities induced by sinful behaviour;
- expiatory or proprietary acts designed to avert divine wrath and bring about reconciliation by redressing the imbalance caused by offences against the divine.

The above views are expressed in various ways in the OT. According to Venter (2005:285-286) the variety of rituals of atonement in the priestly literature were performed with a dual purpose:

- to bring forgiveness for the covenant people of God from all their sins and
- to bring freedom from the power of sin.

These two notions permeate most of the sacrificial systems in the OT, particularly the Day of Atonement festival in Leviticus 16. The development of the concept and the related rituals can be traced through a stretch of Israel's history.

In reading the Old Testament one cannot avoid the rich history of the development of worship and rituals in Israel. Israel's sacrificial system grew with the people's awakening to the presence and provision of God. These sacrifices are spread throughout the OT. The book of Leviticus contains prescriptions of various sacrifices, specifications for the tabernacle and directions for the priest. All these details bear witness to a long history of worship and the vital experience of the 'tabernacling presence' of God in the sanctuary. Israel's journey with God was a continual journey of revelation. According to the priestly writers God selected Israel for service and to be a congregation that bears witness to the redemptive acts of Yahweh (Anderson 1998:455). Israel over history grew like a child and responded to God's revelation. According to the biblical account, this history reveals God's redemptive hand from the time of creation through all the stages of Israel's history.

As Israel grew in the understanding of their God, rituals came into existence to sustain this relationship. These rituals not only sustained the growing relationship between God and people but also became a way of communal commemoration of God's acts in their history. Some of these rituals found their way into the centre of the people's existence and became a collection of symbols to help tell their story of salvation to their descendants. Like many other rituals Israel's rituals evolved and were purified during different historic periods to retell the story in whatever emerging context. According to Anderson (1998:462–3) with this growth Israel's whole life was eventually becoming a 'liturgy' of service to God.

According to the priestly writers God's sacramental presence in the centre of the community was an important feature in the people's lives. For God to be continually present the people had to make sure that no ethical or ritual impurity is permitted to defile the relationship. If by any incident this relationship was defiled, God provided sacrificial means of healing the covenant relationship and reuniting the people in communion with God – atonement (Ex 30:16; 32:30; Nm 16:47; Ezk 16:63).

As alluded to earlier in the study the concept of atonement developed within Israel's history. Although during the early stages of Israel's history there were specific sacrifices that the people made to God, it is during the exile period that the concept of atonement found a profound definition for the nation. During this historic period a lot of prophetic preaching viewed the exile as divine judgment upon the nation. This brought about a profound sense of remorse and failure for the nation. For the priestly writers there was a deep sensitivity to "the persistence of sin which contaminated the health of the community" (Anderson 1998:463). It is against this background that the present Day of Atonement festival is still celebrated within Jewish and Christian traditions.

Some biblical scholars (Boshoff & Scheffler 2000:23; Douglas 2003:121-2) argue that one cannot discuss the development of the Israelite worship rituals in isolation from the Ancient Near Eastern (ANE) world. Scholars like Anderson (1998:499) believe that "Israel appropriated a great deal of its sacrificial practice and liturgical language from others...but a profound transformation took place in the process of borrowing". What this implies is that Israel's rituals were not faxed from God to the people. It is then of

vital importance for this study to appreciate the fact that the atonement rituals in the Old Testament may have similarities with other rituals in different cultures.

2.3.2 Ancient Near Eastern context

The ANE, where the OT originated was inhabited by a variety of people including Israel. Although the Bible gives Israel an important place in the development of biblical tradition there are numerous other people that can be mentioned. Boshoff and Scheffler (2000:24) argue that in Israel's long existence there are no clear differences in the material culture between Israelites and their closest neighbours. They (Boshoff and Scheffler 2000:24) further contend that Israelites were part of the cultural environment of the ANE, as much as their neighbours were part of it. This means that Israel's worldview can only be a part of that historical context. There are many facets of this history but this study only takes into consideration the religious outlook of these biblical times.

In the world of the ANE the worship of many gods (polytheism) was the order of the day (Blenkinsopp 1986:355–359; Handy 1995:34–43). These gods had various functions (e.g. rain and fertility) either as expressions of celestial bodies or attached to specific places and countries. Even private families could own their household gods like the ones stolen by Rachel from her father's house (Gn 31:34). Religion was closely associated with fertility and nature. Female deities were venerated as universal mothers of life and male deities as the beloved of the goddess. Through specific rites the couple was responsible for the dying and resurrection of life. These gods were not only associated with nature but also with specific peoples and families. It is believed that the god of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in Genesis functioned at that level as a personal and family god (Boshoff & Scheffler 2000:54-56).

The polytheistic view of the ANE brings into question how we should view Israel's God. Many scholars have argued that Israel's faith has been based on a monotheistic view of God from its origins. But given the historical context of the ANE the reverse can also be true. Scholars argue that polytheism was a feature of the Israelite religion down through the end of the Iron Age. Human (1999:494-495) argues that the concept monotheism in Israel emerged gradually through the processes of evolution and revolution. Consistent with Smith (2002:44-76) and Human (1999:495), Gnuse (1979:182–184) cites passages

in the Bible from seventh-century works (Dt 32:8-9, Sm 26:19; 2 Kings 21:3,7) that support the concept of gradual growth and purification of the monotheistic view of Yahweh.

On the basis of this discussion there is enough argumentation to suggest that as much as Israel's concept of God developed over history, it is equally possible that even the concept of atonement developed with that history. It is also evident that the image of God, implied by this history, is a communal God who is involved in every aspect of life. This community between God and the rest of creation (including people) is maintained through rituals that include sacrifices.

2.3.3 Understanding Israel's worship

The worship of a god in the ANE culture often involved a sacrificial meal, which was used to bring a mysterious union between the god and the worshipping community (Boshoff & Scheffler 2000:56). Israel's deeds of worship did not have major differences from the rest of ANE. As Yahweh revealed Himself to Israel through events of their history they also developed ways of communication with this self-revelatory God. As their relationship with Yahweh grew their customs and rituals also got purified and adapted into the new contexts within which they found themselves. This means that Israel's worship during the time of Moses, the Judges, Solomon and the eight-century prophets reflected its own time, but in the process of compilation and integration of traditions, the various strands of worship have been combined in such a way that it is almost impossible to distinguish the periods which they came from.

Israel's worship gradually developed within the polytheistic nature of the ANE religions to being a monotheistic religion that became a testimony to saving events accomplished through the power of God. The reference to other gods in Old Testament literature as Gnuse (1979:180) suggests is not only a sense of revolt against foreign gods but also the existence of a syncretic nature of religion in the ANE. It is therefore important for our understanding of Israel's worship that we take note of the history of development and purification.

2.3.4 Community solidarity

The people of ANE shared common features, which made them a large unity (Boshoff et.al 2000:57). Kinship in the ANE is a central value of community relationships. “The family or kinship group is central in social organization; it is the primary focus of personal loyalty and it holds supreme sway over individual life” (Malina 1989:131). This means that the ANE community upholds the values of the community before that of the individual. This really becomes a critical issue in understanding atonement within this tradition. If a person has morally or ritually defiled oneself there is a need to remove not only that person’s sin but also to cleanse the community of that person’s sin.

Moreover, it is not clear within biblical tradition what the boundaries of Israel’s understanding of community are. Scholars like Jenson (1992:147-8) and Venter (2005:279) see the community as a whole or unit that is always threatened by moral or ritual impurity. For example, Jenson (1992:147) contends that there are specific rites for mourning for the death but implies that death can defile whom so ever affected. Cooper and Goldstan (1993:303) take the opposite view on the issue of ancestors in Israel. They argue that the Bible has traces of ancestral rituals, which have not been given much attention by scholars over the years. May be it will suffice in this case to assume that the mention of Israel’s patriarchal figures like Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is about ancestry. What this implies is that Israel’s community within biblical tradition stretches beyond the living. Their relationship with God is based on God’s self revelation to their ancestors in history and reflecting on that made them project into the future in hope. It is then possible that the Day of Atonement provided for the gathering of this community to shape their future from their past.

Having discussed the development of worship in Israel and the ANE one can conclude that Israel’s feasts are a course of a journey. They have resemblances with other festivals and rituals in other religions and cultures. In the next chapter a detailed analysis of the Jewish Day of Atonement will be done because it provides a comprehensive view of how reconciliation happens within the Jewish tradition.

2.4 African concept of atonement

2.4.1 What is an African concept?

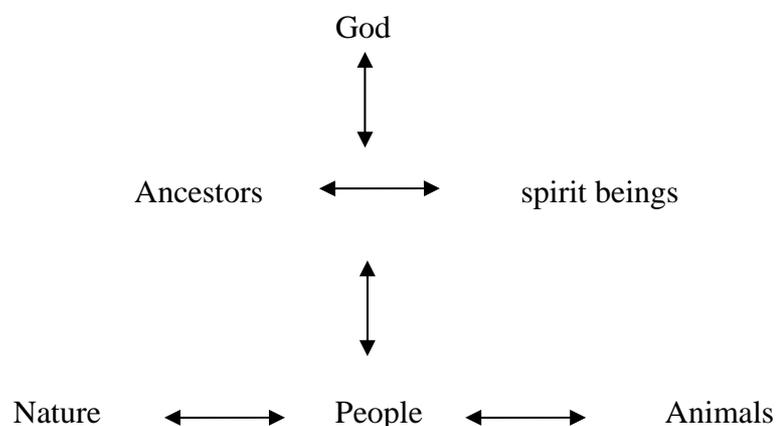
In most instances it has been a general assumption that people automatically know what an African concept is. In this study the term African is used as a general term to refer to the dominant philosophical outlook born out of traditional African cultures and ways of understanding life. The study further acknowledges that our modern day Africa has been influenced by other world cultures and as such one cannot deal with Africa in absolutes. So the term African will be loosely treated to mean all that resonates with the African way of life.

2.4.2 African context

Before we discuss the concept of atonement within the African context it is important to outline some of the important features that define the African society. These features are assumed to give a cosmology within which relationships are maintained and restored. The following are some of the general features.

2.4.2.1 Supreme Being

In most African societies there is a belief in a Supreme Being who created the world order and withdrew into a spiritual realm. This Supreme Being in the African milieu is accorded respect and as such is approached through certain rites such as prayer, song and sacrificial meals (Thorpe 1991:108-109). What the following presents is a form of a hierarchy like the ANE pantheon (Handy 1995:34–37). The African pantheon is structured as follows:



[Figure 1]

The above diagram presents a general framework of communication between the physical and spiritual realms according to African understanding. In the African context, God is never absent because through the physical environment God can be heard. Through natural cycles of life such as rain, thunderstorms, the rainbow, God speaks to people. In the African pattern of life belief in the wholeness of life is integral. Whatever disrupts this harmony and wholeness of both the individual and community is evil and needs to be eradicated (Thorpe 1991:111).

One cannot fully discuss the subject of God in Africa as one model and not deal with worship in detail here. In Africa rituals, sacrifices and prayers are made for both the visible and invisible representatives of God. But through the visible healers and priests God can be reached (Zulu 1998:186-7). This is where the whole subject of ancestral worship comes into the scene. The living accord ancestors the responsibility to look after them and their welfare. Due to the fact that ancestors are assumed to be nearer to God they act as mediators between God and the living. This does not mean that ancestors are worshipped but they are accorded respect as the elders of the community. Worship is due to God who is the creator not ancestors. Mediators only exist to uphold that which God stands for, namely, sustaining life and maintaining an active harmony in the world (Setiloane 1986:65).

2.4.2.2 Community solidarity

It needs to be stated that community solidarity is an important feature of African societies. Every member of an African society exists within a “chain which binds each person horizontally to the other members of the *community*, and horizontally to both the deceased ancestors and coming generations” (Thorpe 1991:120). The concept of harmony or solidarity within the African society is not a static feature, but it is something that each member needs to actively nurture and promote through behaving appropriately within the rhythm of life within the community. It is every member’s responsibility to see to it that war, fights, sickness, witchcraft, jealousy, moral breakdown, famine or hunger does not break the community (Zulu 1998:185).

Harmony in the African context is not only to be maintained with the physical community but also with the living dead (ancestors) and the future generations. The

living community has a responsibility of propagating life. They are not only accountable to those who have departed but also owe it to the future generations. Setiloane (1976:43) argues that the ancestor's attitude towards the living is basically parental – protective, corrective and aimed at the welfare of the whole group. With regards to the future generations we owe them the harmony and protection of all the life giving resources of our generation.

Not only are African people aware that they are interrelated but they are also aware of their relationship with nature, which includes animals (Thorpe 1991:121). The natural environment in Africa is made of trees and specific animals that are used as national and clan symbols. For instance, the Dlamini clan of Swaziland do not eat mutton because sheep is regarded as their clan symbol. What this means, is that in the African context all of life is a sacred 'unit' that needs to be held as such with respect and dignity.

2.4.2.3 Rituals

Rituals are a vital element of African societies because they are a further proof of community orientation. In different African cultures there are specific rituals that demand the participation of specific members of the community. In some cases the whole community is involved. There are rituals for different aspects of life. For instance, there are rituals for birth, initiation to adulthood, marriage, healing and death. A few examples will suffice in each case. The Reed Dance (*Umhlanga*) festival of Swaziland and circumcision ceremony (*Ukweluka*) of the Xhosa clan in South Africa is used to introduce the young people to adulthood. In the case of death there is a Zulu custom to smear windowpanes with ashes (*umlotha*) in order to inform the community that a dark shade (death) has befallen the family. Thorpe (1991:121) argues, "rituals help to give structure and thus give meaning to human life. Individuals need this structure lest their lives become totally aimless. When structure breaks down, psychological disaster looms". The role of rituals within every society is to create cohesion and to give a structure to the community's relationships.

With regard to atonement these rituals become the dramatic presentations that help people to identify their fears and perplexities as a community. Once they know the problems they use necessary rituals to deal with them in a meaningful and constructive

way. These rituals also provide a means of relinquishing old and destructive behavioural patterns and advocating adjustment to new ones (Zulu 1998:186). Most of the rituals are typified by both intentional and spontaneous actions such as dancing and singing. “Africans dance to celebrate every imaginable situation – joy, grief, love, hate, to bring prosperity or to avert calamity.... Singing and joyful conversations enable African people to minimize tensions within a closed community” (Thorpe 1991:117).

Excursion

Typical African ritual - ‘Incwala’ ceremony

The *incwala* ceremony is a comprehensive event that takes quite a period, usually from early October to December. The function begins with the king going into seclusion. At this time he abstains from public affair, which marks the beginning of a national fasting for renewal. He then sends out selected men (*banfu bemanti*) who are from the *Ndwandwe* clan to go and fetch seawater. Before going to the sea these men scatter throughout the country reminding the people that it is that time of the year. During this time people are expected to behave and dress appropriately. The significance of this exercise is that the people are being called up for a time of ritual and moral purity. For instance, if you are found ‘inappropriately’ dressed, you are fined. On their return this water is kept in a special court (*Inhlambelo*) and used at a specific time within the ceremony for the king’s ritual cleansing.

The return of the men from the sea marks the calling of young boys (around puberty stage) to gather at the royal residence. The boys are then sent out to walk a distance of about 15 kilometres to pick *lusekwane* (*dichrostachys cinerea*), sickle bush, used to renew the royal cattle bier. It is expected that these boys keep themselves pure not only within the ritual but up to the time they get married.

On the return of this young regiment with the *lusekwane* the kraal is renewed and the central ceremony begins. At the centre of this function male regiments within the royal kraal kill a bull. This bull is first beaten to symbolise the cursing of evil within the nation. When it is completely weak it is allowed to die by bleeding to death. The blood becomes representative of the nation’s tainted life and the meat then becomes a meal of forgiveness and restoration. Once this main ritual has been performed the nation then unites in mourning and singing of prayers to ancestors and the divinities. During this dancing and prayer ceremony nobody, both citizens and foreigners, are expected to be spectators. All people are participants. The ceremony culminates at a point of celebration where the king as the nation’s high priest takes the first ‘bite’ of the nation’s first fruit (*Liselwa*). This bite is representative of the taste of new life for the nation.

This brief description of the ceremony gives a glimpse of the very broad renewal festival for the Swazi people. It is a ceremony through which the people can curse evil in the life of a nation and look forward to a hopeful future through the guidance of their ancestors and the divinities. These elements of the ceremony have a lot of similarities with other cultural and religious festivals in the African continent.

[Stanford Dlamini, 2005]

The *incwala* ceremony rituals contain reminiscent elements of African rituals of atonement. At the beginning of these rituals there is the need for the community to go through a period of fasting usually followed by the slaughtering of the sacrificial animals. This slaughtering gives expression of the community's admission of guilt and repentance. Representatives of the community (chiefs, priests, diviners or prophets) are then expected to perform blood rites that symbolise purification and or the death of the community's sins. All these rituals culminate in a celebration of new life, which in the case of the *Incwala* ceremony is represented by the king's tasting of the first fruits of the nation. Generally this Swazi ritual typifies most traditional rituals practised in many African indigenous communities.

2.4.2.4 Symbolism

Rituals in the African context are not only important for their overt purpose but also because they have rich symbolic meaning(s). Symbols express the community's beliefs, not so much in words as in acts and art forms. These symbols and beliefs externalise and communicate the people's internal intuitions (Thorpe 1991:121). Beyond their symbolic use rituals and sacrifices are practised in order to appease the wrath of divinities and spirits that are angered by the presence of personal and communal sin. Through the sacrifice the sin is removed. Then peace is restored between the offender and the divinities by atonement. In most of these rituals there are common features and the process seems to do both the appeasing of the divinities as well as restoring peace.

In this section we have discussed the general features of an African society and it is worth stating that this is not a conclusive picture of the African pattern of life.

2.5 A concept of Atonement

Having discussed the characteristic features of the African and biblical worldview it is evident that these features are indeed comparable. Here are some of the comparable features:

2.5.1 Role of God

The African and biblical traditions both view God as a Supreme Being who is responsible for the ordering of the world. In both traditions God is referred to in specific defining attributes such as, creator, parent, king, warrior, ancestor and lord. These traditions also have similar situations where God is deemed to be totally transcendent. People are expected to respect God in terms of space, location and time. At particular times God breaks these boundaries and can be experienced as eminent and involved in the daily affairs of people. In cases where God is remote and out of the people's daily experiences ancestors, priests or priestesses, prophets or prophetesses and diviners become the intermediary people who represent individuals before God.

A healthy relationship with God is of vital importance in both the biblical and African traditions. This relationship can be violated by ritual and moral sin. When the relationship has been violated God is assumed to be angry. Humans and the natural creation can suffer the wrath of God. Although it is not clear whether God can actively punish people or let them suffer as a consequence of their sin, people always interpret natural disasters and other forms of misfortune as punishment by God and ancestors. What comes out clear in both cultures is the belief that a healthy and life-giving relationship with God should always be maintained.

2.5.2 Community solidarity

In the Old Testament community and family are very important features. As Malina (1989:131) sets it out: the life of the individual is deeply embedded in the community. In many ways one can even argue that individualism is an absent motif in the biblical world. When one reads most of the introductions to the Jewish feasts there is a constant reference to the God of ancestors as well as the admonition to teach descendants. This means that the community was viewed as a dynamic entity that grows and develops with

history and time. The same view of community is true within Africa. In most African cultures there is a special place for ancestors and elders in the family.

In both traditions the understanding of community not only includes the living and the dead but also includes the future generations as well as the natural environment. The treatment of particular animals and natural creation shows a deep sense of community. In the Bible the concept of Sabbath not only applied to people but also meant giving rest to land and animals. This means that a good community refers to the peaceful co – existence of people, natural resources and animals, while God oversees this relationship.

2.5.3 Worship and rituals

Worship in the Bible has involved particular rites. Each aspect of life had rites that were practiced as means and symbols of an experience of God and obedient worship from the people's side. Different members of the community ranging from the kings, priests, women, and children to the individual perform these rites and rituals. In each ritual there are symbolic features that are used or performed to represent a specific attitude. In many ways these rituals are means of socializing the community in a way that gives life and removes evil from the community.

Taking an example from atonement ceremonies, there is a whole set of rituals that are performed. There are rituals with water and blood for cleansing and removing sin. Furthermore, there is a meal that represents communion between the deity and the people. There is also a place for celebrating freedom. All these rituals carry in themselves an ethic of peace and reconciliation for all people.

2.5.4 Dealing with sin

Contrary, to the Western world where sin is primarily an individual transgression, in the Bible as well as in African tradition it has a broader meaning. In these traditions sin is something that seems to threaten the prevalence of peace from an individual level as well as the broader community. Anything that does not promote good and progressive livelihood is sin. What this means is: whenever anything happens within the community that seems to be destructive it has to be ritually removed from that community. If the

individual behaves in a way that isolates him or her from the rest of the community then this situation poses a threat to the communal view of life.

If one seeks to define the implied cosmology within these two traditions the words harmony, interconnectedness and wholeness seem conclusive. If this seems to be the implied world view within these traditions there needs to be a way in which these can be made real in our experience of religion and community.

2.6 Summary

This chapter has given a general definition for the concept of atonement. It has further highlighted the main features of the African thinking and its relevance to bring about peace in Africa. From these findings it can be said that the biblical concept, atonement is very broad. It has some striking similarities with some of the African rituals of atonement. The chapter concludes by giving the general cosmology of atonement implied in both the biblical and African traditions. In the next chapter the study will do a detail analysis of the rituals and processes of the Day of Atonement in Leviticus 16.

Chapter 3

Leviticus 16 – an analysis

3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter has discussed the general characteristic features of the concept of atonement as experienced in both the biblical and African traditions. This chapter exposes aspects of the literary and historical elements of the festival of the Day of Atonement in the book of Leviticus (Lv 16). The primary focus of the book of Leviticus is on the priestly activity as well as the cultic life of the people of ancient Israel. Leviticus does not only provide a description of Israel's cult but also the moral obligations that the people should perform in order to keep them ritually and morally pure. From the rituals and laws recorded in this book God's people can learn what is necessary to have an intimate relationship with God. These necessities include sacrifice, mediation, atonement, cleansing and purity (Constable 2005:1)

The Day of Atonement festival (Lv 16) is one of the central festivals that contain a number of intriguing rituals of atonement that have appealed to biblical scholars over the centuries. Scholars such as Milgrom (1991), Gerstenberger (1996) Grabbe (1993) and Hartley (1992) have discussed some literary and historical aspects of these rituals and have all generally agreed that the book of Leviticus rituals provide some of the fundamental theological tenets that shaped Israel's faith and relationship with Yahweh. As the researcher I am also convinced that Leviticus 16 gives expression to most of the significant conceptions of atonement found in the Old Testament.

This chapter is an analysis of the Day of Atonement as presented in Leviticus (Lv 16). The study draws on aspects of historical and literary criticism to analyse certain diachronic and synchronic issues of this passage (Lv 16) as well as the key characters of the story. This chapter is divided into four main sections. The first section discusses the literary and historical elements of the text. Secondly, the study focuses on the structure and composition of the text. The third section is a detail analysis of the some textual elements and the processes of the rituals involved in the Day of Atonement. The final section is a synthesis and application of some of the theological themes embedded in the rituals of atonement.

3.2 Leviticus 16: 1- 34

3.2.1 Text

¹ The LORD spoke to Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron who died when they approached the LORD. ² The LORD said to Moses: "Tell your brother Aaron not to come whenever he chooses into the Most Holy Place behind the curtain in front of the atonement cover on the ark, or else he will die, because I appear in the cloud over the atonement cover.

³ "This is how Aaron is to enter the sanctuary area: with a young bull for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering. ⁴ He is to put on the sacred linen tunic, with linen undergarments next to his body; he is to tie the linen sash around him and put on the linen turban. These are sacred garments; so he must bathe himself with water before he puts them on. ⁵ From the Israelite community he is to take two male goats for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering.

⁶ "Aaron is to offer the bull for his own sin offering to make atonement for himself and his household. ⁷ Then he is to take the two goats and present them before the LORD at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. ⁸ He is to cast lots for the two goats—one lot for the LORD and the other for the scapegoat. ⁹ Aaron shall bring the goat whose lot falls to the LORD and sacrifice it for a sin offering. ¹⁰ But the goat chosen by lot as the scapegoat shall be presented alive before the LORD to be used for making atonement by sending it into the desert as a scapegoat.

¹¹ "Aaron shall bring the bull for his own sin offering to make atonement for himself and his household, and he is to slaughter the bull for his own sin offering. ¹² He is to take a censer full of burning coals from the altar before the LORD and two handfuls of finely ground fragrant incense and take them behind the curtain. ¹³ He is to put the incense on the fire before the LORD, and the smoke of the incense will conceal the atonement cover above the Testimony, so that he will not die. ¹⁴ He is to take some of the bull's blood and with his finger sprinkle it on the front of the atonement cover; then he shall sprinkle some of it with his finger seven times before the atonement cover.

¹⁵ "He shall then slaughter the goat for the sin offering for the people and take its blood behind the curtain and do with it as he did with the bull's blood: He shall sprinkle it on the atonement cover and in front of it. ¹⁶ In this way he will make atonement for the Most Holy Place because of the uncleanness and rebellion of the Israelites, whatever their sins have been. He is to do the same for the Tent of Meeting, which is among them in the midst of their uncleanness. ¹⁷ No one is to be in the Tent of Meeting from the time Aaron goes in to make atonement in the Most Holy Place until he comes out, having made atonement for himself, his household and the whole community of Israel.

¹⁸ "Then he shall come out to the altar that is before the LORD and make atonement for it. He shall take some of the bull's blood and some of the goat's blood and put it on all the horns of the altar. ¹⁹ He shall sprinkle some of the blood on it with his finger seven times to cleanse it and to consecrate it from the uncleanness of the Israelites.

²⁰ "When Aaron has finished making atonement for the Most Holy Place, the Tent of Meeting and the altar, he shall bring forward the live goat. ²¹ He is to lay both hands on the head of the live goat and confess over it all the wickedness and rebellion of the Israelites—all their sins—and put them on the goat's head. He shall send the goat away into the desert in the care of a man appointed for the task. ²² The goat will carry on itself all their sins to a solitary place; and the man shall release it in the desert.

²³ "Then Aaron is to go into the Tent of Meeting and take off the linen garments he put on before he entered the Most Holy Place, and he is to leave them there. ²⁴ He shall bathe himself with water in a holy place and put on his regular garments. Then he shall come out and sacrifice the burnt offering for himself and the burnt offering for the people, to

make atonement for himself and for the people.²⁵ He shall also burn the fat of the sin offering on the altar.

²⁶ "The man who releases the goat as a scapegoat must wash his clothes and bathe himself with water; afterward he may come into the camp.²⁷ The bull and the goat for the sin offerings, whose blood was brought into the Most Holy Place to make atonement, must be taken outside the camp; their hides, flesh and offal are to be burned up.²⁸ The man who burns them must wash his clothes and bathe himself with water; afterward he may come into the camp.

²⁹ "This is to be a lasting ordinance for you: On the tenth day of the seventh month you must deny yourselves and not do any work—whether native-born or an alien living among you—³⁰ because on this day atonement will be made for you, to cleanse you. Then, before the LORD, you will be clean from all your sins.³¹ It is a Sabbath of rest, and you must deny yourselves; it is a lasting ordinance.³² The priest who is anointed and ordained to succeed his father, as high priest is to make atonement. He is to put on the sacred linen garments³³ and make atonement for the Most Holy Place, for the Tent of Meeting and the altar, and for the priests and all the people of the community.

³⁴ "This is to be a lasting ordinance for you: Atonement is to be made once a year for all the sins of the Israelites." And it was done, as the LORD commanded Moses

(New International Version)

3.2.2 Historical and literary contexts

In interpreting this passage it is important to locate this festival (Lv 16) within the broader book of Leviticus and within its literary and historical framework.

3.2.2.1 Title of the book of Leviticus

The Hebrews derived the title of this book from the first word in it, *wayyiqra'*, translated "And he [the Lord] called" (Lv 1:1). The Greek version has its title as *leitikon*, meaning, and "relating to priests" (Constable, 2005:1). It is against this background that the book has always been treated as a manual for Levites or priests and regulating the practice of the temple cult. According to Venter (2005:276) the book is not merely a collection of rituals but it also provides the ethical elements behind each ritual. Grabbe (1993:12) adds on and says "there is more to Leviticus than the cultic ritual.... A closer look at the text reveals many fascinating points and insights into society, history, religion, and theology".

3.2.2.2 Unity, authorship and date

Traditionally the first five books of the Christian Bible have always been attributed to Moses until about 100 years ago when scholars developed the Wellhausen theory,

commonly referred to as the Documentary Hypothesis which ascribed the Pentateuch to a number of writing schools; Yahwist (J- c.922 BCE), Elohist (E- c.922 BCE) Deuteronomistic Historian (D - c.722 BCE) and the Priestly (P- c.537 BCE) (Charpentier 1981). These sources come from different historical background and religious influences and as such have different characteristic features. Through the analysis of some textual and liturgical elements in Leviticus scholars such as Grabbe (1993:12), Milgrom (1991:40-47), Bailey (1987:7-10) and Gerstenberger (1996:10-14) have generally attributed the book of Leviticus to the Priestly (P source) writers which places the date of the book sometime in the fifth century after the Babylonian exile (c. 587–537). In my opinion attribution of the book of Leviticus to the priestly source is a formidable argument given the fact that the Pentateuch records Moses' death and that puts him out of the picture as an author. Reminiscent of the rest of the Pentateuch Leviticus also grew gradually over a period of history and underwent a process of editing as well. This editing did not only happen with the book but with the rituals of the Day of Atonement as well (Anderson 1998:499). There are further arguments on the dating of certain sections of the book but it is beyond the purposes of this study to analyse those arguments. It will suffice only to say that the debates generally rotate around the two major sections of the book (Lv 1-16; Lv 17–26).

3.2.2.3 Historical setting and purpose

The Babylonian exile (c.587-539 BCE) did not only bring the political, economic and social changes in Israel's life but also brought about a religious crisis for the people (Bailey 1987:9). The book of Leviticus as part of the larger edited work of the Priestly code provided a basis for identity and continuity for those who had returned home (539 BCE). They had to reconstitute themselves on the basis of a religious confession organized around the leadership of Levites, priests, scribes, and community elders. According to Gerstenberger (1996:11) the book of Leviticus seems to be presenting a model of a church emerging out of Israel's history. The fact that the book also contains legal, religious and civil laws and admonitions that govern the life of the people is also in support of the concept of reconstitution of the nation.

Although the book of Leviticus might have been completed after the exile its contents come from a long history of worship, which dates back to the Patriarchs; their calling

and selection, oppression, exodus, conquest, covenant, settlement up to the time of exile. Gerstenberger (1996:2) further argues that the book of Leviticus presents itself “fairly artificial except from a larger narrative and legislative work, sewn together like a patchwork quilt from many different, individual pieces”. In view of Israel’s political history it was highly impossible for them to have such a comprehensive record of national rituals at an earlier date. My contention is that the centralization of worship happened during the time of king Josiah (c.622). From Josiah reign onwards these rituals went through a process of continual purification up until they found their treatment as national rituals in the postexilic era.

3.3 Structure and composition

In this section the study does a brief discussion of some aspects of the structure and contents of the book of Leviticus that have inferences to our broader study of the Day of Atonement (Lv 16).

3.3.1 Structure of the book of Leviticus

According to Constable (2005:4) the book of Leviticus is a narrative document, which takes a legal genre. It requires one to read chronologically from the formation of the covenant in the book of Exodus through to Numbers (Ex 19 – Nm 10). “Leviticus continues a revelation concerning the second of three necessary elements for any nation to exist, namely, a people, (Gn 12: 10 – Ex 19) their law (Ex 20 – Nm 10: 10) and their land (Nm 10:11- Jos 24)” (Constable 2005:7). The book is arranged in a thematic structure, which hinges on Leviticus 16, the chapter that is the centre of our study. The following is a general structure for the book (Boshoff et.al 2000:162).

1 – 10	On sacrifices and priests
11 – 15	Prescriptions on purity
16	The great day of reconciliation (Day of Atonement)
17 – 26	The codex of sanctity
27	Prescriptions on the gifts to Yahweh (addendum)

In this study the concentration is on the purification rite, which is the pinnacle of the book of Leviticus. This includes the analysis of the role played by the sacrificial rituals in the atonement festival. The study also reflects on how sin is removed between God and humans in order to re-establish a harmonious life-giving relationship.

3.3.2 Structure of Leviticus 16

3.3.2.1 Introduction

Within the Jewish tradition the goal of the Day of Atonement is to expiate the sins of the priests and the people in order to maintain a good relationship between them and God. This also included the keeping of the sanctuary pure as God's dwelling place. The regulations for the Day of Atonement stand at the centre of the book of Leviticus. As a unit it begins with a historical reference and concludes with a compliance report. For our understanding of the book we need to carefully look into the preceding material (Ex 25-40; Lv 1- 15), which builds up the history and the institution of this purification rite and others of the same essence. With the scarcity of reference to this particular day in the Old Testament (OT) it is difficult to give a historical date or origins for this day. "The lack of historical reference to this day and the prominence given to Aaron in this regulation led the Wellhausen School to place the origin of the Day of Atonement into the post-exilic era" (Hartley 1992:218).

3.3.2.2 Form, structure and movement

Leviticus 16 builds on the preceding chapters, which have outlined the key sacrifices that are necessary for expiation of people's defilements. With all the laws that God gave to the people there was a need for an annual ritual of cleansing. This chapter then forms the theological pivot of the whole book. The first part of the book deals with public worship of the Israelites (Lv 1- 16). It precedes what is commonly known as the holiness code (Lv 17-27), which reveals the Israelites private worship (Constable 2005:60-61). The following is a suggested structure for the chapter (Wenham 1979:228).

I. Introduction and Requirements: (1-5)

- a. Caution required (1-2);
- b. Materials required—animals and clothing (3-5).

II. Survey of the Sin Offerings: (6-10)

- a. Aaron's sin offering (7);
- b. Israel's sin offering (8-10).

III. Detailed Description of the Day of Atonement Rituals: (11-28)

- a. Aaron's role (11-25);
- b. The role of others (26-31);
 - i. Those who have had contact with the sacrificial animals (26-28);

IV. Provisions for the Perpetuation of the Day of Atonement (29-34)

- a. The people of Israel as a congregation (29-31)
- b. Directions for the day and appendix (32-34)

The speech given in this chapter has four main sections; an introduction, a survey of the sin offerings, regulations of the Day of Atonement and the perpetuation of the ritual. The introduction (1-5) contains a warning to the priest (1-2) and describes the materials required for the sacrifices (3-5). The next section is a quick survey of the sin offerings and it deals with the selection and preparation of the sacrificial animals (6-10). The third section deals with the regulations for the Day of Atonement that God gave to Moses and Moses passed them on to Aaron (11-28)). This section is written in the third impersonal person. The speech then moves to a last section (29-34), which locates this day into a liturgical calendar and it is appended with a compliance report (34b).

The whole ritual speech might have existed as a document in different communities and the final piece that the priestly writers might have used is possibly a synthetic version of the rituals involved in the day. These might include the ritual of the two goats and the sprinkling of the blood (Hartley 1992:227).

3.4 Detail analysis

3.4.1 Introduction and requirements: (1-5)

There are two introductions to this speech. The first introduction speaks of a stern warning about the sanctity of the ritual. To make this point the writer makes reference to the sons of Aaron Nadab and Abihu (v 1) who are mentioned earlier in the book (Lv 10:1-7). Scholars such as Milgrom (1991:1011) and Grabbe (1993:73) argue that it is possible that this chapter might have initially followed chapter 10, but the editor had to insert the intermediate chapters (ch 10–15) in order to clarify what is meant by the term uncleanness in this chapter (Lv 16). The second introduction (v 2) seems to be a general restriction and a warning about the holiness of God and may have no direct relationship with verse one (Gerstenberger 1996:227). Kaiser (1994:1110) says the lesson embedded in the Nadab and Abihu story is that “any approach to God demands extreme care, self examination, and the ability to meet the qualifications for coming into God’s presence”. Although I support the view that chapters 10–15 is an insertion I think the introduction (v 1) is meant to emphasize the need for the observance of the purity measures (ch. 10–15).

The text further argues that there might have been limited times at which the priest might enter the ‘holiest place’ and not any time he wishes. It is possible that this limitation may be a later prescription (Heb 9:6-7). Within the context of this caution to the priest Yahweh is said to reveal and conceal self within the ‘cloud’ (Milgrom 1991:1014). Milgrom (1991:1015) continues to argue that it is not clear whether the cloud was the smoke from the incense or the divine fire-cloud that, according to P descends upon the alter as a sign of God’s presence. In the book of Exodus (25:10–20) there is a description of the elements that are contained by the Ark of the Covenant such as tablets of the Ten Commandments, which symbolize the covenant between Yahweh and Israel. On top of the ark was a table called the atonement slate or mercy seat, which was used to make the blood sacrifices so that when Yahweh looks down from above, would see through the sacrifice, the covenant relationship. This figuratively leads Yahweh to govern his people out of mercy and forgiveness (Hartley 1992:234).

The high priest had to make elaborate preparations for entering the holy of holies by cleansing himself physically and spiritually (vv 3-4). This cleansing included special

clothing and a physical bath as well as a bull for sin offering and a ram for the whole offering. The garments specified in this case are the garments he wore to perform regular duties. “These garments made him appear more as a slave than as a king” (Constable 2005:62). Noticeable with these garments is the fact that they are ‘white’. According to Milgrom (1991:1016) these vestments resemble humility and purity, which meant that the priest was, stripped of all former self. This is consistent with biblical tradition because angels are assumed to be wearing white linen (Ezk 9:2–3; Dn 10:6). This color stands for simplicity, purity, and holiness. All this was to make the priest ritually pure before he began his function on this high day (Gerstenberger 1996:236)

In verse 3, the priest is directed to purify himself before he enters the sanctuary or the ‘holy of holies’. This means that the priest is a sinner too, just like the people for whom he is making the sacrifices (Kaiser 1994:1110). Once the priest has performed his cleansing duties the leaders of the community bring to him two goats for purification offering and a ram for a burnt offering (v 5). It is interesting to note here that the two goats are necessary for the expiation of the sins of the community even though one will be offered on the altar and the other a scapegoat (Milgrom 1991:1018). The goats are a graphic symbol of the removal of disruption and pollution, which is brought about by unfaithfulness to God.

3.4.2 Outline of sin offerings (6-10)

Generally the structure of the chapter is quite confusing because there are a lot of recurring phrases and statements such as “to make atonement” (vv 6, 11, 17, 24, 33, 34) and “this/it is to be a lasting ordinance for you” (vv 29, 31, 34) (Kaiser 1994:1110). The chapter uses the typical Hebrew pattern of outlining the ritual first and subsequently describing it in greater detail. In this section this technique has been used. We are first given an outline of the ceremonies (vv 6-10) and the broader details are given later in the passage (vv 11–28) (Kaiser 1994:1110). These ceremonies are the preparation of the high priest (vv 11–14), the forgiveness of sins (vv 15–19), the removal of the sin (vv 20–22) and the washing of the participants (vv 23–28).

3.4.3 Detail description of atonement rituals (11-28)

3.4.3.1 Preparation of the high priest (6, 11–14)

Although the purification ritual done by the priest is comprehensive, the text makes special reference to his family.

He shall offer a bull sacrifice to take away his own sins and those of his family
(v 6)

The issue of priest's preparation has a number of facets to be considered. Firstly it was the importance of making offering for his sins and those of his family. The book of Leviticus provides a social hierarchy in which the priest and his family are characterized by a unique grade of holiness (Jenson 1992:115). It was then important for the priest not only to ritually purify himself but also his family as recognition of social relatedness in society. This social hierarchy also determined the levels of holiness of the people.

Secondly the priest's holiness gave him special spatial privileges (vv 12–13). The priest unlike other people had the right to enter in the innermost place of the tabernacle and offer the sacrifices before God (Jenson 1992:89). This is supported by the text in the sense that specific directions are given to the priest as to how to go about with the sacrifices. Aaron as the priest is given specific directions as to how to prepare incenses and how to make fire. These instructions include directions and limitations about entrance into the holy of holies (v 12). This means that there is a very close relationship between social gradation and the gradation of special places in the sanctuary (Jenson 1992:114). The whole ritual was structured around a defined social and religious hierarchy. The higher you were in the social strata the holier you were and this gave you more privileges. The same principle applied with the aesthetic of the sanctuary; the inner courts were regarded to be more holy than the outer courts.

The third aspect concerns the sacrifices themselves. Our text has two sacrificial animals, the bull for the priest (v 6) and his family and the two goats (v 7). According to Grabbe (1993:34) the sacrifices varied according to the rank of the person offering; for the priest it was a bull, for a chieftain a male goat and for an ordinary person a female goat was offered. This is what Jenson (1992:62-63) calls the principle of graded holiness in the priestly writings. This principle is assigned to several classes or levels and these are

ordered in a certain hierarchy or priority (Jenson 1992:62). The principle of graded holiness is when an object (or person) is classified according to a particular trait. Based on this principle we can assume that the use of the male goats and the bull were in accordance with the norms of the religious sacrificial system of the people.

The next element of atonement rituals is the use of special incense to give a special scent to please God. The reference to the smoke (v 13) that rises may be interpreted from various points. Firstly it may mean that it is to arouse Yahweh's favor and soothe Yahweh's anger towards the people. The other could be related to the haze that the priest has to make so that he may 'not die'. In this case the smoke goes up as prayers of intercession for the people and the priest (Gerstenberger, 1996:216).

Lastly the priest has to perform the blood rites (v 14). The use of blood in sacrificial systems stems out of the understanding that blood contains life- essence or symbolizes the entirety of life. This has two facets: it means that either blood can symbolize death in a substitutionary sense or that the blood absorbs the sin and becomes unclean. Kiuchi (1987:162) argues that both these views are inadequate because they are not comprehensive. In the text the priest is commanded to use his finger to manipulate and sprinkle the blood on the atonement slate seven times.

The manipulation of blood shows that guilt is not automatically removed but requires the participation of the guilty person. It is through this cult that purification of people and the sanctuary can happen (Kiuchi 1987:162). Venter (2005:288) argues, "...when blood is shed, life changes to death. In the sacrifice at the sanctuary blood brings about transition from the realm of the death to the realm of life for the person who sacrifices". This means that reconciliation between God and the person, who offers, happens through the means of blood, which signifies life as a gift to God. The blood of the sacrifice also provides for means of salvation (Venter 2005:289).

The blood used in the sacrificial system "has no inherent trade value" (Venter 200:290). Venter further argues that blood within the cult has a symbolic value than being a "down payment for the persons life". This means that God is the only giver of life and all that the sacrifice does is to bring people to a place of confession and renewal of relationship. In sum the blood sacrifice becomes a symbol of unity with divine life and

blood as a means of expiation, purification, and bringing people “into the divine sphere of life and holiness” (Venter 2005:291).

3.4.3.2 Forgiveness of sins (8, 15–19)

The next step of the ritual is sacrificing one of the two goats to God (v 8). This goat is sacrificed as sin offering for the people and the priest comes to the outer court to perform all the rites for this kind of offering (vv 15-19). The sacrifice is meant to cleanse the sanctuary of all the defilement that the sins of the people caused (ch 11-15; see Hartley 1992:240). On the other hand the sprinkling of blood on the mercy seat (v 15) was to expiate the sins of the people (Constable 2005:63). It is important to observe that the cleansing here includes the priests, alter, sanctuary and all the people. In effect it is not only an individual cleansing but also a communal and comprehensive one for the nation. At the end of this cleansing the priest has made atonement for himself, his house, his fellow priests, and all the assembly of Israel. He has also purified the three places in the sanctuary: the tabernacle, alter and the holy of holies.

3.4.3.3 Removal of sin (20 –22)

Once the priests has done the sprinkling over of the blood and purified the community and sanctuary the live goat which was chosen for Azazel is brought forward. According to Grabbe (1987:152–167) the two goats used in the ritual represent the two aspects of the atonement that Yahweh provided. The goat that was slain represented the judgment upon sin that resulted in death and the goat that was sent off into the wilderness symbolized the removal of sin and guilt.

The ritual of the two goats in the Day of Atonement festival has intrigued both ancient and modern interpreters. The heart of the ritual revolves around two goats, which are chosen by lot, one ‘for God’, and one ‘for Azazel’ (v 8). The former is to be slain and offered as a sin offering to God and the latter is to be sent away alive in the wilderness ‘for Azazel’ (vv 8-10, 26). The ritual of sending away the goat has had various interpretations (Milgrom 1991:1020-1021; Douglas 2003:133; Levine 1989:102;

Hartley 1992:241). The priest is expected to symbolically place his hands on the goat and ‘confess’ the sins of the people. By this action the priest transfers the sins and remorse of the community upon the goat.

One of the integral aspects of the ritual is the sending away of the goat for Azazel. This is because it had the power to release people of the oppression of their sin as a burden in their relationship with God. As part of the ritual the goat necessitates the complete removal of sin and marks the breaking of the power of sin upon the people (Douglas 2003:133). It is also important at this moment to note the three terms used to refer to the sins of the people: iniquities, rebellion and sins. These terms together encompass all dimensions of human sinfulness and they are all in the plural, which indicates the frequency and communal nature of human sin (Hartley 1992:241).

Excursion: Azazel

The study cannot do justice to the passage if it does not discuss some of the dominant views about the goat for Azazel or scapegoat. Milgrom (1991:1020 –1021) proposes three main views to the concept of Azazel within the biblical tradition. The first is the view that characterizes the goat itself and can be rendered as ‘departing goat’, hence ‘(e) scapegoat’. This is an early interpretation already found in the Septuagint, which translates the Hebrew word in Leviticus 16 as ‘for the one sent away’ (vv 8, 10), ‘the goat which is determined for release’ (v 26). The second refers to the goat’s destination and means ‘a rough and difficult place’ or ‘precipice’ and this interpretation is found in Rabbinic literature (Milgrom 1991:1021). The last refers to a means ‘entire removal’ and according to this interpretation, ‘for Azazel’ signifies ‘for the entire removal of guilt.

Douglas (2003:126) and Levine (1989:102) agree with these concepts but also add that the word Azazel may refer to the name of a demon on the basis of the following arguments. Their reasons for this view are: if the one goat is directed to a supernatural being the other should also be sent to such a power. If God is a supernatural power then Azazel as well should have such a power. In the text (v 8) it seems like the two destinations for the goats seems to be contrasted. Furthermore, Levine (1989:102) thinks it is consistent with scripture that demons are opponents of God and as such the goat designated for Azazel is driven into that wilderness, which is often described as the abode of demons (Lv 17:7; Is 13:21-22; 34:11-15; Mt 12:43).

Douglas (2003:122) further compares the Azazel ceremony with Greek riddance ceremonies. She points out that for the Greek it was not a scapegoat but a scapeperson. She argues that the person chosen should come from the poor section of the community. This person would be humiliated and driven out of the town as a symbol of expelling evil from the community. With the Greek case the rite has a punitive aspect and this is not the case with the Levitical rite (Douglas 2003:122). It is possible that there are similarities between these rites but it is beyond the purposes of this study to analyse the relationship between Greek and Leviticus rites.

In conclusion Hartley (1992:238) argues that whichever way the name Azazel is understood in the context of the Day of Atonement it is a rite of riddance. The use of ‘send away’ (v 21) for this goat carries the connotation that it had to be removed from the community.

3.4.3.4 Cleansing of the participants (4, 24 & 28)

Having made atonement for himself, his fellow priests, the sanctuary and the people the priest is supposed to enter the sanctuary one more time. This time unlike at the beginning (v 4) of the whole ritual, where he had to dress in special clothes in order to execute the task of atonement, he is now called to remove those clothes and wear his normal priestly garments (v 24; see Kaiser 1994:1112). The priest is also expected to take a bath. Hartley (1992:242) argues that the bathing symbolizes the removal of the sin that contaminated him as he manipulated the sin sacrifices in the sanctuary. The text continually exaggerates the holiness of God. God's holiness reveals people's sin. All the people who are in contact with God or with the sacrificial elements need to observe a level of ritual purification through bathing (vv 26, 28).

One should note that water and blood take a special place in the purification rites. Jenson (1992:166) argues that water unites the themes of cleansing and symbolizes the giving of life. With regards to blood he believes that it was necessary for more serious offences in the community.

3.4.3.5 Role of people

The main goal for the Day of Atonement is renewal and restoration of relationships. At the end of the sacrifice the people are in a renewed relationship with Yahweh and with one another. The renewal of the relationship includes; aesthetic, personal and ritual dimensions. The cleansing of the sanctuary and the removal of the burnt sacrificial remains symbolize the aesthetic or spatial dimension. These remains are removed from the sanctuary and disposed outside the community as an observance of the boundary between that which represents their expiated sin and their renewed community (vv 27-28).

Although people are not actively involved the ritual purifies their sin through the priest's representation and the passage calls them to abstain from work and "to afflict themselves" (vv 29, 31). Hamilton (1982:293) observes that purification and atonement happens even though "the congregation has played minimal role in the ceremonies"

“...The Day of Atonement, for the layman, is to be a national day of prayer, fasting and repentance” (Hamilton 1982:294).

One can note that at the centre of these admonitions (vv 23-28) is the problem of transferability of impurity. For instance the person who sends away the scapegoat into the wilderness comes into close contact with the animal and its accumulated burden of sin. The other is the disposal of the excess elements of the altar sacrifices (Gerstenberger 1996:223-224). The goal of the whole process is to purify the people and their environment and thus the dawning of a renewed relationship with Yahweh. Kiuchi (1987:137) propounds this fact and says that it is possible that the sacrificial animals become unclean and as such those who come into close contact with them need to be purified. This might be true with regard to the scapegoat because of the element of transferability of sin and defilement.

3.4.3.6 Perpetuation of the ritual (29-34)

The style of the discourse changes in verse 29. Most of the instructions in the book are addressed to Moses but in this ritual they are given to Aaron. The order of communication has always been quite clear- Yahweh – Moses – Aaron, but here there is a noticeable shift. In verse 29 the reference to “Israelites and foreigners amongst them” is seemingly an address to a bigger number of listeners. This enlarges the picture of the Day of Atonement in the sense that the whole nation has to participate in the feast. This is consistent with the thought that the ritual of the Day of Atonement might have developed over time and eventually used during the post-exilic period. Kaiser (1994:996) supports this conception by saying that the ritual took its present form during the postexilic time and this explains the silence about the Day of Atonement in the broader OT. I am of the opinion that the existence of rituals of atonement in other ANE communities might have influenced the development of this Israelite ritual. Within Israel this rite possibly moved from being a rite to appease gods into a rite of covenant renewal and atonement between God and human beings.

In the concluding section (vv 29-34) the congregation is called to adhere to the vestment ordinance (v 32b) and to fully carry the expiatory functions (v 33; see Gerstenberger

1996:223-224). In this appended section the Day of Atonement is placed in the seventh month of their calendar. This meant annual observance of the day. With growth of the ritual tradition, particularly in post-exilic Israel the need for fasting became increasingly a sign of repentance and seeking God's mercy (Ezra 8:21–23). Within the Jewish traditions there grew specific ways of fasting which forbade eating, drinking, anointing, putting on sandals and marital intercourse during the fasting period (Hartley 1992:242).

The last verse (v 34) sets this ritual as a perpetual ordinance – “to be a lasting ordinance”. This means that Israel was expected to continually observe this day as stated earlier in verse 29. In a good literary style the same verse gives a compliance report. In my opinion this compliance report does not only refer to Aaron, as a representative of the priestly order, but to all generations. The priestly writers expected that the ritual would become a national day of penance, repentance and renewal. All generations are expected to keep this ritual.

3.5 Theological issues in the ritual

The whole book of Leviticus carries a lot of theological pronouncements. Some of them are quite explicit and yet some are embedded in the rituals. As Leviticus is part of the so called Priestly ‘P’ writing, we cannot do justice to discussing theological issues in this chapter without considering P’s theology. In drawing some of the theological conclusions I will take some of the fundamental views into consideration held by the ‘P’ legists. At the backdrop of P’s theology are the influences of neighboring religions of the time (Milgrom 1991:42). P’s theology is a reaction to the pagan ideologies about, deity, social life and the use of magical powers to manipulate the gods. Below are some theological conclusions.

3.4.2 Yahweh – One Supreme God

Generally the Bible portrays God in a monotheistic view. God is seen as the one true and supreme God who does not have any competing peers. This is true as an idealistic view of the Bible but scholars (Human 1999:49; Gnuse 1979:177; Blenkinsopp 1986:354-362) in the last three decades have debated this view. Gnuse (1986:177-227)

argues that the monotheistic view of God in Israel developed over a long period of time stretching from the patriarchs, exodus, settlement, and monarchial and exilic times. Human (1999:49) supports this view and further says that scholars have analyzed the growth process through principles of evolution and revolution. All these views do not discard the monotheistic view of God presented in the priestly writing. According to Gnuse (1986:177) the Priestly writers were merely “editors trying to promulgate monotheism in their own exilic age by projecting their religious values in idealized fashion back into the past”.

In my opinion Gnuse (1986:177-227) statement is true as substantiated by the introduction to our text (Lv 16:1). The stern warning (v 1) to the priests shows that they had strict views about God. Milgrom (1991:42-47) argues that in the priestly writings Yahweh stays in his sanctuary. Nothing, not even demonic powers can drive him out of that sanctuary except human impurity. What this means is that humans who live in relationship with God need to be purified continually. If human behavior is not holy it has the potential to defile God’s sanctuary, and in effect drive God out of his sanctuary. “Humans can drive God out of the sanctuary by polluting it with their moral and ritual sins... if persons unremittently polluted the sanctuary they forced God out of their lives.” (Milgrom 1991:43) This means if human beings behaved inappropriately they will suffer the wrath of God like Aaron’s sons.

In conclusion I think the picture of God implied in the Priestly writings is a very transcendent God who can only be accessed through a lot of rituals. This is probably because the exile created a deep sense of guilt in Israel. So they felt it was necessary to have ritual means to access and win God’s favor.

3.5.2 Holiness

The book of Leviticus is loosely called the holiness code because purity is one its central themes. Holiness in Leviticus is about maintaining God’s created order. People are expected to occupy their allocated space in the order. Whenever people leave their place they make the boundaries of their limits permeable (Venter 2005:279–280). Jenson (1992:62) calls this graded holiness in the priestly writing. Graded holiness is

the attribution of holiness through particular, personal, religious and spatial traits. In the Day of Atonement the need for moral and ritual purity can never be overemphasized. The priests who belong to a special class of holiness are expected to cleanse themselves with at least three ways: by bathing with water, blood sacrifice and appropriate vestments. Water, blood and vestments in the Levitical writings are used for special rites of purification.

Even though the priests are regarded to be fairly holy during the ritual they still have to be purified. This emphasizes the holiness of God and stands as a challenge to the people. People can make themselves impure through sin, rebellion and failure to keep themselves ritually pure. In my opinion God's holiness is static in the ritual. On the other hand the holiness of people is very dynamic and it demands that they always try to keep themselves pure. For people to keep themselves pure God has provided them with the necessary rituals that help them keep their relationship with God pure. This relationship also has a human dimension. People are expected to keep their relationship with each other pure. In sum holiness is about living in a healthy harmonious relationship with God, people and the environment. This is what Venter (2005:279) calls wholeness, purity and justice.

3.5.3 Sacrificial system

Israel's religion is full of sacrificial rites. As stated earlier in the study these sacrificial rites came from different historic times and are borne out of different influences (Boshoff et.al 2000:23). The purpose of these rituals was to restore God's order and maintaining God's creative order. Rituals were performed in the cult with its tabernacle, special furniture, artifacts, priests and on specific seasons (Venter 2005:281). In my opinion these rituals were used as a way of enhancing fellowship with God and creating community solidarity. The rituals gave rhythm to the people's life as individuals and as a community. These sacrifices became a liturgy of atonement with God because they helped the community to deal with social, psychological, emotional and religious needs.

The Day of Atonement sacrifice is a comprehensive ritual. It covers all the expected categories of a sacrifice: communion with God, removal of sin and purification. At the

beginning of the feast the priest is expected to do sacrifices for the purification of his sins and the sins of the community (vv 5-10). The priest also presents the sacrificial meat and shares in a fellowship meal with God (Lv 3; see Venter 2005:282). Lastly he sends off the scapegoat and the dispose of the sacrificial remains, which symbolizes the removal of sin from the community. Each sacrifice was described in a way that it generally guides you to a specific attainable or prospective goal. In view of the Day of Atonement these sacrifices were used with the aim of renewing the personal and aesthetic relationship between people and God.

3.5.4 Sin and atonement

Within the context of the Day of Atonement ritual people are expected confess their sins in order to live in a healthy relationship with God and with one another. In the discussion of holiness above I cited that the people are expected to remain within the boundaries of God's creative order. In this context sin can be defined as any behavior that does not promote the welfare of the individual and the community. This includes refusing to keep oneself ritually pure and any form of rebellion against God. When people fail to do the latter they break the harmony of life. According to the priestly writers God's created world order is always threatened by the presence of sin. This sin always contaminates the created order and chaos and destruction become part of the world (Nurnberger 2004:218-19). The ritual of atonement provides a way of purification and sanctification which maintains Godly order in the world. In this sense atonement is a continuous work of renewing God's purpose for creation – harmony.

3.6 Summary

The book of Leviticus reveals that God is holy and sinless and, yet continually open to a relationship with human beings. This is a covenant relationship in which human beings can continually become impure due to moral and ritual sins. There are means of renewal and restoration of this broken relationship. In the Day of Atonement ritual one discovers

the power of God's grace and willingness to forgive and continue a relationship with people.

This chapter has highlighted some of the important aspects of the day. The Day of Atonement ritual is a product of a long journey of reduction and found its present shape in the hands of the priestly writers after exile. At the beginning of the ritual there is a warning to the priests to take caution as they approach God's sanctuary. Within the ritual the priest does sin offerings for himself and the nation. These offerings include the blood rites used to expiate the people's sin and cleanse them from all impurity. Once the people have been cleansed sin is removed from the sanctuary through the scapegoat, which symbolizes the removal of evil or sin within the community. The Day of Atonement ritual provides a comprehensive means of community renewal and restoring the people's relationship with God.

Chapter 4

Atonement in the context of healing and transformation

4.1 Introduction

The research was undertaken to determine if the biblical and African concepts of atonement could be used in the African context to bring about reconciliation. Rituals are widely accepted as a strategy to provide healing and transformation. From a theoretical perspective, rituals have been identified and introduced as a guiding framework for the study. From a methodological perspective, Africa was selected as a research area because there are similarities between the rituals of atonement used in the biblical context and in the African context as discussed in the previous chapters. As such the study has attempted to establish this relationship and assess if these rituals of atonement can be used creatively by the church to bring healing and transformation. This chapter therefore, discusses some ways in which this can be achieved. It is divided into three sections. The first section discusses atonement as one of the goals of reading and engaging with scripture. The second section analyses the importance of rituals in the journey of healing and transformation. The third section is a critique of the concept of graded holiness within the biblical ritual of atonement.

4.2 Atonement as a hermeneutical issue

‘Thus says the Lord!’ This is a phrase that keeps ringing in my mind from my college years. James Massey, my OT lecturer always argued that preachers hide the Bible behind them and just point a finger at the congregation and tell them what the Lord says. Many ordinary Christians in Africa have experienced the Bible through missionaries who proclaimed Christianity clothed in the western garb. Over the last century scholars have argued Africa’s case in the world of biblical studies. They have dressed Africa in her own garb. This process has at least removed the Bible behind the missionaries and has allowed Africans to wear their own lenses when reading the Bible. African biblical scholars have developed their own methods and tools for reading the Bible (West 1995:314). Therefore the work of reconciliation in Africa cannot exclude the reconciliation of Africa with the Bible and with Africa’s own views on religion.

4.2.1 Retracing the journey

According to Justin Ukpong's (1999:314) article, Africa's journey with the Bible in the modern church can be divided into three phases:

- | | |
|---------------------------|---|
| Phase I: 1930s – 70s: | Reactive and apologetic about the place of African culture and hermeneutics; focused on legitimising African religion and culture: dominated by the comparative method. |
| Phase II: 1970s – 90s: | Reactive-proactive method of doing Bible studies and theology; use of the African context as resource for biblical interpretation: dominated by Africa-in-the-Bible approach, inculturation-evaluative method and liberation hermeneutics (Black theology). |
| Phase III: 1990s onwards: | Proactive about doing hermeneutics within the African context: recognition of the ordinary reader: African context as subject of biblical interpretation: dominated by holistic inculturation methodologies. |

Most of the scholars within the first phase undertook to legitimise African culture, which had previously been condemned by some missionaries in the 19th and 20th centuries. Scholars in this league include the works of Williams (1930), Dickson (1973) and Ukpong (1987). Most of these scholars did comparative studies between African culture and religion and the culture implied in the Bible (Ukpong 1999:315-316). The works of these scholars marked the beginning of the critique on western scholars' interpretation of African culture and religion.

The second phase of the journey was characterized by the search for Africa and African people in the Bible in order to articulate Africa's influence on the history of ancient Israel and correct the negative interpretations of texts about Africa (Ukpong 1999:317).

Scholars in this phase did evaluative studies. They used historical-critical methods to analyze texts and anthropological or sociological methods previously used to analyze the African situation. This phase entails the works of scholars such as Mbiti (1972), Williams (1976), Tutu (1979), Abe (1986), Adamo (1987), Mosala (1989) and Oduyoye (1994). The second phase did not only see the emergence of the evaluative studies but also new methods of doing hermeneutics such as liberation hermeneutics, black theology and feminist theology (Ukpong 1999:320–322).

The last phase is characterised by a proactive spirit, which seeks to read the Bible against a specific human situation. The practice approach sees the Bible as a text for both ordinary readers and academic readers (West 1993:58–61). The two major hermeneutical methods used here are liberation, which uses contextual Bible studies (West 1993) and inculturation hermeneutics (Ukpong 1994). These two methods have been born out of the previous phases.

It is against this background that I argue that the work of reconciliation is a hermeneutical journey. Mosala (1989:13) made a profound statement in that both the oppressor and the oppressed can use the Bible for their own selfish ends. For example, in South Africa the Bible was used to formulate the apartheid theology. The very same Bible was used by freedom fighters to bring about democracy in South Africa. In such a context there is a need to go beyond such traditional methods of doing hermeneutics. According to West (1997:12) South Africa has to begin opening up to the rest of Africa to begin to integrate its culture of doing biblical studies with scholars from the rest of the continent. My suspicion is that there are still biblical scholars that still look at each other through the keyhole because they come from different sides of the struggle. Those who have been fighting for the liberation of the poor still see God as the God of the oppressed and still exegete texts with an attitude of dethroning the oppressor. On the other hand those who were in support of the apartheid regime are hiding away in shame because they might be criticized. This does not only apply to South African scholars but all African scholars that have studied within the western frame of mind. Some of them have struggled to understand how African culture and religion relates with Christianity.

My contention in this regard is that scholars like Ukpong (1994), Mosala (1989) and West (1993) have paved the way in terms of engaging African history, culture, religion

and the Bible but this still has to go further into a place where true atonement can happen. And true atonement can only happen when both the oppressor and the oppressed can sit together and read the Bible. By doing this they will liberate themselves from the past into a future of relationship and understanding. Most South African churches have generally agreed that there are discrepancies in their history. However, some churches would still prefer to maintain their status quo in terms of their constituency. The challenge is to read the Bible together and learn from each other's experiences. In this case atonement happens when real faces coming from different ideological, political, social, economic, cultural and religious backgrounds meet to share their experiences of God and the Bible. Through this process the Bible will become a common source of life for all its readers.

4.3 Atonement and African rituals

Throughout the process of the rituals of the Day of Atonement there is an emphasis on restoration, unity and removal of impurity. The same values characterize most African rituals. In African religions everything is about relationship, strengthening relationships and healing them. In fact, the affairs of human relationships are considered to be more important than the relationship with God. "Africans believe that conflict between humans brings about conflict between humans and God; reconciliation between people also causes reconciliation with God" (Meiring 2005:719). Horizontal relationships seem to precede their vertical relationship with God (Bediako 1995:101; Ndungane 2003:101).

According Meiring, (2005:720)

"African religion offers a wealth of reconciliation models, myths and rituals that may deepen our understanding of reconciliation. These ideas are expressed in a variety of ways, in proverbs, short statements, songs, prayers, names, stories and religious ceremonies..."

Given that Southern Africa as a whole is involved with a lot of reconciliation work in terms of political, economic and social changes, the church can make a very important

contribution in a paradigm shift. Using some of the principles behind the rituals the church can promote the work of reconciliation. I think it is essential that these rituals are contextualised. An important feature of biblical rituals is that they are directly related to the people's history. The Day of Atonement ritual may have come from a specific period of Israel's history but the priests only adapted and reinterpreted it during and after the Babylonian exile (Anderson 1998:499). It is when Israel's history was in a transitional phase that the priestly writers began providing the necessary rituals to inspire the people for the future.

Rituals in every community can be used in many ways to bring about healing and transformation. Rituals help people to define their past or present situations and also pulsate hope for the future. They also help communities mourn, heal, confront their past, express remorse and repentance, exorcise evil within their communities and celebrate forgiveness. Rituals are also needed to express justice, reconciliation, uphold human dignity and honor (Omi 1998:137). In this regard the rituals provide a structure within which these elements can be performed. On a broad scale the TRC (1996) of South Africa is one such ritual used to allow the nation, the sacred space to graciously deal with their past with integrity. Although this was a very good ritual for the nation I am not convinced that it did justice to the masses of the people in the country. For some it only scratched the surface. For others it brought closure to long stories of grief.

It is against this background that I regard the church as the best place where the work of reconciliation can happen. The church has a rich theological basis to do the work of healing and transformation. She can still produce more liturgical resources like the Rite of Reconciliation published by the South African Council of Churches to facilitate the telling of stories and proclaiming healing. I am convinced that these rituals can be used for cases dealing with political issues as well as be used to address new social issues that Southern Africa is struggling with.

Secondly, the rituals are used to re-member or re-construct communities. In most African families and communities, when a tragedy has befallen the community, the people gather together to discuss their circumstances. Rituals of celebration usually follow the dialogue where the community proclaims hope through rituals such as song and dance. This is consistent with the biblical ritual of the Day of Atonement. Within

the ritual the community leaders had to bring sacrifices for their sin and once the sin had been removed the nation would be free to start all over again. One imagines how much hope did this ritual awaken in the people who had been dislocated by the exile.

Thirdly rituals provide symbols and images that speak of hope. Symbols such as water, blood and vestments have the ability to do to the soul what words can never articulate. They connect us with the mystical aspects of our faith. One should state that these rituals do not do anything miraculous but at least they give meaning to virtues such as cleansing, health and forgiveness. This is consistent with the church's use of sacraments. Sacraments over the ages have been used to hold together the deep mystery of the Christian faith. For the church it is necessary to be always creative in order to adapt its witness with the needs of their communities. What this implies, is that as a church one need to criticize some of the existing images that promote violence such as guns and suggest to the world new images like the prophet Isaiah who criticized spears and called for the making of ploughshares and pruning hooks (Is 2: 1–5).

A few examples of rituals are going to be used for the purposes of illustration:

4.3.1 Story telling

Mutwa (1996:183) tells a story of an African antelope, the kudu. During the mating season, two male kudus would fight and often get their beautiful horns so entangled that they are unable to free themselves. These kudus eventually die fighting and when hunters found them, they would take their skulls to the chief. The skulls with interlocking horns then act as an example to the people about the cost of indulging in senseless strife. This story can be true for any context because it gives expression to the power of allowing stories of people to be heard before they create in each one an animalistic aggressor. Welch (1990:157) argues that stories about people's daily struggles for survival, care and tolerance need to be told because if not employed they can create a culture of cynicism.

The challenge for the church is to draw on these stories and proclaim forgiveness in the context of huge social problems such as unemployment, land issues, crime, and poverty. Kotze and Kotze (1996:2) as therapists argue that in Southern Africa you are daily confronted with issues of suffering, hunger, rage and anger, crime attacks, violence and

rape. For healing and transformation to truly happen there is a need for opening avenues where stories of ordinary life survivors can be heard and celebrated. In my opinion this is consistent with the African concept of dealing with pain. In an African setup when a family member has suffered a tragedy the family gathers and that family member's story is shared and communicated to the ancestors through the ritual of a feast. Atonement in society can happen if people are allowed to own and tell their stories by means of ritual.

4.3.2 Liturgies and church services

According to Smit (2002:100) liturgy holds the key to the development of theology and creative liturgies that reflect on the lives and faith of believers give birth to new theological insight. Meiring (2005:732) supports Smit's view and further says African insights can be translated into new liturgies of reconciliation. These liturgies can help people define their circumstances and inspire them to work towards reconciliation. A good example is the Rite of Reconciliation liturgy (SACC 1996) published by the SACC before the inception of the TRC, to help churches facilitate the process of repentance and proclamation of forgiveness. This liturgy included symbols such as fire, healing oil, blood, water, goats and guns. In my opinion this is a very prophetic way of dealing with the past and proclaiming the future. Moreover, through the liturgy we are able to encourage the use of such symbols and also to exorcise the evil use of these symbols. As cited earlier I think part of the church's responsibility is to convert the symbols of war into ploughshares and pruning hooks.

Meiring (2005:732) argues that these liturgies can be classified into three emergent themes in African religious myths and rituals: community, acceptance and rebellion. In my opinion these themes are enshrined in both the biblical and African rituals of atonement. The need for establishing and maintaining community is fundamental in both these rituals. Meiring (2005:724) sees this act as a process of reconciliation. The presence of community is a ritual of reconciliation in itself. So any liturgy that upholds community values is a contribution towards the work of reconciliation.

Acceptance is one of the underlying features in bringing about healing. Although Meiring (2005:727) embraces the need to accept people, at the same time, he says that

we should be careful not to cultivate a culture of accommodating evil, as it is the case with some African cultures. Ndungane (2003:103) emphasizes this and says it is consistent with the Christianity:

“When we refuse to allow difference in our communities and when we ostracize those who are ‘other’, we deny ourselves and others the opportunity to be fully human. African culture invites us to embrace the ‘other’ and discover a fuller richer humanity”

In my view the use of liturgies of acceptance will strengthen the community in their capacity to be compassionate and still condemn evil in a gracious and caring atmosphere.

Albert Nolan (1988:158-159) in support of liturgies of rebellion says that singing and dancing were visible characteristics of the struggle in South Africa. He suggests that this is a powerful ritual to challenge oppressive structures. This is a common feature in most African cultures. Singing and dancing can be used in moments of celebration, healing, struggle and mourning (Thorpe 1991:24). For reconciliation to happen people have to challenge oppressive systems through appropriate rituals. I am convinced that these rituals can help encourage the work of healing and transformation in communities.

Liturgies and services like the Day of Atonement ritual are a public presentation of the presence and forgiving nature of God. And as such church services are suitable mediums for shaping the morality and upholding symbols of hope and healing today. It is also of vital importance that we do not just use these symbols but use the relevant symbols within each particular context and culture.

4.4 Atonement and holiness

The purpose of reconciliation in the Old Testament was to re-establish the harmony that was broken down owing to sin and failure to live faithfully within the Yahweh faith community (Zulu 1998:191). According to Venter (2005:278) this harmony or interconnectedness of life is described as holiness. This form of holiness is dynamic. It demands people to keep God’s order, remain in the place allocated to them and keep

everything in equilibrium. Maintaining this equilibrium makes one holy, pure, whole and just (Venter 2005:278). In support of this view Pilch (1993:151) says being holy is to “observe the system of space and time lines that human groups develop to have everything in its place and a place for everything”. The concept of holiness, wholeness, purity, harmony and interrelatedness is a central feature of the biblical Israelite community.

The concept of solidarity of holiness is consistent with the traditional African way of life. Two statements about the African worldview will suffice. According to Thorpe (1991:120) in the traditional African pattern of life every member of the community is closely linked with the community. The “link creates a chain which binds each person horizontally to other members of the tribe, and vertically to both the deceased ancestors and coming generations...individuals cannot exist alone. They are because they belong” (Thorpe 1991:120). Zulu (1998:193) calls this harmony, *ubuntu*, (humanness), which basically means humility and belonging together as a community. In view of these sources it is evident that both biblical and African concepts substantially have similar views on the concept of community.

Although people are always expected to remain within the boundaries of God’s order of the world, the reality is people can stretch and break these boundaries (Venter 2005:280). People can behave in ways that disregard God’s created order. When the boundaries are broken people need means to restore this relationship. In the African societies the person has to undergo ritual purification in order to re-establish relationships with the community and ancestors. The same concept of restoration was applied in ancient Israel (Milgrom 1991:48).

In my opinion both biblical and African concepts of atonement happen as a liturgy of reconciliation. “A liturgy is a ritual that helps people to express their sorrow and grief for the sins they committed against others or sins done by others to them” (Eriksson 2000:31). Eriksson (2000:31) further argues that the rituals create a structure that helps certain elements to be performed. Firstly it allows people to confess their sins and take responsibility for their sins. They also confess their hope and dreams for the future. Secondly when they provide an atmosphere of repentance, which allows people to change their life for the better. Thirdly it creates an environment where forgiveness can

be offered and received. Finally people are reconciled with each other and open the possibility of a new life.

I further contend that confession; repentance, forgiveness and reconciliation are part of the process of atonement in both biblical and African contexts. All these processes form a liturgy of dealing with sin, impurity and estrangement in society. These are very relevant in the Southern Africa context that is faced with political, economic and social issues. At a socio-economic level a liturgy of atonement can provide platforms where people's stories can be heard and can cultivate a culture of compassion and caring. An example of a liturgy of reconciliation is the work done by TRC (1996) in South Africa where individuals were given a platform to tell a story, forgive, be forgiven and start a walk towards reconciliation or atonement.

4.5 Removal of sin and Azazel

Since human beings are aware of their limitations in maintaining harmony within their societies and also acknowledge that God is the source of universal order and harmony, they regularly turn to God whenever that harmony is threatened. In as much as God can be the source of harmony African people believe that as a community they are responsible for sustaining their relationships. According to Arinze (1970:34-47) harmony in African traditions is maintained through sacrifices. One of the main purposes of sacrifices and offerings is expiation. In the Day of Atonement expiation happens through the alter sacrifices that 'wipe out' purge or 'cover' the people's sin (Milgrom 1991:1021). The sacrifices are also meant to remove an abomination, placate the wrath of God and thus restore the equilibrium that was disturbed by the sinful acts. "The fundamental meaning of sacrifices and offerings," writes Magesa (1997:203), "lies in their efficacy to restore wholeness. If wrong-doing causes a dangerous separation of the various elements of the universe, sacrifices and offerings aim to re-establish unity and restore balance."

Once sin has been confessed it has to be removed in order to give way to a new ethic of life. In African traditions sin is removed through rituals of atonement. In the Incwala ceremony of the Swazi's this sin is transferred onto the sacrificial bull. The bull is

humiliated and beaten until it is half dead. When the bull is weak it is then ripped on its neck and blood will flow out as a symbol of the death of sin and evil spirits in the nation. This symbolism exists in most African rituals. In my opinion this is a very important aspect of community renewal. Atonement and reconciliation can never happen unless the sin is removed from the relationship.

The greatest struggle in many cultures is the presence of rituals that have become ends in themselves other than means to an end. Although there are rituals of atonement some of the ethical principles of atonement have lost value. In his article on rituals and ethics Rabbi Artson argues,

“Ritual requires ethics to root it in the human condition, to force it to express human needs and to channel urges, to serve human growth and to foster insight. Ethics requires ritual to lend substance to lofty ideals, to remind, on a regular basis, of ethical commitments already made, and to create a community of shared values and high standards. Ritual without ethics becomes cruel. Ethics without ritual becomes hollow.” (Artson (sa) smyjewishlearning.atypica.com)

I agree with Artson’s view on the relationship between ethics and rituals. My argument is that the Jewish Day of Atonement offers a relevant conceptual framework to facilitate the work of reconciliation in the Southern African context. My agreement is not without question. Two questions come to mind; how do we explain the blood rites in a context like South Africa where blood has cleaned the streets for decades. What becomes the scapegoat in the context of crime, poverty and HIV/AIDS? Both these questions do not have simple answers.

4.5.1 Blood rites

My proposition concurs with Venter (2005:280) view that blood should not be treated as a price for life but should be honored as a sacrifice that symbolizes life and honoring life. Liturgies, songs and stories that uphold the sanctity of human life and the need to prevent the flow of blood can be a helpful resource to create a culture of peace. The Rite of Reconciliation liturgy is a good example for the re-interpretation of sacrificial symbols.

4.5.2 Azazel rites

The rituals of the Day of Atonement provide meaningful ways of dealing with the tragedy of sorrow and pain in society. I think it still provides the premise where healing and transformation can happen. I am of the opinion that there is a need for reconciliation in many families and communities that struggle with the issues such as the HIV/AIDS pandemic. Having ministered in communities with a high prevalence of people dying and living with HIV/AIDS I have touched the sense of rejection that is usually experienced by those infected and affected. In most instances the stories are filled with anger, frustration, judgment and rejection. In some instances religious people have explained their way out of the circumstances. My opinion is that the affected and infected people become the goat for Azazel in such cases. Family members and communities isolate, judge and hide such people. This is a challenge. According Douglas (2003:122) the scapegoat rites in the Jewish Day of Atonement do not have any punitive connotations but they uphold the values of reconciliation. This is consistent with most African rites of reconciliation. In cases where separation and isolation has been inevitable the church can provide the theological basis for working towards atonement. In the case of HIV/AIDS related issues Biblical and African rituals of atonement can be used to reconcile families and communities that have been torn apart by the trauma of the pandemic. This applies to all social evils that destroy the harmony and peaceful co-existence within communities. The challenge we have in every context is to re-interpret our rites and make them life giving. Removing sin should not be the condemnation of people.

4.6 Final synthesis

The doctrine of atonement in the Old Testament was to restore the harmony that was broken down by sin. Through the rituals of the Day of Atonement people found a way into a new future in their relationship with God and each other. The ritual provided a liturgy for healing and transformation. Atonement, reconciliation, and harmony come “through the admission of guilt, confession, forgiveness, cleansing, and renewal” (Zulu 1998:191). The rituals of the Day of Atonement provide the necessary symbols and principles to make atonement possible in communities. The journey of renewal begins

with the priest making sin offerings for him and the whole nation. For this to be possible the nation has to observe a time of fasting where they 'afflict' themselves (Lv 16:28). This means the nation fasts for the whole duration of the festival. Fasting allows people to do introspection and own their guilt.

The second stage of the journey is the confession of known and perceived sins. In this regard the priest uses blood, water, the bull and the two goats. Once sin is confessed the people are then purified through the sacrifices he does on the mercy seat in the holy of holies. Because sin has the power to contaminate it had to be removed from the community. The people's sin is then transferred onto the scapegoat, which is driven out of the community into a desolate area where it cannot find its way back into the community. The last step of the ritual is the difficult one- atonement. The people can now look forward to a future of peace and forgiveness. In my opinion this is the integral aspect of the whole process of atonement. The ability to offer forgiveness and receive forgiveness in order to start a new future is a gift from God.

For this reason in the study I have argued that there is a need for rituals to make forgiveness and reconciliation a reality in our communities. The world needs public symbols that offer people an alternative to anger, hatred and violence.

The African scenario offers hope because their world is build around the concept of unity. The individual within the community is expected to uphold the community ethics and values of harmony and peaceful co-existence. The need to preserve unity and harmony is a striking feature in the African cosmology. In this regard I agree with Ambe (1992:37) that African rituals can enrich the sacrament of reconciliation. He argues that the goal of African rituals is a harmony. Most African rituals end with a meal where the reconciled parties eat from one dish as a symbol of peace (Ambe 1992:37). In the African pattern punishment is hardly a value because it is regarded as God and the ancestors' work.

Given such a rich heritage Africa can creatively use its rituals together with the biblical concepts of atonement to restore harmony among its societies. These rituals can be used in various life circumstances: At a political level rituals such as the TRC can help in the negotiation of peace and provide the theological foundations for reconciliation; In the

sphere of leadership the priest's role in the festival of atonement provides a very humble ethic of servant-hood; At a social level it will help inspire people to value each other and help in dealing with issues such as domestic violence; They can be used in the battle against HIV/AIDS to deal with issues of stigma and rejection and cultivate a culture of compassion and care. In sum it suffices to say both the priestly and African views of life indicate that the primary goal of rituals is a community of peace, friendship, purity and creative harmony – harmony.

It should be stated that the study has not offered a comprehensive view of atonement but explored a possibility that can contribute in the continuous work of healing and transformation in Africa. The definition and work of reconciliation is much broader than the limited view of the study. The study is just a contribution to existing work on reconciliation and hopes to encourage participation in the work of healing and transformation in Africa.

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