



A Self-Paced Study Guide for  
the Presbytery of East Iowa

## WEEK NINE - Theme for the Week

### Might Makes Right?

#### Readings from *Caste*

Pillar Seven: Terror as Enforcement, Cruelty as a Means of Control

Pillar Eight: Inherent Superiority versus Inherent Inferiority

#### Scripture

Scapegoat, Hebrew sa'ir la-'Aza'zel, ("goat for Azazel"), in the [Yom Kippur ritual](#) described in the [Torah](#) (Leviticus 16:8–10), goat ritually burdened with the sins of the [Jewish people](#). The scapegoat was sent into the wilderness for [Azazel](#), possibly for the purpose of [placating](#) that evil spirit, while a separate goat was slain as an offering to God. By extension, a scapegoat has come to mean any group or individual that innocently bears the blame of others.

The use of scapegoats has a long and varied history involving many kinds of animals, as well as human beings. In [ancient Greece](#), human scapegoats (*pharmakoi*) were used to [mitigate](#) a plague or other [calamity](#) or even to prevent such ills. The Athenians chose a man and woman for the festival of [Thargelia](#). After being feasted, the couple was led around the town, beaten with green twigs, driven out of the city, and possibly even stoned. In this way the city was supposedly protected from ill fortune for another year.

#### Genesis 1:27

So God created humans in his own image, in the image of God he created them. . . .

#### Question for Reflection

These two pillars explain how in each caste system, the prime message about the inherent superiority

of the dominant caste and the inferiority of the lower castes are continually reinforced through the

use of terror and cruelty. Being complicit with the use of terror and cruelty or joining in are rewarded. In this context, analyze the process of dehumanization and how it can lead to people

justifying great acts of cruelty.

#### Action Steps

An essential practice within Jewish communities is *Tshuvah*, which is usually translated as repentance/returning. In Jewish tradition God can forgive us for our oversights and omissions that are between God and us. However, before we approach God and ask for forgiveness, we must do *Tshuvah* for our behavior toward other people: We have to come to terms with those whom we have slighted or wronged and return to the relationship we had prior to the falling-out we experienced with them. Doing *Tshuvah* is about much more than repentance. It also

involves a process where we engage with other people in trying to improve our connections and relationships.

Doing *Tshuvah* does not mean standing on ceremony and repeating over and over again what someone did to harm or insult you. It does not mean dwelling on the negative aspect of your connection with others. Instead, its emphasis is on correcting whatever went wrong and re-establishing a positive relationship with the other person.

There is a simple five-step process for engaging in *Tshuvah* with the individual persons with whom we relate in our Jewish communal lives.

1. Identify the people with whom you feel tension or discomfort.
2. Gain clarity about whether the relationship is weak because of something they said or did to you or something you said or did to them.
3. Decide to approach the other person to "clear the air" and "straighten out the relationship."
4. Set a time to meet with the person so you can engage in a meaningful conversation, rather than catching them on the go.
5. Begin the conversation by saying that you have felt tension between the two of you or you realize that the two of you have not gotten along and you would like to try and make amends. Focus on what it will take to strengthen the relationship; do not go over and over who did what to whom.