

...AND HEAR IT WE MUST

by Rabbi Label Lam

Hashem spoke to Moshe after the death of Aaron's two sons, when they approached before Hashem and died. And Hashem said to Moshe: Speak to Aaron, your brother- he may not come at all times into the Sanctuary, within the Curtain, in front of the cover that is upon the Ark, so that he should not die...(Vayikra 16:1-2)

Hashem spoke to Moshe saying: Speak to the entire assembly of the Children and say to them: Be Holy, for I, Hashem, your G-d am holy. (Vayikra 19:1-3)

It's a strange way to introduce the laws of Yom Kippur and the narrow guidelines for entering the Holy of Holies by reaching back to the death of the Aaron's two sons. Coupled with this we have the general admonition to the entire assembly of Jews to "be holy" and its plethora of pedestrian applications. How are we to make a cohesive salad out of this odd mix of concepts?

At the gigantic rally in Washington D.C., of which I was proud to be counted, at the very end of the program of speakers, a friend of ours from Eretz Yisrael was called upon to speak. I was only sorry that his words were not in the middle of the program. I think they strummed a vital chord in the heart of the assembled masses.

Seth, Rabbi Mandel, whose son was one of two boys brutally and savagely killed on the "West-Bank" last year, told another story of another untimely death. He spoke about the conversation between a father and his young son that was overheard beneath the rubble of one the infamous bombing sights. The son, sensing he was dying, asked his father what they should do. The father told his son, "Let's say the "Sh'ma!" And so they did as they both passed on from this earth.

Seth mentioned that amongst the constant pains he experiences is the enormous sense of lost opportunity. Unlike that other father, he didn't have a chance to say "Sh'ma" with his son before he died. For the benefit of the amazing and wonderful gathering of young and old from all over America, who came out to share in their common sense of pain, grief and frustration over what is happening to our brothers and friends all over the world, and particularly in the Land of Israel, he related the following; since he can no longer say "Sh'ma" with his son he wished to say it together with all of those there in attendance. It was articulate beyond words.

This scene showed me a new angle in the oft connected names of this week's Torah portion; Acharei Mos (After the death) -Kedoshim T'hiyoo (You should be holy). After the death of the two sons...you should be holy. So that the lives of those lost should not have been for naught, the job of the living is

to breath new meaning and a deeper sense of purpose into their life and the lives of others.

Part of the function of the "mourner's kaddish" is to actively fill in more and more, to whatever extent possible, for what was lost from the orchestra of life when this precious and unique G-dly instrument was suddenly and tragically silenced. "May the name of G-d be amplified and sanctified in the world that He created as He willed..."

The connection between -"After the death"... and "Be Holy" reminds us that the courage to live a life of daily decency is the only genuine approach to exit life in holiness and not the other way around. Life, not death, is to celebrated and reveled in, and it is the task of the living to see to it, that it is so.

It is in being self-disciplined and personally responsible, in concrete terms, that we express our G-dliness in human and heavenly interactions thousands of times each day. That profound blend that affirms life in the face of death yields a flavor we can identify as "real holiness". After a death...comes the sound of the trumpet to the entire assembly...Be Holy...Sh'ma Yisrael...and hear it, we must.

Good Shabbos!

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