

FROM THE PROFANITY OF PROFANITIES

by Rabbi Label Lam

HASHEM spoke to Moshe after the death of Aaron's two sons, when they approached before HASHEM, and they died. And HASHEM said to Moshe: "Speak to Aaron your brother- he shall 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. With this shall Aaron come into the Sanctuary..." (Vayikra 16:1-3)

Any man shall not approach his close relative to uncover nakedness, I am HASHEM...(Vayikra 18:6)

HASHEM spoke to Moshe saying, "Speak to the entire assembly of the Children of Israel and say to them, "You shall be holy, for holy am I, HASHEM, your G-d." (Vayikra 19:1)

Why are the instructions about entering the Holy of Holies on Yom Kippur introduced in the context of the death of the two sons of Aaron's? What do the Laws of the Kohen Gadol entering the Holy of Holies have to do with the end of the portion dealing with forbidden relations? One couldn't be higher or holier while the other could be lower and more degrading. Why are they bound together?

When a call came to invite me to the 20th high school reunion, I didn't quite know how to respond. Toni (with an "i"), the class committee-head whose job it was to contact those who were wavering and urge them to come, was curious to confirm the rumor that she had heard about me. She started with, "I heard you became Rabbi! Is it true?" I answered blithely, "Don't believe everything you hear." Then she asked me with a rather exaggerated - Italian- flair, "How ya doin, Bobby'?" (That's my English name. Please don't tell anyone.)

I barely contained my first instinct to blurt out enthusiastically, "Boruch HASHEM!" but I tailored my response to a simple All-American, "Thank G-d! How are you?" to which she responded with a sort of terminal somberness, voice quivering and all, "Hanging in there Bobby, we're all hanging in there!" Needless to say I didn't go to the reunion despite the promise of an open bar and a DJ. If only it had not been scheduled for Shabbos Kodesh!

I hung up, though, with a lingering sense of sadness from that phrase, "hanging in there...were all hanging in there..." It has occurred to me since that all of life hovers between two points, like the ladder in Yaakov's dream, *"And he dreamt. And behold; a ladder was set earthward and its head was reached heavenward; and behold angels of G-d were going up and down on it. And behold; HASHEM was standing over him ..."* (Breishis 28:12-13)

Somewhere between a glorious "Boruch HASHEM!" and "hanging in there...we're all hanging in

there..." we lurch, lunge, and let loose. This is the full range of human potential, from the highest of mountain peaks to the deepest and darkest of canyons. Maybe that's why these subjects are clustered together. Even the highest and holiest is warned not to descend to the abyss and the lowest is encouraged to reach for the highest heights.

More important than a starting point on the ladder at any given moment is the direction. "Angels of G-d are going up and down". Traffic is going both ways on the ladder of life. Some may be tempted to step onto the slippery slope from even the Holy of Holies, while others are striving daily for holiness from the Profanity of Profanities. Text Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and **Torah.org**.