

# ENCOURAGING HIS CHILDREN TO CLIMB

*by Rabbi Label Lam*

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)

Be Holy! Great! How do you "be holy"? What's holy? Where do I begin? What's required to be holy? These are not easy questions but they are screaming out for answers. Success and failure in life are hinging on our response to this mandate to become holy! How do I know when I've achieved holiness?

There is a rule I have discovered! Anything take out of context will tend to be misunderstood! Stated affirmatively: "Something seen in its proper context is more easily understood!"

On Shabbos, for a few weeks in the year, I am treated, as I stroll to and from Shul to watching some Pakistani fellows playing cricket. It looks like baseball but it aint. The guy bowls overhand with a stiff arm instead of just throwing it as a pitcher would, and then another chap with a wide bat like a beaver's tail takes a stiff armed swing in an awkward fashion. I'm left with too many questions.

Are they not allowed to bend their elbows? Do they not know how to hit and pitch properly? When he hits the ball nobody runs. Is this practice? Admittedly I'm lost! I don't know the rules and watching from afar once a week for so many years has not made me any wiser when it comes to cricket. I'm sure they too are a little mystified about me walking around on a sunny day with bar codes on my shoulders like I just escaped from Sam's Club!

What is the context of this general admonition to "be holy". In "Acharei Mos we start out with the laws of the Kohen Gadol, the high priest going into the Holy of Holies on the highest of the holy days. He alone is allowed on that day alone to go into a place where no man can go! The Kohen is like the astronaut who reaches the moon while the entire nation celebrates his accomplishment. This was not just for any man! No! The Kohen Gadol had to be worthy to survive the experience. During the 420 years of the Second Temple more than 300 Kohen Gadolim had to be dragged out and one entered successfully for 80 years. It really was a celebration of high achievement.

At the end of that Portion we are reading about the lowest of the low behavior. Unspeakable practices are listed and cautioned about as if anyone normal needs to be chased away from actions that are universally taboo and intrinsically despicable. However, just like the Kohen Gadol in the

opposite direction, a few decrepit individuals and maybe more than we know are flirting with danger.

What we have outlined before our very eyes is a spectrum of the greatest and the worst of human potential. Like Yaakov Avinu's ladder which stretched from the earth to the heavens, this is the range of humanity, of every man! In Yaakov's dream angels of G-d were going up and down but interestingly none were parked and standing in one place. Either they were going up or they were going down!

When my wife left seminary in Israel to return to the United States the Rabbi warned the girls to learn five minutes each day! He told them, "A bird that stops flapping its wings does not remain in the same place!" At a Yeshiva dinner years ago an old friend I had not seen for many years told me, "Label, you are exactly the same as you were 25 years ago!" I took it as a complement and I told him, "You have no idea how hard work is required just to remain the same!"

In that context, when we understand how low a person can fall and at the same time how high a person can climb we realize that we are faced with a dramatic choice. "Choose life" like "be holy" is not just an admonition but rather it's an invitation to climb upward. Holiness is a direction on the ladder of life. It's no wonder the verse that calls out for holiness is crowned with the words, "for holy am I, HASHEM, your G-d." How does that help? Topping that ladder is HASHEM like an Abba **encouraging His children to climb**. DvarTorah, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and [Torah.org](http://Torah.org).