

THE HOLY OF HOLIES

by Rabbi Label Lam

It is a Sabbath of rest (Shabbat Shabbaton) for you, and you shall afflict yourselves. It is an eternal statute And the Kohen who is anointed or who is invested to serve in his father's stead, shall effect [this] atonement, and he shall don the linen garments, the holy garments; And he shall effect atonement upon the Holy of Holies, and he shall effect atonement upon the Tent of Meeting and upon the altar, and he shall effect atonement upon the Kohanim and upon all the people of the congregation. (Vayikra 16:31-3)

Rabbi Akiva says, "Happy are you Israel! Before Whom do you purify yourselves and Who purifies you? Your- Father in Heaven! As it says, "The Mikvah of Israel is HASHEM!" (Jeremiah 17) Just as a Mikvah purifies from sins so The Holy One Blessed Be He purifies Israel."(Talmud Yuma 85 B) For on this day (Yom Kippur) He will make atonement for you to cleanse you from all your sins, before HASHEM you will be cleansed. (Vayikra 16:30)

We spend a good part of the Yom Kippur service focused on one man's entry into this sacred territory. It's a wonder how the Kohain Gadol effects an atonement for the entirety of the congregation by his entering the Holy of Holies? How does it work?

I have a theory! The way a Mikvah works is that a certain quantity of pure waters from rain or some other unsullied or natural source is collected. Rarely do we find that one actually immerses in the original body of specially-collected waters. The usual approach is to build a regular pool of ordinary water right nearby and then to open up a hole that connects the two. The result is that the once ordinary waters are then transformed by their contact with the original holy waters and they can also act as a Mikvah.

When the Kohain Gadol enters the Holy of Holies he is like a super spiritual astronaut stepping onto the moon. It is "one small step for man but one giant step for mankind". No human with normal traits can survive in such an awesome environment.

All too often during the 2nd Temple the unfit Kohain had to be dragged out by a chain. However, when he did "make it" it was cause for celebration. A human had entered into rarified place where "nothing took up space", whatever that really means. It is the closest a person on this earth can come to HASHEM, and it may be more like entering the next world and returning.

The next world is not less than being exposed to HASHEM, in the realm of He was, He is, He will be,

and He brings everything into being. Those concepts combine to form the contraction which is HASHEM's name as we know but do not pronounce, except for the Kohain Gadol on Yom Kippur.

Now when he penetrates that place, it is like that opening is created between the holy pool of water and the ordinary stuff which is then transformed. The whole world then becomes the Holy of Holies by extension and therefore we shout with clarity at the conclusion of Yom Kippur when our bodies have yielded to our souls, "HASHEM Hu HaElochim" -seven times. HASHEM... next/other worldly, is really compressed and woven throughout this world-Elochim.

Any stranger peeking into the room at Neilah, right before the fast concludes, might conclude that this congregation is a gathering of raving lunatics. All the shaking and crying and screaming of "HASHEM Hu HaElochim", to the untutored eye certainly can create that impression. I remember when a waiter from the hotel accidentally stepped into the room and glanced at wildness with a look of consternation before closing the door quickly. I wondered what he must have thought of us at that moment.

The truth is, though, that that precious moment at the climax of a day of prayer and fasting may be the only really sober and sane moment of the entire year and the rest of time we just might be certified crazy. However, if understood properly, it may also be our last best chance to be so enveloped by **the Holy of Holies!** DvarTorah, Copyright © 2007 by Rabbi Label Lam and Torah.org.