

SHOCK TREATMENT

by Rabbi Label Lam

And HASHEM spoke to Moshe after the death of Aaron's two sons, when they drew near before the HASHEM, and they died. (Vayikra 16:1)

Why is mentioning the death of the two sons of Aaron a fitting introduction to the laws of Yom Kippur and entry of the Kohen Gadol into the Holy of Holies? Rashi explains that it is a strong warning to deter anyone from entering the domain of the holy in a prohibited way. The verse is cautioning even seekers of the sublime from rushing in where angels fear to tread. It is an absolutely dangerous move without any margin of error or allowance for favoritism.

According to Rashi, the ordinary amongst us are officially cautioned not to enter where we do not belong. What about the Kohen Gadol and his ilk?! What does the mention of the death of Aaron's sons do for them? Why is it an intro to the laws of Yom Kippur, in general?

Now more than a month ago right before Purim, I was happily treated to a string of late nights followed by early mornings. My daughter was getting engaged and the L'Chaim was on a Sunday night. Monday morning I was back at work. Monday night was the Vort! It was another lovely but late night event and again I was back at it with a few hours of sleep. That Tuesday afternoon I received a call from Rabbi Zacharia Wallerstein. He asked me if I could sub for his Tuesday evening class at Ohr Yitzchok. That night was Taanis Esther and the next day was a half day in Yeshiva and so I agreed to drive to Brooklyn after work to give a 10:30 PM Shiur. I knew I was setting myself up for another day, a fast day "running on empty".

I was preparing a fiery piece of Sefas Emes when 10:30 passed by without a single soul entering the room. At 10:40 a middle aged gent sauntered in and sat a few rows away. I warmly welcomed him. Inwardly, admittedly, I was wrestling whether or not I should bother to deliver a class. Maybe I was too embarrassed to excuse myself or maybe he looked like he was hungry, so we jumped in. It was awesome! We prepared for Purim with all the bluster I could muster. After 50 minutes we both felt we had eaten a big Torah meal. We walked out together exchanging pleasantries.

Rabbi Wallerstein called to find out how the Shiur was, and "how many people" were there. Not wanting to break the news all at once I told him a story about a preacher had a lone farmer in the audience when he was ready to give his sermon. He told the farmer, "No speech today!" The farmer retorted, "If I went to the field and saw one horse, wouldn't I feed him?!" Getting the hint he launched into a 45 minute fury of fire and brimstone and looked to the farmer for approval. The farmer tells the

preacher, "If I went into the field and saw only one horse, do you think I would dump the whole truck load of hay for him?!" Rabbi Wallerstein was astonished, "One person!?" I told him that I dumped the whole truck load of hay!

Two weeks later on a Tuesday morning, Rabbi Wallerstein calls me again. This time he tells me that the fellow who came that night never missed a class. The next week he was sick and they said the Shiur for a Refua Shleima. "This morning he had a massive heart attack and died. I am at his Levaya now! Your Shiur was his very last!" I was stunned!

What a sobering thought! You never know when you might find yourself standing like the Kohen Gadol inside the Holy of Holies or beyond, in front of HASHEM. How does one get ready for that inevitability of all inevitabilities? Yom Kippur and the Kodosh Kedoshim are models of that ultimate birthing process- "Teshuvah". The best preparation to successfully enter that ultimate realm might be a **shock treatment!**