

Parshat Acharei Mot Kedoshim 5777

We say that Yom Kippur is one of the days of 'awe'. Why do we associate Yom Kippur with awe? We are forgiven on Yom Kippur so surely we should see that day as a great day of joy. What a wonderful opportunity G-d has given us on that day to purify ourselves.

The Torah doesn't introduce us to Yom Kippur as a great day of joy celebrating the forgiveness of our sins. Instead, the subject is introduced (16:1) by the death of Aaron's sons. Aaron is then told (16:2)

- (a) when **not** to come into the kodesh kedoshim lest he should also die and
- (b) that G-d appears **in the cloud** above the aron's cover.

There follows 27 verses explaining what Aaron/the Kohen Godol must do on Yom Kippur. This involves a detailed explanation of the korbonos that must be brought as part of the Kohen Godol's service to G-d on that day.

Then, and only then, after Aaron has carried out all these detailed duties, at verse 16:28, is he told when he **can** enter the kodesh kedoshim.

After such a long set of instructions, finally in verses 16:29 and 30 Aaron is told the only day of the year when all this can happen-the 10th day of the 7th month. Only then is he told that this is the day when we shall afflict our souls and do no work; that this special day atones for our sins and we are purified and cleansed **before G-d**.

Why isn't verse 16:30 at the beginning of this chapter? Isn't Yom Kippur primarily about being pardoned for our sins? Aaron is instead told when not to come in, then when he can come in; and then how to carry out the Yom Kippur service in the Mishkan/Beis Hamikdash. Only after that is it mentioned that this is the day G-d purifies us.

Perhaps the answer is that Yom kippur is not primarily about forgiving our sins. G-d introduces Yom Kippur by reminding us of the death of Aaron's

sons. They died (16:1) trying to get close to G-d; but they died because they went about it the wrong way.

Perhaps Yom Kippur is about telling us the right way to get close to G-d. פי כִּי בָּעֲנַן אֲרָאָה עַל הַכַּפֹּרֶת (16:2) '*for I appear over the aron cover **in a cloud***'. G-d tells us that **He is in that cloud**. We have heard this before at Har Sinai as stated in Shemos (24:16) וַיִּקְרָא אֶל מֹשֶׁה בַּיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי מִתּוֹךְ הָעֲנָן '*and He called Moshe on the 7th day **within the cloud***'.

So here in the kodesh kedoshim we have the cloud above the aron containing the Aseres HaDibros and G-d tells us that He is in that cloud just as he was at Har Sinai. So Yom Kippur contains within it a Har Sinai moment. But unlike the 2 sons of Aaron we are being told how to go about it the right way.

G-d tells Aaron to bring the incense into the kodesh Kodoshim. This incense is set on fire and the smoke fills the kodesh kodoshim causing this man-made incense cloud to merge with the cloud above the aron. That same cloud which G-d has told us he is in

So perhaps the imperative of Yom Kippur is not forgiveness. It is to get close to G-d. And that forgiveness that we receive is a by product of that closeness we can achieve on that special day. On Yom Kippur we can recreate a moment of Har Sinai when the Kohen Godol goes into the Kodesh Kodoshim. That is the awesomeness of that day

The word יִכַּפֵּר has the same root as כִּפֹּרֶת. So the word for forgiveness is the same as the word that describes the very covering of the aron over which the two clouds merge and under which are placed the Aseres HaDibros.

So the cleansing takes place **before G-d**. As we are told in verse 16:30. כִּי בַּיּוֹם הַזֶּה יִכַּפֵּר עֲלֵיכֶם לְטָהַר אֶתְכֶם מִכָּל חַטֹּאתֵיכֶם לִפְנֵי ה' תִּטְהָרוּ '*Because on this day He shall effect atonement for you to cleanse you. **Before G-d**, you will be cleansed from all your sins*'.

