



Parshat Acharei Mot: Holy Maintenance

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Aharon is given a set of instructions. Once a year, on Yom Kippur, he was to enter the Kodesh Hakodashim, the Holy of Holies – but only after performing an extensive ritual of purification and atonement to allow for his brief audience with the Divine presence in its sacred abode^א. Under no other circumstances may the Kohen Gadol enter the Kodesh Hakodashim (the Holy of Holies), no other person could enter along with him ([Vayikra 16:17](#)), and there was great fear that, in accordance with the words of the Torah ([Vayikra 16:2](#)), a diversion of any kind from the set ritual, known as Avodat Yom Hakippurim, could lead to the very demise of the Kohen Gadol (Cf. Rashi ad. loc.; [Yoma 19b](#)). To serve as the Kohen Gadol on Yom Kippur was an awesome and sacred responsibility, to be performed with the utmost care.

Yet just a few months ago, while visiting Ohr Torah Stone students mobilized to IDF reserves in the south of Israel, I was reminded of another halakha regarding the Kodesh Hakodashim from an interaction with one of our brave students. He had been stationed at a location in Kibbutz Beerli which had been designated for tank repairs, a skill set he had developed during the years of his regular service. He admitted to me that he was feeling somewhat disappointed. Many of his friends and peers were fighting on the frontlines, yet he had been left back to perform work that is, despite the physical exertion and technical mastery needed, considered less important than combat.

I shared with this student that, despite the Torah's seeming pronouncement that the Avodat Yom haKippurim is the only circumstance in which we allow for entry into the Holy of Holies, the Tosefta in Keilim (1:11) notes that Kohanim were permitted to enter the Kodesh Hakodashim at their leisure when performing maintenance work. No additional sacrifices or sprinklings of blood were necessary; the Kohen could simply enter the Kodesh Hakodashim.

These priestly maintenance workers of millenia ago reminded me of this student, who was similarly tasked with what seemed to him to be menial tasks lacking in the meaning and excitement designated to others. I encouraged him to see in his current task a similar fulfillment of responsibility. Sure, this particular student wasn't serving on the frontlines; but his role in ensuring that the tanks operated was no less than crucial.



In fact, throughout the past few months, the people of Israel have been witness to a wide range of crucial tasks on the home front as well: medical staff working extra shifts to keep hospitals operating, community members bringing food to the families of wounded soldiers or those in miluim, volunteering to care for children who have been evacuated to the center of the country or have been recently orphaned, and so much more.

It is easy to spot the heroes on the frontlines who, like the Kohen Gadol on Yom Kippur, put their entire lives and wellbeing on the line in order to protect us. Yet a half-year into this ongoing war, we should remember that we all have the capacity to be heroes of a different stripe, people who can similarly enter the 'holy of holies' to perform the so-called 'menial tasks' that support and empower others. All the background and behind-the-scenes work that allows our families, communities, and state to thrive ought to be cherished and performed with pride. These, too, are priestly pathways to the Divine allowing all of us to find our presence in the Holy of Holies.

[\[1\]](#) The Netziv in his introduction to Vayikra quotes the Gaon of Vilna that Aharon the first High Priest was permitted to enter the Holy of Holies any day, not just on Yom haKippurim. All future High Priests could only enter once a year. Furthermore, if Aharon wanted to enter he needed to follow the rigorous protocols required for any High Priest on Yom haKippurim, the protocols mentioned in our parsha.