

## “Before Hashem” by Avraham Norin

The theme of Parashat Acharei Mot is the ability to be "before *Hashem*".

The *Parsha* starts out with the sad fact that Aharon's two sons died "when they drew near **before Hashem**" unsuccessfully (Vavrika 16:1). To prevent this from happening in the future, the Torah commands the *Cohen Gadol* to enter the holy area of the sanctuary ("before Hashem") only if he first brought offerings of atonement for the entire nation: "For on this day he shall effect atonement for you to cleanse you- **before Hashem**, you shall be cleansed from all your sins" (Vavrika 16:30)

The *Parsha* continues to describe how each person can achieve a level of being "before Hashem". When one brings offerings exclusively to Hashem's house of honor, the Torah writes that he comes to "the Mishkan **before Hashem**". (17: 4). Similar to the *Cohen Gadol's* offerings, these offerings bring atonement for those who brought them. (17: 11).

The *Parsha* teaches us that even outside the Mishkan one can achieve a status of being "before Hashem". In the verses 18:1-4 it is written "Speak to the Israelite people and say to them: I the Lord am your God. You shall not copy the practices of the land of Egypt where you dwelt, or of the land of Canaan to which I am taking you; ... My rules alone shall you observe, and faithfully follow my laws: I the Lord am your God!" The multi-repetition of Hashem's name in this section teaches us that the one who follows God's laws is also considered to be "before Hashem".

The *Parsha* concludes by mentioning the word "before" in a different context: "For all those abhorrent things were done by the people who were in the land before you, and the land became defiled. So let not the land spew you out for defiling it, as it spewed out the nation that came before you" (18:28). By switching the subject from "**before Hashem**" to "the nation that came **before you**", the Torah is teaching the following lesson: When Israel follows the value system of other nations, the land will be defiled and the people will be exiled from it; When Israel

follows the laws and statues of the Almighty, they will merit to spirituality and the ability to live in the land of Israel.

Therefore, the entire *Parsahat Acharei Mot* can be summarized with the following message: Although Aharon's sons failed in their attempt, it is possible to be "before Hashem". Only if one has the good of the nation in mind and is dedicated to Hashem's ways, can one reach this state. The rewards of doing so include atonement, a spiritual life, and a lifetime stay in the land of Israel.