Yehoshua November is an English professor and poet. He was also a very active member of his campus Chabad house as an Undergrad at Binghamton University. I’d like to share one of his poems with you tonight.

This morning,
in the small basement synagogue,
amidst several Chasidic students lost in prayer,
I looked up from my prayer book
to see a man in worker’s clothes climb a ladder
and enter through an open ceiling panel.
And I thought, Oh yes,
he is just another one
like all of us
trying desperately to ascend,
but knowing full well he must come back down
to perform the work of this earth.

– Yehoshua November

Did you grow up in classrooms with drop ceilings? Do you recall leaning back on your chair, rolling your eyes upwards and counting the exact number of Panels of particle board kept in place by metal strips? If any of this sounds familiar, it’s easy to picture one of those panels in need of replacement.
With the thrill of small school children, a high school class would clear space for a handiman to fix the ceiling. Putting the math books aside, the party began.

In November’s poem the praying crowd did not allow themselves to be distracted. The siddur could not be cast aside as easily as the text book. Most people in the room probably took very little notice of the minor distraction – except for the poet.

The poet saw himself in weekday clothes. He saw a book of prayer in his weekday hands. Perhaps he wanted to stay in prayer, study and mediation but seemingly he did not.

One day of the Jewish year is called “Shabbat Shabbaton” – the Sabbath of all Sabbaths and that day is Yom Kippur. In this week’s parsha Aharon, the high priest, is commanded to enter the Holy of Holies on the Sabbath of Sabbaths – Yom Kippur. The instructions are very detailed and the High Priest is only allowed to enter into the Holy of Holies one day a year. Many more details are discussed regarding Yom Kippur observance throughout the Parsha.

In recent weeks the Torah detailed the tragic death of Nadav and Avihu, two sons of Aharon the Kohen. Nadav and Avihhu longed for a life of total spirituality and therefore entered into the Holy of Holies uninvited. They went into that sanctified space thirsting for G-dliness and they were ultimately consumed by a G-dly fire. It was as if the workman never came down from the ladder, preferring the world only from up high.

November addresses this issue. He writes;

trying desperately to ascend,
but knowing full well he must come back down
to perform the work of this earth.

It doesn’t actually matter if the workman prefers the top of the ladder – he has a mission to complete with his feet firmly on the ground.

Judaism is not meant to be observed on a mountain top – it is a religion replete with practical mitzvot that are very detailed. Everyone in this room has a specific mission, you were each sent to this world for a purpose. The Baal Shem Tov teaches that a person might live for 70 or 80 years just to do a practical favor for another. We don’t necessarily know our purpose – but we all have one.

They say that the issue that you struggle with the most, is deeply connected to your purpose in this world.

The high priest is indeed privy to enter into the Holy of Holies – but ONLY for one day a year. We each celebrate Yom Kippur just one day a year. The rest of year we are busy with...life. The priest was busy with communal responsibilities and students are busy with exams and papers. The message is clear that we must find balance.

The sons of Aharon could not tolerate a material world and their father was commanded to visit the Holy but just once each year. In our lives we have moments or experiences that inspire and motivate, but we also have many regular days filled with regular tasks. Shabbat itself is a spiritual day set aside which hopefully keeps us inspired into the next week, but the Sabbath of Sabbaths happens just once a year.
The Jewish day begins and ends with prayer. Prayer can feel like a moment of Shabbat packed into a work day. November’s poem grapples with the back and forth between the spiritual and the mundane.

May we all be blessed that this Shabbat have an uplifting affect on the upcoming week

L’chaim

**Parsha Points:**

1) Special garments worn by the High Priest

2) High Priest would confess/atone for the nation while bring the sacrifices on YK

3) Procedure of Azazel - the “scape goat” is described

4) The Jews are forbidden to offer sacrifices outside of the Temple

5) Laws regarding not consuming blood and not living like Canaanites or Egyptians

6) Forbidden sexual relationships

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