

Tzav – 5782

In Leviticus, Chapter 7, Verses 37 & 38, we read the following “Such are the rituals of the burnt offering (olah – rising higher), the grain offering (mincha - generosity) , the purification offering (chatat – feelings of guilt), the reparation offering (asham – feelings of guilt), the offering of ordination (zevach –sacrifice of well-being -shlamim), and the sacrifice of well-being (sacrifice of well-being -shlamim), with which the Lord charged Moses on Mount Sinai, when He commanded that the Israelites present their offerings to the Lord in the wilderness of Sinai.

When I started to study this week’s parsha, I read the words above and realized that I had never really noticed this complete and meaningful summary of all the various kinds of sacrifices. The sages point out that each served a particular purpose in the daily lives of the Israelites. If you noticed, I added the specific Hebrew words from the text and then used commentaries to understand what kinds of events they represented. What I inferred from this list is that there are NO sacrifices offered to beg HaShem for intervention in one’s daily life, or protection from one’s enemies. That is one very big leap for mankind, if you will.

Being of a certain age, I was required, along with my age and grade mates to study the ancient civilizations of the Incas, the Mayans, and the Aztecs, and taught later on about the sacrifices of the Egyptians. We also learned along the way about the sacrifices to the gods of Rome and Greece to oftentimes appease the anger of their gods. We read none of these things in the Torah and know that they did not exist. Rather, the Israelites, our forebearers, were through their sacrifices, getting lessons in how to get along with people, how to be thankful for the bounties of the earth on which we live

and how to properly acknowledge the ways in which we sought to find harmony in society. If you will, think of it as finding peace inside and outside ourselves and the space we inhabit.

I am reading *Relational Judaism, Using the Power of Relationships to Transform the Jewish Community* by Dr. Ron Wolfson in preparation for a webinar conducted by the Northeast Region of United Synagogues for Conservative Judaism about the quest to create the synagogue of the 21st Century. In that book, Wolfson refers to the Nine Bayns of our Existence. He divides these nine into two groups, those between us and others and those between HaShem and the community. I really liked this synopsis and made a copy of the chart for my office because I knew it would come in handy. Little did I know it would resonate on the same day I made it. I say that because the types of sacrifices I referred to above fall precisely and neatly into those same two categories – for personal reasons and for communal reasons. Each strengthens the other, without the one there is not the other.

Wolfson's book reminds me that our identities as Jews helps to anchor us in a world that is forever changing and often filled with challenges to our sense of self. All we need to do is think about all that we have endured because of the pandemic and how so many of us have reflected on the value of our weekly Thursday morning davening. I am reminded as well of how valuable the mourners we have had in our midst these past two years found the virtual shiva and know that throughout our lives we have come to see how the shiva has helped the mourners confront the reality of death and the loss of someone special. The rituals in our tradition, which stemmed from the sacrifices that are outlined in this week's parsha, give meaning to our lives, and help us like a bridge over troubled waters from time to time. Pity

those who have no such faith and are cast adrift without any identity and / or ritual to help them with that self-same bridge. We are revelling in the ability to daven together once again and to look forward immensely to soon being able to socialize each week over breakfast on Thursdays and Kiddush on Shabbat. There have been so many times when simchas have brought into our sanctuary, individuals who grew up with our traditions but have since left them behind and confess to feeling comfortable and rejuvenated with and by singing of the prayers in our services. These are the personal relationships sacrifices were meant to heal and contribute to a sense of well-being and mental health.

Then there are the sacrifices, the traditions that remind us of our place in the scheme of things and give us pause to find humility when it is needed. It would have to be a very wounded individual who wouldn't stop and think about their own mortality when participating in the rituals of death and burial in our community of practice. I am excited to know that I am going to be on the beach in Tel-Aviv, with my son and grandson, among others, watched the annual Yom HaAtzmaut sail past and air show of the IDF and celebrate the continued existence of our Jewish state. It is not at coincidental that before Yom HaAtzmaut is celebrated, the sirens mark the start, the observance and the end of Yom HaShoah, the memorialization of those who were lost not just in Europe during World War 2 but those who have died fighting for the existence and success of our beloved State. We pray on both days for peace in our lifetimes and are reminded that the Yizkor prayer contains no reference to death but only to life and the role of HaShem in protecting our lives.

I am reminded once again of the fact that my Zayde Max Dental always used to say that sometimes we have to hurt to do good. That hurt he was

referring to be the inner kind, the kind we had to make sacrifices for in the days of the temple. The good was the kind we get when we fulfill the covenant to aspire to be holy in our daily existence which was reinforced by the sacrifices so that we could improve the world. Each sacrifice, whatever its kind, is offered in the name of Tikkun HaOlam, by enhancing the relationships between ourselves and our fellow men and woman and aspiring to be holy because we are created in the image of HaShem who is, by definition, Holy. May it continue to be ever thus.