



Holiness and offering up our best

March 27, 2020

This week, we read from the very beginning of Leviticus, *Vayikra*. //

It details the various sacrifices offered by the priests
on behalf of our people in the wilderness. //

We see the Olah (burnt offering),

Mincha (meal offering),

Zevach Shelamin (sacrifice of well-being),

Chatat (sin offering),

and Asham (guilt offering). //

When we use the word sacrifice,

our common understanding is giving up something
or doing without for a greater gain or purpose. //

Many would use this word to describe

how we are forgoing social gatherings

and working from home. //

**First Baptist church in Rhode Island has a sign outside that says,

“Had not planned on giving up this much for Lent.”

Many of us have had to give up on many things:

Working, going to school, seeing friends,

having a drink out, gym, beach. //

The changes to our lives are staggering

even though we recognize that it is and will be temporary.//

Animal sacrifices though, in antiquity,
were understood differently.//

First of all, the English word, ‘sacrifice’
comes from the Latin meaning, ‘sacredness’
or ‘making something holy.’ //

The offerings our people made
were to elevate their humanity and connect with God. //

Our sacrifices were means of marking time,
special occasions, expressing gratitude
and also remorse.//

What is significant about these ‘sacrifices’
is that they all entailed the best the people had to offer. //

If it was an animal,
it had to be healthy and without any blemish. //

If it was flour, it must be the finest. //

Our people took the best that they had
and offered it up to strengthen their community,
relationship with God, and in doing so,
engaged in a holy act.//

During this time of uncertainty,
it behooves us to focus on what brings sanctity to our lives. //

When do we feel connected
with something bigger than ourselves? //

How can we live according to our values
in a time of upheaval?//

It starts with identifying
what our core values are and why we live. //
As humans, we need connection, we need people. //
Even though, we can't gather together like before,
we can pick up the phone and call a friend or relative. //
We can reach out with compassion and caring
on line and social media. //
And we can express appreciation to those
who share our homes with us. //

As Jews, we need to remember that as *Pirkei Avot* teaches,
“The world rests on three things, Torah,
worship, and acts of lovingkindness.’ //
And so, how can we continue to engage in Torah and study? //
Well, we can use Zoom, live streaming,
google chats and more. //
We can also just open up a book and read and learn. //
Engaging our mind can help us
traverse the walls of our homes. //

Worship and ritual are important ways
to mark time and connect. //
Shabbat is still here every week. //
We can light candles
and watch our synagogue's services on line. //
Prayers, blessings, and songs
can raise our spirits and fortify us. //

It is noteworthy that for the last two thousand years,
after the destruction of our Temple,
prayers and study literally took the place of the animal offerings.//

And then there are acts of loving kindness. //
Now even more so, we need to explore how we can help others? //
Some of us are able bodied and able to run errands for others. //
Those of us who can't go out,
can still give Tzedakah, make contributions,
no matter how small. //
We can offer compassion and empathy to others
who are alone and fearful. //
A call can help elevate one's mood and give hope to another.//

This is a time for us to dig deep. //
We must take the time to identify our core values
and what makes us who we are. //
And then act on them! //
Life continues even in times of uncertainty. //
We must live purposefully and joyfully. //
As the Israelites offered the best of their herd and flocks,
we must be the best version of ourselves
and know that we are here for a reason
and that life is beautiful. //
If we focus on our values,
our lives will be meaningful
and our days will be filled with blessing.//