

Shabbat Shalom,

when I first came to Vancouver I went to public school for the grade two year. At that school there was a group of popular kids let lead by one specific individual girl. For some reason there was another girl at the school who the the “Queen Bee” did not like. So, she did absolutely everything that she could to make the other girl’s life miserable. Every day she would force all of her friends, me included to ignore, exclude, and bully the poor girl. It later turned out the “ Queen Bee” was the only one who had something against that girl. Everyone else simply followed for no valid reason. You might be wondering; “Why?” “Why would someone do something like this for no reason?” I’ll tell you: peer pressure.

It is important not to give into peer pressure. That is true not only for individuals but for entire nations or even countries.

This week we read parashat Vaykra. In this parashat the Israelites are commanded to sacrifice animals and food products in honour of God. Rambam explains in his book (Guide of the Perplexed) that the reason why the Torah commands animal sacrifice instead of prayer is simply because that is what all of the other nations were doing at the time. The Israelites simply did not want to be the odd ones out. It seems that the Jewish nation was actually giving into peer pressure by their neighbours. Even though this example was on a national level it still serves us as a reminder that others can influence our behavior either positively or negatively.

The reason why it is severely important not to fall under peer pressure is because it can eventually lead you into doing bad things to others and to yourself. Even if it starts out with something harmless such as wearing a specific brand of shoes or

dressing in a specific way peer pressure can eventually develop and increase into horrible things such as doing drugs or stealing others property. Peer pressure can make you do terrible things that you would have never wanted or even thought of doing on your own.

Another reason why it is important not to fall under peer pressure is because it takes away your freedom of choice in the decisions that you make. This can be very bad because it can not only make you do things you never thought of doing but it also makes you dependent on other people. If one were to always follow others actions and decisions they would eventually lose their independence and would forever rely on others to make their decisions for them.

On the opposite side, those who stand up to peer pressure develop their will power and become stronger as individuals. The more you resist the bad influence of others the more you gain the ability to stand up for what you believe in and grow as a leader and a mench to others.

Peer pressure is not only something that is faced by pre-teens and teenagers yet is something that people of all ages must deal with. The Israelites had to deal with peer pressure by the surrounding nations, as we too must deal with this same concept every day by the people we interact with. Peer pressure does not end when you turn 13, 20 or even 100 it is something that people of all ages must deal with their entire life. As I stand here before you today and celebrate becoming a young jewish adult I know that peer pressure is an issue I will always have to deal with. And I can tell you with certainty that this is one fight I am not willing to back down from.

Thank you.