

Shabbat Parashat Vayikra Making “Offerings” at Purim Time

This week's *parasha* is among the harder weekly Torah portions to read from cover to cover. It contains the details and practices for the various different sacrifices that were to be offered first in the *Mishkan*/portable desert Tabernacle and then later in the Temple in Jerusalem. The sacrificial system is a relic of our ancient past, which to us, serves as the foundation for our current structure and themes for daily prayer. These are the historical contributions which this now very distant system for communication with God provide. However, digging a little bit deeper, the sacrificial program reveals the value and requirement of making a personal offering or sacrifice in order to achieve higher spiritual fulfillment, which is difficult to capture in what is the routine of daily prayer.

In ancient times, the personal communicative bridge to God was built through the very physical process of bringing a live animal to the Temple Mount. The effort that this act required “took something out of you.” Physical exertion was necessary in order to achieve a spiritual end. In addition, this animal that was being brought was either one from your own personal flocks or one that you purchased upon arrival to Jerusalem. Either way, the animal was of financial value, and handing it over the *Kohanim*/Temple Priests represented a monetary sacrifice in addition to the physical labor that you either had or would exert getting the animal to the Temple. Thus, the word “sacrifice” is a very literal representation of what the ancient offerings to God, in fact, really were.

To read of the sacrifices this week reminds us that personal sacrifice or making offerings is one of the embedded aspects of the successful achievement of a Jewish spiritual high, in any generation. It is not a coincidence that it is a standing tradition of several Jewish festivals for *tz'dakah*/charity to be given in order to make it possible for Jews who are less fortunate also to be able to enjoy a proper celebration. At Purim, which Jews around the world will celebrate beginning NEXT Saturday night (March 19th), the *mitzvah*/commandment that gets the most “press” is *mishlo'ah manot*, sending gift baskets to friends, family, and others close to us. This is a beautiful practice, which adds to the joy of our Purim celebrations. However, equally important, if not even more so, is the *mitzvah*/commandment of *matanot la'evyonim*, making gifts to the poor. As Purim and Pesah approach, the financial burden on Jewish families in need only grows. It is for this reason that tradition includes the commandment to assist those in need during this season.

Last week, I received a communication from Vancouver's Jewish Food Bank informing me that several grocery staples have now come into very short supply. A perfect opportunity to satisfy the *mitzvah* of *matanot la'evyonim* for Purim this year would be to bring in any of the following items to our school for the Jewish Food Bank:

- Canned salmon and tuna
- Kosher soup - canned or in packages

- Canned Fruit and vegetables
- Cereal
- Snack size juices

The school has a Food Bank donation bin next to the water fountain in our front hallway. As you do your own grocery shopping for your family this weekend or next week, please consider purchasing an extra item or two from the list above for the Jewish needy. Not only will you be fulfilling an important *mitzvah*, but you will also be taking the opportunity to, perhaps, achieve a Jewish spiritual high in the spirit of the sacrifices, which we read about in this week's *parasha*.

Shabbat Shalom!

Hag Purim Samei'ah!