

Shabbat Shalom
from Rabbi Michael Gold

Candle Lighting Time
Friday Erev Shabbat 7:14 pm

Services

Thursday Mar. 19 Rosh Hodesh, Minyan followed by Bagels and Bible

Saturday Mar. 21 9:30 am Shabbat morning service
Passover Begins Wednesday Night April 1.

Here is my weekly message.

PARSHAT VAYIKRA
SACRIFICE

“Speak to the Israelite people and say to them: When any of you presents an offering of cattle to God: You shall choose your offering from the herd or from the flock.” (Leviticus 1:2)

This week we begin reading the book of Leviticus, the third book of the Torah. Later in the book are some of the most powerful laws from our tradition including “Love your neighbor as yourself.” But the beginning of Leviticus is difficult for moderns. It summarizes the arcane laws of animal sacrifice.

Animal sacrifice fell out of practice with the destruction of the Temple almost two thousand years ago. But we still read about it. The question is, can we learn anything from these ancient laws? I believe we can. The Hebrew word for sacrifice is *korban*. The word comes from the Hebrew root *k-r-v* which means, “to become close.” If we want to become close to God, we need to practice sacrifice.

In fact, if we want to accomplish anything important in life, we need to practice sacrifice. My wife and I just returned from South Carolina where we had a wonderful visit with my daughter, son-in-law, and two grandchildren. I spent time talking to our ten-year-old grandson, Judah. He is doing well in school; I watched him focusing on his homework. He also does well in sports, playing football and rugby. (I have no idea how to play rugby; he tried to explain the rules to me.) He is going to religious school where he is learning to read Hebrew. Finally, he has become a better chess player; we each beat the

other once.

I told him that if he wants to be good at any of these things – schoolwork, rugby, Hebrew, or chess, it takes work and sacrifice. Nothing worthwhile ever comes easily for us. In English we say, “no pain, no gain.” In Hebrew we quote *Pirkei Avot, Lefum Tzara Agra*, “According to the pain is the reward” (*Avot* 5:23). Anything worthwhile in life, whether good relationships, raising children, a proper education, or success at work, involves pain and sacrifice.

The lesson of Leviticus is becoming close to God involves sacrifice. Today we do not sacrifice animals. But for the important things in life, we do make sacrifices of time and hard effort. Life is never easy. But everything worthwhile in life involves this kind of sacrifice. It is not easy to explain this to a ten-year-old who wants everything to come easily. But there is a reason why his rugby team does strict workouts as they prepare for each game. “According to the pain is the reward.”

Passover is coming in two weeks. It is one of our most beautiful festivals. Most Jews try to find themselves at some kind of Passover seder or ritual Passover meal. But keeping Passover according to tradition also involves hard work and sacrifice. In our kitchen, we take out boxes of special dishes that we use only on Passover. We do a large amount of shopping, buying food that has no trace of forbidden food, any kind of leavening that has been allowed to rise. My dietary habits change on Passover, avoiding foods that I enjoy the rest of the year. (Those who know me realize that eight days without popcorn is difficult.)

What do we learn from the beginning of Leviticus? We learn that everything worthwhile in life involves hard work and sacrifice. But such sacrifice creates a life worth living.