Vayikra 5780

Southern Wall experience, imagines you entering the temple times.

Street with vendors, a mikveh for purification, money changers if you’ve come from far away, making possible to purchase your offering.

Leviticus invites us into a world we never know, but one that still enriches our lives.

The Talmud teaches us:

David wanted to build God’s house but God told him no, God was upset about all the blood David had spilled and the wars David had fought. David wondered, “will you ever forgive me? “God answers, “Eventually, but your son, Solomon, will be the one to build the Temple.”

Solomon had built the most beautiful Temple in Jerusalem and on the day it was ready to be dedicated, Solomon wanted to bring the Ark into the Holy of Holies but the gates refused to open. The gates refused to open. Solomon said, “Lift up your heads. Open the gates, let in the ruler with honor.” The gates stayed shut and asked him, “Who is the ruler with honor?” Solomon said, “The Ten Commandments, they are in the ark.” The gates said, “Try again.” Solomon said, “The Holy One who often comes close to us when we are near the ark.” The gates didn’t move and said, “What is your third guess?” Solomon said, “David, my father, who was God’s servant.” The gates opened. The ark went into the Holy of Holies. David was forgiven, and the angels sang, *Baruch atah Adonai, ha-tov Shimkha u’lkha na-eh l’hodot*, Praised are You Adonai, your name is goodness and it is pleasant to offer you praises.”

We read about the sacrifices, in Hebrew they are called *korbanot*, which means a closeness, in ancient times when one would go up to the Temple with an offering in hand, they would try to get closer to God. In our Torah portion we read about different kinds of offerings. The first three: burnt, meal, and wholeness offerings are brought to return something to God. In modern times, we think of these offerings as signs of gratitude. When we are grateful for something we say thank you. Challah, Kiddush, eating, we say a blessing as a word of gratitude for the gift God brought to us.

We also learn about the sin offering, and the guilt offering and we bring an offering to correct something that has gone wrong. This offering is a correction offering. When we have gone off course, we hope to get closer to God to bring us back to the right path.

Life, is about walking in a direction and then our path is disrupted, sometimes out of our own doing. Sometimes I wonder if we live in a world where there is not enough gratitude and now that our world has been disrupted, we are really reflecting on all the things we are grateful for, technology, learning, free online concerts by our favorite musicians, a good neighbor or fellow temple member for taking care of us, perhaps most importantly our first responders and medical professionals in this time of disruption.

Our Torah teaches us that if we are in a time of normalcy or in a time of disruption, there is one thing we are to do. Turn to the familiar to restore balance to our lives. We might even turn ritual to bring us closer to what is holy.

What are you doing now in this time of disruption that brings you closer to what is familiar, to what is holy?

I learned this week fro a colleague, Rabbi Judy Schindler, From Rabbi Judy Schindler

In the Displaced Persons camp, Bergen Belsen, a parachute was used to create a wedding dress that was used over and over again for the multitude of weddings. The greatest Jewish birthrate was in the immediate days and months after the Holocaust ended.  Parachutes even when used on the ground can be life saving.

Those moments were certainly moments of disruption, but what did they do, they found a way to get closer to what is holy. In those times, of eternal darkness and despair, they celebrated love, they found ways to get closer to what is holy, to save their lives and to bring Jewish life into the future.

As individuals, we might feel overwhelmed by such a sacred task, but the rabbis of the Talmud note that in the opening verses of Leviticus, when Moses is instructing the people to bring an offering, he changes the tense of the words, you will bring in offering from singular to plural. Why? The rabbis of the Talmud tell us, “Those individuals, who do a single mitzvah, draw themselves and the entire world toward righteousness.” We are searching for closeness right now, we are searching for light in the midst of darkness, what one thing will you do each day, to bring our world of disruption closer to peace, closer to holiness. May we all have the strength and the patience to bring the best of ourselves so we can bring the whole world closer to righteousness.