

Vayikra, Leviticus 1:1-5:26

On days I feel exhausted, emotionally drained, and weak, I find myself considering all that I sacrifice. I reflect upon the hours of sleep lost, time spent supporting others, and moments to refuel spread farther apart than I want. I am also reminded that in those moments of feeling less than complete, I have also reduced my time to pray, to participate in a Shabbat service, and to engage with my Judaism.

This week we begin the book of Leviticus. In Parsha Vayikra, God calls on Moses to reveal the commandments of sacrifice—the offerings that helped bring the people closer to God—which today are symbolized by prayer and service to the synagogue, the Jewish community, and humankind.

These five types of offerings: the burnt offering, the meal offering, the sacrifice of well-being, the sin offering, and the guilt offering are all out of date practices for modern Reform Judaism but reflect the idea that even if we sin accidentally, there are ways to repent. Most importantly, these offerings allowed the Israelites to feel closer to Adonai. The Hebrew word for “sacrifice” is Korban, meaning “approaching” or “drawing nearer to.” In this translation we can understand sacrifice as a means of becoming closer to God.

Though an outdated ritual in Reform Judaism, the idea of offering something to God is still present today. Giving back to our community, taking the time to pray, and asking forgiveness from those we have wronged, all bring us closer to God and to the community in which we express and live out our values.

Additionally, the idea of sacrifice reminded the Israelites to stay humble. Even as leaders, we must recognize our shortcomings, our responsibility to others, and the support of others to find success in our roles. Taking time to pray and contribute to our society allows us to emphasize humility in our lives.

May we spend this Shabbat reflecting the ways in which we can be leaders who act with humility, greatness, and holiness.

Shabbat Shalom,
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For more Torah learning, please join us for Torah Talk, Saturdays, 9 AM at BHC.

