

Tzav: Leviticus: 6-8
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This Shabbat is called Shabbat Hagadol or the Great Sabbath, which is the Sabbath that precedes Passover or Pesach.

It was in Egypt that Israel celebrated the very first Shabbat Ha-Gadol. Five days before being released from slavery, on the tenth day of Nissan, the Israelites were given their first commandment from God. In Exodus 12, it states: "On the tenth day of this month (Nissan), each man should take a lamb for the household, a lamb for each home. The mitzvah of preparing a lamb for the Passover offering four days before it was to be brought, applied only to that first Passover in Egypt, and the Torah does not tell us that we must continue to do so on every future Passover. Nonetheless, the people continued to do this and made sure that their lambs had no blemishes which would preclude their being sacrificed. Even today, we commemorate this lamb sacrifice by having shank bones on our Seder plate. Many miracles were performed in connection of this Passover offering, the most importantly of course, was when the angel of death Pesach, passed over the doors of the Israelites, sparing the first borns of the Hebrews. The Israelites were commanded to stay in their homes as the angel of death passed over them. Today, we may feel very much like the Israelites as we stay indoors to avoid getting sick and protecting ourselves from COVID 19. Luckily, we have

ways to communicate with one another, though, and we have modern ways to entertain ourselves.

In our Torah portion, Tzav, it describes the many types of Sacrifices that the Israelites were commanded to perform. These ancient sacrifices were made as sin offerings, guilt offerings, as a sacrifice of well-being or peace as a gift of thanks, or as a personal offering. It was believed that the people needed to please, thank and ask forgiveness of God, and that they could only do this by offering a sacrifice.

I would like to tell a little midrash ala Cantor Martin about this coming week's portion. It involves the prophet, Eliyahu, who is said to come to our Passover seders to drink from his special cup. There are many midrashim written about how Eliyahu comes down to earth to help those who are poor or in need. So here is a little midrash that I have written:

About 2000 years ago, when sacrifices were still being offered, there lived a kind and simple man named Moishe, who lived with his wife, Chana, and their 5 children outside of Jerusalem. Every year he would travel to Jerusalem and bring his most beautiful and choice cow to sacrifice on behalf of his family. This year however, there had been a plague and he lost all but one of his cows. He had a dilemma. Should he sacrifice his one cow that was left, even though this would be the only way he and his family would survive? He went to the Temple the next day and waited outside praying to God for the answer to his prayers. On the way in to the Temple was Shlomi, who was very wealthy. He had a beautiful Sheep and some grain to offer to God. When he saw Moishe, he looked at him disgustedly and threw a shekel at him. This only distressed Moishe even more. Later that day,

Eliyahu came by with some beautiful sheaves of grain to offer. Seeing Moishe sitting there praying, he stopped and asked him if he was alright. Moishe explained his dilemma and Eliyahu was sad to hear of his plight. He was kind and compassionate and sympathetic to poor Moishe. He said, "Go home and I am sure that God will help you find the answer to your problems by tomorrow." At the end of the day, Moishe went home very dejected and sad. His wife came running out to him and said: "Moishe, you will not believe what has happened! I went outside to dry our clothes, and there on the doorstep were a pile of sheaves of grain, and also some seedlings for us to plant! We will not starve now, and we can keep our last cow so that we will have milk for our children!"

Moishe was astounded, but then he smiled and thought about Eliyahu's remark. God has listened to my prayers, said Moishe, and so has Eliyahu."

As the Coronavirus has affected so many people's lives and our economy, we need to take this story to heart, and think about how we can all be an Eliyahu and help each other. I know that there are many organizations that are now trying to fundraise to help those who are most heavily hit by this terrible epidemic. At a clergy meeting yesterday, we spoke with the new CEO" of the Milwaukee Jewish Federation, Miryam Rosenzweig, who assured us that they will do their best to help those who need it. We, at CEEW will try to do our best to help those in need, as well, especially spiritually. We care about all of our congregants and are here for you. If anyone needs help in anyway, please let us know. If you fall sick, let us know so we can stay in touch and help with checking in and seeing if you need anything, and of course, put you on our mi Shebeirach list. For

those who can help in any way, financially or helping with running errands or just making calls and reaching out to people who are lonely, this is a time for you to do a mitzvah for others.

The Haftarah portion read for this Shabbat is Malachi's prophetic message of God's promise for the ultimate salvation and redemption of the whole world. As such, these words remind us that our role as a people and the very point of our tradition is to strengthen ourselves so that we may strengthen others. What better time to help strengthen one another than in the midst of a time when we need each other more than ever?

Although in ancient days, one was expected to make animal and food sacrifices, the Rabbis and Sages have made it clear to us that God does not need or want those things from us. Our understanding of sacrifice today is that we give of ourselves, either by volunteering to help others individually or in the community or by donating money to those who cannot help themselves. Jews often make monetary donations during holidays as a remembrance of the sacrifices our ancestors would make. This year, especially, making donations of food, clothing or money will especially be needed.

On this Sabbath, we look for healing and hope for a day when we can be with each other in person and hold each other without fear or hesitation. I pray for healing of your hearts and souls and of course your body, if needed. We can be a blessing to each other during these days of isolating ourselves. I pray that God gives us the strength, the love, the kindness and the health to overcome these next weeks. May those who have lost their jobs, have ways to survive financially, by funds they

receive from the government in relief checks and unemployment. May other organizations also step in with relief of some kind. If you are in this situation, please let us know so we can help you with knowing where to go and what to do. If you are lonely, depressed or sad, feel free to reach out to me, and I will be there for you spiritually to support you and help you through these difficult times. If you need help getting food, medicine or supplies, let us know. There are a few people who have offered their help in that way, as well. Jews are always there to help each other and Jews have a lot of experience in living through some pretty terrible predicaments. At times like this, although it may seem counter-intuitive, it is especially good for us to see all the blessings in our lives. All the things we have to be grateful for. So I offer this prayer for us to contemplate:

There are often times, O God, when I feel alone, and yet I know in my heart that I am never alone. You are always there waiting for me to speak to You of my desires, hopes and dreams.

Yet how seldom do I reach out to You to voice my gratitude for all that is beautiful in my life...all the gifts of my life. Love, family, friendship have come from You.

But the greatest gift of all is Your presence, which time and again has given me strength, faith and courage.

Now, in the midst of doubt and confusion, I need to know that You are beside me in the depth of my being. With You there, I know I am not alone-ever.

On this Shabbat HaGadol we say to one another Shabbat haGadol Mevorach, may you have a blessed Shabbat haGadol and may your sacrifices be from your

heart and mind so that you can give others a blessed Shabbat haGadol as well. Shabbat Shalom.