

Two thousand years ago, the center piece of Jewish worship and spirituality was the Temple which stood in Jerusalem. Our ancestors were commanded to come to the Temple at least three times a year for the festivals of Pesah, Shavuot and Sukkot. Those who came for Sukkot, arrived two weeks earlier to take part in the Rosh HaShanah and Yom Kippur worship also.

The central worship which took place in the Temple was the sacrificing of animals. There were daily sacrifices to acknowledge the power of God. There were those that showed gratitude for the abundance in our ancestors' lives and also ones to atone for their sins.

This system was intricate and carefully laid out in the Torah, leaving no room for improvising. Our Medieval commentator Rambam posited that this was to clearly differentiate our religious practice from that of the pagans who sacrificed any and everything.

We still read yearly in our Torah which kinds of animals were chosen for which sacrifice, how many of them to use and how the priest handled the animal. As we well know this system is no longer practiced. Both of our Temples have been destroyed, one in 586 BCE and one in 70 CE.

We are taught by our Sages that the first Temple was destroyed because the Israelites turned from our mitzvot, our commandments to worshiping foreign gods. They placed idols in their homes and in their towns. They set up altars on which to sacrifice to foreign gods. Even as our prophets warned the people not to worship those idols, that God would punish them for their lack of belief in Him, they continued to place objects of stone and clay above God. Eventually, our Sages teach us, God brought the Assyrians to capture the northern kingdom of Israel and then the Babylonians to capture the southern kingdom of Judah.

The Babylonians not only captured our people, forcing them into captivity, they also destroyed the Temple. As our people lived in exile in Babylonia, they mourned the loss of the Temple deeply and profoundly. So profound was their grief, we would think that their collective memory would not allow them to make the same mistake twice.

But after the Temple was rebuilt in 516 BCE, they again disobeyed God. First they assimilated into a Hellenistic lifestyle. And then when the Maccabees freed the Jews from Greek rule, they made a pact with the Romans which led to Roman rule over the Jews and Israel.

When the Jews finally began a revolt against the Romans in the middle of the first century, they had strayed so far from the mitzvot and were divided into so many factions, Sadducees, Pharisees, Zealots and others, they could not cooperate with each other and fight together against the Romans. Each group fought for control of the war strategy. They even resorted to killing opposition leaders in the streets of Jerusalem in broad day light.

One group, the Zealots, went so far as to destroy a twenty-four year supply of wheat in Jerusalem. They believed that God would take care of the Jews and they wouldn't need concrete things like food to keep them alive. This, of course, ensured that the people in the city starved to death because the Romans were encamped outside the city walls, allowing no one to enter and only the dead to leave. As more people starved to death, as the residents of the city grew weaker, the Romans had no

strong opposition and easily broke through the walls, destroying the city and the Temple.

While the first Temple was destroyed because of *avodah zarah*, idol worship, our Sages point out that the second one was destroyed because of *sinat chinam*, expressions of senseless hatred toward one another.

We may think that those two practices were an ancient problem and are not still plaguing the Jewish people today. But in reality we find both of them in our modern world.

Material possessions and celebrities are our new idols. We read People Magazine with more zeal than we do the Torah. We are more drawn to the mall than we are to the synagogue. We feel momentarily fulfilled by our possessions. But this fulfillment does not sustain us for long.

And we certainly still engage in a regular, if not daily way with *sinat chinan*, senseless hatred and gossiping about people in our lives. Our Sages remind us that the first Temple which was destroyed because of idol worship was rebuilt in a mere 70 years. But the senseless hatred and gossip which destroyed the Second Temple, was even worse. That Temple has still not been rebuilt.

For most of us we, that's not a problem. We don't want the Temple to be rebuilt. We certainly don't want to go back to sacrificing animals. But as I said at the beginning of my talk, there was something very important about having a specific system of sacrifices with which to express our gratitude and atone for our sins.

Making a sacrifice at the Temple was very satisfying. In fact we learn in our Talmud, 'In all Jerusalem there was no happier person than the one who brought a[n]... offering...' It was a concrete, overt way to acknowledge deep, profound feelings ranging from joy to despair. We really don't have anything as systematic as that today. While we are told by our prophet Hoshea that acts of loving kindness are supposed to take the place of sacrifices, we don't have a concrete way to keep track of these acts. Neither do we have a list of which acts take the place of which sacrifices.

As we pray here on Yom Kippur and become more aware of the place idol worship and senseless hatred have in our lives, let us think about creating a new system of sacrifices. We can each create one that would work for us personally.

For example, giving a certain amount of money to make up for five minutes of gossip could work for one person, while taking food to a sick friend for that same five minute lapse might work for someone else. Imagine if we were that conscious of our actions. We would have a much harder time engaging in these forbidden acts if after doing them, we were required to give money or care for others in such a concrete way. Focusing on our mitzvot and on treating people in loving, holy ways would go a long way to healing all of us personally, as well as creating a stronger and more vibrant Jewish community.

While we can each have our own personal korbanot, our own sacrifices, here are three principles we can all include in our system. They were suggested by *Rambam*, a 13th century commentator and philosopher. He called them the principles of *Ahavat Yisrael*, showing love for one another.

Our modern teachers often referred to them as 'senseless love.'

First: Speak well of others. Compliment them when they do something noteworthy and do not tear them down when they make mistakes. Give them the benefit of the doubt, just as we do for ourselves. When we speak positively of others, we create allies in our community. Everybody is enriched by this positive way of seeing each other. We become more aware that we are all part of one community, of one family.

Second: Take care of each other physically, emotionally and monetarily. Become aware of how ultimately frail and needy we all will ultimately be. Become more forgiving and tolerant of others who are needy themselves. We can all give money as well as time and attention to those who are in need.

Third: Actively seek out situations that bring honor to others. Joyfully acknowledge when family and friends do something worthy and holy. By doing this, we encourage them to continue to act in righteous ways, becoming role models for others while we spread the word of their righteous actions. We also hold these righteous people up as role models for ourselves.

It is so easy to speak negatively about others, to put possessions above holiness. We feel powerful when we do these things. But it's a false sense of power.

Imagine how much would change if we thought, spoke and heard positive things about the people in our lives. Imagine how much would change if we talk about doing acts of loving kindness, if we talk about an inspiring piece we read in a Jewish book, if we honor a person who is kind and gentle.

When we take our focus away from senseless hatred and idol worship and place our focus on what is positive and loving around us, we will not only change how we see other people but we will change how we see ourselves.

Whether we ever build another temple is not really the issue for us. Rather it's becoming as righteous as possible. Especially on Yom Kippur. As we pray from our makhzorim; as we look around the room and prepare to make apologies to those people that we have hurt; as we review the last year and continue to make decisions about how to improve ourselves in the next one, let us each create a system of sacrifices that we can live with and that will help us live with each other in a more righteous and holy way.

Gmar Hatima tova and tzom kal, May each of us have a good signing in the book of life and an easy fast.