

Today's Torah portion from the book of Leviticus outlines in detail how the priests of the Jerusalem temple were to commemorate Yom Kipper when animal sacrifices were still the primary form of worship. It is a how to manual-the selection of two goats, the transfer of sins, the sacrifice of one goat while the other is set free to escape with all our sins on its back. But most shocking, it begins with a clear reminder that if one does not follow the rules accurately, one runs the risk of dying as Aaron's two son's did just chapters before in the same book of Leviticus. They died because they brought a strange fire to Gd. Ultimately, they did the sacrifices wrong and it ended their life. We are given this how-to manual in Leviticus, not as an intellectual exercise, but as a reminder that the rituals that make up our life matter. Rituals teach, guide and inform what we do.

The Haftorah, from the book of Isaiah, on the other hand, is all about people who get the sacrifices right; who know which goat to kill and how to bring the remains before Gd. People who are more concerned with the ritual trappings than the teachings behind the ritual. It is a cry to listen to the kavannah, the intent of the prayer, not just the keva, the fixed practice. For Isaiah the focus was on helping the poor and needy in our community. As it is written, "As for the downtrodden and destitute, I shall revive the spirit of the lowly and the heart of the depressed I shall restore." But the truth of the matter is that Isaiah could have focused on any one of the many ways we mistreat and harm our planet, ourselves and others. Isaiah continues and clarifies his target of scorn when he challenges the very power structure that the Torah portion described. Isaiah reminds those who were involved in ritualistic life that ritual void of kavannah, intent, is useless. As Isaiah described "Behold while you are fasting, you engage in business, and your workers you continue to oppress!...Is this the kind of fast I delight in? A fast merely to deprive one's body...Is not the fast that I desire the unlocking of the chains of wickedness, the loosening of exploitation, the freeing of all those oppressed, the breaking of the servitude?"

On one hand, it is very easy to see why the rabbis connected both this Leviticus and this Isaiah passage to Yom Kippur. Leviticus is a description of the most ancient celebration of YK.

As for Isaiah, it is about fasting, the most common practice tied to YK to this day, 3000 years later. Leviticus is about an ancient ritual, archaic even to the rabbis of the Talmud. And the Haftarah is all about business ethics; what could be more mundane than that? On the one day we have the largest crowds, why would we talk about money and business, especially synagogue business? And yet for the rabbis, the whole point of Judaism was to elevate the mundane to the sacred. Judaism was not only about the exceptions that proved the rule. It wasn't only about the special lifecycle events or holy days. It wasn't about the times we all gathered and were accounted for. Judaism was about how we lived every single minute of our life; the most sacred and the most mundane. It is about the prayer we say when we go to the bathroom, the way we eat our food, who we break bread with, what friendships we maintain and how we spend our limited resources. Yom Kippur, according to Isaiah, is not only about what we do today here in this room. It is all about what we did yesterday and the day before and more important, what are we going to do tomorrow and Tuesday or Wednesday. Yom Kippur is about how we live our values, how we infuse our mundane daily existence with meaning.

Judaism is predicated on the idea that there is no aspect of our life that is devoid of Jewish expression. How we live is how we express our Jewishness. As Alec Baldwin asks in the Capital one commercial, "What do you carry in your wallet?" How did it get there? Where is it going? Who will it help? Who will it hurt? All are part of fasting, doing teshuvah, and asking for forgiveness today. This goes for synagogue business as well as our own family affairs. This is why I have been so proud of CJC's board engagement in creating a solid financial foundation for our community. As these discussions continued, it became increasingly clear to me that first we needed to discuss the wisdom of Judaism over the centuries regarding finances, resource management, wealth, poverty, priorities, tzedakah, and how we understand money. Before I go any farther, let me make it clear: there is very little more controversial and divisive than money. In fact, many come to shul to avoid talking, and/or thinking about all the stress surrounding money.

And yet, there is nothing more necessary for survival and, dare I say, thriving than an honest engaging understanding of the complexity involved in our financial make up. As Rabbi Ishmael said in the Talmud, Bava Batra 175a “One who wishes to acquire wisdom should study the way that money works, for there is no greater area of Torah study than this. It is like an ever-flowing stream.”

Last winter CJC’s board convened a subcommittee to begin a very preliminary study into how we could study the business side of the congregation. By spring, the board had approved a two-year exploration into different ways that different congregations developed sound financial bases.

It is very important to many on the committee and to me that this exploration begin with an understanding of Jewish teachings. So this fall starting after Simchat Torah, at the end of Oct. on Sundays at CJCS, we will be learning together about Jewish business values. Feel free to take the flyer outside on your way out. I strongly encourage all of you to be part of this synagogue initiative from the very beginning. For no matter what is decided, what will be decided will affect all of you—whether it affects what you give or affects what you receive. How and what we do as a synagogue will be partially determined through this two-year project.

Having said that, I am quite aware that talking about money is incredibly difficult. There are many different reasons given as to why it is so difficult to talk about money and/or resource management: embarrassment, insecurity, fear, judgment and survival to name a few. Laura Bouyea in the book, Robin Hood Was Right: A Guide to Giving Money for Social Change, wrote “The subject of money is more taboo than sex....laden with embarrassment, guilt, secret pleasure, fear of other people’s envy.” On top of that, Jews have a historical ambivalence about engaging in discourse about finances. After all as Lawrence Bush and Jeffrey Dekro’s wrote in their book, Jews, Money and Social Responsibility, “For Jews, anxieties about money are vastly heightened by our historic experience of persecution and displacement....Jews cannot afford to be glib about money issues. Money has been for us a tool, not merely of status and power, but of survival. Jews are also constantly contending with

classic enduring stereotypes...” Money has been used throughout history as a way to discriminate, scapegoat, and control us. No wonder we are afraid to talk about money. And yet if we do not talk about this foundational enterprise using Jewish wisdom to guide us, how vacuous is our Jewish life? What does it mean to be Jewish if we do not apply Judaism to the most important aspects of our life?

Rabbi Shawn Zevit wrote, “It is important to overcome the various stigmas in our society concerning money, while at the same time acknowledging our own discomfort levels. First, we need to create a trusting and comfortable environment for such a discussion. It can be challenging, because issues of class and money are tied to issues of self-worth, and personal values and choices. We may have discomfort or even shame at having ‘too much,’ ‘too little,’ or ‘not enough.’ Envy, competition, and insecurity can all surface when we talk about financial issues. These can become magnified when attached to conversations about religion, Jewish identity, and building faith communities. However, through study, effective listening and open discussion of our attitudes and expectations, we can turn a potentially challenging subject into a profound opportunity for building relationships and community.... Budgets and spending priorities become a reflection of our priorities, which in turn reflect the values articulated by a communal mission statement supported by the entire community. We have to learn to recognize financial and other resources as spiritual components of the conversation on how we want to live our lives in holy ways.” This is the exploration CJC’s board legislated for us to engage in during the next two years. How successful this exploration is depends on you. If you choose to look away and not share your own wisdom and experience, then nothing good can come from this. The only chance of success is if our community as a whole actively engages in the topic and in each other in a conscious thought-provoking way, aimed at listening as much as talking; listening to each other and our tradition. This exploration is likely to create as many unanswerable questions for us as it answers. Questions like if I were to share one thing about money and me with someone else, what would it be? What dreams do I have that I think money will help make possible for me? How is my sense of safety and security tied up

with money? Would I feel less valued if I had less money, or more valued if I had more money? How was money discussed in my home of origin? With whom am I most comfortable speaking about money? When in my life have I been least concerned about money? When in my life have I been most concerned about money? Who is the most generous person I know? Am I willing to make changes in the way I relate to money as I listen to Gd's voice in my life? Does Judaism have anything to teach me about business ethics and managing a budget? How do you feel about the relative economic success of North American Jews? How confident do you feel that success continuing in the future? What hesitations do you feel about applying a 'Torah of Money' to your most significant financial activities? Which of your values would you simply not compromise in the name of profit? What measures might you, your social networks, your business, your Jewish community or your society undertake to help you commit to a 'covenanted' economic life?" Just to name a few.

I remember in graduate school my professors often said that the questions we asked were significantly more important than the answers we found because the questions determined where we looked, who we talked to, and what we engaged in. The questions defined the parameters of what we were to discover. So as we embark in this new journey together, take some time to think of the questions you would like answered in order to determine a spiritual use of resource management, both in your own homes as well as here at CJC. And by Simchat Torah, feel free to email them to me. I promise to try to engage in as many of the questions as I can during this two year exploration.

Our Torah portion described in detail how the priest celebrated Yom Kippur so that the community could atone for its sins. The next two years will look at the details, the nitty gritty of financial resources-acquisition and spending in order to allow us to learn from our mistakes, all the while hearing Isaiah's voice in our ear asking us to get not only the keva right but also the kavannah. What is our intent? Who is harmed? Who is helped by what we choose to do?

What are the authors of Leviticus and Isaiah begging of us? To fully integrate our Jewish practice and wisdom into our daily life so that we walk our talk and live our values to the fullest no matter how difficult, contentious or mundane the experience might be. This is the exploration our Torah service is begging us to engage in; an exploration that will hopefully unite the ritual aspects and business aspects of our community as one by placing each of us into a human Jewish web creating a truly sacred community. For if we ignore the business aspects, we are only concerned with sitting, standing and bowing. Equally problematic is that if we ignore Judaism, we lose the benefit of thousands of years of incredible wisdom. The end of our Torah portion today reminded us that we are to atone for all our sins, not just the ones we feel comfortable with or even the ones with easy straightforward answers but all the challenging, difficult, quandaries that face us as individuals and as a community. So as we begin this project, I encourage you to avail yourself of the many different ways that will be available to you to lend your experience, voice, and opinion to this exciting, albeit slightly scary, look at ourselves and our Jewish community.

Is this the fast asked of you? Is it one whose effects end as soon as we eat tonight or is it one whose effects will follow us throughout this year? Isaiah is begging us to choose to bring blessings into all aspects of our life. The authors of Leviticus remind us that the scapegoat was sacrificed so that we can do better next time. Today you are fasting? Why? For what purpose? How will today's fast change your life tomorrow? Is this the fast asked of you? Me? And/or us?