This Week in Torah *Tzav*

There are a lot of details in the book of Leviticus—focusing on the intentionality of the sacrificial system of the Torah. There are meal offerings, well-being offerings, thanksgiving offerings, guilt offerings and sin offerings. Each are specific in its purpose and each have slight variations of what is to be done. For us, the key here is deliberate action and knowing with a mindfulness of intentionality as we act. That is what makes a *mitzvah* more than a good deed—it is a specified focus in our behavior.

Then there comes a verse that challenges that! In Leviticus 7:7, we read: "The guilt offering is like the sin offering. The same rule applies to both: it shall belong to the priest who makes expiation thereby." Wait—didn't I just say that there are differences here, albeit subtle? Well… enter the rabbis! Rabbi Obadiah ben Jacob Sforno of Italy [1475-1550] believed that sin and guilt are closely related. A sin offering, he stated, is needed when there is a deliberate action. A guilt offering, he believed, was necessary when there was carelessness. Both offerings are results of mistakes, but the intentionality was either overt or benign. Knowing the inner motivation of why one did something incorrectly makes for the difference in the offering. It is not a sense of judgement, rather it is with a sense of acknowledgement and humility as one admits the vulnerability of the self. The author of *Divrei Sha'arei Chaim*, Rabbi Chaim Aharon Tzvi Halpern, believed that is why the thanksgiving offering was essential for everyone to offer. It creates a sense of balance—gratitude is a counter-weight to our guilt and the heaviness of our sins. Seeing the good and blessings is essential as well.

We know that admitting our flaws and having a little guilt are great catalysts for change. These let the body know that we have work on the self to be done as we seek to raise up to meet our fullest divine potential. But we also know that too much guilt means we become neurotic as we know also that no guilt means we are a sociopath. The key is a healthy and realistic balance within the self.

How do we do this? The *korbanot*/offerings help focus the self as our ancestors publicly announced what they did and who they are. In *Sefer HaChinuch*, which was published anonymously in the 13th century, a priest can challenge an offering to see if it is being given properly. Like the Torah's version of a therapist, a *kohan* can gently prod or

correct one's intentionality through their offerings. For us, a good friend or a trusted family member or a trained therapist or a rabbi can do the same.

Although the *korbanot* are no longer offered at the Temple in Jerusalem, their purpose can linger. When we acknowledge what we do and why, they are still relevant today. When we honestly judge our behavior and balance it with a sense of gratitude, we can grow to be more in the image of God as we were destined to be. When we heed the loving support of another that gently brings us to an honest expression, then we are being fair to ourselves. In these ways, the message of a bygone era is still relevant today.