

Parsha Achray Mot –Shabbat Hagadol

12 Nisan 5711 – D'var Torah XXXX XXXXX

Leviticus 16:1-18:3

Shabbat Shalom. Good morning. Thank you for coming here to Temple Beth El on this Shabbat morning as I become bar mitzvah. It is an important day for me as a Jew and as a young man here in this synagogue.

The words “Bar Mitzvah” means “Son of the Commandment” and may be interpreted as “belonging to the people who are obligated to observe the commandments”. Becoming a Bar Mitzvah is one of the most significant events in the life of a Jew as it marks a major milestone in both religious life and religious maturity. FOR ME THIS MEANS.....

In our community, becoming bar mitzvah includes action. We believe that it is our duty to help make this world a better place. Mitzvah means positive action. When we engage in community service work there is a Hebrew term that we use. I would like to tell you about Tikkun Olam. The phrase Tikkun Olam in Hebrew means “repairing the world”. In Judaism, this is something that originated in the medieval period. Tikkun Olam is something that should be practiced by everyone not because it is required, but because it helps to avoid social chaos.

I know that I cannot repair the entire world but I certainly help repair my part of the world. There is a teaching in the Mishnah, the rabbinic collection of teachings after the Hebrew Bible that

says, “it is not your job to complete the task, but you cannot refrain from starting to create change, either.” I am an active Boy Scout and work on many service projects to help the environment. I also recently took a lot of food to a homeless shelter just so it wouldn’t go bad. I think through this process, I’ve learned how little things make big differences especially to those who are in need.

We just finished reading from the torah. Each week we read chronologically from the five books of Moses. This week’s parsha, which means portion of the Torah, is Acharay Mot which can be found in the book of Leviticus, the third book of the Torah. The chapters are 16:-18. Acharay literally means “after.”

Please listen carefully as I explain my parshah, Acharay Mot.

This begins following the death of Aaron's two oldest sons, Nadab and Avihu. God told Moses to instruct Aaron not to come to the Holy of Holies. Only once per year, on the 10th day of the 7th month is the High Priest to enter the shrine behind the curtain. The High Priest is to be dressed in a white linen robe and he is to make apology for himself, his family and all Israelites. We call this the Day of Atonement; in Hebrew Yom Kippur. This is the day on which Jewish practice has evolved to atone for our sins or short comings on this day. We no longer sacrifice animals to make this apology, rather, we gather as a community to sing, meditate, pray, and reflect on our actions and to begin to head in a better direction.

In the Torah, the Yom Kippur ritual was a single act performed by the high priest, not the entire community. It involved sacrificing two animals. One representing the bad deeds or mistakes of the people and the other represented god's love and forgiveness. In Leviticus it describes the scene. This is also the portion that is read on Yom Kippur morning. The High Priest called the Kohen Gadol was to take 2 male goats and mark 1 FOR God and one for Azazel. He would slaughter the goat marked for God and use its blood to cleanse the altar.

At this time, Aaron or later the High Priest would symbolically place all of the sins of the Israelites to on the goat marked for Azazel and then let the goat marked for Azazel free into the

wilderness. Following this God tells Moses to inform the people as to how they are permitted to slaughter and consume meat. For the Israelites, all meat that was to be eaten also had to be slaughtered in a ritual way. The location of this sacrifice was central to the camp and was before the Tent of Meeting. Torah instructs us that as a sign of the life in all animals, we are forbidden to consume the blood of an animal. It represents the life force. While we humans are permitted, although reluctantly, to consume animal protein, we must respect the animal's life and God's life force as represented in the blood. Animals that we eat are only those that are intentionally slaughtered for our consumption. Wild animals are not permitted nor are animals that die by attack or disease.

What this all means to me.

In reflecting on the week's portion, I would like to focus on the lesson of Yom Kippur. For a Jew, Yom Kippur is the holiest day of the year. It is a way of refreshing your body and your soul and setting yourself back on the right course. This is a renewal for 24 hours that we are comfortable, we try not to eat and to pray for a whole day. As a Jew, I will strive to live by God's law(s) and teachings as we can best interpret them. I like being a good person and being respectful of my religious upbringing and traditions. Judaism has a rich heritage and there are many ways to honor our legacy.

I think that giving a person a time of the year to reflect-- 10 days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur—and to repent

or make repair for their sins is awesome. It gives me a chance to think about what i have done that was wrong or just ways I may want to do things better. We set for ourselves goals while at the same time remembering what we still need to work on or goals for the next year. Judaism teaches us that life is a journey to creating holiness and along the way we can evolve and adapt.

I believe that living as a Jewish person who makes conscious choices is important and a strong Jewish value. For example, my family does not observe traditional kashrut to the fullest extent. I don't think that is totally wrong but i don't think it's totally right either. Food and Jewish attitudes toward eating is something I think about. I don't know how I will think about

kosher food when I am living on my own, but I know that it is important for me to give consideration to Jewish ways of thinking about food as a holy practice. Although my practice might not be traditional, I feel that I am showing a focus to our heritage. It is not just about being Jewish, though. How we act toward one another and to the animals that we share this earth with this is what it means not only to be a Jew but to be human being in our world.

In conclusion, I would like to thank the Temple Beth El community for creating a supportive Jewish environment. I have been able to grow and learn in our community. There are many parts of our congregation that help sustain our community so I am able to have a Jewish education and

community to be a part of. In particular, I would like to thank the synagogue board for providing me with a place where my Judaism can grow, and also to the sisterhood and men's club for the ritual items.

I would like to thank my aunt XXXXX & Uncle XXXX for the beautiful flowers on the bima; my Bubbie for absolutely everything she has done for our family, my parents for the oneg & kiddush and my entire family for my party I'm about to have. Thank you to my XXXXX & XXXX school friends who could join me here today and of course I cannot forget my teachers-- Mrs. Seidel, Mrs. Schultz, Mrs. Giannotti, Mrs. Bagel, Mrs. Dior, Mrs. Romao, Mr. Hannaford, Rabbi Kaplan and Rabbi Micah for teaching me what it means to become a bar mitzvah and supporting me as I become one today.

Thank you everyone once again for being here today with me
and our community!

Shabbat shalom.