

Daily Offerings  
October 1, 2021

The Book of Life has been sealed. The sukkah has been taken down. The Torah scrolls are back in their regular clothes. And rabbis and cantors around the world heave a sigh of relief. We've made it through the High Holidays, that most intense, most awesome, most dramatic time of the year. But with relief comes a sort of letdown, just as after any highly anticipated event. It's human nature to look forward to these climactic moments, to focus our attention and energy on these most special, holy days, just as we anxiously prepare for and look forward to weddings, birthdays, graduations, and Super Bowls. We do love a good special occasion. (I remember a couple of years ago I was explaining to my son what a special occasion was. After my explanation, I asked him, "So can you think of an example of a special occasion?" And he said, "When the garbage man comes." So it seems that special is in the eye of the beholder.)

Special occasions are wonderful, and Judaism has an embarrassment of riches in the special occasion department, particularly this time of year. But our tradition also reminds us that we can't live on holidays alone. Consider the disagreement between Beit Hillel and Beit Shammai about the order of blessings on a festival evening. Beit Shammai

says a person should bless the day and then bless the wine, and Beit Hillel says one should bless the wine and then the day (Ber. 51b). Since Beit Hillel is almost always right, we follow his ruling: as we did tonight, first we say “*borei p’ri hagafen*” over the wine and then we recite the rest of the Kiddush, which concludes by blessing God for sanctifying Shabbat or the holiday. This might seem like an obscure, not particularly interesting halakhic dispute, but the reasoning behind the decision is significant. The Talmud explains, “The blessing over wine is recited frequently, and the blessing over the day is not recited frequently, and there is a general principle: When a frequent practice and an infrequent practice clash, the frequent practice takes precedence” (ibid.). The frequent practice takes precedence. In other words, we might think that meeting the obligations of the special occasion is more important than fulfilling the mitzvot we perform every day, but the halakhah says the opposite: even on holidays, our daily practices should still remain our primary concern.

The origin of this principle comes from the order of sacrifices that are prescribed in the Torah, which we don’t need to get into tonight. But the bottom line is that the most valuable offerings to God are the regular ones, the mundane, everyday goats or sheep that were offered on the altar as the *olat tamid*, the regular daily offering. Devotion to God is demonstrated by

our regular--both in the sense of recurring and in the sense of ordinary--offerings. Likewise, today, a relationship with God is often only achieved through repeated attempts for connection. That's why we call it a prayer practice--we don't often get it right the first time.

What is true for the relationship between God and Israel is also true for our human relationships. It's relatively easy to show up for our loved ones when there's a crisis: a bad diagnosis, a death in their family. We bring a meal, send a card. It's much harder to remember to check in months later, when our attentions have drifted elsewhere but their pain is still very real. True friendships are only maintained by repeated and continual acts of care and affection. Likewise, marriages are built day after day, not just at the wedding or on an anniversary. Wedding vows have to be kept over and over again. Even plants have to be watered regularly if they're going to grow and thrive. Commitment, faithfulness, covenant--none of these can be achieved just on special occasions. Who we are and what we care about isn't measured by what we do on Yom Kippur--it's measured by what we do every other day of the year.

Our High Holidays have passed, and hopefully they brought us joy, inspiration, and renewal that we will carry with us through these next holiday-free months. Now we have the opportunity and the challenge to

recommit ourselves to the *olat tamid*, the regular acts of faithfulness and devotion, the sum of which ultimately make for a life well lived, a life worth living.