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Kol Rinah  
Parashat Tetzaveh  
February 12, 2022 / 11 Adar 1 5782

## Two Lambs, Every Day

As many of you know, we have not had shul on Friday nights or Saturday afternoons these last weeks, since the advent of Omicron. With so many people anxious about coming in person, it's been clear that we won't have a critical mass, a minyan. There's something that becomes depressing about coming when only a few people are there, week after week.

But the result has meant that services that ideally we would have every week have become disrupted, irregular.

Among the things we long for, I think, as Jews, and as humans, is regularity, stability, predictability, patterns. Surprises, special occasions, vacations, holidays—we like those, but mostly when they come amidst a regular, predictable, stable schedule.

So much of Jewish life is rooted in daily and weekly and monthly practice. Daily prayer; Shabbat every week. Rosh Chodesh—the new month, coming with the new moon. They come literally with the regularity of the sun and the moon.

As we know, though, biblically, it was not prayer that happened with such regularity; prayer was something that happened spontaneously. Rather, sacrifices were the primary religious act that occurred on schedule.

The core of that schedule, the daily sacrifices, are introduced in this week's parashah. I want to read a little more of it than I might otherwise:

### **Exodus 29:38-46**

*Now this is what you shall offer upon the altar: two yearling lambs each day, regularly. You shall offer the one lamb in the morning, and you shall offer the other lamb at twilight.*

*There shall be a tenth of a measure of choice flour with a quarter of a hin of beaten oil mixed in, and a libation of a quarter hin of wine for one lamb;*

*and you shall offer the other lamb at twilight, repeating with it the meal offering of the morning with its libation—an offering by fire for a pleasing odor to God,*

*a regular burnt offering throughout the generations, at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting before God. For there I will meet with you, and there I will speak with you, and there I will meet with the Israelites, and it shall be sanctified by My Presence.*

*I will sanctify the Tent of Meeting and the altar, and I will consecrate Aaron and his sons to serve Me as priests. I will abide among the Israelites, and I will be their God.*

*And they shall know that I God am their God, who brought them out from the land of Egypt that I might abide among them—I, their God.*

Two lambs, every day, one in the morning, one at twilight. It's there, then, through these daily offerings, that God will meet with us, that God will dwell with us, that God will be our God. It's daily religious practice that makes God present in our lives, in our community, in our world.

The midrash (Numbers Rabbah 12:3) explains there were three things that perplexed Moses, and one of them was that God would enjoy the smells, the food, of the sacrifices. The midrash resolves that the sacrifices are not for God, but really for us. This is to say, God is present no matter what, but our sensitivity and attunement to God's presence is turned on and calibrated through daily religious practice.

Various commentators assume that the daily sacrifices started immediately once the Mishkan was inaugurated, and that they were offered daily during the next 38 years in the wilderness. But Ibn Ezra and a few others push back against this, arguing that the daily sacrifices began only in the land of Israel. Why did they wait so long? "Israel spent about thirty-eight years in a wasteland, *in a howling wilderness* (Dt. 32:10). Where did they get half a *hin* of olive oil and a half *hin* of wine daily? How could they carry almost fourteen thousand *hin* around with them? Where did they get two lambs daily in the first year?" These are Ibn Ezra's questions, not mine, lest you think I'm being impious or argumentative!

This is all to say that, at least according to one opinion, there was this time of waiting for the regular to begin. The Torah skips over the time in the desert pretty quickly. It mentions the locations the Israelites camped in, but there's not much of a record of what they did in those thirty-eight years, between the beginning and the end.

We've been having minyan on Zoom regularly since the beginning of pandemic. We barely missed a minyan in our transition from being in-person to Zoom. And while we sometimes don't get to ten people, most of the time, we do.

But with Friday nights and Saturday afternoons, we're in this "between-time." And the same for a more regular Shabbat morning experience, a time with full or fuller capacity, with food, with community.

In the wilderness, God was present through the guiding cloud and the pillar of fire, even without the two lambs, one in the morning, one at twilight. But what were the Israelites longing for in the wilderness? I have to imagine that what they longed for to settle down, to stop wandering, not to experience God as this prod to wander, uncertain when God would tell them to stop or go, but rather as a more regular, stable, predictable presence.

I'm longing for more stability, predictability and regularity in my religious, and in our religious life and community. I do have this sense that we're getting closer. But just like the length of the trip from Egypt to Israel took longer because of the behavior of the Israelites, how long it takes for us to get back to regularity in large measure depends on you—on all of you being willing and able to be here, to create the experiences and community that you and I long for. Of course, some depends on this outside our control. But what will you do to create the regularity we all miss?

Shabbat shalom?