



WALK THROUGH THE PARSHA

WITH RABBI DAVID WALK

Keep The Beat

Having taught teenagers over a number of decades, I believe that I have an understanding of the term ‘boring!’. I would hear it muttered or exclaimed many times throughout the school year. The dread of hearing that put down was an impetus to keep my classes fast moving and, hopefully, interesting. BTW, no student ever exclaimed ‘interesting’ or ‘fascinating’. The best you could hope for was a breathy ‘cool!’ We are now embarking on the Torah volume most designated ‘boring’ by my teenaged mayvans on the topic. It’s no wonder that many commentaries point out that the little ALEPH in the first word of our book means that we should teach it to young children. Little kids love rote and repetition. I think it gives them a sense of security. Hence, the popularity of Baby Shark (5 billion views). I, on the other hand, require ear plugs when it’s played by, otherwise, loveable grandchildren.

I’m embarrassed to admit that until recently I always skipped the KORBANOT passages in davening. You know, there’s always a rush to keep up the pace, and

you sort of just slough off material in the process. But my Sefardi son in law got me to thinking that in reality our prayers do compensate for the lack of Temple offerings. I mean, we do want a renewal of those offerings. So, I’ve been trying hard to include them in my davening. Recently, I heard Prof. Arthur Green expound upon the Chassidic and Kabbalistic nature of reciting these verses. They usher us step by, crucial, step into God’s Divine Presence. So, I joined the team.

In the game-book of life, we need some trick plays for extreme circumstances

But there’s more to it. Here at the beginning of Vayikra we read about the voluntary offerings and the special offerings which are brought because of sin. Reading and studying this material can be understood as being in lieu of actually bringing them in the Beit HaMikdash.

This brings us to the daily offerings, the TAMID. We, as individuals, never brought these. How can my recitation in any way be construed as a replacement for the Cohanim offering them up? I believe that pedagogically and psychologically

something else is going on. The regular communal offerings (TAMIDIM) are recorded far away from these other offerings. They are listed at the end of parshat Pinchas. I strongly believe that there's a reason for that.

Pinchas represents emergency behavior. His extreme act of violent justice in the case of Kozbi and Zimri (Bamidbar 25:6-18) was shocking at the time, but was Divinely sanctioned with the blessing of SHALOM. This inspiring act of heroic justice might have become a societal norm, which could have been disastrous. Therefore, in the same weekly parsha, we read about the TAMIDIM. These regular Temple offerings must be the norm. Society, indeed individuals, require routines to manage life. We balance the highly abnormal with the steady drumbeat of normality.

In the game-book of life, we need some trick plays for extreme circumstances. However, the steady pace of regularity is generally the recipe for success. Ultimately, the good life is mostly about brushing your teeth, getting to bed on time, and eating well, rather than jumping on grenades or foiling super villains. Life is mostly TAMIDIM, with an occasional Pinchas.

This message is rarely as poignant as now.

This present emergency reminds me of the Gulf War or the Intafadas, when we said, 'The bad guys win when they disrupt our lives!' Well, today, there are no bad guys, but the message is the same,

'Keep going under trying circumstances!'

Our normal routines have been blown up. My life was regulated by work and minyan. Since I've retired, it's been minyan. Now, I don't have that, either. It's crucial that we impose routines upon ourselves and our families. Make and keep schedules. Invent routines. Limit checking the news. If you have kids in the house, make games out of the new requirements like washing hands and social distancing. We can do it. Soon, we'll look back on Covid-19 as we did on Saddam's Skuds, and feel good about how we responded.

Remember, this scourge will be beaten by the message of the Temple offerings. Steady, and, yes, stubborn always wins! ■

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