

Rabbi's Report to the Congregation June 15, 2022

Behaalotcha/When you go up to light the Menorah

The midrash imagines that was upset that he and his tribe of Levi were not asked to bring sacrifices along with the other tribes for the inauguration of the altar. God told Moses to tell Aaron not to worry. The work of sacrifices will only be operant for as long as the Temple stands, but his work, that of lighting the candles, will stand forever.

Sacrifices are temporary.

The Talmud (Shabbat 10a) says that even prayers, which came to replace the sacrifices, are temporary:

רַבָּא חֲזִייה לְרַב הַמְנוּנָא דְקָא מְאָרִיךְ בְּצִלּוֹתֵיהּ. אָמַר: מְנִיחִין חַיֵּי עוֹלָם, וְעוֹסְקִים בְּחַיֵּי שָׁעָה.

Rava saw Rav Hamnuna, who was prolonging his prayer. He said about him: They abandon eternal life, (the study of Torah), and engage in temporal life, (prayer, which includes requests for mundane needs).

חַיֵּי שָׁעָה

The Sefat Emet, Rabbi Yehuda Leib Alter of Ger, teaches that the “Menorah [that Aharon lit] hints at “the Torah [which] is a light” (Proverbs 6:23) and it is an eternal measure, for it is from the original hidden light [of creation], the or ha-ganuz, which “illuminates the world from one end to the other” (Breishit Rabbah 11:2).

Tradition teaches that God hid this light (this is the light that God created on the first day of creation – “let there be light” – which is different from normal light of the sun, which wasn’t created until day 4!) because God realized people would use it for nefarious purposes. God hid it (that’s why it’s called the or haganuz, the hidden light) away for the righteous.

Where is it hidden? And who are those righteous?

The light is hidden in Torah, and the righteous are any of us who seek it.

And, have we been engaged in Torah, this past year!

we have been finding the *or haganuz* together, in our:

Learning:

topics:

Radical Judaism

The Jew in the Lotus

Lovesong

Shmita

Reparations

Theology

Jewish Views of the Afterlife

Adult Ed:

Who is a Jew – Jew? Jew-ish?

Making end of life decisions

And for kids:

Torah School – 25 sessions each for 3-5 graders & 6th & 7th graders, monthly meetings for post-b'nai mitzvah students. Plus a visit from Camp Havaya!

and B&B and M&M and learning about Israel through having our first ever shinshinit and our annual Israel forums.

In our support of the synagogue: Mini-Golf, Bowling, Trivia Night and security training

In our learning to repair the world: CRJ programs on racism and antisemitism, and economics as a tool for undoing racism

in our prayers & celebrations: Morning Gatherings, Rosh Chodesh groups, holiday observances, on Shabbat we lit candles, prayed and studied and shared soup and our lives, meditated, chanted, and walked (and join us next Shabbat at Target Rock!).

in our community involvement: engaging the interfaith community in environmental work, leading the Huntington Mobilization for Sustainability and hosting the first Huntington Environmental Festival, welcoming a

member of the SCPD, hosting the MLK Day of Service, fall and spring food drives, supporting local organizations in our community against racism – and some participated in Reconstructing Judaism's Convention. And we hosted the Community Commemoration of Yom HaShoah.

And, of course, in our caring for each other: when we're ill, a loved one has died, or when we're celebrating an achievement of a child or the birth of a grandchild.

We have done a LOT this year! Anything I forgot to mention?

But, of course, despite our wonderful programming and active community, as a congregation, we face challenges.

Mostly, these are in our declining #s: which is a phenomenon that's been happening for years, not only to us, but across most liberal churches and synagogues, and covid has hit us hard. Our volunteers (that's you all!) are stretched thin, circulating tasks around a smaller and smaller group.

Despite, that, look what we've done!

We are in a time of transformation – perhaps even bigger than that of the time between the age of sacrifices and the transition to prayer.

It has me thinking about the world of cars:

We've been driving cars with internal combustion engines for 100 years now. It's been great. The engines have transformed our lives, and, in many ways for the better. And they've also caused problems, which you don't need me to elaborate on.

So now, as with sacrifices, it's time to move on. Many companies are working to retool themselves and move into hybrid and electric vehicles.

Some people love classic cars - they have real followings, and passionate fans. But most people aren't driving these any more.

Just as most Jews aren't affiliating any more.

Our classic car is running extraordinarily well! And yet, fewer people are interested in classic cars – they're looking towards something that needs less maintenance and is better for the environment.

We could say – we like classic cars, we like our product. Let's be a classic car club! But that's essentially what we have been, and classic car enthusiasts are not a large group.

Or we can be like Ford, whose leader says they are now “betting the company” on an electric-vehicle future.

We can make the Ford f-150!

The challenge is, even Ford doesn't know how the f-150 will do. Will those who like the classic 150 (the best-selling truck in the country) buy the electric version?

And the EVs and other modernizations have challenges too – we're reading about the crashes of assisted driving cars, and the minerals needed for those big batteries have their own problems. There is no magic pill – not for car companies, the climate, or for us.

None of us find the sacred divine light in sacrifices, and, face it, most of you don't find it in prayer, either. We need to think big about how we might help people access a little of the light that you find here. That probably will require us to do things differently.

How? We need to figure that out together. But, we are assured:

כִּי נֵר מְצֻוָּה וְתוֹרָה אֹר

The commandment is a lamp and torah is a light

This light is eternal. We can find it through our effort. And we can share it. And it will be a beacon.

Let us, like Aaron, go up and light the lights. But we might need to retool the menorah.