

## **Parshat Vaikra: Sacrifices in our own sanctuaries – March 16, 2013**

This week we begin the Reading of Vayikra, the third book of the Torah. Our weekly section, which has the same name as the book, tells us about all the details of the “korbanot” the sacrifices-offerings that our ancestors gave to God in the Temple of Jerusalem. We are presented with a very detailed description about the process of preparing and bringing sacrifices, sometimes involving proceedings and images that are not so easy for us to accept, especially in our modern times.

Almost 2000 years after the destruction of the Temple, Judaism has been discussing the desire or need to rebuild the Temple and returning to the times of animal sacrifices. Some people argue: It is that simple that you bring a sacrifice and you receive an instant atonement for your sins? Others say: How we can imagine a God that enjoys the smell of a burnt animal, or just the only idea of taking the life of an animal as a means to reach Him/Her? Some rabbis try to differentiate between a “sacrifice” and an “offering”. Defining “korban” as an “offering” will imply that it is like a gift which was given in order to satisfy the receiver. But then we have to ask: But God does not need our gifts! God has no needs or physical desires! But if we understand “korban” as “sacrifice”, it will emphasize the importance of giving up something of value to oneself in order to serve a higher purpose.

In any case, after the destruction of the Temple and over

the course of many centuries, the Temple altar has been replaced by the table of every Jewish home. Our home is a "mikdash meat" – a little sanctuary, and the table is the "mizbeach" – the altar where the sacrifices were offered. We can learn from this that what happens in our home, and especially with the way we eat and share our food, is similar to the Temple: The possibility of sharing what we have with strangers or people in need, can provide us a unique opportunity to effect atonement. By inviting guests to our table and opening our homes, it can be possible to initiate a process of Tikkun - repair and enhancement - of the relationships we have established with people outside of our immediate family.

Shabbat Shalom!