

THE LAST (JEWISH) JEDI

A long time ago, in a land far, far away...

We were supposed to show our praise and gratitude to God through the sacrificial system detailed very specifically in the Book of Leviticus. Torah teaches for these sacrifices to be “done right” in a very fixed and ritualistic manner. We trusted in this system because it was safe, easy, reliable and rule-bound. Rules create tranquility and safety in chaotic times.

With the destruction of the 2nd Temple, the world still stood, but the building was lost. So too was the sacrificial system. It was up to our Sages to rebuild Judaism on new pillars. With the reinvention of Judaism by Yochanan ben Zakkai and the Great Assembly at Yavneh, liturgy was also born. The Rabbis made liturgy rule-bound as well to feel safe and easy as we had once known with the sacrifices. But it was up to us to make the fixed *keva* spontaneous and meaningful.

A New Hope in Prayer

So Torah became a way of life, along with Avodah and G'milut Hasidim (study, prayer, and good deeds). The sacrificial system became a system of ritual verbal prayers that could be recited by the individual alone. Festive dinners with challah and wine at festive home tables replaced sacrifices at the altars. We became the priests, complete with hand-washing rituals, and acted for ourselves alone. Homes replaced *the* Temple and synagogues emerged as communal prayer centers.

Prayer Strikes Back

Even in the time of a global pandemic, prayer withstands time and has continued to provide comfort for all in need. Whether you prefer praying the *keva* or would rather prayer from your heart, prayer has kept the people Israel throughout all time.

- Prayer is an evolving tradition in which our children are not merely descendants, but ancestors. (*Rabbi Sandy Eisenberg Sasso*)