

## Rabbi's Column

We are in the middle of construction season. The State Capitol, the synagogue's bathrooms, and the Tabernacle (local resting spot) used in the wilderness. This past week we read of the most important pieces of furniture - the Ark, the table and the sacrificial altar, the buildings in which they were to be placed, and some of the tools relevant to their use. This coming week we begin to read about the Priesthood. Who they are, what they wear, how they get to be in charge of sacrifices, and a tiny bit about what they will be doing. Moses is not mentioned at all in this portion, as he has nothing to do with the kinds of things the Priests will be doing.

So, why are there Priests in the first place? They are not actually necessary, since they weren't part of the original plan. As it turns out, two texts help explain why they are there. The first text is from a couple of weeks ago. After God's revelation on Mount Sinai, the people went to Moses and said, (paraphrasing) "This direct contact with God is way out of our league. You talk with God, and let us know what God says." None of them were ready to be a Tevye, holding conversations with God constantly. The second text comes from next week's portion. When the charismatic leader, Moses, was gone for a little longer than they thought he should be, they all felt they needed a more permanent representative of God, who could be trusted to stay put, so Aaron helped them form an item to look at.

After some fast talking (and intense prayer) by Moses, God decided not to zap the people, and to enable them to create an item which would represent his constant presence among them. It was supposed to remind the people that God's presence is eternal, and everywhere. To help in that process, the Israelite sacrificial system was born.

The same critters, on the same altars, at the same times of the day/month/year, offered by people who were dressed the same. Every time you came it would be the same thing. Dependable, like you hoped God would be, and like Moses (as a human being) really wasn't.

The purpose of sacrifices, like the purpose of statutory prayer, is to remind us that God is always present in our lives. [There are other functions that both serve, of course - why should anything that is good be good for just one thing?] Are we living our lives today as though we remember that God is here?