

Rabbi's Column

Back to basics: Kohanim were told to prepare two different kinds of offerings on a daily basis. One was a meat animal, and the other was a plate of parched grain soaked in oil. Keep that in mind. Next, we are asked to think upon all the things that God has suggested would help us make the world a better place in both the morning and evening. From the combination of these two factors, we come up with our daily services in the evening, morning and afternoon. Since the morning and afternoon services coincide with prepared meals, the standing prayers during those services are traditionally repeated (said once quietly and then out loud). Since the evening only coincides with thinking about something and not with preparing food, the standing prayer is traditionally not repeated.

Fair to middling: One of the concerns the Rabbis in the Mishnah era, after the Temple was destroyed, have in terms of Kashrut (acceptable foods to eat) was whether the food that was being prepared came from crops which had the proper tithing taken out. When the Temple was standing, people brought their actual tithed items, or the monetary equivalents, to Jerusalem as their part of the communal festival celebration. Once the Temple was destroyed, and the actual items could not be brought to the Temple, each person was to set apart a monetary equivalent of the specific items that would be tithed, and reserve that money until God decided to bring back the Temple. Proper tithing meant that not only did you have the money equivalent stored away, but you could point to the items that the money represented. If you could not do both things, then the food you were serving was not considered Kosher, and many of those Rabbis in that era would not eat it.

Beyond the beyond: Discussion of the very beginning is not a matter of learning, as it was one topic that could not be taught or discussed, even with one student. What was allowed was that if a student had, all on their own, come up with the appropriate chapter headings, you could tell them they were on the right path. Which definitely means that neither of the creation stories were designed to answer all questions about how things started.

For more about what questions are answered in the creation stories, I invite you to attend Torah Thursday at noon, where we are beginning again with the very beginning, using the commentaries of Rashi, Sforno and Rabbi Adin Steinsaltz to get some handles on what the text could mean. After counting the traditional commentators last week, we have enough for the next five sequences without repeating ourselves.