

Tzav
By
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I converted to Judaism approximately 35 years ago. Prior to converting, I spoke with several Rabbis and ministers and I attended a Judaism Conversion class for four months. It was a great deal to absorb in such a short time. Shortly thereafter, I married a wonderful man, Marshall, and was welcomed into a very loving family.

During those years, I went back to school to complete my professional life by attaining a Bachelor's Degree and Master's Degree. However, even with this education, marriage, my job, my life did not feel complete and something was lacking. During Shabbat services and the High Holidays, I sit with my husband and Gloria Bein. After listening to both of them, I realized that there was so much more that I needed to learn. Now it was time to focus on my spiritual journey. I sought to deepen my understanding of the Jewish religion and increase my comprehension of the various sections in our prayer book. I worked to improve my Hebrew, read from the Torah and learn more about service etiquette and ritual observances.

In February 2008, a postcard came in the mail from Judy Fox, Education Director at the Emanuel, informing me about the next Adult Bar/Bat Mitzvah class starting that March. Since I was not sure exactly what it involved, I contacted Judy to learn what the classes entailed, what I needed to do, and if there were any prerequisites. Even though I live in Waterbury, I was willing to travel to West Hartford each week to attend the Adult B'Nai Mitzvah class. The classes would be held in the evening and some on Sunday mornings. I was concerned

whether I could commit to the two years. My position requires me to be on call almost every other week and work can be quite demanding at times.

Judye Fox and Cantor Cohn are excellent instructors and both have been extremely patient. These two years have passed by very quickly. Under their direction and leadership, I was able to improve my Hebrew so that I could read from the Torah. Their guidance has been immeasurable. I would also like to thank Rabbi Small for his assistance in helping me to feel more comfortable with the prayer book and rituals, and for his aid with my D'var Torah. Even after taking the classes, I realize that I still have so much to learn.

My husband has been my coach and would cheer me on each step of the way. I could not have reached this milestone in my life without him.

I would be remiss if I did not also thank my co-workers for their help and encouragement. Each week they would check on how class was going. When I was wavering on whether I could accomplish all that was needed to prepare myself for this day, another co-worker found an article in the New York Times entitled "Having a Bat Mitzvah in Their 90s..." The youngest woman was close to 90 and the oldest woman was age 97. They all studied together and had their Adult B'not Mitzvah in a Synagogue in a suburb of Cleveland. It served to remind me that you can set a challenge at any age and you can achieve it. From time to time over the past year when I needed a nudge, I would refer to that article.

I would like to speak about this week's Torah portion. Parsha Tzav lists the sacrifices that were offered in the Temple (the burnt offering, the grain offering, the sin offering, the guilt

offering, the peace offering, and the thanksgiving offering). G-d instructs the Kohanim (the priests) on exactly how each sacrifice (korban) is to be offered and handled by not only the priests but also the people. The rituals and procedures set an attitude of reverence and respect. There are special instructions for how the priests should dress. However, when the priests are to take the ashes from yesterday's offerings outside the camp into a clean place, they are to change into old clothes.

With respect to taking out the ashes, we can equate this to our every day home and work life. Once our projects and goals are accomplished, we should check to see what worked best, what are the opportunities that we can improve upon for future projects and challenges. Also, could we have treated others differently by being less judgmental, more patient and respectful? It is true that every project or challenge that comes our way may not be favorable but we should approach it with an open mind. We should not dwell on negative thoughts or dread the task but think of it as an adventure. You have to be willing to put some effort into it. Try to find something positive in your project or your daily life. It is important to start each day with a fresh start, looking at life or projects in a new way.

These sacrifices were a method of drawing people closer to G-d. Today we do not perform animal sacrifices. We can get closer to G-d by performing acts of loving kindness to help others. By belonging to the Fraternal Organization, the Odd Fellows and Rebekahs whose principles are to "Visit the sick", "Relieve the distressed", "Bury the dead" and "Educate the orphan", this is one way I feel closer to G-d. My parents were members of this wonderful organization. Since I was a very young girl, my parents instilled in me that we should visit others. They would often take me down to FAIRVIEW, The Odd Fellows & Rebekahs

nursing home in Groton. As time went on, I came to know several of the residents. I could see how happy the people were that someone came to see them. I still look forward to going down and visiting with them and trying to do what I can to make their lives more comfortable.

At the hospital where I work, my department as well as several other departments donate a Thanksgiving basket to our Children and Family Health Center for families in need. The families appreciate the generosity of all and are pleased and delighted by being able to shop for things that their families enjoy as part of their holiday celebration.

Unfortunately with the instability of the economy, many people have lost their jobs. We all have a responsibility of reaching out to those in need and performing a mitzvah. Performing a mitzvah or an act of loving kindness can be considered as affirming a connection or relationship to G-d. Any number of actions could be considered a mitzvah. One of the projects that our Odd Fellows and Rebekahs group does is bring canned goods each time we meet and donate them to the local food bank. Around the holidays, we also adopt a family so that they can have a nice Thanksgiving or holiday meal. We have also collected items where we have filled over 100 boxes and sent these to our troops overseas. We provide scholarships to students to continue their education. There are many other charitable causes that we support that I am apart of. When one shows kindness to others, it is contagious.

When I was a patient in the hospital for almost two weeks many years ago, I looked forward to the get well cards and phone calls that I received. Prior to that, I had been in the habit of sending out some greeting cards to family and friends who were ill or having birthdays or

anniversaries. It was not until my hospitalization that I understood just how much receiving a card or a call meant to people. I have continued sending cards especially to those who are ill with the realization of just how important it is to them.

Prayer can also bring us closer to G-d by letting us release our feelings of fear, stress and worry. Because of G-d's power, we feel we can communicate and ask for direction and guidance even if we feel we are not perfect and deserving. It is a way of giving us insight into handling our situations better and provides a sense of hope. Prayer helps us get through our day when we are facing unbelievable challenges that are presented to us. We are thankful for all that G-d has done for us, the opportunities we have been given, and we atone for things we have done or not done but should have. We are thankful when a loved one comes through surgery and/or an illness and that person's health improves.

Today, we can also do some introspection in our own lives, by looking to see if there is something that we should stop doing or start doing. Also what can we do to improve not only the quality of our life but also the lives of others? With Passover just around the corner, this is a time for renewal and hope for a future where there is peace and harmony among all.