

Parshat Tzva discusses four types of sacrifices aptly titled a regular every day sacrifice, a sin offering, a guilt offering, and a peace offering. To me this sounds like the cycle of living. Every day regular activities followed by lapses, guilt, and hopefully a return to peace and wholeness.

I would like to dwell on the guilt, for frankly, I am obsessed by guilt. What does guilt mean? To mean it means a sense of inadequacy and regret, of never doing enough for myself or others, for letting people down, for not achieving what I would have liked, and what my mother would have approved.

Jewish guilt is about our mothers. How does the joke go? The mother of the first Jewish president gets a call from her son and remarks. I am so ashamed of him. He could have gone to medical school.

A burnt offering is completely consumed on the altar. A peace offering, we eat in gratitude for overcoming a life threatening crisis. It is our chance to give thanks, and thereby to become whole again. Shalom means being whole.

A sin offering is made so we can purge our sorrow for unintentionally being careless and missing the mark. It comes from a desire for reconciliation. The sins for which we bring this offering can be communal as well as individual.

A guilt offering is made when we have a sense of having harmed others. Often it requires monetary restitution of 20 percent, if we have inadvertently stolen, committed fraud, or broken a trust with other people. If the guilt is legal, there is the certainty of misbehavior and prosecution by the authorities, but emotional guilt also exists. It comes about because of the doubts and uncertainties we have of whether we have wronged another person.

It is hard to go through life without harming others. Everyday we disappoint someone.

Have we hurt another? If we are not psychopaths, and have a conscience that is a hard feeling with which to live.

Sin and guilt offerings cannot atone for acts done intentionally and maliciously. Only acts done non-deliberately qualify.

With a guilt offering we are dealing with anxiety and shame about what we might have done to another human being. For this type of hypothetical wrongdoing we require penitence and expiation to go on.

The unacceptable behavior does not have to be real. It has to be felt. I feel like I have hurt someone, which makes me infinitely uncomfortable about myself. How could I have done this?

That is my best explanation for why we bring this sacrifice, to remove this terrible feeling of guilt, to obtain forgiveness and receive some type of absolution.

If we deceived, lied, and swore falsely, without meaning to do so, and therefore have hurt other people, if we are not sociopaths, then we require a way to clear our consciences. We wish to achieve reconciliation with other human beings and with G-d.

That is the reason, in my opinion, for the guilt offering.

Molly Jong-Fast, Erica Jong's daughter, apparently said that "we suffer two great inheritances of the Jewish people: irritable bowel syndrome and guilt." Guilt is institutionalized in our daily prayer. It is a central part of our religious practice and language. Because we have such a profound sense of guilt, we rarely are able to be totally happy. It is because of our sins, of course, that the Bet HaMikdash was twice destroyed.

Guilt is a useful tool if it can lead to repentance. We wonder about our relations with others and our relations with ourselves. We have regret. We

could have acted differently. We could have done more. We will do more. Is it possible?

The guilt offering takes away some of this burden. It assures us. We are not perfect. Only G-d is perfect. Yet we can do better. We can learn from our mistakes. We can improve. Sometimes we are weak and thoughtless but we are not intrinsically evil. We will work on our shortcomings and try to overcome them, knowing that we can never surmount them entirely. We always will suffer from some guilt.

Freud gave guilt a bad rap. Too much of it is a bad thing. It leads to despair if we believe we can never live up to the impossible standards and expectations we impose on ourselves and achieve perfection.

We have to lighten up a little. We never will never get it absolutely right.

Let's use our guilt to inspire us to better, if not perfect behavior. Let's use it not for the purpose of excessive self-punishment and doubt but for forgiving us for our shortcomings. Perfection is beyond the reach of most of us

The guilt we feel should motivate us to change for the better.

As Diane Barth, a social worker, wrote in an article in *Psychology Today*.

"Like so many painful emotions, guilt is actually important to our well-being, part of healthy psychological development.... Guilt is a way we have of recognizing that we have not lived up to our own values and standards. At its best, it is an opportunity to acknowledge and rectify mistakes."