

Hi everyone - when Stephen asked me to speak during the high holidays, a range of emotions came over me. First - I was honored, then I thought, who was the speaker (or speakers) that backed out? “You know who you are...” As much as I love a captive audience, a little fear took over because while I’ve often spoken publicly, this is in front of people I know and might see again! At least some of you. My name is Jonathan Polansky and I have been a member of HERJC for over 30 years. My wife Randi and I joined the temple shortly after my dad passed away in 1991 as I wanted a place to say Kaddish that was close to home and somewhere I would feel comfortable. My three children went to Nursey, Hebrew School and were bat/bar mitzvah’d here.

Despite my long-standing membership, my involvement with the temple was fairly limited until a few years ago when David Burton nudged me towards a more active role. Thanks David. Today, I proudly served on the board, on various committees, and most recently joined Jack Skiba and others as trustees for the new endowment fund.

As I contemplated what to share with you on this holiday, I decided to speak about the theme of today’s parsha and how it intersects with my beliefs. It calls to mind the profound sacrifice that Abraham was tasked with - a command that defied understanding: to offer his own child as a demonstration of his loyalty and devotion to God. Our lives, too, have seen us confronted by the notion of sacrifice. Often, this involves the relinquishing of our resources—whether it be time, money, and sometimes our careers—to better the lives of others – whether it be our own loved ones or those in the community. Personally, I

have encountered this within my own family, each time without a shred of doubt concerning the rightness of my/our actions. While Abraham's challenge was of a magnitude beyond comprehension, our sacrifices serve a different purpose - one of enriching lives rather than extinguishing them.

Over the years, the actions of my wife, Randi, and our children have inspired me to take a more active role in service - specifically our temple community and engaging in volunteer work. Randi's commitment to learning sign language to assist people who are deaf and taking on an active board role at SULAM LI (a religious school for children with special needs), Samantha's high school leadership with BBYO and involvement with not for profits, Ashley's dedication to educating young minds as a first-grade teacher at RAMAZ, and Josh's experience locally with the Friends Program, all have sparked a realization within me about the need to give back.

It is through their examples that I have come to appreciate the immense value of happiness and fulfillment derived from service over the years – it started at work with NY Cares – painting NYC classrooms, cleaning up parks, interview training for veterans to name a few. Over the past few years, I have been involved with those that are food insufficient through volunteering monthly with Randi at the LB soup kitchen and more recently with food delivery through Hatzilu. For me personally, the value provided far exceeds the investment of my time.

We all navigate our unique emotional landscapes, and I'm not suggesting that our experiences will mirror one another, but I do

believe it is worth our while to explore the potential of sacrifice within our own lives. Whatever our sacrifices are, they most likely will pale in comparison to the unfathomable test faced by Abraham.

The idea of volunteerism brings to mind two quotes that have resonated with me - one from Muhammad Ali - "Service to others is the rent you pay for your room here on Earth." If you know me, it will not surprise you that the other is from Ricky Gervais' series the "After Life" (avail on Netflix if your sharing PW still works) - it underscores the importance of living for the right reasons. The quote is "If you want to be an angel, you've got to do it while you're alive. Be good and do good things."

As I conclude, I encourage each of you to consider embracing moments of sacrifice when they align with your path in whatever form works for you. Test the waters and evaluate if the pursuit of enrichment through sacrifice resonates with you. In doing so, we honor the essence of this season and the legacy of Abraham, while seeking our own fulfillment and happiness.

Thank you for your time and attention. Shana Tova to you and your families.