

SHABBAT SERMON
Parashat R'eih
5775

As I said in my d'var Torah Monday morning, the revolution in Jewish worship that's described in the parashah is an experiment that failed. The leaders of ancient Judea wanted to get rid of the pagan worship practices in the local altars and so they centralized all worship to the temple in Jerusalem. The only problem was, "What did you do if you lived 20 miles outside Jerusalem?" And, since we know that some Jews were already living in a diaspora, "What did you do if you were living 1000 miles from Jerusalem?" How did you worship? And so, of necessity, Judaism went back to a system of local worship centers, this time called 'synagogues.' And within those synagogues, there is wide variation in worship practices – and there probably always has been.

- I'm glad we got rid of animal sacrifice 2000 years ago. Judaism would have been much different if we had not done so.
- But the laws of Deuteronomy were purist; they went for a complete purification of practice. And there was no way, with a community spread out far and wide, that we were able to keep all worship uniform.

A good friend of mine, a skilled businessman and negotiator, once gave me his theory of negotiation. He said, "You always leave something on the table." Be prepared to let something go. We may start out knowing that our position is correct, and completely invested in getting everything we want. But unless there's a dramatic imbalance of power, that rarely happens. It's also rarely good.

We can learn this lesson from history.

- After WW I, the Allied forces wanted to leave Germany weak – and they succeeded in doing that. They left Germany so weak that there was room for a maniac like Hitler to come to power – because he was the only one who gave the German people hope, a crazy hope.
- After the U.S. toppled Saddam Hussein, we dismantled the Iraqi army. Now some of the officers of Hussein's army are leading Islamic State instead.

Getting everything you want is not always a good thing.

Isn't this true in our personal lives as well? We have disagreements with our spouses and children, maybe our siblings. We have disagreements with people with whom we do business. It may be our first instinct to see things in black – and –white terms: we are all correct; they are all wrong. We are all good; they are all bad. Everyone does that. And it probably does not work for any of us. If and when we finally resolve the issue, we often make adjust-

ments in ways we did not originally imagine. None of us can see the entirety of a situation.

- The classic example given in textbooks about mediation is about two people fighting over one orange.

They both want it. It's only through negotiation that they discover that one of them wants the orange peel to use in a cake and the other wants the meat of the orange because he's hungry.

All-or-nothing is often unnecessary. It can also be destructive.

The book of Deuteronomy seems to me short-sighted. How were the people who lived too far from Jerusalem going to worship? In their zeal to get rid of foreign worship practices from local altars, did the authors not think or care about that?

In the case of a dispute, we usually think about one thing: getting what we want. We should be thinking of two things: what's going to happen after we get what we want? How will we put the relationship back together? The failure to do that, can look and feel like a relationship based on "scorch and burn."

All of you know that I am opposed to the nuclear agreement with Iran. They have violated past agreements and cannot be trusted. Twenty-four day notice before an inspection is just too long.

But as I said a few weeks ago, I don't listen to the screamers – the ones who say that we should not have negotiated with them to begin with, who say that we should never lift sanctions. All good negotiations leave something on the table. In this case, a crippled or humiliated Iran would have led to less stability, not more.

In our personal lives and on the world stage, we really have two goals in a dispute. One is getting some or even most of what we want. The other is having some peace when the issue is resolved. We often forget that and we should not. As the Midrash says, “Great is peace, for the name of the Holy One is Peace.”