

March 19, 2010

Shabbat Shalom!

I enjoy rooming with my brother, Rabbi Steve Karol of Temple Isaiah in Stony Brook, New York, at conventions. We are now on a string of two: the Union for Reform Judaism Biennial convention in Toronto this past November and the Central Conference of American Rabbis Convention last week in San Francisco. We had carefully arranged for our charges to be split between us in two different accounts and on two different credit cards. When I checked my American Express bill this morning, I noticed that it included two charges to my card, rather than just one, for the room. I realized that I had become both Stephen Karol and Lawrence Karol all rolled into one person! I know that there is a process by which this error will be fixed, hopefully through the good graces of the bookkeeping office of the Fairmont San Francisco. If not, I am sure it will all work out.

The Torah reading for this week talked about what people needed to do when they realized that they had made a mistake, one that may not have been as easy to repair as our hotel bill. We know from many years of High Holy Day worship, sermons and study that fixing relationships or personal errors in judgment, even mistakes that may have been committed unintentionally, takes work, patience, tenacity and a generous spirit. The ancient Israelite prescription for “making things right” required the sacrifice of an animal, based on their usual ritual practices. What was required was an animal “without blemish,” meaning the best type of offering possible. Bringing a proper sacrifice was an exercise in showing respect to God and demonstrating sincere care regarding the need to “repair what was broken” in a given situation or relationship.

That is why we hear so much at High Holy Days, and in prayers throughout the year, about giving our best. It is not that we have to be perfect. Rather, when we are trying to heal a hurt or right a wrong, our effort should reflect the best we can give – an effort that is straightforward, honest (to ourselves and others), direct, caring, and hopeful. It may be that not everything can be repaired, but there is much we can do if, through our attempts to “set things right,” we are reaching for perfection.

-- L'shalom, Rabbi Larry