BS"D
March 20, 2026

Potomac Torah Study Center
Vol. 13 #23, March 20-21, 2026; 3 Nisan 5786; Vayikra 5786

NOTE: Devrei Torah presented weekly in Loving Memory of Rabbi Leonard S. Cahan z"l, Rabbi Emeritus of Congregation Har Shalom, who started me on my road to learning more than 50 years ago and was our family Rebbe and close friend until his untimely death.

Devrei Torah are now Available for Download (normally by noon on Fridays) at www.PotomacTorah.org. Thanks to Bill Landau for hosting the Devrei Torah archives.

May Hashem protect Israel and Jews everywhere. May Hashem's protection shine on all of Israel, the IDF, and Jews throughout the world. We mourn those of our people who have perished since attacks have resumed. May the IDF and the U.S. soon force Iran to seek peace, and may a new era bring security and rebuilding for both Israel and all others who genuinely seek peace.

Sefer Vayikra consists entirely of laws, except for two short narrative sections. The end of Sefer Shemot indicates why the Torah focuses so heavily on legal issues. Once Hashem's presence (a cloud during the day and fire at night) comes to rest on the Mishkan, the intensity of His presence is too great even for Moshe to approach without God first inviting him (40:35). B'Nai Yisrael do not move from the base of Har Sinai until 12 Iyar of the second year after leaving Egypt (Bemidbar 10:11). During the entire period when God presents the laws in Vayikra to Moshe, and Moshe delivers them to B'Nai Yisrael, the people remain by the base of Har Sinai. Once Hashem's presence descends onto the Mishkan, the people must learn and observe the regulations for becoming and remaining tahor (ritually pure) so they can come close to the Ohel Moed and participate in the rituals there. Vayikra, then, is primarily the book of what B'Nai Yisrael must observe and do to become and mainitain ritual purity (tahara) so they can live in Hashem's presence.

The basic activity involving B'Nai Yisrael near the Ohel Moed is the korbanot (daily, Shabbat, and Yom Tov). The root of korban is *"harov,"* which means *"to come near."* Sefer Vayikra opens with the laws of bringing a korban (Vayikra) and the procedures for the kohen performing the korban (Tzav).

Rabbi David Fohrman identifies three basic types of korbanot. An **olah** is a burnt offering – the entire animal is burnt, and the smoke goes up to God. A **shlamim** is a peace or shared offering. A small portion of the animal is burned, and the smoke goes up to Hashem. Some parts are reserved for the kohanim to eat. The remainder is for the family bringing the korban – and often for friends and other relatives (especially for a large animal that feeds dozens of people). A **chatat** or sin offering makes up for an unintentional transgression. Some of the chatat remains on the alter as a burnt offering, but most of the meat goes to the Kohanim (representatives of Hashem) to eat.

Since the destruction of the Second Temple, approximately 2000 years ago, there has been no place where Jews have been able to bring korbanot. An obvious question is whether, after more than 2000 years, the Third Temple will include korbanot. Rambam and Ramban are the leaders in raising this issue. Rambam, in his *Guide to the Perplexed,* argues that people at the time of the Temples could not have conceived of any form of worship other than korbanot. Ramban, however, counters that the detailed laws of korbanot and history of sacrifices going back to the beginning of humans convince him that korbanot are basic to maintaining a relationship between man and God. For more discussion, see the article below by Rosh Yeshiva Dov Linzer.

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, z"l, turns the discussion around and focuses on what life wants from us. Rabbi Sacks turns to Holocaust Survivor and therapist Viktor Frankl, z"l, who developed a psychotherapy based on "man's search for meaning." To Frankl, the way to find meaning in life is to search for the reason each of us is in the world. Each of us has a role to play

during our lifetime, and we should seek that role – and do the best we can to make our life meaningful. This philosophy helped Frankl survive in Auschwitz, and he used this focus to help many other Holocaust inmates and survivors cope with the horrors they faced.

Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander observes that the Torah calls one who brings a korban "adam" (a person) but changes to "nefesh" (soul) to describe a poor person who brings a grain offering. Rabbi Brander interprets that the Torah (Hashem) places a higher value on a simple, inexpensive offering of a poor person than on a more expensive korban of a wealthier person. When a poor person brings even a simple grain offering, he gives it with his own soul, and that gift is very special to God. In both cases, however, Isaiah states that God is open to mitzvot and teshuvah from all Jews – His love transcends human failure.

Rabbi Brander has frequently written about how many Israelis have responded to attacks from Iran, Gaza, and Hezbollah by increasing their levels of mitzvot. Some Haradi young people have responded by joining IDF (and performing tasks that enable them to avoid violating halacha). Some secular Israelis have starting observing kashruit and Shabbat. Sefer Vayikra is an appropriate time to applaud increases in people's mitzvot. As we look forward to Pesach, we can become more optimistic for the future of our people, both in Israel and elsewhere in a world that has been much more dangerous recently than for many prior years.

My beloved Rebbe, Rabbi Leonard Cahan, z"l, enjoyed teaching the legal sections of the Torah more than the narrative sections. Although some of the legal sections of the Torah are less accessible to modern readers than the narrative sections, I have come to agree with Rabbi Cahan. Sefer Vayikra offers compelling depth and continues to fascinate me. In a traditional yeshiva, instruction in the Torah would start with Sefer Vayikra. Generations of our children started their Torah education with the korbanot that we start reading this week. A person bringing a korban is to put his hands on the animal, feel some of the blood thrown at him during the ceremony, and realize that the animal is dying in his place. A korban is a very physical and immediate experience. While we do not experience the physical aspects today, we should study the history of the korban system and try to understand how it felt to our ancestors. May we make the lessons vivid and share this understanding with our children and grandchildren.

Shabbat Shalom,

Alan & Hannah

Much of the inspiration for my weekly Dvar Torah message comes from the insights of Rabbi David Fohrman and his team of scholars at www.alephbeta.org. Please join me in supporting this wonderful organization, which has increased its scholarly work during and since the pandemic, despite many of its supporters having to cut back on their donations.

Please daven for a Refuah Shlemah for Velvel David ben Sarah Rachel; Moshe Aaron ben Leah Beilah (badly wounded in battle in Gaza but slowly recovering), Daniel Yitzchak Meir HaLevy ben Ruth; Avram David ben Zeezl Esther, Avraham Dov ben Blimah; Ariah Ben Sarah, Hershel Tzvi ben Chana, Reuven ben Basha Chaya Zlata Lana, Avraham ben Gavriela, Mordechai ben Chaya, David Moshe ben Raizel; Zvi ben Sara Chaya, Reuven ben Masha, Meir ben Sara, Oscar ben Simcha; Miriam Bat Leah; Rena Michal bat Sara, Yehudit Leah bas Hannah Feiga; Miriam bat Esha, Chana bat Sarah; Raizel bat Rut; Rena bat Ilsa, Riva Golda bat Leah, Sharon bat Sarah, Kayla bat Ester, and Malka bat Simcha, and all our fellow Jews in danger in and near Israel. Please contact me for any additions or subtractions. Thank you.

Haftarat Parshat Vayikra: The Pauper's Offering

By Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander *
President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone

Rabbi Brander dedicates his Dvar Haftorah this week to the heroic soldiers, security forces and first responders

of the IDF, defenders of the Jewish people and the land of Israel, and the United States Armed Forces, defenders of liberty and justice for all. May Hashem protect them and bring them all home speedily and safely.

The opening chapters of Sefer Vayikra introduce the sacrificial system – the intricate framework through which an individual sought forgiveness and built or restored their relationship with God. At first glance, these rites may seem distant from our contemporary religious lives. Yet embedded in these opening chapters is a subtle spiritual distinction so theologically charged that the Sages treat it as one of the Torah's most powerful statements – one that speaks directly to how we approach God even today.

When the Torah describes the ordinary person who brings an animal offering in chapter 1, it uses the word adam – the standard term for a human being: "When one of you [adam] brings an animal offering to the Lord…" (1:2). But in chapter 2, which addresses grain offerings, the Torah shifts its language. It no longer says adam; it says nefesh – meaning "soul," or "self": "When one [nefesh] brings a grain offering to the Lord…" (2:1).

The Gemara in tractate Menachot (104b) notices this shift, and interprets it in light of the fact that grain offerings tended to be brought by those of limited means, who could not afford an animal sacrifice. In the Gemara's reading, when one with so little to give makes the effort to bring even the most modest of offerings, God regards it as though he has offered his very soul [nefesh].

This point is made even more forcefully in Vayikra Rabba (3:1), which asserts that the grain offering of a poor man is more precious to God than the most elaborate incense brought on behalf of the entire community. What makes it so is not its monetary worth but the purity of intention it represents – the willingness to give all of oneself even in times of great duress and want.

This contrast between adam and nefesh – between outward ritual practice and genuine self-offering – is precisely what this week's haftara addresses on a national scale. Drawn from Yeshayahu chapters 43 and 44, it confronts the Jewish people at a moment of spiritual deprivation. Like the adam of chapter 1, they are present in form but may be absent in substance. Their religious practice has become hollow. God's rebuke is direct and stinging: *"It is not Me you call for, Yaakov; Israel, you wearied of Me. You did not bring Me the lamb of your offering; it was not Me your sacrifice honored"* (43:22–23). This is not a people that has stopped sacrificing altogether. It is a people that sacrifices without meaning it – going through the motions of religious life while remaining spiritually detached.

And yet – and this is the pivot at the heart of the haftara – God does not abandon us. The very next verses are not a verdict but an astonishing declaration of grace: *"I am I, who expunge your offenses for My own sake and will not keep your sins in mind*" (v. 25). The forgiveness is not contingent on the people having earned it. It is offered for the sake of God Himself. The covenant does not wait for the Jewish people to become deserving before it holds.

Yeshayahu names the depth of the problem unflinchingly. *"Your first father sinned,"* he says (v. 27) – a reference some commentators identify with Avraham, who in a moment of uncertainty asked*, "My Lord God, how shall I know that I will possess it?"* (Genesis 15:8), revealed that even the greatest patriarch was not beyond doubt and faltering. If the founding father himself fell short, how much more so a people in the depths of political and spiritual crisis? Yeshayahu does not look away from this, but he pivots immediately to consolation: *"And now listen, Yaakov My servant, Israel whom I chose"* (44:1). Even now, the relationship has not lapsed.

This arc – frank acknowledgment of failure, followed by unconditional reaffirmation – is not incidental to the haftara. In truth, it is one reason the whole institution of the haftara exists. When foreign rulers prohibited the public reading of the Torah in synagogues, the Sages instituted the reading of prophetic portions in its place. **The haftara was born out of persecution, and it carries that origin in its purpose: to say that even when access to the sacred is impeded, even when the people have fallen short of what they could be, the relationship endures. The glass is half full – not because the problems are not real, but because the love that holds the Jewish people close to God is greater than their failures.** [emphasis added]

That message has not aged. We live in a period of genuine difficulty – conflict, communal fracture, searching questions about the kind of society we are building in the land to which we have returned. There are moments when the mirror

Yeshayahu holds up to ancient Israel feels uncomfortably familiar. We are not always bringing the nefesh offering; sometimes we bring the adam offering – present in body, absent in soul.

But the haftara refuses to end on that note. **The covenant between God and Knesset Yisrael is not transactional. It does not expire when we fall short. It holds – not because of what we have achieved, but because of who He is, and who we have always been to each other. That is the promise Yeshayahu asks us to carry out of shul and into the week ahead.** [emphasis added]

Shabbat Shalom.

* Ohr Torah Stone is a modern Orthodox group of 32 institutions and programs. Rabbi Dr. Shlomo Riskin is the Founding Director, and Rabbi Dr. Brander is President and Rosh HaYeshiva. For more information or to support Ohr Torah Stone, contact ohrtorahstone@otsyny.org or 212-935-8672. **Donations to 49 West 45th Street #701, New York, NY 10036.**

https://ots.org.il/haftarat-parshat-vayikra-rabbi-brander-5786/?pfstyle=wp

---

Vayikra; Pesach: How Do We Approach This Child?

By Rabbi Label Lam © 5764

Concerning four sons the Torah speaks: One wise, one wicked, one simple, and one who does not know how to ask. (The Pesach Haggadah)

And you shall tell your child on that day (Shemos 13:8)

Why are only four varieties of children mentioned here? Could there not be more types than this? Are wise and wicked opposite terms? Does the simple one stand in contradistinction to the one who does not know how to ask? What's the order here?

Having just heard the shocking claim that We were slaves in Egypt and HASHEM our G-d took us out with a strong hand and an outstretched arm, there are really only four kinds of reactions. Let's imagine, for example, someone would enter a University cafeteria and claim to be Napoleon. Now let us measure the responses. One student will come running over immediately with a note pad and paper and begin to pepper the man with the hand in jacket with detailed questions. He'll be excited to have a primary source for a paper on French history.

Another will be automatically repelled. He'll begin to look for the exit, assuming that this man is a lunatic and he has just escaped from a mental institution. Why else would a grown person walking around in the 21st century make such an outrageous claim? A third will inch a little closer and wonder, observing the other two opposite responses, and inquire more generally, Who is Napoleon? Did he invent a pastry?

A fourth fellow sitting self-absorbed, in a corner, will glance occasionally at the excitement but retreat again to whatever else he's doing. When asked his opinion on the matter, he'll shrug his shoulders, his look will say, "Who cares who this guy is?! I've got my own problems? Let him be whoever he wants to be! Its not my business!"

These four attitudes divide evenly into two categories. There are two types of responses of those who have some knowledge base, and two possible responses by those who don't. The wise one is knowledgeable, and his appetite is stimulated by the Seder. He wishes to know more and more. That hunger must be fed.

The wicked one is haunted by the fact that he fails to live up to what he knows. His conscience doesn't give him rest. His level of existential angst is heightened by the Pesach Seder, so he feels a need to reject it all. He is basically told that he can only push himself away. He could never derail G-ds plan – His seder, but only his role in that plan. That's his medicine.

The simple one doesn't know what's flying but is willing to take some risks to discover what the real story is, although the price of knowledge might be required action. He is embraced and admired for his courage to want to know.

As for the son who does know how to ask, he's paralyzed with fear to venture out of his comfort zone or maybe just to be found ignorant. He therefore emulates the ostrich, enjoying the temporary bliss of ignorance. He needs to be prompted and made to feel safe that it's ok not to know and it better to find out what you need to know than not!

The Maharal asks why the word one appears before the name of each category of child, and he says that they are really one person. We have all these parts within us, though one may be more dominant at a given time. There are areas in which we are growing from strength to strength and others in which we are at risk of shrinking. Certain new and exciting topics are due to arise that may become our new friends for years to come, and then there are those topics – well, let's not go there! The question for each of us at the Pesach Seder is, How do we approach this child?

https://torah.org/torah-portion/dvartorah-5764-vayikra/

Sacrifices? What Sense Does that Make?

By Rabbi Dov Linzer,Rosh Yeshiva, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah © 2016

The second half of the book of Shemot focused on creating the Mishkan as a Sanctuary in which God Godself could dwell among the Children of Israel. In contrast, the book of Vayikra focuses on what is done in that Sanctuary: first and foremost, the bringing of sacrifices. What is the connection between sacrifices and the Temple? The Torah seems to be telling us that sacrifices are the primary means to serve and connect to God, and that this connecting is best done in the Temple, where God's presence dwells. But how are we to understand animal and grain sacrifices as a means of connecting to God, let alone as the primary means?

As modern people, it seems to us like a very bizarre way to worship an infinite God. What does God need with our sacrifices? Isn't such a messy and bloody act, one that takes an animal's life no less, the furthest thing possible from an elevated religious act of worship? At the same time, we must acknowledge that it was the primary form of worship in the ancient world. Did it answer a universal human need, something relevant even for us today, or was it part of a primitive, less intellectually and spiritually developed society?

Given that the Torah commands obligatory communal and individual sacrifices (and allows for non-obligatory, free will sacrifices), it stands to reason that a traditional Jewish approach would seek to find intrinsic value in these animal sacrifices. Rambam (Maimonides), however, coming from a strong rationalist perspective, says otherwise in his *Guide to the Perplexed* (section III, chapters 31 and 46). He states that worshiping God through animal sacrifices is not ideal, but the people at the time of the Giving of the Torah could not conceive of any other form of worship. If they would have been forced to choose between worshiping God with prayer and worshiping pagan gods with sacrifices, they would have chosen the latter. Thus God conceded to them their need to use sacrifices but demanded that they be brought to God in a way that did not lead to idolatry.

This approach, which resonates with most modern people, still raises some questions. First, as a traditional Jew who believed in the eternal bindingness of the mitzvot, how could Rambam suggest that sacrifices had outlived their purpose? If he did not believe that they would continue to be binding in the future, why did he write all the laws of sacrifices in his Yad Hachazaka? And doesn't this take away from the concept of the perfection of the Torah? Rambam himself answers the latter question, saying that God does not change the nature of people, and a perfect Torah is one that is perfectly suited for the realities of where people are. Sometimes, says Rambam, we have to consider where the mitzvot are pointing us rather than seeing them as describing an ideal, final state. This is quite provocative, and we have discussed it at greater length elsewhere.

Ramban (Nahmanides), in his *Commentary to the Torah* (Vayikra, 1:9) takes great issue with Rambam's approach and, besides arguing the specifics and bringing proof texts to contradict Rambam, argues against the idea that sacrifices, so central to worship in the Torah and already practiced by Adam and Noach, should not have intrinsic value. He states that the significance of the sacrifices can be understood as symbolic and psychological, and he sees the sin-offering as the primary sacrifice. Accordingly, he states that when a person sees the animal slaughtered, the blood thrown on the altar, and the entrails burned up, he reflects and takes to heart the greatness of his sin, how he has sinned both in thought and deed, and how he deserves to die. Ramban also gives a kabbalistic explanation, seeming to indicate that the sacrifices have a

theurgic and metaphysical impact on God's relationship to the world.

It should be noted that Ramban's emphasis on the sin-offering seems misplaced, given that the olah, the burnt offering, seems to be the primary form of worship. It was the sacrifice of Kayin and Hevel and of Noach, and in the Temple the olah is the twice-daily communal sacrifice and the core of the musaf sacrifices brought on Shabbat and Yom Tov. The Chinukh (Mitzvah 95) addresses this problem, and extends Ramban's symbolic and psychological approach to non-sin offering sacrifices and other details and rituals of the sacrifices.

There seems to be one thing missing from all these explanations, a point implicit in Rambam and hinted at in the Chinukh. The religious value of sacrifices would seem, at its core, to be that indicated in the first sacrifice of the Torah, that of Kayin and Hevel. The verse states: *"Kayin brought of the fruit of the ground an offering to the Lord. And Hevel also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat of it"* (Breishit, 4:3-4). That is, the primary sacrifice is the olah, the burnt offering, the giving of something fully to God. It is taking the fruit of one's labor, what one values highly and feels deeply connected to, recognizing that this comes from God and giving it back to God to demonstrate and internalize this mindset. This is why the idea of sacrificing one's children — or the command of akeidat Yitzchak — fits into this model. It is taking the *"giving of what is most dear"* to the ultimate extreme.

Understood this way, the sin offering uses this principle to achieve forgiveness and expiation. We say in the *u'Netaneh Tokef* prayer that *"u'teshuva u'tefillah u'tzedakah ma'avirin et ro'ah ha'gezeirah,"* that repentance, prayer, and charity eliminate the stern decree. In the same way, a korban — which is an intense and personal form of charity, of giving of oneself, of giving what is most dear — accompanied by the verbal confession of the sin-offering can achieve atonement.

It may be that this is most hard for us to relate not because of the concept of giving things that we treasure to God, but because 1) we don't relate this way to animals. Ethical issues aside, given how little most of us have to do with livestock and slaughtering, we are aesthetically repulsed by the idea of slaughtering animals. And 2) we would like our donations to religious causes to be used more practically, not in a merely symbolic way. While both of these are true and reflect different sensibilities from those of the past, we can still understand the core human need that sacrifices addressed in the time of the Temple.

The importance of using something physical in our worship is a related point. As physical beings, it is often hard for us to connect to an infinite, non-physical God. Just as Rambam explains that we need to use anthropomorphic and anthropopathic terms as a means of describing or relating to God, most of us need a form of worship that has a physical component. Sacrifices gave this to people. The reason this physical mode took the form of sacrifice was discussed above, but this framing helps us understand Rambam's point of saying that sacrifice is to prayer what prayer is to intellectually connecting to God. The ultimate form of worship for Rambam is a purely non-physical, intellectual connection. Most people, however, can't handle that. They need something more connected to human concerns and actions: petitionary prayer, fasting, and the very act of praying. While necessary for most, says Rambam, this is not the ideal.

The question that persists, though, is, given that we are human, why describe what we need as less than ideal? We are not angels or pure intellects, so for us, as physical beings, prayer might be the best way to connect to God. And when praying, how many of us have not felt that we could connect more strongly if there was a more physical component? Wearing a tallit or tefillin can help, as can shokeling; it feels like we are connecting more if we are doing more.

The need to find meaningful ways to connect and the importance of the physical remain as true today as they did in the time of the Temple. If for us, animal sacrifice is not the way, we should still be honest about our deep human need to find a way to connect to God, and we should work at developing those paths in the absence of sacrifices.

From my archives.

The Spirituality of Sacrifice: Korbanot as Emotional Self-Discovery

By Rabbi Ysoscher Katz *

I can't wait to go to shul this Shabbat and for the next couple of weeks because we are starting to read Sefer Vayikra.

There, we will be learning about the intricacies of the various sacrifices people brought to the Beit Mikdash.

And I truly can't be more excited, not because of some morbid fascination or bloodlust, but because it is a foundational guide to theological depth and emotional self-discovery. A surface encounter with korbanot is often limited to the visceral externals of "blood and gore." But to mistake those externals for the whole is a profound misreading of both the text and Jewish theology. To look past that initial shock is to unlock the genuine depth and sophistication of this entire genre of Halakha.

In fact, one cannot properly understand Jewish theology without truly mastering the genre of korbanot. Anything one says about Jewish theology is incomplete, and quite possibly incorrect, if one has never studied the particulars of Seder Vayikra. Vayikra is not merely an ancient instruction manual; it is a foundational text of Jewish spiritual anthropology.

Using Heschel z"l's terminology, one could describe Sefer Shemot as the book of *"God in search of man,"* a story of the Divine Initiative. In Shemot, God attempts to convince the Jews to worship Him, giving them His Torah and offering to move in next to them via the Mishkan. He presents Himself as a kind and redeeming God, seeking a loving and intimate relationship with Klal Yisroel.

Sefer Vayikra flips the coin. It is the book that teaches us about *"man in search of God,"* detailing the human initiative to connect to God through sacrifices, pilgrimage, and adherence to holiness. It is a spiritual guidebook for drawing near to the Divine and provides a rigorous structure for human beings to reach upwards.

Beyond profound theology, studying Vayikra is vital because it is the biblical psycho-religious precursor to our modern inner life, an ancient parallel to the depth psychology of Freud or Jung. Temple life cultivated an incredible degree of psychological self-awareness, offering people the opportunity to give full, ritualized expression to an elaborate array of feelings.

Each type of korban corresponded to a different spiritual or emotional state, serving as a dedicated channel for that particular state of mind. This reflects a robustly rich spiritual inner life for the Jew during the time of the Beit Mikdash, one that required them to be hyper-attuned to the nuance of their religious state of mind:

> To express remorse for an unknowing sin, one brought a Chatat.
>
> To express regret for a quantifiable violation that requires making amends, one brought an Asham.
>
> To express joy and deep gratitude, one brought a Todah.
>
> To express elation and the desire for a communal, intimate connection, one brought a Shelamim.
>
> And, finally, when experiencing inner turmoil or a general desire for closeness without a specific cause, one brought an Olah, which was entirely consumed by the fire, symbolizing total devotion and ascent.

Temple life forced its participants to walk with an incredible degree of emotional alertness. They had to perform a precise spiritual self-diagnosis: Am I in a Chatat mode, or an Asham mode? Am I in a Shelamim space, a Todah space, or in a different space altogether, an Olah? This daily, mandated process cultivated a robustly rich spiritual inner life and a profound integration of the emotional self with the Divine will. This self-awareness is what we today desperately try to replicate through psychological and mindfulness practices. Thus, the origins of Jewish dedication to spiritual health and emotional self-awareness have their source in the parshiyot of Sefer Vayikra.

This theological and psychological depth is supported by the compelling interpretation of the Parsha's opening phrase by the students of the Baal Shem Tov. The Torah states: *"A person, when he offers a sacrifice to the Lord, from you"* (Leviticus 1:2).

The classical commentators, including the Ibn Ezra, Ramban, and Rabbenu Bachya, all ask the same grammatical question: Wouldn't it have made more sense to say: *"A person from you when he offers a sacrifice?"* The word *mikkem* seems misplaced.

Torat HaChassidut offers an insightful solution to the misplaced word by revealing a deeper, non-literal reading: when one brings a sacrifice, *"מכם,"* they must bring something of themselves. **The sacrifice is indeed *"from you,"* from your very essence, a self-offering of your nefesh as a korban to God.** In Yiddish, one brings the self. The material sacrifice was merely the external vehicle for the inner act of self-consecration, spiritual vulnerability, and ascent. [emphasis added; Hebrew and Yiddish omitted]

In light of this, the seemingly surprising idea that one who studies the laws of the sacrifices is considered as if they have offered a sacrifice (Menachot 110a), now makes sense. This claim, **equating study with the physical performance of the Mitzvah, is made about no other Mitzvah.** This is precisely where the Chassidic insight is so illuminating: The **essential ingredient of the korban was the full self-offering of the person, the dedication of the self to a higher purpose, not the animal.** Since the destruction of the Beit Mikdash made the animal sacrifice impossible, the self can still be offered. Our study of Torah and our honest work on our emotional and spiritual self are the means by which we continue to offer our truest, deepest selves today, fulfilling the perpetual call of Vayikra. [emphasis added]

As we begin Sefer Vayikra, let us reject the superficial image of blood and gore. Let us embrace the text's true meaning: a guide to theological depth, emotional clarity, and the ongoing commandment to offer our best and most authentic selves to God. Let us approach the study of korbanot as a vital act of self-consecration, making our learning a vibrant and enduring continuation of Temple service.

Shabbat Shalom.

[note: because of problems formatting across different word processing problems, I had to omit most Hebrew text, and some remaining Hebrew text will end up out of order, depending on word processing format.]

* Chair of the Talmud Department and the Director of the Lindenbaum Center for Halakhic Studies, Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, Bronx, NY

https://library.yctorah.org/2026/03/the-spirituality-of-sacrifice-korbanot-as-emotional-self-discovery/

Hiring and Firing: Thoughts for Parashat Vayikra

By Rabbi Marc D. Angel *

Mark Zuckerberg, head of Facebook, was asked what he looks for in a prospective employee. He replied: "I will only hire someone to work directly for me if I would work for that person." I assume he was referring to top echelon employees, people who would have major executive responsibilities. If these people shared the values and work ethic of Mark Zuckerberg, then he would be ready to work for them. If they lacked those qualities, he would not hire them because he would not want to work for them either.

Mark Zuckerberg was offering some very important advice. In our own businesses, organizations, synagogues etc., we should only want to hire top people who we ourselves would want to work for. We should look for people who share our values and work ethic, who have a genuine sense of responsibility and commitment.

We would not want to work for an egotist, a social climber, a shirker of responsibility, or a control freak. We would not want to work for someone who creates dissension, who lacks respect for fellow employees, who takes off work on a regular basis. So we shouldn't hire such a person! Although this seems so obvious, it often happens that people ignore the "Zuckerberg rule" and hire employees who they themselves would never want to work for.

This week's Parasha includes descriptions of offerings which were to be brought in the Mishkan. These offerings shed light on what it takes to be a good, responsible person.

The burnt-offering was to be dedicated entirely to God. A lesson: a good person is ready and willing to sacrifice without expectation of personal reward. An idealistic commitment stems from a pious heart.

The peace-offering was brought as an expression of gratitude to the Almighty. A lesson: good people are grateful. They don't take their blessings for granted. They say thank you.

The sin-offering was brought to atone for sins that one committed accidentally, without intention to do the wrong thing. A lesson: good people admit their mistakes. They don't pretend to be perfect. They are humble and honest. They don't look for excuses to justify their mistakes and they don't try to pin blame on others. They take responsibility.

The guilt-offering was brought by those who unintentionally caused a loss to the Sanctuary by appropriating sacred property for personal use. A lesson: good people try not to desecrate that which is holy. They have reverence for the Sanctuary. They conduct themselves with respectfulness and gravitas, especially when in the presence of the Sacred.

The guilt-offering for breach of trust was brought by those who have dealt dishonestly with their fellow human beings. Aside from making restitution to those whom one has cheated, the sinner must also atone before the Almighty. A sin against a human being is also a sin against God. A lesson: good people are scrupulously honest. They avoid cheating or hurting others. They do not betray the trust of others. They do not renege on agreements.

A highly successful financier once told me: if you trust people at their word, you can do business with them. You don't need written agreements. Their word is their bond. But if you don't trust people, written contracts will not be a panacea. Untrustworthy people will find lawyers to re-interpret the contract; they will drag you into court; they will waste your time and money.

In short, good and trustworthy people are a blessing. They are reliable, honest and caring. Untrustworthy people are the bane of humanity. They are unreliable, dishonest, and unscrupulous.

Who would you hire? Who should you hire? Who would you work for?

And, most importantly, in which category do we ourselves belong? Would Mark Zuckerberg hire us?

* Founder and Director, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals. and rabbi emeritus of the historic Spanish and Portuguese Synagogue of New York City.

The Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals needs our help to maintain and strengthen our Institute. Each gift, large or small, is a vote for an intellectually vibrant, compassionate, inclusive Orthodox Judaism. You may contribute on our website jewishideas.org or you may send your check to Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, 2 West 70th Street, New York, NY 10023. Ed.: Please join me in helping the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals during its current fund raising period. Thank you.

https://www.jewishideas.org/hiring-and-firing-thoughts-parashat-vayikra

---

Paired Perspectives on the Parashah: Vayikra
Korbanot: Humans Approaching God, God Dwelling among Humans

By Rabbi Hayyim Angel *

Introduction

Parashat Vayikra opens the Torah's detailed discussion of korbanot, the sacrificial service that stood at the center of Israel's religious life in the Tabernacle and later in the Temple. The word korban derives from the Hebrew root *karov,* meaning *"to draw near."* A korban is not simply a sacrifice in the conventional sense, but an offering that enables a person to approach God.

For modern readers, the institution of sacrifices often appears distant or difficult to understand. Classical Jewish thinkers therefore devoted great effort to explaining their meaning and purpose. Two complementary perspectives illuminate the

institution of korbanot. One emphasizes the human dimension: sacrifices express the worshipper's desire to draw closer to God through submission, devotion, and repentance. The other focuses on the divine dimension: the sacrificial service sustains the presence of God among Israel through the sacred institutions of the Tabernacle and Temple.

Together, these perspectives frame korbanot as a meeting point between heaven and earth — where human beings approach God, and God in turn chooses to dwell among His people.

Perspective I — Humans Approaching God

Many commentators understand sacrifices primarily as expressions of human devotion and submission.

Ibn Ezra, Ramban, and others explain that a korban symbolically represents the individual who brings it. Through the laying of hands, slaughter, and burning of the offering, the worshipper confronts the reality that what is being done to the animal could just as well have been done to him. The animal serves as a substitute, dramatizing the gravity of human accountability before the Divine.

Rabbi Saadiah Gaon offers another explanation that also centers on the human experience of worship. Human beings naturally express devotion through giving gifts. Korbanot channel that instinct toward God, transforming a basic human impulse into an act of religious service.

Perspective II — God Dwelling among Humans

A second perspective shifts the focus from human devotion to divine presence.

Ramban explains that the Tabernacle extends the revelation of Sinai into an ongoing reality. At Sinai, God's Presence descended upon the mountain for a brief moment of unparalleled revelation. The Tabernacle — and the sacrificial service performed within it — ensures that this presence continues to dwell among Israel.

Rabbi Yehudah Halevi expresses a similar idea in the *Kuzari* (II:25–26), where he describes the Temple service as one of the central means through which the Divine Presence rests upon the nation.

The Torah itself underscores this idea through its language. Sacrifices are repeatedly described as *"a fire-offering, a pleasing aroma to the Lord."* The sacrificial service is presented not simply as a human expression of devotion but as an act that is welcomed by God Himself.

The Debate between Rambam and Ramban

Medieval Jewish thinkers also debated a deeper question: why did God command sacrifices at all?

Rambam *(Guide of the Perplexed* III:32) argues that sacrifices were historically necessary in the ancient world. Religious worship everywhere involved sacrificial rituals, and people would not have been able to conceive of divine service without them. God therefore commanded sacrifices as part of a gradual educational process, redirecting an existing practice toward monotheistic service.

The Torah also restricted sacrifices to a single sanctuary and to a designated priesthood, thereby preventing the proliferation of pagan-style rituals. Over time, Rambam suggests, more elevated forms of worship — such as prayer and intellectual contemplation — would become central.

Ramban strongly rejects this explanation. If sacrifices were merely a concession to human weakness, he argues, the Torah would not devote such extensive attention to their laws or describe them as pleasing to God. Moreover, sacrifice existed long before idolatry: Cain and Abel, Noah, and the Patriarchs all brought offerings to God.

The Prophetic Balance

Despite their central role in the Temple service, **the prophets repeatedly warn that sacrifices alone cannot sustain the relationship between God and Israel.** [emphasis added]

Samuel declares that obedience is greater than sacrifice (I Samuel 15:22). Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, Hosea, Micah, and the psalmists all insist that God rejects offerings when they are accompanied by injustice and corruption. [emphasis added]

The prophets do not abolish sacrifices; rather, they insist that ritual worship must be accompanied by righteous conduct. Sacrifices are part of divine service, but they can never replace justice, compassion, and humility.

Conclusion — Meeting Between Heaven and Earth

Seen through these lenses, korbanot emerge as a profound meeting point between God and humanity.

On one level, sacrifices allow human beings to approach God with humility, devotion, and repentance. On another level, they sustain the divine presence among Israel through the sacred institutions of the Tabernacle and Temple.

The prophets remind us that these two dimensions must operate together. **Ritual worship without moral responsibility loses its meaning, while ethical life without devotion risks losing its spiritual foundation.** [emphasis added]

In Parashat Vayikra, the Torah teaches that authentic religious life requires both movements at once: human beings striving to draw closer to God, and God choosing to dwell among His people.

* Yeshiva University and National Scholar, Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals.

https://www.jewishideas.org/node/3420

The Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals needs our help to maintain and strengthen our Institute. Each gift, large or small, is a vote for an intellectually vibrant, compassionate, inclusive Orthodox Judaism. You may contribute on our website jewishideas.org or you may send your check to Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals, 2 West 70th Street, New York, NY 10023. Ed.: Please join me in helping the Institute for Jewish Ideas and Ideals during its current fund raising period. Thank you.

Vayikra – G-d's Secret

By Rabbi Mordechai Rhine *

May this Dvar Torah be a Zechus Refuah Shileima for Cholei Yisroel

Parshas Vayikra describes the system of Korbanos offerings, including those for atonement. The Torah describes how a person may sometimes make a mistake, and how he can rise up afterwards to restore the relationship. There are many lessons to be learned from the mitzvah of atonement. One of the most basic is that it is indeed possible for a person to make a mistake.

From the earliest times, the human condition was a confusing one. The Talmud (Sanhedrin 38) tells us that when G-d was about to create mankind, He courteously asked the angels their opinion. The angels looked at the destiny of mankind and said, *"Don't bother creating man. His story is one full of errors."*

Yet G-d did create mankind despite man's tendency to make mistakes. G-d understood clearly that in mankind, He was not creating angels. He knew that He was creating human beings. Free choice, and the potential for human error, is what makes success in life so treasurable.

The system of atonement is based on the awareness that human beings sometimes make mistakes. G-d knows that secret. We would do well to remember that secret as well.

There is a humorous story told of a woman who came to a Rabbi with a problem. She said, "Rabbi, help me. My son is crazy."

After declaring repeatedly how her son was a meshugeneh, she finally explained. "My son is truly crazy. He eats pig meat and dances with non-Jewish women."

The Rabbi responded, *"Your son is not crazy. If he would eat non-Jewish women and dance with pigs, that would be crazy. But what he is doing is a human failing. We have much experience in helping people out of such behavior."*

Too often, we don't take the human component into account when we assess ourselves. I admire people who strive for perfection. Yet there are people who not only strive for perfection but truly expect themselves to be perfect. One wonders if they have forgotten that they are human.

I recall, for example, reading an article in a Jewish periodical that I felt was very well written. I was so touched that I obtained the author's phone number and called him to thank him for writing the article. His response shocked me. He said, "Yes, it was a nice article. But did you see the typo in the second paragraph. It really ticked me off that they printed it like that."

I paused. I wondered. "Can a person strive for perfection so badly that he forgets that we are human?"

Sometimes, we don't allow ourselves the luxury of being human. Sometimes, we don't even allow others the luxury of being human.

I once attended a Bar Mitzvah at which the Bar Mitzvah boy read beautifully from the Torah, but he made two mistakes. The mistakes were noticed immediately, and he corrected them.

When the president got up to wish Mazal Tov he stated, "And I would like to compliment Michael on that perfect, or, well, almost perfect reading of the Torah…." I cringed. To my way of thinking, it was a perfect reading. As a human being — all of thirteen years old — if he read beautifully and corrected his two mistakes smoothly and professionally — It was a perfect reading.

The angels looked at the human being through angel eyes. They saw human failings and said to G-d, "Mankind isn't worth your trouble."

But G-d had a secret. G-d knew that human beings were created as human beings, not as angels. Life allows for atonement. Life is a growing process. Too often, we forget G-d's secret: that human beings are human.

So, the next time you set out to do good, don't give up as the angels did at the first sight of imperfection. Treasure goodness, even if it is imperfect goodness. Remember G-d's secret and allow yourself and others the luxury of being human. [emphasis added]

For Family Discussion:

- The rabbi in the story says that certain behaviors are "human failings, not craziness." What's the

difference? Does calling something a "human failing" make it easier or harder to change?

- The shul president said, "almost perfect." Was he being honest or unkind — or both? Is there a way to hold high standards and be encouraging at the same time?

With best wishes for a wonderful Shabbos!

* Rabbi Mordechai Rhine is a certified mediator and coach with Rabbinic experience of more than 20 years. Based in Maryland, he provides services internationally via Zoom. He is the Director of TEACH613: Building Torah Communities, One family at a Time, and the founder of CARE Mediation, focused on Marriage/ Shalom Bayis and personal coaching. To reach Rabbi Rhine, his websites are www.care-mediation.com and www.teach613.org; his email is RMRhine@gmail.com. **For information or to join any Torah613 classes, or to help sponsor his Torah insights, contact Rabbi Rhine.**

Vayikra – Believing In Those Who Failed

by Rabbi Yehoshua Singer *

When describing the different types of meal offerings, the Torah instructs us to include salt in our offerings. This is followed by a special warning to be sure to always include salt, *"And all of your meal offerings should be salted with salt and do not cease salt of the covenant of your Lord from on your meal offering on all of your offerings you should bring salt."* (Vayikra 2:13) Why is it so important to include salt in the offerings, and what is the meaning of the phrase *"salt of the covenant"*?

The Da'as Zekainim mi'Ba'alei Tosfos explains that the salt is called *"salt of the covenant,"* because it is intended to remind us of a covenant Hashem made with us regarding the sacrifices. This is a covenant that the sacrifices will bring us forgiveness for sins we have committed. **Salt was chosen to represent this covenant because it is an everlasting preservative. Just as salt is everlasting, so too G-d's covenant with us,** that He will accept our sacrifices and forgive our sins, is an everlasting covenant. [emphasis added]

The Da'as Zekainim explains that this forgiveness is critical to G-d's purpose in the world. G-d wishes to provide us with merit and reward for all we do right in our lives. However, once a person sins, they can lose faith in themselves and lose interest in doing mitzvos. As the Gemara in Kiddushin says, *"Once a person has sinned and repeated it, it becomes to him as if it's permissible."* (Kiddushin 20a) He explains this to mean that although one who has sinned knows that the sin is wrong, he no longer cares and feels that since he has already sinned, it's okay for him to do so again. We mistakenly say to ourselves, *"I messed up already, so what's the point?"* He explains this with a parable. A person who has dirty clothing won't be careful to avoid the dirt. Whereas, a person with nice, clean clothes will be cautious to avoid any dirt at all.

This, says the Da'as Zekeinim, is what Shlomo Hamelech meant when he said, *"At all times your clothing should be white."* (Koheles 9:8) We must always view ourselves as wearing nice, clean, white spiritual clothes. In this way, we will understand that our mitzvos do matter and be careful not to sin.

The words of the Da'as Zekeinim speak for themselves. Hashem believes in us, and He wants us to believe in ourselves, too. However, I believe there is a much more profound message here.

The person who sinned and now needs forgiveness, sees himself as a failure. He has tried to do what's right but failed and sinned. He has failed in a way that he now understands that his spiritual clothes are no longer clean. He seemingly correctly says to himself, *"What difference does another small stain make?"* It is for this person that Hashem provides the sacrifices as a means for forgiveness, because Hashem wants to reward this person and doesn't want them to give up. Even before they have been forgiven, even before the covenant of sacrifices existed in the world, Hashem already wants to bring merit and reward to this individual. **Even while he sees himself as a failure, Hashem is anxiously waiting for his next mitzvah. It is for this reason that Hashem created the covenant of the forgiveness of sacrifices.** [emphasis added]

However, even this covenant wasn't good enough for Hashem. **Hashem wanted to ensure that we would be able to recognize and appreciate that we are still forgiven.** He therefore instructs us – and firmly warns us – to **include salt in our sacrifices so we can be reminded that sacrifices have an everlasting component and always remember His everlasting covenant to forgive us.** All so we can believe in ourselves, and see in ourselves, what Hashem sees even when we think we are "failures." [emphasis added]

It is so easy to fall into the trap of allowing our past to shackle our future. Hashem is teaching us with the sacrifices that our past doesn't even shackle the past. Even after we have erred and failed, Hashem still believes in us, cherishes us and yearns for the next mitzvah we will do and the opportunity to reward us.

* Co-founder of the Rhode Island Torah Network in Providence, RI. Until recently, Rabbi, Am HaTorah Congregation, Bethesda, MD., and then associated with the Savannah Kollel.

The Future of Sacrifices

By Rabbi Haim Ovadia * (5783)

The rebuilding of the Temple, and the reestablishment of the sacrifices in it, are central themes in our prayers and rituals, including the Haggadah, but have you ever tried to visualize yourself making the pilgrimage to that Third Temple, with the animal for sacrifice in tow? Imagine yourself walking uphill, pulling a goat, lamb, or ox, behind you. You are surrounded by thousands of revelers, each with his own animal. You arrive at the gates of the Temple, where you wait in line for your turn. Hundreds of Cohanim hurry across the Temple grounds to perform the ritual slaughtering, while choirs of Levites chant and sing. When your turn comes the Cohen skillfully slits the animal's throat, as he has done thousands of times before. He deftly collects the blood in a vessel and hands it to a human chain which ends at the altar, on which the blood will be sprinkled.

How will you feel? Will you be elated and inspired by the frenzied action, the smell of blood, the burning animals, the clamor of the multitude, and the music in the background, or will you feel disconcerted and confused? Do you expect all other aspects of your life to remain the same when the Temple is built? If so, would you be able to walk away from the Temple Mount, barefoot and with blood soiled garments, check into your hotel, change, and be back the following day at your office? You don't need to be a vegetarian to feel uncomfortable with the description of the sacrifices at the temple, just try to spend a couple of hours at a butcher's shop, preferably in the summer. Most of us have never seen an animal being slaughtered, except maybe for chicken for Kapparot (a practice forbidden by the Shulhan Arukh). The process happens away from us, and we receive the clean, sterilized meat, packed with absorbent pads to save us the discomfort of the sight of blood. Honestly, in the twenty-first century, do people still believe that God demands animal sacrifices of us?

The scholar who best represents this dilemma is Maimonides. In his *Guide of the Perplexed,* he argues that the system of the sacrifices was a concession, made by God to accommodate the Israelites, who knew no other way to worship their gods. According to that explanation, in a Temple built in modern times, there will [not] be room for sacrifices, since our society has changed and matured. On the other hand, in his Halakhic work, *Mishneh Torah,* there are over a dozen sections dedicated to detailed legislation of the Temple, its vessels, and the sacrifices. Which Maimonides do you follow? The rationalist who understands that sacrifices belong in the past, or the legalist who must present the full spectrum of Jewish Law? While many Jews choose to side with one of the options Maimonides offers, others prefer to live with the cognitive dissonance, feeling that the idea of sacrifices does not excite or inspire them, but adhering to the law as presented by Maimonides.

I believe that we pray for the restoration of the Temple and the sacrifices because we long for the past and this is what we have lost, and that the future may hold for us a different way of life. One might argue that one of Maimonides' Principles of Faith is the Torah is eternal and will never change, so it would be impossible to entertain an idea of a Temple in any other way than is described in the Torah. The answer to that is the Torah will never be changed by humans, but if God, through the word of the prophets, or maybe by speaking directly to all of us, informs us that a new system is in place, it is hard to

imagine that we will reject His orders and say that we adhere to the Principles of Maimonides (though I can think of some colleagues who will do just that.)

In the meantime, if we look for guidance in the Tanakh itself, we will see that the concept of sacrifices was approached with great caution, and even criticism, from the very beginning. There are the scathing prophecies and sermons of Samuel, King David, Isaiah, Micah, Hosea, Amos, and Jeremiah,[1] and there are the failed attempts of Aaron's sons and of Balaam to appease God through sacrifices. In a subtler way, the Torah informs us of the true purpose of the sacrifices in this week's Parasha, simultaneously with the introduction of the concept of sacrifices. The Torah does so by intertwining laws of impurity and protecting the Temple's possessions with laws of business ethics, honesty, and civic responsibility.

The section starts with the responsibility of citizens to report crimes to the judicial branch, and continues to discuss impurity, a powerful word which conjures images of banishment and contamination. The equation of the two is not coincidental. It is meant to plant in our mind the importance of fulfilling our civic duty. The next transgression is embezzlement of the Temple, another looming taboo, from which we go to a general statement on the transgression of any mitzvah. Following that, the Torah speaks of one who betrays God trust. And who is that person who defies God's authority, who is embezzling, as it were, God's possessions? It is the one who unlawfully took money or goods from another person.

The Torah makes it clear that there is no distinction between embezzling the Temple or your fellow man, and that being unethical and dishonest is tantamount to impurity. All these can be cured by a thorough process which includes repenting, paying damages and fines, bringing a sacrifice, and confessing publicly, but it is obvious that if only the ritual is conducted, while reparations were not made, and one did not change his ways, that the sacrifice is meaningless.

We should therefore focus on teaching these values to the next generation and on practicing them ourselves. This might lead to redemption and to the construction of the future Temple, which according to Micah (4:1-2) will be a center not for animal sacrifices, but for the dissemination of the Torah and its values:

> Micah 4:1-2:
>
> *(1) In the days to come,*
> *The Mount of the LORD's House shall stand*
> *Firm above the mountains;*
> *And it shall tower above the hills.*
> *The peoples shall gaze on it with joy,*
>
> *(2) And the many nations shall go and shall say:*
> *"Come,*
> *Let us go up to the Mount of the LORD,*
> *To the House of the God of Jacob;*
> *That He may instruct us in His ways,*
> *And that we may walk in His paths."*
> *For instruction shall come forth from Zion,*
> *The word of the LORD from Jerusalem.*

ENDNOTE:

[1] 1 Sam. 15:22-23; Psalms 51; Is. 1:10-18; Micah 6:6-9; Hos. 4:1-5:7; Amos 5:21-26; Jer. 7:1-19;

Leviticus 5:1-26:

> (1) If a person incurs guilt — When one has heard a public imprecation .... (2) Or when a person touches any impure thing ... (3) Or when one touches human impurity... (4) Or when a person utters an oath to bad or good purpose... (15) When a person commits a trespass, being unwittingly remiss about any of H's sacred things... (17) And a person who, without knowing it, sins in regard to any of H's commandments about things not to be done... (21) When a person sins and commits

> a trespass against H' — by dealing deceitfully with another in the matter of a deposit or a pledge, or through robbery, or by defrauding another, (22) or by finding something lost and lying about it; if one swears falsely regarding any one of the various things that someone may do and sin thereby... (26) The priest shall make expiation before H' on behalf of that person, who shall be forgiven for whatever was done to draw blame thereby.

Shabbat Shalom.

* Judaic faculty, Ramaz High School, New York; also Torah VeAhava. Until recently, Rabbi, Beth Sholom Sephardic Minyan (Potomac, MD). Faculty member, AJRCA non-denominational rabbinical school). **Many of Rabbi Ovadia's Devrei Torah are now available on Sefaria: https://www.sefaria.org/profile/haim-ovadia?tab=sheets** . The Sefaria articles include Hebrew text, which I must delete because of issues changing software formats. Rabbi Ovadia retains all rights (copyright) to this and all other Devrei Torah that he permits me to share.

A Bissel of Torah from a Tiny Jewish Community

By Rabbi Natanel Kaszovitz *
Auckland, New Zealand Hebrew Congregation **

Today (Thursday) we begin the month of Nissan, which means Pesach is fast approaching. I'd like to start by wishing everyone an easy, meaningful, and even enjoyable time with all the preparations – both for the Sedarim and for the cleaning.

Roni and I have been working for some time on a Pesach booklet that will be available at the deli for a gold coin donation (at cost). This guide is designed to walk you through everything you need: how to clean your kitchen and home, what products are available locally, Zmanim for the Chag, upcoming classes and events, and more. Our goal is to make the process as clear and accessible as possible. We would really appreciate your feedback, as we plan to revise and improve it while the information is still fresh.

During the month of Nissan, there is also a special blessing known as Birkat Ha'Ilanot. When one goes outside and sees blossoming trees, the following Bracha is recited, thanking Hashem for the beauty and abundance in His world:

> *"Baruch atah Hashm Elohkaynu melech haolam shelo chasar b'olamo klum u'vara vo briyot tovot v'ilanot tovim l'hanot bahem b'nei adam."*

Translation:

> *"Blessed are You, Hashem, our God, King of the universe, who has made nothing lacking in His world and created in it good creatures and good trees to give pleasure to humanity."*

In this month of Nissan, we celebrate freedom, renewal, and gratitude to Hashem. May we merit to celebrate our redemption once again, with Mashiach, together with all of Am Yisrael in Eretz Yisrael very soon.

Bahavat Yisrael,

Rabbi Netanel

* Rabbi Kaszovitz is now posting his Devrei Torah and classes on You Tube: https://youtube.com/c/TheNairobisher .

[Editor's note: If you became Rabbi of the only synagogue in a small, isolated Jewish community, at what level would you direct your Shabbat message for the congregation?]

** Rabbi Kaszovitz, an Israeli ordained at Ohr Torah Stone, previously served as Rabbi in Nairobe, Kenya. He became Rabbi of Auckland Hebrew Congregation in September 2025. Rabbi Moshe Rube, whose remarks I previously posted in this space, is in the process of starting a new Rabbinic position in Australia. Rabbi Rube is waiting for his visa to enter Australia, when he will be able to start his new position. I plan to use this space to include messages from Rabbi Kaszovitz and Rabbi Rube going forward.

Rav Kook Torah
Vayikra: The Goal of Sacrifices

Sacrifices are not an innovation of the Jewish people. Noah also offered sacrifices to God. However, not all offerings are equal. The Midrash employs the following parable to illustrate this idea:

> There was once a king who hired two chefs. The first chef cooked a meal that the king ate and enjoyed. Then the second chef cooked a meal that the king ate and enjoyed. How can we know which meal the king enjoyed more? When the king subsequently commanded the second chef, Make for me again the dish that you prepared, we realize that the second meal was the king's preferred dish.

In other words, by the fact that God commanded the Jewish people to offer sacrifices, we know that God prefers their offerings to those which Noah initiated on his own accord.

But how do we evaluate the relative worth of different sacrifices? What distinguishes the service of Israel from that of Noah?

Two Goals of Offerings

The key to assessing an offering is to examine its purpose. The more elevated the goal, the more acceptable the offering. Noah's objective in offering sacrifices after the Flood was very different than that of the Jewish people. Noah sought to preserve the physical world, to protect it from Divine retribution. Noah's offerings achieved their goal — *"God smelled the appeasing fragrance and said to Himself, 'Never again will I curse the soil because of man'"* (Gen. 8:21).

The offerings of the Jewish people aspire to a far greater objective. Their goal is to enable Israel to merit heightened levels of Divine providence and prophecy. The Torah explicitly sets out the purpose of the Temple service*: "Make for Me a sanctuary, and I will dwell in their midst"* (Ex. 8:25).

Fragrance and Bread

The difference between Noah's offerings and those of Israel is reflected in the metaphors that the Torah uses to describe them. Noah's offerings had an "appeasing fragrance" *(rei'ach nichoach),* while those of Israel are referred as "My bread" *(lachmi)*. What is the difference between a fragrance and food?

When an animal consumes vegetation, the plant life is absorbed into the animal and becomes part of it. In this way, the plant has attained a higher state of being. When a human consumes an animal, the animal is similarly elevated as it becomes part of that human being. This transformation to a higher state through consumption parallels bringing an offering with the objective of attaining a higher state of existence. The offerings of the Jewish people are called *"My bread,"* since the magnitude of change to which they aspire — perfection as prophetic beings — is similar to the transformations of plant to animal and animal to human.

The offerings of Noah, on the other hand, had only an *"appeasing fragrance."* They produced a wonderful scent and appealed to the natural senses, but they did not attempt to effect a fundamental change in nature. Their purpose was to maintain the world, to refine humanity within the framework of its natural moral and intellectual capabilities.

In fact, the offerings of the Jewish people encompass both of these objectives. They are described both as “appeasing fragrance” and as “My bread,” since we aspire to perfection in two areas — natural wisdom and Divine prophecy.

(Sapphire from the Land of Israel. Adapted from *Midbar Shur,* pp. 155-158.)

https://ravkooktorah.org/vayik62

Vayikra: The Pursuit of Meaning (5776, 5783)

By Lord Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z”l, Former UK Chief Rabbi*

The American Declaration of Independence speaks of the inalienable rights of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. Recently, following the pioneering work of Martin Seligman, founder of positive psychology, there have been hundreds of books published on happiness. Yet there is something more fundamental still to the sense of a life well-lived, namely, meaning.

The two seem similar. It’s easy to suppose that people who find meaning are happy, and people who are happy have found meaning. But the two are not the same, nor do they always overlap. Happiness is largely a matter of satisfying needs and wants. Meaning, by contrast, is about a sense of purpose in life, especially by making positive contributions to the lives of others. Happiness is largely about how you feel in the present. Meaning is about how you judge your life as a whole: past, present, and future.

Happiness is associated with taking, meaning with giving. Individuals who suffer stress, worry, or anxiety are not happy, but they may be living lives rich with meaning. Past misfortunes reduce present happiness, but people often connect such moments with the discovery of meaning. Furthermore, happiness is not unique to humans. Animals also experience contentment when their wants and needs are satisfied. But meaning is a distinctively human phenomenon. It has to do not with nature but with culture. It is not about what happens to us, but about how we interpret what happens to us. There can be happiness without meaning, and there can be meaning in the absence of happiness, even in the midst of darkness and pain.[1]

In a fascinating article in *The Atlantic,* “There’s More to Life Than Being Happy,”[2] Emily Smith argued that the pursuit of happiness can result in a relatively shallow, self-absorbed, even selfish life. What makes the pursuit of meaning different is that it is about the search for something larger than the self.

No one did more to put the question of meaning into modern discourse than the late Viktor Frankl, who has figured prominently in these essays on spirituality.[3] In the three years he spent in Auschwitz, Frankl survived and helped others to survive by inspiring them to discover a purpose in life even in the midst of hell on earth. He knew that in the camps, those who lost the will to live died. It was there that he formulated the ideas he later turned into a new type of psychotherapy based on what he called *“man’s search for meaning.”* His book of that title, written in the course of nine days in 1946, has sold more than ten million copies throughout the world, and ranks as one of the most influential works of the twentieth century.

Frankl used to say that the way to find meaning was not to ask what we want from life. Instead we should ask what life wants from us. We are each, he said, unique: in our gifts, our abilities, our skills and talents, and in the circumstances of our life. For each of us, then, there is a task only we can do. This does not mean that we are better than others. But if we believe we are here for a reason, then there is a tikkun, a mending, only we can perform; a fragment of light only we can redeem; an act of kindness, or courage, or generosity, or hospitality only we can perform; even a word of encouragement or a smile only we can give, because we are here, in this place, at this time, facing this person at this moment in their lives.

“Life is a task,” he used to say, and added, *“The religious man differs from the apparently irreligious man only by experiencing his existence not simply as a task, but as a mission.”* He or she is aware of being summoned, called, by a Source. *“For thousands of years that source has been called God.”*[4]

That is the significance of the word that gives our parsha, and the third book of the Torah, its name: Vayikra, *"And He called."* The precise meaning of this opening verse is difficult to understand. Literally translated it reads:

> *"And He called to Moses, and God spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting, saying..."* Vayikra 1:1

The first phrase seems to be redundant. If we are told that God spoke to Moses, why say in addition, *"And He called"*? Rashi explains as follows:

> *And He called to Moses: Every [time God communicated with Moses, whether signalled by the expression] "And He spoke," or "and He said," or "and He commanded," it was always preceded by [God] calling [to Moses by name].* Rashi on Vayikra 1:1.

"Calling" is an expression of endearment. It is the expression employed by the ministering angels, as it says, *"And one called to the other."* (Isaiah 6:3)

Vayikra, Rashi is telling us, means to be called to a task in love. This is the source of one of the key ideas of Western thought, namely the concept of a vocation or a calling, that is, the choice of a career or way of life not just because you want to do it, or because it offers certain benefits, but because you feel summoned to it. **You feel this is your meaning and mission in life. This is what you were placed on earth to do.** [emphasis added]

There are many such calls in Tanach. There was the call Abraham heard to leave his land and family (Gen. 12:1). There was the call to Moses at the Burning Bush (Ex. 3:4). There was the one experienced by Isaiah when he saw in a mystical vision God enthroned and surrounded by angels:

> *Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" And I said, "Here am I. Send me!"* Is. 6:8

One of the most touching is the story of the young Samuel, dedicated by his mother Hannah to serve in the sanctuary at Shiloh where he acted as an assistant to Eli the Priest. In bed at night he heard a voice calling his name. He assumed it was Eli. He ran to see what he wanted but Eli told him he had not called. This happened a second time and then a third, and by then Eli realised that it was God calling the child. He told Samuel that the next time the voice called his name, he should reply, *"Speak, Lord, for Your servant is listening."* It did not occur to the child that it might be God summoning him to a mission, but it was. Thus began his career as a prophet, judge, and anointer of Israel's first two kings, Saul and David (see I Samuel 3).

When we see a wrong to be righted, a sickness to be healed, a need to be met, and we feel it speaking to us, that is when we come as close as we can in a post-prophetic age to hearing Vayikra, God's call. And why does the word appear here, at the beginning of the third and central book of the Torah? Because **the book of Leviticus is about sacrifices, and a vocation is about sacrifices. We are willing to make sacrifices when we feel they are part of the task we are called on to do.** emphasis added]

From the perspective of eternity, we may sometimes be overwhelmed by a sense of our own insignificance. We are no more than a wave in the ocean, a grain of sand on the seashore, a speck of dust on the surface of infinity. Yet we are here because God wanted us to be, because there is a task He wants us to perform. The search for meaning is the quest for this task.

Each of us is unique. Even genetically identical twins are different. There are things only we can do, we who are what we are, in this time, this place, and these circumstances. For each of us God has a task: work to perform, a kindness to show, a gift to give, love to share, loneliness to ease, pain to heal, or broken lives to help mend. Discerning that task, hearing Vayikra, God's call, is one of the great spiritual challenges for each of us.

How do we know what it is? Some years ago, in *To Heal a Fractured World,* I offered this as a guide, and it still seems to me to make sense: **Where what we want to do meets what needs to be done, that is where God wants us to be.** [emphasis added]

FOOTNOTES:

[1] See Roy F. Baumeister, Kathleen D. Vohs, Jennifer Aaker, and Emily N. Garbinsky, "Some Key Differences between a Happy Life and a Meaningful Life," *Journal of Positive Psychology,* vol. 8, issue 6 (2013): pp. 505–16.

[2] Emily Smith, "There's More to Life Than Being Happy," *The Atlantic,* 9 January 2013.

[3] See in particular the essay from earlier in this series for entitled "Reframing."

[4] Viktor Frankl, *The Doctor and the Soul: from Psychotherapy to Logotherapy* (New York: A. A. Knopf, 1965), p. 13.

Around the Shabbat Table:

[1] Who decides on what your calling is?

[2] Do you know what your calling is? How do you know?

[3] Can you think of other key times in the Tanach when God called someone to a task?

https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/vayikra/the-pursuit-of-meaning/ Note: because Likutei Torah and the Internet Parsha Sheet, both attached by E-mail, normally include the two most recent Devrei Torah by Rabbi Sacks, I have selected an earlier Devar.

Heart vs. Action

By Karen Kaplan * © Chabad

Sometimes I act like a human robot. I brush my teeth without thought, do housework mindlessly, and, worst of all, I do mitzvot by rote, without feeling, without putting my heart and soul into each one.

The Book of Vayikra (Leviticus) goes into great detail about the animal sacrifices offered in the Temple. Everything from the age and sex of the animal, to how and where it was slaughtered, how the blood was sprinkled, and which parts could be eaten and by who[m], is covered in these pages. Each sacrifice was meaningful; there were peace offerings, guilt offerings, daily offerings, offerings of thanksgiving, and the additional offerings on Shabbat and holidays, among others.

While the many physical details of the sacrifices were scrupulously observed, did the people, as I do, sometimes lose sight of the "heart and soul" of the offering? Does the mitzvah count if you scrupulously perform the physical details but without feeling?

Conversely, is it ever enough to offer up only your heart and soul, or do you have to also physically perform the mitzvah?

Sometimes the Action Is Enough ...

Imagine this scenario: It's December and you see your neighbor's children walking to school in windbreakers. You know the father lost his job, and your heart aches for those cold children. Is feeling bad a substitute for getting them warm coats? Of course not. All the empathy in the world won't warm those children. And what if you don't like these neighbors? If you keep those feelings to yourself and buy coats for the kids, albeit grudgingly, have you performed the mitzvah?

Yes! Your inner feelings are secondary; what matters is the action.

And Sometimes It Isn't ...

There are some mitzvahs that demand more than autopilot. King David says*, "You do not desire that I bring a sacrifice, nor do You wish for a burnt-offering. A contrite spirit is the sacrifice for G d."*1

In other words, in Temple times, merely bringing a sin offering wasn't enough. It was an outward action that was supposed to go hand in hand with the inner feelings of regret and return.

And this process hasn't changed since the days of the Temple. If you've said or done something to hurt someone, offering an insincere apology isn't going to heal the relationship. It won't even heal you. Like the offering, the apology must go hand in hand with genuine regret.

The First Step

It is natural to go through the motions at times, fulfilling the letter of the law without the heart and soul. But mitzvahs are the way we connect to G d. Each one we perform is like a precious thread running between us. The more we do, the more threads we make, until we have a sturdy rope that keeps us constantly tethered. Robots can't do that, because these threads are woven with feelings.

So, how can we put our hearts and souls into every mitzvah we do?

Thankfully, G d gave us the answer in one of His first commandments. It's a commandment that's all heart and soul; no physical action is required. It will turn off the inner robot and turn on the feelings and sincerity needed to spark that connection.

It's the mitzvah to believe in G d. This is the first of the Ten Commandments, *"I am the L rd Your G d,"* by which we are instructed to believe in His existence. This is echoed by Maimonides in the first of his 13 Principles of Faith.

This non-physical, actionless mitzvah can be seen as the *"pre-mitzvah mitzvah."* Take a moment — before performing any mitzvah — to reaffirm your belief in G d. Remind yourself Who gave you that mitzvah and Who you're doing it for. This moment can't be done like a robot because it's all about what's happening in your heart, soul, and feelings. It transforms a robot into a human, and thereby transforms a mundane action into a spiritually connected experience.

Here is an analogy:

Imagine it's your father's birthday, and you have budgeted $100 for a gift for him. You can pull an assortment of bills totaling $100 out of your wallet, shove them in a plain envelope, and write "Happy Birthday" on the envelope. Or you can spend $100 on two tickets, one for each of you, to a baseball game where his favorite team is playing.

In the first case, you hand over an envelope. In the second case, you spend the day together doing something he loves. It's a $100 gift in either case. But clearly the tickets are a more heartfelt gift because you've shown you care about the recipient and what he would enjoy.

Similarly, we can perform a mitzvah by *"stuffing our actions in an envelope,"* or we can invest those same actions with care and feeling.

Same actions, but what a difference!

FOOTNOTES:

1. Psalm 51.

* Community volunteer (Chicago).

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/5865746/jewish/Heart-vs-Action.htm

---

Vayikra: A Positive Prejudice

By Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky

G-d taught Moses the procedures for sin-offerings, which atoned principally for unintentional misdeeds. Special sin-offerings are prescribed when such sins are committed by the community's leaders – the high priest, the Sanhedrin (high court), or the king. When the Sanhedrin issued an incorrect ruling that the community followed, the community had to bring a sin-offering.

> *He must do to the bull just as he would do to the sin offering bull [of the high priest]. He must do this to it to atone for them so they may be forgiven.* (Lev. 4:20)

The Torah does not completely describe the details of how the sin-offering brought by the community is handled, preferring instead to simply say that it should be treated the same way as the previously-discussed offering. Rashi tells us that this is because G-d does not wish to dwell on the wrongdoings of His people.

The Torah enjoins us to learn from G-d's example.

Our love for our fellow should permeate us so thoroughly that when we do him or her a favor, we feel that we are doing it for ourselves rather than for someone else. Similarly, anything that happens to another person, good or bad, should affect us personally.

And, following the example in this verse, we should recoil at the very prospect of saying something depreciative about someone else.

--From Kehot's *Daily Wisdom* Vol. 3

* Insights by **the Lubavitcher Rebbe** on the weekly parashat from Chabad's *Daily Wisdom* 3 by Rabbi Moshe Wisnefsky.

Gut Shabbos,

Rabbi Yosef B. Friedman
Kehot Publication Society
291 Kingston Ave., Brooklyn, NY 11213

Likutei Divrei Torah

Gleanings of Divrei Torah on Parashat Hashavuah via the Internet

Shabbat Shalom

Volume 32, Issue 23 **Shabbat Parashat Vayikra** **5786 B"H**

Covenant and Conversation
Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, z"l

Why Do We Sacrifice?

The laws of sacrifices that dominate the early chapters of the Book of Leviticus are among the hardest in the Torah to relate to in the present. It has been almost two thousand years since the Temple was destroyed and the sacrificial system came to an end. But Jewish thinkers, especially the more mystical among them, strove to understand the inner significance of the sacrifices and the statement they made about the relationship between humanity and God. They were thus able to rescue their spirit even if their physical enactment was no longer possible. Among the simplest yet most profound was the comment made by Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, the first Rebbe of Lubavitch. He noticed a grammatical oddity about the second line of this Parsha: Speak to the Children of Israel and say to them: "When one of you offers a sacrifice to the Lord, the sacrifice must be taken from the cattle, sheep, or goats." Lev. 1:2

Or so the verse would read if it were constructed according to the normal rules of grammar. However, the word order of the sentence in Hebrew is strange and unexpected. We would expect to read: adam mikem ki yakriv, "when one of you offers a sacrifice." Instead, what it says is adam ki yakriv mikem, "when one offers a sacrifice of you."

The essence of sacrifice, said Rabbi Shneur Zalman, is that we offer ourselves. We bring to God our faculties, our energies, our thoughts and emotions. The physical form of sacrifice – an animal offered on the altar – is only an external manifestation of an inner act. The real sacrifice is mikem, "of you." We give God something of ourselves.[1]

What exactly is it that we give God when we offer a sacrifice? The Jewish mystics, among them Rabbi Shneur Zalman, spoke about two souls that each of us has within us – the animal soul (nefesh habeheimit) and the Godly soul. On the one hand we are physical beings. We are part of nature. We have physical needs: food, drink, shelter. We are born, we live, we die. As Ecclesiastes puts it:

Man's fate is like that of the animals; the same fate awaits them both: as one dies, so dies the other. Both have the same breath; man has no advantage over the animal. Everything is a mere fleeting breath. Eccl. 3:19

Yet we are not simply animals. We have within us immortal longings. We can think, speak, and communicate. We can, by acts of speaking and listening, reach out to others. We are the one life-form known to us in the universe that can ask the question "why?" We can formulate ideas and be moved by high ideals. We are not governed by biological drives alone. Psalm 8 is a hymn of wonder on this theme:

When I consider Your heavens,
the work of Your fingers,
the moon and the stars,
which You have set in place,
what is man that You are mindful of him,
the son of man that You care for him?
Yet You made him a little lower than the angels
and crowned him with glory and honour.
You made him ruler over the works of Your hands;
You put everything under his feet.
Ps. 8:4–7

Physically, we are almost nothing; spiritually, we are brushed by the wings of eternity. We have a Godly soul. The nature of sacrifice, understood psychologically, is thus clear. What we offer God is (not just an animal but) the nefesh habeheimit, the animal soul within us.

How does this work out in detail? A hint is given by the three types of animal mentioned in the verse in the second line of Parshat Vayikra (see Lev. 1:2): beheimah (animal), bakar (cattle), and tzon (flock). Each represents a separate animal-like feature of the human personality.

Beheimah represents the animal instinct itself. The word refers to domesticated animals. It does not imply the savage instincts of the predator. What it means is something more tame. Animals spend their time searching for food. Their lives are bounded by the struggle to survive. To sacrifice the animal within us is to be moved by something more than mere survival.

Wittgenstein, when asked what was the task of philosophy, answered, "To show the fly the way out of the fly-bottle."[2] The fly, trapped in the bottle, bangs its head against the glass, trying to find a way out. The one thing it fails to do is to look up. The Godly soul within us is the force that makes us look up, beyond the physical world, beyond mere survival, in search of meaning, purpose, goal.

The Hebrew word bakar, cattle, reminds us of the word boker, dawn, literally to "break through," as the first rays of sunlight break through the darkness of night. Cattle, stampeding, break through barriers. Unless constrained by fences, cattle are no respecters of boundaries. To sacrifice the bakar is to learn to recognise and respect boundaries – between holy and profane, pure and impure, permitted and forbidden. Barriers of the mind can sometimes be stronger than walls.

Finally, the word tzon, flocks, represents the herd instinct – the powerful drive to move in a given direction because others are doing likewise.[3] The great figures of Judaism – Abraham, Moses, the Prophets – were distinguished precisely by their ability to stand apart from the herd; to be different, to challenge the idols of the age, to refuse to capitulate to the intellectual fashions of the moment. That, ultimately, is the meaning of holiness in Judaism. Kadosh, the holy, is something set apart, different, separate, distinctive. Jews were the only minority in history consistently to refuse to assimilate to the dominant culture or convert to the dominant faith.

The noun korban, "sacrifice," and the verb lehakriv, "to offer something as a sacrifice," actually mean "that which is brought close" and "the act of bringing close." The key element is not so much giving something up (the usual meaning of sacrifice), but rather bringing something close to God. Lehakriv is to bring the animal element within us to be transformed through the Divine fire that once

What Does Judaism Say About … Podcast with Rabbi Dr. Nachum Amsel. The week's topic is: **Underlying Values and Concepts of Shabbat**
Next week: Shabbat - Even Deeper Ideas
Search for "Nachum Amsel" on your podcast app or go to:
Apple: tinyurl.com/applejudaismsays
Spotify: tinyurl.com/spotifyjudaismsays

burned on the altar, and still burns at the heart of prayer if we truly seek closeness to God.

By one of the ironies of history, this ancient idea has become suddenly contemporary. Darwinism, the decoding of the human genome, and scientific materialism (the idea that the material is all there is) have led to the widespread conclusion that we are all animals, nothing more, nothing less. We share 98 per cent of our genes with the primates. We are, as Desmond Morris used to put it, "the naked ape."[4] On this view, Homo sapiens exist by mere accident. We are the result of a random series of genetic mutations and just happen to be more adapted to survival than other species. The nefesh habeheimit, the animal soul, is all there is.

The refutation of this idea – and it is surely among the most reductive ever to be held by intelligent minds – lies in the very act of sacrifice itself as the mystics understood it. We can redirect our animal instincts. We can rise above mere survival. We are capable of honouring boundaries. We can step outside our environment. As Harvard neuroscientist Steven Pinker put it: "Nature does not dictate what we should accept or how we should live," adding, "and if my genes don't like it they can go jump in the lake."[5] Or, as Katharine Hepburn majestically said to Humphrey Bogart in The African Queen, "Nature, Mr Allnut, is what we were put on earth to rise above."

We can transcend the beheimah, the bakar, and the tzon. No animal is capable of self-transformation, but we are. Poetry, music, love, wonder – the things that have no survival value but which speak to our deepest sense of being – all tell us that we are not mere animals, assemblages of selfish genes. By bringing that which is animal within us close to God, we allow the material to be suffused with the spiritual and we become something else: no longer slaves of nature but servants of the living God.

[1] Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi, Likkutei Torah (Brooklyn, NY: Kehot, 1984), Vayikra 2aff.
[2] Ludwig Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations (New York: Macmillan, 1953), p. 309.
[3] The classic works on crowd behaviour and the herd instinct are Charles Mackay, Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds (London: Richard Bentley, 1841); Gustave le Bon, The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind (London: T. F. Unwin, 1897); Wilfred Trotter, Instincts of the Herd in Peace and War (London: T. F. Unwin, 1916); and Elias Canetti, Crowds and Power (New York: Viking Press, 1962).
[4] Desmond Morris, The Naked Ape (New York: Dell Publishing, 1984).
[5] Steven Pinker, How the Mind Works (New York: W.W. Norton, 1997), p. 54.

Shabbat Shalom: Rabbi Shlomo Riskin

Uplifting the World

"Speak unto the children of Israel and say unto them: When any person of you brings an offering unto God, you shall bring from the cattle, the herd or the flock." (Leviticus 1:2)

The book of Leviticus continues where the book of Exodus left off: after the exquisite description of the complexity of the Sanctuary's components, the Torah is ready to introduce the priestly duties of sacrifices described in the verse above.

Undoubtedly, the entire sacrificial system, replete with whole burnt offerings, sin offerings, guilt offerings and peace offerings, has a rather raucous ring to the modern sophisticated ear.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch attempts to provide a symbolic significance for each of the sacrifices, and etymologically suggests that the essence of korban (Hebrew for sacrifice) is to bring the individual close (karov) to God.

For our purposes, I'd like to approach the entire holy Temple ceremony by analyzing a rather striking midrash which emphasizes an otherwise innocuous pronoun in our opening verse: "When any person of you (mikem) brings an offering unto God…." The fact is that if the purpose of our verse is to issue a command to bring offerings, it could just as easily have been transmitted without the word mikem. Indeed, this particular pronoun in this particular context never appears in the Bible again. Teaches the midrash:

"Why does [the biblical text] state mikem [of you]? From here we derive that whoever fulfils the obligation to recite one hundred blessings each day is considered as if he/she offered a sacrifice. How do we know this? From the Hebrew word mikem [of you], which has the numerical equivalent of one hundred [mem-kafmem=40+20+40]." (Midrash Yalkut Ma'ayan Ganim, ad loc.)

Why does the midrash link these 100 daily blessings with an offering to God? Presumably, if we understand the connection, the world of blessings may very well illuminate the world of sacrifice.

Let us examine the essence of a blessing. Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi in his classic work The Kuzari, teaches that the laws of proper blessings enhance our pleasure, create heightened awareness and a more sensitized appreciation of every object in the world; indeed, the necessity of our making a blessing precludes the possibility of our taking for granted God's many bounties. The Kuzari illustrates his concept by the analogy of a drunkard fortunate enough to have a patron. This drunkard, like all people, asked for and received special foods, vintage wines and splendid clothing. But as luck would have it, the patron's benevolence reached the drunkard during one of his binges. When he finally woke from his stupor, it was clear that he had no sense of having received anything from his benefactor. His mind – totally absorbed inside a bottle of illusions – had no memory and therefore no concept of what he had been given. Pleasure demands awareness, and a blessing sharpens our senses, leading them to appreciate what we have and are about to enjoy: a glorious sunrise, a burst of lightning, the children around the Sabbath or festival table, a bright, red strawberry.

But what then should we do with our awareness? How do we channel our new-found awakenings to the gifts of the world around us? A comment of Rabbi Aaron Soloveitchik, of blessed memory, on a passage in Tractate Berakhot, can provide us with an interesting insight.

Rabbi Levi asked concerning two contrasting texts. It is written:

"'The heavens are the heavens of God but the earth has He given to the children of men, '(Ps. 115:16), and it is also written, "The earth is the Lord's, and the fullness thereof" (Ps. 115:16). There is no contradiction: in the one case it is before a blessing has been said, in the other case after." (Berakhot 35a)

The usual interpretation explains that before I make a blessing, everything belongs to God; the blessing is my request for permission to partake of God's world. Hence, partaking of something without a blessing is in effect committing thievery against God; it is as a result of our blessing that the Almighty grants us permission to partake of His physical world. In effect, before the blessing, the world is God's, and after the blessing, He gives the world's bounty to us humans.

In a unique twist, Rabbi Soloveitchik turns this interpretation on its head: "The heavens are the heavens of God, but the earth has He given to the children of men." (Ps. 115:16) is the description of the world before blessings, and the verse, "The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof," is after the blessing!

Why? A world devoid of blessing is a world without any divine connection, a neo-platonic world with an iron curtain separating the human and godly realms. The spiritual belongs to the heavenly domain, to God, while the physical is the sphere of humanity – and never do the twain meet. But once the human being utters a blessing before enjoying any worldly gift or upon experiencing a special historical or natural phenomenon, humanity is admitting

God into the world, it is suffusing the physical sphere with divine spirituality, and it is recognizing God's gifts within the material world.

Suddenly, earth and heaven are no longer enemies, strangers in a strange universe, but all of God's creations magnificently and miraculously come together. If the Torah has one urgent message, it is the sanctification of our physical world. For Jews, the divine and the physical meet in an eternal dialogue, and the first expression of that dialogue is the blessings we make.

An additional and related aspect of the significance of blessings is the Hassidic-Kabbalistic nation. Early in the book of Genesis, God becomes disappointed with His world and decides to destroy it (except for the righteous Noah, that is):

"And God said, 'I will blot out the human being whom I have created…. both humans, and beast, and creeping things, and fowl of the air….'" (Genesis 6:7)

Rashi asks why God's anger is directed toward animals? After all, these brute creatures are innocent of any wrongdoing. Rashi then presents us with two possible interpretations. First, that all of creation including animal life had become so depraved that nothing could be called innocent – a perversity that pervaded all of reality. But his second answer is the one that concerns us here:

"Everything was created for the human being. When he ceases to be, what need have I for them (beasts, creeping things, fowl)." (Rashi, ad loc.)

This is a profound idea that looks at God's creation as a hierarchy, starting with inanimate rocks, ascending toward living plant life, and from there to animal creatures of mobility and then reaching upward to the communicating human being. All the mobility of an animal cannot alter the fact that animals are ruled by the earth and the waters and the skies, into the mold of each individual species. Only the human being's gift of communication enables him to relate to God – if indeed he utilizes his freedom of choice properly.

Now when the human being takes the objects of the world around him, and he makes blessings over the world he lives in, he brings all of existence – including plant life, animal life, and every worldly object – into a relationship with God. In effect he is giving a higher purpose to all of these realms, thereby bringing everything back to its ultimate divine source. By uplifting the world, by restoring it to its divine dimension, the human being repairs a world broken by iniquity and despair, alienation and materialism And without this potential for uplifting the world, without a lofty and up-reaching human being, all of creation becomes short-circuited, the universe has no purpose for being, a reverse "bang" takes place.

Now we are ready to return to our midrash, the rabbinic concept which identified the daily blessings with the sacrifices that brought humanity close to the divine. What God wants from us is not only to build a Sanctuary, but to transform the entire world into God's Sanctuary, God's Temple. "You shall make for Me a Sanctuary so that I may dwell in your midst," commands God. And so the sacrifices bring cattle, grain and fruits back to the Almighty who created them, enlisting the world – inanimate, vegetative and the human facilitators – in the service of the divine.

Just as Temple sacrifices brought God into the world in the period of the Sanctuary, so do the daily 100 blessings bring God into the world – suffuse the material world with divine spirituality – in our world today. By means of daily blessings we have the potential of making the entire universe a divine sanctuary.

The Person in the Parsha
Rabbi Dr. Tzvi Hersh Weinreb

Sacrificial Ethics

Last week, we finished the Chumash of Shemos and learned about the construction of the Mishkan. Much effort and very much cooperation was involved in that difficult but necessary and important process. We were able to appreciate the ethical and spiritual benefits of giving, of the importance of the participation of every individual if a community, however large and gifted, is to achieve its goals.

It is not naïve to assume that even the contemporary phenomenon of Jewish generosity and our people's enthusiastic involvement in charitable causes has its roots in the degree to which we all contributed to the sacred task of building the Mishkan. The successful completion of this task is even more remarkable when one realizes that it was achieved by a mass of "homeless" people wandering through an arid and untamed wilderness.

This week, we begin the Chumash of Vayikra and for several weeks will read about the animal sacrifices that were offered in the Mishkan, and continued to be offered in the Holy Temple of Jerusalem (with some disruptions) for many centuries.

Many people find themselves perplexed by these upcoming readings. For one thing, they find the very notion of animal sacrifices disturbing. They associate such sacrifices with primitive societies and consider them totally alien to modern sensitivities. They even have difficulties with the fact that we include pleas for the imminent restoration of such sacrifices in our daily prayers and even more so in our prayers during the Sabbath and Festivals.

Some of those of us who are troubled by sacrificial rites are aware of Maimonides's suggestion that these rites were only temporarily necessary for an ancient people that was accustomed to, if not steeped in, such practices and had to be gradually weaned from them. The fact that Maimonides himself devoted major sections of his major work to a detailed explication of sacrificial procedures seems to indicate that his suggestion that they were impermanent was just that, a suggestion.

Others, less concerned with animal sacrifices per se, ask this question: "The Torah is meant to be a guide to our ethical behavior and soulful spirituality. How does this week's parsha, and the next several parshiyot, guide us ethically or inspire us spiritually?"

Our commentaries throughout the ages have taken these concerns seriously and have addressed them in ways that were consistent with the cultural backgrounds of their audiences. This week, and for the next several weekly Torah portions, I will attempt to present approaches to this topic, some classic and some quite recent.

To begin with a truly classic commentator, I'll share Rashi's concern with one word in the opening verses of our parsha. The verses read:

"The Lord called to Moshe. From the Tent of Meeting, He spoke to him and said, 'Speak to the Israelites. Say: When one of you [adam mikem] brings an animal offering to the Lord, you may bring it either from the herd [cattle] or from the flock [sheep or goats].'"

Rashi quickly picks up on the extraordinary use of the word adam instead of "one of you" or "man" or "person". After all, adam is the name of one specific man, namely Adam, the first man created. Rashi answers:

"Just as Adam did not bring an offering from a stolen animal, for—as the only human then alive—everything was his, so too should none of you offer a stolen animal."

Rabbi Avigdor HaLevi Nebenzahl, the Chief Rabbi of the Old City of Jerusalem, used this comment of Rashi in an informal lecture to his students. He was particularly disturbed by the assumption that everything on earth "belonged" to Adam in that primeval setting. After all, the Lord is described as the Koneh HaKol, the owner of everything, including

Adam himself. Did Adam indeed "own" every living creature, every plant and tree, mountain and river? Of course not.

Rabbi Nebenzahl proceeds to analyze the nature of the prohibition of offering sacrifices from stolen animals.

One of his helpful insights is the distinction he makes between two purposes for the prohibition. One is a social purpose: Positive relationships among the component members of society require trust and interdependence. Without rules and regulations, life in a society would be unbearable.

The second is a spiritual purpose: The cultivation of spirit and soul in this mundane world requires rules governing monetary matters. Only with such rules can the soul advance from "earth to heaven."

Rabbi Nebenzahl is astonished by the brazenness of a person who steals an animal and offers it to God! What can he be thinking? Can a Divine Being be duped or bribed? Or can God be so needy that He would ignore the egregious sin of theft just to, so to speak, satisfy his needs? Has the good Lord no compassion for the poor victim of the theft?

One who offers stolen animals is either blasphemous, or has a self-centered motivation so consuming that he develops a perverse theology, or is just plain stupid.

The use of the term adam provides Rashi with the opportunity to demonstrate the most fundamental aspects of an authentic theology, namely that worship and blatant sin cannot go hand in hand. The Lord despises theft, just as He despises all human behaviors that harm other humans. Legitimate acts of worship must be free of wrongdoing. This is a concept that Talmudic sages formulated long ago—nothing is a mitzvah if it comes about through an averah.

How apt are the following prophetic teachings of Micah, and how useful are his words as a framework for gaining perspective on the entire concept of sacrificial ritual as we soon confront the entire Chumash Vayikra:

"What then can I offer the Lord when I bow low to the God Most High? Should I come before Him with burnt offerings, with year-old calves? Would the Lord want a thousand rams, untold rivulets of oil? Should I offer my firstborn as payment for my crimes, the fruit of my womb for the sins of my being? Man, God has told you what is good and what the Lord seeks from you: only to do justice, love goodness, and walk modestly with your God." (Micah 6:6-8)

Dvar Torah: Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis

How can we feel an attachment to the Almighty? At the beginning of the Parsha of Vayikra, which marks the start of the book of Vayikra, Hashem gives us a commandment:"Adam ki-yakriv mikkem korban la-Hashem."
" –When anyone among you would like to bring an offering, a sacrifice, to Hashem."

However, the phrasing seems a bit awkward. Literally, it translates as:
"Adam ki-yakriv" – "a person, when they offer a sacrifice", "mikkem" – "from among you", "korban la-Hashem" – "a sacrifice to Hashem".

It would have made more sense if it said, "Adam mikem," meaning "someone among you."

The Alter Lubavitcher Rebbe explained beautifully, this is how you should read it:

"Adam ki-yakriv" – when any person wants to come to the Almighty, "mikkem korban la-Hashem" – that closeness should come from you.

Don't just wait for God to enter your life. You need to take those first steps, and Hashem will respond in a magnificent way.

The Talmud teaches us that Hashem says: "Pit'chu li petach shel machat, va-ani eftach lachem pit'cho shel ulam." Open for Me just the space of the eye of a needle, and in return, I will open for you the size of a large hall.

Hashem is telling us: All we need to do is make a small effort, and He will respond in the most remarkable way.

This is exactly what we experience when we perform Mitzvot, study Torah, raise our spiritual level, and deepen our awareness of our tradition. It's incredible how the Almighty becomes an integral part of our lives, lifting us up and allowing us to live a meaningful and joyous existence.

It's a bit like the lottery. You can't complain about never winning the jackpot if, in the first place, you didn't buy a ticket.

There is a Chassidic idea that puts it this way: Where can God be found? The answer is: Where people let Him in.

Ohr Torah Stone Dvar Torah

The Sin-Offering of the Community
Dr. Miriam Weitman

"And if the entire congregation of Israel errs…" The sin-offering (chatat) is intended to atone for a sin committed unintentionally—generally the inadvertent sin of an individual. However, in the portion of Vayikra, and again in the portion of Shelach-Lecha in the Book of Bamidbar, a sin-offering appears that is meant to atone for an unintentional sin committed by the entire community. A comparison between these two instances of the communal sin-offering indicates that they do not refer to the same sin, nor to the same sacrifice, and not even to the same depth of forgiveness and atonement.

Vayikra 4:13–21: "And if the entire congregation of Israel errs, and the matter is hidden from the eyes of the assembly, and they perform one of all the commandments of the Lord that must not be done, and they incur guilt—when the sin that they committed becomes known, the congregation shall bring a young bull as a sin-offering and bring it before the Tent of Meeting… and they shall be forgiven… it is the sin-offering of the congregation."

Bamidbar 15:22–26: "And if you err and do not perform all these commandments that the Lord spoke to Moshe… then the entire congregation shall prepare one young bull as a burnt-offering… and one he-goat as a sin-offering… and they shall be forgiven, for it was an error… and forgiveness shall be granted to the entire congregation of the children of Israel and to the stranger who sojourns among them, for the entire people acted in error."

In the portion of Vayikra, the situation described is one in which the entire congregation of Israel has sinned through a single transgression: "And if the entire congregation of Israel errs… and they perform one of all the commandments of the Lord that must not be done." By contrast, in the portion of Shelach-Lecha the situation described is one in which the entire congregation of Israel fails to uphold all the commandments of the Torah: "And if you err and do not perform all these commandments that the Lord spoke to Moshe."

The sacrifices in the two cases also differ. In the first case, a bull is brought as a sin-offering for a single sin committed by the entire community (in the language of the Sages: par he'elem davar, "the bull for an unwitting communal sin"). In the second case, a double offering is required—a bull as a burnt-offering and a goat as a sin-offering—when the entire congregation has sinned and has failed to observe all the commandments of the Lord.

How could a situation arise in which the entire congregation sins unintentionally? According to the Sages, this refers to a sin committed by the entire community as a result of an erroneous ruling of the Sanhedrin. "If the court issued a ruling and the entire congregation, or the majority of them, acted in accordance with

it—they bring a bull. And in the case of idolatry, they bring a bull and a goat" (Mishnah Horayot 1:5).

In the portion of Vayikra, the reference is to an incorrect ruling of the court in any matter whatsoever. In the portion of Shelach-Lecha, however, the mistaken ruling concerns idolatry, which is considered equivalent to all the commandments combined. In both cases, each individual who sinned unintentionally does not bring a separate offering; rather, a single communal sacrifice is brought to atone for all. The transfer of responsibility from the individual to the collective expresses the understanding that the sin arose from a systemic failure of authority, rather than from the personal decision of each sinner.

However, the Ramban (on Bamidbar 15:22) cites the words of the Sages and adds that according to the plain meaning of the text, the distinction between the two cases does not lie in the nature of the halachic ruling, but in two fundamentally different realities. In Vayikra, indeed, the entire community has sinned as a result of an erroneous ruling of the court. But in the portion of Shelach-Lecha a different public consciousness is described—a situation in which the entire people of Israel has cast off the yoke of Torah and commandments, based on the mistaken belief that the world has changed and the observance of mitzvot is no longer necessary: "…for example, they may think that the time for [observing the] Torah has already passed… or they may have forgotten the Torah."

We are familiar with such phenomena: the belief that "the time for Torah has passed," as well as the reality of Torah being forgotten in the wake of an iron curtain that left generations of Jews without any knowledge of it. The Torah is aware of—and responds to—the possibility that Jews might become detached from Torah because of internal ideological forces or external historical pressures. Even after such a rupture, the Torah charts a path of return and atonement.

The Ramban's interpretation introduces a profound insight: an error (shegagah) is not merely a mistake concerning a specific halachic detail, but can also be a mistaken understanding of the place of Torah in our lives. Even a sweeping and profound deviation may be considered an error if its source lies in a flawed consciousness rather than in deliberate opposition. This understanding reframes even the deepest spiritual crises as inadvertent sins—failures that can ultimately be repaired.

Understanding the nature of the error described in Shelach-Lecha also explains the need for a burnt-offering (olah) in addition to the sin-offering. The sin-offering repairs the past, while the burnt-offering builds the future. Precisely when the sin is all-encompassing — "you do not perform all the commandments"— a sin-offering alone is not sufficient. A burnt-offering is also required: a sacrifice that does not atone for a specific transgression, but rather expresses complete devotion. Returning to Torah is not merely the correction of what once was, but the renewal of the Covenant itself.

In both passages that deal with the communal sin-offerings, the following promise appears: "and they shall be forgiven." Yet in the second passage, which deals with the case in which the entire people cease to observe the Torah, the wording is doubled, amplifying the possibility of forgiveness: "and they shall be forgiven, for it was an error… and forgiveness shall be granted to the entire congregation of the children of Israel and to the stranger who sojourns among them, for the entire people has acted in error."

This verse of forgiveness has become one of the climactic moments of our prayers on Yom Kippur. We repeat it on Yom Kippur at moments of profound elevation, with the hope and faith that the Holy One will receive our prayers and recognize our desire to return to Him. When we recite this verse, we do not merely pray for individual sins, but also for the relationship itself. We seek forgiveness even for periods in which Torah ceased to be the language of our lives—whether due to historical, cultural, social, or personal circumstances.

Perhaps for this reason this verse was chosen as one of the great climactic verses of Yom Kippur—as a promise that the path of return will never be lost.

"And forgiveness shall be granted to the entire congregation of the children of Israel and to the stranger who sojourns among them, for the entire people has acted in error."

Dvar Torah: TorahWeb.Org

Rabbi Mordechai Willig

The Will of Hashem

I. "A pleasant fragrance (reiach nicho"ach) to Hashem" (Vayikra 1:9). Contentment (nachas ru"ach) before Me, that I said and My will was done (v"na"aseh r"tzoni) (Rashi).

The Mishna (Zevachim 46b) lists six things for which a korban (zevach) is brought. One is l"sheim Hashem. The K"sav V"hakabala asks on Rashi, why is nicho"ach listed separately if it means "contentment before Me"? The Gemara adds the word "Hanachas ruach laShem". What does that mean?

The K"sav V"hakabala links rei"ach to ru"ach. In the haftora for the last day of Pesach, the Moshiach will be blessed with the spirit (ru"ach) of Hashem (Yeshaya 11:2). He will be censed (vaharicho) with the reiach (scent) of yiras Hashem (11:3). Indeed, it is ruach, wind, which spreads reiach, scent.

Nichoach denotes lowering, as in yaniach yado, when Moshe lowered his hand (Shemos 17:11), as opposed to yarim, raised his hand. The korban must include "hashpalas haru"ach v"hachna"aso". The double ches of nicho"ach indicates extreme humility and subservience to Hashem. Only a humble person, whose mind and wisdom rule over his spirit, can avoid his spirit leading to sinful thoughts and deeds. The sacrifices Hashem desires are a broken spirit, a heart broken and humbled (Tehillim 51:19). This is hanachas ru"ach, lowering one"s spirit.

Indeed, the Gemara (Sanhedrin 43b) commenting on this passuk, says that one who feels lowly, the Torah considers it as if he brought every type of korban, and his prayers are answered.

II. The K"sav V" hakabala states that in every person are implanted forces (kochos) and their reverse (hipuchei kochos). When aroused by his spirit (ruach) they can be used for good or bad. Only one who has a humble spirit can control his thoughts and forces to subdue an idea which is against the Torah and avoid sin. A humble spirit is a prerequisite to be counted among the students of Avraham Avinu (Avos 5:19).

The next mishna (5:20) teaches how to do the will (la"ason ratzon) of Hashem, a term the aforementioned Rashi (1:9) employs. Remarkably, R" Yehuda ben Teima begins: "Be as bold (az) as a leopard", a typically negative trait (Rambam). He concludes paradoxically "az panim l"Gehinnom". The Tosfos Yom Tov resolves the apparent contradiction. The trait of boldness is advisable only to do the will of Hashem. Otherwise, it is very bad, especially if used against the will of Hashem.

The Maharal links the two mishnayos in the negative. The students of Bilam inherit Gehinnom because of their arrogant spirit (ru"ach gevoha). Az is linked to fire (Beitza 25b), including the fire of Gehinnom. However, to do Hashem"s will boldness is required to overcome natural inertia. Rashi"s term is "lahut b"mitzvos", fire in doing Hashem"s will, the opposite of azus which leads to the fire of Gehinom.

The Rambam says that boldness is required to rebuke sinners. However, it must be done only l"sheim shamayim, as the Mishna concludes: to do the will of your Father in Heaven.

III. The Tur (Orach Chaim 1:1) opens his magnum opus with R" Yehuda ben Teima"s exhortation to be as bold as a leopard. He explains that one should not be embarrassed because of people who mock him in his service of Hashem. The Beis Yosef, cited in the Mishna Berura (5), states that one should not quarrel with them. The trait of boldness is very despicable. It should be avoided even in service of Hashem, lest he acquires this trait even when serving Hashem is not involved.

In B"iur Halacha, he limits the words of the Beis Yosef to a private encounter. However, if in his place there are heretics who rebel against the Torah and can lead others away from the will of Hashem, and his peaceful words and fell on deaf ears, it is a mitzva to quarrel them and to foil their plans as much as possible.

It requires great discretion, even for individuals with the requisite lowly spirit, to know whether, or how, to respond to contemporary challenges of this sort. Rav Soloveitchik, in 1975, responded to what he considered a heretical statement in very sharp, uncharacteristic terms [See Light 17 Kislev 5736 p. 11-13 for the transcript] "One must not try to gear the halachic norm to the transient values of a neurotic society (That"s what our society is)." Moreover, we should not be apologetic when communicating the external truth of the Torah. "Yahadus does not have to apologize. We should have pride in our Mesorah, in our heritage. We must not yield to the transient and passing charm of modern political or ideological slogans."

In the past half century, the values of our society have plunged to new depths, unimaginable when our rebbe spoke. This requires greater resolve, as he wrote elsewhere, "Every halachic maxim assumes greater import in times of disregard and unconcern. The greater the difficulty, the more biting the ridicule and sarcasm, and the more numerous the opponent then the holier is the principle, and the more sacred is our duty to defend it."

May Hashem grant Torah leaders the humility and wisdom to properly navigate the turbulent and treacherous waters of modern society with uncompromising loyalty to Torah.

Rabbi Eliakim Koenigsberg
Admitting Our Mistakes

When the Torah describes the sin offering of the nasi in Parshas Vayikra, it begins (4:22), "asher nasi yecheta - in the case of a leader who sins". Rashi notes that the use of the word asher seems puzzling. The Torah should have said "im nasi yecheta - if a leader sins," just like it says earlier (4:13), "v'im kol adas Yisrael yishgu - and if the entire congregation of Israel will make a mistake". Why does the Torah use the word asher when discussing the sin of the nasi? Rashi explains that the word asher sounds like "ashrei - fortunate" because fortunate is the generation whose leader feels a desire to bring a korban for his unintentional sins; all the more so, will such a leader regret his intentional sins. A leader who can admit his mistakes is truly worthy of his position.

The haftorah of Parshas Zachor tells the tragic story of King Shaul who was not able to admit his mistake. Hashem tells Shmuel to command Shaul to destroy Amalek, but Shaul does not fulfill the command properly. He leaves Agag alive, and he allows the people to save some of the animals to sacrifice to Hashem.

Chazal say (Yoma 22b), "Shaul was guilty of only one sin, and yet it counted against him, while David was guilty of two indiscretions and yet they did not count against him." Shaul defied Hashem's command by not completely destroying Amalek and he lost the kingship, while David acted inappropriately twice, first when he arranged for Uriah, the husband of Bas Sheva, to be killed in battle, and later when he conducted a census which caused a plague, and yet he retained the kingship.

Why was Shaul punished more severely than David if he only sinned once? The Malbim explains that the difference between Shaul and David lay in their reaction to a prophet's rebuke. When Shmuel confronts Shaul with his sin, Shaul justifies his actions. He initially declares innocently that he fulfilled the word of Hashem (Shmuel I, 15:13). When Shmuel asks him about the sheep, Shaul responds that the people spared some animals to sacrifice to Hashem (15:15). Shmuel then shares with Shaul that Hashem appeared to him and told him to convey to Shaul that He is dissatisfied with his behavior (15:17-19). Incredibly, Shaul still protests. "But I did listen to the voice of Hashem," he argues (15:20-21). Only after Shmuel expresses Hashem's disappointment with Shaul one more time, and he tells Shaul that Hashem has rejected him as king (15:22-23), does Shaul admit his sin (15:24). By contrast, when Nosson the prophet admonishes David for arranging Urieh's death, David immediately admits his guilt. He says simply, "I have sinned" (Shmuel II, 12:13). He does not rationalize his actions even for a moment. This, says the Malbim, is the critical difference between Shaul and David.

It is not easy for anyone to admit their faults. We all make mistakes - whether they be in the realm of bein adam l'makom or bein adam l'chaveiro or even bein adam l'atzmo (in our middos and attitudes). But what is even worse than making a mistake is not admitting that we have done something wrong, not owning up to the truth.

We have to be honest with ourselves, and sometimes it's not easy. Unfortunately, we do not have prophets who can reveal to us what we have done wrong and to guide us on the path toward improvement. However, oftentimes we know the truth in our hearts, but are not brave enough to admit it and to make amends for what we have done wrong. The story of Shaul highlights the importance of being honest with ourselves and not being afraid to admit our mistakes.

This, in fact, is one of the middos that helped save the Jewish people at the time of Purim. Rav Dessler (Michtav M'Eliyahu, vol. 1 p. 76) quotes Rav Simcha Zissel, the Alter of Kelm, who pointed out that the story of Purim actually took place over a span of nine years, from the third year of Achashveirosh's reign through the twelfth year. Most people would not have detected the connection between the feast at the beginning of the story and the evil decree of Haman to destroy the Jewish people. Only Mordechai, through his ruach hakodesh, understood the connection.

Mordechai had told the Jewish people not to attend Achashveirosh's feast, but they were afraid that not attending would anger the king and he might kill them, so they went to the party, against Mordechai's wishes. There seemed to be no negative repercussions from their behavior, but nine years later, Haman decreed that everyone should bow to him. Chazal (Sanhedrin 61b) concede that in truth there was no violation of avodah zara in bowing, and yet Mordechai refused to bow so there should not even be the perception that he was serving avodah zara. There were those that claimed that Mordechai was putting them all in danger because of a chumra. And, in fact, their worst fears seemed to have been realized. Haman was incensed that Mordechai refused to bow to him, so he conspired with Achashveirosh to destroy the Jewish people.

Most rational people would have said that Mordechai was the one who caused the terrible decree. But Mordechai told them that the decree was actually a result of their attending Achashveirosh's party. It seemed so unlikely, and yet, instead of criticizing Mordechai, the Jewish people admitted their mistake, did teshuva, and joined Mordechai and Esther in fasting and tefillah. It was that ability of Klal Yisrael to be honest with themselves and trust Mordechai's wisdom that led to the incredible turnaround and miracle of Purim.

Admitting mistakes is never easy. But sometimes when we take the difficult route of true introspection, we can merit enormous blessing.

Torah.Org Dvar Torah
by Rabbi Label Lam

It's OK to Have Questions

Blessed is the One Who keeps His promise to Israel, blessed is He. That the Holy One, Blessed is He, calculated the end, just like He told Avraham our father at the covenant between the parts, as it says, (Breishis 15:13-14) "And He said to Avraham, 'Know with certainty that your children will be strangers in a land not theirs, and they will enslave

them and oppress them four hundred years, and also the nation that oppresses them I will judge and afterwards they will go out with a great wealth. – Haggadah

Here is a story I share every year at the beginning of our Pesach Seder. I am ok repeating it year after year for a few reasons. 1) If I would only say it once then no one would ever remember that I said it. It would be lost forever. Now that I repeat it every year, even though people are rolling their eyes in the back of their heads, after 120 years, there's a good chance someone will someday say at their own Pesach Seder, "You know what my father/grandfather used to say…" 2) Somebody clever once told me that anything worth saying is worth repeating, and then he said it again, "anything worth saying is worth repeating." 3) At a Sheva Brochos in Yeshiva years back, the fish had just been served and the Master of Ceremonies immediately announced, "Don't eat the fish, for two reasons. Number one, it's from last week and number two we need it for next week." This story is from last year and we need it for next year too.

An elder Chassidic Rebbe, after having survived the Holocaust, emigrated to the Land of Israel, and was asked by a group of devotees how he liked living in the Holy Land. It was around Pesach time, and he told his students, "I love living in the Land of Israel. The culture is a little different, but they have one phrase that I like very much, "Ha Kol B'Seder"- "Everything is in-order!" Of course, when the man in the streets uses this expression he means it in a dismissive way, "Cool your heels…Back off" The Rebbe heard it with his loving heart.

He understood the meaning beyond its narrow context. "HaKol B'Seder"…Everything is in the Seder. The whole of Jewish history and destiny intersect Seder night. The Haggada is like a giant mirror, not just a history book. When we look at the near images, in a mirror we see ourselves. However, if we can get beyond ourselves, and look to the farthest point on the historical horizon, then we gain a clear picture of what is coming in the future.

Perhaps one more layer of meaning in the Rebbe's understanding of the phrase, "HaKol B'Seder" leaves us with a theme we can latch onto and keep as a souvenir from the Seder. "Everything is in order!" Hashem "calculated the end". Exile and Exodus are part of a grand well-organized plan.

One of my Rebbeim shared that he recently spoke to a young man. Years earlier this fellow, an older single growing older, was seriously dating a young lady, but he came to the Rabbi with multiple concerns about proceeding forward. The Rabbi listened to what sounded more like excuses and asked him if he was afraid. The young man admitted that he was indeed afraid. The Rabbi told us that he spoke to him for just a few minutes and his fears ceased to be an impediment. Years later he discovers that he is happily married with three children. Immediately I asked him, "What did you say to him?" He said that he asked him, "What is the difference between a courageous person and a coward?" He answered as expected, "A coward is afraid, and a courageous person is not afraid." The Rabbi said, "No! A coward is afraid, and a courageous person is afraid but for the courageous person it is OK to be afraid!"

We look out on a vast and confusing world swirling with sound, fury, and questions. Is everything really B'Seder? What's the difference between a heretic and a believer? A heretic freezes because he has unanswered questions, while a believer in HASHEM lives with the Emuna that HaKol B'Seder. For him, it's OK to have questions.

BS"D

To: parsha@groups.io
From: Chaim Shulman <cshulman@gmail.com>
& Allen Klein <allen.klein@gmail.com>

INTERNET PARSHA SHEET
ON **VAYIKRA** - 5786

parsha@groups.io / www.parsha.net - in our 31th year! To receive this parsha sheet, go to http://www.parsha.net and click Subscribe or send a blank e-mail to parsha+subscribe@groups.io Please also copy me at cshulman@gmail.com A complete archive of previous issues is now available at http://www.parsha.net It is also fully searchable.

Sponsored in memory of **Chaim Yissachar z"l** ben Yechiel Zaydel Dov

---

To sponsor a parsha sheet contact cshulman@gmail.com
(proceeds to tzedaka)

CRC **Pesach Guide** 2026 www.tinyurl.com/CRCPesach2026
Kosher Quest **Pesach** Conscience 2026 tinyurl.com/KashrusConscience2026
Star-K **Pesach** & Meds Guide www.tinyurl.com/StarKPesach2026
OU **Pesach** Guide 2026 www.tinyurl.com/OUPesachGuide2026

Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky–Korbanos: Permanent, Not Temporary
Prepared by **Chaim Ozer Shulman** (AI used for some of the translation from אמת ליעקב)

40th Yahtrzeit of Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky, zt"l this past Wednesday, the 29th of Adar – Rav Yaakov Kamenetsky*, zt"l (1891–1986), a talmid of Slabodka, was among the senior roshei yeshiva in America and a central figure at Yeshiva Torah Vodaath. He was widely sought out for guidance across decades and continents, first in Europe, and later in Toronto, Brooklyn, and Monsey, known not only for his exceptional mastery of Torah, but for a rare clarity of judgment and deep understanding of people and real-world situations. His counsel was marked by a striking combination of gadlus baTorah and practical wisdom: he had an ability to cut through complexity, to see situations as they truly were, and to respond with calm, balanced insight. Whether the issue was communal policy, chinuch, or deeply personal questions, he approached each with sensitivity, realism, and a quiet decisiveness that inspired confidence in all who turned to him. See https://tinyurl.com/RavYaakov At times, that clarity expressed itself in disarming simplicity, a brief question, a measured pause, or a single understated comment that reframed an entire issue and revealed what truly mattered. I merited to meet Rav Yaakov on a few occasions, and once, when introduced by his son, Rav Yaakov paused to tell me a story about an encounter he had with Rav Chaim Ozer Grodzenski zt"l, my namesake.*

אמת ליעקב The following is an excerpted and translated section from Rav Yaakov's seminal אמת ליעקב, printed from Rav Yaakov's shiurim and notes after his passing.

One entry in אמת ליעקב on Vayikra (1:9) אשה ריח ניחוח לה' discusses the Rambam in Moreh Nevuchim, which explains that korbanos redirect idolatrous instincts toward serving Hashem. However, the Ramban on Chumash, and even the Rambam himself in the Yad HaChazakah, state clearly that korbanos are chukim, which we may not fully understand, but are obligated to observe, and are not merely a temporary concession to wean from idolatrous practice or from the rules of the Mitzrim who worshiped animals.

"והקטיר הכהן את הכל… עלה אשה ריח ניחוח לה'" Rav Yaakov discusses the Rambam in **Moreh Nevuchim** (III:32) regarding the nature of korbanos, explaining that the reason for the korbanos was that the Mitzriyim and Kasdim, among whom Klal Yisrael had lived, worshipped cattle and sheep through animal sacrifice. It would have been psychologically impossible for Bnei Yisrael to suddenly abandon that entire mode of worship. Therefore, Hashem redirected that instinct, instead of abolishing sacrifice, He commanded it toward His service and under strict conditions.

However, **the Ramban** on Vayikra 1:9 sharply rejects this approach, writing that these are דברי הבאי that attempt to resolve a great difficulty too easily and are only meant to counter the thinking of the misguided; one should see there at length where he elaborates in rejecting the Rambam.

Note that the Rambam himself clarifies his position in **Yad Hachazaka** Hilchos Me'ilah (8:8), where he writes:

> ראוי לאדם להתבונן במשפטי התורה הקדושה ולידע סוף ענינם כפי כחו ודבר שלא ימצא לו טעם ולא ידע לו עילה אל יהי קל בעיניו ולא יהרוס לעלות אל ה' פן יפרוץ בו ולא תהא מחשבתו בו כמחשבתו בשאר דברי החול It is fitting for a person to contemplate the mishpetei haTorah hakedoshah and to understand their ultimate purpose to the extent of his ability, but regarding something for which he cannot find a reason, he should not treat it lightly. The Rambam continues that one must certainly not dismiss mitzvos simply because their reason is unknown. The chukim are those mitzvos whose reasons are not known, and all korbanos fall into this category. וכל הקרבנות כולן מכלל החוקים הן אמרו חכמים שבשביל עבודת הקרבנות העולם עומד Chazal teach that the world stands on the avodah of korbanos, and through fulfilling chukim and mishpatim the yesharim merit Olam Haba. שבעשיית החוקים והמשפטים זוכין הישרים לחיי העולם הבא והקדימה תורה ציווי על החוקים and the Torah gave precedence to the command of chukim.

Rav Yaakov explains that in the Yad Hachazaka the Rambam reveals his true belief. At the beginning the Rambam uses the phrase "mishpetei haTorah hakedoshah," an expression not commonly found, indicating that there are areas of Torah which, due to their inherent kedushah, lie beyond full human comprehension. Nevertheless, a person must attempt to understand them as far as his ability allows; and if he cannot, he must recognize that they belong to the realm of chukim and not diminish their importance simply because he does not grasp them. This is further clarified at the end of Sefer Avodah.

Furthermore, the Rambam's approach may be understood as presenting three paths through which a person attains the level of eved Hashem: Torah, which is the highest level and through which Moshe Rabbeinu is called eved Hashem; tefillah, which (although not as great as Torah, since one whose Torah is his occupation may be exempt) connects a person to the Borei Olam through the recognition that everything comes from Him; and korbanos, which serve as a path for one who cannot yet reach even the level of tefillah, providing a concrete means to distance oneself from avodah zarah and draw closer to Hashem. Thus, even according to the Rambam, korbanos are chukim with many aspects beyond our understanding and will not be abolished in the future; rather, one must strive to understand them "kefi kocho," through which a person can draw closer in avodas Hashem.

The **Ramban**, after rejecting the Moreh Nevuchim, writes that on a deeper level there is a sod ne'elam (kabalistic secret) in korbanos, and cites Chazal that in the parashah of korbanos the Torah uses specifically the Shem Havayah, and not other Sheimos, in order not to give any opening to a ba'al hadin (the kateigor) to argue. He concludes with the teaching of the malach to Manoach that if one offers a korban it must be brought "laHashem levado," and Rav Yaakov explains that although in the context of nezirus we sometimes find the expression nezir Elokim, nevertheless with respect to korbanos they must be offered specifically to the Shem Havayah, for korbanos are not directed to Elokim but to the Shem haMeyuchad, and this too requires careful consideration.

Approaching Korbanos: A Framework for Avodas Hashem
Prepared by **Chaim Ozer Shulman**
(with a little help from AI but checking all the sources)

I. Ramban: Midas HaRachamim within Din

Any serious understanding of korbanos begins with the well-known disagreement between the Rambam and the Ramban (see Emes

L'Yaakov above.) The Rambam, in **Moreh Nevuchim** (III:32), explains that korbanos were a concession to the times. Since people were accustomed to offering sacrifices, the Torah redirected that practice toward avodas Hashem. According to this approach, korbanos were necessary at that stage, but are not inherently essential.

The **Ramban**, in his commentary to Vayikra (1:2 and 1:9), strongly disagrees. He explains that korbanos express something real and fundamental. When a person brings a korban, he is meant to recognize that he himself should have been in its place. The semichah, the shechitah, and the burning are not merely symbolic acts; they are intended to bring the person to the realization that מצד הדין this should have happened to him. At the same time, the korban embodies rachamim. Instead of the person, an animal is brought, ראוי לו שישפך דמו וישרף גופו… ולולי חסד הבורא לקח ממנו תמורה.

In this way, the korban brings together both din and rachamim. A person confronts what he deserves, while simultaneously recognizing that Hashem provides him with a path back. Korbanos, in the Ramban's view, are neither symbolic nor merely historical; they reflect the reality of a person standing before Hashem with honesty and awareness.

The Ramban further notes that there is a deeper, kabbalistic dimension that lies beyond full human understanding. Korbanos are not only about what a person feels or comprehends, they also effect something real. At the same time, they remain acts performed because Hashem commanded them, even when their full meaning is beyond us.

II. Rav Soloveitchik: Standing Before Hashem

Rav Yosef Dov Soloveitchik explains that korbanos are not primarily about the external act, but about what that act creates within the person. The Torah states, אדם כי יקריב מכם קרבן לה׳. The word מכם teaches that the korban must come from within the individual, the אדם מקריב את עצמו. **A person does not merely bring an animal; he brings himself.**

The actions of the korban are precise and highly structured, yet they are not the ultimate goal. Rather, they create a setting in which a person is compelled to confront himself. When bringing a korban, one cannot remain detached; he must acknowledge what he has done and where he stands.

At the same time, he stands לפני ה׳. That awareness transforms the entire experience. The korban is not only something he performs, but a moment of presence, a person standing before Hashem with humility, and at the same time with a sense of closeness.

The act upon the mizbeach and the inner experience of the person unfold together. As the korban is brought, the individual is meant to rise with it. The avodah is not only in the action, but in the transformation it produces.

Sefer Vayikra thus teaches that avodas Hashem is not only about performing mitzvos, but about becoming a person who stands before Hashem.

III. Rav Dessler: Korban as Giving

Rav Eliyahu Dessler, in Michtav MeEliyahu, explains that the foundation of avodas Hashem lies in the distinction between nesinah and netilah, giving and taking. A person naturally lives with a mindset of taking: what do I want, what works for me. The Torah seeks to shape a person who gives. The korban is one of the most powerful ways to instill that transformation. When a person brings a korban, he is not merely offering an animal; he is giving something of himself. If it remains only an external act, it misses the point. The goal is that the person himself changes, that he becomes someone defined by giving.

Rav Aharon Lopiansky further explains that this idea is embedded in the very definition of a korban. Most mitzvos are obligations: a person is commanded and fulfills what he is required to do. A korban, however, is fundamentally an offering, a gift that a person brings from himself to Hashem.

In this way, the korban trains a person in nesinah. Through cheit, a person lives in a mode of taking; the korban reverses that orientation through action.

Sefer Vayikra thus teaches that avodas Hashem is not only about doing the right things. The ultimate goal is not just what a person does, but what he becomes.

IV. Rav Hirsch: Korban as Drawing Close

Rav Shimshon Raphael Hirsch, in his *Commentary on the Torah*, explains that a korban is not a "sacrifice" in the conventional sense. The word itself comes from קרב, to draw close. A korban is a means through which a person brings himself closer to Hashem.

The entire process is directed toward the individual. The animal represents the instinctive, physical dimension of life. The avodah is not about destroying that aspect, but about redirecting it toward a higher purpose. Each stage of the korban expresses this idea. The shechitah represents a break from a self-centered mode of living. The zerikah, symbolizing life itself, teaches that every aspect of a person's existence must be directed toward Hashem. The haktarah reflects elevation and transformation.

In Rav Hirsch's view, Sefer Vayikra presents a system designed to shape the individual, bringing his life into alignment with a deeper sense of closeness to Hashem.

V. The Lubavitcher Rebbe: Elevating the Physical

The Lubavitcher Rebbe, in *Likkutei Sichos*, explains that korbanos are fundamentally about elevating the physical world. The animal represents the physical and instinctive side of life. When it is brought upon the mizbeach, it is not simply being destroyed; it is being elevated, transformed into something holy.

The same is true for the person. His natural drives are not inherently negative; they are meant to be directed and refined. The korban teaches that even the most physical aspects of life can become part of avodas Hashem. The goal is not to escape the physical world, but to engage it properly and elevate it.

Sefer Vayikra thus teaches that nothing in life lies outside the realm of avodas Hashem. Everything can be brought close, everything can become a korban.

VI. Rabbi Sacks: Relationship Expressed Through Action

Rabbi Jonathan Sacks, in *Covenant and Community*, explains that korbanos are a way of expressing a relationship with Hashem through action. What matters most is not conveyed through words alone; in real relationships, what a person does reveals what he is truly committed to. The korban is that kind of act. It is not about giving something to Hashem, but about giving form to the relationship itself, making the connection tangible and real. Rabbi Sacks captures this idea by describing sacrifice as "the choreography of love": the korban transforms something inner into something visible, expressing closeness to Hashem not only in thought, but in action. In this way, Sefer Vayikra teaches that avodas Hashem is not only about what a person feels or believes, but about how that relationship is lived and expressed through what he does.

VII. Rav Kook: Enduring Meaning and Historical Expression

Rav Avraham Yitzchak HaKohen Kook, in *Midbar Shur* and *Chazon HaTzimchonut VeHaShalom*, reexamines the classic debate between the Rambam and the Ramban. While the Rambam explains korbanos as a response to the religious habits of the time, Rav Kook argues that this does not diminish their inherent value.

Korbanos are, at their core, a lofty form of Avodas Hashem. הקרבנות מבטאים את שאיפת האדם להתעלות אל ה׳. They create closeness between האדם

and Hashem, like one who is invited to eat at the King's table. This is not merely a concession, but a genuine spiritual elevation.
At the same time, Rav Kook explains that certain expressions of korbanos were intensified at particular moments in history. In the desert, for example, Bnei Yisrael were required to bring even ordinary meat as part of a korban. This was not the ideal form for all time, but a temporary stage designed to refine a people emerging from a world of avodah zarah.
Korbanos therefore reflect both permanence and development. The יסוד remains constant—a person's desire to draw close to Hashem—but the way that desire is expressed can vary across different stages of spiritual growth.
Sefer Vayikra teaches that Avodas Hashem is rooted in something enduring, yet unfolds differently as a person and a nation grow.

VIII. Conclusion: A Unified Avodah

Beginning with the Ramban, korbanos are not a concession, but an essential avodah—real, commanded, and transformative, even when not fully understood.
Each approach reveals another dimension of that avodah. A person stands לפני ה' (Rav Soloveitchik), gives of himself (Rav Dessler), draws close and is transformed (Rav Hirsch), elevates the physical (the Lubavitcher Rebbe), expresses relationship through action (Rabbi Sacks), and participates in an ongoing process of spiritual growth (Rav Kook).
Sefer Vayikra teaches that Avodas Hashem is not only what a person does, but what he becomes through what he does. The korban is the model for that process—an act that expresses the person and, in turn, transforms him into someone closer to Hashem.

---

https://torah.org/torah-portion/frand-5786-vayikra/

Rav Yissocher Frand

If He Does Not Testify, He Bears Iniquity – Only If a Subpoena Has Been Issued

Parshas Vayikra
Posted on March 19, 2026 (5786) By Rabbi Yissocher Frand
These divrei Torah were adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissocher Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Tapes on the weekly portion: #1374 Pesach Shaylos You May Never Even Have Thought About. Good Shabbos!
The pasuk in Parshas Vayikra says, "If a person will sin: If he accepted a demand for an oath, and he is a witness – either he saw or he knew – if he does not testify, he shall bear his iniquity" (Vayikra 5:1). The halacha is that if someone knows eidus (testimony) about a case, he needs to testify. If he knows facts germane to a case – at least in monetary matters – and he refuses to provide testimony, he has committed an aveira.
The "Mitteler Rebbe" (Rabbi Dov Ber (1773-1825), son of the founder of Chabad, Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi), was once told by his doctor that he needed to go to the famous spas in Marienbad (in what is today the Czech Republic). The Rebbe was in White Russia, which was in Belarus. He had to travel to Marienbad, but for some reason, he traveled by way of Posen (in Poland), which was where Rabbi Akiva Eger lived.
The Rebbe went to visit Rabbi Akiva Eger and asked him to explain the following pasuk, which is recited as part of the Haftorahof Shabbos Hagadol: "I Hashem have not changed, and you, Children of Yaakov have not been destroyed." (Malachi 3:6).
Rabbi Akiva Eger responded by citing the pasuk in our parsha relating to refusal to testify: "If he will not tell, he will bear his sin." Now, quite atypically, the negation in the first part of that pasuk (V'im lo yagid…) is spelled lamed-vov-aleph. (Normally a negation is just spelled lamed aleph.) Rabbi Akiva Eger explained (and this is how the Rambam paskens) that the halacha that it is an aveira if someone who knows testimony for someone else does not testify only applies if the party to the dispute subpoenas the witness and asks him to testify on his behalf. If the litigant does not ask the witness to testify in court, even if he witnessed the incident and does not come to court to share his knowledge, he has not sinned.
From where does the Rambam get this halacha? The answer is, he gets it from the above-cited pasuk: "V'im lo yagid". The Rambam infers this detail from the fact that lo is spelled with a vov (before the aleph). Read as lamed vov, the word means "to him" – implying that there is a "him" who is demanding that the witness testifies. Only if "to him" (lamed vov), he does not (lamed aleph) testify – then he will bear his sin.
Rabbi Akiva Eger explained that there is another pasuk which states: "I appoint heaven and earth this day to bear witness against you that you will surely perish quickly from the land to which you are crossing the Jordan to possess; you shall not have lengthy days upon it, for you will be destroyed." (Devorim 4:26). The Ribono shel Olam invokes the shamayim and aretz to testify against Klal Yisrael if they do not keep the mitzvos.
Unfortunately, in our history, there have been many periods in which we, Klal Yisrael, have not kept the mitzvos and yet, the shamayim v'aretz have not come to testify against us, and therefore we are still around. Why are we still around when the pasuk says that heaven and earth will testify against us and that once they do testify, we will be speedily destroyed?
This can be understood based on the halacha derived earlier from the pasuk "V'im lo yagid…" (Vayikra 5:1), that a witness is only obligated to testify if he is called upon to do so. Although the Ribono shel Olam appointed the shamayim v'aretz as witnesses, He never summoned them to testify. That, said Rabbi Akiva Eiger beautifully, is the meaning of the above-cited pasuk in Malachi. "Ani, Hashem, lo shaneesi…" I, the Ribono shel Olam says, changed lo – meaning the word lo to include a vov. Since I changed the lo, the witnesses do not need to testify. Consequently, the end of that pasuk is fulfilled: "you, B'nei Yisrael, have not been destroyed."
A beautiful 'chap' by Rabbi Akiva Eiger, which the Lubovitcher Rebbe certainly enjoyed.

Klal Yisrael Does Not Need to See the Finished Product

My son Yakov told me a vort he saw in the sefer Tzror Hamor, which gives a unique pshat to a pasuk we read on Parshas Hachodesh. The pasuk begins "Hachodesh hazeh lachem rosh chadashim…" (This month will be for you the first of the months…) (Shemos 12:2). The simple reading is that the pasuk teaches us that Nisan is the first month of the Jewish calendar. The Tzror Hamor had a different take on it.
The Tzror Hamor says that he saw in an old sefer that the Mitzrim (Egyptians) also used a lunar calendar, but that Rosh Chodesh was not at the beginning of the month, when the new moon appears, but rather it was in the middle of the month, when the moon is full. Therefore, the pasuk "Hachodesh Hazeh lachem rosh chadashim" introduced the innovation that the new month begins as soon as the "new moon" appears.
The Tzror Hamor points out that this is not only an astronomical concept, it is a hashkafic (philosophical) concept as well: The Mitzrim only valued the achievement of full potential. A full moon is significant because it has reached its full potential. However, when the moon is just a sliver it does not have significance. Klal Yisrael, says the Tzror Hamor, is just the opposite. When we see that sliver of the moon, we see the potential for an entirely different situation.
"Hachodesh Hazeh lachem rosh chadashim", says the Tzror Hamor, is a basic lesson in Jewish hashkafa. By Klal Yisrael, we do not need to see the finished product. We don't need to see the moon in its maximum configuration to appreciate it. We only need to detect the potential for future greatness and growth. The Mitzrim needed to see the full moon. The Jews give significance even to the sliver – knowing what it can develop into.
He explains that with this idea, we can better understand three different pesukim:
The pasuk in Parshas Vaera says, "V'samti p'dus bein Ami u'bein amecha; l'machar yiheyeh haos hazeh. (I am going to make a difference between My nation and your nation – the difference between them is tomorrow.)"

(Shemos 8:19) We look at the tomorrow, the future, the potential. For the Mitzrim, it needs to already be there.
With this distinction, we can also interpret the pasuk (Shemos 17:9) "And Moshe said to Yehoshua 'Choose for us people and go out and do battle with Amalek; tomorrow I will stand on the top of the mountain with the staff of G-d in my hand." The way to fight Amalek and what they embody is "tomorrow" – namely to look at people and be cognizant of their future potential growth. That is the way to fight Amalek.
Finally, the third pasuk involves the old question of the difference between the question of the chachom (wise son) and the question of the rasha (wicked son). The difference may be explained by the fact that by the wise son, the Torah writes, "When your son will ask you tomorrow…" (Devorim 6:20). By Yidden, there is always a tomorrow. The son who wants all the answers today, who says "I want it all NOW" is wicked. That is not the way it works. The difference between Klal Yisraeland the Mitzrim is that we recognize the potential for growth and the potential for eventual perfection.
Transcribed by David Twersky; Jerusalem DavidATwersky@gmail.com
Edited by Dovid Hoffman; Baltimore, MD dhoffman@torah.org
This week's write-up is adapted from the hashkafa portion of Rabbi Yissochar Frand's Commuter Chavrusah Series on the weekly Torah portion. A complete catalogue can be ordered from the Yad Yechiel Institute, PO Box 511, Owings Mills MD 21117-0511. Call (410) 358-0416 or e-mail tapes@yadyechiel.org or visit http://www.yadyechiel.org/ for further information.

---

https://consumer.crckosher.org/publications/first-time-making-pesach-a-cheat-sheet-for-the-rest-of-us/

First Time Making Pesach…A Cheat Sheet for the Rest of Us

Date: January 21, 2026

By Rabbi Dovid Cohen, cRc Administrative Rabbinic Coordinator

Introduction

Preparing for Pesach takes effort, but with a bit of planning and focus it is possible to succeed and welcome Yom Tov positively. This article's goal is not to provide details and instructions, but rather to provide a framework of what must be done and issues to consider, and guidance on how to learn more about those topics. This article is written specifically for those who have never made Pesach at home or have not done so for many years but may also be a good overview for those who have more experience.

A. Schedule Finding ways to be organized and scheduled goes a long way towards having a successful preparatory Pesach season. Many find it helpful to work backwards, thinking which jobs should or must happen on Erev Pesach, which should be done in the days before that, etc. to roughly plan when each item will be taken care of.

In this context it is worth noting that many Pesach tasks can be performed well in advance of Yom Tov. For example, one can buy clothes and have them tailored and checked for shatnez, and paper goods can be purchased and put away. Any job that can be taken care of early is one less thing to do in the hectic days just before Pesach.

It may be difficult for one person to perform all the steps needed to prepare for Pesach. Of course, there are tasks that family members, even small children, can help to accomplish, but those who can afford extra help in the house should take advantage of that opportunity.

B. Clean the house We can avoid owning chametz on Pesach by selling our chametz to someone who is not Jewish; this is known as mechiras chametz and can be arranged with your local Rabbi. If we are home on Pesach, then we must also clean our houses to ensure we do not accidentally eat any chametz on Pesach. We identify all chametz and either destroy it or put it into a closet, cabinet, or room that will be closed for Yom Tov and sold to a non-Jew. [1]

Which foods are chametz and must be removed? The letter of the law is that only items which meet these three requirements must be removed:

It is chametz Chametz includes just about everything made with wheat, barley, rye, oats, or spelt.

Ashkenazim do not eat kitnios (corn, rice, soy, beans, et al) on Pesach, but do not have to remove them from their homes.

Many medicines, cosmetics and toiletries are free of chametz or deemed inedible and are, therefore, "not chametz". Others should only be kept if they are known to be chametz-free. Similar rules apply to cleaning products and certain other non-foods.

Pet foods are considered edible, and if they contain chametz they (a) cannot be served to pets on Pesach, and (b) must be put aside with the "sold" chametz.

In this context, all of the following are acceptable for Pesach: Ammonia, baby oil, bleach, blush, body wash, candles, detergent, dishwashing soap, eye drops, eye liner, eye shadow, furniture polish, hair gel, hairspray, isopropyl alcohol, liquid dish soap, lotions, mascara, mineral oil, nail polish, nail polish remover, ointments, oven cleaner, petroleum jelly, sanitizers (e.g. Purell), shampoo, shaving lotion, silver polish, soaps, and sponges. Further listings are available on ASKcRc.org.

It is either larger than an olive (kezayis) or in a form that someone might eat it For example, there is no need to get rid of one solitary Cheerio or chametz crumbs (because they are smaller than an olive), or a dirty pretzel underneath a bed (since no one would eat that, even if it is technically edible). [2]

It is reasonably accessible For example, you must remove chametz which is in the folds of a couch, under a bed or dresser, or in one's office, but not if it is behind a refrigerator or underneath the washing machine.

The above reflects the letter of the law and is appropriate for situations when one has no other choice. But the longstanding minhag is to thoroughly clean one's home and remove even the smallest bits of chametz. Those who have questions as to how this applies to their situation, should discuss their family dynamics with their local Rabbi.

Basic Cleaning Guide Sweep, vacuum, or mop the entire house, and empty vacuum cleaner bags. Collect all chametz into 1 or 2 places. Empty and wipe all areas that hold food, such as pantries, shelves, refrigerators, and freezers. Thoroughly clean all parts of the kitchen, dining room, family room, and other rooms where food is eaten. Vacuum all parts of the car and couches, including in "folds" of the seats, and check the trunk and glove compartment. Empty and wipe all purses, briefcases, knapsacks, and school bags, and check pockets. Check/clean drawers (especially in children's rooms) at home and in the office. Check medicine cabinet for sprays, toiletries, and cosmetics that are not recommended for Pesach. Thoroughly clean and wash crib and Pack 'N Play (including padding), and highchair, stroller, and toy boxes. C. Shopping The second part of preparing for Pesach is shopping for an entire pantry worth of food. The simplest reason for this is that many foods require special hashgacha for Pesach. But the truth is that even if a particular product does not need special hashgacha, it is prudent to purchase a new package or container to ensure that there are no crumbs or other residue of chametz in the package which was used before Pesach.

Meat, poultry, fish, wine, and grape juice are typically available as kosher for Pesach well before Yom Tov. After Purim, one can also purchase most dry goods, spices, frozen foods beverages, Pesach matzah, and many other staples. If those are bought in advance, the only shopping needed just before Pesach will be fresh fruits and vegetables, and (fresh) prepared foods.

In shopping for food, keep in mind the needs of infants, children, pets, and those who are ill. Which type of formula, pet food, nutritional supplement, and medicinal items might be needed? What about toothpaste, mouthwash, and other toiletries for the rest of the family? Which ones are suitable for Pesach, and if the regular choice is not acceptable, which substitute is available? Getting answers to these questions early, will avoid a last-minute emergency.

A related issue is to consider other Yom Tov shopping needs such as for clothing, shoes, shaitels (and haircuts), paper goods, presents, and Hagaddos, and plan for them accordingly.

D. Kashering Whenever hot food comes into contact with a pot, dish, counter, sink, oven, dishwasher, piece of silverware, or anything else, some of the food's taste/flavor is absorbed into the pot etc. Accordingly, if these items were used with chametz during the year, we cannot use them for Pesach, unless they undergo a process known as hechsher keilim or "kashering".

Items made of ceramic or glass cannot be kashered, and for this reason China, Corelle, mugs, and drinking glasses must be replaced for Pesach. In addition, dishwashers, colanders, and other items with small crevices or holes where food might be trapped, also cannot be kashered. One other basic rule of kashering is that nothing can be kashered unless it first is is thoroughly cleaned and left unused for 24 consecutive hours. Lastly, as a rule, kashering cannot be performed on Pesach. Based on these considerations, most people will:

Kasher their oven, stovetop, and kitchen sink a few days before Pesach. [See below in Section E.] Countertops are either kashered and/or covered depending on whether they are made a material which is suitable for kashering. Purchase pots, pans, oven mitts, and sponges for Pesach, and never use them during the year. Kasher tablecloths and dishtowels. In general, flatware generally can be kashered, but dishes cannot be. Accordingly, many have silverware and dishes which are used only on Pesach, and others use disposables. Details of how to kasher the kitchen can be found in the cRc Pesach Guide and are demonstrated in the video available at https://kshr.us/KasherKitchen.

Those who will be purchasing new pots, dishes, flatware, peelers, and other kitchen utensils for Pesach should remember that generally, they must undergo tevillah before they are used.

E. Switching Over In the final days leading up to Pesach, the house must be converted from one where people are eating and using chametz, to one which is going to be used for Pesach. Most people want to be able to eat chametz until the "last minute", but at the same time the house must be cleaned, the kitchen kashered, and cooking must begin so there will be something to eat once Yom Tov starts.

There are different ways to deal with this logistical issue. Some pointers include:

Kitnios

One may own kitnios on Pesach, such that even after a room has been cleaned for Pesach it is perfectly fine to eat rice, corn, beans or other kitnios foods there. The same applies to "egg matzah"; Ashkenazim do not eat egg matzah on Pesach, but it is permitted to own it. Therefore, it may be eaten in a room after it has been cleaned for Pesach.

Timing the kashering

The choice of when to kasher the kitchen is a balance between people wanting to continue eating chametz as long as possible, the need to cook food for Pesach in advance, and technical issues, such as that one can only kasher if the item has not been used for the previous 24 hours. One way to resolve this issue is to kasher one part of the kitchen (e.g., the meat side) a few days before the rest.

Erev Pesach can occur on four days of the week – Monday, Wednesday, Friday, and Shabbos – and the day to kasher depends somewhat on that.

When Erev Pesach is on Monday, most families will kasher their kitchen some time before Shabbos Hagadol (e.g., Wednesday night), and basically eat Pesach food for that Shabbos. Any chametz food, such as challah, will be carefully controlled and kept away from Pesach pots, dishes, etc.

In contrast, when Erev Pesach is on Friday or Shabbos, most families will eat chametz food for the Shabbos before Pesach, and then kasher after Shabbos. An advantage to kashering just after Shabbos is that no one cooks etc. on Shabbos such that (just about) everything has not been used for 24 hours and is ready for kashering.

When Erev Pesach is on Wednesday, some will kasher before Shabbos and others will wait until afterwards.

F. Erev Pesach On the night before Pesach, we must search for chametz in all parts of the house where food is ever brought. The mitzvah, called bedikas chametz, is to use a candle or flashlight to look for the types of chametz which one cannot own on Pesach, as defined above in Section B. The halacha states that this must (a) be performed in homes, offices, dormitory rooms, summer homes, and all areas where chametz might have been eaten, and (b) include a thorough check of all "cracks and crevices", which would include under beds, the folds of a couch, clothing pockets, pantry shelves, etc. There is a difference of opinion as to whether this type of "full" bedikas chametz is required if the house has already been thoroughly cleaned, and one should consult with their Rabbi on this issue.

Bear in mind that when Erev Pesach is on Wednesday, one must create an Eruv Tavshilin on Erev Pesach. When Erev Pesach is on Friday, an Erev Tavshilin is needed on Thursday of Chol HaMoed (the day before the second days of Yom Tov).

On the morning of Erev Pesach, one may only eat chametz (and kitnios and egg matzos) until a given time called sof zman achilas chametz, and all chametz must be destroyed/burned or sold by a somewhat later time. These times vary based on the day of the year, and the location.

G. Seder Preparations There are many items to purchase and prepare for the Seder. Some of these tasks can be taken care of a few days before Pesach, and others will have to happen on Erev Pesach, as follows:

Have Available

Wine, grape juice, shemurah matzah, marror, and karpas vegetable for each participant. Haggadah, kos (cup), and pillow for each participant. Kittel and k'arah (Seder plate) for leader of the Seder. Prepare

If using romaine lettuce for marror, check it for infestation (or buy pre-checked lettuce). If using horseradish, grate before Yom Tov. Saltwater for karpas (and for beginning of festive meal) Zeroah (meat on bone), beitzah (egg), and charoses for Seder Details of how to prepare the Seder plate can be found in the cRc Pesach Guide and are demonstrated in the video available at https://kshr.us/SederPlate.

In addition to the physical items needed for the Seder, it is important that everyone be well rested and that the participants give thought to the ideas and ideals they will share at this important time.

H. Chametz After Pesach Chametz which was owned by a Jewish person over Pesach, may not be eaten or used by anyone, even after Pesach ends. Towards this end one must ascertain that any Jewish-owned grocers have sold their chametz.

Endnotes

1 There are two reasons one must clean their home for Pesach: Firstly, the Torah forbids us from owning chametz on Pesach. Secondly, we are accustomed to eating chametz all year round, and getting rid of it ensures no one will mistakenly eat it on Pesach. We can satisfy the first reason by selling our chametz, but that will not help for the second one.

2 It is forbidden to eat even the tiniest bit of chametz, but assuming one performs bitul chametz (recited after "bedikas chametz"), they may keep it in their possession if it is very small or so undesirable that no one would want to eat it.

cRc Pesach Guide 2021 updated in January 2026.

---

from: **The Rabbi Sacks Legacy** <info@rabbisacks.org>
date: Mar 19, 2026, 11:16 AM
subject: Between Destiny and Chance (Vayikra)

COVENANT & CONVERSATION

Between Destiny and Chance

VAYIKRA

This audio was recorded by Rabbi Sacks in 2016

The third book of the Torah is known in English as Leviticus, a word deriving from Greek and Latin, meaning, "pertaining to the Levites". This reflects the fact that in Judaism the priests – all direct descendants of Aaron - were from the tribe of Levi, and that the ancient rabbinic name for the book was Torat Kohanim, "the law of the Priests". It is an appropriate title. Whereas Shemot and Bamidbar are shot through with narrative, the book between them is largely about sacrifices and the rituals associated, first with the Tabernacle and later with the Temple in Jerusalem. It is, as the name Torat Kohanim implies, about the priests and their function as guardians of the sacred.

By contrast, the traditional name Vayikra, "And He called", seems merely accidental. Vayikra just happens to be the first word of the book, and there is no connection between it and the subjects with which it deals. The truth, I will argue here, is otherwise. There is a deep connection between the word Vayikra and the underlying message of the book as a whole.

To understand this, we must note that there is something unusual about the way the word appears in a Sefer Torah in this particular instance. Its last letter, an aleph, is written small - almost as if it barely existed. The standard-size letters spell out the word vayikar, meaning, "he encountered" or "he chanced upon." Unlike vayikra, which refers to a call, a summons, a meeting by request, vayikar suggests an accidental meeting, a mere happening.

With their sensitivity to nuance, the Sages noted the difference between the call to Moses with which the book begins, and God's appearance to the pagan prophet Bilaam, which does not use the same form of the word. This is how the Midrash puts it:

What is the difference between the prophets of Israel and the prophets of the pagan nations of the world? . . . R. Hama ben Hanina said: The Holy One blessed be He reveals Himself to the pagan nations by an incomplete form of address, as it is said, "And the Lord appeared to Bilaam", whereas to the prophets of Israel He appears in a complete form of address, as it is said, "And He called to Moses."

Rashi is more explicit:
All [God's] communications [to Moses], whether they use the words "speak" or "say" or "command" were preceded by a call [keri'ah] which is a term of endearment, used by the angels when they address one another, as it is said, "And one called to the other" [vekara zeh el zeh, Isaiah 6:3). However, to the prophets of the nations of the world, His appearance is described by an expression signifying a casual encounter and uncleanness, as it says, "And the Lord appeared to Bilaam."
The Baal HaTurim goes one stage further, commenting on the small aleph: Moses was both great and humble, and wanted only to write Vayikar, signifying "chance", as if the Holy One blessed be He appeared to him only in a dream, as it says of Bilaam [vayikar, without an aleph] - suggesting that God appeared to him by mere chance. However, God told him to write the word with an aleph. Moses then said to Him, because of his extreme humility, that he would only write an aleph that was smaller than the other alephs in the Torah, and he did indeed write it small.
Something of great significance is being hinted at here, but before taking it further, let us turn to the end of the book. Just before the end, in the sedra of Bechukotai, there occurs one of the two most terrifying passages in the Torah. It is known as the tochachah (the rebuke: the other appears in Devarim 28), and it details the terrible fate that will befall the Jewish people if it fails to keep its covenant with God:
As for the survivors, I will bring such insecurity into their hearts in their enemies' lands that the sound of a windblown leaf will make them run as if they fled the sword; and they will fall, though no one is chasing them. They will stumble over one another as if fleeing the sword, when no one chases them. You will have no power to stand before your enemies. You will perish among the nations; your enemies' lands will devour you.
Lev. 26:36-38 Yet despite the shocking nature of the forewarning, the passage ends with a note of consolation:
I will remember My covenant with Jacob; and My covenant with Isaac and My covenant with Avraham I will also remember, and I will remember the land . . . Yet even then, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not reject them nor despise them and annihilate them, will not break My covenant with them, for I am the Lord their God.
Lev. 26:42-44 The keyword of the passage is the word keri. It appears exactly seven times in the tochachah - a sure sign of significance. Here are two of them by way of example:
If, despite all this, you still do not listen to Me – if still you walk contrary to Me – then I, in My fury, will walk contrary to you. I will punish you seven times more for your sins.
Lev. 26:27-28 What does the word keri mean? I have translated it here as "contrary". There are other suggestions. The Targum reads it as "harden yourselves", Rashbam as "refuse", Ibn Ezra as "overconfident", Saadia as "rebellious".
However, Rambam gives it a completely different interpretation, and does so in a halachic context:
A positive scriptural command prescribes prayer and the sounding of the alarm with trumpets whenever trouble befalls the community. For when Scripture says, "Against the adversary that oppresses you, then you shall sound an alarm with the trumpets" the meaning is: Cry out in prayer and sound an alarm . . . This is one of the paths to repentance, for when the community cries out in prayer and sounds an alarm when threatened by trouble, everyone realises that evil has come on them as a result of their own wrongdoing . . . and that repentance will cause the trouble to be removed. If, however, the people do not cry out in prayer and do not sound an alarm but merely say that it is the way of the world for such a thing to happen to them, and that their trouble is a matter of pure chance, they have chosen a cruel path which will cause them to continue in their wrongdoing, and thus bring additional troubles on them. For when Scripture says, "If you continue to be keri towards Me, then in My anger I will be keri towards you", it means, "If, when I bring trouble upon you in order to cause you to repent, you say that the trouble is purely accidental, then I will add to your trouble the anger of being-left-to-chance."
Mishneh Torah, Taaniyot, 1:1-3 Rambam understands keri to be related to the word mikreh, meaning "chance". The curses, in his interpretation, are not Divine retribution as such. It will not be God who makes Israel suffer, rather it will be other human beings. What will happen is simply that God will withdraw His protection. Israel will have to face the world alone, without the sheltering presence of God. This, for Rambam, is simple, inescapable measure-for-measure (middah kenegged middah). If Israel believe in Divine Providence, they will be blessed by Divine Providence. If they see history as mere chance - what Joseph Heller, author of Catch-22, called "a trash bag of random coincidences blown open by the wind" - then indeed they will be left to chance. Being a small, vulnerable nation, chance will not be kind to them.
We are now in a position to understand the remarkable proposition linking the beginning of Vayikra to the end - and one of the most profound of all spiritual truths. The difference between mikra and mikreh - between history as God's call and history as one event after another with no underlying purpose or meaning - is, in the Hebrew language, almost imperceptible. The words sound the same. The only difference is that the former has an aleph while the latter does not (the significance of the aleph is obvious: the first letter of the alphabet, the first letter of the Ten Commandments, the "I" of God).
The letter aleph is almost inaudible. Its appearance in a Sefer Torah at the beginning of Vayikra (the "small aleph") is almost invisible. Do not expect - the Torah is intimating - that the presence of God in history will always be as clear and unambiguous as it was during the Exodus from Egypt and the division of the Red Sea. For much of the time it will depend on your own sensitivity. For those who look, it will be visible. For those who listen, it can be heard. But first you have to look and listen. If you choose not to see or hear, then Vayikra will become vayikar. The call will be inaudible. History will seem mere chance.
There is nothing incoherent about such an idea. Those who believe it will have much to justify it. Indeed, says God in the tochachah: if you believe that history is chance, then it will become so. But in truth it is not so. The history of the Jewish people - as even non-Jews such as Pascal, Rousseau, and Tolstoy eloquently stated - testifies to the presence of God in their midst. Only thus could such a small, vulnerable, relatively powerless people survive, and still say today - after the Holocaust - Am Yisrael Chai, the Jewish people lives. And just as Jewish history is not mere chance, so it is no mere coincidence that the first word of the central book of the Torah is Vayikra, "And He called".
To be a Jew is to believe that what happens to us as a people is God's call to us - to become "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."
With thanks to the Schimmel Family for their generous sponsorship of Covenant & Conversation, dedicated in loving memory of Harry (Chaim) Schimmel.

Tidbits for Parashas Vayikra 5786
From **Ira Zlotowitz** <Iraz@klalgovoah.org>
Thu, Mar 19, 7:01 PM
Parashas Vayikra • March 21st • 3 Nissan 5786
Chodesh Nissan began this past Thursday. For the duration of the month, Tachanun, as well as the Yehi Ratzons recited after Kerias Hatorah, are omitted from the weekday davening. On Shabbos, Av Harachamim (before Mussaf) and Tzidko'scha (after Minchah) are omitted as well. The Kel Malei recited by one who has a yahrzeit is also not said. Fasting and hespeidim are generally prohibited as well.
The first opportunity for Kiddush Levanah is this Motzaei Shabbos Parashas Vayikra, March 21st. The final opportunity is the first Leil Haseder, April 2nd at 4:35 AM EDT.

Bircas Ilanos (a blessing on a newly blossomed fruit tree) should ideally be said during the month of Nissan.
Many have the minhag not to eat matzah from Rosh Chodesh Nissan (some have been forgoing matzah beginning from Shushan Purim).
One must donate money for Maos Chittin, money which will be used to provide the needy with food during Pesach. The donation may be given from maaser funds.
Daf Yomi - Shabbos: Bavli: Menachos 69 • Yerushalmi: Rosh Hashanah 10 • Mishnah Yomis: Me'ila 4:6-5:1 • Oraysa (coming week): Yevamos 43a-45a • Kitzur Shulchan Aruch: 114:5-12
Make sure to call your parents, in-laws, grandparents and Rebbi to wish them a good Shabbos. If you didn't speak to your kids today, make sure to connect with them as well!
Shabbos HaGadol is next Shabbos Parashas Tzav, March 28th Leil Bedikas Chametz is on Tuesday evening, March 31st Pesach begins on the evening of Wednesday, April 1st.
Summary VAYIKRA: Korban Olah from male cattle (bulls), flock (sheep or goats) and birds (doves) • Various kinds of Korban Minchah: unbaked flour, baked doughs (loaves and wafers), and fried doughs (shallow-pan and deep-pan) • The Korban Omer • No yeast or honey may go on the Mizbeiach • Salting korbanos • Korban Shelamim from male or female cattle, sheep and goats • Two Korbanos Chatas Penimi: the Kohen Gadol's, and if a wide community sins; two Korbanos Chatas Chitzon: the king's, and a private individual's • The Korban Chatas Oleh v'Yored for three sins: swearing falsely to not knowing testimony, exposure to Kodesh while tamei, and transgressing a vow; and its three levels of offerings: animal, bird, and minchah • A Korban Asham's three sins: inadvertently benefiting from kodesh, uncertainty if one sinned, and swearing falsely to not owing money • One who inadvertently benefitted from hekdesh and one who swears falsely to not owing money must pay an additional fine of a chomesh (an additional 25%). Haftarah: The parshah discusses the service of Hashem through korbanos. The haftarah relates the prophecy of Yeshaya (43:21-44:23), who rebukes those who turn away from this avodah and serve idols instead. The navi promises that Hashem will forgive and accept those who return to Him encouraging them to recognize the futility of these idols.
"וְנֶפֶשׁ כִּי־תֶחֱטָא בִשְׁגָגָה" A soul which sins inadvertently (Vayikra 4:2) The Daas Zekeinim explains that the Torah refers to the sinner as a "Nefesh", as we find in the pasuk (Yechezkel 18:4) "Nefesh hachoteis hi tamus", a soul that sins should die, for the soul, that is holy and recognizes its Creator, is mostly at fault for the sin. One may question why the pasuk in Yechezkel indicates that the sinner deserves death, while in our parashah the Torah advises the sinner to bring a korban for atonement? The Sforno explains that Hashem redeemed Klal Yisrael from Mitzrayim after hearing "na'akasam", their outcries, as these outcries made Klal Yisrael deserving of redemption. Rav Yerucham Olshin shlit"a explains that the power of prayer isn't solely that Hashem grants a response. Rather the power of prayer is that the outcry internally changes the person, transforming him into a believer who recognizes his Creator. This change in the person makes him deserving of redemption and salvation. So, too, a sinner may truly be deserving of death, as Yechezkel said, yet his teshuvah and korban change him into a new person, one who is closer to Hashem and deserving of forgiveness, as said in the parashah. Our tefillos today take the place of korbanos and thus have the power to change us, making us deserving of the refuos and yeshuos we so desperately need.

---

from: YUTorah <yutorah@comms.yu.edu>
date: Mar 19, 2026, 6:39 PM
subject: The Purpose of Korbanot

Korbanot and the Modern Mind

Rabbi Moshe Taragin

Chazal gave each sefer of the Torah a nickname. The nickname of Sefer Vayikra is Torat Kohanim, as it outlines the laws of the Mikdash, which are administered and supervised by the kohanim.

The sefer opens with two parshiyot that list the laws of korbanot. Sefer Shemot described the construction of the Mishkan, including the two mizbechot. It did not describe the korbanot themselves. Parashat Vayikra and Parashat Tzav introduce the various korbanot and the ceremonies through which they are brought.

Korbanot Before Vayikra

Although korbanot first appear in detail in Sefer Vayikra, they are deeply woven into Jewish identity and Jewish history. The covenant that shaped Jewish history at the Brit Bein HaBetarim was sealed through several korbanot. According to Chazal, one of the messages conveyed that night was that Jewish history would be redeemed through the merit of korbanot.

Of course, Avraham's most iconic moment occurred when he was commanded to offer his son upon a mizbeiach on Har HaMoriah. Stopped at the final moment, he instead offered a ram as a korban. Yitzchak and Yaakov also brought korbanot, and korbanot were presented at Har Sinai even before they became formal mitzvot. The world of korbanot lies at the heart of Jewish history and Jewish identity.

Modern Discomfort With Korbanot

The modern world chafes at the thought of korbanot. Rituals involving blood and animal parts feel ancient and even unsettling, far removed from modern sensibilities. We do not typically express reverence by sacrificing animals or by performing rituals with their blood and organs. Much of the imagery surrounding the Mikdash can feel foreign to contemporary instincts. Descriptions in Chazal of the Mikdash courtyard as a "river of blood," meant to convey the intensity and grandeur of the avodah, stand sharply at odds with modern cultural instincts.

Some have attempted to contextualize the world of korbanot. In a famous and very controversial claim, the Rambam argued that korbanot were instituted to redirect ancient man's instinct for sacrifice away from idolatry and toward the worship of Hashem. The debacle of the egel demonstrated how powerful and seductive sacrificial worship was to the ancient imagination and how easily it could slide into idolatry. For that reason, the Torah established a different and carefully structured system of korbanot, allowing those generations to express reverence through korbanot, but directing that impulse exclusively toward Hashem.

Historical Approach To Mitzvot

This approach reflects the Rambam's broader tendency to explain mitzvot within their historical context. For example, he suggests that the prohibitions of sha'atnez and of removing the pe'ot were meant to distance us from contemporary pagan practices. Certain religious sects wore garments of mixed wool and linen or shaved the corners of their heads as part of their rituals. The Torah therefore prohibited these practices to separate Jewish life from those pagan rites.

What made the Rambam's position controversial is the implication that once the socio-cultural context disappears, the mitzvah might no longer be necessary. For religious Jews who view the word of Hashem as eternal and transcending specific cultural moments, this is unimaginable. Explaining mitzvot primarily through historical circumstances can make them seem temporary and can reduce them from expressions of divine command to responses to social conditions.

A similar discomfort surrounds the Rambam's view of korbanot. By presenting them as a redirection of ancient sacrificial impulses, his approach appears to diminish their divine character and raises the unsettling possibility that, at some stage of religious development, they might become obsolete. Making explicit what the Rambam only suggested implicitly, Rav Kook also wondered whether in the future animal korbanot might no longer be necessary. He did not state this categorically but merely raised the possibility that if humanity rises to a higher spiritual state, the service of the Mikdash might take a different form.

His position, however, remains a minority view, in part because it is so difficult to imagine halacha without korbanot.

A Difficult Imagination

It is difficult to imagine that such a central feature of the Torah and of halachic life would simply disappear. Korbanot stand at the heart of the Torah and are woven into our daily tefillah and the rhythm of the chagim. We pray constantly for the rebuilding of the Mikdash and for the restoration of the avodah. To suggest that these hopes are merely metaphorical, that we long for a rebuilt Mikdash but without korbanot, edges toward intellectual dishonesty. Yet if we are honest with ourselves, we must also ask whether we can realistically imagine the return of blood sacrifices.

A Revolution Of Consciousness

Evidently, though we cannot imagine ourselves drawn to korbanot, our imagination may simply be limited by the contours of our current worldview. At present we inhabit a cultural and moral space that recoils from the imagery of blood ritual. It feels distant from our religious instincts and jars against our sensibilities.

Yet redemption may transform not only the world around us but also the human mind itself. When the presence of Hashem becomes manifest, human consciousness will expand and categories that now feel foreign may assume entirely different meaning.

Inner Transformation

There is much debate about whether the arrival of Moshiach will unfold through an apocalyptic upheaval that reshapes the existing order, or whether the world will continue largely as it is, with history adjusted through renewed Jewish sovereignty and our return to Yerushalayim. The Rambam famously adopted the latter position, insisting that olam k'minhago noheg, the world will continue to function much as it does now. Others envisioned a far more dramatic and transformative messianic era, one that overturns the familiar structures of history.

Yet regardless of how one imagines the changes in the world around us, the arrival of Moshiach will undoubtedly transform the world within us. A reality in which the presence of Hashem is unmistakable will inevitably alter the texture of human experience. Living in a world where divine providence is visible, where history unfolds with a clarity we have never known, will reshape the way we interpret events and understand our place within them. The restoration of prophecy will also reshape the delicate balance between divine guidance and human autonomy. And the manifest presence of Hashem may spark a profound revolution of consciousness, allowing us to move beyond the limits of our current imagination. Ceremonies of the Mikdash that today feel distant or difficult to comprehend may one day appear meaningful and compelling, experienced in ways far richer and more resonant than we can presently envision.

The appearance of Hashem in our world will be so dramatic and so revolutionary that it will recalibrate the way we experience avodat Hashem. What now feels alien may one day appear radiant with meaning. We may yet discover a beauty in korbanot that presently lies beyond the reach of our imagination.

Fragile Assumptions

Even within ordinary history we occasionally experience moments that force us to rethink what once felt unimaginable.

It is often challenging to step outside our current assumptions and imagine a reality different from the one we inhabit. Human nature inclines us to believe that the structures of our present world will remain stable and enduring into the future. We live within familiar frameworks and assume that they will continue unchanged. Yet the past several years have confronted us with moments that shattered these assumptions. Only five years ago, the coronavirus pandemic overturned our basic expectations about health, society, and daily life. None of us could have imagined the year that awaited us. We could not picture ourselves davening outside of shul. We could not foresee the sweeping disruption to nearly every aspect of ordinary life.

Three years later our assumptions were shattered again. We believed we had established security and deterrence along our southern border. The savage attack of Hamas on October 7, 2023 overturned that confidence and thrust us into a new and painful reality. Those six dark hours carved themselves into our national memory, permanently altering the way we view our security and our vulnerability. Over the past two and a half years our outlook has continued to shift. For years we understood ourselves to be surrounded by hostile forces, all bent on our destruction. One by one, however, many of those forces have collapsed or been sharply degraded in their ability to threaten us. Only after dismantling large parts of their terror infrastructure did we fully grasp the magnitude of the danger that had encircled us. Even as we remain locked in a second confrontation with the murderous regime in Iran, it has become increasingly apparent that our security landscape, though still precarious, is significantly stronger than it was before October 7.

If the past six years have taught us anything, it is that events far beyond the scale of ordinary human expectation can suddenly break into our world. They reshape our consciousness and force us to see reality in ways we could never have imagined beforehand.

The return of Hashem's Shechinah to this world in an open and unmistakable manner will far surpass any of these events. It will not merely change the world around us; it will reshape our consciousness itself. In such a world our spiritual imagination may expand beyond its current limits.

Will that transformation allow us to appreciate korbanot in ways we cannot presently grasp? It is entirely possible that what now feels distant from our sensibilities will one day appear natural, meaningful, and even beautiful within a world suffused with the presence of Hashem.

---

from: **Alan Fisher** <afisherads@yahoo.com>

Potomac Torah Study Center
Vol. 13 #23, March 20-21, 2026; 3 Nisan 5786; Vayikra 5786

Devrei Torah are now Available for Download (normally by noon on Fridays) at www.PotomacTorah.org. Thanks to Bill Landau for hosting the Devrei Torah archives.

May Hashem protect Israel and Jews everywhere. May Hashem's protection shine on all of Israel, the IDF, and Jews throughout the world. We mourn those of our people who have perished since attacks have resumed. May the IDF and the U.S. soon force Iran to seek peace, and may a new era bring security and rebuilding for both Israel and all others who genuinely seek peace.

Sefer Vayikra consists entirely of laws, except for two short narrative sections. The end of Sefer Shemot indicates why the Torah focuses so heavily on legal issues. Once Hashem's presence (a cloud during the day and fire at night) comes to rest on the Mishkan, the intensity of His presence is too great even for Moshe to approach without God first inviting him (40:35). B'Nai Yisrael do not move from the base of Har Sinai until 12 Iyar of the second year after leaving Egypt (Bemidbar 10:11). During the entire period when God presents the laws in Vayikra to Moshe, and Moshe delivers them to B'Nai Yisrael, the people remain by the base of Har Sinai. Once Hashem's presence descends onto the Mishkan, the people must learn and observe the regulations for becoming and remaining tahor (ritually pure) so they can come close to the Ohel Moed and participate in the rituals there. Vayikra, then, is primarily the book of what B'Nai Yisrael must observe and do to become and mainitain ritual purity (tahara) so they can live in Hashem's presence.

The basic activity involving B'Nai Yisrael near the Ohel Moed is the korbanot (daily, Shabbat, and Yom Tov). The root of korban is "harov," which means "to come near." Sefer Vayikra opens with the laws of bringing a korban (Vayikra) and the procedures for the kohen performing the korban (Tzav).

Rabbi David Fohrman identifies three basic types of korbanot. An olah is a burnt offering – the entire animal is burnt, and the smoke goes up to God. A shlamim is a peace or shared offering. A small portion of the animal is burned, and the smoke goes up to Hashem. Some parts are reserved for the kohanim to eat. The remainder is for the family bringing the korban – and often for friends and other relatives (especially for a large animal that feeds dozens of people). A chatat or sin offering makes up for an unintentional transgression. Some of the chatat remains on the alter as a burnt offering, but

most of the meat goes to the Kohanim (representatives of Hashem) to eat. Since the destruction of the Second Temple, approximately 2000 years ago, there has been no place where Jews have been able to bring korbanot. An obvious question is whether, after more than 2000 years, the Third Temple will include korbanot. Rambam and Ramban are the leaders in raising this issue. Rambam, in his Guide to the Perplexed, argues that people at the time of the Temples could not have conceived of any form of worship other than korbanot. Ramban, however, counters that the detailed laws of korbanot and history of sacrifices going back to the beginning of humans convince him that korbanot are basic to maintaining a relationship between man and God. For more discussion, see the article below by Rosh Yeshiva Dov Linzer.

Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, z"l, turns the discussion around and focuses on what life wants from us. Rabbi Sacks turns to Holocaust Survivor and therapist Viktor Frankl, z"l, who developed a psychotherapy based on "man's search for meaning." To Frankl, the way to find meaning in life is to search for the reason each of us is in the world. Each of us has a role to play during our lifetime, and we should seek that role – and do the best we can to make our life meaningful. This philosophy helped Frankl survive in Auschwitz, and he used this focus to help many other Holocaust inmates and survivors cope with the horrors they faced.

Rabbi Dr. Katriel (Kenneth) Brander observes that the Torah calls one who brings a korban "adam" (a person) but changes to "nefesh" (soul) to describe a poor person who brings a grain offering. Rabbi Brander interprets that the Torah (Hashem) places a higher value on a simple, inexpensive offering of a poor person than on a more expensive korban of a wealthier person. When a poor person brings even a simple grain offering, he gives it with his own soul, and that gift is very special to God. In both cases, however, Isaiah states that God is open to mitzvot and teshuvah from all Jews – His love transcends human failure.

Rabbi Brander has frequently written about how many Israelis have responded to attacks from Iran, Gaza, and Hezbollah by increasing their levels of mitzvot. Some Haradi young people have responded by joining IDF (and performing tasks that enable them to avoid violating halacha). Some secular Israelis have starting observing kashruit and Shabbat. Sefer Vayikra is an appropriate time to applaud increases in people's mitzvot. As we look forward to Pesach, we can become more optimistic for the future of our people, both in Israel and elsewhere in a world that has been much more dangerous recently than for many prior years .

Shabbat Shalom,

Alan and Hannah

---

from: RIETS Kollel Elyon from RIETS Bella and Harry Wexner Kollel Elyon Substack <riets@substack.com>

date: Mar 15, 2026, 10:08 AM

Parashah Vayikra: Privacy, Confidentiality, and Secrets in Jewish Law
Rabbi Daniel Z. Feldman

Before the Torah launches into the legislation of the sacrificial system, it conveys, in its very first verse, a rule of striking contemporary relevance. God calls to Moses and speaks to him from the Tent of Meeting, and the verse concludes with the word laimor, "saying," granting Moses permission to transmit what he has been told. The Talmud (Yoma 4b, per Leviticus 1:1) derives from this that had such permission not been explicitly granted, it would not have been appropriate for Moses to repeat the communication. Information shared in confidence carries with it an inherent restriction on further dissemination, unless and until the original speaker explicitly grants permission to repeat it.

This principle stands as one of the central pillars of the laws of appropriate speech as they relate to the domain of privacy and confidentiality, a domain that, while ancient in its sources, has become one of the most pressing concerns of contemporary halakhic discourse.

The Peddler's Route

The biblical prohibition of talebearing is formulated in Leviticus (19:16): "Do not go as a peddler (rokhel) among your people." The choice of the word rokhel, a traveling merchant, is itself instructive. A peddler moves from place to place, carrying goods from one location and depositing them at another. The metaphor captures something essential about the dynamic of harmful speech: information, like merchandise, is lifted from one context and transported to another, where it causes damage.

On a textual level, the same root appears in Proverbs (11:13; see similarly 20:19): "A talebearer (rakhil) reveals secrets; but he who is of a faithful spirit conceals the matter." It should be noted that some, such as Rabbenu Yonah and the Vilna Gaon, interpret the verse as saying that a rokhel is likely to reveal secrets, but not necessarily that revealing secrets is itself an act of rekhilut; that is, however, the interpretation of Ibn Ezra and others. The definitional connection, on the broader reading, is significant: the talebearing prohibited by the Leviticus verse encompasses not only negative information but anything which is private, of any nature.

The Talmud's sweeping assertion that anything one is told by another person may not be related to any other without explicit permission is subject to some qualification. Some later authorities understood this as recommended behavior rather than an absolute prohibition (see Chafetz Chaim, Hilkhot Lashon Hara 2:13, and R. Betzalel Stern, Responsa BeTzel HaChokhmah IV, 84, based on Dina DeChayei to Semag, lavin 9, and Meiri to Yoma; Maimonides does not record a prohibition; see also R. Yehudah Assad, Responsa Yehudah Ya'aleh, 19). On the other hand, the commentary of Ohr HaChaim (Exodus 7:8–9 and 25:2) implies that an actual prohibition is involved, as does the language of the Sheiltot DiRav Achai Gaon (28, though R. Stern interprets this as nonliteral). The Semag (lavin 9) quotes the Talmudic statement verbatim, leading some to conclude that he perceives a biblical prohibition; the Torah Temimah (Leviticus, loc. cit.) interprets the Semag this way, though he himself maintains that the Talmudic association is an asmakhta and thus constitutes a rabbinic prohibition. Practically, the prohibition of repeating a statement without express permission is recorded in Magen Avraham (Orah Chayyim 156), who adds that if there is an explicit directive not to repeat the information, doing so would constitute lashon hara. Nonetheless, if the statement is clearly of a confidential nature, whether because the content or context indicates as such, or the speaker explicitly identifies it as such, a clear prohibition applies in any case.

What Counts as Harm

The conceptual underpinning of the privacy concern within lashon hara emerges most clearly from Maimonides. In one of his formulations of the prohibition, he defines lashon hara to include the revelation of any information that would be harmful to the subject. His delineation of "harm" is notably expansive, encompassing not only material or reputational damage but also anguish, the emotional suffering felt when one's privacy is breached.

This categorization applies to one who reveals private information to others regardless of whether he obtained it legitimately or illegitimately. It would also address the obtaining of others' private information in and of itself, even if it is not disseminated to any third party.

This last point deserves emphasis. It might seem intuitive that lashon hara is only violated when one communicates with another person, that there must be a speaker and a listener. But as some authorities have formulated, there is no reason why the talebearer cannot play both roles in the process, acting as both speaker and listener, communicating information effectively to himself (see R. Refael Stern, Nizkei Shechenim, p. 179). This was phrased directly by R. Yaakov Chagiz (1620–1674), who posed the rhetorical question: "What difference does it make if one peddles tales to another, or to one's self?" (Responsa Halakhot Ketanot I, 276). The intrusion into private information, regardless of whether it is subsequently transmitted, is itself the violation.

Rekhilut and the Erosion of Trust

The related prohibition of rekhilut, often translated as tale-carrying, i.e., reporting to a person what others have said about him, is also relevant here. While it is commonly understood that this transgression is committed when one relates a private conversation to the subject of that conversation, thus

provoking his anger against the original speaker, Maimonides' formulation does not explicitly state that to be the case. Some commentaries read his model of rekhilut as the general exposure of secrets, which inflicts tremendous harm on society through the erosion of trust (this interpretation is advanced in Kodesh Yisrael, 2:1). Early commentators, such as the Kessef Mishneh, who add the detail that the listener is the subject, would not necessarily be differing from this interpretation; the point may simply be that a secret will only be of interest to parties who are directly affected, and thus the risk of causing damage through revelation is greater in that context.

Privacy as a Value System

Beyond the specific prohibitions of lashon hara and rekhilut, broader principles of the Torah apply to the domain of privacy. The commandment to "love your fellow as yourself" (Leviticus 19:18), appearing just two verses after the prohibition of talebearing, has been interpreted by many authorities as carrying prohibitory force as well. While it is impossible, practically, to provide care for others in the form of attention and service to the same degree as one does for oneself, it is possible to apply "as yourself" to the negative: one should not do to others what one would not want done to himself. Accordingly, the verse prohibits any type of behavior that can be reasonably interpreted as universally undesirable. Many authorities have explicitly included breaches of confidentiality and privacy within this directive.

It is important to point out that the mandates relating to privacy are not purely victim-based, and therefore do not necessarily disappear if the subject is not opposed to the revelations. The Torah describes how the Jewish people were praised by Bilam, an archenemy who had come with intent to curse them. "How goodly are your tents, O [People of] Jacob" (Numbers 24:5). The Talmud (Bava Batra 60a) explains what had impressed him: he saw that the people lived with modesty and privacy, in dwellings whose doors did not open opposite each other, allowing their neighbors a full view of the interior. The implication is that it is irrelevant whether or not the neighbors themselves wanted to be seen; modesty is a communal standard and value to uphold, one that draws from many principles of Jewish law and philosophy, but with a strong basis in the precepts of lashon hara.

Damage Through Seeing

The Talmud (Bava Batra 2a–3a and 59a–b) considers the question of damage inflicted upon a person who has his privacy violated through being seen against his will, what is known as hezek re'iyah, "damage through seeing." Much like damage inflicted through malicious speech, no monetary penalties are imposed for such a violation, but it is nonetheless recognized as an offense, resulting both in a codified prohibition and the possibility of injunctive relief when applicable (see Rama, Choshen Mishpat 154:3 and 7; Sefer Me'irat Einayim #14; Netivot HaMishpat #18; see also R. Yitzchak Zilberstein, Torat HaYoledet, p. 168).

The commentaries analyze the nature of this offense (see the discussions in R. Yisrael Yaakov Kanievsky, Kehillot Yaakov, Bava Batra, 1, and R. Asher Weiss, Minchat Asher, Bava Batra #2). To some, the focus is the emotional and psychic suffering people undergo when they are violated on a personal level. Such anguish may not result in the collection of monetary damages, but it is understood as genuine and harmful. Alternatively, or perhaps additionally, some see the issue as essentially a monetary tort: by compromising the privacy of another, one restricts that person's ability to use their property as desired, resulting in reduced productivity of business endeavors or an obstruction to the subject's obtaining the full value of his property. The unwanted visibility imposes a monetary loss, albeit indirectly. Again, such indirect economic harm is not actionable as far as collecting penalties, but is nonetheless prohibited.

Particularly noteworthy is a third perspective, implied by Nachmanides in his Talmudic commentary (Chiddushim to Bava Batra, 59b, s.v. ha detenan). He connects the issue of hezek re'iyah to an unspecified concern of lashon hara. His intent may be to assert that lashon hara, as a generalized concern, is breached when the boundaries of privacy are lowered and neighbors are unnecessarily intertwined in each other's affairs, and this is true even before one word of gossip is spoken. The mere exposure of what should otherwise be personal lays the foundation of the mentality that is part of "talebearing." Some interpret Nachmanides' comments in a more victim-based fashion, suggesting that he is alluding to what later authorities expressed more explicitly: accessing the private information of another, even without revealing it to a third party, constitutes a violation of lashon hara (see Sha'arei Avraham, pp. 308–309). This may find precedent in an earlier source, the Jerusalem Talmud (Pe'ah 1:1), where a listing of offenses included in lashon hara includes "he who knows it." This condemnation of a seemingly passive state may actually refer to one who actively seeks to learn information that is meant to be confidential (Responsa VeDarashta VeChakarta, III, Choshen Mishpat, 7; the commentary Pnei Moshe to the Jerusalem Talmud interprets the passage differently).

Eavesdropping and the Limits of Silence

The Talmud's concern for hezek re'iyah is not paralleled with any expressed concern for "damage through hearing." Later authorities, however, are quick to point out that this should not be understood as permission for eavesdropping. The context in the Talmud is that of building construction and the limitations placed upon structures regarding visibility of neighboring properties. A neighbor's exposure to unwanted visibility can interfere with construction plans that pose that risk; by contrast, if a neighbor is worried that another's house will be placed in earshot, allowing him to overhear private conversations, this is not sufficient to prevent the construction, as the responsibility falls on the speaker to adjust his volume to avoid being overheard (see Meiri to Bava Batra 2a and Responsa R. Eliyahu Mizrachi [Re'em] #8; Sha'arei Avraham, pp. 312–313, suggests that the distinction is due to the fact that overhearing requires no effort, while seeing into another's property takes intent). But intentional eavesdropping on the personal conversations of others is certainly prohibited (see Emek HaMishpat, Hilkhot Shekhenim, #26, and R. Shlomo Deichovsky, in the journal Techumin, XI, pp. 299–312).

Several elements converge in this prohibition. The mandate to "love your fellow" and the prohibition of talebearing are both implicated. The Talmud also prohibits geneivat da'at, literally "stealing knowledge," generally understood as deceptive behavior, and some have associated this prohibition with the unjustified appropriation of information, whether as intellectual property theft or as invasion of privacy (see Responsa Chik'kei Lev, I, YD, 49).

The great medieval authority Rabbenu Gershom (960–1040) imposed a communal sanction (cherem) against one who would read another's mail (see Responsa Maharam MiRotenburg, Prague edition, IV, 1022; Shiltei Giborim, Shavuot ch. 5, 17a in pages of the Rif; Knesset HaGedolah/Be'er Heitiv, YD 334, glosses to Tur #5; Kol Bo, 116; and Responsa Maharam Mintz, 102:73). This sanction has also been taken to prohibit the recipient of mail from disclosing the contents to a third party (see Chik'kei Lev, ibid.). Some later authors understood the sanction to include eavesdropping, while others argued forcefully that such behavior is already prohibited by the Torah itself (see the debate between R. Tzvi Spitz, Responsa Mishpetei HaTorah, I, 92, and Responsa VeDarashta VeChakarta, I, YD, 46). The two positions do not necessarily create a practical, or even much of a theoretical, difference; the behavior may be prohibited on a Biblical level and reinforced by the later communal sanction.

Nonetheless, there may be factors such as self-protection that can justify overriding these prohibitions, as R. Yitzchak Zilberstein discusses in separate treatments of eavesdropping (Chashukei Chemed, Bava Batra, 4a, p. 46, s.v. of hashamayim) and the recording of conversations without the other party's knowledge (ibid., 39a, pp. 217–218, s.v. lo timru; see also Chik'kei Lev, ibid., for an earlier version of this approach). It can be presumed that the threshold for such evaluation varies in correlation with the severity of the infringement, with eavesdropping considered a greater violation than second-party recording, a distinction reflected in American law, which requires a warrant in the first instance and, in many states, not in the second.

Professional Confidentiality

Doctors and other similar professionals are bound to confidentiality regarding their services, both by the dictates of lashon hara and related precepts, and by professional ethical standards, sometimes emphasized through an oath, which may carry independent halakhic significance. Nonetheless, there are circumstances when disclosure may be indicated, either for the protection of the patient or client, or for the protection of others. In these cases, halakhic authorities often mandate disclosure, while some also give weight to considerations of the deleterious effect this may have on other patients and the related concern about loss of professional license (see R. Ovadiah Yosef, Responsa Yehaveh Da'at, IV, 60; R. Nachum Rabinovitz, Responsa Siach Nachum, 117; R. Yaakov Ariel, Responsa BeOhalah Shel Torah I, 83; R. Yitzchak Zilberstein, in the journal HaBe'er [Sanz], XXIV, pp. 63–69; and Ohev Yamim, diyunim, #4).

The Torah's legislation of lashon hara, rekhilut, hezek re'iyah, and bal tomar all converge on a single principle: that the private sphere of another person is not merely a protected legal category but a sacred domain. The call that opens Vayikra, intimate, directed, meant for one recipient alone, reminds us that discretion is core to dignity, and that a culture of genuine respect for privacy and appropriate confidentiality is the foundation of the trust upon which a holy society is built.

---

from: **Michal Horowitz** <michalchorowitz@gmail.com>
date: Mar 19, 2026, 8:04 AM

Vayikra 5786: The Beauty of a Bird

By Michal Horowitz

With the reading of Parshas Vayikra we begin Sefer Vayikra, the third book of the Torah. If Sefer Shemos chronicled the birth of the Jewish nation - from slavery to redemption, from Egypt to Sinai, and from Revelation to the building of the Mishkan - then Sefer Vayikra focuses on the avodah that would take place within that sacred space.

Much of our parsha discusses the various korbanos that were brought in the Mishkan, and later in the Beis HaMikdash. Among these offerings was the korban brought from birds - either a tor (turtledove) or a ben yonah (young dove).

The Torah instructs that when such a korban is brought, the kohen performs the avodah and then burns the bird upon the mizbayach (Copper Altar). The pasuk tells us:

וְהִקְרִיבוֹ הַכֹּהֵן אֶל־הַמִּזְבֵּחַ וּמָלַק אֶת־רֹאשׁוֹ וְהִקְטִיר הַמִּזְבֵּחָה וְנִמְצָה דָמוֹ עַל קִיר הַמִּזְבֵּחַ - And the kohen shall bring it near to the altar, and nip off its head, and cause it to [go up in] smoke on the altar, and its [the bird's] blood shall be pressed out upon the wall of the altar (Vayikra 1:15).

Two pasukim later the Torah teaches:

וְשִׁסַּע אֹתוֹ בִכְנָפָיו לֹא יַבְדִּיל וְהִקְטִיר אֹתוֹ הַכֹּהֵן הַמִּזְבֵּחָה עַל־הָעֵצִים אֲשֶׁר עַל־הָאֵשׁ עֹלָה הוּא אִשֵּׁה רֵיחַ נִיחֹחַ לַיהוָה - And he shall split it open with its wing feathers [intact], but he shall not tear it completely apart. The kohen shall then cause it to [go up in] smoke on the altar, on top of the wood which is on the fire. It is a burnt offering, a fire offering, a pleasing fragrance to Hashem (1:17).

Commenting on this offering, Rashi notes a fascinating detail. The wings of the bird are burned together with the korban. Rashi explains that when the wings burn, they emit a strongly unpleasant odor. One might have thought that this part of the bird should be removed before the offering is burned. Why then are the wings included?

Rashi explains that the bird offering was generally brought by a poor person. The Torah therefore says that the entire bird should be burned upon the altar, wings included, even though they produce an unpleasant smell. The reason is because this is the offering of a poor person, and HKB"H says: כְּדַי שֶׁיְּהֵא הַמִּזְבֵּחַ שָׂבֵעַ וּמְהֻדָּר בְּקָרְבָּנוֹ שֶׁל עָנִי - so that the altar is filled and beautified with the offering of a poor person.

Chazal are teaching us that Hashem cherishes the korban of the poor person. While the wealthy individual might bring a large animal offering, the poor person can only afford a small bird. If the wings were removed, the korban would appear even smaller. Therefore the Torah teaches that the wings remain, allowing the offering to appear full and complete upon the mizbayach.

What an incredibly beautiful lesson this teaches us.

In the eyes of HKB"H, the value of a korban is not measured by its size or its cost. It is measured by the heart and soul of the person who brings it.

The wealthy person may bring a large animal offering. The poor person brings a small bird. Yet if that bird represents the full ability of the one who offers it, then that korban is precious before Hashem.

In the absence of the avodah of korbanos today, we must recognize that this lesson and message extends far beyond the korbanos of the Mishkan and the BHM"K.

In our own lives, people serve Hashem in many different ways. One person may give large amounts of tzedaka. Another may only be able to give a small sum. One person may have the time and ability to accomplish great things for the community. Another may only be able to contribute in smaller ways. But HKB"H does not measure our service by comparison to others. He measures each person according to his or her own ability, effort, and sincerity.

When a person gives what he or she truly can - that offering is beloved before Hashem. As Rashi continues and says: לוֹמַר לְךָ אֶחָד הַמַּרְבֶּה וְאֶחָד הַמַּמְעִיט וּבִלְבַד שֶׁיְּכַוֵּן אֶת לִבּוֹ לַשָּׁמַיִם, to teach you whether one offers much or little, it is equally pleasing to Hashem, provided that he directs his heart to Heaven (Rashi to Vayikra 1:17).

The small bird with its wings burning upon the altar reminds us that no sincere act of avodas Hashem is ever insignificant. When we give from the fullness of our heart and according to our ability, that offering rises upward and is cherished before HKB"H.

This idea is echoed elsewhere in the Torah as well. When the Torah describes the korbanos, it repeatedly refers to them as a רֵיחַ נִיחוֹחַ לַה' - a pleasing aroma before Hashem. Chazal explain that this does not mean that HKB"H is in need of offerings or their fragrance. Rather, the "pleasing aroma" refers to the fact that the will of Hashem has been fulfilled. When a person brings an offering with sincerity, humility, and devotion, that act itself is precious before Him. Whether the offering is large or small, costly or simple, what matters most is the heart and intention with which it is brought.

May we merit to serve Hashem with kavanas ha'lev, correct intentions of heart, as well as the true ratzon of our neshamos, our pure souls. And in this merit, may we soon witness the restoration of the avodah in the BHM"K with the coming of the ultimate redemption, speedily and in our days.

In Nissan they were redeemed, in Nissan they will be redeemed (R"H 11a).

Parshiot Vayikra-Tzav: The Korban Minchah

By Rabbi Yitzchak Etshalom

I. OVERVIEW OF SEFER VAYYIKRA

Sefer Vayyikra is devoted to the subject of Shekhinah - God's Presence among the Jewish People. The Sefer can be broken up, in broad strokes, into the following sections:

Ch. - Topic

1-7: Korbanot (offerings)

8: Investiture of Kohanim

9-10: Inauguration of the Mishkan

11-15: Various Sources of Impurity

(which render one unfit to participate in Mishkan-related activities)

16: Purification of the Mishkan (Yom haKippurim)

17: Laws Related to Offerings

18-20: Sanctity of the People

21-22: Sanctity of the Kohanim

23: Festivals (and their "Mishkan" aspect)

24: Additional Offerings

25: Sanctity of the Land

26: Covenantal Blessing and Warning

27: Sanctified Objects

Parashot Vayyikra and Tzav overlap two of these topics (Korbanot and Investiture of the Kohanim); we will focus on the first of these - and on the first seven chapters of Vayyikra.

II. VAYYIKRA & TZAV: DIFFERENT PRESENTATIONS

Although we have listed the first seven chapters under the title "Korbanot", there is a significant difference in the presentation of the Korbanot in Parashat Vayyikra (Chapters 1-5) and that in Parashat Tzav (Chapters 6-7) (which, at a cursory glance, seem to be somewhat redundant). Whereas the presentation in Vayyikra comes from the non-Kohanic perspective - i.e. from the point of view of the "bringer" of the offering - the presentation in Tzav is Kohanic in function. Each of the Korbanot is introduced with the phrase *Zot Torat ha...* - "this is the instruction regarding [the offering] of ...". In Parashat Vayyikra, the emphasis is on what types of circumstances would motivate the bringing of an offering, what type of animal (or grain) is brought etc. In Tzav, the focus is on the procedure of the officiant Kohen once the offering has been brought.

KORBANOT: DEFINITIONS AND CATEGORIES

The word Korban is traditionally translated as "sacrifice". Regardless of what the original meaning of "sacrifice" was (it probably comes from a combination of Latin words - meaning "to make holy"), its common usage bears little - if any - resemblance to the ideology -or etymology - of a Korban. In conventional English, a sacrifice is something given up in

exchange for nothing - but on behalf of a noble cause (e.g. defense of country, raising children etc.) The word Korban, on the other hand, comes from the Hebrew root "K*R*B - meaning "to come close". A Korban is a vehicle for Man to come close to God. For purposes of this shiur, we will either refer to these offerings as Korbanot (plural of Korban) or as "offerings".

There are, generally speaking, two types of Korbanot: Zevachim (lit. "slaughtered") and Menachot (grain offerings). Although we will focus on the Korban Minchah, a brief overview of Zevachim is in order - and it will help us understand the phenomenology of the Korban Minchah with greater insight.

ZEVACHIM: AN OVERVIEW

There are four basic types of Zevachim. (My thanks to the Judaic Seminar list, from whose archives I copies this synopsis)

1 OLAH:. "ascend", seems to refer to this sacrifice's distinctive feature, that the offering is completely burnt on the altar (except for the hide, which is given to the participating priest), thus it totally "ascends" to God. Only male animals or doves or pigeons (male or female) are acceptable.

2. SH'LAMIM: from "shalem" or "shalom", presents many possible interpretations. It may express a sense of "well-being"; "wholeheartedness" with God; a gift of "greeting" to God; or perhaps "completeness" (altar, donor and priest all sharing in it). Male or female animals are acceptable but not birds. Certain fat and internal organs are placed on the altar by the kohanim. The remainder, almost the whole animal, is permitted to be eaten. In Vayyikra Chapter 7, the Torah ordains that any pure person is permitted to partake of the Sh'lamim, thus allowing the donor to share it with family and invitees. Eating the Sh'lamim is permitted during the day and night of the offering and the day following and was not restricted to the sanctuary precincts. The "todah" (thanksgiving offering) - a Sh'lamim subdivision - is an exception in that it is only allowed to be eaten the day of its offering and the night following. Kohanim receive the breast and the right thigh.

An individual's olah and Sh'lamim are voluntary offerings. Although their names may connote certain purposes, and expiation was mentioned in connection with the olah, the reasons why one may bring an olah are not provided. [Note that Hazal do provide several explanations for the 'Olah - notably, that it is a form of expiation for neglected Mitzvot Aseh.]

3. HATTAT: "sin-offering", refers only to unintentional sins, generally those that had they been done intentionally are culpable of "karet". Carelessness and inadvertence indicate laxness as concerns one's responsibilities; such transgressions defile the sanctuary. The hattat, bringing purification and expiation to the sanctuary, is a mandatory part of the unintentional sinner's repentance process. With the exception of the Asham brought for withholding testimony, intentional sins can not be expiated by means of a sacrifice.

Four classes of hattat, varying according to the offender's status and without reference to the particular transgression, are itemized - those of:

a) the Kohen Gadol;

b) the whole community of Israel (explained by the sages as based on a high court directive);

c) the Nasi (including the king);

d) any individual.

From the sanctuary perspective the first two classes reflect a graver transgression, impacting the spiritual welfare of the nation, and require an elaborate ritual involving a young bull, a blood- sprinkling ritual on the parokhet veil in the Ohel Moed and upon the incense altar as well as upon the bronze altar, and burning the complete bull on the ash heap outside the camp. The latter two classes of hattat lack these stringencies. After all, the Nasi is not an official religious leader. He brings a male goat while the private individual brings a female goat or ewe. Male Kohanim eat from these latter offerings within sanctuary precincts.

Three particular transgressions of omission that require a hattat offering for expiation are also listed:

a) one who withheld testimony despite having heard an adjuration to testify;

b) various cases of being impure in a span of forgetfulness (and entering the sanctuary or eating sacred items); and

c) inadvertently violating an oath.

Depending on financial ability, one either brings a female sheep or goat, two birds or a measure of flour. In the latter case, oil and frankincense are not added, reflecting the somber nature of the offering.

4. ASHAM: "guilt-offering" of a ram, referring to three specific classes of violations:

a) asham me`ila - an unintentional misappropriation for personal use of sanctuary property. The violator makes full restitution and pays a penalty of one fifth in addition to the sacrifice

b) asham taluy - the contingency asham - when one has a doubt if he committed an unintentional transgression that had be been certain he did transgress unintentionally would require a hattat and

c) asham g'zelot - a trespass against God in that one lied under oath, defrauding his fellow man concerning a deposit, loan, stolen article, found article, etc.

When the defrauder chooses to repent, he restores the lost capital to the owner, adds a fifth as penalty and brings an asham sacrifice. Although the sin was intentional, when the violator came forth himself to repent by making restitution and paying a penalty, he is allowed the expiation sacrifice. Bamidbar 5:5-10 contains a supplement to this asham legislation.

Before addressing the fifth type of Korban - the Minchah - we will look at two approaches among the Rishonim as to the meaning behind Korbanot (specifically Zevachim).

III. RAMBAM AND RAMBAN ON KORBANOT

Rambam, in his philosophic work Moreh Nevuchim (The Guide for the Perplexed), devotes a good deal of discussion to the topic of Ta'amei haMitzvot (the rationale behind the Mitzvot). Most of the third (and final) section of the Guide contains a study of many of the ritual Mitzvot and prohibitions found in the Torah. Rambam's general approach (unlike that of Rashi as noted in the beginning of this week's special reading, Bamidbar 19) is that every Mitzvah is driven by a specific and deliberate rationale. Much of the thinking behind ritual prohibitions (e.g. Sh'a'atnez, meat & milk), according to Rambam, can best be understood against the background of Canaanite pagan practice at the time of the Torah. Since the pagans practiced such rituals as cooking a kid in its mother's milk, performing cult-worship in clothes made of a wool-and-linen mix etc., the Torah prohibited these practices to separate us from them and their idolatrous practices.

In his discussion of the rationale behind Korbanot, Rambam similarly follows a path of reasoning guided by historic considerations:

"It is impossible to go from one extreme to the other suddenly. Therefore man - according to his nature - is not capable of abandoning suddenly that to which he was deeply accustomed ... As it was then the deeply-ingrained and universal practice that people were brought up with to conduct religious worship with animal sacrifices in temples ... God in His wisdom did not see fit to command us to completely reject all these practices - something that man could not conceive of accepting, according to human nature which inclines to habit ... He therefore left these practices but transformed them from their idolatrous associations ... that their purpose should be directed toward Him. Thus, He commanded us to build a sanctuary for Him with an altar to His name and offer sacrifices to Him... In this way idolatry was blotted out and the great foundation of our faith - the existence and oneness of God - was established. This was accomplished without confusing people's minds by prohibiting the worship they were accustomed to and which alone they were familiar with ... God doesn't choose to change man's nature with a miracle ... As sacrificial worship is not a primary intention ... only one Temple has been appointed ... in no other place is it allowed to sacrifice ... to limit such worship within bounds that God did not deem it necessary to abolish it ... because of this the prophets often declared that the object of sacrifices is not very essential and that God can dispense with them..."(Guide III:32). [It should be noted that this approach stands in stark contrast to that taken by Rambam in the Mishneh Torah. Scholars have attempted to harmonize these approaches with varying degrees of success.]

While this approach has a certain attraction - especially in assuaging our modern sensibilities which are easily ruffled by the picture of animal offerings - it carries with it considerable difficulties. First of all, this places the entire scope of Korbanot in the realm of a temporary exigency born out of a regrettable situation. The implication of this is that Korbanot do not belong to the realm of the ideal - and, as such, have no place in our vision for the Messianic future. There are two additional challenges to this approach, voiced by Ramban. After quoting Rambam's approach, Ramban challenges:

"But these words are mere expressions, healing casually a severe wound and a great difficulty, and making "the Table of the Eternal polluted", [as if the offerings were intended only] to remove false beliefs from the hearts of the wicked and fools of the world, when Scripture says that they are "the food of the offering made by fire, for a pleasing odor." Moreover, [if the offerings were meant to eliminate] the foolish [ideas] of the Egyptians, their disease would not thereby be cured. On the contrary, it would increase the cause of sorrow, for since the intention of the above-mentioned wicked ones was to worship the constellations of the sheep and the ox, which according to their opinion possess certain powers [over human affairs], and which is why they abstain from eating them in deference to their power and strength, then if these species are slaughtered to the Revered Name, it is a mark of respect and honor to [these constellations]. These worshippers themselves were in the habit of so doing, as He has said: "And they shall no more sacrifice their sacrifices unto the satyrs," and those who made the [golden] calf sacrificed to it. Now the Rambam mentions that the idolaters used to sacrifice to the moon on the days of new-moon, and to the sun when it rose in a particular constellation known to them from their books. The disease of idolatry would surely have been far better cured if we were to eat [these animal-deities] to our full, which would be considered by them forbidden and repugnant, and something they would never do.

"Furthermore, when Noah came out of the ark with his three sons, there were as yet no Chaldeans or Egyptians in the world, yet he brought an offering, which was pleasing to God, as concerning it Scripture says: "And the Eternal smelled the pleasing odor"...Yet there was as yet not the slightest trace at all of idol-worship in the world...The Scriptural expression concerning the offerings is "My food which is presented unto Me for offerings made by fire, for a pleasing odor unto Me" (Bamidbar 28:2). Far be it that they should have no other purpose and intention except the elimination of idolatrous opinions from the minds of fools.

"It is far more fitting to accept the reason for the offerings which scholars (Ibn Ezra?) say, namely that since man's deeds are accomplished through thought, speech and action, therefore God commanded that when man sins and brings an offering, he should lay his hands upon it in contrast to the deed [committed]. He should confess his sins verbally in contrast to his [evil] speech, and he should burn the inwards and the kidneys [of the offering] in fire because they are the instruments of thought and desire in the human being. He should burn the legs [of the offering] since they correspond to the hands and feet of a person, which is analogous to the blood in his body. All these acts are performed in order that when they are done, a person should realize that he has sinned against his God with his body and his soul, and that "his" blood should really be spilled and "his" body burned, were it not for the loving-kindness of the Creator, Who took from him a substitute and a ransom, namely this offering, so that its blood should be in place of his blood, its life in place of his life, and that the chief limbs of the offering should be in place of the chief parts of his body. The portions [given from the sin-offering to the priests], are in order to support the teachers of the Torah, so that they pray on his behalf. The reason for the Daily public Offering is that it is impossible for the public [as a whole] to continually avoid sin. Now these are words which are worthy to be accepted, appealing to the heart as do words of Agadah. (Commentary on the Torah: Vayyikra 1:9)

In summary, whereas Rambam views Korbanot as a historical exigency, Ramban sees them as [close to] ideal, reflecting man's obligation or need to vicariously offer himself on the altar - the image of which will surely stir him to repentance. As we explained earlier (in the shiur on Parashat Vay'chi this year), the act of Semikhah (laying the hands on the animal immediately prior to slaughtering it) is the vehicle through which the person transfers his "energy" to the animal, thus effecting the substitute-offering.

Although there are some theological and philosophical (as well as historical) difficulties with this approach, there is one which comes directly from our text. How does Ramban explain a Korban Minchah - which cannot possibly constitute a human substitute and where the law of Semikhah does not apply?

Besides this problem, there are several textual "flags" in the Torah's commands regarding the Korban Minchah which we will address.

IV. KORBAN MINCHAH

A Minchah, meaning "tributary gift" to God, is the fifth type of Korban. Although in other parts of Tanakh the term "Minchah" is applied to offerings of both agricultural produce and animals (B'resheet 4:3-4; Sh'muel I 2:15-17), in Korbanic legislation it strictly refers to grain offerings. Generally, it is comprised of semolina wheat (solet) and olive oil with some frankincense spice (levonah) added. It could be offered in several varieties: raw, oven-baked in either a thick or thin preparation, or fried either on a griddle or deep-fried in a pan. A fistful is burnt on the altar and the remainder eaten by male priests within sanctuary precincts.

The laws of the Minchah are delineated in Vayyikra, Chapter 2 - and later, from the Kohanic perspective, in 6:7-11. [It is recommended that you read these sections before continuing].

There are several textual anomalies in this section:

1) Unlike the first chapter, which describes the "Korban Olah" (and later sections describing the other Zevachim), the section on the "Korban Minchah" is introduced with the phrase *v'Nefesh ki Takriv*. A "Nefesh" (which means soul in Rabbinic Hebrew) means "a person" in Biblical Hebrew. The specific orientation of the word is "life-force", as we see in Vayyikra 17:11, "The Nefesh of all flesh is in the blood". Why is the Minchah uniquely described as being brought by a Nefesh?

2) The "Kometz" (fistful) of the Minchah which is burned on the altar is called an *Azkarah* - commemoration. What is this commemoration and what is being remembered?

3) In 2:11, the Torah prohibits a leavened Minchah - or the use of any leavening or sweetening agent on the altar. Why is Hametz to be distanced from the Mikdash?

4) Within the context of the Korban Minchah, the Torah commands us to salt every Minchah - with the *Melach B'rit Elohekha* (The salt of the covenant of your God - 2:13). What is the significance of salt - specifically within the context of the Korban Minchah?

There are two other questions, both related to the issue of Hametz:

5) Although the Torah forbade the use of leavening in preparing a Minchah, we are commanded to offer a communal Minchah on Shavuot composed of two loaves (known as Minchat Sh'tei haLechem - specifically made of Hametz (Vayyikra 23:17). Why the exception?

6) There is one other exception to the Hametzless-Minchah rule: the loaves which accompany the Korban Todah (a subset of Sh'lamim). In Vayyikra 7:12-13, the Torah commands us to bring (40) loaves as an accompaniment to the Korban Todah (thanksgiving offering) - and ten of them must be Hametz! Again - why the exception? (See M. Menachot 5:1, where these two are presented as the only two exceptions.)

V. RAV BIN-NUN'S APPROACH

Regarding the sh'tei halechem, I'd like to share the synopsis of an approach developed by R. Yo'el Bin-Nun. The complete thesis is found in Megadim 13:25-45. This synopsis was put together by Shalom Holtz for the Virtual Beit Midrash of Yeshivat Har Etzion:

The key difference between Hametz and Matzah lies in how sophisticated the wheat has become through production. Hametz is wheat in its most complex form. It is the goal of the wheat grower and the final stage to which the wheat-growing process can be taken. Matzah, on the other hand, is bread in its most basic form, at the beginning of the bread-baking process. These physical characteristics of Hametz and Matzah shed light on several mitzvot which govern their consumption, including the prohibition of Hametz on Pesach.

Because of its simple nature, Matzah is considered "lechem oni," bread of poverty. A poor person, one who cannot afford to bring the wheat to its most advanced form of Hametz, bakes Matzah. The Israelites are commanded to eat matzot and maror, together with the korban Pesach, in order to remember the poverty and slavery they experienced in Egypt.

It would seem more appropriate that with the redemption from Egypt would come a commandment to eat Hametz. Just as the Matzah has symbolized the Israelites' state of poverty and enslavement, Hametz would be an appropriate symbol

of their newly-obtained freedom and prosperity, for Hametz is the food of the wealthy. However, the instructions for the days which commemorate the period immediately following the exodus commands exactly the opposite: not only a commandment to eat Matzah but also a ban on Hametz. "Throughout the seven days unleavened bread shall be eaten; no leavened bread shall be found with you, and no leaven shall be found in your territory (Shemot 13:7)." What, then, is behind this prohibition and the parallel obligation?

Matzah symbolizes that the exodus from Egypt is only the beginning of the redemption process. After the night of the korban Pesach, the Israelites are not fully redeemed. Matzah, bread at the beginning of the process of its production, serves as a reminder that the exodus is just the beginning of a journey, a long hard road through the desert, with the goal far in the distance.

The process which begins at the exodus culminates in two other major events: the giving of the Torah and the entrance into the Land of Canaan. The mitzva of bikkurim, the offering of the first-grown fully-ripe fruits, commemorates both of these events in Jewish history. The holiday marking the beginning of the harvest of the wheat crop, Shavuot, falls out on the same date as the giving of the Torah, the sixth of Sivan. A major component of the ceremony of the offering of the bikkurim, which commemorates the arrival in the Holy Land, is mikra bikkurim, the recitation of Devarim 26:5-10. These verses constitute a declaration of thanks for a successful crop grown in the Land of Israel. The mitzva of bikkurim, which commemorates the dual conclusion of the redemption process, includes a positive commandment regarding Hametz. The meal-offering brought with the bikkurim, known as minchat shtei ha-lechem, is an offering of two loaves of leavened bread. This sacrifice of Hametz on Shavuot represents the completion of the process begun on Pesach, which was symbolized by the matzot.

The "maggid" section of the Haggada is centered on the recitation of the midrashic interpretation of mikra bikkurim. However, the reading is limited to the first verses, which focus on the history of Am Yisra'el:

"My father was a wandering Aramean, and he went down to Egypt and sojourned there, few in number. He became there a great mighty, and populous nation. The Egyptians dealt ill with us and afflicted us, and laid upon us hard labor. And we cried out to Hashem , the God of our fathers, and God heard our voice and saw our affliction and our toil and our oppression. And God took us out of Egypt with a strong hand and with an outstretched arm, and with great terror and with wonders." (Devarim 26:5-8).

The last verses, which contain the expressions of thanks: "And He brought us to this place, and He gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. And now, behold, I have brought the first fruit of the land which You, God, have given me" (ibid., 9-10) are not recited on the night of the Seder. The selection of this section of the Torah for maggid is a reminder of the nature of the Seder night and of Pesach in general. Pesach commemorates the beginning of the process of redemption whose conclusion is symbolized by the bikkurim. On Pesach we remember that the exodus was only a beginning, and to do this we eat Matzah. Similarly, we recite only those verses within mikra bikkurim which pertain to the process of redemption. We leave out the verses pertaining to the final arrival in Eretz Yisra'el as a reminder that on Pesach, at least, the process has just begun.

VI. ANOTHER APPROACH TO HAMETZ

I would like to propose another understanding of Hametz and the rationale behind the prohibition of Hametz both on Pesach and in Menachot. This will also explain the other text anomalies pointed out above.

Along with Rav Bin-Nun's take on Hametz, positing it as representative of the completion of a process, there is another, more basic reality about Hametz and about what it may represent.

Although on a molecular level there is certainly change which takes place in flour and water - that change is not visible (in a short time period) to the naked eye. Hametz, on the other hand, is the very soul of radical change. Flour and water, baked without leaven, can remain in that flat state (Matzah) for a long time and nothing much would change in the makeup of that bread. Once leaven is introduced, rapid change takes place - change which also introduces rapid entropy and mutation. Take a piece of Hametz and look at it several weeks later - the same leaven which caused it to rise and become glorious and airy - has introduced the mold which makes it inedible. Hametz represents immediate and radical change.

This explains why the Torah places such stringent prohibitions on the use of Hametz on Pesach. Although we might consider that Pesach is a time of change (from slavery to nobility, from darkness to a great light etc.), a quick look at the

text of the Torah will give us a very different picture.

Throughout the Exodus narrative, we are reminded that the merit by which we were redeemed was an ancient covenant - going back to B'resheet 15 and the B'rit Bein haB'tarim (Covenant between the pieces). The very essence of Pesach is timelessness - that the B'rit was only dormant, not dead and that its time had come to be fulfilled. There is no room for Hametz on Pesach, because the celebration and commemoration of Pesach is the historical bond which we share with our ancestors going all the way back to the Exodus - and several hundred years before that. Indeed, Pesach can act as the model for the future Redemption because the absence of Hametz allows the experience to remain unchanged and alive.

We can explain the Sh'tei haLechem on Shavu'ot in this light. Although we are accumstomed to thinking of Shavu'ot as the commemoration of the Giving of the Torah, this association is not made anywhere in the T'nakh (the earliest source is the Book of Jubilees, an apocryphal work from the first two centuries BCE). Within the context of the Torah, Shavu'ot is purely an agricultural festival, commemorating the beginning of the wheat harvest.

Unlike Pesach, which represents the timeless nature of Jewish (meta-)history, the harvest season is a time which, by definition, we wish to see pass. It would be counterproductive (and, by definition, impossible) to have every day be the beginning of the harvest - it is specifically the change from growth, to harvest, to plowing etc. which causes the greatest blessings to be realized in the field. Hence, the offering brought on Shavu'ot is specifically Hametz - we are celebrating this particular time and its passage.

VII. BETWEEN ZEVACHIM AND MENACHOT

We can now revisit our earlier questions about the prohibition of Hametz in Menachot and the textual anomalies in Parashat Menachot.

The thesis here is that unlike Zevachim which (following Ramban) represent Man's desire to have a one-time "altar experience", a Minchah represents Man's yearning to stand in God's presence at all times. This is the sentiment expressed by David:

One thing I asked of Hashem , that will I seek after: to live in the house of Hashem all the days of my life, to behold the beauty of Hashem , and to inquire in His Temple" (T'hillim 27:4).

It is not just the "Adam" (person) who brings a Minchah - it is the "Nefesh", the essence of the person, that brings this offering in his attempt to come - and stay - close to God; to appease Him and enjoy His Presence. However, since the individual cannot practically stay in the Mikdash, in front of the altar and he must (sadly) depart - he leaves a piece of this offering behind, to commemorate not only his visit, but his yearning to stay. That is why the Kometz (fistful) is called an Azkarah - it commemorates his visit (almost, if you will, like signing a guest book).

Although it has been a number of years since I nestled in the safety of the Beit Midrash in Har Etzion, that experience is something which has a timeless component. I return there in my mind often and maintain those years as a series of unyellowed, fresh snapshots. I share this perception - which we all have in our souls with regards to some place or person in our past - to illustrate the ideology of the Minchah and the hopes of the person offering it. The endeavor of the Minchah is an experience which the Makriv (person bringing the offering) would like to have bronzed in time. His brief stand in the holiest of places, in front of the altar, in God's Presence, is a moment out of time which (hopefully) lasts forever. As such, there is absolutely no room for Hametz in the composition of a Minchah - it represents the fleeting, the temporary, the passing event.

Salt, on the other hand, plays the exact opposite role. Where Hametz mutates, salt preserves. Salt is called the Melach B'rit (salt of the covenant) because just as salt preserves meat for a long time, the B'rit is preserved (and preserves us) forever. The Minchah, which represents Man's desire to ever and always be standing "there", is salted in order to represent that timelessness.

We now come to the one other exception to our Hametz-rule: Lachmei Todah - the loaves which accompany the Korban Todah.

The Korban Todah is not brought by someone who just feels gratitude; it is brought by someone who was in some sort of danger and was saved. The Gemara (Berakhot 54b) states: There are four [circumstances in which a person] must give

thanks. [They are:] those who travel by sea, those who travel through a desert, someone who was imprisoned [or taken captive] and freed - and a sick person who was healed. (The B'rakhah known as "Birkat haGomel" is recited today in lieu of that Korban).

Unlike a conventional Korban Sh'lamim, which might be brought as a demonstration of goodwill (see above), the Korban Todah is brought in direct response to a potentially tragic situation which was averted by the grace of God. There is every reason to introduce Hametz here - because this is a situation which the person bringing it would not want to see repeated - it is not a "snapshot in time" which is cherished, rather a horrible possibility which we would never want to experience again.

[Note that only 10 of the loaves are Hametz, whereas the other 30 are not. Perhaps the idea is that the person bringing it was in one of the four dangers mentioned (sea, desert, prison, illness) - so that 1/4 of the loaves are Hametz.]

Compare the Lachmei Todah with its "sister-Minchah" - the *Lachmei Eil Nazir*. When a Nazir completes a successful term of N'zirut (see Bamidbar 6), he brings an offering which includes a ram - and the ram is accompanied by 40 loaves. Here, however, all 40 are Matzah - no Hametz at all. According to our thesis, this is easy to understand. Much as the Nazir is returning to the "real world", he likely sees the term (30 days or more) of N'zirut as an idyllic period of spiritual cleansing and sanctity - which he would like to preserve. Again, there is no room for Hametz here.

VIII. V'ARVAH L'Hashem ...

In Malakhi (3:4), we read a vision of the Messianic future which begins with this oft-quoted verse:

And the Minchah of Yehudah and Yerushalayim will be sweet to God, just as in days of old and like years past.

We can now approach this verse with a new understanding - the Minchah is the Korban which lasts forever and which, when God redeems us, will represent more than any other offering, the eternal link which we have with God and with the worship at His altar. Is it any wonder that Rav Kook zt"l was of the opinion that when the third Beit haMikdash is built, that all Korbanot will take on the spiritual flavor of the Minchah? The B'rit which God maintains, keeping us alive and restoring us to our Land, is symbolized by the eternal Korban Minchah.

Parshat Vayikra: Animal Sacrifice? The Shelamim

by Rabbi Eitan Mayer

This week we will look at two fundamental questions:

1) Are sacrifices a concession or an ideal? Does Hashem allow them or demand them? Sources to be discussed:

a) Rambam (Maimonides), Guide to the Perplexed 3:32
b) Rambam, Guide 3:46
c) Midrash VaYikra Rabba 22:8
d) Ramban (Nahmanides), VaYikra 1:9

2) What is the Torah's attitude toward killing animals for food? Sources to be discussed:

a) Bereshit (Genesis) 1:29-30 -- Mission statement I to humanity
b) Bereshit 9:3-4 -- Mission statement II to humanity
c) Bereshit 4:4 -- Hevel's sacrifice
d) Bereshit 8:20 -- No'ah's sacrifice
e) VaYikra (Lev.) 3 -- the shelamim I
f) VaYikra 7 -- the shelamim II
g) VaYikra 17 -- the shelamim III
h) Devarim (Deut.) 12 -- slaughter for meat

SACRIFICES: IDEAL OR CONCESSION?

Many of us have wondered about the purpose of the korbanot (offerings to Hashem, including animal sacrifices), especially from Hashem's end: Does He really want them? If so, why? If not, why does He command us to offer them?

THE RAMBAM: CONCESSION:

In the Guide of the Perplexed 3:32, the Rambam begins his discussion of korbanot by observing that human nature cannot change overnight. In order for people to change, they must be gradually introduced to new situations and new rules. If suddenly presented with unfamiliar demands, they simply reject them. Hashem is aware of this, of course, so when He calls upon the newly freed Bnei Yisrael to become his "kingdom of priests and holy nation," He knows that He will have to transform the people gradually. Since the people are deeply entrenched in the idolatrous practices of the nations (see Ezekiel 18) of which they have become part -- Egypt in particular -- Hashem knows that transferring their theological loyalty from the gods they worship to Himself must be done gradually and smoothly to succeed. If the people are used to worshipping their gods by offering sacrifices, then the way to establish their permanent knowledge of and loyalty to Hashem is to have them sacrifice to Hashem instead of to their former gods. Of course, Hashem does not have much use for sacrifices Himself and would not have commanded them if He had His "druthers," but He is willing to accept them because He is patient and understanding of human frailties.

Lest we reject the Rambam's theory on the grounds that the Torah would not have gone to all the trouble of the great detail of the korbanot for such a paltry purpose, the Rambam offers an example to demonstrate that Hashem is willing to go to plenty of of 'trouble' to allow for the people's weaknesses. When Hashem leads the people out of Egypt, He takes them the 'long way,' purposely bypassing the shorter route since it would lead through the land of the Philistines. Hashem sees that these people, slaves yesterday, cannot magically become warriors today and be willing to encounter the trained forces of a hostile nation -- they might just turn back in fear and return to Egypt. In the same way, the Rambam argues, Hashem knows that telling Bnei Yisrael to worship Him without sacrifices would be like telling us nowadays that we are not to pray or try in other ways to communicate with Hashem; instead, we are to worship Hashem solely by meditating on Him.

It is worth noting that VaYikra Rabba 22:8 records a point of view which seems to express the same idea as the Rambam expresses here.

THE RAMBAN: IDEAL:

The Ramban (VaYikra 1:9) reports the Rambam's position, vehemently rejects it, and then articulates his own view. He reports, based on Guide of the Perplexed 3:46, that the Rambam believes that korbanot are intended only as a polemic against idol worship; for example, since the Egyptians, Chaldeans, and Hindus worship sheep, rams, and cows respectively and therefore do not kill these animals, we are commanded to slaughter these very animals to our God to show our rejection of the veneration of these animals.

The Ramban's objections to the Rambam's idea:

1) The Torah records in many places that the korbanot create a "pleasing smell" when they burn; this clearly shows that Hashem is pleased by them and does not just tolerate them.

2) If the whole idea is to show to ourselves (and the world) that we reject these animals as gods, then the most direct way for the Torah to accomplish that would have been to command us to slaughter and eat these animals (something which their true worshippers would never do) -- not to slaughter these animals as *sacrifices.* Sacrificing these animals might lead people to believe that we *agree* that these animals represent the heavenly constellations of the lamb and ox, and that we are worshipping these constellations.

3) No'ah offers sacrifices when he emerges from the ark after the floodwaters subside. Since there are no Egyptians and Chaldeans yet in the world, the Rambam's theory cannot explain why Hashem seems pleased with the sacrifices. Hevel also offers a sacrifice, and certainly there are no idol worshippers to worry about at that time.

[Of course, it is possible to respond to some of these arguments in various ways. The Ramban's second objection to the Rambam's position seems especially weak, as the Ritva points out in Sefer ha-Zikkaron: the reason it would not have been enough for the Torah to command us to eat the above animals is because, as the Rambam says in 3:32 (which the Ramban does not cite -- he cites only from 3:46), the people were entrenched in the practice of sacrificing and could not be deflected from it. That being the case, Hashem decided that as long as they were sacrificing, they might as well use the opportunity for a polemic against idol worship -- i.e., by sacrificing the animals worshipped by others. The Ritva and Abravanel also deal with the Ramban's other questions.]

The Ramban himself offers two explanations for korbanot: one mystical, which we will leave for others to explain, and one symbolic: Bringing a korban communicates to the bringer that in truth, he himself ought to suffer the fate of the korban for his sin. He leans on the animal ("semikha"), using the same hands as performed the sin; he confesses his sin with the mouth that may have committed it; he burns the innards and kidneys because his own innards and kidneys guided him to his lusts (the kidneys are seen in Tanakh as the seat of the moral conscience); he burns the legs because his own legs brought him to sin; he sprinkles the blood to show that his own blood should be spilled to expiate his sin.

As attractive as some aspects of this explanation may seem, it is also highly problematic for some sacrifices. While it may explain the expiatory korbanot, such as the hattat and asham -- brought to attain forgiveness for sins -- it certainly does not explain the shelamim, for example, which is brought to express joy, celebrate, mark the creation of a covenant, and the like. One who brings a shelamim may have been motivated by the joy of graduating college, for example; this has nothing to do with sin (unless you are somewhat right-wing, of course) and requires no expiation. Perhaps even more convincing, the celebrant *eats* the shelamim! Certainly, if the korban is meant to represent me and my suffering the death penalty, it is particularly strange that I am allowed to enjoy the flesh which is supposed to represent my own executed corpse!

KILLING FOR FOOD:

We now move to our second issue this week: What is the Torah's attitude toward killing animals for food? Although Parashat VaYikra, which is all about sacrifices to Hashem, may seem like an unlikely place to focus on this issue -- after all, the topic is killing animals to offer them to Hashem, not killing them to feed ourselves -- we will see where the issue comes up in our context.

If you stretch back to Bereshit perek (chap.) 1 you will recall the "Mission statement" with which Hashem charges

humanity: He created them be-tzelem Elokim -- in the image of Hashem -- meaning that they are gifted with the potential necessary to fulfill the goals of creating ("be fruitful and multiply"), controlling ("fill the land and conquer it"), and behaving morally (represented by the prohibition to kill animals for food). Although it has recently become popular to see tzelem Elokim as a description of the inherent *nature* of a human being, from the way tzelem Elokim is used by the Torah it appears that that is only half the story. Tzelem Elokim is a *demand*, not a description; it is a state we are commanded to achieve. [For details I will be happy to forward to you the shiur on Parashat Bereshit.]

Before very long, humanity sinks deep into evil, failing the tzelem Elokim mission completely. Hashem, seeing that the tzelem Elokim project has fallen apart, destroys all of the failed tzelem Elokims (after all, the whole purpose of their existence is to reflect Hashem; if they fail that, they have no purpose) except the one person who shows some promise: No'ah. Eventually, the floodwaters subside and No'ah emerges to reestablish human and animal life on dry land. Hashem marks the recreation of the world and humanity in particular by commanding No'ah with "Mission statement II" in Bereshit 9. This mission statement largely duplicates the first one, with several marked differences -- including that permission is given to kill animals for food!

As we discussed in Parashat Bereshit and Parashat No'ah, Hashem lowers His standards after the flood. He 'realizes' that humanity as a whole cannot maintain the high standards He had originally set, so He relaxes the standards and begins the process of selecting individuals to found a nation which will accomplish the mission properly. But, significantly, Hashem has not simply thrown out the old goals completely. Originally, humanity was to show respect for life by not killing it for food. Now, although He permits No'ah to kill animals for food, Hashem insists that their blood may not be eaten, since blood, throughout Tanakh (the Bible), represents life or the life force. Eating blood, symbolically, means consuming the life-force/soul, and this is something humans can never do.

Lest the animal rights activists among us jump to the conclusion that the Torah's original intent is that humans never ever kill animals for any purpose, it is worth noting that even during the period in which the higher standard was in force, killing animals was permitted for sacrificial purposes. Thus Hevel brings an animal sacrifice to Hashem (4:4), who is pleased with the offering and rejects Kayyin's offering of fruits; and thus No'aah brings animal sacrifices to Hashem just after exiting the ark (8:20), before he has been given permission to eat animals. Of course, the bringers of these sacrifices do not eat any portion of the offering -- the Torah explicitly calls No'ah's offering an "ola," a totally fire-consumed offering, and it is likely that the same is true of Hevel's korban. Why is it OK to kill animals for korbanot but not for food? Perhaps because serving Hashem is more important than eating meat, so taking animal life is justified for the former but not for the latter. Apparently, life can be used for some instrumental purpose, but the instrumental purpose must be very important.

THE SHELAMIM:

We now come to Parashat VaYikra andd the korban shelamim, which will connect with the issue of killing for meat. First we will talk about what a shelamim is and some of the details of how it is brought.

THE NAME:

What does "shelamim" mean? I have found enough possibilities to convince me that no one is really sure:

1) From "shalom" (peace): it makes everyone happy because everyone gets a piece of it (i.e., Hashem, the kohanim, and the owner of the korban) -- Tosefta Zevahim 11:1, Sifra, Nedava 16:2.

2) From "shalom" (hello): it is like a greeting to Hashem, like saying "shalom."

3) From "shalem" (complete): you bring it when *you* feel shalem, whole, complete, sound, as opposed to when, for example, you are in mourning -- Sifra, Nedava 16:3.

4) From "shalem" (complete): you bring it to join with Hashem in a meal, and this gives you completion.

5) From "shilem" (to pay): the korban repays Hashem for blessings -- Rashbam 3:1.

6) From Akkadian "salimu," (covenant): as we will see, the shelamim is often brought to seal or celebrate a covenant.

7) From Akkadian "sulmanu" (gift): the korban is a gift to Hashem.

THE PURPOSE:

What is the purpose of the shelamim? Since it is a voluntary korban, under what circumstances would it be appropriate to volunteer a shelamim? VaYikra perek 7 offers several possibilities:

1) A "neder": It is worth noting that when Hazal use the term 'neder,' they mean that one has simply promised to bring a korban. When Tanakh uses the term 'neder,' it often is referring to a case where a person made a "deal" with Hashem. The person promises to give something to Hashem if Hashem does something for the person. Examples:

a) Bereshit 28:20-22 -- Ya'akov, on his way to Lavan's house, dreams a vision of Hashem speaking to him from atop a ladder with angels ascending and descending. Hashem promises to protect Ya'akov and return him safely home. When Ya'akov awakens the next morning, he builds an altar, pours oil on it to consecrate it, and then makes a deal with Hashem: If Hashem will come through on the promises He has made to Ya'akov in the dream, Ya'akov will in turn give various gifts to Hashem.

b) Yonah 1:16, 2:10 -- Yonah is commanded by Hashem to go to Ninevei, a non-Jewish city, and warn the people to repent lest Hashem destroy them. Yonah refuses the command and boards a ship headed elsewhere. Hashem storms the seas, the ship is endangered, it is discovered that Yonah is the cause of the storm, and he is tossed overboard. In order to gain Hashem's favor, the sailors make "nedarim" to bring shelamim if Hashem saves them. Later, in the belly of the fish, Yonah scoffs at the sailors' promises, declaring that they are not truly faithful to Hashem, but that he, Yonah, will indeed keep his neder. The implication is that Yonah, too, has made a deal with Hashem, promising to bring a korban if Hashem saves him.

2) Nedava -- designating a specific animal as a korban.

3) Toda: a thanksgiving offering. According to Hazal, the Toda is not really included in the shelamim category, because it has different requirements. But in VaYikra 7, the toda appears subsumed or closely related to the shelamim, so we will mention it here. Hazal say that it is brought under four circumstances:
a) return from a sea voyage
b) return from a desert journey
c) recovery from a serious illness
d) release from prison

What all of these have in common is that they are happy occasions. The shelamim is a korban brought to express joy, to celebrate, to thank. For example, we find that there is a shelamim (or several) at the following events in Tanakh:

1) When covenants are made:
a) Bereshit 26:30 -- between Yitzhak and Avimelekh
b) Bereshit 31:54 -- between Ya'akov and Lavan
c) Shemot 24:5, 11 -- between Hashem and Bnei Yisrael at Sinai

2) Occasions of individual or national celebration:
a) Shemot 18:12 -- Yitro offers olot and zevahim to Hashem and then shares the meal with the elders.
b) BeMidbar 10:10 -- shelamim are to be brought on days of joy, hagim, Rosh Hodesh.
c) Devarim 27:7 -- when the people cross into Israel for the 1st time, they are to bring shelamim.

Since the "ola," the completely burned offering, and the shelamim are both brought voluntarily, why would one decide to bring a shelamim as opposed to an ola? The shelamim is eaten by the common people: the kohanim receive certain parts of it and the rest of the meat is eaten by the owner of the korban and his invitees. Only the helev (certain types of fat) is burned on the Mizbe'ah as an offering to Hashem. On the other hand, the ola is completely burned on the mizbe'ah; no part of it is eaten, so it does not provide meat for a feast to celebrate the joyous occasion. This does not mean that the ola is brought only under non-joyous circumstances -- VaYikra 22:17-19 and other examples show that an ola can be the form of a neder or nedava, which can certainly be expressions of joy. Other sources complete the picture and show that the ola is a multi-purpose korban which can be motivated by many different occasions or feeling. But the ola does not provide a

feast, while the shelamim does.

As a general point, it is worth noting that the shelamim and the ola both appear in the Torah prior to VaYikra; this means that these types of korbanot were known beforehand and were not 'invented' by the Torah. Before the Torah, there were two multipurpose korbanot -- the ola and shelamim -- the ola being especially suited to serious occasions, such as in order to achieve forgiveness for sins, and the shelamim especially suited to celebrations. The hattat and asham ("sin-offering" and "guilt-offering"), on the other hand, are 'new' korbanot which the Torah introduces for expiation of certain sins. We may cover these korbanot next week.

OFFERING A SHELAMIM (5 easy steps):

The purpose of bringing a shelamim is to express good feelings: joy, thanks, celebration, completion of an agreement, achievement of a goal. The details of the bringing of the korban hold important lessons for us, and here we begin to focus on the question with which we began -- the Torah's attitude toward eating meat. What is the actual process of bringing a normal shelamim?

1) Semikha: The owner lays his hand on the animal. This is understood in different ways by different commentators:
a) To transfer sin to the korban
b) To show ownership of the korban
c) To identify with the korban

The possibility that seems most likely is that it signifies ownership. This is shown by the fact that there is no semikha for communal korbanot (except in two cases, which are explainable), since no one in particular owns the korban; it belongs to the community. Also, semikha cannot really be to transfer sin, since the shelamim requires semikha even though it has nothing to do with expiation for sin.

2) Shehita (slaughtering): can be done by anyone, not necessarily a kohen.

3) Zerikat ha-dam (sprinkling blood on the mizbe'ah).

4) The korban is skinned and cut apart; the kohen puts the helev etc. on the fire on the mizbe'ah.

5) The kohen takes his portion of the korban and eats it; the owner takes his portion and eats it.

THE FAT OF THE MATTER:

Before we look at the evidence for what the Torah thinks of eating meat, we will consider for a moment the helev, the fat offered to Hashem. The helev is fat located under the skin and around organs. It is thick and easy to remove, unlike 'shuman' (permitted fat), which is entwined with the muscles. Paradoxically, modern sources tell us that helev is inedible, or at least not usually eaten, although it can be used in cooking and for other purposes (Rabbi Shalom Carmy mentioned to me that since it is prohibited to eat helev, heretics used to take candles made of helev and eat them -- on Yom Kippur, when all eating is forbidden anyway -- in order to show their total disrespect for the Torah).

The fact that helev is not really edible, or not much good to eat, raises a question: If the reason the helev is forbidden to eat is because it is supposed to be offered to Hashem, and the reason why things are offered to Hashem is because they are the best, how can helev qualify, since it is either inedible or at least not the choice part by any standard?

Perhaps things are offered to Hashem not because of their *practical* worth, but for what they symbolize. Helev and blood are both offered to Hashem even though helev is inedible and blood is certainly not normally drunk for enjoyment and not considered the 'best part' of the animal. We will get to the blood in a moment, but as far as helev goes, it seems to represent *richness* in the ways it is used in Tanakh:

1) Bereshit 45:18 -- Paro invites Yosef to bring his family down to Egypt, where he will provide them with the "helev ha-aretz" -- the "fat of the land," the richness of the land.

2) BeMidbar 18:12 -- The kohanim are presented by Hashem with the "fat of the wine and fat of the oil," the best or richest parts.

3) Devarim 32:14 -- Hashem warns the people that they will eventually become fat and complacent when they consume all of the good Hashem will offer them in Eretz Yisrael, including the "helev kilyot hita" -- the fat of the kernels of grain.

BLOOD AND THE SHELAMIM:

Note that the shelamim section in VaYikra 3 ends with a prohibition to eat blood and helev. Note that this prohibition appears again in the shelamim section in VaYikra 7! And the blood prohibition appears *again* in connection with the shelamim in VaYikra 17. Why does the blood prohibition seem to dog the shelamim in particular? Perhaps it is because the shelamim is the korban from which the common people can eat, so there is the most likelihood for confusion and mistakes here (i.e., the inadvertent ingestion of blood).

But there may be another reason as well. If one of the primary thrusts of the shelamim, especially as opposed to the ola, is to provide animal meat for a feast, then when the Torah cautions us not to eat blood, it is doing the same thing it did when it permitted meat to No'ah: "Yes, you can eat meat, but do not eat the blood!" The blood represents life, as these prohibitions in VaYikra repeatedly confirm explicitly -- and blood must not be eaten. What VaYikra adds is that blood spilled in the context of a korban must be offered to Hashem. This requirement can be understood in many ways, as we will see.

LIMITED LOCATIONS:

VaYikra 17 prohibits slaughter except at the Ohel Mo'ed. But it remains unclear if the prohibition refers to sacrificial slaughter or even to profane slaughter. Does the Torah mean that if I want to offer a korban shelamim, I must bring it to the Ohel Mo'ed and offer it to Hashem there and not on my backyard altar, or does it mean that I cannot slaughter an animal in my backyard for any reason, even for meat, and can get meat only by making my animal a korban shelamim at the Ohel Mo'ed?

This question is debated by R. Akiva and R. Yishmael in Hullin 16b. R. Akiva says that the Torah in VaYikra 17 was only demanding that all *korbanot* be brought to the Ohel Mo'ed; as the Torah warns in VaYikra 17, the people had been bringing sacrifices to demons (which they understood were represented by goats and are therefore referred to as 'se'irim'). The best way to prevent this was to demand that all sacrifices be brought at the Ohel Mo'ed under the supervision of the kohanim, who would presumably help insure that the sacrifice was headed for the right God. R. Yishmael, on the other hand, says that the Torah was prohibiting profane slaughter completely. The permission that had been given to No'ah long ago to eat meat was being severely limited. From now on, meat could be obtained only by offering the animal as a shelamim at the Ohel Mo'ed. It is clear that R. Yishmael also is working with the reason given in the Torah -- that the people were sacrificing to demons; he differs with R. Akiva only in his claim that the Torah prohibited all slaughter, not just home-performed sacrifice, because he feels that even profane slaughter might lead to sacrifices to the demons.

Or perhaps not -- perhaps R. Yishmael focuses on the ethical question with which we began: Is it OK to kill for food? Originally, the Torah said no (to Adam); to No'ah, it said yes ("but don't eat the blood!"); now, the Torah takes a middle position, permitting meat but only if provided by a sacrifice to Hashem. An echo of this position is perhaps also discernible in the fact that when the Torah warns the people not to slaughter animals in VaYikra 17, it says that if they do so, "dam shafakh" -- one who does so has spilled blood, has murdered. This is clearly an ethical/moral issue, not connected (or not obviously so) to the fear that slaughter might become pagan sacrifice. If so, then what the Torah is doing in VaYikra 17 is calling the Bnei Yisrael to a higher moral standard than the rest of humanity; everyone else can slaughter for meat, but we may do so only if the slaughter is justified as a form of avodat Hashem, service of Hashem -- as a korban.

In any event, everyone agrees that profane slaughter eventually becomes permitted, as Devarim 12 clarifies. But, as we might expect, R. Akiva and R. Yishmael interpret Devarim 12 differently. R. Akiva, who believes that profane slaughter has always been permitted and that VaYikra 17 only prohibited private sacrifice, understands that Devarim 12 is telling Bnei Yisrael that when they perform profane slaughter, they must do so through the process of shehita, while during the entire period of their wanderings in the desert, they were permitted to simply stab the animal to death. R. Yishmael, on the other hand, understands thaat Devarim 12 is telling the people that they can now engage in private slaughter (although sacrifices can be brought only at the Misshkan/Mikdash).

This makes for a fascinating disagreement: R. Akiva belives that Devarim 12 represents a moral step up -- now the people cannot simply stab the animal to death and must instead kill it through shehita, which many understand as the

most painless available way to kill the animal, while R. Yishmael may believe that it is a moral step down -- now the people can return to killing for meat and no longer must subsume this act in an act justified as divine worship. R. Yishmael's most likely rationale is that once the people conquer the land, settle it, and spread out over hundreds of miles -- the reality assumed by Devarim 12 -- it becomes simply impractical to demand that all slaughter be done only in the Mishkan/Mikdash. On the other hand, when Bnei Yisrael are are travelling through the desert, with everyone grouped around the Mishkan fairly densely, the ideal of making every meat meal a sacrifice to Hashem is achievable. [Of course, one could also say -- as the Rambam does in the Guide -- that the prohibition of slaughter/sacrifice in the desert was repealed later by the Torah because only during the earlier period were the people prone to bringing sacrifices to the demons. Later on they overcame these habits and therefore were permitted to slaughter at home.]

Shabbat Shalom

****

THE TANACH STUDY CENTER www.tanach.org
In Memory of Rabbi Abraham Leibtag
Shiurim in Chumash & Navi by Menachem Leibtag

****

SEFER VAYIKRA - INTRODUCTION

Most of us find Sefer Vayikra rather boring - at least until we reach Parshat Kedoshim.

In our series on Sefer Vayikra we attempt to make the study of this book a bit more exciting, not only by analyzing its specific laws, but also by paying careful attention to its structure and theme.

WHAT MAKES SEFER VAYIKRA UNIQUE

Before we begin our study, we must first clarify how (and why) Sefer Vayikra is 'structurally' different from the other books of Chumash.

In general, when we study Chumash, we encounter two basic types of passages. They can either be:

1) **narrative** - i.e. the ongoing 'story' of Chumash; or
2) **commandments** - 'laws' that God commands Bnei Yisrael

Up until Sefer Vayikra, Chumash has essentially been narrative, i.e. the story of how God chose the Jewish nation, took them out of Egypt and gave them the Torah. For example, Sefer Breishit begins with the story of Creation and continues with the story of God's 'bechira' (choice) of Avraham Avinu and his offspring to become His nation. The few mitzvot that we do find in Sefer Breishit (e.g. 9:1-7, 32:32) are presented as part of that ongoing narrative.

Similarly, Sefer Shmot begins with the story of the Exodus and Bnei Yisrael's subsequent journey to Har Sinai. Surely, we find numerous mitzvot in Sefer Shmot; however, each set of laws is imbedded within the ongoing story. For example, the laws of Pesach (12:14-20) are presented as part of the story of Yetziat Mitzrayim, and the Ten Commandments (& the laws of Parshat Mishpatim / see 20:1-23:19) constitute an integral part of the story of the covenant between God and His nation at Ma'amad Har Sinai. [Note from 24:3-7 how those laws become the Sefer Ha-brit.]

Sefer Vayikra is radically different, as it not only begins with a set of commandments [mitzvot], the entire book (with the exception of two short narratives) is a collection of various mitzvot! In other words, the ongoing narrative of Chumash that began in Sefer Breishit and continued with Sefer Shmot **does not** continue in Sefer Vayikra. Instead, that narrative resumes in Sefer Bamidbar - with the story of how Bnei Yisrael prepare to leave Har Sinai (after the Mishkan has been built). Sefer Vayikra appears to stand alone, as it constitutes a book of laws, spanning a wide range of laws (mostly relating to the Mishkan and "kedusha" [holiness]).

As Sefer Vayikra is a book of laws (and not a story), our shiurim will focus on which specific types of laws are found in this book, as well as the significance of their order and progression.

THE LONE NARRATIVES

Before we discuss the mitzvot, we should mention the two narratives that we do find in Sefer Vayikra:

The first is that of the mishkan's dedication ceremony - chapters 8 thru 10, including the story of the seven day "milu'im" ceremony and the special korbanot that were offered on the 'eighth day' ["yom ha'shmini"], followed by the story of the tragic death of Nadav and Avihu. In our study of that narrative, we will show how that story actually 'belongs' at the end of Sefer Shmot, while suggesting a reason why it was recorded in Sefer Vayikra instead.

The second is the brief story of the "mekallel", who was executed for blaspheming God (see 24:10-23). We will show how that story actually forms an introduction to a certain set of mitzvot. In other words, when we do find a narrative in Sefer Vayikra, we will explain how and why it was included to provide us with a better understanding of the commandments that follow that story.

TORAT KOHANIM

If our above assumption (that Vayikra is essentially a book of laws) is correct, then it is very understandable why Chazal refer to Sefer Vayikra as "Torat Kohanim" [the law guide for the priests]. At first glance, it certainly appears that most of its laws are targeted for those who officiate in the Bet ha-Mikdash. [See first Ramban on Vayikra.]

Likewise, this also explains why the laws in Vayikra should progress in thematic order, and not necessarily in the chronological order of when they were first given.

[Note how the laws (given earlier to Moshe) in Parshat Behar (see 25:1) are recorded much later than the laws given to Moshe from the ohel mo'ed in Parshat Vayikra (see 1:1).]

Even though the name 'Torat Kohanim' implies that the mitzvot of Sefer Vayikra will relate primarily to mishkan related laws, nonetheless we do find numerous laws that discuss other topics (e.g. Parshat Kedoshim). Furthermore, we will also find many other laws regarding the mishkan in other books of Chumash, especially in Sefer Bamidbar. Therefore, it would be difficult to conclude that Sefer Vayikra deals exclusively with mishkan related laws.

So what makes Sefer Vayikra unique?

To answer that question, we will search for a central theme that will thematically connect all of the mitzvot in Sefer Vayikra and explain their progression.

THE THEME OF SEFER VAYIKRA

To accomplish this task, we will follow a methodology that begins by first identifying 'units'. Usually, each set of mitzvot can be categorized as belonging to a single topic - thus forming a 'unit'. After identifying these units, we will discuss the logic of the progression from one unit to the next. By doing so, we hope to be able to answer such questions as:

- Why does the sefer begin with the laws of korbanot?
- Why are the korbanot outlined twice (in Vayikra **and** Tzav)?
- Why does the book abruptly switch topics in the middle of Acharei Mot, from the mishkan to 'arayot' [in chapter 18]?
- Why does the sefer include Parshat Kedoshim, which has little - if anything - to do with korbanot, but a lot to do with the laws that were already discussed in Parshat Mishpatim?
- Why does Vayikra conclude with the laws of 'shmitta' and 'yovel', that discuss how we are not permitted to work the land once every seven years?

In the shiurim to follow, we will attempt to answer these questions (and more).

A SPECIAL BOOK

In closing, one general remark concerning the relationship between Sefer Vayikra and our study of Chumash thus far, and hence the importance as the 'central' book of the 'Five Books.

In Sefer Breishit we saw how God entered into a covenant with Avraham Avinu in order that his offspring ['zera'] would become a nation dedicated to the representation of His Name. To facilitate that goal, God entered into a covenant with the Avot, promising both a special Land ['aretz'], and a long historical process to become that nation (i.e. 'brit bein ha-btarim' / see Br. 15:6-18).

Sefer Shmot began as God began His fulfillment of that covenant by redeeming Bnei Yisrael from Egypt, and giving them the Torah at Sinai - i.e. the laws that would help establish this special nation. The unfortunate events at chet ha-egel constituted a 'breach', raising the question if this special relationship could continue.

Fortunately, God declared His attributes of mercy, thus enabling Bnei Yisrael an avenue for repentance, as reflected in their collective effort to construct of the mishkan. The return of God's Shechina to the mishkan at the conclusion of Sefer Shmot served as a climax, for it showed that this covenantal relationship had returned to its original level.

It is precisely at this point - when God's Shechina returns - where Sefer Vayikra begins. Before Bnei Yisrael continue their

journey towards Eretz Canaan (as will be discussed in Sefer Bamidbar), God commands them with an additional set of mitzvot that will not only provide a guide for how they can use the mishkan, but will also facilitate their becoming God's special nation - a "mamlechet kohanim ve-goy kadosh" (see Shmot 19:5-6).

In this sense, Sefer Vayikra constitutes more than simply a technical list of the various rituals performed in the mishkan. As we will show, the laws of Sefer Vayikra will focus on the very nature of Am Yisrael's relationship with God, at both the individual and national level.

In our shiur this week on Parshat Vayikra, we will focus on the first unit of laws in Sefer Vayikra, that deals primarily with 'korbanot' [sacrifices], to show how those laws relate to this general theme.

Till then, shabbat shalom,
menachem

FOR FURTHER IYUN - A FEW IMPORTANT CLARIFICATIONS

A. RAMBAN'S SHITTA

Despite our observation that Sefer Vayikra is basically a book of **mitzvot**, it is important to note that a brief narrative introduces each set of mitzvot.

For example, most mitzvot begin with the classic header:

"And God spoke to Moshe saying..."

["va-'yedaber Hashem el Moshe leimor.."]

[see 4:1; 5:14,20; 6:12 etc.]

Sometimes, God directs His dibbur to Aharon, as well: "And God spoke to Moshe **and** Aharon saying" (see 11:1, 13:1).

In some occasions, the opening phrase may even tell us **where** these mitzvot were given to Moshe. Two classic examples:

1) In the ohel mo'ed -

"And God called to Moshe and spoke to him from the **ohel mo'ed** saying: speak to Bnei Yisrael..." Vayikra (1:1);

2) At Har Sinai -

"And God spoke to Moshe at **Har Sinai** saying..." (25:1).

[the first pasuk of Parshat Behar/ see also 7:37-38, 16:1, 26:46, and 27:34.]

Therefore, 'technically speaking,' one could still consider Sefer Vayikra 'narrative-based,' and perhaps even a continuation of Sefer Shmot. In other words, Parshat Vayikra opens with the **first** dibbur that Moshe received from the ohel mo'ed, once the mishkan was completed (see shiur on Parshat Pekudei); and then records the mitzvot Hashem issues from that point onward.

[This is more or less Ramban's shitta, who maintains 'yesh mukdam u-me'uchar ba-Torah'. See the lengthy Ramban on Vayikra 25:1 (till the end)!]

In truth, however, the two examples mentioned above could demonstrate quite the opposite, i.e. that the mitzvot in Sefer Vayikra are not presented in chronological order. According to 1:1, the first set of mitzvot is transmitted from the **ohel mo'ed**, and thus this dibbur must have occurred only **after** the mishkan was built. However, the mitzvot in chapter 25 were given on **Har Sinai** (see 25:1), and therefore must have been given **before** the **ohel mo'ed** (1:1) was built! [See also 26:46 & 27:34.]

Further proof may be drawn from Parshat Tzav. Although, as mentioned, the first set of mitzvot in Sefer Vayikra was given from the **ohel mo'ed** (chapters 1->5, see 1:1), the Torah tells us that God taught Moshe the next set of mitzvot (chapter 6->7 / Parshat Tzav) on **Har Sinai** (see 7:37-38) - **before** the mishkan was built! Nevertheless, Sefer Vayikra juxtaposes them, evidently because of their **thematic** connection (i.e. they both discuss the laws of korbanot).

[Note that Ramban on 7:38 seems to disagree. Iy"h, his shitta will be discussed in greater detail in our shiur on Parshat Tzav.]

B. SIGNIFICANT HEADERS

As noted above, a brief header introduces each set of mitzvot. In most cases, these introductions make no mention of **where** these mitzvot were given to Moshe, only that "God spoke to Moshe saying..."

When the Torah does offer this information, the commentators will always find significance latent within the Torah's specification in this regard. (For example, see 25:1 - Rashi, Ramban, & Chizkuni.)

Similarly, certain parshiot in the middle of the sefer, such as the laws of Yom Kippur (16:1/ "acharei mot..."), were given in the wake of a certain event. These laws must have been given to Moshe only **after** the mishkan was constructed, while other laws may have actually been given earlier, on Har Sinai, but recorded only later on in Sefer Vayikra.

PARSHAT VAYIKRA

Does God need our "korbanot"?

Or, would it be more correct to say that we 'need' to bring them, even though He doesn't need them?

In an attempt to answer this 'philosophical' question, this week's shiur undertakes an analysis of Parshat Vayikra to show how its specific topic of "korbanot" [sacrificial offerings] relates to one of the primary themes of the Bible.

INTRODUCTION

The Mishkan certainly emerges as a primary topic in **both** the books of Shmot and Vayikra, and hence, it would only be logical to assume that its underlying purpose must be thematically important. To appreciate that purpose, we must first note a very simple distinction that explains which details are found in each book.

In Sefer Shmot, the Torah explains **how to build** the mishkan, and hence Shmot concludes (in Parshat Pekudei) with the story of its assembly. In contrast, Sefer Vayikra explains **how to use** the mishkan, and hence Parshat Vayikra begins with the laws of the korbanot - i.e. instructions regarding the sacrifices that will be offered there.

Even though this distinction explains why Sefer Vayikra discusses korbanot in general, it does not explain why the Sefer begins specifically with the laws of korban **ola** [the burnt offering]; nor does it explain the logic of the progression from one type of korban to the next. In our shiur, we begin with a technical analysis of its internal progression - but those conclusions will help us arrive at a deeper understanding of the purpose of korbanot in general.

AN OUTLINE for PARSHAT VAYIKRA

In our study questions, we suggested that you prepare an outline of chapters one thru five, by identifying the primary topic of each individual 'parshia'. The following table summarizes our conclusions. Before you continue, study it carefully (with a Chumash at hand), noting how the section titles provide an explanation of the progression of its topics.

[Note how each 'parshia' corresponds to one line in our chart. Note also that each asterisk ('*') in the outline marks the beginning of a new 'dibra', i.e. a short introduction for a new instruction from God to Moshe [e.g. "va-yedaber Hashem el Moshe..."]. Note as well how the outline suggests a short one-line summary for each parshia, as well as a title for each section. See if you agree with those titles.]

PARSHAT VAYIKRA - THE KORBAN YACHID

I. KORBAN NEDAVA - Voluntary offerings (chaps. 1-3)

- **A. Ola** (the entire korban is burnt on the mizbeiach)
  1. 'bakar' - from cattle
  2. 'tzon' - from sheep
  3. 'of' - from fowl
- **B. Mincha** (a flour offering)
  1. 'solet' - plain flour mixed with oil and 'levona'
  2. 'ma'afeh tanur' - baked in the oven

3. 'al machvat' - on a griddle
4. 'marcheshet' - on a pan (+ misc. general laws)
5. 'bikkurim' - from wheat of the early harvest

C. Shlamim (a peace offering, part is eaten by the owners)
1. bakar - from cattle
2. tzon - from sheep
3. 'ez' - from goats

[Note the key phrase repeated many times in this unit:
"isheh reiach nichoach l-Hashem."]

II. KORBAN CHOVA - MANDATORY OFFERINGS

A. * CHATAT (4:1-5:13)

1. **for a general transgression**
[laws organized according to violator]
a. 'par kohen mashiach' (High Priest) - a bull
b. 'par he'elem davar' (bet din) - a bull
c. 'se'ir nassi' (a king) - a male goat
d. 'nefesh' (layman) a female goat or female lamb
2. **for specific transgressions** ('oleh ve-yored')
a. a rich person - a female goat or lamb
b. a poor person - two birds
c. a very poor person - a plain flour offering

B. * ASHAM (5:14-5:26) - animal is always an 'ayil' (ram)
1. 'asham me'ilot' - taking from Temple property
2. 'asham talui' - unsure if he sinned
[Note the new dibbur at this point / see Further iyun.]
3. * 'asham gezeilot' - **stealing** from another

[Note the key phrase repeated numerous times in this unit:
"ve-chiper alav... ve-nislach lo."]
==========

Let's explain why we have chosen these titles.

TWO GROUPS: NEDAVA & CHOVA

First and foremost, note how our outline divides Parshat Vayikra into two distinct sections: 'korbanot nedava' = voluntary offerings and 'korbanot chova' - mandatory offerings.

The first section is titled "nedava", for if an individual wishes to voluntarily offer a korban to God, he has three categories to choose from:

1) An OLA - a burnt offering [chapter one];
2) A MINCHA - a flour offering [chapter two]; or
3) A SHLAMIM - a peace offering [chapter three]

Note how these three groups are all included in the first "dibbur" - and comprise the "nedava" [voluntary] section.

In contrast, there are instances when a person may transgress, thus obligating him to offer a sin offering - be it a "chatat" or an "asham" (depending upon what he did wrong).

The two categories (chapters 4 and 5) comprise the second section, which we titled "chova" [obligatory].

The Chumash itself stresses a distinction between these two sections not only the start of a new dibbur in 4:1, but also the repetition of two key phrases that appear in just about every closing verse in the parshiot of both sections, stressing the primary purpose of each respective section:

In the nedava section: "**isheh reiach nichoach l-Hashem**"
["an offering of fire, a pleasing odor to the Lord"
See 1:9,13,17; 2:2; 3:5,11,16];

In the chova section: "**ve-chiper a'lav ha-kohen...** "
[the kohen shall make expiation on his behalf..." -
See 4:26,31,35; 5:6,10,13,16,19,26]

With this background in mind, we will now discuss the logic behind the internal structure of each section, to show how (and why) the **nedava** section is arranged by category of offering and the type of animal, while the **chova** section is arranged by type of transgression committed, and who transgressed.

NEDAVA - take your pick

If an individual wishes to offer a korban nedava, he must first choose the category that reflects his personal preference. First of all, should he prefer to offer the entire animal to God, he can choose the **ola** category; but should he prefer (for either financial or ideological reasons) to offer flour instead, then he can choose the **mincha** category. Finally, should he prefer not only the animal option, but would also like to later partake in eating from this korban - then he can choose the **shlamim** category.

Once the individual has made this general choice of either an **ola**, **mincha**, or **shlamim** - next, he can pick the sub-category of his choice.

For example, should one choose to offer an **ola** - which is totally consumed on the **mizbeiach** - then he must choose between cattle, sheep, or fowl.

The Torah explains these three options (in the first three parshiot of chapter 1), including precise instructions concerning how to offer each of these animals.

Should the individual choose a **mincha** - a flour offering - instead, then he must select from one of the five different options for how to bake the flour, corresponding to the five short parshiot in chapter two. In other words, he can present his offering as either flour (mixed with oil), or baked in an oven ("ma'afe tanur), or fried on a skillet ("al machvat"), or deep fried ("marcheshet"). Should the flour offering be from the wheat of the early harvest ("minchat bikkurim"), it must first be roasted and ground in a special manner (see Ibn Ezra 2:14).

Finally, should he choose the **shlamim** option- a peace offering - then he must select between: cattle ("bakar"); sheep ("kvasim"); or goats ("izim") - corresponding to the three individual parshiot in chapter three.

It should be noted as well that the laws included in this **korban nedava** section also discuss certain procedural instructions. For example, before offering an **ola** or **shlamim**, the owner must perform the act of 'smicha' (see 1:4, 3:2,8,13). By doing "smicha" - i.e. resting all his weight on the animal - the owner symbolically transfers his identity to the animal. That is to say, he offers the animal instead of himself (see Ramban).

One could suggest that the act of smicha reflects an understanding that the korban serves as a 'replacement' for the owner. This idea may be reflective of the korban **ola** that Avraham Avinu offered at the **akeida** - when he offered a ram in place of his son - "**ola** tachat bno" (see Breishit 22:13).

CHOVA - if you've done something wrong

As we explained earlier, the second category of Parshat Vayikra discusses the "korban **chova"** (chapters 4 & 5) - an obligatory offering that must be brought by a person should he transgress against one of God's laws. Therefore, this section is organized by **event**, for the type of sin committed will determine which offering is required.

The first 'event' is an unintentional transgression of 'any of God's mitzvot' (see 4:2 and the header of each consecutive parshia in chapter 4). Chazal explain that this refers to the unintentional violation ('shogeg') of any prohibition of the Torah - that had the person transgressed intentionally ("meizid"), his punishment would have been 'karet' (cut off from the Jewish nation).

[This offering is usually referred to as a 'chatat kavu'a' (the fixed chatat).]

Should this transgression occur ("b'shogeg"), then the actual animal that must be brought depends upon **who** the sinner is. If the **kohen gadol** (high priest) sins, he must brings a bull ("par"). If it is the political leader ("nasi"), he must bring a male goat ("se'ir"). If it was simply a commoner, he must bring either a she-goat or lamb ("se'ira" or "kisba").

[There is also a special case of a mistaken halachic ruling by

the 'elders' [i.e. the 'sanhedrin' - the supreme halachic court], which results in the entire nation inadvertently sinning. In this case, the members of the sanhedrin must bring a special chatat offering - known as the "par he'elem davar shel tzibur". See 4:13-21.]

In chapter five we find several instances of specific transgressions that require either a "chatat" or an "asham".

The first category begins with a list of three specific types of transgressions, including - the case when a person refuses to provide witness (see 5:1), or should one accidentally enter the Temple (or Mishkan) while spiritually unclean ('tamei' / see 5:2), or should one not keep a promise (to do/ or not to do something) made with an oath ('shvu'at bitui' / see 5:4).

Should one transgress in regard to any one of these three cases (detailed in 5:1-4), the specific offering that he must bring depends on his income. If he is:

a) rich - he brings a female lamb or she-goat;
b) 'middle class' - he can bring two birds instead;
c) poor - he can bring a simple flour offering.

Interestingly, this korban is categorized as a "chatat" (see 5:6,10,13), even though the Torah uses the word "asham" [guilt] in reference to these acts (see 5:5). It makes sense to consider it a "chatat", because in the standard case (i.e. if the transgressor be rich) - the offering is exactly the same animal as the regular chatat - i.e. a female goat or sheep.

Furthermore, note that these psukim (i.e. 5:1-13) are included in the same "dibbur" that began in 4:1 that discussed the classic korban "chatat", while the new "dibbur" that discusses the korban "asham" only begins in 5:14!

The rabbis refer to this korban as an "oleh ve-yored" [lit. up and down] as this name relates to its graduated scale - which depends entirely upon the individual's financial status.

One could suggest that the Torah offers this graduated scale because these specific transgressions are very common, and hence it would become rather costly for the average person to offer an animal for each such transgression.

The final cases (from 5:14 till the end of the chapter) include several other categories of transgressions - that require what the Torah refers to as a korban **asham -** a guilt offering. In each of these cases, the transgressor must offer an ayil [a ram], including:

- when one takes something belonging to hekdesh ('asham me'ilot'/ 5:14-16)
- when one is unsure if he must bring a **chatat** ('asham talui'), i.e. he is not sure if he sinned.
- when one falsely denies having illegally held possession of someone else's property ('asham gezeilot' / 5:20-26), like not returning a 'lost item' to its owner.

THE GENERAL TITLE - KORBAN YACHID

We titled the entire outline as **korban yachid** - the offering of an individual - for this entire unit details the various types of korbanot that an **individual** (='yachid') can (or must) bring. Our choice of this title reflects the opening sentence of the Parsha: "**adam** ki yakriv..".- **any person** should he bring an offering to God..." (see 1:2).

The korban yachid stands in contrast to the korbanot tzibbur - the public offerings - which are offered by the entire congregation of Israel (purchased with the funds collected from the machatzit ha-shekel). The laws relating to korbanot tzibbur we first found in Parshat Tezaveh in regard to the daily "olat tamid" offering. They continue with the special offering that the nation brings (collectively) on the holidays, as detailed primarily in Parshiot Emor (Vayikra chapter 23) and in Parshat Pinchas (Bamidbar chapters 28-29).

WHICH SHOULD COME FIRST?

Now that we have explained the logic of the internal order of each section, we must explain why the laws of korban **nedava** precede those of korban **chova**. Intuitively, one would have perhaps introduced the **compulsory** korban before the **optional** one.

One could suggest that Parshat Vayikra begins specifically with the korban nedava since these korbanot in particular reflect the individual's aspiration to **improve** his relationship with God. Only afterward does the Torah detail the korban chova, which **amends** that relationship (when tainted by sin). Additionally, perhaps, the korban **nedava** reflects a more **ideal** situation, while the obligatory sin-offering seeks to rectify a problematic situation.

We may, however, suggest an even more fundamental reason based on the 'double theme' which we discussed in our study of the second half of Sefer Shmot.

Recall from our previous shiurim that the mishkan served a dual purpose:

A) to perpetuate the experience of Har Sinai (emphasized by Ramban); and
B) to atone for chet ha-egel (emphasized by Rashi).

(A) REENACTING HAR SINAI

Recall how the covenantal ceremony that took place at Har Sinai (when Bnei Yisrael accepted the Torah) included the public offering of "**olot"** & "**shlamim"** (when the declared "na'aseh ve-nishma"/ see Shmot 24:4-7). In fact, in that ceremony we find the very **first** mention in Chumash of a korban **shlamim**, suggesting a conceptual relationship between the korban **shlamim** and Har Sinai.

[Note also that Chumash later refers to the korban shlamim as a 'zevach' (see 3:1 & 7:11). The word zevach itself is also used to describe a feast, generally in the context of an agreement between two parties. For example, Lavan and Yaakov conduct a zevach after they enter into a **covenant** ('brit') agreeing not to harm each other (see Br. 31:44-54). Today, as well, agreements between two parties are often followed or accompanied by a lavish feast of sorts (e.g. state dinners, weddings, business mergers, etc.). Therefore, one could suggest that by offering a **zevach shlamim,** an individual demonstrates shows his loyalty as a **joint** partner in a covenantal relationship with God.]

The korban **ola** also relates to Ma'amad Har Sinai, based not only on the above parallel, but also based on a key phrase - "isheh reiach nichoach l-Hashem" - that the Torah uses consistently in its description of the korban **ola**. [See 1:9,13,17.]

This exact same phrase is also found in the Torah's description of the "**olat** tamid", the daily congregational offering, as inherently connected to Bnei Yisrael's offerings at Har Sinai:

"**Olat tamid** ha-asuya **BE-HAR SINAI**, le-reiach nichoach isheh l-Hashem" (see Bamidbar 28:6).

Similarly, in Parshat Tetzaveh, when the Torah first introduces the **olat tamid** and summarizes its discussion of the mishkan - we find the exact same phrase:

"... le-**reiach nichoach** isheh l-Hashem... **olat tamid** le-doroteichem petach **ohel mo'ed**..." (Shmot 29:41-42)

Hence, by offering either an **ola** or a **shlamim** - the efficacious reminders of Ma'amad Har Sinai - the individual reaffirms the covenant at Har Sinai of "na'aseh v'nishma" - the very basis of our relationship with God at Ma'amad Har Sinai.

[One could also suggest that these two types of korbanot reflect two different aspects of our relationship with God. The **ola** reflects "yirah" (fear of God), while the **shlamim** may represent "ahava" (love of God).]

Recall also that the last time Bnei Yisrael had offered **olot** & **shlamim** (i.e. before chet ha-egel) was at Har Sinai. But due to the sin of the Golden Calf, God's **shechina** had left Bnei Yisrael, thus precluding the very possibility of offering korbanot. Now that the mishkan is finally built and the **Shchina** has returned (as described at the conclusion of Sefer Shmot), God's **first** message to Bnei Yisrael in Sefer Vayikra is that they can once again offer **olot** & **shlamim**, just as they did at Har Sinai - at not only as a nation, but also as individuals.

This observation alone can help us appreciate why the very first topic in Sefer Vayikra is that of the voluntary offerings - of the korban ola & shlamim, and hence it makes sense that they would precede the obligatory offering of chatat & asham.

(B) KORBAN CHOVA - BACK TO CHET HA-EGEL

In contrast to the 'refrain' of 'isheh reiach nichoach' concluding each korban **nedava**, we noted that each korban **chova** concludes with the phrase "ve-chiper alav ha-kohen... ve-nislach lo". Once again, we find a parallel to the events at Har Sinai.

Recall our explanation that Aharon acted as he did at "chet ha-egel" with the best of intentions; only the results were disastrous. With the **Shchina** present, any transgression, even should it be **unintentional**, can invoke immediate punishment (see Shmot 20:2-4 & 23:20-22). Nevertheless, God's attributes of mercy, that He declares when He gives Moshe Rabeinu the second "luchot", now allow Bnei Yisrael 'second chance' should they sin - i.e. the opportunity to prove to God their sincerity and resolve to exercise greater caution in the future.

We also find a textual parallel in Moshe Rabeinu's statement before he ascended Har Sinai to seek repentance for chet ha-egel: Recall how Moshe Rabbenu told the people:

"Atem **chatatem chata'a** gedola… ulai **achapra** be'ad **chatatchem**" (Shmot 32:30; read also 32:31-33).

Later, when Moshe actually receives the thirteen /midot ha-rachamim' on Har Sinai along with the second luchot (34:-9), he requests atonement for chet ha-egel:

"... ve-**salachta** le-avoneinu u-le**chatoteinu**..." (34:9).

This key phrase of the korban **chova** - "ve-chiper alav... ve-nislach lo" - may also relate to this precedent of God's capacity and willingness to forgive. The korban **chova** serves as a vehicle by which one can ask forgiveness for sins committed "b'shogeg" and beseech God to activate His "midot ha-rachamim" [attributes of mercy] to save them for any punishment that they may deserve.

Therefore, we may conclude that the korban **nedava** highlights the mishkan's function as the perpetuation of Ma'amad Har Sinai, while the korban **chova** underscores the mishkan's role as means of atonement for chet ha-egel.

WHO NEEDS THE 'KORBAN'?

With this background, one could suggest that the popular translation of korban as a sacrifice may be slightly misleading. Sacrifice implies giving up something for nothing in return. In truth, however, the 'shoresh' (root) of the word korban is k.r.v., 'karov' - to come close. Not only is the animal brought 'closer' to the mizbeiach, but the korban ultimately serves to bring the individual **closer** to God. The animal itself comprises merely the vehicle through which this process is facilitated.

Therefore, korbanot involve more than dry, technical rituals; they promote the primary **purpose** of the mishkan - the enhancement of man's relationship with God.

In this sense, it becomes rather clear that it is the individual who needs to offer the "korban" - as an expression of his commitment and loyalty to his Creator. Certainly it is not God who needs to consume them!

For the sake of analogy, one could compare the voluntary offerings [the korban nedava] to a gift that a guest brings to his host.. For example, it is only natural that someone who goes to another family for a shabbat - cannot come 'empty handed'. Instead, the custom is to bring a small gift, be it flowers, or wine, or something sweet. Certainly, his hosts don't need the gift, but the guest needs to bring something. But the reason why they are spending quality time together is for the sake of their relationship. The gift is only a token of appreciation - nonetheless a very important act.

TEFILLA KENEGED KORBANOT

In closing, we can extend our study to help us better appreciate our understanding of "tefilla" [prayer before God].

In the absence of the Bet ha'Mikdash [the Temple], Chazal consider 'tefilla' as a 'substitute' for korbanot. Like korbanot, tefilla also serves as a vehicle through which man can develop and strengthen his relationship with God. It is the individual who needs to pray, more so that God needs to hear those prayers

As such, what we have learned about korbanot has meaning even today - as individual tefilla should embody **both** aspects of the korban yachid: **nedava** and **chova**.

Tefilla should primarily reflect one's aspiration to come closer to God - an expression of the recognition of his existence as a servant of God. And secondly, if one has sinned, tefilla becomes an avenue through which he can amend the tainted relationship.

Finally, tefilla, just like the korbanot of the mishkan, involves more than just the fulfillment of personal obligation. Our ability to approach God, and request that He evoke His "midot ha-rachamim" - even should we not be worthy of them - should be considered a unique privilege granted to God's special nation who accepted the Torah at Har Sinai, provides an avenue to perfect our relationship. As such, tefilla should not be treated as a burden, but rather as a special privilege.

shabbat shalom,
menachem

==========

FOR FURTHER IYUN -

A. In regard to the nature of the laws in Parshat Vayikra; even though they primarily focus on the details of what the **owner** must do with his korban, this section also details certain procedures that can be performed only by the kohen. Even though we may have expected to find those details in Parshat Tzav (that discusses the korbanot from the kohen's perspective), one could explain that these details are included here for the kohen's functions as 'shaliach' (emissary) of the owner. Ideally, the owner should bring the korban himself. However, in light of the events at chet ha-egel, God decided to limit this work to the kohanim, who were chosen to work in the mikdash on behalf of the rest of the nation (see Devarim 10:8).

B. Although korban mincha is not mentioned at Har Sinai, it may be considered a subset of the general ola category. Namely, the mincha may be the korban ola for the poor person who cannot afford to bring an animal. Note that the 'olat ha-of' is connected to korban mincha by a parsha stuma. The olat ha-of, too, is a special provision for one who cannot afford a sheep.

C. The two basic levels of kedushat korban explain why the ola precedes the shlamim in the discussion in our parsha. The greater the portion offered on the altar, the higher the level of kedusha:

1) Kodshei Kodashim - the highest level of kedusha:
   ola: cattle, sheep, and fowl.
      The entire korban ola is burnt on the **mizbeiach**.
   mincha: the five various ways to present the fine flour.
      The 'kmitza' (a handful) is burnt on the **mizbeiach**;
      The 'noteret' (what is left over) is eaten by the **kohen**.
2) Kodashim Kalim - a lower level of kedusha
   shlamim: cattle, sheep, and goats.
   The fat surrounding the inner organs go onto the **mizbeiach**.
   The 'chazeh ve-shok' (breast and thigh) go to the **kohen**, while the meat that remains may be eaten by the **owner**.

D. Leaving aside the difficulty in pinpointing the precise difference between sins requiring a chatat and those requiring an asham, it seems clear that a korban asham comes to encourage a person to become more aware of his surroundings and actions. For example, if one is unsure whether or not he sinned, his korban (asham talui) is more expensive than the korban chatat required should he have sinned for certain. The Torah demands that one be constantly and acutely aware of his actions at all times, so as to avoid even accidental wrongdoing.

E. Note that the phrase '**reiach nichoach'** does appear once in the second (korban **chova**) section (4:31), in the context of a **chatat** brought by a layman ('**me-am ha-aretz'**).

The reason may lie in the fact that the layman may choose which animal to bring for his **chatat** - either a female goat ('**se'irat izim'**) or a female lamb. Therefore, if he chooses the more expensive option – the goat - his offering bears some **nedava** quality, thus warranting the description '**reiach nichoach'**.

Another difference between a lamb and a goat: is that a lamb has a fat tail, which prevents one from identifying the animal' gender from afar. Therefore, one looking upon this korban from a distance might mistake it for an **ola** (which is always male, as opposed to the layman's **chatat** which must be female). A goat, by contrast, has a thin tail, thus allowing one to easily determine the animal's gender and hence its status as a **chatat**. Therefore, by bringing a goat rather than a lamb, the sinner in a sense broadcasts his sin and repentance. This perhaps renders the **chatat** a nedava of sorts, in that the sinner sacrifices his honor in order to demonstrate the principle of repentance ("**lelamed derech tshuva la-rabim**").

===

F. **ASHAM GEZEILOT (a mini-shiur)**

The last korban dealt with in the parsha, korban asham, atones for three general categories of sins:

5:14-16 Accidental use of 'hekdesh' - known as asham me'ilot;

5:17-19 When one is unsure if he sinned at all - known as an asham talui;

5:20-26 Several cases for which one brings an asham vadai.

Although all three categories require the transgressor to offer an asham, the final parsha (5:20-26) begins with a new dibbur! This suggests a unique quality latent in this final group. Indeed, the sins in this category all involve intentional transgressions (be-**meizid**) against someone else. The previous cases of asham, by contrast, are inadvertent sins (be-**shogeg**) against **God**.

It would be hypocritical for one who sins **intentionally** against God to bring a korban. The korban chova is intended for a person who strives for closeness with God but has inadvertently sinned. The obligation to bring a korban teaches him to be more careful. Why should the Torah allow one who sins intentionally against God the opportunity to cover his guilt? The mishkan is an environment where man develops spiritual perfection, not self-deception.

Why, then, would the Torah provide for a korban asham in cases of **intentional sin**?

This group, known as an 'asham gezeilot', deals with a thief who falsely avows his innocence under oath. The Torah grants the thief-perjurer atonement through an asham, but only after he first repays his victim with an added one-fifth penalty.

Why should a korban be necessary at all? The victim was repaid and even received a bonus. Why should God be involved?

The standard explanation is that the thief sinned against God by lying under oath. Although this is undoubtedly the primary reason for the necessity of a sacrifice, one question remains: why does he bring specifically an **asham**? All other instances of perjury require a **chatat** oleh ve-yored (see 5:4)!

A textual parallel between this parsha and a previous one may provide the answer. The parsha of "asham gezeilot" opens as follows:

> "nefesh ki techeta, ve-**ma'ala ma'al b-Hashem** ve-kichesh be-**amito**..." (5:21).

This pasuk defines the transgression against one's **neighbor** as 'me'ila b-**Hashem**' [taking away something that belongs to God]! This very same phrase describes the first case - 'asham me'ilot', unintentional embezzlement of 'hekdesh' (Temple property / see 5:14-16):

> "Nefesh **ki timol ma'al** b-**Hashem** - ve-chata bishgaga..."

This textual parallel points to an equation between these two types of asham: unintentional theft of hekdesh and intentional theft of another person's property. [Note that both require the return of the principal and an added penalty of 'chomesh'.]

The Torah views stealing from a fellow man with the same severity as stealing from God! From this parallel, the Torah teaches us that unethical behavior towards one's neighbor taints one's relationship with God, as well.

[See also Tosefta Shavuot 3:5!]