

Parshas Vayikra

For the week ending 3 Nissan 5756
22 & 23 March 1996

Summary

The Book of Vayikra (Leviticus) which we start reading this week, is also known as *Toras Kohanim* – the Laws of the Priests. It deals largely with the *korbanos* (offerings) that are brought in the *Mishkan* (Tent of Meeting). The first group of offerings are called “*Olot*”, burnt offerings. The animal is brought to the entrance of the *Mishkan*. Regarding cattle, the one who brought the offering sets his hands on the animal. Afterwards it is slaughtered and the *Kohen* sprinkles its blood on the Altar. The animal is skinned and cut into pieces. The pieces are arranged, washed and burned on the Altar. A similar process is described involving burnt offerings of other animals and birds. The various meal offerings are described. Part of these are burned on the altar, and the remainder is eaten by the *Kohanim*. Mixing leaven or honey into the offerings is prohibited. The peace offering, part of which is burnt on the Altar and part eaten, can be either from cattle, sheep or goats. The Torah prohibits eating blood or “*Cheilev*” (certain fats in animals). The offerings that atone for inadvertent sins -- committed by the *Kohen Gadol*, by the entire community, by the prince and by the average citizen -- are detailed. Laws of the guilt-offering, which atones for certain verbal transgressions and for transgressing laws of ritual purity, are listed. The meal offering for those who cannot afford the normal guilt offering, the offering to atone for misusing sanctified property, laws of the “questionable guilt” offering, and offerings for dishonesty are detailed.

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Commentaries

NUMBER ONE

The first word of the Book of Vayikra/Leviticus is “*Vayikra*” (*And he called*). It is written in the Torah with a small *Aleph*. The *Aleph* is the letter that represents the will, the ego. It is the first letter of the word for “I” - ‘*Ani*’. When a person sees himself as being very small, like that small *Aleph*, then he makes room for the Divine Presence to dwell in him. His head is not swollen with the cotton-candy of self-regard. Moshe Rabbeinu was the humblest of all men. Moshe made of himself so little that he was barely in

this world at all. He, as no man before or since, saw that there is only one *Aleph* in all of creation - only one Number One - Hashem. Moshe made his own *Aleph* - his ego - so small, that he merited that the Torah was given via him. To Moshe, Hashem ‘called’ - “*Vayikra...*”

(Based on Reb Bunim of P’schiske)

PLEASE WAIT HERE

“*Vayikra...*” (1:1)

The word “*Vayikra*” implies that Hashem called to Moshe with affection, just as the angels call to one another. Hashem called, and Moshe came. But when *Bilam*, the Midianite prophet, wanted to curse the Jewish People, the Torah says that **Hashem went to him**. If Moshe went to Hashem, surely all the more so *Bilam* should have gone to Hashem. So why did Hashem go to *Bilam*? The answer is that when you receive an important guest, he is ushered into the sitting-room, but when the garbage man comes to the door, you go out to him so that your home doesn’t smell like a trash-can!

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CLOSENESS

“When a man from among you will bring a korban...” (1:2)

Closeness and distance are not necessarily measured in meters or miles, for people can be close even when they are on different sides of the world, and they can be distant even though they may be sitting next to each other on a bus or living in the same house. Closeness is spiritual; part of the internal life.

We have no word in the English language to express the meaning of the *korbanos* which were brought in the *Beis Hamikdash*. The word ‘sacrifice’ implies that I am giving something up that is of value to me so that the other person will benefit. Obviously, Hashem cannot benefit from ‘sacrifices’, for He lacks nothing. ‘Sacrifice’ also implies having to do without something of value. In point of fact, what we gain from the ‘sacrifice’ is infinitely more valuable than the ‘sacrifice’. The word ‘offering’ is also inaccurate: The idea of an ‘offering’ is that it appeases the one to whom it is brought. It’s like ‘buying someone off.’ A kind of bribery. The reason that we have a problem translating the word ‘*korban*’ into English, is that our ideas of ‘sacrifices’ and ‘offerings’ derive from pagan

cultures. Indeed, in those cultures, the word ‘sacrifice’ and ‘offering’ were apt and accurate.

The root of the word *korban* is the same as the word ‘closeness’. It is used exclusively in relation to Man’s relationship with Hashem. When a person brought a *korban*, he wanted to bring himself close to G-d. Being close to Hashem is the only real ‘good’ that exists. All other ‘goods’ are pale imitations, like worthless forgeries, compared to the real Good of being close to G-d. In the halls of Heaven, the problems of life solve themselves. Happiness is a barometer which rises and falls corresponding to one’s closeness to G-d. In the minds of those who have refined themselves, even suffering can become exalted to happiness when one is near to Hashem.

Today when we no longer have the closeness to Hashem that *korbanos* gave us, we still have its substitute - prayer. When we pour out our hearts in prayer, when we offer ourselves up to Hashem, we bring close both ourselves, and the world with us, to our Father in Heaven

(Based on Rabbi S. R. Hirsch, Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin)

Haftorah: Yishayahu 43:21-44:23

AN EYE TO ETERNITY

“But you did not call to Me, O Yaakov, for you grew weary of Me, Yisrael.” (43:22)

“Shver zu zein a Yid” runs an old Yiddish expression - “It’s difficult to be a Jew.” If you set your sights low and focus only on this world and its tribulations, you will certainly find it *shver* to be a Jew. But if you raise your gaze and focus on eternity, you will realize you have been given the greatest gift there is. The opportunity to be close to G-d. Someone who truly wants to do the will of Hashem doesn’t understand the meaning of weariness. To him, the ‘yoke’ of Torah and mitzvos is a crown of solid gold overlaid with

pearls placed on the head of a king, which, while weighty, is none the less dear and extremely desirable. However, when a person’s motives for doing mitzvos are not altruistic, rather he performs them for ulterior motives, or he does mitzvos out of mere habit, then the gravity of Torah and mitzvos weighs like a heavy burden around his neck. Thus, he becomes wearied and exhausted extremely quickly. If “*you grew weary of Me, Yisrael*”, it is a sure sign that “*You did not call to Me, O Yaakov*”...

(Based on Mayana shel Torah)



Insights into the Zemiros sung at the Shabbos table throughout the generations.

Ki Eshmerah Shabbos - T'Ba v'nat If
“If We Observe Shabbos...”

“I shall study the Torah of Hashem and it shall make me wise” - *Ehgeh B'soras Kayl, Us-chakmayni*

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“When Jews will enter their land,” complained the Torah to Hashem, “this one will run to his vineyard and the other to his field - and what will happen with me?”

“Fear not” came the divine reassurance, “I have a mate for you whose name is Shabbos. On that day they will be free from their labors and will be able to study you.”

This *Midrash*, quoted by *Tur, Orach Chaim* 290, expresses the unusual opportunity given to a Jew who is too busy to study as much Torah as he would like during the week. By demonstrating on Shabbos that we learn whenever we have the opportunity we get credit as if we were studying Torah all week long.

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