

VAYIKRA



ALIYA-BY-ALIYA SEDRA SUMMARY



Rabbi Reuven Tradburks Director of RCA Israel Region

The theme of the parsha is sacrifices. Different offerings will be required in a variety of circumstances later in the book of Vayikra. This parsha outlines the rules of those offerings, so that when they come up later, their procedure will be familiar.

The parsha outlines the procedures for: Olah, a fully burned offering, Shlamim, an offering consumed by the Kohanim and by the owner, and a Chatat, a sin offering. In the course of those, the mincha, the flour offering is also described.



1st aliya (Vayikra 1:1-13) And He called to Moshe, and G-d spoke to him. When a person brings an **Olah**, it may be brought from cattle or sheep. If from **cattle**, the procedure is: the owner places his hands on the animal, it is slaughtered before G-d, the blood is sprinkled about the altar, the fats are burned and the entire offering is burned. If either **sheep** or goat, the same is done: slaughter same place, sprinkle blood, offer fats, and completely burned.

The first words of the parsha baffle the commentaries. No English teacher would allow a student to start a book “And He called to Moshe.” Who is the he? Nothing

has happened in the book yet that we can refer the he to. Why begin with “And He called”?

Clearly, the Torah is deliberately referring back to the previous story. And continuing it. At the end of Sh’mot the Mishkan was completed. The thick cloud descended, indicating G-d’s presence. Moshe could not enter the area of the Mishkan due to the cloud. G-d now beckons Moshe to enter, to teach the laws of offerings.

This interaction frames the book of Vayikra. In Sh’mot, G-d descended to us. He commanded the Mishkan, as a place to meet with us. He descended and filled the place. And now? Our turn. He approached us. Now we approach Him. In Sh’mot the Jewish people were passive, drawn to Him. Ordered to make a meeting place for G-d to meet us. Now, in Vayikra, the Jewish people are the active ones. This book then is a continuation of the last; there He approached us, here we approach Him. And that is the meaning of sacrifices; man approaching G-d.



2nd aliya (1:14-2:5) If the Olah is from **birds**, the procedure is similar: blood sprinkled, organs burned, and completely burned. If a **nefesh** shall bring a **flour** offering, the procedure is: the flour is mixed with oil and frankincense. The Kohen takes a finger’s full, burns it on the altar. The remainder is eaten by the Kohanim. The flour offering may also be **baked** or **fried** as a thin matza with oil.

The Olah offering is a sliding scale. Cattle, sheep, goat, birds, flour. While the heart may stir one to approach G-d, the pocket may demur. Rashi points out that when

describing the one who is bringing a flour offering, the least expensive one, the Torah uses the word **nefesh**, as if to say it is the soul that is bringing this inexpensive flour offering. For some, the flour offering is as big a sacrifice as the bull is to another.



3rd aliya (2:6-16) Or one may bring a fried **soft** flour offering.

In each of these, the Kohen brings the mincha offering to the altar, offering a finger's full. The remainder is eaten by the Kohanim, treated as holy of holies. No offering of this sort may be chametz or with honey. Only the **first fruits** offering contain chametz and honey. The **Omer** offering is from new barley of parched ground kernels with oil and frankincense.

How can we find meaning in sacrifices? Let me offer the following.

In life, we experience a plethora of feelings and emotions. Success brings satisfaction; failure, disappointment. At times, we feel desperate, beaten down by challenges and uncertainty. Threats of war or of illness make us feel frantic. Sin can engender a deep sense of worthlessness. At other

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times we feel exuberant, blessed, fortunate. That the sun has shone upon us. Gratitude, appreciation; hearts full.

Life is full of experiences of anxiety, of triumph and of disappointment. A sensitive soul needs to express itself; the religious soul needs to frame these emotions in relationship to G-d.

There are occasions outlined later in this book where offerings are required. And there are occasions when we offer these voluntarily.

An Olah is an offering that is completely burned. It expresses a complete submission to G-d. It is brought in a variety of contexts: communal offerings, individual obligatory offerings, voluntary. But whatever the context, it conveys resignation or submission. This is indeed a core attitude we have in our relationship with G-d. It can be paired with joy, with guilt, with appreciation – but resignation and submission form the root of our religious experience. So when an Olah offering is brought it can be an expression of profound appreciation, but conveying that appreciation with resignation: that it is not my hands that have wrought my success, but that I as a Jew am charged with living hand in hand with G-d. My success demands an expression to G-d, as does my desperation. I give my life wholly to Him – both my success and my despair. This complete resignation is expressed in the olah – an offering completely burned. As if to say, I am in Your hands.



4th aliya (3:1-17) The **Shlamim** offering may be brought from cattle. The owner places his hands on the head, the Kohanim take the blood after slaughter and sprinkles on the

altar, the fats are burned. If it is brought from sheep, the same procedure is followed. Or if brought from goats. An eternal law is that no blood or fats may be eaten.

The Shlamim is eaten by the owner along with the Kohen; not totally burned as is the Olah. As such, it expresses a partnership between man and G-d. It has a mood of celebration. Perhaps the joy that at a certain level, while submissive to G-d we also partner with Him. There is complexity in human experience, combining both submission and partnership.



5th aliya (4:1-26) When a **nefesh sins**: if the **Kohen** sins in his official capacity, he brings a **Sin offering** of a bull. The Kohen places his hands on the head, the Kohen sprinkles the blood toward the curtain of the Holy of Holies and on the incense altar. The fats are burned. The bull is burned outside of the holy area, where other ashes are deposited. If the **entire people** err in committing a **sin**, a bull is brought as a sin offering. The elders rest their hands on the head of the animal, the Kohanim sprinkle the blood in front of the Holy of Holies and on the incense altar. Its fats are burned and the bull is burned outside of the holy area as was the Kohen's sin offering. When the **Ruler** inadvertently commits a **sin**, he brings a goat. He places his hands on its head, the Kohanim place the blood on the altar corners and its fats are burned.

This aliya describes 3 sin offerings brought by leaders: the Kohen, the Sanhedrin when it makes a ruling that all the people follow and that they realize was in error, and the King. True leaders must recognize that though they are higher than the

rest of the people in their roles, they remain subservient to G-d. Papal infallibility is not a Jewish notion; here we assume that the Kohen (the religious leader), the Sanhedrin, (the judiciary) and the King, the political leader will all sin. And admit their sins.



6th aliya (4:27-5:10) If a **person sins** inadvertently, he brings a goat as a sin offering. He places

his hands on the head, the blood is placed on the corners of the altar, the fats are burned. He may bring a sheep; the procedure is similar. An **Asham sin offering** is brought for: withholding testimony resulting in an oath taken unnecessarily, unknowingly violating the laws after becoming impure, taking an oath unnecessarily. A confession is made. The offering may be brought from sheep or goats. If the **owner cannot afford** these, then he may bring **2 birds**, one an olah and one a sin offering.

It is crucial to note that the sin offering is not the first sacrifice in the descriptions of offerings. It is the 3rd, following the Olah and the Shlamim. Sacrifices are not brought only to atone for sins. And not all sins can be expiated through sacrifices. Some do not rise to the need for a sacrifice. And for some, a sacrifice does not suffice for atonement. The offerings rather span the gamut of human experience and more accurately express a desire to engage G-d in all sorts of experiences, not just when needing atonement.



7th aliya (5:11-25) And if **he cannot afford** these, then he may bring a **flour** offering, though

without oil or frankincense, as this is a sin offering, an Asham. A finger's full is brought

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on the altar; the Kohanim consume the rest. If a person uses **sanctified property**, he needs to bring a ram to atone as an Asham. And to compensate the holy fund with a 1/5 additional penalty. If a person is **unsure of a sin**, he needs to bring a ram to atone as an Asham. If a person **denies** a financial obligation and swears falsely, he must make restitution with an additional 1/5 and to bring a ram to atone.

These offerings are required to be brought to the Mishkan and later, to the Temple in Jerusalem. The experience of the grandeur of those places would generate humility. Healthy humility, knowing our place as both majestic beings and meek in His presence is generated by the experience of sacrifice in the holy place.

to this theme, this week's haftorah starts with a rebuke to the people of Israel for abandoning the service in the Beit Hamikdash.

The message which is conveyed from the prophet Yeshayahu are words of rebuke related to the Israelites turning away from dedicating their lives to God and turning to idolatry instead. The Almighty calls to his people to do *teshuva* and He promises that their transgressions will be forgiven.

Yeshayahu exhorts the people by mentioning to them that serving idols is merely serving an object crafted by an artisan and has no power - "neither see nor hear nor do they know..."

The conclusion of the haftorah states God's overwhelming desire that His beloved people remember Him and return to Him. ■

HAFTORAH

YESHAYAHU 43:21- 44:23

This week's parsha focuses exclusively on the sacrifices brought in the Mishkan. Related



A SHORT VORT | BY RABBI CHANOCH YERES

Rav, Beit Knesset Beit Yisrael, Yemin Moshe

Rabbi Shlomo Ephraim Luntscitz (1550-1619, Rav of Prague) in his commentary on the Torah, the Kli Yakar, was puzzled by the second pasuk of this Parsha.

אדם כי יקריב מכם קרבן לה' מן הבהמה ומן הצאן תקריבו את קרבנכם (א:ב)

"When any man of you offers an offering unto G-d, of cattle, of the herd, or of the flock, you shall bring your offering" (1:2)

Why does the verse begin with the singular (adam ki takriv- any man) yet ends in the plural Takrivu- You shall bring?

The Kli Yakar answers that the language is to warn those who will bring a sacrifice, not to err the same way as Kayin and Hevel, when they offered to G-d, at the beginning of the Torah.

Kayin failed to bring from live animals. Instead, he brought from simple plant life- flax or wheat. Therefore, the verse stresses "from the cattle and from sheep" you shall bring. If one is to ask for atonement for his sins, he should offer a live animal- a lesson meant for the masses- therefore the plural form is used.

Kayin erred when he decided to bring an offering only after seeing Kayin's offering. His motive was due to jealousy of what his brother was doing. Therefore, the beginning of the verse is in the singular -"When a person (Adam) brings an offering" it is to teach us that we should model Adam HaRishon who offered to G-d with the correct intentions for the sake of Heaven, since there was no one else to be jealous of, at that time.

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STATS

24th of 54 sedras; 1st of 10 in Vayikra
Written on 215 lines in a Torah, rank: 19
21 Parshiot; 13 open, 8 closed
111 p'sukim - rank: 26 (2nd in Vayikra)
Same number of p'sukim as Eikev
1673 words - rank: 20 (1st in Vayikra)
6222 letters - rank: 20 (1st in Vayikra)
The sedra is of average length, but its p'sukim are longer than average for the Torah.

MITZVOT

16 mitzvot; 11 positive, 5 prohibitions
The book of Vayikra has the largest number of mitzvot among the five Chumashim - 247, 40% of Taryag. On the other hand, Vayikra is the shortest Book by far - in number of columns and lines in a Sefer Torah, number of p'sukim, words, and letters. This makes the mitzvah stats even more impressive.

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