



## Torah Reflections on *Parashat Vayikra* Leviticus 1:1 – 5:6

Much of the content of the book of *Vayikra*, Leviticus, is the center point for issues dealing with the raw feelings of human concern: sexuality and diet, separation and holiness, disease and health, and how to deal with interpersonal relationships in a variety of economic and social settings. Therefore, structurally and psychosocially, the book is at the very heart of our sacred text.

### Reading the Map: You are Here

- We begin the third book of Torah
- Five types of sacrifice are described: *olah* (burnt), *minhah* (meal), *zevah sh'lamim* (sacrifice of well-being), *hatat* (wrongdoing) and *asham* (guilt)

### *Koshi* – What's the Key QUESTION?

**What and why do we bring sacrifice? How does the process create expiation?**

The following quotations are brought to help inspire study and conversation, reflection and reframing of the questions raised by this week's Torah portion.

### *P'SHAT*... Finding the Path... Feeling Our Way through the text

**Leviticus 4:27-31** "If any person from among the populace incurs unwittingly guilt by doing any of the things which by the Eternal's *mitzvot* ought not to be done, and he (she) realizes his (her) guilt - or the sin of which he (she) is guilty is brought to his (her) knowledge - he (she) shall bring a female goat without blemish as his (her) offering for the wrong of which he (she) is guilty. He (she) shall lay his (her) hand upon the head of the sin offering, and the sin offering shall be slaughtered at the place of the burnt offering. The priest shall take with his finger some of its blood and put it on the horns of the altar of burnt offering. All the rest of the blood, he shall pour out at the base of the altar. He shall remove all its fat, just as the fat is removed from the sacrifice of well being. The priest shall turn it into smoke on the altar, for a pleasing odor to the Eternal. Thus shall the priest make expiation for him (her). He (she) shall be forgiven."

### *REMEZ*... Clearing the Road- Sensing Our Way through the Sources

**Rabbi Peter S. Knobel** – "The Judaism of Leviticus is embodied religion. It is about eating, making love, coping with illness, and guilt and forgiveness. It is a messy religion- a hands-on religion. Our hands must get dirty, and we wash them. The noise, the odors, and the red blood spattered on the white priestly tunics leave an indelible impression on the heart, mind and soul.

Our Torah portion is directed to the whole Israelite community. It is a manual not for the priests but for the people.... We are called upon to give of the best we have....

Acts of inadvertence can often be traced to indifference and lack of attention. They are serious because they can frequently cause great damage. They must be expiated...."<sup>1</sup>

### *D'RASH*...Discovering New Direction—Re-Interpreting Text Through the Ages

**Tamar Frankiel (Rabbi Avigdor Miller (A Kingdom of Cohanim))** – "As Rabbi Miller observes, we have to use 'the imagination of our emotional minds' to make the offerings real to us. The care with which these ceremonies were performed, step by step, hints to us of the awareness of process and meaning that we can develop in our daily actions.... The person

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<sup>1</sup> Rabbi Peter S. Knobel, "Parashat Va-Yikra" in *Learn Torah With... 1995-1996 Torah Annual A Collection of the Year's Best Torah*. Edited by Rabbi Stuart Kelman and Joel Lurie Grishaver. Los Angeles, CA: Alef Design Group. 1999, 206-207.

making an offering had to place his hands on the head of the animal, identifying with it and leaning into it with all his strength!...

The 248 limbs and organs and the 365 sinews and nerves are also, symbolically, the 613 *mitzvot*. The *mitzvot* are acts of connection... We can become healers of the world by concentrating, leaning into, loving all these bits and pieces of the reality we are remaking. Then we can imagine every piece going up in smoke like the limbs of the animal, always a straight column of smoke, its essence rejoining its Creator. For ‘the spirit returns to G-d that gave it’ (Ecclesiastes 3:21, 12:7). We imagine letting go, not being attached, turning it over, returning to its source.... We must turn it around and around until we can put it into our bodies, into physical action, to recreate the world.”<sup>2</sup>

### **SOD... Stepping Inside—Re-contextualizing the Story Through Our Lives**

**Rabbi Norman S. Lipson** – “Each of us is a living soul with mind and body, whether offering a sacrifice on the altar of the Temple or within our own synagogue today. Each of us is confronted with choices: to sin or to refrain from sinning; to admit guilt or to pretend that a sin never happened; to realize error can be made unwittingly or to act as if we are always right; to answer the call for testimony or to blend into the crowd of anonymity.

By looking at the offering rather than at the one who brings it, we fall into the trap of judging the person not by who he or she is but by what he or she may have to offer to G-d, or to us. We compare his or her offering with our own and play the ‘size does matter’ game. But by seeing others and even ourselves as souls, we can become better Jews, better men and women, and better members of society, rather than defining ourselves by the labels we normally use- priest, leader, doctor, lawyer, Indian chief. By doing so, we may begin to understand the true purpose of sacrifice- that by sacrificing, we are, in reality, only giving back to G-d what already is G-d’s. Hopefully, from that awareness, we can grow into more sensitive and holy children of G-d.”<sup>3</sup>

As you think about these perspectives, and about what makes sense to you, I hope you find some comfort.

Blessed are You, O’ Eternal One, Ruler of the Universe, who gives us the ability to study Torah wherever we may find ourselves. May we ever enjoy and learn from whomever we have the pleasure of studying. May the text find meaning to us as we continue to walk through the rocks that fall on our life path.

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<sup>2</sup> Tamar Frankiel, “Parashat Va-Yikra”, IBID, 203-204. Cited Rabbi Avigdor Miller, *A Kingdom of Cohanim*. Brooklyn, NY: Avigdor Miller. 1995. on Vayikra 6:4, 73.

<sup>3</sup> Rabbi Norman S. Lipson, “O ‘Soulo’ Mio”, *Torat Chayim- Living Torah*. NY: URJ, Vol. 8, No. 23.