



Parshas Vayikra

For the week ending 1 Nissan 5758
27 & 28 March 1998

Overview

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 is called *korban olah*, a burnt offering. 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 the meal offering is burned on the altar, and the remaining part 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 is eaten, can be either from cattle, sheep or goats. The Torah prohibits eating blood or *chelev* (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.

Insights

THE BIG A

"And He called..." (1:1)

Michaelangelo may have known a thing or two about sculpture, but when it came to Jewish anatomy he was a bit off. When he sculpted Moses he gave him little horns. Michaelangelo's problem came from a mistranslation of the Hebrew word *keren*. It's true, *keren* does mean a "horn," but it also means a "ray of light." The English word "*corona*," meaning a "glowing halo," is probably a derivation of *keren*.

How did Moshe get his "horns?"

When Moshe had finished writing the Torah, he had some ink left on his quill. He passed the quill across his forehead and the drops of ink made beams of light shine.

Everything in Heaven and Earth is precise. If Moshe was given ink to write the Torah, he was given enough ink to write the Torah and not one drop more. We're not dealing here with end of season discounts and remnants. We're talking about the ink of eternity. Nothing can be too little or too much. How can there have been a little bit of ink left over?

If you look at a Sefer Torah, you will see that the first word in Vayikra (Leviticus) is written in an unusual fashion. The last letter of that word — the *aleph* of the word *Vayikra* — is written much smaller than the rest of the word.

Why is the *aleph* small?

When Hashem told Moshe to write the word *Vayikra* — "And He called" — Moshe didn't want to write that last *aleph*. It seemed to Moshe that it gave him too much importance. How could he write that Hashem called to him? Who was he, after all? A mere man. Moshe would have preferred to write "*Vayikar*" — "*And He happened (upon him)*" — as if Hashem just came across Moshe, as if He didn't "go out of His way" to appear to him.

In spite of Moshe's protestations, Hashem told him to write "*Vayikra*" — "*And He called.*" Moshe put the *aleph* at the end of the word as Hashem had commanded him — but he wrote it small. What's in a small *aleph*?

The *aleph* is the letter that represents the will, the ego. It is the first letter of the word "I" — "*Ani.*" When a person sees himself as the

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Big A, the Big *Aleph*, Number One, he usurps the crown of He who is One.

When a person sees himself as no more than a 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 was the humblest of all people. Moshe made of himself so little that he was barely in this world at all. He didn't even want to be a small *aleph*. 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 through him.

How did Moshe get his horns? That extra ink left on his pen was the ink that should have gone to write the big *aleph*. Instead it became a corona of shining light to adorn the humblest of men.

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. It is 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 giving up something of value so that another person will benefit. Obviously, Hashem cannot benefit from “sacrifices,” for He lacks nothing.

The word “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, which is the only real good that exists. All other “goods” are pale imitations, worthless forgeries compared to the real good of being close 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 G-d.

PERFECT

“...Unblemished...” (1:3)

Peter Finch, the famous Australian film actor, once remarked “When you move an eyebrow in Cinemascope it travels three feet...”

Our age is unique in the way we place importance on external appearance. Whether that appearance is the carefully groomed lines of a Lexus sedan, or the mandatory shape of the human anatomy painfully carved in the sweat and toil of so many man-hours of aerobics.

As a culture, we are obsessed by appearance.

Oliver Cromwell had a large wart on his nose. One hesitates to think whether he would have become the ruler of England had it been necessary for him to appear on “Entertainment Tonight.”

The medium has become the message. The outside has become the inside.

However, appearance is not unimportant. It all depends on the context. The Torah tells us that a *korban* in the *Mishkan* and the *Beis Hamikdash* had to be *tamim* — unblemished.

When a person brought a *korban* it had to be completely healthy. When a Jew seeks to come close to G-d, he must do so with all his faculties. Nothing can be omitted or abbreviated. His service must also be unblemished. The perfection of the *korban* was the physical expression of the perfection of the heart seeking to be close to its Maker.

Haftorah for Shabbos HaChodesh: Yechezkel 45:16 - 46:18

PARTNERS IN TIME

The last of the “*Four Parshios*” is *Parshas HaChodesh*. *Shabbos HaChodesh* usually falls out on the Shabbos before the beginning of Nissan. This year, however, the first of Nissan coincides with Shabbos and so we read *Parshas HaChodesh* and its accompanying Haftorah on Rosh Chodesh itself.

Nissan, the first month of the year, is called the “king of the months.” On Rosh Chodesh Nissan the Jewish People received the first of all of the 613 *mitzvos* — the sanctification of the moon.

Through this mitzvah the Jewish People were given a partnership in the mastery of time: The world of Shabbos is fixed in time. We return to it every seven

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days. However, the mitzvah of *kiddush hachodesh* (sanctifying the moon) gave the Jewish People the ability to establish the length of the months and thus to determine the dates of *Pesach*, *Shavuos*, *Succos*, etc. Thus Man becomes a partner with Hashem in sanctifying time. Hashem through the fixed holiness of Shabbos, and the Jewish People through *kiddush hachodesh*. The Cesium and Rubidium atomic clocks at the U.S. Naval Observatory Time Center are accurate to one second in 300,000 years. But three thousand years ago, Moshe, had no such time-piece. However, somehow Moshe knew the exact length of the lunar month to be 29.53059 days, an accuracy which was literally out of this world.

In the reference work *Astronomy and Astrophysics* the precise length of the lunar month is listed as 29.530589 days. How did Moshe have a figure so accurate that it took science three thousand years to come to the same number?

Our sages tell us that this number was given to Moshe by Hashem at the beginning of *Parshas HaChodesh*. It was passed down through the ages, from Moshe to Hillel II, the last prince of the House of David. When

Hillel II sanctified all the new moons from his day until the final redemption, he had to know the exact length of the lunar month to within a fraction of a second, for even a small error would, over millennia, amount to a visible error.

There have been approximately 41,000 new moons since the time of Moshe, but from Mount Sinai onward the secret of the exact length of the lunar month has always been known to the Jewish People, because Moshe had a clock that was literally "out of this world!" The Haftorah of *Parshas HaChodesh* describes a month of Nissan yet to come. Mashiach has arrived and the Third *Beis Hamikdash* is to be consecrated in a ceremony which starts on Rosh Chodesh Nissan. As in *Parshas HaChodesh*, so too in the Haftorah, the laws and sacrifices of Pesach are detailed.

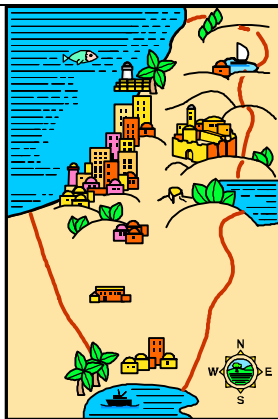
Sources:

The Big A - *Ba'al Haturim*, *Midrash Tanchuma Ki Sisa 37*, *MITa'amim in Iturei Torah*

Closeness - *Rabbi Shimshon Rafael Hirsch*, *Rabbi Shlomo Yosef Zevin*

LOVE OF THE LAND

Selections from classical Torah sources which express the special relationship between the People of Israel and Eretz Yisrael



GATEWAY TO HEAVEN

One who prays outside of *Eretz Yisrael* should face in the direction of *Eretz Yisrael*, and one who prays in *Eretz Yisrael* faces in the direction of *Yerushalayim*.

Both of these directives are deduced from the prayer of King Solomon at the inauguration of the *Beis Hamikdash*, in which he appealed to Hashem to accept the prayers of His people in all places and all circumstances. Should they be taken away from their land into foreign captivity because of their sins, he asked that their repentful "prayers directed to Hashem through their land" be accepted (*Melachim I 8:48*). Should they be engaged in war in their own land, he asked that their prayer for heavenly help "directed to Hashem through the city You have chosen" be accepted (*Melachim I 8:44*).

Although King Solomon was referring to particular circumstances placing Jews outside their land and their city, he set the guidelines for how Jews in all times must direct their prayers to Heaven through the holy land and the holy city where the holy house of Hashem stood.

Berachos 30a

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