

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI MORDECHAI WEISS

The Soul from Within

When analyzing the book of Vayikra, one is faced with perplexing and disturbing questions. Besides the obvious questions as to why the torah devotes so much space to describing these Karbanot (sacrifices) and yet for the past two thousand years these laws have little application or meaning to a practicing Jew- there is also a question of priorities. One only needs to look at the pomp and beauty of the Mishkan (tabernacle) and later the Holy Temples built by King Solomon and later by Ezra and beatified by King Herod, to ask the question; doesn't this gaudiness and pageantry border on arrogance? Do we need a Mishkan made of gold and silver and fine linens to serve G-d? Isn't this display the antitheses of the way a Jew is supposed to live his life?

In the portion of Tizaveh the name of our teacher Moses is not found. Our sages ask the obvious; why wasn't Moshe's name included in this parsha? Many answers are presented. Some say that it is because when praying to G-d for forgiveness for the Jewish people in building the golden calf, Moshe said to G-d that if he won't forgive the Jewish people then G-d should "erase my name from the Torah". Moshe's name is missing because G-d was contemplating these remarks and temporarily deleted his name.

I would like to posit that perhaps the reason that Moshe's name did not appear in the portion of Tizaveh was because for Moshe, the spectacle and the outward appearance of haughtiness demonstrated by the dress of the Kohanim (priests) was foreign and distasteful to him. Moshe was always described as a humble person, one who had no part in conceit or superiority. Perhaps this is why his name is not found. For him all this was objectionable.

Obviously there is a reason for this showiness. Rashi states that it is not for our sake as much as it is to glorify almighty G-d. "Zeh Keli Vanvehu," "This is my G-d and I will extol him".

But gold and silver alone can never exalt the name of G-d. There must be longing and a love- a neshama -that is also part of the picture.

When the Torah states "Vasu li Mikdash vshachanti bitocham," "and I will make for you a sanctuary and I will dwell amongst you" our sages note the disparity in the language. Grammatically it should

have written "I will make for you a Sanctuary and I will dwell within it? Why does it say that I will dwell "within them?"

Our Sages respond that the language brings home the point that the sanctuary alone has no meaning unless it dwells within each person. We must have the Proper Kavannah (intent and thoughts) and soul for the Sanctuary to have any meaning. It must be "betocham" within us! Often the prophets rebuke the Jewish people by saying "Why do I need your sacrifices saith the L-rd". For if there is no intent then one's sacrifices are worthless!

The Jewish home is also called a Sanctuary. On the outside it must appear beautiful and special. But if there is no warmth and love, if there is no caring and sensitivity on the inside, then it can be equated to an empty shell.

Interestingly, if we take the numerical value (gematriah) of the word "Mikdash" (sanctuary) we will come to a value of 444 (Mem=40 + Kuf=100 + Daled=4 + Shin=300). If we take the value of the letters in the word "Bayit" (house) we will come up to the numerical value of 412 (Bet=2 + Yud=10 + Taf=400). The difference between the two words is 32. Thirty two is the numerical value of the word "Lev" heart (Lamed=30 + Bet=2). It is also the first and last letters of our Torah (Bet in Bereshit and Lamed in Yisrael).

The message that perhaps is indicated is that our homes are also a sanctuary. However, it is of little value and importance unless we infuse it with heart and sensitivity (lev) and the words and the dictums of our Holy Torah (the bet and the Lamed). Then we will be successful in imparting to the next generation the beauty of our traditions.

The pageantry and the beauty of the Mishkan and the Temple were only effective if the hearts of the Jewish people were bound up in sincerity.

And the pageantry and the beauty of our homes are only meaningful if it reflects the depth and splendor of our hearts and souls. ©2009 Rabbi Mordechai Weiss has been involved in Jewish education for over four decades. He has served as Principal of various Hebrew Day Schools and as evaluator for Middle States Association. He has received numerous awards for his innovative programs and was chosen to receive the coveted "outstanding Principal" award from the National association of Private Schools. During his distinguished leadership as

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Principal, his school received the sought-after "excellence in education" award given by the US Department of Education. He now resides in Efrat and is available for speaking engagements. Contact him at ravmordechai@aol.com.

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS

Covenant & Conversation

Sacrifices, the subject of this week's parsha, were central to the religious life of biblical Israel. We see this not only by the sheer space devoted to them in the Torah, but also by the fact that they occupy its central book, Vayikra.

We have not had the sacrificial service since the destruction of the second Temple almost 2000 years ago. What is deeply relevant today, however, is the critique of sacrifices we find among the Prophets of the first Temple. That critique was sharp and deep and formed many of their most powerful addresses. One of the earliest was delivered by the Prophet Samuel: "Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obedience to the Lord's command? Surely, obedience is better than sacrifice, compliance than the fat of rams" (1 Sam. 15:22).

Amos said in the name of God: "If you offer Me burnt offerings -- or your meal offerings -- I will not accept them; I will pay no heed to your gifts of fatlings... But let justice well up like water, righteousness like a never-ending stream" (Amos 5:21-24). Likewise Hosea: "For I desire goodness, not sacrifice; obedience to God, rather than burnt offerings" (Hosea 6:6).

We find a similar critique in several Psalms. "Were I hungry, I would not tell you, for Mine is the world and all it holds. Do I eat the flesh of bulls, or drink the blood of goats?" (Ps. 50:8-15). "Lord, open my lips, and let my mouth declare Your praise. You do not want me to bring sacrifices; You do not desire burnt offerings. True sacrifice to God is a contrite spirit; God, You will not despise a contrite and crushed heart" (Ps. 51:17-19).

Jeremiah seems to suggest that the sacrificial order was not God's initial intention: "For when I freed your fathers from the land of Egypt, I did not speak with them or command them concerning burnt offerings or

sacrifice. But this is what I commanded them: Do My bidding, that I may be your God and you may be My people; walk only in the way that I enjoin upon you, that it may go well with you" (Jer. 7:22-23).

Strongest of all is the passage at the beginning of the book of Isaiah that we read on Shabbat Chazon (before Tisha b'Av): "'What need have I of all your sacrifices?' says the Lord. 'I have more than enough of burnt offerings, of rams and the fat of fattened animals; I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats. When you come to appear before Me, who has asked this of you, this trampling of My courts? Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to Me'" (Is. 1:11-13).

This entire line of thought, sounded by many voices and sustained across centuries, is extraordinary. The people were being criticised not for disobeying God's law but for obeying it. Sacrifices were commanded. Their offering was a sacred act performed in a holy place. What then aroused the Prophets' anger and rebuke?

It was not that they were opposed to sacrifice as such. Jeremiah foresaw the day when "People shall come from the towns of Judah and from the environs of Jerusalem... bringing burnt offerings and sacrifices, meal offerings and frankincense, and bringing offerings of thanksgiving to the House of the Lord" (Jer. 17:26).

Likewise Isaiah: "I will bring them to My sacred mount and let them rejoice in My house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices shall be welcome on My altar, for My house shall be called a house of prayer for all peoples" (Is. 56:7).

They were not criticising the institution of sacrifices. They were criticising something as real now as it was in their time. What distressed them to the core of their being was the idea that you could serve God and at the same time act disdainfully, cruelly, unjustly, insensitively or callously toward other people. "So long as I am in God's good graces, that is all that matters." That is the thought that made the Prophets incandescent with indignation. If you think that, they seem to say, then you haven't understood either God or Torah.

The first thing the Torah tells us about humanity is that we are each in the image and likeness of God Himself. Therefore if you wrong a human being, you are abusing the only creation in the universe on which God has set His image. A sin against any person is a sin against God.

In the first mission statement of the Jewish people, God said about Avraham, "For I have chosen him that he may instruct his children and his posterity to keep the way of the Lord by doing what is just and right" (Gen. 18:19). The way of the Lord is to act justly and righteously toward your fellow human beings. In context, this meant that God was inviting Avraham to pray on behalf of the people of Sodom, even though he

knew that they were wicked and sinners.

It is specifically in the book of sacrifices, Vayikra, that we find the twin commands to love your neighbour as yourself, and love the stranger (Lev. 19:18, 33-34). The sacrifices that express our love and awe of God should lead to love of the neighbour and the stranger. There should be a seamless transition from commands between us and God to commands between us and our fellow humans.

Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, Micah and Jeremiah all witnessed societies in which people were punctilious in bringing their offerings to the Temple, but in which there was bribery, corruption, perversion of justice, abuse of power and the exploitation of the powerless by the powerful. The Prophets saw in this a profound and dangerous contradiction.

The very act of bringing a sacrifice was fraught with ambiguity. Jews were not the only people in ancient times to have temples, priests and sacrifices. Almost everyone did. It was precisely here that the religion of ancient Israel came closest, outwardly, to the practices of their pagan neighbours. But the sacrificial systems of other cultures were based on totally different beliefs. In many religions sacrifices were seen as a way of placating or appeasing the gods. The Aztecs believed that sacrificial offerings fed the gods who sustained the universe. Walter Burkert speculated that the ancient Greeks experienced guilt when they killed animals for food, so they offered sacrifices as a way of appeasing their consciences.

All these ideas are alien to Judaism. God cannot be bribed or appeased. Nor can we bring Him anything that is not His. God sustains the universe: the universe does not sustain Him. And wrongs righted by sacrifice do not excuse other wrongs. So intention and mindset were essential in the sacrificial system. The thought that "If I bring a sacrifice to God, He will overlook my other faults" -- in effect, the idea that I can bribe the Judge of all the earth -- turns a sacred act into a pagan one, and produces precisely the opposite result than the one intended by the Torah. It turns religious worship from a way to the right and the good, into a way of easing the conscience of those who practice the wrong and the bad.

To serve God is to serve humanity. That was the point made memorably by Micah: "He has told you, O man, what is good, and what the Lord requires of you: To do justice, to love goodness, and to walk humbly with your God." (Micah 6:6-8). Jeremiah said of King Josiah: "He judged the cause of the poor and needy; then it was well with him: was not this to know Me? says the Lord" (Jer. 22:16). Knowing God, said Jeremiah, means caring for those in need.

Maimonides said essentially the same at the end of *The Guide for the Perplexed* (III, 54). He quotes Jeremiah: "Only in this should one glory: that they have the understanding to know Me, that I am the Lord, who

exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight,' says the Lord" (Jer. 9:23). To know God is to know what it is to act with kindness, justice and righteousness.

The danger of the sacrificial system, said the Prophets, is that it can lead people to think that there are two domains, the Temple and the world, serving God and caring for one's fellow humans, and they are disconnected. Judaism rejects the concept of two disconnected domains. Halachically they are distinct, but psychologically, ethically and spiritually they are part of a single indivisible system.

I believe that to love God is to love our fellow humans. To honour God is to honour our fellow humans. We may not ask God to listen to us if we are unwilling to listen to others. We may not ask God to forgive us if we are unwilling to forgive others. To know God is to seek to imitate Him, which means, said Jeremiah and Maimonides, to exercise kindness, justice and righteousness on earth. *Covenant and Conversation 5780 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l ©2020 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks and rabbisacks.org*

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"**H**e [God] called to Moses, and the Lord spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting saying..." (Leviticus 1:1) So opens the third book of the Pentateuch, the book known as *Torat Kohanim*, the book of the priest-ministers of the Divine Sanctuary, the guardians of the rituals connecting Israel to God. Indeed, this book in Hebrew is, like the others, called by its opening word, *Vayikra*.

And herein lies a problem. Each of the other four books is called by its opening words, but in those instances the opening words have great significance.

Bereishit [Genesis] is the beginning, the moment in which God called the world-creation into being; *Shemot* [Exodus], the names of the family members who came down to Egypt, and the exile-slavery experience which transformed them from a family into a nation with a national mission of universal freedom; *Bamidbar* [Numbers], the desert sojourn of a newly freed people who had to learn the responsibilities of managing a nation-state before entering their promised homeland; and *Devarim* [Deuteronomy], the farewell words and legacy of Moses, the agent of Hashem.

But what is the significance of *Vayikra* – God "calling out" to Moses, as the name for a Biblical book? Did not God call out to Moses from the time that he came onto the scene of Jewish history? And why is it specifically this time that Moses chose to express his modesty, the word is spelled with a small alef, as if to record that God merely "chanced upon him" (*Vayiker*),

but had not specifically called out to him? I believe that the answer lies in the very strange concluding words of the last portion of the Book of Exodus, towards the end of Pekudei: "The cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the Tabernacle. Moses could not enter the Tent of Meeting, for the cloud rested upon it, and the glory of the Lord filled the Tabernacle..." (Exodus 40:34-35)

We saw in last week's commentary the majestic words of the Ramban (Nahmanides), explaining how the Book of Exodus concludes the Jewish exile with the glory of the Lord resting upon – and filling – the Tabernacle. Was it not Moses who asked God to reveal His glory to him? Was Moses not the supreme individual in human history who came closer to the Divine than anyone else, who "spoke to God face to face," whose active intellect actually kissed the active intellect of the Shechina? Then why is Moses forbidden from entering the Tent of Meeting? Moses should have entered straightaway, precisely because the glory of God was then filling the Tabernacle!

Apparently, the Bible is teaching a crucial lesson about Divine Service: God wants human beings to strive to come close to God, but not too close. God demands even from Moses a measured distance between Himself (as it were) and human beings. We must serve Him, but not beyond that which He commands us to do. In Divine Service, we dare not go beyond the laws He ordains that we perform.

There is no "beyond the requirements of the law" in the realm of the laws between humans and God.

God understands the thin line between *kadosh* and *kadesh*: Divine service and diabolical suicide bombers, fealty to the King of all Kings and fanatic sacrifice to Moloch. Hence not only does our Bible record the commands God gave to Moses regarding the construction of every aspect of the Divine Sanctuary (Truma and Tetzaveh) but it painstakingly informs us again and again in Vayakhel and Pekudei that those orders were carried out exactly as they had been commanded, no less and no more: "Moses did according to everything that the Lord had commanded, so did he do" (Ex. 40:16).

This is why, further on in the Book of Leviticus God metes out a stringent death penalty upon Nadab and Abihu, sons of Aaron, when they bring before the Lord a "strange fire which they had not been commanded to bring" (Lev. 10:1) in the midst of national fervor of exultant song. Moses even explains this tragic occurrence by saying, "of this did the Lord speak, saying 'I will be sanctified by those who come [too] close to Me.'" Too close to God can be more dangerous than too distant from Him, if over-zealous Fanaticism is what measured Divine service turns into!

This is why both the Rambam (Maimonides) and the Ramban interpret the commandment par excellence in interpersonal human relationships, "You

shall do what is right and good" (Deut. 6:18), to necessitate going beyond the legal requirements, to make certain that you not act like a "scoundrel within the confines of the law," whereas in the area of Divine-human relationships, you dare not take the law into your own hands; our legal authorities are concerned lest your motivation be *yuhara*, excessive pride before God, religious "one-upmanship, which too early may overtake the sober humility of the all-too eager zealot."

Thus the sacred Book of Vayikra, the book which features our religious devotion to the Lord, opens with Moses's reluctance to enter the Tabernacle of the Lord unless he is actually summoned to do so by God.

His humility is even more in evidence when he records only in miniature the final letter alef in the word Vayikra, as if to say that perhaps the call he had received by God was more by accident than by design.

Indeed, the Midrash (Tanhuma 37) teaches that the small amount of unused ink which should have been utilized on the regular-sized alef of the Torah (as it were), was placed by God on Moses's forehead; that ink of humility is what provided Moses's face with the translucent glow with which he descended from Mount Sinai (Ex. 34:33-35).

Fanatic zealots are completely devoid of humility; they operate with the fire without rather than the radiant light from within!, the authorities light of glory which suffused Moses entire being, the truest rays of splendor which express the sanctity beyond deeds and beyond words. ©2020 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

RABBI BEREL WEIN

Wein Online

In this week's Torah reading, the Torah describes for us the rituals of offering sacrifices in the temple. Our generation and our society are far removed from the concept of animal sacrifices and, because of this, the Torah reading somehow does not really speak directly to us.

Already in the 13th century, Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon offered the idea that we have to view sacrifices for the value that they entail and not so much for the rituals themselves. Even though one of the six sections of the Mishnah and the Talmud concerns itself almost exclusively with the laws and rituals of animal sacrifices, this has become more of a theoretical and scholarly exercise, without it having any practical effect upon our lives.

When the temple will be rebuilt, then all these things will become actualized once more, but for now they are theoretical. Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon, said that the idea of sacrifice was that the person offering the sacrifice should see his own self as being the sacrifice.

This means that one must sacrifice one's desires, habits, lifestyle and all sorts of other pleasures to the service of God and of Israel. This type of sacrifice

certainly remains alive and necessary today as well, and it entails the ability to give away what we think is ours for a cause that we believe to be greater and nobler than our own personal needs and wants.

Because of this, the concept of sacrifices has cogency and meaning for each one of us. If we look at our lives, we see that every day we make choices in which ultimately lie the sacrifice of oneself, one's interests, and one's own desires, for a higher cause.

There are many different types of sacrifices listed in this week's Torah reading. There is a sacrifice that is a complete donation to God where the man or woman bringing the sacrifice really has no immediate or material benefit. This altruism was reserved usually for public sacrifices that were offered twice a day in the temple.

There are sacrifices, however, that are very personal. There are sacrifices that are meant to atone for sins and only we know which sins we have committed. There are sacrifices for wrongdoing when we are not even certain if the wrongdoing occurred. Because of this, we are constantly involved in reassessing our lives and rethinking events and policies that we have subscribed to.

People change during their lifetime and hopefully they mature and see things in a different light. The idea of sacrifice for sins passed makes for a stronger present and a brighter future. There are also sacrifices of thanksgiving. That is a sacrifice of one's own ego. In this instance we have to acknowledge that we found ourselves in terrible difficulty, in great danger and we survived and emerged from the crisis....with help. We must admit that we did not do it on our own.

We are thankful to others and we are thankful to our creator for having allowed us to be able to survive the issue, that is a sacrifice of ego. No one wants to admit that we need help from others. We all desire to be self-sufficient in the broadest sense of the word. But life teaches us that none of us are completely self-sufficient, that all of us are dependent upon others.

Then there are sacrifices that mark our holidays that are, so to speak, ritual sacrifices imposed upon us by history. The sacrifice of the paschal lamb is the outstanding example of this. We cannot proceed with the future unless we are aware of the past and are aware of the sacrifices of the past that enable us to even contemplate a future, a better future.

All these ideas are encompassed in the ritual laws of the sacrifices introduced in this week's Torah reading. The Torah reading begins by God calling out to Moshe. The same word in Hebrew that represents calling out also represents glory and honor. Because of that, when we hear God calling out to us, governing our behavior and thoughts, then we are aware of the glory and honor of being part of the people of Israel.

Everyone should stay healthy and cheerful. I look forward to seeing you soon. ©2020 Rabbi Berel

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RABBI AVI WEISS

Shabbat Forshpeis

Why is the letter aleph in the word va-yikra, the very first word of the Book of Leviticus written smaller than the others?

Smaller, suggests the Ba'al Ha-Turim, because it points to Moshe's (Moses) humility — teaching an ethical lesson. Moshe preferred the text to read va-yikar without a final aleph, as va-yikar means "by chance." Rather than state that God called Moshe (va-yikra) implying a constant close relationship, Moshe in his modesty wished the text to read that on occasion God spoke with him (va-yikar). Moshe, of course, adheres to God's command that the aleph be included, but does so humbly and writes a small aleph.

A second, more mystical thought comes to mind. Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Kook suggests that the soul is made up of different Hebrew letters. When performing a mitzvah (commandment), the letters shine brightly. In other words, whatever the action required for a religious observance, it ought to reflect or inspire an inner spiritual quest. And, that quest is expressed through the illumination of the inner letters, especially the aleph, the first letter of the alphabet (aleph literally means chief), representing all Hebrew letters.

A korban (sacrifice) which is the subject of God's calling to Moshe (va-yikra) should not remain an external empty gesture. It must be complemented by the human being's inner decision to internalize the mitzvah. That's why it is called korban, coming from the word karov – to draw near to God. That is why the Torah states the sacrifice is offered mikem – from you – representing the sincere, pure inner self. (Leviticus 1:2) Hence, the aleph is distinguished by being written small, as the goal of the sacrifice is to stir the figuratively small albeit powerful "lights of the soul" drawing one near God.

A final Chassidic thought: Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach often told the story of the Munkatcher passport. In this story his uncle asked the Munkatcher Rebbe for a passport to travel from Munkatch to Berlin just before WW II. Considering the climate of the times the request seemed impossible to fulfill. After many hours, the Rebbe emerged from his private chambers and gave him an empty piece of paper soaked with tears with which Shlomo's uncle was escorted everywhere in Germany with great honor.

The Munkatcher passport surfaces over and over in our lives. When a bride walks around her groom, they give each other the Munkatcher passport. When children are born they close their eyes and cry, giving to and receiving from their parents the

Munkatcher passport. And when we stand near the Kotel and place a kvittel in its crevice, we do so with the Munkatcher passport. And, concluded Rabbi Carlebach, when we begin the Talmud, we start on the second page — daf bais. Where is daf aleph, the first page? It is empty, absolutely empty. It is the Munkatcher passport.

What is the Munkatcher passport? Perhaps it represents infinite love. Hence the aleph of va-yikra is small to remind us of the importance of humbly, sincerely approaching God with daf aleph, with the Munkatcher passport — symbol of the unconditional love that we ought to have for God and that God has for us and that we should all have for each other. ©2020 Hebrew Institute of Riverdale & CJC-AMCHA. Rabbi Avi Weiss is Founder and Dean of Yeshivat Chovevei Torah, the Open Orthodox Rabbinical School, and Senior Rabbi of the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale

RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

Migdal Ohr

"You shall salt your every meal-offering with salt; you may not discontinue the salt of your G-d's covenant from upon your meal-offering — on your every offering shall you offer salt." (Vayikra 2:13)

In just this one posuk, we are told twice to put salt on korbanos, and once to not discontinue the salt of Hashem's covenant. It seems rather important for this salt to be there! It is curious. First of all, why is it so important? Second of all, why is it called, "the covenant of your G-d," and third of all, when it says, "do not discontinue the salt of the covenant," that implies that the salt is already there and you're removing it somehow.

Most of us are familiar with the Midrash that during Creation, Hashem separated the waters above and put the firmament between them. That left some water in the heavens and some on Earth. The lower waters were unhappy to be separated from Hashem and their lofty, holy, plane, so they cried out to Hashem. He appeased them by making a deal.

In order for the lower waters to be uplifted, they would be placed on the altar with korbanos. Each time a sacrifice was brought, it would have salt sprinkled on it, and salt is a component of water. On Sukkos, liquid water would be poured on the altar as part of the service. This covenant made by Hashem is what we're referring to. We must place salt on the korbanos 'for Him,' that is, to uphold Hashem's part of the deal. This alone is an amazing thought, that we are helping Hashem keep His word and are His partners in Creation through our actions.

The Sifsei Chachomim here also quotes another Midrash which teaches us that Hashem chooses humble things to be placed on the mizbe'ach. "Why were doves chosen for bird sacrifices? Because they are the most pursued bird species. Oxen, sheep

and goats are chosen for sacrifices because they are the most-pursued animals." This teaches us that Hashem prefers the lowly and lifts it up [onto the altar.] So, too, a person should be humble and Hashem will lift him up. Therefore, the waters which were lowered, were assured to later be uplifted.

We still have our question that it seems like the salt is there, when it is we who are supposed to be adding it. To this, we answer with another question. If the waters were supposed to be uplifted, why do we only pour water on the altar during the holiday, and not every day with the korbanos, when we only use salt?

The answer is that there are two components to water: the sweet water and the powerful salt. The sweet water represents the tzaddikim, the righteous people, and the salt represents sinners. Though they sin, Hashem wants them to return to Him, so He honors them with the mitzvah of the salt on the altar. It is this covenant, that Hashem is constantly waiting for all of us to return to Him and be uplifted, which cannot be missed or forgotten.

A talmid of R' Noach Weinberg z"l, founder of Aish HaTorah, recounted how one evening, R' Noach invited him home to help put up his sukkah and have dinner. When they got there, R' Noach's seven-year old son was trying to climb a pipe in the corner of the living room. The boy was about six feet off the ground and not getting any higher.

Knowing what would happen in his home, the student braced himself as R' Noach approached the boy, sure that the child would get into trouble. But he was in for a surprise. R' Noach got right next to his son, bent over a bit and said, "Stand on my shoulders and I'll help you reach the ceiling."

That's how R' Noach treated every Jew, and that's why he was a giant in Kiruv. He didn't scold; he humbled himself and helped everyone reach higher.
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RABBI YITZCHAK ZWEIG

Shabbat Shalom Weekly

As the vast majority of the world practices social distancing and people spend extended periods of time in isolation, we are forced to consider how much time we can really handle being with ourselves.

Luckily, we live in remarkable times, the likes of which have never been seen or even imagined by preceding generations. As much as we seclude ourselves to our private world we can still, quite literally, pull the outside world into our own. One of the most powerful breakthroughs in the history of education is the now ubiquitous concept of virtual schools whereby we can maintain a relatively high level of learning and even achieve a modicum of social connectivity.

For me, in particular, this is an important breakthrough. I run an educational system here in South Florida that begins with toddlers and goes all the

way through graduate school. The responsibility of creating educational continuity for a thousand souls can be a little overwhelming. While grateful for the technology that makes it all possible, the actual execution of creating meaningful educational experiences for each division has certainly been challenging.

Furthermore, just because we make educational content available virtually to students of all age groups, this does not magically convert parents into competent teachers or even managers of their children's "classes." The very first day we had virtual school in session, the principal received the following message from a parent: "After three hours of home school: one student has been suspended and the other has been expelled."

The good news is that no one will complain about paying tuition any more. Perhaps even more importantly, parents will finally begin to believe what teachers have been saying about their children. Sigh.

One of the unique aspects of our educational system is the focus on teaching critical thinking skills -- even at a young age. This is an outgrowth of my father's philosophy that we need to develop each student's mind, not merely feed them information. In order to implement this we have broad crossover between the different divisions. As a case in point, every kindergarten class pays a visit to the head of the university (in Hebrew this is known as the "Rosh HaYeshiva" -- head of the Yeshiva) for an introduction and to have a friendly conversation.

My brother Rabbi Akiva Zweig -- whom I have previously mentioned -- had the pleasure of hosting one of the kindergarten classes this year. After some pleasantries he asked them the following question, "Who loves you the most?"

Being that the student body comes primarily from a religious background and that the school itself has, at its core, a strong religious discipline, he was not surprised when almost every child answered, "Hashem -- God -- loves me the most."

He then asked, "Who loves you second most?" Here the children were sharply divided; some said their mothers, some said their fathers, and some said their teachers (who were also in the room with them).

Next, he asked them, "How do you know that Hashem loves you more than your parents?" Interestingly, the answer that most children gave was "because He created us." The implication being, that since He created both them and their parents His loves for us supersedes all.

My brother then began to offer them a deep insight to consider. He asked, "Do you love someone that you do not know?" The children shook their heads.

"Why not?" he continued, "Because it's hard to love someone who you don't know. But Hashem knows you best of all. If you break a lamp in your house, even

if your parents don't know who did it, Hashem surely knows that you did and loves you anyway and unconditionally." He then thanked the children, gave each child a snack and they happily went on their way.

When Kobe Bryant died a few short months ago I was perplexed to see so many people that had never really known him, nor even spoken to him, crying uncontrollably. Somehow they felt that they really loved Kobe. But this was difficult to understand, after all they didn't actually know him. He may very well have been a remarkable person in many respects, but you cannot have a genuine love for someone you don't know; even a child understands that!

The truth is that many of us don't know ourselves much better than we knew Kobe. We're constantly on the run and working hard, often experiencing more self-loathing than self-love. We never measure up to impossible standards and we mistakenly believe that our shortcomings are who we are. But it needn't be this way. God created each of us in a perfect way -- exactly the way we were meant to be. It's each and every person's job to get in touch with that essential self and act in a way that reveals the true person that God intended you to be.

The self-isolation that has been thrust upon us should be seen as a real opportunity for growth. We can begin to focus on who we truly are and who we want to become. We must each take this time to explore how we want to improve ourselves -- our minds, our bodies, our spirits, and our interpersonal relationships. This will ultimately lead to greater self-knowledge and therefore a closer relationship with one's self.

We need to remember that we are all created by God and imbued with a beautiful soul. We were created in His image and therefore the more we are connected to who we truly are the more we can love ourselves.

This week's Torah reading follows a similar theme. This week we begin the third book of the Five Books of Moses. In Hebrew tradition it's known as *Torat Kohanim* -- the laws of the priestly caste (Leviticus is a mistranslation as the majority of Levites were not of the priestly caste). Much of this book deals with the different offerings that were brought in the Tabernacle (Mishkan) and the laws of holiness that the priestly caste had to maintain.

Thus, this book introduces the concept of a "korbon -- offering." Until this time, the only word the Torah used was "zevach," which means to sacrifice. But once we built a home in our midst for the presence of God to descend, we now had a daily relationship with Him. We see this from the etymological source of the word "korbon."

The root of the word korbon is "kiruv -- closeness." Hashem is informing us that the service in the Mishkan isn't simply to pay homage to Hashem; it is

to gain a closer relationship with Him, which is what He desires. This is because God knows who we truly are and loves us unconditionally. Now is the time to focus on what it is that He loves about us, commit ourselves to being worthy of His love, and learn to love ourselves just as much. © 2020 Rabbi Y. Zweig

RABBI SHLOMO RESSLER

Weekly Dvar

Parshat Vayikra includes instructions "if a leader has sinned" (4:22). The Talmud interprets "if" to be derived from the word "fortunate" (asher and ashrei), which would make the Passuk (verse) read, "fortunate is the leader that has sinned". How does that make any sense?

Rabbi Twerski explains in Living Each Week that it's referring to the generation being fortunate to have a leader that admits when they make a mistake. As Moshe exemplified, the Torah values truth over all else. Even though there might be ways to justify being less than truthful, Moshe resisted those temptations, and always spoke the truth, even to his possible detriment (Leviticus 10:20). If our leaders establish a precedent for truth, we would be fortunate to have them as our role models, and would not hesitate to admit when we're wrong. Truth really does set you free (to correct mistakes, that is). © 2010 Rabbi S. Ressler & LeLamed, Inc.

YITZ WEISS

Covid HaBriyos

What must it have felt like just before the Bais Hamikdash was destroyed? I'm not sure, but I would like to imagine there must have been a thriving Jewish society, possibly filled with gemachs, chesed organizations, yeshivas and schools. People would have been learning, helping, volunteering and probably believing it was the greatest time in history to be a Jew.

And then - tragedy. The Bais Hamikdash - the focal point of all Jewish life- was destroyed. We know that the reason for the destruction of the Bais Hamikdash was because of sinas chinam - because the Jewish people had no underlying respect for one another. Despite all the wonderful things that probably existed at that time, without achdus and respect, all of it was worthless.

After the Bais Hamikdash was destroyed, imagine if someone had gotten together a group of people and decided they were going to go and bring sacrifices anyway. Or imagine if someone decided he'd just build a mizbayach (altar) in his backyard and get some friends over to bring his own sacrifices. Even ignoring the prohibitions from doing so, wouldn't it appear they completely missed the message?

I had an epiphany this past Shabbos while davening at home with my family, that brought tears to

my eyes. For whatever His reasons, Hashem allowed a powerful virus to spread throughout the world that closed down our shuls, our Mikdash Me'at. It's almost as if the Bais Hamikdash was just destroyed again. Chazal tell us that if the Bais Hamikdash wasn't rebuilt in our generation, it's as if it was destroyed in our generation. We are literally living in those times.

I think it's dangerous to try and come up with "reasons" that bad things happen, or in this case, why we seem to be reliving our history. I don't think anyone alive today has the type of insight as to why Hashem does what He does behind the scenes (I know I don't). But I think it's vital to find something about what happens in our lives that "speaks" to each and every one of us, and incorporate that message into our lives. I don't know what the message needs to be for everyone, but I know what message I'm taking from this. I'd like to suggest that those who think they are doing the right thing by continuing to have minyanim, large simchas and gatherings while the whole world is locking down to protect people are completely missing the point (besides the obvious issue of chillul Hashem and the imminent danger to life by hastening the spread of the virus). It is the same mentality as the kanaim (zealots) who burned the stores of food in Yerushalayim when the city was under siege and were responsible for some of the terrible things we read about in Eicha.

Additionally, we live in a society where political discourse and day-to-day rhetoric has become so coarse that it's virtually impossible to have a reasonable conversation with someone with whom we disagree. In the Jewish world, the not-quite-lashon-hara is so prevalent that it's almost the norm. The "eynayim ramot" (haughty attitude) we confess about on Yom Kippur doesn't even raise any eyebrows throughout the year. We find that people have very little patience or understanding for anyone who does anything different than we do ("Anyone who thinks otherwise - they're wrong!").

If the second Bais Hamikdash was destroyed because of sinas chinam, I think that might be a good place to start. I'm resolving to do what I can to tone myself down a bit. I don't need to be the first one to respond, to send out a "zinger," or be "that guy" who has the sharpest answer when something rubs me the wrong way. Maybe just by pausing, taking a breath, and then reframing whatever annoys me I can do something small toward fixing the animosity that seems to be all around. © 2020 Yitz Weiss

