

# Toras Aish

## Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

**RABBI MORDECHAI WEISS**

### The Soul from Within

**W**hen 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

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 [rvmordechai@aol.com](mailto:rvmordechai@aol.com).

**RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS ZT"L**

## Covenant & Conversation

The laws of sacrifices that dominate the early chapters of the book of Leviticus, are among the hardest in the Torah to relate to in the present. It has been almost 2,000 years since the Temple was destroyed and the sacrificial system came to an end. But Jewish thinkers, especially the more mystical among them, strove to understand the inner significance of the sacrifices and the statement they made about the relationship between humanity and G-d. They were thus able to rescue their spirit even if their physical enactment was no longer possible.

Among the simplest yet most profound was the comment made by R. Shneur Zalman of Ladi, the first Rebbe of Lubavitch. He noticed a grammatical oddity about the second line of today's parsha: Speak to the children of Israel and say to them: when one of you offers a sacrifice to the Lord, the sacrifice must be taken from the cattle, sheep or goats. (Lev. 1:2)

Or so the verse would read if it were constructed according to the normal rules of grammar. However, in Hebrew the word order of the sentence is strange and unexpected. We would expect to read: adam mikem ki yakriv, "when one of you offers a sacrifice". Instead what it says is adam ki yakriv mikem, "when one offers a sacrifice of you". The essence of sacrifice, said R. Shneur Zalman, is that we offer ourselves. We bring to G-d our faculties, our energies, our thoughts and emotions. The physical form of sacrifice – an animal offered on the altar – is only an external manifestation of an inner act. The real sacrifice is mikem, "of you". We give G-d something of ourselves.<sup>1</sup>

What exactly is it that we give G-d when we offer a sacrifice? The Jewish mystics, among them R. Shneur Zalman, spoke about two souls each of us has – the animal soul (nefesh ha-behamit) and the G-dly soul. On the one hand we are physical beings. We are part of nature. We have physical needs: food, drink, shelter. We are born, we live, we die. As Ecclesiastes puts it:

Man's fate is like that of the animals; the same fate awaits them both: As one dies, so dies the other. Both have the same breath; man has no advantage over the animal. Everything is a mere fleeting breath. (Ecclesiastes 3: 19)

Yet we are not simply animals. We have within

us immortal longings. We can think, speak and communicate. We can, by acts of speaking and listening, reach out to others. We are the one life form known to us in the universe that can ask the question "Why?" We can formulate ideas and be moved by high ideals. We are not governed by biological drives alone. Psalm 8 is a hymn of wonder on this theme:

When I consider your heavens,  
the work of your fingers,  
the moon and the stars,  
which you have set in place,  
what is man that you are mindful of him,  
the son of man that you care for him?  
Yet You made him a little lower than the angels  
and crowned him with glory and honor.  
You made him ruler over the works of your hands;  
you put everything under his feet...(Psalm 8: 4-7)

Physically, we are almost nothing; spiritually, we are brushed by the wings of eternity. We have a G-dly soul. The nature of sacrifice, understood psychologically, is thus clear. What we offer G-d is (not just an animal but) the nefesh ha-behamit, the animal soul within us.

How does this work out in detail? A hint is given by the three types of animal mentioned in the verse: behemah (animal), bakar (cattle) and tzon (flock). Each represents a separate animal-like feature of the human personality.

Behemah represents the animal instinct itself. The word refers to domesticated animals. It does not imply the savage instincts of the predator. What it means is something more tame. Animals spend their time searching for food. Their lives are bounded by the struggle to survive. To sacrifice the animal within us is to be moved by something more than mere survival.

Wittgenstein, when asked what was the task of philosophy, answered "To show the fly the way out of the fly-bottle".<sup>2</sup> The fly, trapped in the bottle, bangs its head against the glass, trying to find a way out. The one thing it fails to do is to look up. The G-dly soul within us is the force that makes us look up, beyond the physical world, beyond mere survival, in search of meaning, purpose, goal.

The word bakar, cattle, in Hebrew reminds us of the word boker, "dawn", literally to "break through", as the first rays of sunlight break through the darkness of night. Cattle, stampeding, break through barriers. Unless constrained by fences, cattle are no respecters of boundaries. To sacrifice the bakar is to learn to recognize and respect boundaries – between holy and profane, pure and impure, permitted and forbidden. Barriers of the mind can sometimes be stronger than walls.

Finally tzon, flocks, represents the herd instinct – the powerful drive to move in a given direction

<sup>1</sup> R. Shneur Zalman of Ladi, Likkutei Torah, Brooklyn, N.Y., 1984, Vayikra 2aff.

<sup>2</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, New York: Macmillan, 1953, 309.

because others are doing likewise.<sup>3</sup> The great figures of Judaism – Abraham, Moses, the prophets – were distinguished precisely by their ability to stand apart from the herd; to be different, to challenge the idols of the age, to refuse to capitulate to the intellectual fashions of the moment. That ultimately is the meaning of holiness in Judaism. Kadosh, the holy, is something set apart, different, separate, distinctive. Jews were the only minority in history consistently to refuse to assimilate to the dominant culture or convert to the dominant faith.

The noun korban, “sacrifice”, and the verb le-hakriv, “to offer something as a sacrifice” actually mean “that which is brought close” and “the act of bringing close”. The key element is not so much giving something up (the usual meaning of sacrifice) but rather bringing something close to G-d. Le-hakriv is to bring the animal element within us to be transformed through the Divine fire that once burned on the altar, and still burns at the heart of prayer if we truly seek closeness to G-d.

By one of the ironies of history, this ancient idea has become suddenly contemporary. Darwinism, the decoding of the human genome, and scientific materialism (the idea that the material is all there is) have led to the widespread conclusion that we are animals, nothing more, nothing less. We share 98 per cent of our genes with the primates. We are, as Desmond Morris used to put it, “the naked ape”.<sup>4</sup> On this view, Homo sapiens exists by mere accident. We are the result of a random series of genetic mutations and just happened to be more adapted to survival than other species. The nefesh ha-behamit, the animal soul, is all there is.

The refutation of this idea – and it is surely among the most reductive ever to be held by intelligent minds – lies in the very act of sacrifice itself as the mystics understood it. We can redirect our animal instincts. We can rise above mere survival. We are capable of honouring boundaries. We can step outside our environment. As Harvard neuroscientist Steven Pinker put it: “Nature does not dictate what we should accept or how we should live,” adding, “and if my genes don’t like it they can go jump in the lake.”<sup>5</sup> Or as Katharine Hepburn majestically said to Humphrey Bogart in *The African Queen*, “Nature, Mr Allnut, is what we were put on earth to rise above.”

<sup>3</sup> The classic works on crowd behavior and the herd instinct are Charles Mackay, *Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds*, 1841; Gustav le Bon, *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind*, 1897; Wilfred Trotter, *Instincts of the herd in peace and war*, 1914; and Elias Canetti, *Crowds and Power*, New York, Viking Press, 1962.

<sup>4</sup> Desmond Morris, *The Naked Ape*. New York: Dell Pub., 1984.

<sup>5</sup> Steven Pinker, *How the Mind Works*, New York, W.W. Norton, 1997, 54.

We can transcend the behemah, the bakar and the tzon. No animal is capable of self-transformation, but we are. Poetry, music, love, wonder – the things that have no survival value but which speak to our deepest sense of being – all tell us that we are not mere animals, assemblages of selfish genes. By bringing that which is animal within us close to G-d, we allow the material to be suffused with the spiritual and we become something else: no longer slaves of nature but servants of the living G-d. *Covenant and Conversation 5775 is kindly supported by the Maurice Wohl Charitable Foundation in memory of Maurice and Vivienne Wohl z"l* ©2015 Rabbi Lord J. Sacks z"l and rabbisacks.org

### RABBI BEREL WEIN

## Wein Online

One of the categories of sacrifices that are described in this week’s Torah reading describes the offerings that are meant to bring about forgiveness for sins that one committed inadvertently. The Torah details for us how the sacrifice was to be brought, and what its effects regarding forgiveness from Heaven would then occur.

Even though we live in a time when such animal sacrifices are not possible, one of the main lessons which is pertinent to us is that all forgiveness for wrongdoing requires true “sacrifice” on the part of the perpetrator of the sin. There is no free lunch involved here. The ability to request forgiveness for wrongdoing is completely contingent upon the true contrite feelings of the sinner.

And in our time, being remorseful can be expressed by one’s willingness to sacrifice one’s own time, wealth, abilities, and even social standing, to achieve the forgiveness so necessary for spiritual and physical survival. In many ways, we are accustomed to sacrifice to achieve goals that we have set for ourselves. We are willing to sacrifice much of our youth and its pleasures, in the hope that we will survive and live comfortably and nicely in our later years. We restrain ourselves, no matter how strong our desires may be, in the hope and belief that this will somehow bring us to a better future. We understand fully that without sacrifice, it is useless to expect forgiveness. And since human beings are, by their nature, imperfect, we are engaged in a continual process of sacrifice and self-restraint.

Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon -- Rambam -- expresses the idea that the sacrifice of an animal on the altar of the Temple should engender in the mind of the sinner who brought forth the sacrifice that the sinner himself or herself should be brought on the altar. The animal being sacrificed is to be seen merely as a substitute for one’s own self in attempting to redress past wrongs and trying to engender heavenly forgiveness for transgressions and sins.

Even though we no longer can bring such animal sacrifices on the altar of the Temple, we, nevertheless, can perceive ourselves as being the necessary sacrifice to accomplish our atonement and forgiveness. And this can only be accomplished through regret for the past misdeeds and the stronger permanent commitment of restraint over our future actions and behavior.

It is this deep understanding that we ourselves are the sacrifice that can bring us to a true attainment of forgiveness, in terms of heavenly judgment. In so doing, no detail of our behavior and actions can be considered insignificant or unimportant.

Just as the animal sacrifice cannot contain any blemish or imperfection, so, too, the mental, spiritual, and physical sacrifice entailed in obtaining forgiveness for our sins must be, as far as humanly possible, free from blemish and imperfection. This is a lofty goal to achieve, but it is the only sure path to goodness in life in this world and to the achievement of eternity in the Next World. ©2022 Rabbi Berel Wein - Jewish historian, author and international lecturer offers a complete selection of CDs, audio tapes, video tapes, DVDs, and books on Jewish history at [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com). For more information on these and other products visit [www.rabbiwein.com](http://www.rabbiwein.com)

#### **RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN**

## **Shabbat Shalom**

**"S**peak to the children of Israel, when any human being of you shall bring from themselves a sacrifice to God from the cattle, from the herd or from the flock..." (Leviticus 1:2) What does it mean to be a human being? Are we the "social animal" of Aristotle? The thinking being of Descartes ("cogito ergo sum" – I think therefore I am)? The Book of Leviticus presents us with a profound answer to this question that also enables us to better understand the deeply misunderstood sacrificial system outlined in this third book of the Bible.

Leviticus begins with God calling to Moses: "Speak to the children of Israel, when any human being (Heb: "adam") of you shall bring from yourselves a sacrifice to God from the cattle, from the herd or from the flock..."

The use of the word "adam" is curious. Why does the Torah use the most universal term for a person, evoking the first human who ever lived and from whom every single person in existence is descended? Not only does "adam" seem out of place in this particular context, it is not even needed in order to understand the verse.

The Torah, in fact, long precedes Descartes' observation with the piercing insight, "I sacrifice, therefore I am." The Torah teaches that the essence of the human being, Jew and non-Jew alike, is his need – and his ability – to sacrifice.

Only the human being, among all of God's

creatures, is aware of his own limitations, reflecting on his own mortality. And since "adam" is aware of the painful reality that no matter how strong, powerful or brilliant he may be, he will ultimately be vanquished by death, his only hope is to link himself to a being and a cause greater than he, which was there before he was born and which will be there after he dies.

Most people amass wealth and material goods in order to utilize them for themselves, to enjoy them in the here-and-now. But mortality reminds us that our material possessions do not really belong to us; one day we will be forced to leave them and the entire world behind.

Hence the real paradox: only those objects that we commit to a higher cause, which we give to God: to His Temple; to His study halls, synagogues, and schools; to His homes for the sick; to His havens for the poor – only these are truly ours, because they enable us to live beyond our limited lifetime, perhaps to all eternity. Only that which we sacrifice is really ours!

Jewish history, and the City of Jerusalem, emanate from this fundamental truth present in God's initial command to Abraham to sacrifice his beloved son Isaac on Mount Moriah, known as the Temple Mount in present-day Jerusalem. Isaac was the first olah – whole burnt offering. In effect, God was teaching Abraham that his new-found faith would only endure in history eternally if he, Abraham, were willing to commit to it his most beloved object, ironically, his very future.

In his willingness to make that sacrifice, Abraham secured his eternity. And by means of the seminal story of the Akeidah, the Bible teaches that the most significant sacrifices of all are not our material goods, but rather are our own selves, our time and our effort, our intellects and our unique abilities. A person must sacrifice "mikem," from yourselves.

Giving a child the gift of a check is hardly as significant as giving a child the gift of our time, our thoughts and our interest. And this, too, God teaches Abraham. God ultimately instructs him not to slay Isaac, but to allow him to live, because the greatest sacrifice we can make is not in dying for God but is rather in living in accordance with His commands and desires. Isaac in life after he descends from the altar is called by our sages an olah temimah, a whole burnt offering.

Rashi (France, 11th century), suggests another reason for the seemingly superfluous "adam" in our text. The Biblical commentator par excellence teaches that just as Adam, the first human being, never sacrificed stolen goods, since everything in the world belonged to him, so are we prohibited from sacrificing anything which is stolen (ibid., based on Vayikra Rabbah 2:7).

Perhaps Rashi is protecting us against an appealing danger inherent in the idealization of sacrifice. We can only sacrifice objects or characteristics that technically, if even in a limited

sense, belong to us. We can only sacrifice in a manner, and for a cause, which He commands. Thus, in detailing the sacrifices in the Holy Temple, the Book of Leviticus helps us discover the deeper teaching of not only what it means to be a Jew, but also of what it means to be a human being. ©2022 *Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

### RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

## Migdal Ohr

**"S**peak to the Children of Israel and say to them, a man when he offers from you an offering to Hashem... (Vayikra 1:2) Now that the Mishkan has been completed, we turn our sights to the new Sefer, Vayikra, which discusses the laws of the korbanos and the Avoda that would take place within it. This posuk is the introduction of korbanos, sacrifices, to the Jewish People. Hashem tells Moshe to speak to them and say, "these are the guidelines."

We find the concept in many places that the word "daber/speak" connotes harsh or forceful speech, while "amarta/say," is a softer approach. Why does Hashem choose to introduce the korbanos, which are intended to foster closeness between the Jewish People and Hashem, with a harsh tone of voice? Wouldn't it make more sense to ask people to donate in a pleasant way?

Further, the Torah immediately begins a litany of requirements and rules relating to the offerings. Why should a person not be allowed to bring whatever he is moved to bring? Would that not be a greater show of personal connection and love? Each person's uniqueness could be appreciated and exhibited that way.

The answer is clarified in the words of the Sforno, who says, "A man who sacrifices from you," refers to one who sacrifices a part of himself, approaching G-d only after confessing his sins and humbling himself. Hashem has no desire in the offerings of fools who bring sacrificial animals without humbling themselves.

The reason the Torah starts off with a more direct and brusque command is to teach us that bringing a sacrifice or gift of your own volition does not necessarily enhance the relationship. If you demand to be able to offer what you want on your own terms, then you are not concerned with the other party in the relationship. Only once a person has accepted that he wishes to make Hashem happy, and will do whatever He requests, can he begin to grow the relationship through the korbanos.

I'd like to bring this type of animal but Hashem wants that kind. OK, I give up my desire for His. I would offer it in this place, but Hashem wants it over there. Yes, I humbly substitute His will in place of my own. This is the sacrifice Hashem wants from us and giving in to what He "demands" of us is the first hurdle we

need to overcome.

The slaughter of our own egos and the sacrifice of our arrogance are the prerequisites to being able to utilize the korbanos to bring us closer to Hashem. Tell the people the "hard facts," but then say gently to them that when they willingly give up the notions that they understand everything and know how to make Hashem happy better than He does, they will get back so much more in return.

*In Vienna, in the early 1900's, a young girl of the Schiff family had the voice of an angel. One day, an agent of the famed Vienna Opera offered her the chance to join the Opera. She was excited but her devout parents were less than thrilled. Unable to talk her out of it, the father brought his daughter to the Kapischnitzer Rebbe, who was in Vienna at the time.*

*Prepared for a tongue-lashing, she was shocked when the Rebbe empathized. "This must be such a difficult test for you. But tell me, why do you want to join the Opera? Is it the money?" After thinking, she replied that it was fame. She wanted the world to know her name.*

*The Rebbe furrowed his brow. "If you give up this chance, I promise that you will have a son whose Torah will light up the world. Your fame will come through him, but you will benefit not only in this world, but the next." She agreed.*

*R' Dan Segal heard the story and researched it, discovering the girl married and had a son named Shmuel – noted Posek, R' Shmuel HaLevi Wosner. He asked R' Wosner about the story, who said, "I never heard the story, and my mother did have a beautiful voice. But now I understand why, when I went to Yeshiva, she said to me, "Learn well, my dear. I gave up everything for your Torah."'" ©2022 Rabbi J. Gewirtz and Migdal Ohr*

### RABBI AVI WEISS

## Shabbat Forshpeis

**H**aving completed the description of the building of the Tabernacle, the Torah now presents the order of sacrifices that were offered there. Although they are certainly more esoteric than other parts of the Torah, the chapters dealing with Temple sacrifice have much to teach.

Consider the opening thought of the Book of Leviticus, "When an adam brings an offering to the Lord" (Leviticus 1:2). The noun used for an individual, adam, is strange, as the Torah most often uses ish or isah (man or woman). This unusual choice of words represents several possibilities.

First, Adam, unlike all others, was fashioned by God Himself. The name evokes the imagery of this first human being, who was intimately connected to the Lord. The use of adam here appears to express the hope that, through the sacrificial service, the individual comes close to God.

The Midrash suggests another solution. Just as Adam took advantage of all the world had to offer without concern for others (since he was alone in the world), so must every person who brings a sacrifice feel assured that the offering to God is solely his or hers. It must not be stolen, for in the process of serving God, one must never violate interpersonal ethics (Rashi, quoting Vayikra Rabbah 2:7).

A third option is that while the sacrificial service deals specifically with the Jewish People, the use of the term adam speaks to the universality of the Temple. Adam was the ancestor of all humankind. From him, all human beings emerged. The noun adam by its very definition embraces the whole world. Perhaps the Torah uses the term here to remind us that ultimately the Temple is a "beit tefillah l'chol ha'amim" (a house of prayer for all humankind; Isaiah 56:7) where all people will one day come to worship the Lord. This inclusive approach reflects the spirit of God, Who often calls out to the prophet with a universal message, addressing him as ben adam (e.g., Ezekiel 37:3). ©2022 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 DAVID LEVIN

## The Special Calling

**T**he first pasuk of our parasha is a source of many commentaries. For starters, the last letter of the first word, Vayikra, is written much smaller than the rest of the word. This occurs in our printed text and in the Torah script itself. This in itself would draw our attention to the word. But it is not only the smaller letter, the aleph z'irah, that would indicate that this word should be analyzed. If we look at the entire pasuk, we will see that several questions arise.

The parasha begins, "And (He) called (Vayikra) to Moshe. And Hashem spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting saying." Again, we must draw on the fact that the Torah is concise and is careful not to waste a word. We see a difference between the two phrases, "and He called to Moshe" and "and Hashem spoke to him," for if there were no difference, then one of these phrases is redundant. HaRav Shamshon Raphael Hirsch says that, if the pasuk had read, "And Hashem called Moshe and spoke to him," we would assume that this was an ordinary calling, separated from the act of speaking. Hashem called Moshe and spoke to him. However, the pasuk indicates that this calling was connected to the act of speaking; a call came which led to Hashem speaking to Moshe. Hirsch offers an interesting explanation for this connection.

There are some Bible critics who say that the revelation of laws was originated by Moshe. These critics place Moshe's revelation on par with "all those imaginary visions of so-called ecstasy, or simply as an

inspiration coming from within a human being." This places Judaism and Torah into the category of a "religious phase" in the development of the human mind. But we know that these laws are not originated from Moshe, nor are they the product of his mind. That is why the "call" precedes the speech, so that the people could hear that Moshe was called by Hashem even though they were not privy to the conversation. Hashem was the origin of the laws, and not Moshe. We see this more clearly when we examine the contrast between Moshe and Bilaam. The Torah tells us, "And He called (Vay'kar) Bilaam." But the call to Bilaam is entirely different. This is indicated by the missing aleph at the end of Vay'kar. Hashem responded to Bilaam, He did not initiate the meeting. When Bilaam wanted to speak with Hashem, he first worked himself into an emotional ecstasy which raised his consciousness to a new level. Moshe was unaware of Hashem's desire for a conversation until he was called. He did not prepare himself. This may be the reason that we find that Moshe separated from his wife, so that he would always be pure for whenever Hashem would call him.

Hashem spoke to Moshe from between the angels that were on the cover of the Aron Kodesh. The Aron was kept in the Kodesh K'dashim, the Holy of Holies. The Ramban tells us that Aharon, as the Kohen Gadol, was the only Kohen permitted in the Kodesh K'dashim, and then only at designated times in the year. Moshe was permitted in the Kodesh K'dashim, but only whenever Hashem wished to speak to him. This is further proof that it was Hashem Who originated the laws as Moshe only approached when summoned.

HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin explains why we see these first three words, "Vayikra el Moshe, and he called to Moshe", on this occasion but not when Hashem speaks to Moshe at a later time. There are three times in the Torah where the word "vayikra" precedes Hashem's conversation. We find this first at the burning bush. Hashem initiated a conversation with Moshe which began with Vayikra, so that Moshe would be aware that Hashem was preparing to speak with him. The second occasion is when the Jews were about to cross the Yam Suf. This was the first time that Hashem spoke to Moshe and the B'nei Yisrael. Here vayikra was heard by the B'nei Yisrael, but they were not able to hear the conversation that followed. The third vayikra occurred in our pasuk, so the people would understand that it was Hashem who initiated the conversation about the laws that Moshe would bring to them. This was the first time that Hashem spoke to Moshe from between the Cherubim above the Aron Kodesh.

The small aleph was an indication of Moshe's humility. HaRav Sorotzkin explains that Hashem called to Moshe with a full-size aleph. Hashem did not minimize His calling at all. Moshe, on the other hand,

minimized the aleph because he felt that he was not worthy to receive this calling. Moshe was humbled by the fact that he alone was called for a private conversation with Hashem that even Aharon would not hear. Aharon was now to be the spiritual leader of the people, and Moshe willingly relinquished this role to his brother. Moshe was surprised then when Hashem called to him rather than Aharon. Moshe humbly accepted this continued role as the receiver of the law even though they involved the various sacrifices that were performed by the Kohanim. Moshe understood that it would still be his responsibility to hear laws from Hashem and teach them to Aharon, the Kohanim, and the people.

We often look upon Hashem's relationship with Moshe as unique. Yet Hashem initiates contact with us regularly. Our problem is that we often do not realize that this contact has been made. We can learn to attune ourselves to this calling. We need to open our eyes to the many messages that Hashem gives us daily. As an avid photographer, I am keenly aware of Hashem's gifts to us. The shape of a leaf or the budding of a flower cries out to me with the message of Hashem's influence on this beautiful world. I am reminded of Hashem through the intricate weaving of the wings of a dragonfly or the myriad colors that make up His butterflies. I marvel at the strength of an ant as it carries several times its weight. I delight in the Mastery behind the numerous songs of the birds in the morning. Each of these experiences is a "calling" from Hashem that alerts us to His Glory and His desire to please us with a beautiful world. But that is only part of His calling. When we sit and learn Torah we are drawn into a personal conversation with Hashem. It is as if we were brought into the Kodosh K'dashim together with Moshe. When we learn Torah with our full concentration, it is as if we are receiving that Torah next to Moshe. This can only be done if we listen carefully and we allow our minds to place us in that framework. We must sensitize our ears and our eyes to recognize these signals, and we too will hear the calling of Hashem. © 2022 Rabbi D. Levin

### RABBI AVROHOM LEVENTHAL

## It's the Thought That Counts

**P**arshat Vayikra and the ensuing parshiyot contain the instructions regarding the various details of the (sacrifices) that were brought in the Mishkan and later in the Beit HaMikdash.

There are 2 instances in the parsha that connect the poor to specific aspects of the sacrifices.

The first reference is the offering of a bird. וְשָׂעָה אֹתוֹ בְּכַנְפָּיו לֹא יִבְדִּיל וְהִקְטִיר אֹתוֹהֶפֶהן הַמִּזְבֵּחַ (א:ט"ו) על-הַעֲצִים אֲשֶׁר עַל-הָאֵשׁ עֹלָה הוּא אִשָּׁה גִּים נִחֵם לָהּ:

He shall tear it open by its wings, without

severing it, and turn it into smoke on the altar, upon the wood that is on the fire. It is a burnt offering, an offering by fire, of pleasing odor to Hashem. בְּכַנְפָּיו. נֹצֵחַ מִמֶּשׁ; וְהָלָא אֵין לָהּ הַדְּיוּט שְׁמֵרִים רִים כְּנָפִים נִשְׂרָפִים וְאֵין נִפְשׁוּ קֶצֶה עָלָיו, וְלָמָּה אָמַר הַתּוֹב יִקְרִיב? כְּדִי שְׂיִהָא הַמִּזְבֵּחַ שְׂבַע וּמִהַדָּר ('בְּקֶרְבָּנוּ שָׁל עָנִי (ויק"ר ג

It means actually the feathers (not the wings). But surely you will not find even a common sort of man who can smell the odor of burnt feathers without being disgusted with it! Why, then, does Scripture say that it shall be offered with the feathers? In order that the altar should appear full up, as it were, and adorned with the sacrifice of the poor (since the bird with its feathers makes a finer show than without them) (Leviticus Rabbah 3:5).

Many mistakenly interpret this Midrash to say that the inclusion of the feathers is a reference to the lowliness of the poor. That somehow calling this normally offensive odor "pleasant", comes to say that everyone is equal and pleasant in the Eyes of G-d.

Yes, that is true. G-d does look at all of His creations in a positive light and what their potential is.

That is not the point here, however. The inclusion of the feathers is a sensitivity to the poor person. Due to their circumstances, they can't afford a more expensive and larger animal. They therefore bring a bird. If the Torah commanded to flay and dismember the bird as in the case of the other sacrifices, the result would be a scrawny, featherless offering. The poor person, already feeling low, would become even more embarrassed by the sight of the tiny bird.

Hashem comes and says, "take the entire bird, feathers and all so that this poor person feels that they offered something of substance. The foul odor of burnt feathers becomes pleasing to Me when preserving the dignity of the person".

G-d doesn't "need" our offerings. It is we that gain from them to learn more about our relationships with Hashem, ourselves and our fellow humans.

If G-d says that let My Holy place fill with burnt feathers for another's self-esteem, we too could sometimes "bear" the unpleasantness of someone if it will make them feel more worthy.

There is no sweeter smell than when we respect the dignity of another person.

Shortly after this, the parsha speaks of the voluntary offering, called a נִדְבָה. These offerings can consist of animals, birds or even fine flour. וְנִפְשׁ כִּי-תִקְרִיב קֶרְבַּן מִנְחָה לָהּ סֵלֶת יִהְיֶה קֶרְבָּנוּ וְצִק עָלֶיהָ שֶׁמֶן וְנָתַן עָלֶיהָ לִבְנֵה:

When a person(soul) presents an offering of meal to ה': The offering shall be of choice flour; the offerer shall pour oil upon it, lay frankincense on it.

Here Rashi brings the Gemara in Menachot (104). וּנְפֶשׁ כִּי תִקְרִיב. לֹא נִאָּמַר נִפְשׁ בְּכָל קֶרְבָּנוֹת נִדְבָה אֶלָּא בְּמִנְחָה, מִי דָרְכּוֹ לְהַתְנַדֵּב מִנְחָה? עָנִי. אָמַר הַקָּב"ה, מַעֲלָה אֲנִי (עָלָיו כְּאֵלוֹ הַקְּרִיב נִפְשׁוֹ(מִנְחוֹת ק"ד):

The only voluntary sacrifice to mention נִפְשׁ

(soul) is that of the meal offering (מנחה). Who usually brings a מנחה for their voluntary sacrifice? A poor person. Hashem says that I consider the מנחה of the poor person as if they brought their very soul as the offering.

Once again G-d doesn't look at what is being offered but rather who is offering. Fine flour to a poor person is more valuable than many animals is to someone of means. Hashem says, that when this person gives of themselves in order to bring Me an offering, it is not the fine flour but rather their very soul that they are giving.

Sometimes, actually in most cases, it's not the value of the gift but the thought behind it that really counts.

Dignity, worth, esteem. Just as we all want these traits for ourselves, we should go out of our way, even just a little, to instill and protect them in others. Particularly those who may be less fortunate or more vulnerable than we. ©2022 Rabbi A. Leventhal, noted educator and speaker, is the Executive Director at Lema'an Achai [lemaanachai.org](http://lemaanachai.org)

**RABBI DOV KRAMER**

## Taking a Closer Look

"**A**nd He (G-d) called to Moshe" (Vayikra 1:1). "The 'aleph' of 'and He called' is small because Moshe wanted to write 'and He happened upon' (which has the same letters as 'and He called' without the 'aleph'), the way it's said [regarding G-d's communication] with Bilam (Bamidbar 23:4 and 23:16), [to make it seem] as if [G-d] only appeared to [Moshe] indirectly, [but] G-d told him to write the 'aleph' too, [so] he wrote it smaller." This explanation, put forth by the Ba'al HaTurim, raises several issues, some of which I discussed several years ago (<http://rabbidmk.wordpress.com/2011/03/09/parashas-vayikra-5771/>). I would like to discuss one of those issues further, adding another layer to it.

This is not the first time G-d called to Moshe (see Sh'mos 3:4, 19:3, 19:20 and 24:16). Why didn't Moshe try to make the "aleph" of the word "and He called" smaller earlier? The source of the Ba'al HaTurim's explanation, Midrash Rabbi Akiva ben Yosef al Osiyos K'tanos v'Ta'ameihen (Batay Midrashos II, pg. 478), says that the reason Moshe wanted to drop the "aleph" (and eventually made it smaller) was to differentiate between the way the angels are called and the way he was called. How did Moshe know the manner in which G-d called the angels? Spending 40 days and 40 nights atop Mt. Sinai, where he "ascended to the heavens" (see Shabbos 88b), Moshe was able to witness it happen first hand. After seeing that the angels were "called" by G-d, he decided he didn't want the way G-d initiated communication with him to be described the same way.

There was much communication between G-d

and Moshe before he ascended Mt. Sinai for 40 days and nights (and was able to see how G-d communicated with the angels). If anything, the communication between G-d and Moshe was on a much lower level then, yet is still described as "and He called" (with an "aleph"). When explaining what "The Book of the Covenant" (Sh'mos 24:7), which Moshe had written down and read to the people (24:4), was, Rashi (in both places) tells us it was the Torah "from the 'beginning' (i.e., creation) until the point where the Torah was given." When did Moshe write this down? Before Moshe spent 40 days and 40 nights atop Mt. Sinai (see Rashi on 24:1). In other words, when Moshe wrote the narrative that included those earlier communications down, he was not yet aware that G-d "called" the angels, so had no reason to protest against the communication between G-d and himself being described the same way.

This explanation works for the earlier instances of "and He called." However, when Moshe was "called" to ascend Mt. Sinai for the public revelation (19:20), as well as when he was "called" to ascend for 40 days and nights (24:16), although they also occurred before Moshe was aware that the angels were "called," they weren't written down until afterwards. Nevertheless, his level of communication with G-d was certainly not worse in those two instances than those described earlier, so it would be inappropriate to differentiate between his earlier communication with G-d (including the one that had occurred just days earlier) and those. However, the first communication that took place in the newly dedicated Mishkan, which was a prototype for all subsequent communication (see Rashi on Vayikra 1:1) and is therefore purposely described the same way as G-d's communication with the angels (ibid), provided Moshe with the opportunity to let everyone know that it was not exactly the same as it is with angels. Even though G-d didn't let him leave off the "aleph" completely (since Moshe's level of communication was so far above that of Bilam), He did allow him to make it a small one, thereby differentiating between the cherished way he was "called" and the cherished way the angels are "called." ©2014 Rabbi D. Kramer

