

Toras Aish

Thoughts From Across the Torah Spectrum

RABBI LORD JONATHAN SACKS ZT"l

Covenant & Conversation

The third book of the Torah is known in English as "Leviticus", a word deriving from Greek and Latin, meaning, "pertaining to the Levites". This reflects the fact that in Judaism the priests -- descendants of Aaron -- were from the tribe of Levi, and that the ancient rabbinic name for the book was *Torat Cohanim*, "the law of the priests". It is an appropriate title. Whereas *Shemot* and *Bamidbar* are shot through with narrative, the book between them is largely about sacrifices and the rituals associated, first with the Tabernacle and later with the Temple in Jerusalem. It is, as the name *Torat Cohanim* implies, about the priests and their function as guardians of the sacred.

By contrast, the traditional name *Vayikra*, "And He called", seems merely accidental. *Vayikra* just happens to be the first word of the book, and there is no connection between it and the subjects with which it deals. The truth, I will argue here, is otherwise. There is a deep connection between the word *Vayikra* and the underlying message of the book as a whole.

To understand this we must note that there is something unusual about the way the word appears in a *sefer Torah*. Its last letter, an aleph, is written small -- almost as if it barely existed. The standard-size letters spell out the word *vayikar*, meaning, "he encountered, he chanced upon." Unlike *vayikra*, which refers to a call, a summons, a meeting by request, *vayikar* suggests an accidental meeting, a mere happening.

With their sensitivity to nuance, the sages noted the difference between the call to Moses with which the book begins, and God's appearance to the pagan prophet *Bilaam*. This is how the midrash puts it:

"What is the difference between the prophets of Israel and the prophets of the pagan nations of the world?... R. Hama ben Hanina said: The Holy One blessed be He reveals himself to the pagan nations by an incomplete form of address, as it is said, 'And the Lord appeared to *Bilaam*', whereas to the prophets of Israel He appears in a complete form of address, as it is said, 'And He called to Moses.'"

Mazel tov to my parents Moreet & Eli Weiss
and to my big brother Ehud
on the birth of their daughter/sister (that's me!)
Can't wait to find out what my name is!

Rashi is more explicit: "All [God's] communications [to Moses], whether they use the words 'speak' or 'say' or 'command' were preceded by a call [*keri'ah*] which is a term of endearment, used by the angels when they address one another, as it is said 'And one called to the other' [*vekara zeh el zeh*, *Isaiah 6:3*]. However, to the prophets of the nations of the world, His appearance is described by an expression signifying a casual encounter and uncleanness, as it says, 'And the Lord appeared to *Bilaam*.'"

The *Baal HaTurim* goes one stage further, commenting on the small aleph: "Moses was both great and humble, and wanted only to write *Vayikar*, signifying 'chance', as if the Holy One blessed be He appeared to him only in a dream, as it says of *Bilaam* [*vayikar*, without an aleph] -- suggesting that God appeared to him by mere chance. However, God told him to write the word with an aleph. Moses then said to Him, because of his extreme humility, that he would only write an aleph that was smaller than the other alephs in the Torah, and he did indeed write it small."

Something of great significance is being hinted at here, but before taking it further, let us turn to the end of the book. Just before the end, in the *sedra* of *Bechukotai*, there occurs one of the two most terrifying passages in the Torah. It is known as the *tokhachah* (the other appears in *Devarim 28*), and it details the terrible fate that will befall the Jewish people if it fails to keep its covenant with God: "I will bring such insecurity upon those of you who survive in your enemies' land that the sound of a driven leaf will make them flee from the sword. They will fall with no one chasing them... The land of your enemies will consume you." (26:36-38)

Yet despite the shocking nature of the forewarning, the passage ends with a note of consolation: "I will remember My covenant with Jacob, as well as My covenant with Isaac and My covenant with Abraham. I will remember the land... Even when they are in their enemies' land, I will not reject them or abhor them so as to destroy them completely, breaking My covenant with them. I am the Lord their God. But for their sake I will remember the covenant with their ancestors whom I brought out of Egypt in the sight of the nations to be their God, I am the Lord." (26:42,44)

The key-word of the passage is the word *keri*. It appears exactly seven times in the *tokhachah* -- a sure sign of significance. Here are two of them by way of example: "If in spite of this you still do not listen to Me

but continue to be hostile towards Me, then in My anger I will be hostile towards you, and I myself will punish you seven times for your sins." (26: 27-28) What does the word *keri* mean? I have translated it here as "hostile". There are other suggestions. The Targum reads it as "harden yourselves", Rashbam as "refuse", Ibn Ezra as "overconfident", Saadia as "rebellious".

However, Rambam gives it a completely different interpretation, and does so in a halakhic context: "A positive scriptural command prescribes prayer and the sounding of the alarm with trumpets whenever trouble befalls the community. For when Scripture says, 'Against the adversary that oppresses you, then you shall sound an alarm with the trumpets' the meaning is: Cry out in prayer and sound an alarm... This is one of the paths to repentance, for when the community cries out in prayer and sounds an alarm when threatened by trouble, everyone realises that evil has come on them as a result of their own wrongdoing... and that repentance will cause the trouble to be removed.

"If, however, the people do not cry out in prayer and do not sound an alarm but merely say that it is the way of the world for such a thing to happen to them, and that their trouble is a matter of pure chance, they have chosen a cruel path which will cause them to continue in their wrongdoing, and thus bring additional troubles on them. For when Scripture says, 'If you continue to be *keri* towards Me, then in My anger I will be *keri* towards you', it means: If, when I bring trouble upon you in order to cause you to repent, you say that the trouble is purely accidental, then I will add to your trouble the anger of being-left-to-chance." (Mishneh Torah, Taaniyot, 1:1-3)

Rambam understands *keri* to be related to the word *mikreh*, meaning "chance". The curses, in his interpretation, are not Divine retribution as such. It will not be God who makes Israel suffer: it will be other human beings. What will happen is simply that God will withdraw His protection. Israel will have to face the world alone, without the sheltering presence of God. This, for Rambam, is simple, inescapable measure-for-measure (*middah kenegged middah*). If Israel believe in Divine providence, they will be blessed by Divine providence. If they see history as mere chance -- what Joseph Heller, author of *Catch-22*, called "a trashbag of random coincidences blown open by the wind" -- then indeed they will be left to chance. Being a small, vulnerable nation, chance will not be kind to them.

We are now in a position to understand the remarkable proposition linking the beginning of *Vayikra* to the end -- and one of the most profound of all spiritual truths. The difference between *mikra* and *mikreh* -- between history as God's call and history as one event after another with no underlying purpose or meaning -- is, in the Hebrew language, almost imperceptible. The words sound the same. The only difference is that the former has an aleph while the latter does not (the significance of the aleph is obvious: the first letter of the

alphabet, the first letter of the Ten Commandments, the "I" of God).

The letter aleph is almost inaudible. Its appearance in a sefer Torah at the beginning of *Vayikra* (the "small aleph") is almost invisible. Do not expect -- the Torah is intimating -- that the presence of God in history will always be as clear and unambiguous as it was during the exodus from Egypt and the division of the Red Sea. For much of the time it will depend on your own sensitivity. For those who look, it will be visible. For those who listen, it can be heard. But first you have to look and listen. If you choose not to see or hear, then *Vayikra* will become *Vayikar*. The call will be inaudible. History will seem mere chance. There is nothing incoherent about such an idea. Those who believe it will have much to justify it. Indeed, says God in the *tokhachah*: if you believe that history is chance, then it will become so. But in truth it is not so. The history of the Jewish people -- as even non-Jews such as Pascal, Rousseau and Tolstoy eloquently stated -- testifies to the presence of God in their midst. Only thus could such a small, vulnerable, relatively powerless people survive, and still say today -- after the Holocaust -- *am yisrael chai*, the Jewish people lives. And just as Jewish history is not mere chance, so it is no mere coincidence that the first word of the central book of the Torah is *Vayikra*, "And He called". To be a Jew is to believe that what happens to us as a people is God's call to us -- to become "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." *Covenant and Conversation is kindly sponsored by the Schimmel Family in loving memory of Harry (Chaim) Schimmel zt"l* © 2026 The Rabbi Sacks Legacy Trust rabbisacks.org

RABBI SHLOMO RISKIN

Shabbat Shalom

"Speak unto the children of Israel and say unto them: When any person of you brings an offering unto God, you shall bring from the cattle, the herd or the flock." (Leviticus 1:2) The book of *Leviticus* continues where the book of *Exodus* left off: after the exquisite description of the complexity of the Sanctuary's components, the Torah is ready to introduce the priestly duties of sacrifices described in the verse above.

Undoubtedly, the entire sacrificial system, replete with whole burnt offerings, sin offerings, guilt offerings and peace offerings, has a rather raucous ring to the modern sophisticated ear.

Rabbi Samson Raphael Hirsch attempts to provide a symbolic significance for each of the sacrifices, and etymologically suggests that the essence of *korban* (Hebrew for sacrifice) is to bring the individual close (*karov*) to God.

For our purposes, I'd like to approach the entire holy Temple ceremony by analyzing a rather striking midrash which emphasizes an otherwise innocuous pronoun in our opening verse: "When any person of you

(mikem) brings an offering unto God....” The fact is that if the purpose of our verse is to issue a command to bring offerings, it could just as easily have been transmitted without the word mikem. Indeed, this particular pronoun in this particular context never appears in the Bible again. Teaches the midrash: “Why does [the biblical text] state mikem [of you]? From here we derive that whoever fulfils the obligation to recite one hundred blessings each day is considered as if he/she offered a sacrifice. How do we know this? From the Hebrew word mikem [of you], which has the numerical equivalent of one hundred [mem-kafmem=40+20+40].” (Midrash Yalkut Ma’ayan Ganim, ad loc.)

Why does the midrash link these 100 daily blessings with an offering to God? Presumably, if we understand the connection, the world of blessings may very well illuminate the world of sacrifice.

Let us examine the essence of a blessing. Rabbi Yehuda HaLevi in his classic work *The Kuzari*, teaches that the laws of proper blessings enhance our pleasure, create heightened awareness and a more sensitized appreciation of every object in the world; indeed, the necessity of our making a blessing precludes the possibility of our taking for granted God’s many bounties. The Kuzari illustrates his concept by the analogy of a drunkard fortunate enough to have a patron. This drunkard, like all people, asked for and received special foods, vintage wines and splendid clothing. But as luck would have it, the patron’s benevolence reached the drunkard during one of his binges. When he finally woke from his stupor, it was clear that he had no sense of having received anything from his benefactor. His mind – totally absorbed inside a bottle of illusions – had no memory and therefore no concept of what he had been given. Pleasure demands awareness, and a blessing sharpens our senses, leading them to appreciate what we have and are about to enjoy: a glorious sunrise, a burst of lightning, the children around the Sabbath or festival table, a bright, red strawberry.

But what then should we do with our awareness? How do we channel our new-found awakenings to the gifts of the world around us? A comment of Rabbi Aaron Soloveitchik, of blessed memory, on a passage in Tractate Berakhot, can provide us with an interesting insight.

Rabbi Levi asked concerning two contrasting texts. It is written: “‘The heavens are the heavens of God but the earth has He given to the children of men,’ (Ps. 115:16), and it is also written, “The earth is the Lord’s, and the fullness thereof” (Ps. 115:16). There is no contradiction: in the one case it is before a blessing has been said, in the other case after.” (Berakhot 35a)

The usual interpretation explains that before I make a blessing, everything belongs to God; the blessing is my request for permission to partake of God’s world. Hence, partaking of something without a blessing is in effect committing thievery against God; it is as a

result of our blessing that the Almighty grants us permission to partake of His physical world. In effect, before the blessing, the world is God’s, and after the blessing, He gives the world’s bounty to us humans.

In a unique twist, Rabbi Soloveitchik turns this interpretation on its head: “The heavens are the heavens of God, but the earth has He given to the children of men.” (Ps. 115:16) is the description of the world before blessings, and the verse, “The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof,” is after the blessing!

Why? A world devoid of blessing is a world without any divine connection, a neo-platonic world with an iron curtain separating the human and godly realms. The spiritual belongs to the heavenly domain, to God, while the physical is the sphere of humanity – and never do the twain meet. But once the human being utters a blessing before enjoying any worldly gift or upon experiencing a special historical or natural phenomenon, humanity is admitting God into the world, it is suffusing the physical sphere with divine spirituality, and it is recognizing God’s gifts within the material world.

Suddenly, earth and heaven are no longer enemies, strangers in a strange universe, but all of God’s creations magnificently and miraculously come together. If the Torah has one urgent message, it is the sanctification of our physical world. For Jews, the divine and the physical meet in an eternal dialogue, and the first expression of that dialogue is the blessings we make.

An additional and related aspect of the significance of blessings is the Hassidic-Kabbalistic nation. Early in the book of Genesis, God becomes disappointed with His world and decides to destroy it (except for the righteous Noah, that is): “And God said, ‘I will blot out the human being whom I have created.... both humans, and beast, and creeping things, and fowl of the air....’” (Genesis 6:7)

Rashi asks why God’s anger is directed toward animals? After all, these brute creatures are innocent of any wrongdoing. Rashi then presents us with two possible interpretations. First, that all of creation including animal life had become so depraved that nothing could be called innocent – a perversity that pervaded all of reality. But his second answer is the one that concerns us here: “Everything was created for the human being. When he ceases to be, what need have I for them (beasts, creeping things, fowl).” (Rashi, ad loc.)

This is a profound idea that looks at God’s creation as a hierarchy, starting with inanimate rocks, ascending toward living plant life, and from there to animal creatures of mobility and then reaching upward to the communicating human being. All the mobility of an animal cannot alter the fact that animals are ruled by the earth and the waters and the skies, into the mold of each individual species. Only the human being’s gift of communication enables him to relate to God – if indeed he utilizes his freedom of choice properly.

Now when the human being takes the objects of

the world around him, and he makes blessings over the world he lives in, he brings all of existence – including plant life, animal life, and every worldly object – into a relationship with God. In effect he is giving a higher purpose to all of these realms, thereby bringing everything back to its ultimate divine source. By uplifting the world, by restoring it to its divine dimension, the human being repairs a world broken by iniquity and despair, alienation and materialism. And without this potential for uplifting the world, without a lofty and up-reaching human being, all of creation becomes short-circuited, the universe has no purpose for being, a reverse “bang” takes place.

Now we are ready to return to our midrash, the rabbinic concept which identified the daily blessings with the sacrifices that brought humanity close to the divine. What God wants from us is not only to build a Sanctuary, but to transform the entire world into God's Sanctuary, God's Temple. “You shall make for Me a Sanctuary so that I may dwell in your midst,” commands God. And so the sacrifices bring cattle, grain and fruits back to the Almighty who created them, enlisting the world – inanimate, vegetative and the human facilitators – in the service of the divine.

Just as Temple sacrifices brought God into the world in the period of the Sanctuary, so do the daily 100 blessings bring God into the world – suffuse the material world with divine spirituality – in our world today. By means of daily blessings we have the potential of making the entire universe a divine sanctuary. *The above article appears in Rabbi Riskin's book Vayikra: Sacrifice, Sanctity & Silence, part of his Torah Lights series of commentaries on the weekly parsha, published by Maggid and available for purchase at bit.ly/RiskinVayikra. © 2026 Ohr Torah Institutions & Rabbi S. Riskin*

YESHIVAT HAR ETZION

Virtual Beit Medrash

STUDENT SUMMARIES OF SICHOT OF THE ROSHEI YESHIVA
SICHA OF HARAV BARUCH GIGI

Summarized by David Navon

Translated by David Strauss

The book of Vayikra begins in the middle of a sentence: “And the Lord called to Moshe, and spoke to him out of the Tent of Meeting, saying.” (Vayikra 1:1) This call to Moshe is a continuation of the end of the book of Shemot, which describes the resting of the Shekhina (Divine Presence) in the Mishkan: “Then the cloud covered the Tent of Meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the Mishkan. And Moshe was not able to enter into the Tent of Meeting, because the cloud abode on it, and the glory of the Lord filled the Mishkan.” (Shemot 40:34-35)

There is a certain redundancy here. It is clear that the first verse focuses on the very resting of the Shekhina in the place, whereas the second verse

focuses on Moshe, who because of the Shekhina cannot enter into the Tent of Meeting. The problem is resolved at the beginning of our book, when God calls to Moshe and makes room for him for listening and speaking from the Tent of Meeting. The speech to Moshe throughout the book will be from the Tent of Meeting, “from above the ark-cover, from between the two keruvim which are upon the ark of the testimony” (Shemot 25:22). God, as it were, vacates His place, thereby enabling man's encounter with the Shekhina.

In the parashiyot dealing with the Mishkan in the book of Shemot, the sacrifices brought in the Mishkan are not emphasized, and in fact are hardly mentioned at all. But at the beginning of the book of Vayikra great emphasis is placed on them. At the beginning of the book we read: “When any man of you brings an offering to the Lord, you shall bring your offering of the cattle, even of the herd or of the flock.” (Vayikra 1:2)

Man does not only hear the word of God from the Mishkan, but also acts to draw closer to Him, and this is done through the sacrifices -- which, as their name indicates, create closeness. As the Ramban says in his explanation of the reason for the sacrifices: “Since man's deeds are accomplished through thought, speech, and action, therefore God commanded that when man sins and brings an offering, he should lay his hands upon it in contrast to the [evil] deed [committed]. He should confess his sin verbally in contrast to his [evil] speech, and he should burn the innards and the kidneys [of the offering] in fire because they are the instruments of thought and desire in the human being. He should burn the legs [of the offering] since they correspond to the hands and feet of a person, which do all his work. He should sprinkle the blood upon the altar, which is analogous to the blood in his body. All these acts are performed in order that when they are done, a person should realize that he has sinned against his God with his body and his soul, and that 'his' blood should really be spilled and 'his' body burned, were it not for the lovingkindness of the Creator, who took from him a substitute and a ransom, namely this offering, so that its blood should be in place of his blood, its life in place of his life, and that the chief limbs of the offering should be in place of the chief parts of his body. The portions [given from the sin-offering to the priests], are in order to support the teachers of the Torah, so that they pray on his behalf. The reason for the daily public offering is that it is impossible for the public [as a whole] to continually avoid sin. Now these are words which are worthy to be accepted, appealing to the heart as do words of Aggada.” (Ramban, Vayikra 1:9)

Beyond these Aggadic teachings, which portray a person's offering as though he were offering himself, the Ramban further highlights the element of genuine closeness inherent in bringing a sacrifice directly to God: “Similarly, all terms related to korban (offering) [from the root karav, “to draw near”] are expressions of approach

and unity."

Thus we see that in the Mishkan, there is a mutual movement of closeness and sacrifice -- God restricts His presence and turns to man, and man sacrifices on the altar in order to draw closer to Him. On the three Pilgrimage Festivals, both movements find expression: "Three times in a year shall all your males appear before the Lord your God in the place which He shall choose; on the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and on the Feast of Weeks, and on the Feast of Sukkot; and they shall not appear before the Lord empty; every man shall give as he is able, according to the blessing of the Lord your God which He has given you." (Devarim 16:16-17)

"All your males shall appear" -- just as he comes to see, so he comes to be seen. (Sifrei Devarim 143)

A person comes to the Temple and brings an *olat re'iya*, a pilgrimage burnt-offering, with a request to draw near; and God is there, watching over, "seeing" as it were, those who come.

At the beginning of II Divrei ha-Yamim, we read that Shlomo defines the purpose of the Temple as follows: "Behold, I am about to build a house for the name of the Lord my God, to dedicate it to Him, and to burn before Him incense of sweet spices, and for the continual showbread, and for the burnt-offerings morning and evening, on the Shabbatot, and on the new moons, and on the appointed seasons of the Lord our God. This is an ordinance forever to Israel." (II Divrei Ha-Yamim 2:3)

The Gemara in Menachot (110a) explains the meaning of the words, "This is an ordinance forever to Israel," offering a number of explanations. One of them is: "Rav Giddal said in the name of Rav: This refers to the altar built [in heaven], where Michael, the great Prince, stands and offers up on it an offering."

This explanation may be related to the question raised by the commentators regarding how to punctuate the Avoda blessing (Retzei) in the Shemoneh Esreh prayer. We say: "May the Lord, our God, be pleased with Your people, Israel, and their prayer; and restore the service to the inner chamber in Your abode, and the fire-offerings of Israel, and their prayer accept in love with favor." The commentators disagree about how to punctuate this sentence: Is there a request to restore the offerings of Israel, the sacrificial system that enables man to draw near -- "and restore the service to the inner chamber in Your abode and the fire-offerings of Israel" - followed by another request -- "and their prayer accept in love with favor"? Or is the request that the offerings of Israel, which are also being offered now, together with the prayers of Israel, be accepted in love and with favor? As the Tosafot put it:

"Where Michael, the great Prince, stands and offers up on it an offering -- The Midrashim are divided: Some say [that the offering is] the souls of the righteous, and some say lambs of fire. And this is what we say in

the Amida prayer, in the Avoda blessing: 'And the fire-offerings of Israel and their prayer speedily accept in love with favor.' And some say that it refers to what precedes it, 'And restore the service to the inner chamber in Your abode, and the fire-offerings of Israel.'"

The expression, "the souls of the righteous," refers to souls of the righteous and holy on high who are sacrificed on the supernal altar; it also refers to the martyrs, the souls of the righteous in whose presence no one can stand. So many of them were recently sacrificed before Him -- pure and righteous sacrifices, perfect offerings.

We seek to replace these sacrifices with the lambs of fire, and pray to the One who sits in the heavens, that He will shine His face upon us and bring us close to Him with great favor and mercy -- "And may You, in Your abundant mercy, desire us and accept us, and may our eyes behold Your return to Zion with mercy." [This *sicha* was delivered by Harav Baruch Gigi on Shabbat Parashat Vayikra 5784.]

RABBI DAVID LEVIN

Placing on of the Hands

Parashat Vayikra begins the third Book of the Torah, known as Leviticus. It is so named because of the service of the Temple which was conducted by a subset of the tribe of Levi, the Kohanim (Aharon and his sons). The Levi'im also participated in the service with their songs and musical instruments. The major service of the Temple consisted of various types of offerings, some of which were animal sacrifices, some meal (grain) offerings, libations and incense. Their was also the lighting of the Menorah every evening. Each Holy Day had its own set of offerings which were delineated in the Torah. All of these were communal offerings as well as offerings by individuals.

One aspect of the *korbanot*, sacrifices is the phrase "v'samach yado, he shall lean his hands on" the *korban*. As the Torah states, "He shall lean his hand(s) on the head of the olah-offering; and it will be considered pleasing on his behalf, to atone for him." HaRav Shmshon Raphael Hirsch explains, "v'samach yado is not merely, 'laying hand(s) on or supporting with hand(s).' The predominant meaning of v'samach is 'to support,' ... that what is demanded here is supporting with all one's strength, and with both hands." The concept of laying on of the hands is not found only with regard to *korbanot*, but significantly at the initiation of the Levi'im, at the initiation of Yehoshua, and at the execution of the blasphemer.

The use of both hands rather than just one comes from a different place in the Torah when it describes Aharon placing both hands on the *korban*. The question then arises why the Torah uses "yado, his hand" in the singular rather than the plural. HaAmeK Davar theorizes that the use of the plural form on Yom Kippur, but leaving out a letter so that it appears to be

written in the singular, is to teach that both hands are weaker because of fasting, and so both are needed. He bases this on the use of the word “yad” to indicate the left hand, which is normally thought to be the weaker hand. HaAmek Davar suggests that one could use only his (one) weaker hand because that would cause him to concentrate more to apply his full strength, something which might not be done using only the right, stronger hand.

In another section of the Book of Vayikra, we find that laying on of the hands comes to exclude someone other than the person who was bringing the korban: “his hand and not the hand of his son, or his slave, and not the hand of his messenger or agent.” We will see later why this action must be done by the one bringing the korban. There is also the significant concept of all one’s strength involved in the “laying on of hands.” Two words could be used for placing one’s hands on the animal: (1) sim, put and (2) samach, place. If one used only one hand or did not press with all his might, the command used would have been “sim, put.” “Samach” requires the use of both hands and all one’s strength.

There appears to be two different types of “s’micha, placing on of the hands.” HaRav Zalman Sorotzkin explains that when Moshe, just prior to his death, placed his hands on Yehoshua to pass on the leadership of the Jewish People, the Rambam determined that the person who places his hands does not actually need to touch the person (or animal) with his hands. HaRav Sorotzkin explains the difference between these two different commands. One who sins must place his hand on the animal with his full force. This is to indicate that his very life is connected to that animal; that the animal is slaughtered and burned in his place, and through that substitution, he is now granted a good life. The Chachamim (wise ones, referring to the sages of the Talmud) understood that, “it is not by force, nor by strength, but only through the Spirit of Hashem, the Lord of Hosts.” That “s’micha” is to place on the head of the individual, with the help of Heaven, Truth, and Knowledge of the correct path. That “s’micha” is between one man and another and raises that lower individual to a higher, spiritual life. This is the term used to describe the initiation of a new Rabbi after years of study and preparation. The term “s’micha” is used to remind that person that his new position cannot be achieved without introspection to correct any sins for which he needs atonement. As the Gemara Sanhedrin (14) states, “A man may not ascend to greatness except if he can be pardoned for all his sins.”

HaRav Hirsch explains “the laying on of the hands” as “the hand that had become morally weak by omission or commission (in the case of an olah-offering or a chatat-offering, respectively) ‘supports’ itself on the resolution of future betterment that is expressed by the offering. The “laying on of the hands” develops a specific relationship between the animal and the person who was

offering it. “S’micha only takes place at such offerings which are brought in connection with the bringer’s actions, as Asham (Guilt offering), Chatat (Sin offering), Olah (elevation or burnt-offering), and Shelamim (Peace offering), but not at Bechor (Firstborn), Ma’aser (Tithe) or Pesach (Passover) offerings, which are brought more in relations to one’s property and lot in Life. If two people bring a korban conjointly which requires s’micha, each must individually do s’micha on the animal. HaRav Hirsch suggests that this is the reason that a communal offering does not require s’micha as it would be virtually impossible for everyone to place his hand on the korban.

The Ramban, among others, indicate that the korbanot are to bring about atonement for the bringer and to receive favor in Hashem’s eyes; the korban should be “a pleasing fragrance to Hashem.” While the sprinkling of the blood on the Altar brings about atonement and acceptance by Hashem of the offering, for those offerings that require the “laying on of the hands,” the sprinkling alone is insufficient to achieve that acceptance. Perhaps this is why the “laying on of the hands” cannot be done by one’s son, slave, or messenger. Only the person who sinned can achieve atonement through “laying on of the hands.” A substitute cannot demonstrate the atonement of the sinner, nor can he receive forgiveness for a sin which he did not commit.

Unfortunately, we live at a time when the Temple is destroyed, and the offerings are unavailable to us. In Sefer Torah Lada’at (Tzamah L’cha Nafshi), we know that Hashem answered Avraham’s question, “How will I know that (my children) will (be able to) inherit it(?)” by giving him the animal offerings. Without the Temple, Avraham’s question is renewed. But Hashem already planned that when we mention the offerings in our prayers, Hashem accepts them and forgives us as if we had offered them in the Temple. May we never sin, but may we always achieve forgiveness from Hashem when we falter. © 2026 Rabbi D. Levin

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A Fifth

Translated by Rabbi Mordechai Weiss

As a general rule, a person who steals from another must reimburse the victim, paying the monetary value of the stolen item. There is, however, an exception to this rule: “When a person sins and commits a trespass against G-d by dealing deceitfully with his fellow in the matter of a deposit or a pledge, or though robbery, or by defrauding his fellow... and if he swears falsely... he shall repay the principal amount and add a fifth to it” (*Vayikra* 5:21-25). In other words, he must add an additional twenty percent (*chomesh*) to the value of the stolen item. He is also obligated to bring a guilt offering (*korban asham*).

In order for a person to be liable to this penalty, there are three conditions:

1. He must have stolen.

2. He must have falsely sworn that he did not steal.
3. He must have later admitted that he lied under oath.

May a victim decide to waive his right to the payment of the *chomesh*? According to the Mishnah in *Bava Kamma*, he may.

Given this explicit statement of the Mishnah, it is very difficult to understand the Rambam's statement, "The *chomesh* and the [*asham*] offering are for atonement" (*Hilchot Gezeilah* 7:8).

If the payment of the *chomesh* serves to achieve atonement for the sinner, it would seem that the victim should not be allowed to waive it. Refusing payment would leave the thief without the ability to achieve atonement for his sins (swearing falsely as well as stealing).

One possible way to explain the Rambam is to say that the victim is permitted to waive payment of the value of the stolen item itself. Once he has done this, the additional fifth becomes irrelevant, as a fifth of zero is zero. If this happens, the thief does indeed lose his chance to gain atonement (*Kovetz Shiurim*). Alternatively, one might argue that the obligation to pay the victim is first and foremost a financial one. Once the thief fulfills this monetary obligation, he achieves atonement for his sins. Therefore, when he has no monetary obligation, even if it is because the victim chose to waive his rights, he achieves atonement (*Avnei Nezer*).

What if there is a case in which the thief does not need atonement? Is there still be an obligation to pay the *chomesh*? If the reason for the payment is atonement, then the answer should be no. Yet we know that if the thief dies before making the *chomesh* payment, his heirs must pay it (even though they do not need atonement). This strengthens our earlier suggestion that the obligation is first and foremost monetary, and taking care of the monetary obligation is what achieves atonement. © 2017 Rabbi M. Weiss and *Encyclopedia Talmudit*

RABBI JONATHAN GEWIRTZ

Migdal Ohr

"Speak to the Children of Israel and say to them, "A man who shall bring close, from amongst you, an offering to Hashem..." (Vayikra 1:2) Sefer Vayikra introduces us to the Korbanos, the sacrificial offerings which were part of the service in the Mishkan and Bais HaMikdash. The Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh points out the change in syntax here. First Hashem said to "speak" to the Jews, which is a stronger tone, and then to "say" to them, which is softer and less demanding.

He explains that some offerings are required. When a person sinned unwittingly, he or she would have to bring a korban chatas. This was not a choice, but an obligation. There are other obligatory offerings too, like Korban Pesach or Chagiga. For all these, the language

of "daber" is appropriate.

Then there are korbanos that people choose to bring. One can voluntarily obligate himself in a korban as a means of showing his love for Hashem. Because it is of his own volition, the Torah uses the term, "say," to convey informing the Jews of the opportunity, without any pressure to have to bring the korban.

There are other differences as well. Each type of korban had its own specifics as to the type of animal or grain offered. There were different methods of preparation and locations of offering. Why didn't each korban conform to a specific set of rules? Even if there had to be animal and non-animal options, there could have been fewer rules. Why so much variety in the guidelines for the korbanos?

Perhaps the answer lies in the purpose of the korbanos. They were not intended to "appease" Hashem, by feeding His ego and bowing to Him. Hashem is far beyond these petty emotions, and the "gods" people worshiped over the millennia were created from human concepts. The need to be appeased and worshiped in order to forgive or grant boons to their worshipers is rooted in human smallness and not reflective of Hashem.

Why then does Hashem require a sin offering? Because the person has strayed from their connection to Him and they will keep moving further away if they aren't reconnected. This is a chance for them to be saved by securing themselves to Hashem. The greatest pleasure in the Universe is closeness to Hashem, as Dovid HaMelech says in Tehillim 73: "For me, closeness to Hashem is goodness..." Therefore, Hashem gave us this chance to come back, but it's an obligation born of His kindness, not His pettiness.

The other korbanos contain variety because there are so many ways to come close to Hashem. He wants us to realize there isn't a single path we must each take. Instead, there are many ways to come closer to Hashem, through His various attributes and midos that we perceive. Just as Hashem gave us so many mitzvos so we might find one which brings us closer and starts us on the path to all of them, so do korbanos begin our journey, and enable us to continue it ourselves.

It was a beautiful summer day. There was no school - just blue sky, green grass, and warm breezes. The little boy stood with his bat and ball and as he looked out at the imaginary audience he declared, "I am the greatest hitter in the entire world!" He then tossed the ball in the air and swung the bat mightily. Whoosh! He missed the ball completely.

Undaunted, he tossed it again, and swung with more intensity - Whiff — missed again, strike two. Finally, a third time, and a third swing and miss.

Most people would be devastated, but not our hero. He stood there a moment, then smiled, raised his arms, and proclaimed to the non-existent crowd, "I'm the world's greatest pitcher!" © 2026 Rabbi J. Gewirtz & Migdal

Ohr

RABBI PINCHAS WINSTON

Perceptions

The Torah was given to the Jewish People 3,338 years ago, and from the moment we received it, we have been elucidating it. Can you imagine how many commentaries have been written on the Torah alone over three millennia? And we're still doing it.

It's about more than just trying to better understand what God told us. It's like getting a gift and looking back into the box after you take it out to see if you left anything behind because you either expect or hope there's more...as limited as the gift actually is.

But Torah is a bottomless well of ideas and understanding that doesn't go deeper into the earth but higher up into Heaven. We don't just hope there is more to this "gift," we know there is, so we never stop looking back into the "box" for it, and generation after generation, we find it.

A lot of times, the insight isn't new, just understood differently. The Torah never changes, but time does. Science and technology have greatly advanced, giving us a better understanding of the world that the Torah was used to create. The information was always there. It just took a new set of circumstances to bring it to the surface or to draw out attention to it.

It's similar with people. You can know a person for many years and come to think you know everything about them. And then, all of a sudden, one day you go through something new together, and it brings out a side of the person you never saw before. It makes you wonder how well you know them.

But some things are not like that. Some things don't change with the times. For example, there are many today who prefer not to eat meat because they feel that it is wrong to kill an animal for food unless you really have to. They think that the Torah's heter is archaic and inhumane and might even use it as an excuse to deny its Divine origin.

If that is true of food from animals, then what about sacrifices? Even some people who eat meat and other kinds of animal foods have a problem with animal sacrifices, and assume that they were only relevant at the time because the world offered them, and animal rights organizations had yet to show up on the international scene.

Furthermore, people at that time knew nothing about the world and how it worked. This made them feel vulnerable and pushed them to become superstitious. Offering sacrifices to imaginary gods at least gave them the impression they could influence the outcome of events by buying off their gods with their favorite barbecue meat.

But we have since peeked behind the veil and gotten a better understanding of how the world works. We can influence the outcome of events with the help of

technology, and we're more successful than any idol worshipping sacrificer ever was. Life still has its mysteries, lots of them, but we feel a lot less vulnerable to the "natural" events of history than we did when people never thought twice about killing an animal for personal needs, even ridiculous ones.

That would be enough reason to end the sacrifices of pagan cultures, but not those of the Torah. Many will cease to be "relevant" in the Messianic Era, but not because they were never real or important. They will cease, for example, because we will no longer sin, and therefore no longer need a sin offering. The sacrifices or their effectiveness will never change in essence, but the people who once needed them won't any longer.

What's the difference? The difference is the Torah has told us to bring the sacrifice, when to bring it, and how to bring it. It's the difference between self-prescribing medication, and following a (trusted) doctor's instructions. When you do it yourself you can miss the mark and maybe even cause damage. When you follow authoritative instructions, you can heal properly.

The bottom line is that sacrifices are extremely kabbalistic, even having their root in the sin of Adam HaRishon. His eating from the forbidden fruit blemished the four levels of reality: Mineral, Vegetation, Animal, and Human, and sacrifices were divinely ordained to rectify each one as necessary. And they took someone of great sanctity and Torah knowledge, a kohen, to make sure each part was carried out to precision.

The world didn't outgrow sacrifices. If anything, it has taken thousands of years for the world to catch up to them. But like every well, they all look innocently the same from the top. It's only after dropping a pail into one that you find out how deep it is, or in the case of Torah, endless. © 2026 P. Winston and torah.org

