

PARSHAT VAYIKRA

1 - 7 Nissan 5785
30 March - 5 April 2025

Torah: Leviticus 1:1 - 5:26
Haftorah: Isaiah 43:21 - 44:23

PSALMS DAILY

Psalms for our brethren in the Holy Land

Psalms 117

1. Praise the Lord, all nations, laud Him, all peoples.
2. For His kindness has overwhelmed us, and the truth of the Lord is eternal. Hallelujah!

(Please say Chapter 20 daily)

SEFER HAMITZVOT

Positive Mitzvah 215

Circumcision

We are commanded to circumcise all our male children. This obligation rests upon the child's father, not his mother.

Positive Mitzvah 19

Grace after Meals

We are commanded to express gratitude to G-d after every meal.

THE ULTIMATE MITZVAH

The division of the Torah into five books is neither random nor simply intended to make a long text more user-friendly. Each of the Five Books of Moses has its own unique theme. Nachmanides explains that the theme of the Book of Leviticus, which we begin reading this Shabbat, is mitzvot. While a good amount of commandments are also imparted in the other four books, they are mentioned there incidentally, in the course of conveying the events or messages which are the primary message of those books.

Considering that this is the "Book of Mitzvot," we would have expected this book to open with some of the primary mitzvot which form the basis of the Jew's day. Prayer, tefillin, mezuzah, the laws of kashrut and Shabbat are some which immediately come to mind. Instead, the first portions of Leviticus discuss at length the laws of the various sacrifices offered during Temple times. This begs the question—why does the book devoted to mitzvot start with commandments which: a) aren't permanent fixtures of Jewish life—they have been non-practicable for nearly two thousand years now; and b) were not part of the daily life of the average Jew (who only visited the Temple thrice yearly) even when sacrifices were offered in the Temple in Jerusalem.

A closer examination of the deeper significance of mitzvot will lead us to conclude that sacrifices encapsulate the inner meaning of mitzvot perhaps more than any other individual mitzvah.

An animal is consumed by its desires and impulses of the moment, giving nary a thought to purpose, to future, to its betterment and refinement. Its emotions control its mind, using its limited cognitive abilities to further the heart's agenda. The human, on the other hand, is endowed with the ability to harness his emotions, to act based on need, purpose and ambition rather than expediency and instant gratification. In truth, however, every person is born an animal, and must be educated from without and tamed from within before earning the title of "Mentch"—human.

Becoming "human" in its truest sense is indeed a lofty objective. The world would be so much more pleasant and inviting if more and more people actively pursued this goal. But while mitzvot also greatly assist in this quest, this is hardly their ultimate objective. Mitzvot are intended to take the animal-turned-human and connect him to his Creator, to allow him to rise

above the limitations of a mere mortal and become sanctified—human-turned-holy. This completes the circle; this creation which was originally animal has become holy.

Torah philosophy doesn't agree with vegetarian activism, because the Torah recognizes the value of animal-turned-human—which is accomplished when someone who earned the title of human consumes the flesh of an animal. Indeed, it is a favor for the animal no less than it is a favor for the human: the animal now reaches a state it never could have reached while grazing in the field.

But animal-turned-holy—that's what sacrifices are all about. An animal is taken and becomes sanctified by being offered to G-d.

The commandments associated with sacrifices set the tone for the entire book, clarifying what the ultimate objective of the mitzvah really is.

*By Rabbi Naftali Silberberg
Editor, Jewish Learning Institute*

THE POINT OF ANIMAL SACRIFICES

The issue of animal sacrifices has been a sensitive and controversial one for millennia. Why would an infinite, all-knowing, omnipotent G-d wish for people to offer up animal sacrifices? It seems to be a pointless waste of resources and needless dispensing of life. Scripture makes it clear that faith, integrity, and devotion to the ways of the L-rd are most prized. Piety, righteousness, and strict observance of the commandments are what characterize the life of a servant to the Almighty.

It seems like a needless dispensing of life taken great pains to explain the relevance and importance of sacrifices. We are told that they serve as a symbol of our own inadequacy—in the offering we are symbolically offering up ourselves. We are also told that the offerings also represent our broader efforts to elevate the natural world and offer it up for a higher purpose. Some even argue that the sacrifices were a necessary route away from the pervasive idolatry of the times.

Without question, the topic is weighty and most deserving of attention. Which makes it all the more remarkable that Rashi, the foremost biblical commentator, is silent. While of course Rashi is not obligated to explain or give reasons for every commandment that appears in the Torah, animal sacrifices dominate much of the text of the Five Books of Moses and pose such an immense challenge to decency and common sense that it is unfathomable he would allow this huge topic to go unaddressed.

And that's not all. The few observations Rashi does make about animal sacrifices only deepen our curiosity. The Torah often refers to sacrifices as "a pleasant aroma for the L-rd." Naturally, Rashi finds this phrase problematic. G-d does not smell and is unlikely to find our offering to have a pleasing aroma. Moreover, as commentators have long observed, the smell of burning carcasses is hardly what one would describe as "a pleasant aroma!" Thus, Rashi notes on more than one occasion that this phrase really means, "It gives Me satisfaction that I spoke and My will was fulfilled." Let us ignore the uniquely passive wording for a moment and focus on the point: the pleasant aroma actually means that G-d is pleased. And this is supposed to clear things up?

How so? We are left just as unclear as to what would be pleasing about a sacrifice. We know it is not the aroma, but what then? We are back to the beginning: what is the point and how could it possibly bring pleasure On High?

One final twist: Noah brought a sacrifice and the wording "a pleasant aroma" appears there too. Rashi says nothing there, and assumes it is clear that both Noah and G-d were pleased. It would be hard to miss that impression as the tale there goes on to record G-d's promise never to bring a flood again. It seems Rashi sees absolutely no problem with the words "pleasant aroma," so why are we hearing about it now in the Book of Leviticus?

These complex questions deserve a worthy resolution. The Rebbe, as usual, turns the whole matter on its head. "You are assuming," says the Rebbe, "that there is a reason for sacrifices and that what we should be doing is searching for the most rewarding or convincing reason. What if the opposite is true? What if there is no reason whatsoever for animal sacrifices? What if that – the complete lack of any reason – is the whole point of sacrifices?" In short, what if we have to completely rethink the whole matter in order to get back to basics?

For thousands of years scholars have focused on finding an explanation, but the Rebbe calls in Rashi as an ally to argue that there is no explanation. The entire point of sacrifices is to do something for G-d without the satisfaction of any reasonable justification, simply because He let it be known that this would be pleasing to Him.

This - says the Rebbe - is in fact exactly what Rashi is saying with his explanation of "a pleasant aroma" - "It gives Me satisfaction that I spoke and

Aleph Institute
Hyman & Martha Rogal Center
5804 Beacon Street
Pittsburgh, PA 15217
412-421-0111
Fax: 412-521-5948
www.AlephNE.org
info@AlephNE.org



ALEPH INSTITUTE
No One Alone,
No One Forgotten.

My will was fulfilled.” It now seems blindingly obvious what Rashi is trying to say: bringing sacrifices indeed achieves nothing at all, in the sense that you will have trouble truly explaining how it is the best way to use animals. However, if you were to have found an answer, you will have completely missed the point. The point of sacrifices is that G-d simply had us know that this is something he wants and, hey presto, it now becomes central to our lives and practice. Hence the passive tone in Rashi’s comment, as if to say the point is not that “I am demanding” it, but that “I have informed you that it would meet My wishes.”

There are plenty of commandments that do not come with explanations - they are called Chukim (usually translated as “statutes”). While some suggest that these commandments, too, have explanations, they are just not revealed to us, Rashi states plainly that they have no explanation, period. So, animal sacrifices are not the only practice in Judaism that lacks rational explanation, but there is one significant difference between animal sacrifice and everything else. The

laws for which we have no reason do have a basic, obvious aim: to have us act in obedience to G-d and to learn self-restraint in our choice-making. The specific act may not come with a reason, but everyone understands what the deal is. Animal sacrifices, in contrast, do not teach us obedience or restraint, they are purely an act of homage to G-d. Yet we realize that He does need our sacrifices. This makes offering them a uniquely touching expression of our devotion to Him.

Please do not give me a reason for sacrifices, for the moment you do you have killed the whole idea. Sacrifices are in the manner of a husband saying to his wife, “Whatever you want, dear!” Your request may make no sense to me, but since it comes from you, it is now the most important thing in my world. Almighty G-d, we have no idea why You asked for sacrifices, but now that you did, all we want to do is please You.

VAYIKRA IN A NUTSHELL

The name of the Parshah, “Vayikra,” means “And [He] called” and it is found in Leviticus 1:1.

G-d calls to Moses from the Tent of Meeting, and communicates to him the laws of the Korbanot, the animal and meal offerings brought in the Sanctuary. These include:

- The “ascending offering” (Olah) that is wholly raised to G-d by the fire atop the altar;
- Five varieties of “meal offering” (Minchah) prepared with fine flour, olive oil and frankincense;
- The “peace offering” (Shelamim), whose meat was eaten by the one bringing the offering, after parts are burned on the altar and parts are given to the Kohanim (priests);
- The different types of “sin offering” (Chatat) brought to atone for transgressions committed erroneously by the high priest, the entire community, the king or the ordinary Jew;
- The “guilt offering” (Asham) brought by one who has misappropriated property of the Sanctuary, who is in doubt as to whether he transgressed a divine prohibition, or who has committed a “betrayal against G-d” by swearing falsely to defraud a fellow man.

IN JEWISH HISTORY

Sunday, 1 Nissan 5785 - 30 March 2025

The Patriarchs (1813-1506 BCE)

According to the Talmud, the three Patriarchs of the Jewish people - Abraham (1948 - 2122, or 1813-1638 BCE), Isaac (2028 - 2227, or 1713-1533 BCE) and Jacob (2107 - 2254, or 1653-1506 BCE) - all were born and passed away in the month of Nissan.

Jewish Calendar Inaugurated (1313 BCE)

On the 1st of Nissan of the year 2448 (1313 BCE - two weeks before the Exodus), G-d showed Moses the crescent of the new moon and told him, “When you see the moon like this, sanctify [the new month]”. This ushered in the first Jewish month, and commenced the lunar calendar Jews have been following ever since.

Mishkan Inaugurated (1312 BCE)

On the eighth day following a 7-day training and initiation period, the portable Mishkan (“Tabernacle” or “Sanctuary”) built by the Children of Israel in the Sinai desert was erected, Aaron and his sons began serving as priests, and the Divine Presence came to dwell in the Mishkan; special offerings were brought, including a series of gifts by Nachshon ben Aminadav, the Prince of the Tribe of Judah (similar offerings were brought over the next 11 days by the other tribes of Israel).

Monday, 2 Nissan 5785 - 31 March 2025

First Red Heifer Prepared (1312 BCE)

On the 2nd of Nissan 2449 (1312 BCE), one day after the inauguration of the Tabernacle, Moses prepared the very first Red Heifer, in order to ritually purify the Jewish nation in preparation for the bringing of the Paschal Lamb in the newly erected Sanctuary.

Passing of Rashab (1920)

The fifth Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Sholom DovBer Schneersohn (“Rashab”), was born in the White Russian town of Lubavitch in 5620 (1860). After the passing of his father, Rabbi Shmuel (in 5642, or 1882), he assumed the leadership of Chabad-Lubavitch.

Famed for his phenomenal mind and analytical treatment of Chabad Chassidism, Rabbi Sholom DovBer wrote and delivered some 2,000 Maamarim (discourses of Chassidic teaching) over the 38 years

of his leadership. In 5657 (1897), he established the Tomchei Temimim Yeshivah, the first institution of Jewish learning to combine the study of the “body” of Torah (Talmudic and legal studies) with its mystical “soul” (the teachings of Chassidism); it was this unique yeshivah that produced the army of learned, inspired and devoted Chassidim who, in the decades to come, would literally give their lives to keep Judaism alive under Soviet rule.

In 5675 (1915), Rabbi Sholom DovBer was forced to flee Lubavitch from the advancing WWI front and relocated to the Russian city of Rostov-on-Don. In his final years, he began the heroic battle against the new Communist regime's efforts to destroy the Jewish faith throughout the Soviet Union.

Rabbi Sholom DovBer passed away in Rostov on the 2nd of Nissan, 5680 (1920). His last words were: “I’m going to heaven; I leave you the writings.”

Tuesday, 3 Nissan 5785 - 1 April 2025

Levites Inducted (1312 BCE)

Following the procedure G-d prescribed (Numbers 8:5-22), Moses inducted the Levites into Tabernacle service. The induction ceremony included sprinkling them with the ashes of the Red Heifer, which was prepared the day beforehand.

Wednesday, 4 Nissan 5785 - 2 April 2025

Hospital Convoy Ambushed (1948)

On the morning of the 4th of Nissan 5708 (1948), a civilian convoy of doctors and nurses traveling to the Hadassah Hospital on Mount Scopus, Jerusalem, was attacked by Arab forces. Of the ten vehicles in the caravan, five escaped. The other five vehicles, however, which included two buses and an ambulance, were riddled with machine gun fire and later set ablaze. Altogether, 77 Jewish civilians were massacred on that day.

Shortly afterwards, the hospital was closed down and moved to the western part of Jerusalem.

The Mt. Scopus hospital only reopened after the eastern part of Jerusalem was liberated by Israel in the 1967 Six-Day War. Primarily staffed by Israeli doctors, it is the largest and best equipped hospital in the eastern section of Jerusalem.

Thursday, 35 Nissan 5785 - 3 April 2025

Spies to Jericho (1273 BCE)

Two days before the conclusion of the thirty-day mourning period following the passing of Moses on Adar 7 2488 (1273 BCE), Joshua dispatched two scouts - Caleb and Pinchas - across the Jordan River to Jericho, to gather intelligence in preparation of the Jew battle with the first city in their conquest of the Holy Land. In Jericho, they were assisted and hidden by Rahab, a woman who lived inside the city walls.

Passing of Rabbi Avraham Yehoshua Heshel of Apta (1825)

Rabbi Avraham Yehoshua Heshel was one of the leading Rebbes of his day, serving as rabbi and spiritual leader first in Apta (presently called Opatow), Poland, then in Iasi, Romania, and finally in Mezhibuzh, Ukraine. He was known for his great love of his fellow Jews, and is commonly known as “the Ohev Yisroel [lover of Jews] of Apta.”

Friday, 6 Nissan 5785 - 4 April 2025

Afula Was Founded (1925)

The town of Afula in Northern Israel was founded in this date in 5685 (1925). It is located on the presumed site of the tower (“Ophel”) mentioned in the Biblical account of an Aramean general's visit to the Prophet Elisha (II Kings 5:24).

Afula's central location in the Jezreel Valley makes it the market center of the region; it is often referred to as “the Capital of the Valley.”

Because of the town's proximity to Judea and Samaria, it has repeatedly been a target of terrorist attacks following the Oslo Accords, including during the Second Intifada.

Shabbat, 7 Nissan 5785 - 5 April 2025

Jews Prepare to Enter Canaan (1273 BCE)

The Jewish nation mourned for thirty days following the passing of Moses. On the 7th of Nissan 2488 (1273 BCE), the first day after the mourning period came to an end, Joshua instructed the Jews to stock up on provisions and prepare themselves to cross the Jordan River and begin the conquest of the Promised Land. This was the first time Joshua addressed the nation, and they unconditionally accepted him as their new leader.

The actual crossing occurred several days later, on the 10th of Nissan.