

Torah Weekly

PARSHAT VAYIKRA

15-21 March 2026
26 Adar - 3 Nissan 5786

Vayikra: Leviticus 1:1 - 5:26
Isaiah 43:21 - 44:23

Calendars

We have Jewish calendars and applications. If you would like one, please send us a letter and we will send you one, or ask the Rabbi/Chaplain to contact us.

Family Programs

Do you have family on the outside struggling? Please have them contact our office to learn more about our family programs. You and they are not alone, we are here to help.

Grape Juice & Matzah

We offer free Grape Juice and Matzoh for you to be able to make the blessings every Shabbos. Please have your chaplain / Rabbi contact us to enroll (available to all prisons).

Sacred document please do not destroy

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.

Don't Feel Like a Nothing

Do you ever feel like you're running on a treadmill that you can't stop? The constant demands of life seem relentless and our priorities easily become obscured. Yes, we have many responsibilities and commitments to fulfill, but it's important not to lose sight of the fact that these are a means and not an end. Where are we going? What's the ultimate goal? Is our endgame just the achievement of financial freedom and comfort?

There's a loftier goal—one that is far more expansive and enduring. It's available to everyone, regardless of status, income or profession. Studying the Torah, in conjunction with mindfully observing the mitzvot, enables us to build a personal relationship with G-d. It increases our spiritual reception and enriches everything we do.

This heightened spiritual reception is illustrated throughout the book of Leviticus. It begins with the Hebrew word, vayikra—"And G-d called [to Moses from the Tabernacle]." Rashi explains that although he called out with a loud and thunderous voice, only Moses was able to hear it.

Chassidic philosophy emphasizes that G-d is constantly calling to each and every Jew to draw near to Him in a spirit of love and awe. There is a small spark of Moses within each of us;¹ the challenge is to utilize this spark to tune in to the appropriate spiritual frequency to hear His calling.

Experiencing G-d isn't limited to earth-shattering spiritual experiences. Elijah the Prophet came to realize that G-d's call was to be found in a "small, thin, voice."² G-d is reaching out to us through the circumstances in our daily lives, but if we're not tuned in, we miss out.

Each of us is created in G-d's image. We've been given individual potential and capacities., with the ultimate goal of building and maintaining a strong relationship with Him. Of course, there will be stumbling blocks to overcome along our spiritual journeys.

A story is told about two men incarcerated in the Soviet Gulag. Previously, they had been prominent

physicians; now they were forced laborers. One called out to the other in despair. "In Moscow, we were respected and admired, but here we're nothing. How are you still in good spirits? Why haven't you been broken by our awful plight?" The other man replied: "Wherever I am, regardless of the circumstances, I view myself in the same way. I always strive to achieve the same goal every day—to build a strong relationship with G-d and serve Him in all that I do. In Moscow, I served him as a physician. Here, in the Gulag, I'm still serving G-d, but as a forced laborer. Our relationship hasn't changed; it's just as strong. The difference between you and me is that you still view your worth only as a doctor."

Many people mistakenly think that their identity comes from what they do. They're living an illusion. When these people are no longer able to do what they thought defined them, they face an existential crisis. In reality, what one does isn't who one is. There is no such thing as "feeling like a nothing" for those who are spiritually alive and growing. Proudly serving G-d—no matter the circumstances—bestows one with dignity and continued purpose. Eventually, people may retire from what they do, but not from who they are. There is no such thing as spiritual retirement.

Redefining our ultimate goal and aligning it with G-d's greater purpose can be positively life-changing. We each can strive to integrate both the physical and the spiritual aspects of our lives. There's no greater moment than right now to strengthen your relationship with the Almighty. All of your relationships will benefit, especially your relationship with yourself.

Making It Relevant

Think of situations in which you've recently been. Ask yourself: What could be the purpose for which G-d had this happen to me? What lesson can I learn? What hidden benefit can I uncover?

Recognize your spiritual self-worth. Focus on striving to develop greater spiritual value throughout each day. Think of ways to do that on a daily, or at least a weekly, basis.

Establish a set time for prayer, self-reflection and Torah study.

By Katia Bolotin

Vayikra in a Nutshell

Leviticus 1:1-5:26

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.

Vayikra Aliyah Summary

General Overview: This week's Torah reading, Vayikra, begins the third book of the Torah, Leviticus. Last week we completed the reading of the book of Exodus, which concluded with a description of the construction of the Tabernacle. This week's portion will provide a description of the various sacrifices – animal, fowl, and meal-offerings – offered by the priests in this newly constructed Sanctuary.

First Aliyah: G-d calls out to Moses from the Tabernacle and teaches him the laws of the elective burnt offering, the Olah sacrifice. This aliyah discusses the laws of the cattle, sheep, or goat Olah.

Second Aliyah: G-d then teaches Moses the laws of the fowl Olah. This aliyah then continues with a description of three types of voluntary meal offerings: unbaked flour, baked loaves, and the shallow-fried meal offering. All voluntary meal offerings also contained olive oil and frankincense.

Third Aliyah: The Torah describes the last type of voluntary meal offerings – the deep-fried meal offering – and the mandatory barley offering, the Omer offering, brought on the second day of Passover. G-d instructs the Jews to add salt to every animal sacrifice or meal offering, a symbol of our everlasting "salt covenant" with G-d. We are also commanded not to include any leavened items or anything which contains honey in any Temple offering (there are two exclusions to the leaven prohibition).

Fourth Aliyah: The "Peace Offering," the Shelamim sacrifice, is described in this Aliyah. The Shelamim – which could be brought from cattle, sheep, or goats – was shared by the altar, which consumed some of the animal's fats, the Kohanim, and the donors of the sacrifice who were given the bulk of the meat. The aliyah ends with the prohibitions against consuming blood and the specific fats which were offered on the altar. These prohibitions apply to all animals, even those not offered in the Temple.

Fifth Aliyah: We now begin learning about the "Sin Offering," the Chatat sacrifice, brought by an individual who is guilty of inadvertently transgressing a sin. This section discusses the unique Chatat sacrifices brought by a High Priest who sins, by the Sanhedrin (Jewish Supreme Court) who issue an erroneous ruling which causes the populace to sin, and a monarch who sins.

Sixth Aliyah: The Torah discusses the fourth and final type of Chatat, that of a common person who sins. Also discussed is the Korban Oleh Viyored, a "vacillating" Sin Offering, brought by an individual guilty of certain specific sins. The Korban Oleh Viyored depended on the financial position of the transgressor – a wealthy person brought a sheep or goat, a person of lesser means brought two birds, and a pauper brought a meal offering.

Seventh Aliyah: This section concludes the laws of the Korban Oleh Viyored. We then move on to the last sacrifice discussed in this week's Torah reading, the "Guilty Offering," the Asham Sacrifice. Three types of Asham Sacrifices are discussed: a) an Asham brought by one who inadvertently misappropriates Temple property. b) An Asham brought by one who falsely swears regarding money owed to another. (In addition to bringing a sacrifice, these two individuals must repay the principal amount, and pay a punitive fine equal to one fourth of the principal.) c) An Asham brought by a person who is uncertain whether he violated a Torah prohibition.

IN JEWISH HISTORY

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.

Jews Commanded 1st Mitzvah (1313 BCE)

Shortly before sundown on the 29th of Adar, G-d commanded Moses regarding the mitzvah of sanctifying the crescent new moon and establishing a lunar calendar. This is the first mitzvah the Jews were given as a nation. Moses had difficulty envisaging the moon's appearance at the exact moment of its monthly rebirth. After the sun set, G-d showed Moses the crescent new moon of the new month of Nissan, showing him the precise dimensions of the moon at the moment the new month is to be consecrated. For the generations that followed, each new month was ushered in when two witnesses testified before the Sanhedrin (rabbinic supreme court) that they had seen the molad, the new moon. In the 4th century CE, Hillel II foresaw that the Jews would no longer be able to follow a Sanhedrin-based calendar. So Hillel and his rabbinical court established the perpetual calendar which is followed today -- until Moshiach will come and reestablish the Sanhedrin.

Creation of man (in thought) (3761 BCE)

The Talmud (Rosh Hashanah 10b-11a) cites two opinions as to the date of G-d's creation of the universe: according to Rabbi Eliezer: "The world was created in Tishrei" (i.e., the sixth day of creation--the day on which Adam and Eve were created--was the 1st of Tishrei, celebrated each year as Rosh Hashanah); according to Rabbi Joshua, "The world was created in Nissan." As interpreted by the Kabbalists and the Chassidic masters, the deeper meaning of these two views is that the physical world was created in Tishrei, while the "thought" or idea of creation was created in the month of Nissan. (see "Links" below)

The Patriarchs (1813-1506 BCE)

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

Jewish Calendar Inaugurated (1313 BCE)

On the first of Nissan of the year 2448 from creation (1313 BCE--two weeks before the Exodus), G-d showed Moses the crescent 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).

Death of Nadav and Avihu (1312 BCE)

On the day the Mishkan was inaugurated (see above), "Nadav and Avihu, the sons of Aaron, took each of them his censer, and put fire in it, and put incense on it, and offered strange fire before G-d, which He commanded them not. A fire went out from G-d, and consumed them, and they died before G-d" (Leviticus 10:1-2).

First Red Heifer Prepared (1312 BCE)

On the 2nd of Nissan, 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 1860. After the passing of his father, Rabbi Shmuel (in 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 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 that come, would literally give their lives to keep Judaism alive under Soviet rule.