

(Dvar Torah continued from the front page...)

were, and the other establishes God's space. In Bereshit, Shabbat completed the creation of the world, but God still sought a place to dwell in that world; in Shemot, the building of the *mishkan* fulfills this vision of a world that God's *kavod* could ultimately inhabit.

In Vayikra, the Torah lays out the laws and rituals that would keep the *mishkan* habitable. Localizing God's Presence in a specific space, having the transcendent God also become immanent and physically manifest, wasn't just paradoxical—it was also potentially very dangerous. The *mishkan* functioned in essence like a power plant: it housed the cosmic force that would pump out blessing, which in turn sustained life, rain, and bounty. But if too much impurity attached itself to the *mishkan*, God might withdraw the Presence, the power would shut down or backfire, and the blessing would transform into curse, resulting in Israel's exile.

The *mishkan* had a magnetic quality that literally attracted this impurity—the ritual and moral impurities of *tumah* and *avon*—which the Torah considered actual, physically polluting substances. Thus the latter part of our parashah, in chapters 4 and 5, lists the *hattat* and *asham korbanot* that were meant to purify and transform the effects of sin and ritual impurity, by way of blood, so that Israel could maintain the conditions necessary for the transcendent God to remain immanent.

Keeping God's house in order made possible the other set of sacrifices listed in the first three chapters of Vayikra, which are sacrifices in the true sense: they are gifts given to God, sometimes required and other times given freely in gratitude, sometimes individually and other times given communally. JPS translates the *isheh* offerings as “offerings by fire,” but according to modern scholars (again, see Schwartz on Vayikra 1:9), the word *isheh* is not derived from *esh*, “fire,” but from a Hebrew root meaning “gift.”

We read about these gift offerings as a series of detailed instructions that on the surface may seem to lack any real narrative or theological message, but in their own way they illuminate profound visions of both the transcendent and immanent God. On the one hand, the *olah*, or “whole offering,” in chapter 1 is offered entirely to God, and the *mincha*, or “gift offering,” in chapter 2 goes to God and the kohanim; both provide a “*nachat ruach*” to God (Rashi on 2:2), and both are given over to the transcendent Being that Israel serves.

On the other hand, the *zevach ha-shelamim*, or “well-being offering,” in chapter 3 is more the description of an intimate, shared, festive meal with the divine. The choice organ meats go to the immanent God, while the family enjoys the rest of the offering. It is hard to imagine an experience as sublime as going to Jerusalem with one's family and dear friends, offering a *zevach* as an expression of joy or gratitude, and then quite literally sharing that food with the felt Presence of God. In Shemot 25:8, God said, “Let them make me a sanctuary that I may dwell among them, *v'shakhanti betocham*.” In Vayikra chapter 3, God gave us the opportunity to dine at the *shekhinah's* table.



## Fuchsberg Jerusalem Center Conservative Yeshiva

# TORAH SPARKS

## Parashat Vayikra

March 28, 2020 | 3 Nissan 5780

Annual | Leviticus 1:1-5:26 (Etz Hayim p. 585-605; Hertz p. 410-423)  
Triennial | Leviticus 1:1-2:16 (Etz Hayim p. 585-592; Hertz p. 410-415)  
Haftarah | Isaiah 43:21-44:23 (Etz Hayim p. 606-612; Hertz p. 424-428)

**Editor's Note** - Torah Sparks submissions are made weeks in advance, so the following was written before our lives were turned upside down by the Covid-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, we believe its message still resonates as we focus on our homes as spiritual centers, for the Pesach seder and beyond.

## Sharing a Meal with the Creator of the World

**Rabbi Daniel Isaacson**, Conservative Yeshiva Alumnus (1997-1999) & Director of Spiritual Care Services at Jewish Family and Children's Services in San Francisco

Sefer Vayikra begins mid-sentence, continuing directly where Shemot left off and on the very same day, the first of Nissan, that God's *kavod* entered the *mishkan* in Shemot 40:34. (Vayikra 7:37-38, following scholars like Baruch Schwartz in his Jewish Study Bible commentary on Leviticus, summarize chapters 1-7 as having all taken place on the first of Nissan.) We generally associate Rosh Chodesh Nissan as “the beginning of the months” (Shemot 12:2): the first of the year, the month of the Exodus, the month when God establishes the Israelites as a People, the beginning of Jewish time. But the Rosh Chodesh Nissan in this week's parashah, which takes place exactly one year after the Exodus events, marks a pinnacle in what is arguably the Torah's most central drama: the completion of Creation itself, the establishment of God's home on earth, and—most specifically in Vayikra—the Israelites' charge to maintain God's home and keep God present on earth.

Having a home on earth was a kind of “*sof ma'aseh b'machshava techila*,” much like Shabbat was. Just as God completed creation in Bereshit 2:2 (“*va'y'chal Elohim bayom hashevi'i melachto*”), so too did Moshe complete the *mishkan* at the end of last week's parashah, in Shemot 40:33 (“*va'y'chal Moshe et hamelacha*”). The *mishkan* is Shabbat's parallel: one establishes God's time, as it

Fuchsberg Jerusalem Center

Agron Street 8 • P. O. Box 7456 • Jerusalem, Israel 94265

Tel: 972-2-625-6386 • israel@uscj.org • uscj.org • conservativeyeshiva.org

(Dvar Torah continued on the back page...)

## D'var Haftarah: Taking Responsibility

*Rabbi Mordechai Silverstein, Conservative Yeshiva Faculty*

The prophetic tradition seeks to explore the meaning found in events. It asks not only how events happened but also how they relate to who we are and what we have done. In this week's haftarah, the prophet offers an interesting and difficult explanation to explain the reason for the destruction of the First Temple in a rather bizarre verse: "Your first father (*avikha ha'rishon*) offended, and your spokesmen (*malitzekha*) transgressed against Me (God). So, I profaned the sanctuary's princes and gave Yaakov to destruction and Yisrael to reviling." (43:27-28)

There is so much to unload in this prophecy. First, let us say that the prophet here is not the original Isaiah, who lived over a hundred years before the destruction of the First Temple, but rather a prophet whose message was appended to the message of the original prophet, who lived after the destruction of the Temple. He seeks an explanation for a tragedy which has changed his life and the life of his nation. He identifies the culprits as the "first father" and the "spokesman". Who was this "first father" and who was the "spokesmen" whom he declares as guilty? While the "first father" has variously been identified with Adam or Avraham, the most likely candidate is Yaakov, the founder of the "people" whose sins in the book of Bereishit stand out. Yaakov, as the "founding father" collectively represents the nation as a whole, both past and present. As for the code name, the "spokesmen", most commentators identify him with the leaders of the people and/or the kohanim – the priests, those whom he assumes misled the people and created the conditions which led to the tragedy. (See S. Paul, Isaiah 40-48, Mikra L'Yisrael, p. 185)

Why place the blame on these two figures, one a figure from the past and one contemporary? The prophet's point, it seems to me, is to awaken the people to take responsibility for who they are, what they have done, and what they must do. It asks them to approach their condition with open eyes and awareness and the ability to examine how they might have contributed to the tragedy and not to shirk doing what the situation requires of them to repair what has been destroyed.

We are now living through traumatic times and in order to get through them we must make sure that we are doing our part so as not to bring the "house down". This requires each of us to take responsibility for our actions, our own health and that of others, and afterward to join together to rebuild a world that is better than the one before this "plague" fell upon us.

*At the Conservative Yeshiva in Jerusalem, we offer students of all backgrounds an opportunity to engage with Jewish texts in a dynamic, inclusive, and collaborative environment. We help students gain the skills necessary for Jewish learning and spiritual growth as individuals and in their communities in North America, Israel, and around the world.*

## Parashah Study: Sacrifices? A Waste!

*Vered Hollander-Goldfarb, Conservative Yeshiva Faculty*

**Text: Vayikra 1:2 - 4:10**

(1:2) Speak to the Israelites and say to them, 'Shall any person from you bring forward to the LORD an offering, from the beasts from the herd and from the flock you shall bring forward your offering'.... (4:2) Speak to the Israelites, saying, 'Should a person offend errantly in regard to any of the LORD's commands that should not be done... (3) he shall bring forward for his offense... (8) And all the fat of the offense-offering...the kidneys...(10) the Kohen shall turn them to smoke on the burnt-offering altar...

- Some sacrifices are optional, others are mandatory. When does one seem to be obligated to offer a sacrifice?
- We are told that a person may choose to bring an offering. Why would someone wish to bring one?

**Commentary: Radak [Kimchi] Jeremiah 7:22**

*"For I did not speak to your fathers nor did I command them...about matters of burnt offering and sacrifice." (Jeremiah 7:22) And even when He spoke about sacrifices, He did not command them to bring a sacrifice, but rather "Shall any person from you bring forward an offering," (Lev. 1:2) 'if he does so from his own mind, it should be like this'. However, the daily sacrifices that He commanded are for the honor of the Temple, and they were brought by the public; but individuals - He did not command to bring a sacrifice, [unlike] His command to individuals to do justice, as well as the rest of the Mitzvot. He did not command the individual to sacrifice, unless he sinned errantly; then He commanded the burning of the inner parts so the sinner will take to heart and burn all the animalistic desires that develop from blood and fat, and be careful not to errantly fail in observing the Mitzvot, and obviously not do so intentionally.*

- The prophet Jeremiah, standing at the gates of the Temple, makes an farfetched claim: God did not command the people to bring sacrifices. How does Radak explain this claim?
- Radak distinguishes between sacrifices brought by individuals to those brought by the public. Can you think of situations today in which the individual is not responsible, but the community as a whole is obligated to get involved?
- The situations in which an individual must bring a sacrifice involve wrongdoing of some sort. In those situations, what is the purpose of the sacrifice?