

## Drash on Parashat Vayikra

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Parashat Vayikra is found at the beginning of the third Book of the Torah, also named Vayikra (Leviticus in English). The Hebrew name of the book (and the parashat) means *and He called*, He being God. The English name of the book comes from the Greek (via Latin) which means *book of the Levites*, and this Greek was derived from the Hebraic common description *torat kohanim* which translates as *law of priests*.

This drash will offer a quick introduction to this entire book before moving into this week's portion since we just finished the Book of Sh'mot (Exodus) with the completion of the Tabernacle. Positioned in the center of the Torah, Vayikra explains what to *do* with this Tabernacle. But more than that, Leviticus could be called the Holiness Handbook. Consider: in this one book are found these high percentages of word occurrences within the entire Tenach (Old Testament):

- *kadosh*; i.e., *holy* and *sanctify*—20%
- *profane*—21%
- *clean*—35%
- *unclean*—50% (half of all uses of *unclean* in the Tenach are in this one book)

Similarly, the word for *sacrifice* appears 40 times, *atonement* 45 times, *blood* 85 times, and *priest* 190 times. But wait, there's more: the sanctification of Aaron's eldest sons following their offering of unholy fire is presented in Leviticus. To sum it up, in Vayikra, God commands the Israelites *three* times, "Be holy, for I am holy."

As usual, I quote Wikipedia to provide the summation of this week's portion (but *this* instance isn't even a *précis*):

**The parashah lays out the laws of [sacrifices](#) (קִרְבָּנוֹת, *korbanot* [*in Hebrew*]).**

So I will amplify this summary. To do so, I will draw upon the *Judiasm101* web site at J-E-W-F-A-Q dot ORG, an unassisted labor of love for more than two decades by one Tracey R. Rich. In her own words, she was raised nominally Reform, in college discovered and then aligned more with Orthodox points of view, and, although she downplays her scholarship, she does allow more than one of the *Ask A Rabbi* staff make references to her pages. This drash cites her qorbanot page, spelled Q-O-R-B-A-N-O-T dot H-T-M. She considers this topic *advanced*, and I will quote the first paragraph in its entirety primarily to give you the flavor of her articles [quote]:

**For a long time I was reluctant to write a page on the subject of qorbanot, because it is a subject with little practical application today. However, I felt I had to address these issues, because it is one of the two subjects I receive the most questions about. Interestingly, the questions I receive on this subject are**

**invariably from non-Jews. Most Jews don't seem to have much interest in ancient practices no longer observed.**

[unquote] It is my hope this drash will whet your appetite to read the entire article. If you do, do so critically, for she allows no possibility Yeshua could be The Mashiach. Be a Berean. Also, please understand I say critically in the sense of *critical thinking*, not *being critical*.

Okay, back to the summary amplification. What is this word *qorbanot*? Tracey tells us [quote]:

**The word "qorbanot" is usually translated as "sacrifices" or "offerings"; however, both of these terms suggest a loss of something or a giving up of something, and although that is certainly a part of the ritual, that is not at all the literal meaning of the Hebrew word. The word qorbanot comes from the [root Qof-Reish-Beit](#), which means "to draw near," and indicates the primary purpose of offerings: to draw us near to [G-d](#).**

[unquote] Note there are two other Hebrew words more clearly related to the English words *sacrifice* and *offering*: *zebach*, signifying something consumable; and *minchah*, signifying something giveable. So we must get it into our thinking that whenever we read *sacrifice* or *offering* in English translations of The Scriptures, if it is a translation of qorban (singular) or qorbanot (plural), the original readers and listeners who were fluent in Hebrew were thinking and visualizing *drawing near to God* much more so than *something given over to God*. It was understood that the items being given over are merely the means to the all-important end: drawing near to God. This is what they imagined when they heard or read qorbanot, and so should we, whether directly or indirectly via translation.

So that Wikipedia summary should be interpreted:

**The parashah lays out the laws of drawing near to God through sacrifices.**

In Mark 7:11, Yeshua refuted the Pharisaic notion that God allows parental support obligations to be evaded by declaring such wherewithal to be qorban. He used the Hebrew word, and the writer of Mark chose to transliterate the Hebrew into the Greek alphabet even though there are apt Greek words for *sacrifice* and *offering*, so that choice must have been intended to ensure the *drawing near* meaning is front and center.

I have not the time in this drash to adequately summarize the different types of qorbanot, but Tracey has done a nice job of that, so read the article.

As Tracey noted, *qorbanot* are no longer part of everyday life. None of us have experienced walking through the procedures defined in this parashat. Suppose we did, though...

Do you need to offer a bull or cow? Livestock auctions in the USA just before the global market crash commenced suggest \$2000 might be needed for a non-defective specimen. A sheep could set you back \$700. A goat? Only \$350. Feathered qorbanot might be a mere \$10 or so apiece. Kindly note current prices are difficult to accurately assess during this upheaval but they are unlikely to be decreasing since central banks are practicing quantitative easing at unprecedented levels and speeds.

Now get the livestock to the place of sacrifice still alive and undamaged. Place your hands on its head to cause the animal to become your proxy. Next, presuming you accept the Tree of Life version's

translation regarding the division of labor, unless it is a bird, *you* slit its throat according to the required, humane procedure, then facilitate draining as much blood as possible before *you* skin it *and* butcher it according to its qorbanot type. The priests handle the parts of the rituals involving the altar, sprinkling blood, receiving the portions to be consumed by them, and, for birds, everything needful after the rite of transference. So if it's not a bird, *you* must make it march or the line behind you may get longer. You *must really* want to draw near to God, or you must really want to *be seen* as really wanting to draw near to God.

Now, The **LORD** highlighted to me something Tracey wrote:

**Although animal sacrifice is one means of obtaining forgiveness, there are non-animal offerings as well, and there are other means for obtaining forgiveness that do not involve sacrifices at all. The Biblical book of Jonah tells of an entire community condemned to destruction that was forgiven when they simply repented and fasted, without ever offering any sacrifice, blood or otherwise. (Jonah 3)**

The passage that people ordinarily cite for the notion that blood is required is Leviticus 17:11: "For the soul of the flesh is in the blood and I have assigned it for you upon the altar to provide atonement for your souls; for it is the blood that atones for the soul." But the passage that this verse comes from is not about atonement; it is about [dietary laws](#), and the passage says only that blood is used to obtain atonement; not that blood is the only means for obtaining atonement. Leviticus 17:10-12 could be paraphrased as "Don't eat blood, because blood is used in atonement rituals; therefore, don't eat blood."

Yah-a-mod, Gail bat Kingsley.

Gail will bless us with the Hebrew and English of Leviticus 5:11-13 (TLV):

<sup>11</sup> "But if one cannot afford two turtledoves or two young pigeons, then he is to bring as his offering for the sin he has committed a tenth of an ephah of fine flour as a sin offering. He is to put no oil on it nor put any frankincense on it, for it is a sin offering. <sup>12</sup> He is to bring it to the *kohen*, then the *kohen* is to take his handful of it as the memorial portion and burn it up as smoke on the altar, on *ADONAI*'s offerings by fire. It is a sin offering. <sup>13</sup> The *kohen* is to make atonement for him over his sin that one has committed in any of these things—and he will be forgiven. The rest belongs to the *kohen*, just like the meal offering."

There it is. Tracey is right. Blood is not always required to atone for sin. I learned something new from this drash, and I hope you did as well.

I leave you with James 4:8 (TLV):

**Draw near to God, and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded!**

which echos Jeremiah 29:12 (TLV):

**“Then you will call on Me, and come and pray to Me, and I will listen to you.”**

The next parashat is *Tzav* which spans Leviticus chapter 6 verse 8 through chapter 8 verse 36.