

Vayikra, Leviticus 1:1-5:26

- **WHY SACRIFICE?**

S. David Sperling

Parashat Vayikra opens the Book of Leviticus, arguably the book of the Torah strangest to modern readers. Vayikra devotes five entire chapters to the sacrificial slaughter of animals. Especially strange is the notion expressed in chapters four and five that specific sins require the sacrifice of specific animals. What sense is there in the idea that if I sin, I should kill a goat or have a priest do it for me? Yet within the structure of the Torah, our parashah opens the third book and thus occupies the central literary position. And the importance of sacrifice is not limited to the Torah. Isaiah and Jeremiah, two great prophets of Israel, uttered scathing condemnations of sacrifice when it failed to result in repentance. In opposition to the priesthood, the great prophets taught that sacrifice without repentance was hypocritical, but they did not call for the abolition of the sacrificial system. Even the Mishnah, the foundation document of rabbinic Judaism, avers that the world is sustained by three things. The first is Torah, but the second, avodah, which we translate in our prayer book as "worship," literally refers to the rituals of sacrifice.

Given the historical significance of animal sacrifice in Judaism, it is important for Reform Jews to understand its origins and its symbolism. It is very clear from Vayikra that our ancestors did not originate the sacrificial system. The wording of the laws of sacrifice - "if the offering is an olah, if the offering is a minchah, if the offering is a shehlamim" - shows us that the writers of the Torah took for granted that their audience was already familiar with the sacrificial system. We now have evidence from the ancient Near East that some of the biblical terminology of sacrifice had been in use centuries before the Bible. In fact, anthropologists have demonstrated that sacrificial ritual was practiced during the Paleolithic Age, more than a half-million years ago.

The contribution of the Torah's writers was to incorporate the ancient practices within the Israelite system of values. In our parashah (Lev. 3), the Torah requires that the animal's blood and fat be dashed on the altar. The same chapter prohibits human beings from consuming blood or fat. The reason for these laws is that blood and fat were believed by our ancestors to be our most vital substances. According to Hebrew thinking, it was in the blood and fat that the life force was contained. As such, blood and fat belonged only to God. By prohibiting the consumption of blood and fat to human beings and by demanding that the blood and fat be dashed on the altar, the writers of the Torah imbued the ancient practices of sacrifice with new meaning: Only God has control over the force of life.

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- **HEAR THE CALL**

Sharon L. Wechter

Vayikra el Moshe vayedaber Adonai elav, "God called to Moses and spoke to him" (Lev. 1:1) Why does God call Moses before speaking to him?

According to Rashi, all oral communications from God to Moses, whether they are introduced by the words *daber*, *amar*, or *tzav*, "speak, say, command," were preceded by a call to prepare him for the forthcoming message. Why would Moses need such preparation?

Rabbi Abraham Twersky answers by focusing on the internal changes that Moses faced in order to meet each of God's new tasks and challenges. He draws a correlation to the lobster-growing until it becomes too tight, it goes down to the bottom of the ocean and discards its shell to grow a new, larger one. So, too, Moses needed to journey deep within and discard old, dysfunctional behavior to be able to grow and stretch to meet the new orders. Internal change does not come easily to us human beings; even Moses required preparation to focus his attention.

Midrash Hagadol also addresses the parashah's opening words: "The summoning precedes the speaking. Here the Torah teaches us *derech erez* [i.e., courtesy, good manners]. One should not speak to another person unless that person has been

called." When we are called by another-face it, even our children must call us in order to grab our attention-what type of response do we bring to the calling? ("Mommy?" "Yes? What is it?" "Mommy, will you help me?") To bring focused attention to those who call in need requires us to bring ourselves into relationship with others. And relationships require us to retract attention from ourselves to make room for the other/Other.

Will we listen and attend to those who call us so that what we give and offer can be from our innermost selves, not merely rote actions and behaviors? Will we truly hear and then respond through two-way dialogue, allowing the arrows of connection to fly in both directions? Will we be listening for God's voice, ready to stretch ourselves to meet God and bring the Holy One into the world through our minds, hearts, souls, and actions?

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- **OFFER IT UP**

Faye L. Tillis

The book of Leviticus begins with Vayikra, this week's parashah. In it, we are given very detailed directions about the sacrificial practices that are to be performed in the Temple in Jerusalem. The olah and minchah offerings asked God for blessing or forgiveness. Zevach shelamim was an offering of well being or peace, which expressed gratitude. The chatat was offered as an atonement for a sin that was committed unintentionally. (Interestingly, the Torah does not permit atonement for a sin that was willfully committed.) The asham, or guilt offering, preceded the restoration of stolen or misappropriated property.

The root of the Hebrew word korban ("sacrifice") means "to draw near" or "to approach." The Torah portion implies that in order for us to become closer to God, we must "draw near" to God. The korban was an act of homage and proof of one's love for God. With the destruction of the Temple, however, prayer replaced sacrifice because prayer, the rabbis determined, could be offered wherever people lived, whenever they desired-it did not and does not require a Temple.

Is prayer as it is offered today in our temples and synagogues by our congregants and students a means of drawing near to God? On Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, we speak of sins that we have committed against God (al chet shechatanu lefanecha). We say that we have "missed the mark." But what about atoning for our unintentional sins against people, forgetting promises or hurting others by the carelessness of our actions? Jacob Milgrom in his book on Leviticus (Anchor Bible, Doubleday Press, New York, 1991) translates the chatat offering as the "purification offering," meaning purification not of the sinner but of the consequences of the sinner's actions. Everything around us is affected as a result of our inadvertent sins.

While visiting the ruins of the Temple, Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakkai said to his students, "We have a means of atonement that is equal to sacrifice. It is the doing of kind deeds." (Avot de-Rabbi Natan 4) He then quoted Hosea 6:6, "I desire mercy, and not sacrifice."

The root of the word shelamim is shalom, which means "whole" or "complete" (as well as "peace"). Vayikra reminds us that our actions are important. We can draw nearer to God by doing kind deeds. How we act toward others, accepting responsibility for our actions, can serve as our own peace offerings, creating a sense of wholeness within our family, congregation, and community.

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• THINKING ABOUT A SLAUGHTERHOUSE AND A BARBECUE

Mark S. Shapiro

Here are some thoughts on Parashat Vayikra.

1. Nehama Leibowitz says that the laws of offering sacrifices, with which this portion is filled, are like a "sealed book to us: we comprehend neither their basic meaning nor the purport of their rules and regulations." (New Studies in Vayikra, p. 1) But Jews tend to rise to challenges. There is no mitzvah that might not have its day or its relevance, even offerings of animals and grains as sacrifices.
2. Vayikra directs us to maintain an open community with sliding-scale dues. (Leviticus 5:7 ff.) If a person cannot afford cattle, then sheep, goats, and even pigeons are a satisfactory substitute. There are no second-class Israelites, no givers more "equal" than others.
3. Vayikra makes it clear that the higher your rank is in the community, the more is expected of you. (Leviticus 4:3, 22) Before we learn what the average Jew is to sacrifice when he sins unwittingly, we are told what the High Priest (the Rabbi?) must do, what the elders (the Executive Committee?) must do, what the chieftains (the Temple Board?) must do if they sin unwittingly. And the Law presumes that leadership also leads to self-criticism and responsibility. Jewish leaders cannot just say that "mistakes were made."
4. "Sacrifice" is a poor translation of the Hebrew word korban. Sacrifice means to sustain a loss, whereas korban means "coming close [to God]." The korban system was deeply personal: you offered your animal and you placed your hand on its head (Leviticus 3:2), leading you to feel close to God. We are still trying to come close by attempting to draw people near through small groups, circles, folk tunes, and community building.
5. One of the korban offerings is called shelamim. (Leviticus 3:1) Scholars are puzzled by this term. Their best guess is that it is an offering of greeting. But shalom also means "wholeness." Some synagogues today are promoting the wholeness of body, mind, and spirit through outreach, a caring community, and support groups. Could our task today be to offer Jews the ancient shelamim in a new form?
6. By outlining what a person who commits a white-collar theft must do (Leviticus 5:20-26), Vayikra concludes by going beyond the inner spirit. First, the guilty party must restore what was taken, at \$1.25 on the dollar. Only then can he find forgiveness by sacrificing a ram as a guilt offering.
7. Does the sacrificial system with its blood, guts, and priestly prerogatives still disturb you? Then consider how fortunate we are that it contained the seeds of its own demise. Since only the priest was allowed to perform sacrifices and not the average Israelite, sacrifice did not (and never could) become a sign of personal Jewish piety. When the Temple (with its resident priests) was destroyed, sacrifice was replaced by prayer, study, and democratic synagogue life. Thank God!
8. Vayikra, metaphorically smells like a slaughterhouse with a barbecue that follows. It reminds us that being religious is a matter of life and death, not just an option. Vayikra insures that this thought occurs to us at least one Shabbat a year.

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• HUMILITY: AN ESSENTIAL TRAIT FOR LEADERSHIP

Howard Weisband

Vayikra el Moshe, "And God called Moses." (Leviticus 1:1)

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In every Torah scroll, at the end of the Hebrew word Vayikra, the letter alef is written in a smaller size than all the other letters. This is the only place in the Torah in which an alef is found in this form. Why?

Rabbeinu Asher (the Rosh) in his commentary on the Torah tells us that this particular alef is reduced in size to reflect the humility of Moses, known as Moshe Rabbeinu, our greatest Jewish leader.

Moses is the only prophet to whom God spoke while the one being addressed, Moses, was awake. God communicated with our other prophets while they were asleep. Moses certainly recognized and deserved the merit of a wakeful one-on-one discussion with God. No one would have criticized Moses for openly discussing his unique connection to God in order to strengthen his own credibility as a leader.

Here, in the opening of the third book of the Torah, God calls on Moses to reveal the commandments of sacrifice, the offerings that helped bring the people closer to God, which are today symbolized by prayer and service to the synagogue, the Jewish community, and humankind.

Midrash teaches that Moses, again demonstrating his great humility, wanted to describe his conversation with God as Vayikrah, "And it happened," from the Hebrew root kuf-reish-hei. God held the position that Moses should write Vayikra, "And God called," from the root kuf-reish-alef. The words sound the same, but they are different and have different meanings.

God and Moses had a genuine relationship, a partnership whereby they understood each other. They worked out a compromise and, as a result, the text was written with a small alef so that people might not notice its existence. God's method of providing the commandments through Moses to the Jewish people was preserved in the meaning of the word, while Moses' place as the leader of the Israelites from within the community, not above it, was preserved in the format of the word. In this way, the text illustrates Moses' humility.

Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook (1865-1935) was one of the greatest Jewish leaders, thinkers, and rabbis. Rav Kook, the first Chief Rabbi of Israel--at that time Palestine--spoke of humility. He was a strong proponent of K'lal Yisrael--the value of unifying all the people of Israel--and finding a way to bridge the religious-secular divide.

Hineni, "Here I am," the response of both Abraham and Moses to God, suggests humility as well as zeal, according to Rav Kook. He teaches: "Humility strengthens the memory....It is impossible to achieve any clear perception except through humility." Rav Kook continues: "At times it is not necessary to be afraid of greatness, which inspires a person to do great things. All humility is based on such holy greatness. One is called on to invest much effort in clinging to humility. When a thought of pride or a feeling of self-exaltation arises in the person, it is for him to apply the good aspect of these sensibilities to reinforce the will to holiness."

Humility, we learn from Rav Kook, is essential to greatness as well as to holiness. Humility makes sincere and genuine leadership possible. God clearly understood and valued Moses' personal humility. Thus the alef in Vayikra is hardly noticeable.

May we, the Jews of today, merit such leaders from among Am Yisrael--the People of Israel--and in Medinat Yisrael--the State of Israel--leaders who act with humility, greatness, and holiness.

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- **TO ERR IS HUMAN
FOR FORGIVENESS, BRING A SACRIFICE**

Renni S. Altman

My son and daughter are playing together when, suddenly, cries are heard: My son has hit my daughter. "Was it an accident or on purpose?" I ask. If it was on purpose, my son is told to apologize and then is punished. The intention is, of course, to teach him that he has done something wrong and that he should not do it again. Through such experiences, my son learns that there are consequences for bad behavior. If, on the other hand, my son's hitting his sister was truly an accident, he is required to apologize because he hurt her, but no further action is taken.

We learn in this week's *parashah*, *Vayikra*, that such a response to inappropriate accidental behavior might, in fact, be misguided. The Torah teaches us that we must atone for even unintentional sins: A simple apology is not enough to reinforce the sense of accountability that we should have for *all* our actions.

In Leviticus 4 we read about the *chatat*, the sin offering, that the Israelites were required to bring when they had transgressed a known commandment as well as when they had committed an unintentional sin, either because of their ignorance of the commandments or through carelessness or oversight. In the latter instance, everyone in the Israelite community was obligated to bring a sin offering, even the High Priest.

In contrast to many of us today, our ancestors understood that they were responsible for all their actions, whether intentional or not. In his commentary on Leviticus, Baruch Levine explains that according to ancient cultic belief systems, guilt exists regardless of the perpetrator's awareness of having committed a sin. Guilt, as it were, has a life of its own, and only an act of expiation can wipe it away. Thus we learn in *Sefer Hachinuch*, a thirteenth-century work that discusses the commandments and their purpose, "When a man [*sic*] sins, he cannot cleanse his heart merely by uttering, between himself and the wall, 'I have sinned and will never repeat it.' Only by doing an overt act to atone for his sin, by taking rams from his enclosures and troubling himself to bring them to the Temple, give them to the priest, and perform the entire rite as prescribed for sin offerings, only then will he impress upon his soul the extent of the evil of his sin and take measures to avoid it in the future."

Perhaps we ought not be so cavalier with regard to unintentional sins. Are we no less responsible for our actions than our ancestors were over three thousand years ago? If we had to pay a price for our unintentional sins--perhaps having to put some coins into a *tzedakah* box every time we sin--we, too, might become more conscious of our words and our deeds and make a greater effort not to sin in the future, even unintentionally.

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- **GOD WAS IN THIS PLACE WHEN I MADE A MISTAKE**

Steven Sirbu

Al cheit shechatanu lifanecha b'zadon oovishgagah, "For the sin we have committed against you consciously or unconsciously." These words from the Yom Kippur liturgy, as translated in *Gates of Repentance*, reflect two kinds of sin in the Jewish tradition--intentional and unintentional. More important, they make a presumption about human behavior, namely, that sometimes we do bad things on purpose and sometimes we do them accidentally. That is, sometimes we follow our inclination to do evil and sometimes we follow our inclination to do good but still err and do evil.

This week's Torah portion, *Parashat Vayikra*, is concerned only with those sins that we do unconsciously or inadvertently. The portion gives the details for offering a number of sacrifices, including the *chatat* (sin offering), but does not address the scenario of intentional sin. The first three chapters are about free will offerings, and the next two provide the ritual remedy for unintentional sins.

The placement of the ritual response to inadvertent sins at the beginning of Leviticus underscores their relative importance in priestly theology. According to Jacob Milgrom in his commentary on Leviticus, chapters 1 through 16 (part of the Anchor Bible Series), inadvertent sins can make us impure and can lead to our expelling God from the Sanctuary. Thus we learn that even when we are merely careless or insensitive in our treatment of others, we risk spiritual impurity and banishing God from our presence.

Jewish tradition (especially the biblical prophets) teaches us that God cares about how human beings interact with one another. To motivate us to treat one another well all the time, we must believe that God takes an interest in such matters, that the quality of our relationship with the Divine is linked to our worldly relationships. We must be aware that when we jeopardize our relationships with our family, friends, and coworkers, we also harm our relationship with God.

With the exception of a few spiteful people (we can all probably think of at least one), most of us do not set out to hurt others. Yet when we sin against other people inadvertently, we still do damage. Both the Yom Kippur liturgy and *Parashat Vayikra* address this danger. May these reminders inspire us to be more careful in the course of each day so that we avoid committing unintentional sins when possible. And when we do commit such sins, may we atone in a way that purifies both our hearts and our relationships.

Questions for Discussion

1. Has an unintentional sin ever injured your relationship with another person? How were you affected by that event?
2. Can you suggest some reasons why *Parashat Vayikra* does not address intentional sins?

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• Expressing Gratitude

Rifat Sonsino

Dedicated to the memory of my mother, Victoria Sonsino, z.l., who died on December 25, 2006.

Introducing *Vayikra*

The Book of Leviticus, called *Vayikra* in Hebrew (after the first word of the chapter), is as difficult to comprehend as it is unpopular in our time. The ancient Rabbis referred to it as *torat kohanim* (the regulations of the priests). Except for a few sections that cover some moral and social issues (e.g., Leviticus 19), most of Leviticus is dedicated to sacrifices of all kinds, including animals, food and drink, perfumes, and incense. Many of these issues are often obscure and irrelevant in our day.

After the Roman destruction of the Second Temple in 70 c.e. and the cessation of the sacrificial system, the Rabbinic sages who inherited the text, believing that it was the word of God, had to interpret it by creating midrashim. In medieval times, even the great Maimonides taught that sacrifices were a concession to primitive times and the way by which the ancient Israelites were weaned away from idolatrous practices into true beliefs (*Guide of the Perplexed* 3:32). Rabbi Samuel Sandmel writes, "The accentuation on the man making the offering rather than on the offering itself gives Leviticus a human quality it might otherwise not have" (*The Hebrew Scriptures* [New York: Knopf, 1963], pp. 388-89).

Orthodox Jews still pray that after the Messiah arrives, sacrifices will once again be offered in the Third Temple. For those of us who do not expect the rebuilding of the Temple or do not find such offerings as relevant or desirable, it becomes a challenge to find a lesson for our time in this old text. In this *d'var Torah*, I suggest we look at the underlying rationale for sacrifices and derive a lesson of gratitude.

Sacrifices in the Past

The sacrificial system is very old and extends throughout the entire ancient Near East. Scholars are not always in agreement about its original purpose. Some argue that it was simply a means of feeding the gods. Others stress the values of propitiation or reverence. In biblical times, many of the sacrifices were offered as "gifts" to God. Their basic goal was

"to formalize or reaffirm and, at times, to repair the relationship between the worshiper and God and between the community of worshipers and God" (Baruch A. Levine, *The JPS Torah Commentary: Leviticus* [Philadelphia: JPS, 1989], p. xxiv).

When the Israelites, being part of the cultural continuum of the ancient Near East, adopted the system from their neighbors, they imbued the various types of offerings with their own values. The Torah, for example, insists that sacrifices do not obliterate the transgressions in civil contracts or business deals by themselves without making proper amends (Leviticus 5:21ff.), and stresses that the proper sacrifice to God is "a broken spirit" and "a contrite heart" (Psalm 51:19).

When the Temple worship came to an end in 70 c.e., the Israelites felt a tremendous void. The Temple was not only a national shrine but also the cultural and business center of the entire community. Judeans congregated periodically in Jerusalem during festivals and other occasions. The Temple compound was the only place where the pious could "get close" (the real meaning of the Hebrew word *korban*, wrongly translated as "sacrifice") to the Divine. So, after 70 c.e., there was a need to formalize new means of organized worship and spirituality. A story is told that right after the destruction of the Temple, Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai visited the ruins accompanied by Rabbi Y'hoshua. When Y'hoshua started to bewail the end of the sacrificial system that provided atonement for sin, the old sage replied, "Do not grieve, we have another means of atonement that is equal to sacrifice, and that is the doing of good deeds" (*Avot D'Rabbi Natan* 4).

Gratitude

In our day, we do not offer animal sacrifices to God, but we can relate to some of the values that underlie the old system. Propitiation does not work for us any more, because we do not believe that the divine realm needs or wants our appeasement through food or other objects. But reverence, giving gifts, and particularly gratitude still remain powerful tools for expressing our deepest feelings for everything we have and are.

Our prayer book is replete with sentiments of gratitude to God, who is the ultimate source of our existence. When we rise in the morning, we are expected to recite *Modeh Ani*, "I am grateful" to God for bringing life to me each and every day. In *Birkat HaMazon*, the Blessing after Meals, we thank God for sustaining the world with goodness, kindness, and mercy. During the day or at night, through the prayer *Modim Anachnu Lach*, "We are grateful to You," we thank God "for our souls, which are in Your keeping; for the signs of Your presence we encounter every day; and for Your wondrous gifts at all time."

Life is a divine gift. We are born through no will of our own and die when our time is due. In between, while facing challenges along the way, we encounter many rays of beauty and glory, and these we must acknowledge. No one lives alone, and everyone depends on the goodwill of others. Albert Schweitzer said, "Each of us has cause to think with deep gratitude of those who have lighted the flame within us." So, we must express our thanks, and do so verbally and often, for our good health, for the companionship we cherish, for our parents and children, for our accomplishments, for everything we have learned from our mothers, fathers, teachers, friends, and students. And then we must turn this sense of gratitude into actions that benefit others. As President John F. Kennedy said, "As we express our gratitude, we must never forget that the highest appreciation is not to utter words, but to live by them."

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- **Grateful for the Opportunity**

Steven Fink

In his moving commentary on *Parashat Vayikra*, Rabbi Rifat Sonsino masterfully connects the Temple sacrificial rite with our innate need to express gratitude to God for the many gifts God gives us, gifts that we often take for granted. We rarely take time to offer our thanks to God for life, health, companionship, work, and family. Our tradition helps us articulate this inherent need through the daily prayers in our siddur. As Rabbi Sonsino eloquently writes, gratitude, however, is not enough. We need to translate our appreciation "into actions that benefit others."

We believe that God works in and through us to make this world a more perfect place. Through our individual and communal action, we serve as God's partners in helping to order the chaos left over from creation. Few sections of our siddur better express this sentiment than *Nisim B'chol Yom* (*Gates of Prayer for Shabbat and Weekdays: A Gender-Sensitive Prayerbook* [New York: CCAR, 1994], pp. 14-15), where we praise God for the opportunity to be conduits of God's will. We praise God for the chance to free the captive, clothe the naked, and lift up the fallen. We praise God for the occasion to give strength to the weary and gird our people Israel with strength.

The members of Temple Oheb Shalom in Baltimore recently had the opportunity to express our gratitude through our third humanitarian mission to the Jews of Cuba. Twenty-six of us carried over one thousand pounds of medical supplies, clothing, and Judaica to the fifteen hundred Jews of Cuba. We attended Shabbat services at the Sephardic synagogue and Temple Beth Shalom, where we took part in a rare bat mitzvah. We feasted and danced with Cuban Jews at a favorite restaurant. We divided into three groups and visited beneficiaries of B'nai Brith's Cuban Jewish Relief Project, witnessing firsthand what a difference ten dollars a month makes to their impoverished lives. We were deeply shaken by their material poverty, emotionally touched by their Jewish spirit, and moved to tears with gratitude for the rich life we have as Americans and Jews. "Thank You, *Adonai*, for the opportunity to serve," a member of our group was heard to say upon landing in Miami. May we daily take the opportunity to express our gratitude by serving as *Adonai's* cocreator in the ongoing perfection of our world.

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• THE CALL OF PARASHAT VAYIKRA

Deborah Hirsch

As the Book of Exodus concludes with the completion of the Tabernacle, logic dictates that the laws applicable in that holy site be delineated. *Vayikra*, the third book of Torah, thrusts us into the now-extinct world of animal and vegetable sacrifices, which includes the dashing of blood against the sides of the altar and the sweet smell of acceptable sacrifices ascending to God. How many vegetarian *b'nei mitzvah* students or their parents have struggled to find meaning in the animals consumed by fire on the altar? What can we derive from a cultic system that has been abandoned for nearly two millennia?

The opening chapters of this week's *parashah*, *Vayikra* (God's "Calling" to Moses), describe voluntary *korbanot*, "burnt offerings." The overwhelming majority of the community had the opportunity to participate in the sacrificial system, no matter what their financial well-being was. The meal or pigeon offering of a poor person was equal to the sacrifice of a wealthy person's unblemished bull. Although the ancient sacrificial system, *avodah*, has been replaced by worship, the Jewish community has never relinquished the notion of voluntary contributions. So, too, our own commitment to God, as well as our status in the community, should not be dictated by financial well-being. The individual who sacrifices time and energy on behalf of the synagogue deserves similar *z'chut*, "merit," as those whose financial contributions help provide an "awesome" synagogue structure and spiritual programming. An intrinsic link between the ancient sacrificial system and our contributions of time and money must be rooted in the notion of "freewill" giving. Throughout *Vayikra*, the word *v'im*, "and if," introduces the numerous categories of sacrifice. "If" suggests that free will is implicit in some sacrifices. The Maharal reasons that even when one makes an obligatory sacrifice, (for example, annual temple dues), there should be a voluntary element attached to it.

While congregations today practice a contributory system similar to the ancient Israelites' voluntary *korbanot*, they also have transcended an integral component of that historic period. Present-day rabbis bear little resemblance to their priestly forebears. Emerging from the Pharisaic tradition, the authority of rabbis (and cantors) today is not rooted in a hereditary bloodline. More striking is the function of rabbis and cantors in the modern Jewish community. Not once in the Torah do we encounter a priest engaging in conversation with an ordinary Israelite. Not once does the priest extend a hand in compassion or comfort. Not once do we experience the priest's as a prophetic voice. For the ancient Israelite community, the priest was a functionary serving as a conduit between the people and God. The community depended upon the priest to make expiation on their behalf but did not expect him to serve as their spiritual leader or moral ethical guide. Although each individual could participate in the sacrificial system, she or he could not partner with the priest in charting a course

for that community's destiny. Like a diligent pharmacist, the priest filled God's prescription for acceptable sacrifices and communal purity.

Sefer Vayikra reaches its crescendo in *parashat K'doshim*, which contains the Holiness Code. Whether through *korbanot* or voluntary contributions of their financial resources or time and whether they were priestly functionaries or engaging spiritual leaders, Jews spanning the millennia have striven toward the same sacred goal: Our people's devotion to the desert Tabernacle or modern synagogues creates a pathway through which we can, in accordance with God's holiness implanted within us, be called to draw nearer to our God.

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