

Kol Rina
An Independent Minyan
Parashat Pekudei
March 23, 2024 *** 13 Adar II, 5784

[Vayikra in a Nutshell](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/1480/jewish/Vayikra-in-a-Nutshell.htm)

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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.

[Zachor in a Nutshell:Deuteronomy 25:17–19](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/73232/jewish/Zachor-in-a-Nutshell.htm)

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/73232/jewish/Zachor-in-a-Nutshell.htm

This being the Shabbat before Purim, on which we celebrate the foiling of Haman the Amalekite's plot to destroy the Jewish people, the weekly Parshah is supplemented with the "Zachor" reading (Deuteronomy 25:17–19) in which we are commanded to remember the evil of Amalek and to eradicate it from the face of the earth.

Remember what Amalek did to you on the road, on your way out of Egypt. That he encountered you on the way and cut off those lagging to your rear, when you were tired and exhausted; he did not fear G-d. And it shall come to pass, when the L-rd your G-d has given you rest from all your enemies round about, in the land which the L-rd your G-d is giving you for an inheritance to possess it, that you

shall obliterate the memory of Amalek from under the heavens. Do not forget.

[Parsashat Zachor Haftarah in a Nutshell: I Samuel 15:2-34](https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/647445/jewish/Haftorah-in-a-Nutshell.htm)

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/647445/jewish/Haftorah-in-a-Nutshell.htm

This week's special *haftorah* discusses G-d's command to destroy the people of Amalek. This to avenge Amalek's unprovoked attack on the Israelites that is described in the *Zachor* Torah reading.

Samuel conveys to King Saul G-d's command to wage battle against the Amalekites, and to leave no survivors—neither human nor beast. Saul mobilizes the Israelite military and attacks Amalek. They kill the entire population with the exception of the king, Agag, and they also spare the best of the cattle and sheep. G-d reveals Himself to Samuel. "I regret that I have made Saul king," G-d says. "For he has turned back from following Me, and he has not fulfilled My words."

The next morning Samuel travels to Saul and confronts him. Saul defends himself, saying that the cattle was spared to be used as sacrificial offerings for G-d. Samuel responds: "Does G-d have as great a delight in burnt offerings and peace-offerings, as in obeying the voice of G-d? Behold, to obey is better than a peace-offering; to hearken, than the fat of rams. . . . Since you rejected the word of G-d, He has rejected you from being a king."

Saul admits his wrongdoing and invites the prophet to join him on his return home. Samuel refuses his offer. "The Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you, today; and has given it to your fellow who is better than you." Samuel then kills the Amalekite king.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

[The Dimensions of Sin by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks z"l](https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/vayikra/the-dimensions-of-sin/)

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Our parsha, which deals with a variety of sacrifices, devotes an extended section to the chattat, the sin offering, as brought by different individuals: first the High Priest (Lev. 4:3-12), then the community as a whole (Lev. 4:13-21), then a leader (Lev. 4:22-26) and finally an ordinary individual (Lev. 4:27-35).

The whole passage sounds strange to modern ears, not only because sacrifices have not been offered for almost two millennia since the destruction of the Second Temple, but also because it is hard for us to understand the very concepts of sin and atonement as they are dealt with in the Torah.

The puzzle is that the sins for which an offering had to be brought were those committed inadvertently, *be-shogeg*. Either the sinner had forgotten the law, or some relevant fact. To give a contemporary example: suppose the phone rings on Shabbat and you answer it. You would only be liable for a sin offering if either you

forgot the law that you may not answer a phone on Shabbat, or you forgot the fact that the day was Shabbat. If, for a moment, you thought it was Friday or Sunday. So your sin was inadvertent.

This is the kind of act that we don't tend to see as a sin at all. It was a mistake. You forgot. You did not mean to do anything wrong. And when you realise that inadvertently you have broken Shabbat, you are more likely to feel regret than remorse. You feel sorry but not guilty.

We think of a sin as something we did intentionally, yielding to temptation perhaps, or in a moment of rebellion. That is what Jewish law calls *be-zadon* in biblical Hebrew or *be-mezid* in rabbinic Hebrew. That is the kind of act we would have thought calls for a sin offering. But actually, such an act cannot be atoned for by an offering at all. So how are we to make sense of the sin offering?

The answer is that there are three dimensions of wrongdoing between us and God. The first is guilt and shame. When we sin deliberately and intentionally, we know inwardly that we have done wrong. Our conscience – the voice of God within the human heart – tells us that we have done wrong. That is what happened to Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden after they had sinned. They felt shame. They tried to hide. For that kind of deliberate, conscious, intentional sin, the only adequate moral response is *teshuvah*, repentance. This involves (a) remorse, *charatah*, (b) confession, *vidui*, and (c) *kabbalat he-atid*, a resolution never to commit the sin again. The result is *selichah umechilah*, God forgives us. A mere sacrifice is not enough.

However, there is a second dimension. Regardless of guilt and responsibility, if we commit a sin we have objectively transgressed a boundary. The word *chet* means to miss the mark, to stray, to deviate from the proper path. We have committed an act that somehow disturbs the moral balance of the world. To take another secular example, imagine that your car has a faulty speedometer. You are caught driving at 50 miles per hour in a 30 mile an hour zone. You tell the policeman who stops you that you didn't know. Your speedometer was only showing 30 miles per hour. He may sympathise, but you have still broken the law. You have transgressed the speed limit, albeit unknowingly, and you will have to pay the penalty.

That is what a sin offering is. According to Rabbi Shimshon Raphael Hirsch it is a penalty for carelessness. According to the *Sefer Ha-Chinuch* it is an educational and preventive measure. Deeds, in Judaism, are the way we train the mind. The fact that you have had to pay the price by bringing a sacrifice will make you take greater care in future.

Rabbi Isaac Arama (who lived in Spain in the 15th century) says that the difference between an intentional and an unintentional sin is that in the former

case, both the body and the soul were at fault. In the case of an unintentional sin only the body was at fault, not the soul. Therefore a physical sacrifice helps, since it was only the physical act of the body that was in the wrong. A physical sacrifice cannot atone for a deliberate sin, because it cannot rectify a wrong in the soul.

What the sacrifice achieves is kapparah, not forgiveness as such but a “covering over” or obliteration of the sin. Noah was told to “cover” (ve-chapharta) the surface of the Ark with pitch (Gen. 6:14). The cover of the Ark in the Tabernacle was called kapporet (Lev. 25:17). Once a sin has been symbolically covered over, it is forgiven, but as the Malbim points out, in such cases the verb for forgiveness, s-l-ch, is always in the passive (venislach: Lev. 4:20, Lev. 4:26, Lev. 4:31). The forgiveness is not direct, as it is in the case of repentance, but indirect, a consequence of the sacrifice.

The third dimension of sin is that it defiles. It leaves a stain on your character. Isaiah, in the presence of God, feels that he has “unclean lips” (Is. 6:5). King David says to God, “Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin” – “me-chatati tahareni” (Ps. 51:4).

About Yom Kippur the Torah says:

“On that day atonement will be made for you, to cleanse you [letaher etchem]. Then, before the Lord, you will be clean from all your sins.”

Lev. 16:30

Ramban says that this is the logic of the sin offering. All sins, even those committed inadvertently, have consequences. They each “leave a stain on the soul and constitute a blemish on it, and the soul is only fit to meet its Maker when it has been cleansed from all sin” (Ramban to Lev. 4:2).

The result of the sin offering is tehora, cleansing, purification. So the sin offering is not about guilt but about other dimensions of transgression. It is one of the stranger features of Western civilisation, due in part to Pauline Christianity, and partly to the influence of the philosopher Immanuel Kant, that we tend to think about morality and spirituality as matters almost exclusively to do with the mind and its motives. But our acts leave traces in the world. And even unintentional sins can leave us feeling defiled.

The law of the sin offering reminds us that we can do harm unintentionally, and this can have psychological consequences. The best way of putting things right is to make a sacrifice: to do something that costs us something.

In ancient times, that took the form of a sacrifice offered on the altar at the Temple. Nowadays the best way of doing so is to give money to charity (tzedakah) or perform an act of kindness to others (chessed). The Prophet said so long ago, in God’s name:

“For I desire loving-kindness, not sacrifice.” Hosea 6:6

Charity and kindness are our substitutes for sacrifice and, like the sin offering of old, they help mend what is broken in the world and in our soul.

[Vayikrah: A Model For Transparent Leadership by Rabbi Jill Borodin](https://truah.org/resources/jill-borodin-vayikra-moraltorah_2024/)

https://truah.org/resources/jill-borodin-vayikra-moraltorah_2024/

I used to have trouble relating to much of the book of Vayikra, Leviticus. But that recently changed for me and I now read Vayikra, including this week’s parshah by the same name, with a new perspective. I am grateful for wonderful learning with Sacred Spaces, and particularly a teaching by Shira Berkovits and Rabbi Steven Exler, which helped open this parshah for me as a remarkable and critical moral code with tremendous guidance for today.

Vayikra is a handbook for the kohanim, the priests. However, rather than just being held as secret knowledge for the priests, it is taught to everyone. And there is even a tradition of teaching it to children as their first exposure to Torah study. Why would this be the case? While I have heard many different theories, I want to suggest that it is because of its foundational moral guidance.

What do we learn from having a priestly manual taught to everyone? We model the ideal that all texts and rituals should be accessible and taught to all, not just the priests, scholars, or clergy. We learn about the value of transparency: Vayikra lays out exactly what happens in our innermost sanctum for everyone to see. We, the people, see where our donations go, how sacrifices are to be handled, and what procedures must be followed. We learn what is expected from our leaders and religious figures, and how they should conduct themselves. That way, everyone can be aware when things are done improperly or not according to procedure. The priests are held accountable for honesty and integrity, as everyone knows what their role is supposed to be. This transparency offers a framework to minimize abuses of power.

Our parshah focuses on sacrifices, korbanot, related to the verb l’karev, to approach. It is about people trying to get closer to God, and the steps and rituals for doing so. When seeking closeness, boundaries can blur and be inappropriately crossed, often with harmful results. By making the rituals known to everyone, hopefully, we can make the boundaries clearer and avoid more harm.

Our parshah discusses the different sacrifices and rituals to be done if different groups of people sin. We learn what to do if a person inadvertently incurs guilt, if a priest incurs guilt, and if the whole community of Israel incurs guilt. All of these categories are introduced by the word אִם, if. If these people sin.

But in discussing the nasi, leader, who sins, the designation is introduced by a different preposition: asher nasi yecheta. Not if the leader sins, but when the leader sins. There are perils that come with leadership and power.

As the 19th century commentary Haamek Davar notes on the word asher, “it is known that his leadership causes him to be liable to sin.” A leader has access to power that can be used either for good or nefarious reasons. The attendant ego can allow leaders to think they are not accountable to anyone else and can do what they please without consequences, or that the intent and goal are so noble that “minor” infractions and shortcuts along the way can be overlooked. Finally, there are sins caused by neglecting some part of the great responsibility one has taken on.

Leaders need to be particularly cautious and self-aware in order to guard against these abuses. The Torah is warning us not to think leaders are beyond sin — even more, that they will undoubtedly sin. By offsetting leaders as a category, Vayikra creates a system where it should be easier for them to come forward, admit their mistakes, and take accountability. And also creates a dynamic that more easily allows people to talk about the mistakes of their leaders and hold them accountable.

Rashi suggests a further way of reading asher, through a play on words, connecting it to the word ashrei, happy. He explains: “Happy is the generation whose nasi takes care to bring an atonement sacrifice even for an inadvertent wrongdoing of his; how much more certain is it that he will do penance for his willful sins.”

This year we will be reading parshat Vayikra right before Purim. The troubling end of the Megillah warns us of the danger and violence that can come from power (even wielded by the “good guys”) without limitations.

I yearn (more than ever at the current moment) to live in a generation where everyone, including our leaders, recognizes that leaders sin — where our leaders admit their mistakes, are held accountable, and where they actively make amends.

How much happier it would be to live in such a generation — may it soon be so.

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Parshat Vayikra: Questionable Actions by Rabbi Shlomo Levin

and Rabbi Yonatan Neril[1]

<https://www.growtorah.org/vayikra/2022/3/11-parshat-vayikra-questionable-actions>

This week's Torah portion of Vayikra describes the various voluntary and obligatory sacrifices that Hashem commands the Jewish people to bring. Two types of offerings, the chatat (sin offering) and the asham (guilt offering), provide atonement for unintentional transgressions. After both of these offerings are described, the Torah presents another, puzzling form of the guilt offering:

If a person sins and commits one of the commandments of Hashem which may not be committed, but he does not know, he is guilty, and he shall bear his transgression. He shall bring an unblemished ram from the flock, with the value for a guilt offering, to the kohen. The kohen shall then make atonement for his unintentional sin which he committed and did not know, and he shall be forgiven. It is a guilt offering, he has incurred guilt before Hashem. (Leviticus 5:17-19, Judaica Press Translation)

These verses elicit many questions. We have already read that the sin and guilt offerings atone for unintentional misdeeds, so how does this offering differ? What does it mean, that the person "does not know?" Why is this action uniquely described as incurring guilt "before Hashem?"

The Talmud reads these verses as describing a very specific type of sacrifice, called asham talui, an "undetermined guilt" offering. As opposed to the other sin and guilt offerings, which are brought when a person's action has transgressed a commandment, the asham talui is brought when it cannot be conclusively determined whether the act was, in fact, a transgression at all.

Rashi gives the following example of such a case:

[A piece of] prohibited animal fat and [a piece of] permissible animal fat are placed before someone, and, thinking that both were permissible [fats], the person ate one. Then, people told that person, "One of those pieces was prohibited fat!" Now, if the person knew that the piece consumed was the forbidden piece they would bring a regular sin offering. But since it is unknown which piece was eaten, the permitted or the forbidden, the asham talui offering is prescribed.[2]

But why does one need to bring any offering at all? The 16th-century Italian commentator, Sforno[3] even suggests that, perhaps, a person in this situation would worry that bringing a sacrifice would be wrong. Since maybe the permitted piece of meat was eaten and there was no sin, this sacrificial offering would be unnecessary and, therefore, invalid. It would be bringing unconsecrated meat into the Beit Hamikdash.

Sforno writes that regardless of which piece of meat was consumed, even if it was the right one, this person is still guilty of not paying closer attention to their actions, and not making sure that their food was kosher before eating. The asham

talui teaches us that we may not engage in careless or risky behavior. We must take responsibility for questionable actions even in the absence of conclusive proof that we have done something wrong. Only through correcting our uncertain actions can we truly be absolved of blame.

The logic of the asham talui offering can inform environmental consciousness. Humanity's impact on the global climate is clear. The basic premise of this impact is that modern industrial society has increased greenhouse gas emissions worldwide, with 27% of emissions in the US caused by burning fossil fuels for transportation and 25% caused by electric power as of 2021.[4] This increase affects the makeup of the earth's atmosphere, impacting climate. There is scientific consensus for human-caused climate change.[5] According to the most recent report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), the most authoritative body on climate change science in the world, comprised of hundreds of scientists from tens of countries, "...Evidence of observed changes in extremes such as heatwaves, heavy precipitation, droughts, and tropical cyclones, and, in particular, their attribution to human influence, has strengthened since the Fifth Assessment Report, (AR5) [which was published in 2016]."[6] The US Environmental Protection Agency states that "since 1901, the average surface temperature across the contiguous 48 states has risen at an average rate of 0.16°F per decade (see Figure 1). Average temperatures have risen more quickly since the late 1970s (0.31 to 0.54°F per decade since 1979). Eight of the top 10 warmest years on record for the contiguous 48 states have occurred since 1998, and 2012 and 2016 were the two warmest years on record." [7]

This much is certain. Where the uncertainty lies, however, generally concerns the degree of impact that we can have as individuals. There are many instances where the negative environmental impact of our actions is hard to quantify or understand. It's often unclear how much small personal actions positively or negatively affect the environment. Does shutting the water off while I brush my teeth matter? Will carpooling to work really affect air quality? Do our personal choices make any significant impact on building a sustainable environment, or is the onus on the government policymakers and the corporate industries that contribute most to climate change? These kinds of doubts and uncertainties can prevent people from making changes that could positively affect the environment.

The message of the asham talui offering is that atonement must be sought even in the absence of certainty. Thus, as Sforino says, we should avoid behaviors that might bring us into guilt. Even if making a small change in our lifestyle seems anticlimactic, taking personal responsibility for the climate—alongside advocating for policy change—is the only way forward. Our personal behavior regarding

climate change matters, and when we change our actions to be more environmentally sustainable, we deepen our commitment and responsibility to the earth.

The Torah underlies a contemporary moral guiding value, the precautionary principle. It implies that we must do our best to be environmentally sustainable at the individual level at a time when Hashem's planet is most definitely at risk. Even if it is unclear to what degree our personal choices make a difference, the stakes are too high for us to be lenient. We can make changes that help mitigate the results of climate change. It is our responsibility to make them.

[1] The authors would like to acknowledge Sareet Benayahu and Shimshon Stuart Siegel for their involvement in editing this piece [2] Rashi (France, 2nd century) Vayikra 5:17 [3] Sforno, Vayikra 5:17 [4] Inventory of U.S. Greenhouse Gas Emissions and Sinks: 1990-2021

[5] <https://climate.nasa.gov/scientific-consensus/> [6] Headline Statements of Summary for Policy Makers, AR6, 2021 [7] The United States Environmental Protection Agency

[PURIM SPECIAL: How did the Greeks view Esther...You might be surprised!](https://schechter.edu/purim-special-how-did-the-greeks-view-esther-you-might-be-surprised/)

[By Dr. Etka Liebowitz](https://schechter.edu/purim-special-how-did-the-greeks-view-esther-you-might-be-surprised/)

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In light of the upcoming festival of Purim, I would like to compare the Hebrew Book of Esther with the lesser known Septuagint or Greek version in order to gain insights into the character of Esther.

Some background on these two texts. Scholars have defined the Book of Esther as a historical novel and the date of its composition ranges from the late 4th century to the 3rd century BCE. The Greek book of Esther is dated to about 200 years later and offers a retelling of the events included in the Hebrew Esther. Most important, it contains six Additions which do not appear in the Hebrew version, including the mention of God's name over 50 times! These additions contain various episodes, and most significant for our purposes, they add the prayers of Mordecai and Esther (known as Addition C). This Addition describes Esther as an exceedingly pious Jew even though she is married to a non-Jew! It expresses her loathing of sharing the King's bed since he is a non-Jew: "I abhor the bed of the uncircumcised one" (C:26); and her abstinence from non-kosher food and wine: "And your slave has not eaten at Haman's table, and I have not honored the king's banquet nor drunk the wine of libations" (C:28).

Now let us delve into the most well-known aspect of Esther's appeal, her beauty, which facilitates her ascent to the throne.

When Esther first appears upon the scene, the Hebrew text stresses that "the maiden was shapely and beautiful" and the Greek states that "the girl was

beautiful in appearance.” These descriptions of Esther’s beauty have served to discount her other qualities.

For example, the scholar Lewis Paton asserts that Esther “wins her victories not by skill or by character but by her beauty.” Paton’s commentary, published in 1908, was influenced by a patriarchal view of women, and attributes Esther’s victory solely to her physical beauty and not her brains. This assumption is disproved by the continuation of the story.

Following Mordecai’s admonishment that: “Do not imagine that you, of all the Jews, will escape with your life by being in the king’s palace. On the contrary, if you keep silent in this crisis, relief and deliverance will come from another place...,” Esther is then transformed into an active protagonist with her own ideas of how to save her people. Esther weaves a complex plot to cause the downfall of Haman. First, she causes Haman to be confident that he is in favor with her; then she arouses the king’s wrath by approaching the king, announcing that she and her people are in peril of death, and naming Haman as the culprit.

Indeed, Esther’s courage is emphasized in both the Hebrew and Greek Esther, which state that Esther will approach the king even if this entails her death.

Following the deliverance of the Jewish people, Esther acquires more authority in both the Hebrew and Greek texts – she appoints Mordecai over Haman’s house and she sends a letter ordering the Jews to observe the festival of Purim.

To conclude, Esther is no mere beauty queen.

The Hebrew version portrays her as a brave Jewish leader albeit not overly concerned with religious practice. The Greek text adds her piousness. In fact, Esther’s success is achieved by a combination of charm, courage, rhetoric, strategy and taking on the reins of authority. Unfortunately, many scholars concentrate upon Esther’s “charm” while ignoring her other attributes.

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Yahrtzeit

Karen Brandis remembers her father Stanley Grossel on Sunday March 24th.