Kol Rina
An Independent Minyan
Parashat Vayikra
March 21, 2026 *** 3 Nisan, 5786

Vayikrah in a Nutshell
https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/1480/jewish/Vayikra-in-a-Nutshell.htm

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.

Haftarah in a Nutshell: Isaiah 43:21 -44:23

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/649861/jewish/Haftorah-in-a-Nutshell.htm

This week's haftorah starts with a rebuke to the Israelites for abandoning the Temple's sacrificial service. Sacrifices are the dominant topic of the week's Torah reading, too.

The prophet Isaiah rebukes the Israelites for turning away from G-d and refraining from offering sacrifices, turning to idolatry instead. G-d exhorts the people to return to Him, promising to forgive their transgressions, as is His wont.

The prophet then mentions the futility of serving empty idols which may be crafted by artisans but "neither see nor hear nor do they know…" The haftorah concludes with G-d's enjoinder to always remember Him and to return to Him.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Between Destiny and Chance by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks z”l (5773)

https://rabbisacks.org/covenant-conversation/vayikra/between-destiny-and-chance/

The third book of the Torah is known in English as Leviticus, a word deriving from Greek and Latin, meaning, “pertaining to the Levites”. This reflects the fact that in Judaism the priests – all direct descendants of Aaron - were from the tribe of Levi, and that the ancient rabbinic name for the book was Torat Kohanim, “the law of the Priests”. It is an appropriate title. Whereas Shemot and Bamidbar are shot through with narrative, the book between them is largely about sacrifices and the rituals associated, first with the Tabernacle and later

with the Temple in Jerusalem. It is, as the name Torat Kohanim implies, about the priests and their function as guardians of the sacred.

By contrast, the traditional name Vayikra, “And He called”, seems merely accidental. Vayikra just happens to be the first word of the book, and there is no connection between it and the subjects with which it deals. The truth, I will argue here, is otherwise. There is a deep connection between the word Vayikra and the underlying message of the book as a whole.

To understand this, we must note that there is something unusual about the way the word appears in a Sefer Torah in this particular instance. Its last letter, an aleph, is written small - almost as if it barely existed. The standard-size letters spell out the word vayikar, meaning, “he encountered” or “he chanced upon.” Unlike vayikra, which refers to a call, a summons, a meeting by request, vayikar suggests an accidental meeting, a mere happening.

With their sensitivity to nuance, the Sages noted the difference between the call to Moses with which the book begins, and God’s appearance to the pagan prophet Bilaam, which does not use the same form of the word. This is how the Midrash puts it:

> What is the difference between the prophets of Israel and the prophets of the pagan nations of the world? . . . R. Hama ben Hanina said: The Holy One blessed be He reveals Himself to the pagan nations by an incomplete form of address, as it is said, “And the Lord appeared to Bilaam”, whereas to the prophets of Israel He appears in a complete form of address, as it is said, “And He called to Moses.”

Rashi is more explicit:

> All [God's] communications [to Moses], whether they use the words "speak" or "say" or "command" were preceded by a call [keri'ah] which is a term of endearment, used by the angels when they address one another, as it is said, "And one called to the other" [vekara zeh el zeh, Isaiah 6:3). However, to the prophets of the nations of the world, His appearance is described by an expression signifying a casual encounter and uncleanness, as it says, "And the Lord appeared to Bilaam."

The Baal HaTurim goes one stage further, commenting on the small aleph:

> Moses was both great and humble, and wanted only to write Vayikar, signifying "chance", as if the Holy One blessed be He appeared to him only in a dream, as it says of Bilaam [vayikar, without an aleph] - suggesting that God appeared to him by mere chance. However, God told him to write the word with an aleph. Moses then said to Him, because of his extreme humility, that he would only write an aleph that was smaller than the other alephs in the Torah, and he did indeed write it small.

Something of great significance is being hinted at here, but before taking it further, let us turn to the end of the book. Just before the end, in the sedra of Bechukotai, there occurs one of the two most terrifying passages in the Torah. It is known as the tochachah (the rebuke: the other appears in Devarim 28), and it details the terrible fate that will befall the Jewish people if it fails to keep its covenant with God:

> As for the survivors, I will bring such insecurity into their hearts in their enemies' lands that the sound of a windblown leaf will make them run as if they fled the sword; and they will fall, though no one is chasing them. They will stumble over one another as if fleeing the sword, when no one chases them. You will have no power to stand before your enemies. You will perish among the nations; your enemies' lands will devour you. Lev. 26:36-38

Yet despite the shocking nature of the forewarning, the passage ends with a note of consolation:

> I will remember My covenant with Jacob; and My covenant with Isaac and My covenant with Avraham I will also remember, and I will remember the land . . . Yet even then, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not reject them nor despise them and annihilate them, will not break My covenant with them, for I am the Lord their God. Lev. 26:42-44

The keyword of the passage is the word keri. It appears exactly seven times in the tochachah - a sure sign of significance. Here are two of them by way of example:

> If, despite all this, you still do not listen to Me – if still you walk contrary to Me – then I, in My fury, will walk contrary to you. I will punish you seven times more for your sins. Lev. 26:27-28

What does the word keri mean? I have translated it here as "contrary". There are other suggestions. The Targum reads it as "harden yourselves", Rashbam as "refuse", Ibn Ezra as "overconfident", Saadia as "rebellious".

However, Rambam gives it a completely different interpretation, and does so in a halachic context:

> A positive scriptural command prescribes prayer and the sounding of the alarm with trumpets whenever trouble befalls the community. For when Scripture says, "Against the adversary that oppresses you, then you shall sound an alarm with the trumpets" the meaning is: Cry out in prayer and sound an alarm . . . This is one of the paths to repentance, for when the community cries out in prayer and sounds an alarm when threatened by trouble, everyone realises that evil has come on them as a result of their own wrongdoing . . . and that repentance will cause the trouble to be removed.
>
> If, however, the people do not cry out in prayer and do not sound an alarm but merely say that it is the way of the world for such a thing to happen to them, and that their trouble is a matter of pure chance, they have chosen a cruel path which will cause them to continue in their wrongdoing, and thus bring additional troubles on them. For when Scripture says, "If you continue to be keri towards Me, then in My anger I will be keri towards you", it means, "If, when I bring trouble upon you in order to cause you to repent, you say that the trouble is purely accidental, then I will add to your trouble the anger of being-left-to-chance." Mishneh Torah, Taaniyot, 1:1-3

Rambam understands keri to be related to the word mikreh, meaning "chance". The curses, in his interpretation, are not Divine retribution as such. It will not be God who makes Israel suffer, rather it will be other human beings. What will happen is simply that God will withdraw His protection. Israel will have

to face the world alone, without the sheltering presence of God. This, for Rambam, is simple, inescapable measure-for-measure (middah kenegged middah). If Israel believe in Divine Providence, they will be blessed by Divine Providence. If they see history as mere chance - what Joseph Heller, author of Catch-22, called "a trash bag of random coincidences blown open by the wind" - then indeed they will be left to chance. Being a small, vulnerable nation, chance will not be kind to them.

We are now in a position to understand the remarkable proposition linking the beginning of Vayikra to the end - and one of the most profound of all spiritual truths. The difference between mikra and mikreh - between history as God's call and history as one event after another with no underlying purpose or meaning - is, in the Hebrew language, almost imperceptible. The words sound the same. The only difference is that the former has an aleph while the latter does not (the significance of the aleph is obvious: the first letter of the alphabet, the first letter of the Ten Commandments, the "I" of God).

The letter aleph is almost inaudible. Its appearance in a Sefer Torah at the beginning of Vayikra (the "small aleph") is almost invisible. Do not expect - the Torah is intimating - that the presence of God in history will always be as clear and unambiguous as it was during the Exodus from Egypt and the division of the Red Sea. For much of the time it will depend on your own sensitivity. For those who look, it will be visible. For those who listen, it can be heard. But first you have to look and listen. If you choose not to see or hear, then Vayikra will become vayikar. The call will be inaudible. History will seem mere chance.

There is nothing incoherent about such an idea. Those who believe it will have much to justify it. Indeed, says God in the tochachah: if you believe that history is chance, then it will become so. But in truth it is not so. The history of the Jewish people - as even non-Jews such as Pascal, Rousseau, and Tolstoy eloquently stated - testifies to the presence of God in their midst. Only thus could such a small, vulnerable, relatively powerless people survive, and still say today - after the Holocaust - Am Yisrael Chai, the Jewish people lives. And just as Jewish history is not mere chance, so it is no mere coincidence that the first word of the central book of the Torah is Vayikra, "And He called".

To be a Jew is to believe that what happens to us as a people is God's call to us - to become "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation."

Vayikrah: Drawing Near- Korban and the Courage of Closeness by Rabbi Yali Szulanski
https://yeshivatmaharat.org/drawing-near-korban-and-the-courage-of-closeness/

The Book of Vayikra opens with a scene that feels ancient and unfamiliar: an altar, an offering brought forward, a flame catching and rising slowly toward the sky. The rituals described in its opening chapters can feel distant to the modern reader. Animals are brought close, hands are placed upon them, blood is sprinkled, fire transforms what was living into smoke and ash.

At the center of this system stands a single word: korban.

We often translate korban as "sacrifice," a word that suggests loss or renunciation. Yet the Torah's language gestures toward

something more relational. The noun korban and the verb yakriv share the Hebrew root קרב, meaning “to draw near,” “to approach,” or “to come close.”

This linguistic root offers an important window into the Torah’s imagination. The system of offerings begins with proximity. Before the Torah describes sacred times, priestly garments, or the rhythms of Temple life, it introduces a practice centered on the movement toward closeness.

The Torah introduces the practice with the phrase: “Adam ki yakriv mikem korban laHashem…” “When a person brings a korban to God…” (Vayikra 1:2).

The verse speaks quietly, almost simply, yet its language carries depth. The act of bringing an offering is framed as an act of approach, as something is brought near in order to restore relationship.

Ramban (Moshe ben Nachman, Torah commentator, 1194-1270) draws attention to a striking detail within the ritual itself. Before the offering is placed upon the altar, the person bringing it places their hands firmly upon it. The Torah calls this act semikhah—leaning, pressing, transferring weight. The gesture requires contact. The individual does not remain distant from the moment unfolding before them. They step forward and physically connect with what is being offered.

Ramban further explains that this moment is meant to awaken the heart. As the person leans into the offering, they encounter their own vulnerability and dependence. The ritual becomes an invitation to reflection and humility. In that moment of contact, the individual recognizes their responsibility for their actions and their relationship with the Divine.

Closeness, the Torah suggests, asks something of us: It requires approach, it requires presence.

The opening chapters of Vayikra return repeatedly to another theme as well: shegagah, unintentional harm: “Nefesh ki techeta bishgagah…” “When a person sins unintentionally…” (Vayikra 4:2).

The Torah’s assumption is deeply human. Much of the distance that arises in life grows from misunderstanding, haste, or incomplete awareness. People wound one another even when they do not intend to. Words travel further than expected. Actions carry consequences that only become visible after the moment has passed.

Vayikra treats these moments with seriousness and care. When distance has opened, the Torah introduces a process that draws the individual back toward alignment.

> Bring something forward.
> Place your hands upon it.
> Draw near again.

The Sforno (Ovadiah ben Yaakov Sforno, Torah commentator, 1475–1550) explains that the korban restores alignment between the human being and God. The ritual reorients the heart. Something is relinquished, and through that relinquishment a path toward relationship reopens.

These teachings feel particularly resonant in uncertain times. When anxiety circulates through communities—carried in headlines, in overheard conversations, in the quiet tension adults carry in their bodies—the instinct is often to contract, to protect, to wait for clarity before stepping forward.

Vayikra offers a different movement: draw near anyway.

This call to proximity has particular resonance for women who have pursued Torah leadership. To step forward into a role that has not always been held open—to bring one’s full self close

to the tradition, to the text, to the community—is itself an act of korban in the deepest sense. It requires the courage of approach. It asks the one who draws near to place her hands firmly upon what she is offering, to lean into it with steadiness, trusting that the gesture itself carries holiness.

In every community there are people who quietly tend the fragile spaces between others. The parent who listens patiently as a child tries to make sense of something frightening. The educator who holds a classroom steady while difficult questions circulate. The friend who remains in conversation across differences and asks one more thoughtful question. These gestures often unfold without recognition, yet they sustain the relational fabric that allows communities to endure pressure without fracturing.

There are inward movements as well. A pause before responding to a message that lands sharply. A moment of reflection before speaking in frustration. The humility to acknowledge when one has misunderstood another's words. Each of these small acts carries the spirit of korban—an offering made in the service of closeness.

Vayikra begins its exploration of holiness with a simple and demanding insight: sacred life grows from proximity. Communities remain resilient when people commit themselves to the steady work of remaining connected even when circumstances feel uncertain.

Every generation encounters moments that test the strength of its relationships. Some arrive suddenly and visibly. Others unfold slowly, shaping the emotional atmosphere of daily life. Through each of these seasons, the Torah's opening gesture remains steady: draw near.

Vayikra begins with movement—a body crossing the

threshold, hands pressing forward, something relinquished in the service of closeness. That gesture has never belonged to one kind of person alone. It belongs to anyone with the courage to approach.

May we draw near to one another, to the tradition, and to the holy work of building communities where more people can step fully forward. *(R' Yali Szulanski is the Youth and Family Engagement Rabbi at the Hebrew Institute of Riverdale and continues her work educating and tending to emotional wellness at SAR Academy and beyond.)*

Vayikra: The Power of Embodies Jewish Practice by Rabbi Raffi Levi

https://truah.org/resources/vayikra-raffi-levi-moral-torah-2026/

In Parshat Vayikra, we step into the world of sacrificial offerings in immense detail. With simultaneous relevance and irrelevance, I think about how important it is to bring these practices back to life in some way, shape, or form in our contemporary Jewish lives. Attending a shechita (the ritual slaughter of animals according to the laws of kashrut) and witnessing the death of animals is a practice that reminds us of the sentience of the creatures we choose to consume. It allows us to more fully consider how these offerings of death bring us life and sustenance. This awareness helps us to better value life, even of animals who have been taken to the slaughter. In the words of Rabbi Yitz Greenberg shlit"a (may he live for good and long days), "In every food preparation, in every meal… the kosher practitioner proclaims commitment to the supremacy of life."

Bearing witness to, and taking part in such practices allows us

to more fully embody the ethics of Jewish life, and in a way, returns us to an era where the killing of animals more regularly created the space to uphold their kavod (dignity).

Cultivating an emphasis on embodied Jewish practice, for me, has been a building block not only for developing a more sensitive kashrut ethic, but also a deeper spiritual experience, and a more maximalist approach to Jewish life. Allowing Judaism to seep into my embodied practices, through play, creativity, and general kinetic activity, has functioned for me as the essence of what it means to live Jewishly.

Importantly, when Judaism is an embodied practice, both a halacha (law) and a halicha (way of walking), it leaves less room for holding the cognitive dissonance that separates one's system of ethics from their Judaism. While embodied practices allow for Judaism to inform our ethics, it also requires the reverse to be the case. Our ethics must inform our practice of Judaism. If the two are not integrated but are instead felt as separate worlds, Judaism becomes a stifled archaicism, and no longer sits in the body. It becomes steadily held in the mind, and prevents us from letting our sacred teachings be felt.

The korbanot (ritual offerings or sacrifices) offer us a lens into a totally embodied Jewish practice. There were sights, smells, sounds, and tactile experiences built into this practice. A few modes for contemporarily cultivating an embodied Jewish practice are: spending time in nature to hike and encounter Divine creation with all our senses, the practice of havdalah each week – which incorporates taste, sight, and smell, developing more intentional practices around food, taking a long walk on Shabbat, napping on Shabbat, and developing any rituals that mark Jewishness in other parts of our lives.

This final example includes both restful and active activities, and anything that helps us feel enlivened through multisensory experience.

Finally, embodied practice can also be a pathway for disability justice in Jewish spaces. Emphasizing multi-sensory rituals can be incredibly meaningful for kinetic learners and neurodivergent Jews. The choice to emphasize embodiment also offers a holistic approach that appreciates the whole body, including the mind, since utilizing the mind is, in itself, a sensory experience as well.

As we move through this week's parshah, let's let it move through our whole body. And as we begin to meet the full body's needs, we may continue in the direction of tikkun (repair) for ourselves and the world.*(Rabbi Raffi Levi is a chazzan, day school rebbe, disability activist, creative, and avid hiker based in Nashville, Tenn.)*

Haftarah : The Pauper's Offering by Rabbi Dr. Kenneth Brander

https://ots.org.il/haftarat-parshat-vayikra-rabbi-brander-5786/

The opening chapters of Sefer Vayikra introduce the sacrificial system – the intricate framework through which an individual sought forgiveness and built or restored their relationship with God. At first glance, these rites may seem distant from our contemporary religious lives. Yet embedded in these opening chapters is a subtle spiritual distinction so theologically charged that the Sages treat it as one of the Torah's most powerful statements – one that speaks directly to how we approach God even today.

When the Torah describes the ordinary person who brings an animal offering in chapter 1, it uses the word adam – the standard term for a human being: "When one of you [adam] brings an animal offering to the Lord…" (1:2). But in chapter 2, which addresses grain offerings, the Torah shifts its language. It no longer says adam; it says nefesh – meaning "soul," or "self": "When one [nefesh] brings a grain offering to the Lord…" (2:1).

The Gemara in tractate Menachot (104b) notices this shift, and interprets it in light of the fact that grain offerings tended to be brought by those of limited means, who could not afford an animal sacrifice. In the Gemara's reading, when one with so little to give makes the effort to bring even the most modest of offerings, God regards it as though he has offered his very soul [nefesh].

This point is made even more forcefully in Vayikra Rabba (3:1), which asserts that the grain offering of a poor man is more precious to God than the most elaborate incense brought on behalf of the entire community. What makes it so is not its monetary worth but the purity of intention it represents – the willingness to give all of oneself even in times of great duress and want.

This contrast between adam and nefesh – between outward ritual practice and genuine self-offering – is precisely what this week's haftara addresses on a national scale. Drawn from Yeshayahu chapters 43 and 44, it confronts the Jewish people at a moment of spiritual deprivation. Like the adam of chapter 1, they are present in form but may be absent in substance. Their religious practice has become hollow. God's rebuke is direct and stinging: "It is not Me you call for, Yaakov; Israel, you wearied of Me. You did not bring Me the lamb of your

offering; it was not Me your sacrifice honored" (43:22–23). This is not a people that has stopped sacrificing altogether. It is a people that sacrifices without meaning it – going through the motions of religious life while remaining spiritually detached.

And yet – and this is the pivot at the heart of the haftara – God does not abandon us. The very next verses are not a verdict but an astonishing declaration of grace: "I am I, who expunge your offenses for My own sake and will not keep your sins in mind" (v. 25). The forgiveness is not contingent on the people having earned it. It is offered for the sake of God Himself. The covenant does not wait for the Jewish people to become deserving before it holds.

Yeshayahu names the depth of the problem unflinchingly. "Your first father sinned," he says (v. 27) – a reference some commentators identify with Avraham, who in a moment of uncertainty asked, "My Lord God, how shall I know that I will possess it?" (Genesis 15:8), revealed that even the greatest patriarch was not beyond doubt and faltering. If the founding father himself fell short, how much more so a people in the depths of political and spiritual crisis? Yeshayahu does not look away from this, but he pivots immediately to consolation: "And now listen, Yaakov My servant, Israel whom I chose" (44:1). Even now, the relationship has not lapsed.

This arc – frank acknowledgment of failure, followed by unconditional reaffirmation – is not incidental to the haftara. In truth, it is one reason the whole institution of the haftara exists. When foreign rulers prohibited the public reading of the Torah in synagogues, the Sages instituted the reading of prophetic portions in its place. The haftara was born out of persecution, and it carries that origin in its purpose: to say that even when

access to the sacred is impeded, even when the people have fallen short of what they could be, the relationship endures. The glass is half full – not because the problems are not real, but because the love that holds the Jewish people close to God is greater than their failures.

That message has not aged. We live in a period of genuine difficulty – conflict, communal fracture, searching questions about the kind of society we are building in the land to which we have returned. There are moments when the mirror Yeshayahu holds up to ancient Israel feels uncomfortably familiar. We are not always bringing the nefesh offering; sometimes we bring the adam offering – present in body, absent in soul.

But the haftara refuses to end on that note. The covenant between God and Knesset Yisrael is not transactional. It does not expire when we fall short. It holds – not because of what we have achieved, but because of who He is, and who we have always been to each other. That is the promise Yeshayahu asks us to carry out of shul and into the week ahead. *(Rabbi Dr. Kenneth Brander is President and Rosh HaYeshiva of Ohr Torah Stone)*

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Yahrtzeits

Mel Zwillenberg remembers his wife Susan Zwillenberg on Tues Mar 24

Shari Mevorah remembers her brother Joel Leigh Kirsten on Wed Mar 25