

THE TORAH OF THE KOHANIM

by Shlomo Katz

Parshas Vayikra

The Torah of the Kohanim

R' Yitzchak Abarbanel z"l (1437-1508; Portugal, Spain and Italy) introduces the Book of Vayikra as follows: The first book of the Torah of Elokim writes about the creation of the world; the branching out of the early generations; and the affairs of the holy Patriarchs, until Yaakov descended to Egypt. The second book tells how the Egyptians mistreated our ancestors; how Hashem redeemed them through His agents Moshe and Aharon; the miracles that He did in Egypt, at the Sea, and in the desert, until they arrived at Har Sinai, where they all attained the level of prophets and received the Torah and mitzvot from the Mouth of the All-Powerful One; how they sinned with the Golden Calf and then were forgiven; and how they made the Mishkan so that the Divine Shechinah and Hashem's Hashgachah / Providence would rest on them, as they saw on the day when the Mishkan was assembled (at the end of last week's parashah), "The cloud covered the Ohel Mo'ed, and the glory of Hashem filled the Mishkan."

After these, this third book explains the service in the Mikdash; how the Kohanim will serve their Elokim and atone for Bnei Yisrael's sins; how the Kohanim will toil to study and know the Torah of Hashem--its decrees, commandments, and ordinances--to direct the nation on a straight path and to teach them the way in which they should go, as is written (Malachi 2:7), "For the lips of a Kohen shall safeguard knowledge, and they [the Jewish People] shall seek Torah from his mouth, for he is an agent of Hashem, Master of Legions." (Peirush Al Ha'Torah: Hakdamah L'Vayikra)

"He called to Moshe . . ." (1:1)

Rashi z"l writes: This implies that the Voice was heard by Moshe, and by no one else.

R' Moshe Sofer z"l (1762-1839; the Chatam Sofer; rabbi and rosh yeshiva in Pressburg, Hungary) writes: This suggests an answer to a question asked by Ramban z"l. We will read in two weeks that Aharon's sons Nadav and Avihu entered the Mishkan on their own initiative and were killed by

Hashem. What were they thinking?

The answer, writes Chatam Sofer, is that our parashah is a continuation of the "story" begun in last week's parashah, i.e., Moshe assembled the Mishkan on the first of Nissan (see Shmot 40:2), and then Hashem called to him to enter. Thus, the "calling" to Moshe in our verse took place on the same day that Nadav and Avihu entered the Mishkan uninvited--the first of Nissan. No one but Moshe heard the call; therefore, when Nadav and Avihu saw Moshe enter, they thought that he had entered uninvited, and they reasoned that doing so was permitted. (Torat Moshe)

"Speak to Bnei Yisrael and say to them, 'When a man among you brings an offering to Hashem -- from animals, from the cattle or from the flock shall you bring your offering.'" (1:2)

Among four-legged animals, only the cow, sheep and goat families are fit for sacrificial offerings. Why were these species chosen?

R' Yitzchak Abarbanel z"l (see front page) offers several explanations:

- (1) By their natures, temperaments, and diets, these are the finest of all four-legged animals.
- (2) These are the most widely-available of all animals. [The two preceding explanations are offered by R' Abarbanel in the name of R' Levi ben Gershon z"l (Ralbag; 1288-1344; Provence, France)].
- (3) These three animals allude to the merits of the three Patriarchs. About Avraham we read (Bereishit 18:7-when Avraham "fed" the three angels), "Avraham ran to the cattle, took a calf, tender and good . . ." About Yitzchak we read (Bereishit 22:13), "Avraham went and took the ram and offered it up as an offering instead of his son [Yitzchak]." Finally, about Yaakov we read (Bereishit 27:9), "Go now to the flock and fetch me from there two choice young kids of the goats."
- (4) The Jewish People are compared to these three species in many verses, including: "For Yisrael has strayed like a wayward cow" (Hoshea 4:16); "Yisrael is like scattered sheep" (Yirmiyah 50:17); and "I will put an end to the pride of the mighty / 'azim' [same spelling as 'izim' / goats]" (Yechezkel 7:24). When we offer animals of these three species, Hashem views it as if we have sacrificed ourselves to Him. (Peirush Al Ha'Torah: Hakdamah L'Vayikra)

Elsewhere in the Torah . . .

What does it mean to learn "Torah li'shmah"?

R' Moshe ben Maimon z"l (Rambam / Maimonides; 1135-1204; Spain and Egypt) writes: When a child begins to study Torah, his teacher must promise him sweets as a reward. When he is older, his

teacher promises him a pair of shoes or nice clothes. Still later, his teacher promises him money. After that, the teacher promises that people will appoint him to be a rabbi and will honor him.

All of this, writes Rambam, is not praiseworthy--though it is necessary, due to man's limited intelligence. Such learning is called by our Sages, "Not li'shmah." This means that one is not learning Torah or performing mitzvot as an end in itself, but for a selfish reason. The goal of study should be to know the subject matter. The goal of pursuing truth should be to know what the truth is. The Torah is truth, and the purpose of knowing it is to fulfill it. This also is called, "Serving [Hashem] out of love," in contrast to one who serves Hashem for love of reward or fear of punishment. (Peirush Ha'mishnayot: Hakdamah L'perek Chelek)

R' Shneur Zalman of Liadi z"l (1745-1812; first Lubavitcher Rebbe) writes: "Li'shmah" means, "In order to attach oneself to Hashem." Torah that is learned "not li'shmah" refers to Torah learned for any other purpose, including for the purpose of being a talmid chacham. (Tanya, chapters 5, 39 & 40)

R' Chaim of Volozhin z"l (1749-1821; one of the leading students of the Vilna Gaon) writes: "Li'shmah" does not mean achieving attachment to Hashem, as most people think nowadays. Proof may be found in the midrash which states that King David asked Hashem that reciting Tehilim be considered the equivalent of studying the most difficult tractates of Talmud. If learning Torah li'shmah meant attaching oneself to Hashem, then why was this request necessary? Certainly there is nothing that brings a person closer to Hashem than heartfelt recitation of Tehilim!

Rather, "li'shmah" means, "For the sake of Torah," i.e., to know, to understand, and to increase Torah knowledge through pilpul / give-and-take. Of course, a mitzvah must be performed with a sense of attachment to Hashem and with a holiness of thought, and the same is true for Torah learning. However, during the actual learning, the focus should be on the learning and not on attachment to Hashem. (Nefesh Ha'Chaim IV:2-3)

R' Avraham Yitzchak Hakohen Kook z"l (1865-1935; Ashkenazic Chief Rabbi of Eretz Yisrael) writes: "Li'shmah" means, "For the sake of the Torah." How so? It is Hashem's Will that the wisdom of the Torah be translated from potential to actual. When we study Torah, when we elaborate on a Torah topic and cause the "light" that illuminates us to shine on another soul as well, we are literally making the Torah bigger. That is Hashem's Will. It follows that one who learns because he loves the "light" of Torah is learning li'shmah, for it is Hashem's desire that that light be multiplied. (Orot Ha'Torah 2:1)

Memoirs

R' Yaakov Halevi Lifschutz z"l (1838-1921) was the long-time secretary to R' Yitzchak Elchanan Spektor z"l (1817-1896; rabbi of Kovno), who was one of the leading halachic authorities of the second half of the 19th century as well as a spokesman and lobbyist for Russian Jewry in the

Czar's court. Through his position, R' Lifschutz was a witness to, and a participant in, many important events of that era. His memoirs are entitled "Zichron Yaakov."

[R' Lifschutz begins his memoir by discussing the concept of history. He writes:] The histories of other nations revolve around the development of their states, the stories of their kings, their wars, and their influence on world politics; also, on the activities of their wise men in all areas of wisdom and science.

Jewish history is different from the history of all other nations. Even when the Jewish People lived in their own land under their own rule, the foundation of its existence was its religion and its Torah. When Yisrael went straightforwardly in the way of Hashem and His Torah, they accomplished great things and succeeded. When they turned away from Hashem's path, their power and strength declined wondrously. [A writer] observed in [the Hebrew newspaper] Ha'tzefirah, issue 49, 5644 [1884]:

The Jews suffer their oppressors silently, as if they feel nothing. However, when the oppressor touches their holy delights, then they are disturbed from their restfulness and they become strong like lions. Their lives, their lowly condition, and their lack of political standing are light in their eyes, but the desecration of the Torah they cannot tolerate. . . The greatest tragedy that befell them, the loss of their independence and the end of their status as an independent nation at the hand of the Roman legions, is referred to as the "Destruction of the Bet Hamikdash"--that is what serves as a milestone in their history, whereas the loss of political independence is not mentioned.

The editors hope these brief 'snippets' will engender further study and discussion of Torah topics ('lehagdil Torah u'leha'adirah'), and your letters are appreciated. Web archives at **Torah.org** start with 5758 (1997) and may be retrieved from the [Hamaayan](#) page.

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