

Short Comments on Vayikra and Zakhor with a Little Esther
Rabbi Eliot Malomet March 12, 2022 9 Adar II 5782 Shabbat Zachor

ויקרא א':א' ויקרא אל־מֹשֶׁה וַיְדַבֵּר ה' אֵלָיו מֵאֵהָל מוֹעֵד לֵאמֹר:

Leviticus 1:1 And He **called** to Moses and God spoke to him from the Tent of Meeting, saying...The book of Exodus ended with God's presence coming to rest on the sanctuary. Moses could not enter it. Here God calls Moses from within the sanctuary. The only other time God calls Moses is at Mount Sinai (Exod. 24:16). God revealed the law to Moses there, and God reveals the law to Moses here.

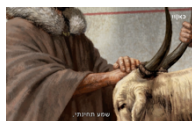
ויקרא א':ב'

(ב) דַּבֵּר אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם אֲדֹם כִּי־יִקְרִיב מִכֶּם קֹרְבָן לַה' מִן־הַבְּהֵמָה מִן־הַבְּקָר וּמִן־הַצֹּאן מִקְרִיבֹו אֶת־קֹרְבָנֵכֶם:

1:2 Speak to the Israelite people, and say to them: When any of you presents a *korban* from domestic animals for God: from the herd or from the flock you may bring your *korban*. We are used to translating the term *korban* as sacrifice. The root of the word *korban* is קרב-which means *near*.¹ A *korban* is an act expressing the desire to **come near** to God. The act involves the presentation of a gift. In a world where people live around domesticated animals, presenting an animal to God is simply an act of reciprocity: I am bestowing to You, what You have bestowed to me. The gift represents the desire to create a bond between the giver and the Receiver. But the giver always harbors the fear of rejection. That's what happened with the very first gift in the Torah. Cain made a gift to God and God did not pay attention to it. Cain's gift was **rejected** and that rejection had catastrophic results. Thus, the giver is someone who is approaching a dangerous boundary: acceptance and rejection. The intricate details surrounding the presentation of *korbanot*, the elaborate ritual, is a way of structuring the experience and controlling a set of circumstances that have the potential to be catastrophic. The rituals involved in presenting a *korban* to God, shields the individual from the danger of coming close to God and insulates the individual from the potential trauma of being rejected.²

¹ See other examples on the other side of the sheet.

² The illustrations are screenshots from the movie



א':ד' וְסָמַד יָדוֹ עַל רֹאשׁ הָעֹלָה וַנְרָצָה לוֹ לְכַפֵּר עָלָיו:

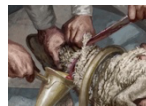
1:4 You **shall lay a hand** upon the head of the burnt offering, that it may be acceptable in your behalf, in expiation for you. There are many different theories as to why the individual *lays a hand* on the head of the animal. It is an act of designation. It means, *this animal is mine*.

א':ה' וְשָׂתַט אֶת־כַּף הַבָּקָר לִפְנֵי ה'

1:5 The bull shall be slaughtered before ה'; In these

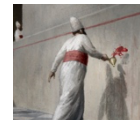


illustrations the kohanim restrain a lamb (not a bull) a special vessel catches the blood of the animal.



וְהַקְרִיבוּ בְנֵי אַהֲרֹן הַכֹּהֲנִים אֶת־הַדָּם וְנָרְלוּ אֶת־הַדָּם עַל־הַמִּזְבֵּחַ כְּסִיב אֲשֶׁר־פָּתַח אֵהָל מוֹעֵד:

and Aaron's sons, the priests, shall offer the blood, **dashing the blood** against all sides of the altar which is at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting.



א':ו' וְהַפְשִׁיט אֶת־הָעֹלָה

1:6 The olah shall be flayed

וַנִּתַּח אֹתָהּ לְנִתְחֶיהָ: and cut up into sections.



א':ז' וַנִּתְּנוּ בְנֵי אַהֲרֹן הַכֹּהֲנִים אֵשׁ עַל־הַמִּזְבֵּחַ וְעָרְכוּ עֲצִים עַל־הָאֵשׁ:

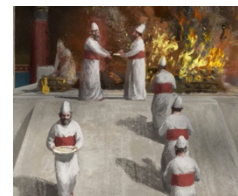
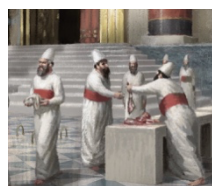
1:7 The sons of Aaron the priest shall put fire on the altar and lay out wood upon the fire;



וְעָרְכוּ בְנֵי אַהֲרֹן הַכֹּהֲנִים אֵת הַנִּתְחִים אֶת־הָרֹאשׁ וְאֶת־הַפָּדָר עַל־הָעֲצִים אֲשֶׁר עַל־הָאֵשׁ וְאֶת־הַשֶּׁמֶן עַל־הָאֵשׁ וְאֶת־הַזֶּמֶן עַל־הָאֵשׁ:

The Sons of Aharon, the priests, are to arrange the sections, the head and the suet, on the wood that

is on the fire, that is on the altar...



Aggadat Hurban. They depict the Temple rituals of the daily *korban*.

The rituals of *korbanot* are very challenging for us. But we cannot underestimate the power of these rituals in biblical Israel, specifically in the era of the two Temples. Encoded in the *korbanot* are a series of themes. For example, we can see the ritual as an imitation of creation: like the primordial universe, at first the animal is whole. To create, God 'divides' the universe into realms - here the animal is sectioned. From the different realms the universe becomes a new whole by divine instruction - here the sectioned animal becomes a new whole when placed in the fire on the altar. From the whole of chaos a new ordered reality emerges. The ritual is a drama of Life and Death. In witnessing the act of slaughter, the worshiper stands at the boundary of life and death and apprehends, in a way that cannot be readily expressed, a confrontation with mortality. The ritual is an attempt to contain the ever present potential of violence. By channeling violence, through ritual slaughter of the animal, to the realm of the sacred, the act of *korban* attempts to contain and redirect human violent impulses to a sacrificial victim rather than to other humans. It is not difficult to imagine that the ritual of the *korban* was somewhat of a spectacle. With fire, smoke, blood, priests in holy attire, special vessels, braying of animals, silence and song, and myriads of other stimuli, not to mention the constant awareness that in performing the act there is the risk of danger, there is no question how captivating this would have been to the kohanim who officiated at this, let alone to the individual worshipers who wanted to partake of it. We may be squeamish about the blood and butchery. But the fact that these rituals persisted for hundreds of years, tells you how powerful they were. Add to that, the world-view that survival depended on the proper performance of these rituals, and it is overwhelming.

Verses on Nearness to God - קרב לקרב קרבה

ישעיהו נ"ח:ב' ואותי נום יום ידרשו ונדעת דרכי יתפצו כגוי אשר צדקה עשה ומשפט אלקיו לא עזב ישאלוני משפט צדק קרבת אלקים יתפצו:

Isaiah 58:2 *To be sure, they seek Me daily, Eager to learn My ways. Like a nation that does what is right, That has not abandoned the laws of its God, They ask Me for the right way, They are eager for the nearness of God:*

תהילים ע"ג:כ"ח ואני | קרבת אלקים לייטוב שתי | באדו' ה' מחסי לספר כל-מלאכותיך:

Psalms 73:28 *As for me, nearness to God is good; I have made the Lord GOD my refuge, that I may recount all Your works.*

תהילים קמ"ה:י"ח קרוב ה' לכל-קראיו לכל אשר יקראהו באמת:

Psalms 145:18 *The LORD is near to all who call Him, to all who call Him in truth.* These three verses express the intense desire of being close to God and they emerge from this highly ritualized world where being near involved the presentation of *korbanot*. We are most familiar with the third verse, from Ashrei. If bringing a *korban* brings us to the boundary of acceptance and rejection, chaos and order, life and death, violence and the sacred, coming close to God brings us to another boundary: sincerity and falsehood. The greatest spiritual challenge in coming close to God is knowing who you and recognizing that God sees through all your falsity and pretentiousness. Which brings us to this verse from the Haftarah for Shabbat Zachor:

ויאמר שמואל לה המפיץ לה בעלות וזבחים כשמע בקול ה הנה שמע מנזבה טוב להקשיב מתלב אילים:

But Samuel said: "Does the LORD desire in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in listening to the LORD's command? Surely, listening is better than sacrifice, compliance than the fat of rams. In the story of our Haftara, Saul has been directed to render justice to Israel's arch enemy, Amalek, the ultimate symbol of radical evil. When told to spare nothing, Saul instead spares their king, Agag, the ancestor of Haman, in addition to all of their livestock, thinking that they would make a very large set of *korbanot* for God. Samuel conveys God's rejection to Saul. God has no ה-פץ-desire for this. (This is the same word that Isaiah uses to convey human desire for God). This rejection, while not located in the ritual setting, signals the catastrophic end of the reign of Saul. The story is a powerful indictment of compassion to those who perform evil.

אסתר ג:ב וכל-עבדי המלך אשר-בשער המלך פרעים ומשמחיים להמן כייבן צנה-לו המלך ומרדכי לא יכרע ולא ישמתחה:

All the king's courtiers in the palace gate knelt and bowed low to Haman, for such was the king's order concerning him; but Mordecai would not kneel or bow low. What does it take to resist the pressure of those around you? In rejecting Haman, Mordecai is upholding this crucial Jewish idea: freedom requires risk in the defiance of tyranny.