



## Wembley Synagogue

ויקרא

### Insights from the commentators into the Sedra of Vayikra

ויקרא אֶל מֹשֶׁה - And He called to Moshe (1:1) Why is the word "Vayikra" written with a small *aleph*? The word "vayikar" ("vayikra" without an *alef*) means "casually calling." The word "Vayikra" (vayikra with an *alef*) means "to call with love." Moshe is the greatest prophet of the Jewish people. Though we are told "Never again has there arisen in Israel a prophet like Moshe" (*Devarim* 34:10), the gentiles were able to boast of having someone as great in prophecy, Bilaam (*Sifri*, *ibid.*) The *verse* about Hashem speaking to Bilaam reads, ויקר אֱלֹהִים אֶל בִּלְעָם - Vayikar Elokim el Bilaam - And G-d met Bilaam (vayikar is an expression of "by chance" (see *Rashi Bamidbar* 23:4). The *alef* of "vayikra" is omitted in order to illustrate that Hashem did not enjoy speaking to Bilaam and therefore called him in an off-hand way. Being the most humble person who ever lived (*Bamidbar* 12:3), Moshe wanted to write "Vayikar." However, because of His great love for Moshe, Hashem insisted that he write "Vayikra" with an *alef*. Moshe and Hashem compromised and "Vayikra" was written with a small *alef*. (Source: Ba'al Haturim)

ויקרא אֶל מֹשֶׁה - Hashem spoke to him from the *Ohel Moed* (Tent of Meeting) saying (1:1). The *Midrash* (*Sifra* 2:13) quoted by *Rashi* explains the word ויקרא (literally: "to say") to mean that Hashem instructed Moshe to present the laws of the offerings to the Jews. Moshe is then to return and notify Him if the Jews willingly accepted those laws. This instruction is not found regarding any other set of laws in the Torah. What is so unique about the laws of offerings that Hashem wished to know if they were willingly accepted?

The *Gemara* explains that at the time of the giving of the Torah at Mount Sinai the Jews were coerced into accepting observance of the laws of the Torah. The *Gemara* states that a *Korban* must be brought willingly, without coercion, in order for it to be valid. This answers our question. Hashem wanted that not only should each specific offering be brought willingly, but even the concept of bringing offerings should be accepted willingly by the Jews. Since the Torah as a whole had been pressed upon the Jews, Hashem instructed Moshe to specifically investigate if the laws of the offerings were acceptable to them. There is an additional law regarding offerings. If there is any doubt as to one's consent, then he must orally express his willingness to bring the offering (*ibid.*). For this reason, Moshe was told to actually hear the words of consent from the Jews. (Source: *Imrei Shefer* quoted in *Shabbos Delights*)

מִן הַבְּהֵמָה - From the animals (1:2)

The *verse* tells us that the offering must be brought from the animals, which implies that there is a specific animal or set of animals that can be used as an offering, to the exclusion of all others. This is indeed the case. Animals with physical blemishes or animals used in the worship of false deities are but some of the animals that may not be brought upon the altar as offerings.

While *Bnei Yisrael* were travelling in the desert, when the entire nation was in close proximity to the altar, the only permissible way to eat the meat of an animal acceptable as a *korban* (sacrifice) was to first offer it upon the altar as an offering. Only then could the owner eat the parts of the animal that the Torah grants him as his share. To slaughter such an animal simply to eat its meat - without using it as an offering- was not permitted. Only upon their arrival into Eretz Yisrael, when distance from the Temple limited people's ability to bring offerings, did the Torah permit slaughter for the purpose of consumption. The numerical value of הַבְּהֵמָה -the animal - with the definite article ה equals 57. This is equal to the value of מִזְבֵּחַ - mizbe'ach - (altar) for it is only these select animals that can be brought to Hashem as offerings upon the altar. (Source: *Kol Dodi*)

וְכָל קָרְבַּן מִנְחֹתֶיךָ בְּמַלַּח תִּמְלַח ..... - And every meal-offering you shall season with salt, and you may not discontinue the salt of the covenant of your G-d upon your meal-offering. On all your sacrifices you shall offer salt. (2:13)

Why were all the sacrifices salted? Here are a few ideas brought by the commentators: The *Sefer Hachinuch* writes that salt has the quality of preserving food and preventing spoilage and rot. So too with the act of the offering, a man is saved from becoming spoiled; his spirit will be protected and it will remain in existence forever. (Source: *Sefer Hachinuch* quoted in *The Parsha Anthology*)

The world is divided into three parts: inhabited land, deserts, and waters (see *Pesachim* 94a, *Tosafot*). The *Beit Hamikdash* was built on inhabited land. The Torah was given in the desert. The waters entreated that they, too, be given some connection with holiness. To placate water, Hashem commanded that salt (which is a salt-water derivative) be placed on all sacrifices, and that water be poured on the altar during *Sukkot*. (Source: Vedibarta Bam)

There is a custom to dip the piece of bread over which one recites Hamotzi into salt. The basis for this practice is the verse that instructs us that all our sacrifices are to be accompanied with salt. Since the table at which we eat is considered to be in place of the altar, it is fitting that we use salt. The Chatam Sofer would refrain from doing so on Friday nights since sacrifices were not offered then. (Source: Ma'ayna Shel Torah)

Salt brings out the taste of the food itself. The Torah teaches us that we must make our service of Hashem similar to this characteristic of salt. Rather than looking for external means to express our service to Hashem, we must use our own unique qualities to serve Him. Although these qualities may often seem to be lying dormant, it is our duty to "salt" them and bring out their full potential. (Source: Pirkei Torah)

עֹלֵת - a peace offering (3:1) Rashi teaches us that this offering is called a peace offering because it provides a portion of the animal for everyone – the altar, the Kohen and the owner – thereby generating peace. Rabbi David Feinstein says that as long as the lesson of this sacrifice is understood, the Divine Presence can have a home amongst the Children of Israel. In the absence of peace, however, if there is baseless hatred and conflict among the people, then the Divine Presence is removed from our midst. This was the case at the time of the destruction of the second Temple, when strife and conflict had such dire results.

The numerical value of עֹלֵת is 420, which is the number of years that the second Temple stood. When this lesson was forgotten, the Temple with all its glory was taken from us.

### The message of Korbanot (sacrifices)

Rambam writes in *Hilchot Me'ilah* 8:8 that *Mishpatim* are mitzvot whose reasons are obvious and the practical benefits of which are well known; examples include robbery and murder and the commandment to honour one's father and mother. *Chukim* are mitzvot whose reasons are not known such as the laws regarding milk and meat and the *Parah Aduma*- the Red Heifer.

Various reasons are given by the commentators for the *Korbanot* – (the sacrifices) but with all that is written, it is still difficult for us to understand why the slaughter of a sanctified animal, the placing of its blood and the burning of its flesh upon the altar, should bring Hashem's presence down to earth. It is impossible to fathom out the ramifications of each particular service, be it an animal offering, meal-offering, wine libation or any other aspect of the Temple sacrificial service. The Ritva writes that the reason for sacrifices is so profound that, in its entirety, it is beyond human comprehension and the best efforts of our greatest thinkers are only a drop in the ocean of Hashem's intent. Therefore the Rambam places *korbanot* – sacrifices – in the category of *chukim* – commandments whose reasons are not known to us.

The *korbanot* part of the Shacharit (morning) service takes the place of the actual offerings as we say when reciting the order of the *korbanot*: "...may it be Your will, Hashem, our G-d, and the G-d of our forefathers, that the prayers of our lips be worthy, favourable and acceptable before You, as if we had brought the *tamid* offering..."

Rabbi Segal ZTL says that when a Jew utters these words he is in effect saying the following: "I know that in this world there are *chukim*- which I do not understand, but I accept them nevertheless for they are an expression of Your will. The Rav suggests that we should carry this message throughout each day; and then, we will have the fortitude to weather whatever trials the day may bring. (Source: Inspiration and Insight - Rabbi Yehudah Zeev Segal ZTL)

## Shabbat Shalom!



**Shabbat starts 6.04pm**



**Shabbat ends: 7.07pm**

The *Insights into the Sedra* sheet is edited by Chazan Anthony Wolfson

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