



ICJW Bea Zucker Online Bible Study Program

“The Five Books of Moses: Contemporary Issues and Classic Perspectives”

By Dr. Bonna Devora Haberman

24 VaYiqra — Sacrificial Meal

ויקרא ב

א וּנְפֹשׁ כִּי-תִקְרִיב קָרְבָן מִנְחָה לַיהוָה סִ לֵת יִהְיֶה קָרְבָנוּ וַיִּצַק עָלֶיהָ שֶׁמֶן וַנִּתֵּן עָלֶיהָ לֶב־נָה. ב וְהִבִּיאָה אֶל-בְּנֵי אַהֲרֹן הַכֹּהֲנִים וְקִמֵץ מִשֶּׁם מִלֵּא קִמְצוּ מִסֻּלְתָהּ וּמִשְׁמֶנָה עַל כָּל-לֶב־נָתַה וְהִקְטִיר הַכֹּהֵן אֶת-אֲזִכָּרְתָהּ הַמִּזְבֵּחַ אֲשֶׁר רִיחַ נִיחֹחַ לַיהוָה. ג וְהִנּוֹתַרְתְּ מִן-הַמִּנְחָה לְאַהֲרֹן וּלְבָנָיו קִדְשִׁים מֵאֲשֵׁי יְהוָה. ד וְכִי תִקְרַב קָרְבָן מִנְחָה מֵאִפָּה תִנּוֹר סִ לֵת חֲלוֹת מִצֹּת בְּלוֹלֹת בְּשֶׁמֶן וּרְקִיקֵי מִצּוֹת מִשְׁחִים בְּשֶׁמֶן. ה וְאִם-מִנְחָה עַל-הַמִּחְבֵּת קָרְבָנְךָ סִ לֵת בְּלוּלָה בְּשֶׁמֶן מִצָּה תִהְיֶה. ו פְּתוֹת אֶתָּה פְּתִים וַיִּצַקְתָּ עָלֶיהָ שֶׁמֶן מִנְחָה הוּא. {ס} ז וְאִם-מִנְחַת מִרְחֶשֶׁת קָרְבָנְךָ סִ לֵת בְּשֶׁמֶן תַּעֲשֶׂה. ח וְהִבֵּאתְ אֶת-הַמִּנְחָה אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה מֵאֲלֵה לַיהוָה וְהִקְרִיבָהּ אֶל-הַכֹּהֵן וְהִגִּישָׁהּ אֶל-הַמִּזְבֵּחַ. ט וְהָרִים הַכֹּהֵן מִן-הַמִּנְחָה אֶת-אֲזִכָּרְתָהּ וְהִקְטִיר הַמִּזְבֵּחַ אֲשֶׁר רִיחַ נִיחֹחַ לַיהוָה. י וְהִנּוֹתַרְתְּ מִן-הַמִּנְחָה לְאַהֲרֹן וּלְבָנָיו קִדְשִׁים מֵאֲשֵׁי יְהוָה. יא כָּל-הַמִּנְחָה אֲשֶׁר תִּקְרִיבוּ לַיהוָה לֵא תַעֲשֶׂה חֶמֶץ כִּי כָל-שֹׂאֵר וְכָל-דְּבַשׁ לֵא-תִקְטִירוּ מִמֶּנּוּ אֲשֶׁר לַיהוָה. יב קָרְבָן רֵאשִׁית תִּקְרִיבוּ אִתָּם לַיהוָה וְאֶל-הַמִּזְבֵּחַ לֵא-יַעֲלוּ לְרִיחַ נִיחֹחַ. יג וְכָל-קָרְבָן מִנְחָתְךָ בְּמִלַח תִּמְלַח וְלֵא תִשְׁבִּית מִלַח בְּרִית אֶל הַיָּךְ מֵעַל מִנְחָתְךָ עַל כָּל-קָרְבָנְךָ תִקְרִיב מִלַח. יד וְאִם-תִּקְרִיב מִנְחַת בְּכוֹרִים לַיהוָה אָבִיב קְלוּי בְּאֵשׁ גֵּרֶשׁ כְּרָמֶל תִּקְרִיב אֶת מִנְחַת בְּכוֹרֶיךָ. טו וַנִּתֵּן עָלֶיהָ שֶׁמֶן וְשִׁמְתָּ עָלֶיהָ לֶב־נָה מִנְחָה הוּא. טז וְהִקְטִיר הַכֹּהֵן אֶת-אֲזִכָּרְתָהּ מִגֵּרֶשֶׁהּ וּמִשְׁמֶנָה עַל כָּל-לֶב־נָתַה אֲשֶׁר לַיהוָה.

Vayiqra 2

1 When a person presents an offering of meal to the Lord, her/his offering shall be of choice flour; s/he shall pour oil upon it, lay frankincense on it, 2 and present it to Aaron's sons, the priests. The priest shall scoop out of it a handful of its choice flour and oil, as well as all of its frankincense; and this token portion he shall turn into smoke on the altar, as an offering by fire, of pleasing odor to the Lord. 3 And the remainder of the meal offering shall be for Aaron and his sons, a most holy portion from the Lord's offerings by fire.

4 When you present an offering of meal baked in the oven, [it shall be of] choice flour: unleavened cakes with oil mixed in, or unleavened wafers spread with oil.

5 If your offering is a meal offering on a griddle, it shall be of choice flour with oil mixed in, unleavened. 6 Break it into bits and pour oil on it; it is a meal offering.

7 If your offering is a meal offering in a pan, it shall be made of choice flour in oil.

8 When you present to the Lord a meal offering that is made in any of these ways, it shall be brought to the priest who shall take it up to the altar. 9 The priest shall remove the token portion from the meal offering and turn it into smoke on the altar as an offering by fire, of pleasing odor to the Lord. 10 And the remainder of the meal offering shall be for Aaron and his sons, a most holy portion from the Lord's offerings by fire.

11 No meal offering that you offer to the Lord shall be made with leaven, for no leaven or honey may be turned into smoke as an offering by fire to the Lord. 12 You may bring them to the Lord as an offering of choice products; but they shall not be offered up on the altar for a pleasing odor. 13 You shall season your every offering of meal with salt; you shall not omit from your meal offering the salt of your covenant with God; with all your offerings you must offer salt.

14 If you bring a meal offering of first fruits to the Lord, you shall bring new ears parched with fire, grits of the fresh grain, as your meal offering of first fruits. 15 You shall add oil to it and lay frankincense on it; it is a meal offering. 16 And the priest shall turn a token portion of it into smoke: some of the grits and oil, with all of the frankincense, as an offering by fire to the Lord.



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Context

The Book of Vayiqra mainly deals with the sacred ritual of the Mishkan, the methods by which the Israelites are to serve the divine. Our parasha sets out the basic sacrificial offerings, *qorbanot*. The first three chapters describe three voluntary sacrifices: the *olah*-burnt/raised offering, *mincha*-grain offering, and *shlamim*-peace/whole offering. Thereafter, varieties of offerings are required in certain situations, according to a person's behavior, the *chatat*-sin and *asham*-guilt offerings that atone for transgressions made by mistake. The parasha concludes with the sin offerings brought for transgressions against people committed knowingly, and for which a person has already reimbursed the person injured by paying costs and damages.

Explorations

Having completed the assembly of the Tabernacle at the end of Exodus, God *calls- Vayiqra* Moshe to prepare for its ritual function. Sacrifice to God is one of the enduring themes in religious culture, and in the Torah. Many of the prescribed rituals draw blood, and take life. Some explanations for sacrifice include the human desire to show gratitude for the gifts of life and sustenance, the sense that we owe the Creator something in return for creating us, and that giving is a circle for us to fulfill—life is not a one-way path of receiving. One of the early scenes in the Torah involves the deep yearning to give and to feel accepted, affirmed.

2 Abel became a keeper of sheep, and Cain became a tiller of the soil. 3 In the course of time, Cain brought an offering to the Lord from the fruit of the soil; 4 and Abel, for his part, brought the choicest of the firstlings of his flock. The Lord paid heed to Abel and his offering, 5 but to Cain and his offering He paid no heed. Cain was much distressed and his face fell. 6 And the Lord said to Cain,

"Why are you distressed,
And why is your face fallen?
7 Surely, if you do right,
There is uplift.
But if you do not do right
Sin couches at the door;
Its urge is toward you,
Yet you can be its master."

8 Cain said to his brother Abel ... and when they were in the field, Cain set upon his brother Abel and killed him. 9 The Lord said to Cain, "Where is your brother Abel?" And he said, "I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?" 10 Then He said, "What have you done? Hark, your brother's blood cries out to Me from the ground! 11 Therefore, you shall be more cursed than the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. 12 If you till the soil, it shall no longer yield its strength to you. You shall become a ceaseless wanderer on earth."
(Bereshit 4).



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This scene indicates the high stakes and mortal danger involved in divine service. The first murder in the Torah happens when the first children quarrel about God's reception of their offerings; Cain kills Abel. Cain had offered vegetarian gifts; Abel had slaughtered his finest animals.

Our parasha begins by describing the process of animal sacrifice, a service that both women and men perform, bringing their gifts to the officiating priests.

Speak to the children of Israel and say to them, ‘A person who brings close an offering to God – from the animals, from the cattle, and from the sheep you should bring close your offerings . . . And the person should place her/his hand on the head of the *olah* (rising up) offering and it will be accepted for her/him to atone on it. And the person should slaughter the calf before God . . .’” (Leviticus 1:2, 4-5)

The sacrifices invoke awareness of our creaturely mortality in relationship to God. We stop just short of offering our whole selves, lay our hands on the animal in identification with it, and displacing onto the animal our willingness to give our own life. The intense connection with death and blood aspire to draw us near to God, offering the most sacred gift, life itself.

Rambam discusses the progression of sacred service in the *Moreh Nevuchim—Guide for the Perplexed*. He clarifies the purpose of the *qorbanot* to channel peoples' idolatrous desires into divine service (3:46). By contrast, Ramban believes that the *qorbanot* have an intrinsic purpose. The fact that they create a delightful aroma indicates God's appreciation for the human offerings. He describes the process of atonement in detail,

Since human acts are comprised of thought, speech, and action, God commands that when an individual transgresses and brings an animal sacrifice:

- s/he should rest his/her hands upon its head—corresponding to the sinful action that requires this expiation
- s/he should confess what s/he did wrong—thereby atoning for the speech that contributed to the transgression
- s/he should recognize that the innards and kidneys being burnt in the altar's fire represent the need for atonement on the part of the seat of all human thought and passion
- the burning of the animal's limbs corresponds to the need for atonement for the hands and feet of the transgressor since these limbs carry out all of his/her activity
- the casting of the sacrifice's blood upon the altar should bring the phrase to mind, ‘his blood will be on his soul.’

A person by either doing or watching all of these actions will come to realize that s/he has transgressed against God with his/her body and his/her soul, and that s/he deserves his/her own blood to be used and his/her body to be burned, had it



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not been for the Compassion of the Creator, who accepts a substitute.

Therefore the sacrifice atones by its blood corresponding to the transgressor's blood, its soul corresponding to the transgressor's soul, its limbs corresponding to the transgressor's limbs, the portions (that are given to the priests) will give life to the teachers of Tora who in turn will pray on his/her behalf. And the daily eternal offerings serve to remind people to avoid sinning continuously. . . . (Ramban on Vayiqra 1:9)

These comments indicate a deep process of coming to accept responsibility and becoming accountable for our behavior. The power of this ritual is compelling, while the instrumental use and killing of animals is troubling; the Torah lays out a system of slaughter and death.

Today, the killing of animals for human consumption is removed from connection to God and awareness of the value of animal life and the anguish of suffering. The meat industry has mechanized the sacredness of Creation into a process of industrial production where life itself is treated as inanimate material. Methodic, cruel, and violent abuse is systemic to domestic animal husbandry. America alone slaughters *9 billion* living animals every year, in numerical terms, 1,500 animal holocausts annually. Buying and consuming meat, people participate in, financially support, and ingest these practices.

Animal *production* is one of the major contributors to the degradation of the planet. In 2006, the UN calculated that the combined climate change emissions of animals bred for their meat were about 18% of the global total – more than cars, planes and all other forms of transport put together; recent scientific analysis finds that livestock and their byproducts actually account for far more climate change than previously calculated.

Our objectification of animals and the damage it causes to life and soul is deeply connected to the objectification of people, particularly women. Butchers segment and label cuts of meat similarly to the way we objectify female anatomy, “breast,” “thigh,” “rump.” Our cultural affiliates masculine potency with meat. Scholars document not only the association of men with meat-eating, but also “macho” resistance to ecologically sound practice (see link below). Exerting violent control over the lives of animals, we express our potential to do the same to humans.

Among the sacrifices discussed in our parasha, the *mincha*-meal offering is unique—it is ground grain; there is no animal, laying of hands, or slaughter. Frankincense and oil make the offering robust and fragrant. The Talmud considers the effectiveness of grain offering,

For what reason is the [introduction to the] *mincha* changed, to say *nefesh*-life?
The Holy One said, “Who is it who usually brings a *mincha*? A poor person. I will [therefore] consider it as though he sacrifices his *nefesh*-life before Me.”
(Menachot 104b)

The sages insist that access to the sacred service is irrespective of wealth. Perhaps with the intention of healing the deadly rivalry between Cain and Abel, the Talmud declares that a simple gift from the earth achieves the same spiritual effect as the offering of life and creates a pleasing aroma to God (VaYiqra 2:2).



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After the destruction of the Temple, the sages annul the sacrifices and institute prayer as an expression of our commitment to and desire for closeness to God without sacrificing life. An ancient midrash states outright:

"All sacrifices will be annulled in the future" (Tanchuma Emor 19, Vayikra Rabbah 9:7)

We traditionally conclude the Amidah, the central standing prayer of Jewish literature with a verse from the prophet Malachi,

Then the grain-offering of Judah and Jerusalem will be pleasing to God as in the days of old, and as in ancient years." (Malachi 3:4)

Zvi Zohar points out that both Rav Abraham Isaac Kook (1865–1935), the first Ashkenazi chief rabbi of the British Mandate for Palestine, and Rabbi Hayim David HaLevi (1924–1998), Sephardi Chief Rabbi of Tel Aviv-Jaffa, independently of one other, interpret this verse to mean that in the future miqdash-sanctuary there will be no animal sacrifices, only mincha-grain offerings. Rav Kook states,

In the coming day, the abundance of insight will spread and penetrate even the living creatures. . .and the way of drawing near [to the divine] will then be with the *mincha*, from the vegetation, "it will be pleasing to God as in the days of old, and as in ancient years." (*Olat Re'iyah*, vol. I, p. 292).

Questions for Discussion

Consider how the *qorbanot* and particularly the *mincha* offering relate to Cain's and Abel's offerings. Though Cain could not have understood what it means to take a life, humanity has accumulated so much experience since that scene. What is missing from the verse when Cain turns to Abel in verse Bereishit 4:8? How would you help resolve the conflict, then, and what does it mean for us today in terms of sacrifice? Eve's voice is absent from the scene in which one child murders another, taking a life she has labored to bring into the world—try to express her perspectives.

How can we better conduct our prayers and our daily tasks in such a way as to experience the awe of life, and gratitude that sacrifice is meant to evoke?

Keep a week-long journal and map the food items you and your family consume. Research the biography of the animals and/or the origin of the produce, and other foods—how do they arrive on your plate? Envision the processes they endured from life through death, from sowing through harvest, and evaluate the costs to our society and environment.

Discuss dietary practices by which you might better nurture yourself and your family/friends to express striving for sacredness, respect and commitment to the people and creatures with whom we share our planet, and closeness to the Creator.



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Study Links

Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach [teaches](#) about the story of Cain and Abel and the desire for reconciliation.

According to Lord Stern, a former chief economist of the World Bank and now I. G. Patel Professor of Economics at the London School of Economics, a leading authority on global warming, “Meat is a wasteful use of water and creates a lot of greenhouse gases. It puts enormous pressure on the world’s resources. A vegetarian diet is better.” Read more about this interview [here](#) and see also “[The Climate Crisis at the End of Your Fork: Taking a Bite out of Climate Change](#).”

Animal rights groups have revealed the inhumane treatment of animals and people in the kosher meat industry. Viewing [this video](#) filmed in the Agriprocessors kosher meat plant in Iowa is subject to consent on account of the brutality of the ritual slaughter procedures. [Fraud committed by the plant manager](#) in relation to the tenure of more than 400 illegal workers (including abuses of under-age workers) led to a prison sentence of 27 years on financial fraud charges.

“Meat, specifically red meat and beef in particular, has long been associated with masculinity in Anglo-America and western Europe.” See Richard A. Rogers essay, “[Beasts, Burgers, and Hummers: Meat and the Crisis of Masculinity in Contemporary Television Advertisements](#)”.

This is a short statement about the [The Eco Kosher Network](#): “promotes responsible consumerism by working to incorporate Jewish teachings about the human responsibility to honor and protect the physical world into daily life decisions and practices. It seeks to align consumer practices with spiritual values order to create a more balanced and sustainable global ecosystem.” The network is working to create a Kashrut certification process that investigates the conditions under which food is produced, including the humane and just treatment of workers, animals, and the environment. .

Carol J. Adams, a feminist theorist, analyzes the structures of abuse in society facilitated by the meat industry—intersections of the violation of animals and women. She maps cuts of meat onto women’s bodies demonstrating our frightening ability to detach from the sanctity of the life of the animals and people. Ultimately, she argues, this alienation fosters domestic and cultural violence and sexist abuse. Read about her ideas [here](#), and view her [slideshow](#).

Barbara Kingsolver's [Animal, Vegetable, Miracle](#) (2007) is the story of a year in which her family ate products grown close to home, and what they learned from the experience. Her book has evoked meaningful conversations about food, holiness, the environment and ethics.

New York Time's, Mark Bittman's latest book, [Food Matters](#), explores “the links among global warming and other environmental challenges, obesity and the so-called lifestyle diseases, and the overproduction and overconsumption of meat, simple carbohydrates, and junk food.”



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Summary of Issues

VaYiqra describes acts that aim to draw us near to the sacred, and pique our awareness of our mortal accountability for our lives and actions. The *offering* of animals as divine service raises challenges about routinized slaughter in our day, and how we can bring our daily lifestyles better in line with our sacred purposes—including our own health and the wellbeing of all of Creation.

Methods & Observations

Though the Torah uses words that sound familiar to us, we understand them in terms of our own beliefs and through the lenses of our culture(s); some concepts in the Torah are foreign to our daily life. The meaning of the *sacred*, of *sacrifice* and *nefesh*-life in the Torah are not self-evident. We will explore them further as we proceed through VaYiqra.

Contact

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