

Friday, March 13, 1992

E WEEK

By **RABBI ZVI YEHUDA**

VAYIKRA is the first word of Leviticus (the third book of Torah) and thus its common name. In context, this verb (from *karo*; to call, summon, recite, proclaim) means that God “called” Moses before “speaking” to him. This prior Divine “calling” seems to serve as a prerequisite stage eliciting Moses’ attention and readiness for his forthcoming prophetic communication with God. According to our sages, however, this dramatic prelude to the ensuing divine revelation serves as God’s distinct expression of love and regard for Moses.

Torah’s instructive revelation is not coercive but solicitous. God first shows affection and esteem to the prophet, then provides him with instruction.

Lesson: Before you appeal to a person’s intellect, you must first “touch” the person’s feelings. First “call” or reach out to your student, showing your care and respect, recognizing the student’s individuality. This is the quintessential sense of *Vayikra*.

Thought of the Week

By RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

VAYIKRA is the Third of Torah's Five Books. Placed in the center of Torah, it assumes a special quality; it primarily deals with the domain of the holy, and mainly addresses the priestly tribe of Levi, prescribing their role in the Temple. Thus it is called "Torat Kohanim" (Priestly Code), Leviticus. The name "vayikra" is the first Hebrew word of the book, telling that God "called" Moses. According to rabbinic tradition, this divine "call" — a prelude to the revelation itself -- is God's expression of love and regard for Moses. Divine revelation emerges in intimate reverence — first showing affection and esteem, then providing instruction. Before you teach a person, "call" him, show him your care and respect; recognize his unique individuality and relate to his special situation.

THOUGHT OF THE WEEK

Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

VAYIKRA

March 21, 1986

VAYIKRA: Before speaking to Moses, God called him, to show him His regard and love. In the handwritten Torah Scrolls, the last Alef of vayikra is small in size, as if squeezed in. This illustrates the difference between vayikra, which implies respect and affection, and vayiker (without an Alef), which indicates irreverence, as if God "occured" to him by chance (Nu. 23:4).

The verb "kara" may convey two different ideas, happening or calling; it depends: If its root is "KRH" (with Hei), it suggests a casual, and sometimes offensive, happening; if "KRA" (with Alef), a purposeful call. A meaningless occurrence is "mikreh" (KRH); an articulate reading, "mikra" (KRA). God called Moses with vayikra; we search for God in Scripture -- mikra.

Thought of the Week

Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

VAYIKRA

March 13, 1992

VAYIKRA is the first word of Leviticus (the Third Book of Torah) and thus its common name. In context, this verb (from *karo*; to call, summon, recite, proclaim) means that God "called" Moses before "speaking" to him. This prior Divine "calling" seems to serve as a prerequisite stage eliciting Moses' attention and readiness to his forthcoming prophetic communication with God. According to our Sages, however, this dramatic prelude to the ensuing divine revelation serves as God's distinct expression of love and regard for Moses.

Torah's revelation emerges with sensitivity and intimacy, by gestures of reverence and cordiality, and not by sudden, compulsive overpowering. Instructive revelation is not coercive but solicitous. God first shows affection and esteem to the prophet, then provides him with instruction.

Lesson: Before you teach a person, appealing to his/her intellect, you must first "touch" the person's feelings. First "call" (reach out to) your student, show your care and respect, recognize his/her unique individuality. This is the quintessential sense of *Vayikra*.

Friday, March 24, 1989 C/

C/

K

By RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

NEDER AND NEDAVAH (Lev. 7:16) are two forms of verbal commitment to the Temple: *neder* is a person's promise; *nedavah* is a consignment of a specific object. "I obligate myself to offer to the Temple" is *neder* -- a general votive vow, whether conditional or outright. "This object is dedicated to the Temple" is *nedavah* -- a freewill dedication of a gift whether inanimate or animate (*Kinnim 1:1*).

What if the donated object was lost, or the animal died, while at the donor's home? In the case of *neder*, a personal commitment, the donor must still fulfill his obligation by providing a substitute. In the case of *nedavah*, a property dedication, the donor's obligation has been fulfilled at the moment of his verbal commitment; then the item has already entered the Temple's domain. It is better to give than to promise.

Rabbi Moshe Garfunkel.

Friday, March 24, 1989

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By RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

NEDER AND NEDAVAH (Lev. 7:16) are two forms of verbal commitment to the Temple: *neder* is a person's promise; *nedavah* is a consignment of a specific object. "I obligate myself to offer to the Temple" is *neder* -- a general votive vow, whether conditional or outright. "This object is dedicated to the Temple" is *nedavah* -- a freewill dedication of a gift whether inanimate or animate (*Kinnim 1:1*).

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Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

RELIGION AS A COMMODITY is ridiculed in Isaiah's satire on idolatry (44:10-20). In vivid caricature the prophet tells how the idolater manufactures and uses his idols. First he picks a suitable piece of wood. "Then half of it he burns in the fire, to prepare on it meat to eat; on it he would roast the meat to his satisfaction. Meanwhile he would also warm himself and say, 'Ah! I am warm! I feel the heat!' Of what remains he makes a god, to be his own graven god; he would worship it, bow before it, pray to it and say, 'Save me! For you are my god!'" (16-17). Amazing how he has no sense to reflect: "Half of the wood I burned in the fire; over its embers I baked bread and roasted meat which I ate. Now, out of the rest shall I make an abominable god? Shall I worship a block of wood?" (19). More than the outward absurdity of paganism, the prophet derides its inner core. Pagan religion is a commodity. Like other household goods, like food or shelter, "gods" too are produced and consumed by human device and demand, responding to mundane needs. Pagan ritual is an alleged "service" for both the deities and their believers. Far from it is the religion of Torah. It is no commodity; nor can it be custom tailored to fit human taste and standards. A divine gift of love, Torah teaches how to seek and comply with the supreme will of God.

—Thought of the Week—

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

“SIN” IS MENTIONED nowhere in Hebrew Scripture of Prayer. **“Het”** – commonly but wrongly translated **“sin”** – really means failure, error; literally, missing the mark. Unlike **“sin”** with its ecclesiastic, mythical and demonic aura, which implies corruption, wickedness and defiance, **“het”** signifies a mistake done unwittingly (**“shogeg”**), without malice or spite. For **“het”** only, but not for willful (**“mezid”**) deviations – called **“avon”** (iniquity) or **“pesha”** (rebellion) – is there ritual atonement. **“Hatat”** (Lev. 4:3) is a **“neglect-offering”** to atone for oversight and evoke human awareness; it is not a **“sin-offering.”** **“Al-het”** (Yom-Kippur prayer) is a confession **“for mistakes”** – not **“for sins”**! Vile and vicious behavior cannot be erased by rite nor dissolved by **“grace,”** but must be confronted, within the social domain, by positive change, reparation and improvement. Torah offers no easy and free absolution.

Friday, March 26, 1993

E WEEK

RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

"KORBAN'" DOES NOT MEAN "SACRIFICE."

The biblical term for an offering to God as a mode of worship, *korban*, stems from the verb *karev*, meaning to bring close, or become close. The *korban*, in Judaism, is a gesture of "giving" offered to God as an expression of devotion and closeness. Judaism, however, insists that God has neither the need nor the desire for gifts. God seeks the integrity of the worshipper's deeds and the purity of the giver's heart. God delights not in the *korban* itself but in the person who offers it, the *makriv*, and in the human devotion and love invested in the gift. By offering a *korban*, the worshipper expresses a quest for nearness to God, and becomes closer to God. Since the destruction of the Second Temple (70 C.E.), we no longer practice the sacrificial ritual within Judaism. The underlying idea of *korban*, however, as a religious experience of giving and becoming closer to God endures.

The *korban* implies, in Torah's perspective, a gift of love offered willingly. A bouquet of flowers offered by a lover to a beloved is no sacrifice. It is, in the true sense of the word, a *korban*, indicating *kirva*, closeness and love.

THOUGHT OF THE WEEK

RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

KORBAN: What is the true meaning of this biblical term? Its widespread translation, "sacrifice," is inaccurate and misleading. The familiar term "sacrifice" literally means "an item made sacred." In context of ancient ritual, the term implies an inevitable, and sometimes forced, self-deprivation, loss or concession. The item becomes "sacred" as it is demanded, claimed or forced out by higher powers, nature, fate, gods or God. The Hebrew *korban*, on the other hand, stems from the noun *karov* (near, close) and the verb *karev*, which means to come or bring near. The word *korban* implies a gift that has been brought near, an offering which expresses a quest for nearness and closeness to God. Thus, the term "gift" or "offering" is more appropriate for the Hebrew word.

In Torah's view, the *korban*, with its enduring symbolism, is a gift of love offered willingly in a quest for closeness to God and Divine intimacy. A bouquet of flowers offered by a lover to the beloved is no sacrifice. It is, however, in the true sense of the word, a *korban* (gift of love).

Judaism insists that God has neither the need nor the desire for any mundane gifts. God seeks the integrity of the worshipper's deeds and the purity of one's heart. Rabbinic teaching insists that the real *korban* is not the token gift that was offered on the altar, but the devotion and elevation of the person to God. God seeks the wholeness of the person who offers it, the *makriv*, who by action and intention reaches out, gets nearer and becomes closer to God. So says the psalmist (51:18-19): "You, God, do not want any sacrifices ..." The true offering is the person's "broken" heart, the worshipper's genuine contrition and moral resolve.

THOUGHT OF THE WEEK

RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

KORBANOT: The ritual offerings in the ancient Temple are of three kinds:

Elevation (*ola*): One would bring this offering to express a sense of regret for one's moral shortcomings. Reaching out for spiritual growth and elevation, one would offer an *ola*. The term relates to the idea of going up – as in *aliyah* (to Torah or to Israel).

Conciliation (*shelamim*): One would bring this offering when touched by a sense of gratitude and devotion. The term relates to the idea of appeasement and contentment, as in *shalom* (peace) and *shelemut* (completeness).

Expiation (*hatat*): This was offered by one who unintentionally failed to heed God's will. Seeking ritual purification, Divine expiation, one would

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bring a *hatat*. The term relates to the noun *het* (mistake), "missing the mark" and the verb meaning purification. For intentional, deliberate transgressions, no offering could effect atonement.

Bridging the generation gap is the ultimate message of prophecy (Malachi 3:23-24): "Behold, I will send you Elijah, the prophet, before the coming of the Day of the Lord, the Great and the Awesome, and he shall turn the hearts of parents to their children, and the hearts of children to their parents."

This idea of generational reconciliation is in the core of Pesach (Ex. 10:9): This is also the essence of the haggada: More than "telling" their children, the parents' role is to be open, listen and respond to their questions and concerns.

THOUGHT OF THE WEEK

RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

"*KORBAN*" means an offering, a gift. The common rendition "sacrifice" is imprecise and beclouds Jewish understanding of the concept. The English term "sacrifice" suggests the notion of sanctity, making a thing (item or person) sacred by its relinquishment or self-denial (from the Latin *sacrificium*). The Hebrew term stems from the root *kru*, implying closeness. In the context of ancient Jewish worship, korban means a "gift" offering by a human being to God.

Judaism insists, however, that God neither needs nor desires gifts. The "gift" offered to God reflects human need and devotion. By offering a korban, one expresses an inner quest for nearness to God. But it is not the korban, the gift, that God requests; it is the "giver" (*makriv*), the person who offers the korban, that God seeks and welcomes. God "accepts" the metaphoric gift of

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human devotion and love expressed by the material gift. The Psalmist (51:18-19); "You, God, do not want any sacrifices; a humble heart is the true offering to God!"

What is the difference between the Hebrew korban and the common term sacrifice? We constantly offer sacrifices in order to preserve or enhance the quality of our lives. But the korban is a gift of love offered willingly. A bouquet of flowers offered by a lover to the beloved is no sacrifice. It is, however, in the true sense of the term, a korban.

Since the destruction of the Second Temple (70 C.E.), the old way of offering animals (the "sacrificial" ritual) is no longer practiced within Judaism. Its underlying idea, however, endures. By giving of oneself, one finds oneself. Genuine giving of self – personally, socially or religiously – is true korban.

THOUGHT OF THE WEEK

RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

KORBANOT – the ritual offerings in the ancient Temple – were of three kinds: elevation (*ola*), conciliation (*shelamim*) and expiation (*hatat*).

Elevation: One would bring an *ola* offering when one felt a sense of regret for, and dissatisfaction with, his/her moral shortcomings and failings. Reaching out for moral growth and spiritual elevation, one would offer an *ola*. The term relates to the idea of “going up” – as in *aliyah* (to Torah or to Israel).

Conciliation: The *shelamim* offering one would bring when touched by a sense of gratitude and devotion. Yearning for harmony with God, oneself and others, for comprehensive reconciliation,

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one would offer a *shelamim*. The term relates to the idea of appeasement and contentment, as in *shalom* (peace) and *shelemut* (completeness).

Expiation: The *hatat* was offered by one who inadvertently failed to heed God's will. Seeking ritual purification, Divine expiation, one would bring a *hatat*. The term relates to *het*, meaning both mistake (not “sin”) and purification. For intentional, deliberate transgressions, no offering could effect atonement. The *hatat* atones only for inadvertent wrongs. Thus, *hatat* promotes and refines moral sensitivity, leading to a higher level of moral awareness and responsibility.

Torah on page 49.

THOUGHT OF THE WEEK

RABBI ZVI YEHUDA

THE TRUE MEANING OF *KORBAN* is gift. To translate it as sacrifice is inaccurate and misleading. The common term sacrifice (from the Latin *sacrificium*) essentially means making an object sacred (whether it be animal, plant, or human), by its renunciation or immolation, to pacify a deity. This non-Jewish term conjures notions of giving up, destruction and forfeit.

The Hebrew term *korban*, however, suggests something else altogether; volunteerism and closeness; gaining rather than losing. Related to the Hebrew noun *karov* (close) and the verb *hakriv* (to bring close or become close), the term *korban* signifies a "gift" one offers to God as a mode of worship, an expression of devotion. Symbolically, by bringing the offering "close" to God, one comes "closer" to God.

Judaism, however, insists that Almighty God has neither the need nor the desire for any gifts. God

delights not in the *korban* (the offering, the "gift") itself, but rather in the *makriv* (the giver), the person who devotedly offers the gift; in the integrity, sincerity, devotion and love which the worshipper expresses by the gift.

Rabbinic teaching insists that the real *korban* is the spiritual transformation within the heart of the *makriv*, the person who offers the *korban* with pure intentions. So prays the Psalmist (51:18-19):

*You (God) do not want any zevah (slaughtered
animal) that I should give;
Nor do you desire an ola (burnt offering)
(My/True) offering to God is a crushed spirit
A crushed and contrite heart, O God, You will not
despise ...*

Since the destruction of the Second Temple (70 C.E.), the sacrificial ritual is no longer a part of ongoing Jewish worship. Its underlying idea, however, endures. By giving of oneself, one finds oneself.

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

THE SACRIFICIAL SYSTEM ("Korbanot") has not been practiced in Jewish life since the Temple Destruction of 70 C.E. Its intrinsic value, however, as an integral part of Torah has never diminished. The "korban" theme is central in the Pentateuch (Leviticus, the Priestly Code). It occupies a sixth of the Mishna ("Kodashim"), compiled by Judah ha-Nassi around 200 C.E., and two Books ("Worship" and "Offerings") out of 14 in the Code of Maimonides (1135-1204 C.E.). This intricate complex of "korbanot," now merely a theoretical-symbolic system, is termed "Chochma" (wisdom). It expresses concepts and ideas of wide and high significance, which are a full-fledged part of Jewish learning. The study of "korbanot" reveals a wealth of insight and understanding into the whole realm of man-to-man and man-to-God relations. "Sacrifice" is an inadequate translation of "korban." The Hebrew (from "karov") conveys the sense of relatedness and nearness. "Korban" symbolizes man's quest for closeness to God. It is not the "korban" in itself that God seeks; it is the "makriv," the person who offers it—his whole stance, his heart, his devotion, his feelings and his yearnings to cling to his Source. Though forms of expression change, the essence of the "korbanot" concept prevails.

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

THE IDEA OF "KORBANOT" — offerings (commonly translated "sacrifices") — as a way of worship is expressed in its Hebrew root "karov" (to be close), indicating man's quest for nearness to God. Judaism has always taught that God has no need for man's offerings; He is concerned with man and seeks the purity of his heart. Although the sacrificial ritual no longer exists (since 70 B.C.), its underlying universal message endures. Man's genuine giving of himself is the true "korban;" his liberation from his exclusive attachment to himself and his possessions is the reward: "There is no room for God in him who is full of himself," said Baal Shem Tov (founder of Hasidism; c. 1700-1760). By giving of himself man finds himself.

Thought of the Week

By Rabbi Zvi Yehuda

SACRIFICE is the term commonly used for the biblical *korban*. This, however, is gravely misleading. The term sacrifice (lit., "something made sacred") implies an inevitable, and sometimes forced, self-deprivation. The Hebrew *korban*, on the other hand, from *karov* (meaning near), implies a gift that was brought near, an offering which expresses a quest for nearness and closeness to God. Rabbinic teaching insists that the real *korban* is not the token gift that was offered on the Altar. God has no need for it anyway. It is rather the person himself, in his pure intentions, who becomes nearer and closer to God. So prays the Psalmist (51:18-19): "You do not want any sacrifices ... A humble heart is the true sacrifice to God." In real life, we are constantly offering sacrifices. Mostly we do it reluctantly; we are forced to sacrifice in order to preserve or enhance the quality of our lives. But the *korban*, in Torah's perspective, with its enduring symbolism, is a gift of love, offered willingly in a quest for closeness and intimacy. A bouquet of flowers offered by a lover to his beloved is no sacrifice. It is, however, in the true sense of the word, a *korban*.