

# טועמיה - חיים

לחיות עם הזמן בשבת קודש

Parshat Vakira 5788

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## Coming closer to God

There is a huge difference between what we read in this week's parsha and what will happen when we rebuild the temple, speedily in our days amen!

In the temple, after cleaning the alter and removing the previous days ashes, the day would begin with the daily morning burnt offering, a compulsory public offering, not dependent on anything happening or the date, the sacrifice must be offered up and it must be funded from public funds. This is true also of certain other sacrifices, public sin offerings, festive sacrifices etc.

Afterwards other sacrifices would be offered up, mostly private ones, some being compulsory such as the mother's offering after birth, and some voluntary.

The day was built in a way to begin with the communal offering, with Am Yisrael, and also to end in the same way with the afternoon daily burnt offering which ended the day with no others after it. When the day begins and ends each one of us is part of Am Yisrael, only in-between there is time for each person to bring something personal or even noncompulsory.

Our parsha, Vayikra, presents the laws in a different order; Rishon opens with the laws of personal voluntary burnt offerings, sheni and shlishi deal with non-animal offerings, such as the voluntary mincha, of grain and oil. The only public offering mentioned is the bikkurim , the first grain, mentioned as it is a part of the menachot.

Revii talks about the shelamim , the peace offering, both personal and voluntary. Only in chamishi does the Torah tell us about compulsory public sacrifices that are offered as a result of sin, and guilt-offerings (Ashamot) some personal and some public.

Would it have been logical to begin with public compulsory sacrifices, and then to move to the personal ones that atone for sin?

The Torah is telling us something fundamental. God forbid that we should think that the altar is part of our lives only if we sin, this would turn the temple into "the committee for finding sins" that would obligate me to bring sacrifices afterwards. This would be true if sacrifice was just to confess for sins, but that is catholic not Jewish!

The purpose of a sacrifice, according to the Ramban, is to come closer to God (the word Korban comes from the root KRV – to come close – S) , to offer up my flesh and blood, to come closer and to show that I am "part of the heavenly God" (the words of the Tanya – S). To offer something near to me in place of myself. We do not come to the temple to tick a "V" and be atoned for sin, God forbid! The opening of Vayikra, called "Torat Kohanim" doesn't even begin with kohanim, not with communal sacrifices or sin, it begins with the individual who recognizes his internal fundamental need to come nearer to God. No reason is needed, not sin or a special date. A person can decide to make a donation of flour, saying, "I want to come close".

He will then come to the temple and whilst offering the sacrifice hear the song of the Leviim, not the daily psalm we all know, but a song for his soul. Only after half the parsha, which talks about the individual, do we start to talk about a people who know that in their midst is "a house of prayer for all people". Of course there is a place for atonement, but coming close to God isn't a life event, it is life itself.

This book is named "And He called to Moshe" , not even "And God called to Moshe". Godliness itself calls to anyone who wishes to "draw himself up" (Moshe – "to draw up, as Pharaohs' daughter did – S). The divine voice calls me, if I have an animal to sacrifice, and even if I am poor and have only some flour left over from tithes I received, I can still offer up and bring the Godliness inside me closer.

The temple teaches us how each one of us is part of the whole, and in this whole each one has his own part, his own donation of grain or flour, and his own personal song.