

# Torah and the Kingdom of Priests

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## I

Parashat Tzav opens with a presentation of the laws and rules for the various types of offerings. Beginning with the burnt offering (olah) (6:1-6), the Torah moves on to the meal offering (6:7-15). From there we move to the details of the sin offering (chatat) (6:17-23), the rules of the guilt offering (asham) (7:1-10), and so on.

At times, the details can seem both arcane and yet eerily familiar. In fact, Sefer Vayikra has already instructed us regarding the various types of offering and their laws. In what appears to be a pattern, Parashat Vayikra already opened with the rules of the burnt offering (1:1-17) and the meal offering (2:1-16). After describing the peace offering (shelamim) (3:1-17) and sin offering (4:1-26) it finishes with the guilt offering (4:27-5:26). This overarching parallelism between parashat ha-korbanot of Parashat Tzav and parashat ha-korbanot of Parashat Vayikra can be summed up as following.

Offerings in Vayikra	Offerings in Tzav
1) Burnt (olah)- 1:1-17	1) Burnt (olah)- 6:1-6
2) Meal (mincha)- 2:1-16	2) Meal (mincha)- 6:7-16
3) Peace (shelamim)- 3:1-17	3) Sin (chatat)- 6:17-23
4) Sin (chatat)- 4:1-26	4) Guilt (asham)- 7:1-10
5) Guilt (asham)- 4:27-5:26	5) Peace (shelamim)- 7:11-38

Both lists contain five different types of offerings. Both lists detail the exact same five offerings. Yet all is not exactly the same. For some reason or another the peace offering has dropped from position three in Parashat Vayikra to position five in Parashat Tzav. To put this a little bit more formally, the standard structure of an "offerings listing" seems to consist of the burnt-meal pair and the sin-guilt pair, plus the unpaired "single," the peace offering. While in Vayikra, the structure runs pair-single-pair, in Tzav it runs pair-pair-single, with the shelamim appearing after, rather than in between, the two pairs. This requires explanation.

The issue of the placement of the peace offering, of course raises a simpler and more fundamental question. Why the repetition? Although the contents of the two sets of "offering codes," the rules of Vayikra and the rules of Tzav, do differ to a great extent, there does exist quite a bit of overlap. In accord with its normal principle of economy, we would expect the Torah to have merged the two sets of instructions and presented a united corpus of offerings rules. If so, what constitutes the purpose and meaning of the Torah presenting two differently ordered sets of offering rules?

## II

Although as argued above, the Torah seems to present two distinct "offering codes," the two segments are indeed topically and textually united (see 1:2 and 7:38). Quite simply, despite all the distinctions mentioned above, we have here a long discourse on the laws of korbanot that opens Sefer Vayikra (1:1-7:38).

Immediately after the end of "Parashat ha-korbanot," God instructs Moshe as follows.

Take Aharon and his sons with him, and the garments, and the anointing oil, and a bullock for the sin offering, and two rams, and a basket of unleavened bread; and gather all the congregation together to the door of the Tent of Meeting. (8:1-2)

From here on out, the remainder of Parashat Tzav (8:1-37) occupies itself not with the laws of offerings, but with reporting the events of the seven days of "miluim," the seven day period of sanctification that constituted the transition to daily operation of the Mishkan. The "miluim" narrative of Parashat Tzav more or less parallels the command of the seven days of "miluim" found in Shemot 29:1-37. As predicted by Shemot 29:42-45, the process culminates with the descent of God's presence to the Mishkan, in front of the eyes of all of Israel (see Vayikra 9:4-6, 22-24).

This brings us to the nub of the matter. In originally instructing Moshe regarding the construction of the Mishkan, God defined the Mishkan as a vehicle for his "dwelling" (sh, k, n) amongst the Children of Israel, (25:8), hence the name miSHKaN. Shortly afterwards, God referred to his "meeting" (ve-noadti) with Moshe and the Children of Israel at the sanctuary (25:22), hence the name Tent of Meeting. These terms and themes resurface at end of the "miluim" instructions narrative found in Chapter Twenty-nine.

And the other lamb you shall offer towards evening... This shall be a regular burnt offering throughout the generations, at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting before the Lord, where I will MEET (ee'vaeid) with you... there. And there I will MEET (ve-noadti) the Children of Israel, and it shall be sanctified by my glory. And I will sanctify the Tent of Meeting and the altar, and I will sanctify Aharon and his sons to me as priests. I will DWELL (ve-shakanti) among the Children of Israel and be their God (Shemot 29:41-45)

The point should be obvious. The construction of the Mishkan finds its conceptual completion in the execution of the "miluim" instructions, the sanctification of the sanctuary, the installation of Aharon

and his sons and the transition to daily operation. Only then will God dwell in the Mishkan and meet the Children of Israel at the Tent of Meeting. In other words, only after the accomplishment of the "miluim" instructions in Vayikra 8-9 can the Mishkan said to be both physically and conceptually complete.

All this should lead us to the following problem. On some level, the "offering code" (Vayikra 1:1-7:38) seems to be in the wrong place. Its position at the opening of Vayikra disrupts the flow and story line. By all logic, the Torah should finish the story of the execution of the "miluim" instructions and the consequent divine revelation, the "completion" of the Mishkan narrative, before moving on to the laws of korbanot. In other words, why does the Torah place the beginning of the "offerings" story of Sefer Vayikra before the end of the Mishkan narrative of Shemot? Or to put this a little bit differently, why does the Torah place the "ending" of the Mishkan narrative of Shemot somewhere deep in Sefer Vayikra? Either way, it is not just the repetitive and inconsistent structure of the "offerings code" that requires explanation. We must also explain the logic that determines the location of "parashat ha-korbanot."

### III

Focusing on some of the differences between the offerings in Parashat Vayikra and offerings in Parashat Tzav should help to clarify some of the issues raised above. Even a casual glance at the first few verses of each respective list should be enough to make us realize that the two sets of commands are addressed to wholly different audiences. The list of Vayikra opens with God's instructing Moshe to "speak to the Children of Israel" (1:2). In pointed contrast, the list of Tzav opens with God's instructing Moshe to "command Aharon and his sons." The elite class of priests, rather than the average member of the people of Israel, constitutes the audience of the second "offerings code" (see Ramban 6:2).

The difference in audience constitutes but part of the story. In line with this distinction, Vayikra depicts the average man of Israel as fully engaged in the bringing of his offering. In the case of the burnt offering, it is the average individual, the "any man" of Israel that presents the offering to the Lord (1:2). It is he who brings the offering to the tent, places his hands upon the offering's head and slaughters the animal (1:3-5). Only at this point does the priest take over (see 1:5-9). Once again, in marked contrast Tzav mentions no such role for the individual Israelite. Only the priest plays a part (see 6:2-6).

This brings us to a third and related distinction. Once again, analyzing the difference between the rules of the burnt offering in Vayikra (1:1-17) and the rules of the burnt offering in Tzav (6:1-6) provides the key. At first glance the laws of the burnt offering presented in Parashat Vayikra seems exhaustive. The Torah lists in detail just about eone would ever want to know about bringing a burnt offering. Starting with the bringing of the animal to the entrance of the Tent of Meeting (1:3), the Torah moves on to describing the "placing of hands" (1:4), and the slaughtering (1:5). From there we move to the offering and sprinkling of the blood (1:5), and finally the skinning, sectioning, washing and burning of the animal by the priests (1:6-9). Moreover, the Torah details the parallel procedure for each different type of animal. What could possibly be left to add?

In fact, Tzav seems to pick up at the precise point in time where Vayikra leaves off. The burnt offering segment presented by the second offering code begins with the requirement to burn the offering upon the altar all night long (6:2). At this point, the text shifts to listing the instructions for the cleaning of the altar of ashes by the priests and the maintenance of a constant fire on the altar by the priests (6:3-6). In other words, where as the laws of the burnt offering presented by Parashat

Vayikra describe the actual process and act of offering, the laws of the burnt offering presented by Parashat Tzav primarily describe the aftermath of the offering.

Finally, the two offering codes utilize different language in referring to what they are about. Vayikra utilizes the term "korban," i.e. offering. The stem k, r, b, appears seven times in the first three verses alone (1:1-3) In contrast, Tzav almost completely eschews this term. In its place, Tzav refers to the specific names of the various offerings prefaced by the modifier "torat." For example "torat olah," "torat mincha" and so on (see 6:2, 6:7, 6:18, 7:1, 7:11). While we are accustomed to translating the term "torah" as "teaching," here it probably should be translated as "ritual" or "procedure."

Putting this all together and extrapolating to the complete offering codes of Vayikra and Tzav yields something like the following. The offering code of Vayikra focuses on the process of offering, involves the individual Israelite as an active participant and consequently addresses itself to the Children of Israel. In contrast, the offering code of Tzav focuses on the technical procedure for dealing with sanctified objects that have already been offered. Consequently, only the priest, the officer of the sanctuary, plays a role. Consequently, Tzav addresses solely the priests and not the individual Israelite.

#### IV

Until this point, I have phrased the offering-process-Israelite vs. procedure-aftermath-Priest distinction argued for above in primarily technical terms. However, I would like to maintain that it in fact constitutes the external form of a far more essential and philosophical distinction. Let us begin by turning our attention to the prominent role of "placing of hands" in Vayikra.

Right after bringing his offering to the door of the Tent of Meeting (1:3) and right before slaughtering his offering (1:5), the Israelite is commanded to "place his hand(s) on the head of the burnt offering" (1:4). The Torah states that by doing so "it will be accepted in his behalf (venirtza lo), in expiation for him (le-kaper alav)" (1:4). Similarly, this procedure, known colloquially as "semicha" (placing) appears prominently in the case of the other animal offerings described in Vayikra (see 3:2, 4:4, 4:29). But what constitutes the meaning of this act? Why does it seem to be a necessary condition for the effectiveness of the offering?

On the simplest level, the act of "placing of the hands" signifies connection and ownership. The presenter of the korban legally defines the identity of the offer as his offer by the symbolic act of "semicha." For some reason or another the Torah has decided that monetary ownership is insufficient to define a status of "the offer of x" and demands an additional symbolic act. However, a quick glance at the other "semicha" context in the Torah indicates that there is more to it than this.

Upon being informed by God of his impending death, Moshe requested the appointing of a successor (Bemidbar 27:15-17). God responds by choosing Yehoshua bin Nun and ordering Moshe to "place your hand(s) upon him" (27:18). He is to stand Yehoshua in front of the high priest and the community, command him and "put some of your honor upon him" (27:20). By placing his hands upon Yehoshua in front of the community of Israel, Moshe does more than just legally designate Yehoshua as his successor. He symbolically transfers some of his essence, his very identity, to Yehoshua. "Semicha" constitutes not just a legal process of ownership but also a symbolic process of "transference," of identity fusion. In fact it is exactly the identity fusion inherent in "semicha" that provides the philosophical basis for the formal legal status of the act. Because Moshe has transferred something to Yehoshua, Yehoshua becomes "of" Moshe, "his" legally designated

successor. Likewise, because the presenter of the korban has transferred something to the offer, the offer becomes "of" the presenter and achieves expiation for him.

While the notion of identity transfer and fusion as an explanation of korbanot may seem odd at first glance, we only need think back to the Akeida, the ultimate paradigm for the Torah's conception of sacrifice. God had commanded Avraham to bring "your son, your only son, whom you love" as a burnt offering (Bereishit 22:2). God commanded Avraham to offer up that which was more dear to Avraham than his very self. He had to sacrifice his child and simultaneously his entire vision of future nationhood. Both Avraham and Yitzchak must sacrifice their very selves.

But of course this does not happen. At the last second an angel calls from heaven and orders the sparing of Yitzchak and the saving of Avraham's self. But the story does not end here. Avraham lifts up his eyes, sees a ram entangled in a nearby bush and "offers it up as a burnt offering in place of his son" (22:13)

Despite the rescinding of the divine command, Avraham feels the necessity to somehow still carry out the original demand. He brings the ram "in place of," as a substitution, for his son. Here are the shocking words of Rashi.

...What is (the meaning of) in place of his son? On every labor that he did, he prayed (to God) and said: Let it be your will that this be AS IF it was done to my son, as if my son was slaughtered, as if his blood was sprinkled... (Rashi 22:13)

In other words, on Avraham's interpretation, the ideal of sacrifice of the self demands fulfillment, if only symbolically.

Avraham continues on to name the place Adonai-Yire, literally meaning God will see, or God will show, a play on Avraham's earlier statement to Yitzchak that "God will show (elokhim yire)...the lamb for the offering, my son" (22:8). Avraham interprets the sudden appearance of the angel and the ram as an act of providence, as an act of divine mercy allowing him to substitute the ram for his son and names the place in commemoration of this permitting of substitution. On Avraham's account the Akeida constitutes not so much a test of his faith or courage, but the teaching of the lesson of total dedication to God, the offering of ones' very self, and God's merciful acceptance of substitution.

God's first command to the Children of Israel mandating korbanot further highlights the connection between the Akeida and the Torah's doctrine of offerings. Immediately after commanding the making of an earthen altar and the bringing of various types of sacrifices upon it (Shemot 20:21), God states the following.

...in every one of the places (be'kal hamakom) that I will cause my name to be mentioned\remembered, I will come to you and bless you (20:21)

The conjunction of an altar, sacrifices, "the place," God's name and blessing by God cannot help to conjure up the story of the Akeida.

Like in the sacrifice command of Shemot, in the Akeida, God commands Avraham to go to "the place," an unspecified and yet somehow specific place (see Bereishit 22:3-4, 9, 14). At that place, Avraham builds an altar (22:9), brings an offering (22:13), mentions and remembers God's name by

naming the place after God (22:14) and immediately afterwards recite blessing from God (22:15-18). In other words, the very first command of korbanot plays off of the model of the Akeida. The Torah's doctrine of sacrifices constitutes the possibility of reliving part of the religious experience of Avraham, the journey to place, the altar, the symbolic act of self-sacrifice, the name and blessing of God. By no small wonder Divrei Hayamim II:2:3 correlates "the place" of the Akeida with Yerushalayim, the place God chooses for the permanent sanctuary and its sacrifices.

But what does this have to do with the variant presentations of offerings in Vayikra and offerings in Tzav, or with the offering-process Israelite vs. procedure-aftermath-Priest distinction propounded earlier? Perhaps nothing. However, I would like to argue that by focusing on "offering," the individual Israelite and the korban process, Vayikra sends a very particular signal. The stem k, r, v, the base of the term "offering" also means "close" or "approach." This is no accident. On the internal and philosophical plane the "offering code" of Vayikra is about the approach of the individual Israelite to God. As pointed out above, in Vayikra the text centers upon the act of semicha and implicitly its connotations of identity fusion and substitution. Once again, this is no accident. On the internal and philosophical plane, the "offering code" of Vayikra is about the religious experience, journey, dedication of self and very own private Akeida-echo of each individual Israelite.

While all this may be the case regarding Vayikra, such is not at all the case regarding Tzav. In Tzav there is no room for the individual Israelite and not a hint of his relation to God or approach to God. It is only about the procedures of sanctuary operation. It is only about the necessary technical and philosophical flip side of Vayikra, the rules for sanctified objects and the duties of the officers of the cult. It is "Torat Kohanim," the Torah of the Priests, in both externals and essence.

## V

By this point, we should no longer need to wonder about the splitting of "parashat ha-korbanot" into two segments, the problem of "repetition" raised earlier. As argued above, the two codes describe different aspects and different actors of the world of korbanot. While Vayikra is about offering-process, experience and the individual Israelite, Tzav is about aftermath-procedure, the rules for sanctified objects and the priestly officers of the sanctuary. While the latter may well be "Torat Kohanim," the procedures for priests, the former comprises "Torat Yisrael," teaching for Israel. The Torah splits the overall offering code into two segments precisely due to their distinctiveness and in emphasis of the necessity and importance of both "Torat Yisrael" and "Torat Kohanim."

More precisely, by separating out "Torat Yisrael" from the larger corpus of the laws of sanctuary and priests contained in Sefer Vayikra, the Torah prevents the reader from committing a crucial error. A quick scan of the first half of Sefer Vayikra may leave the impression that the book is primarily about matters related to sanctuary and priests and is of interest primarily to priests. This "apparent" structure may be mapped as follows.

1:1-7:38	The laws of sacrifices
8:1-9:24	Dedication of the sanctuary and installation of the priests
10:1-20	The death of two priests and the aftermath
11:1-15:33	The laws of clean and unclean\pure and impure entrusted to the priests

But this is incorrect. At its very start, Sefer Vayikra places "Torat Yisrael," the "offering code" addressed to the individual Israelite. The Torah reminds us that the book is not just for priests.

Likewise, recognizing the distinction between the two offering codes should help clarify the problem of order, the placement of the shelamim raised earlier.

In Vayikra the peace offering comes after the burnt offering-meal offering pair and before the sin offering-guilt offering pair. This fits well with the purpose of the shelamim. In general it is brought either as an offer of thanksgiving or as a consequence of a vow (7:12, 16). The offering is consumed jointly by the presenter of the korban and by the priests, the representatives of God (7:34). As such, as either a symbol of thanksgiving, devotion, or covenantal dedication to God, the offering shares much in common with the olah-mincha and their symbolism of voluntary dedication to God. Consequently, the shelamim follows the burnt-meal pair and precedes the obligatory, sin oriented, "negative" and repair oriented sin-guilt pair.

In Tzav however, the orientation of the presenter is wholly irrelevant. Here we are concerned with sanctified objects and the rules for priests. >From this perspective, the shelamim bears little in common with either the burnt-meal pair or the sin-guilt pair. Unlike other offerings that are not completely consumed on the altar, its remains do not possess a formal status of "most holy" (see 6:10, 18, 7:1, 7:11). Consequently, the shelamim follows after the more rarified offerings of olah, mincha, chatat and asham (see Ramban 6:18).

Finally, recognizing the two-part structure of the "offering code" and the Torah's prioritizing of "Torat Yisrael" should help us puzzle out the placement of "parashat ha-korbanot" before the accomplishment of the "miluim" instructions and the true completion of the Mishkan.

The issue of relating to God constitutes one of the key tensions of the latter part of Shemot. Is connection with God something reserved for an elite few, a state achieved by the masses by means of designated intermediaries? Or alternatively, on the other side of the spectrum, is religious connection to God something available to all, an unmediated state open to each individual Israelite by virtue of his membership in God's chosen people? As I have argued on different occasions in the past, much of the Sinai narrative and surely the golden-calf and Mishkan story cannot be properly understood without careful attention to these questions, the tension between these two typological extremes and an appreciation for the fluctuating and dialectical relation between them.

To put this concretely and textually, while in a certain sense the sin of the golden calf stems from an over dependence on Moshe and the apprehension of Moshe as an intermediary, the eventual construction of the Mishkan serves as balance and "tikun." Each and every individual contributes to the construction of God's sanctuary. The actual foundation of the Mishkan, the sockets of silver that anchor the pillars of the Mishkan are made from the half-shekel of the census, contributed equally by each and every member of Israel (38:25-27). God's presence rests upon and in all of Israel.

Yet at the same time, the establishment of the Mishkan runs a certain risk. Its daily operation requires an elite class, a group who will serve in the sanctuary and scrupulously observe the rules and procedures of sanctity necessitated by proximity and connection to the divine presence. A sanctuary means priests, a spiritual technocracy that practices an elite and arcane set of rules.

While the Mishkan aims to provide the proper balance between intermediary and direct relation, it runs the risk of overemphasizing mediation. How easy to conclude that only the priests serve God.

This brings us full circle to "Torat Yisrael" and the placement of "parashat hakorbanot" before the accomplishment of the "miluim." By no accident, the Torah defers the elaborate ceremony of the "miluim" and the installation of the priests until after the offering code, the set of laws that opens with the approach of the individual of Israel and his offering to God. It is his religious quest, his attempt to find God and holiness that constitutes the rationale for Mishkan and the crucial axis of Sefer Vayikra. Lest the Israelites err and misinterpret the meaning of Mishkan, "Yisrael" is there to remind them, and we the reader, of the right interpretation of Mishkan and of the correct orientation for reading Sefer Vayikra. At Sinai, all the Israelites, both group and individual were transformed into "a kingdom of priests and a holy nation" (Shemot 19:6).

### Further Study

1. Read 6:7-16. Try to divide the section into two subsections. Does the second subsection fit into the standard model of the Tzav version of the offering code? If not, how does this section dovetail with the general gist of the Tzav list? How does it provide a bridge to Chapter Eight?
2. At some point in the shiur I maintained that the miluim accomplishment of Vayikra 8 "more or less" parallel the original command in Shemot 29. Do the comparison. Are their significant differences? Now read Vayikra 9:1-23. This is clearly new. See Rashi 9:1, 2, 7 (and the shiur of Rabbi Nati Helfgot on this topic located on the VBM web site archives- Parashat Tetzave). On the assumption that Sefer Vayikra is uniquely concerned with atonement, can we construct an alternative explanation for the "ending" of Shemot in the middle of Vayikra other than that presented in the shiur above? Why must this "ending" come after the offering code that opens Sefer Vayikra?
3. See Rashbam 6:2 and Ramban 6:7, 18. Do these sources already assume the explanation of the doubling of the korban lists presented in the shiur?
4. Read 7:28-38. According to the central thesis of the shiur, is this segment out of place? Why or why not? Reread 7:34-37 and glance at Chapter Eight. Does the foreshadowing of Chapter eight and the miluim resolve the problem? Reread 7:35 and see 8:28-29. What is the apparent contradiction? See Ibn Ezra and Ramban 7:36 for a possible resolution. Can you think of another?