

PARASHAT VAYIKRA

Kohanim and Israel

by Rav Yonatan Grossman

This week we start reading Sefer Vayikra, which the Sages call "Torat Kohanim." The first portion of the sefer focuses on issues pertaining to the Mishkan, and most of the commands in this section are accordingly addressed to the kohanim who are responsible for God's house where the sacrificial service takes place.

The parashot this week and next week (Tzav) deal with the laws of the various sacrifices, and, at first glance, it would seem that these parashot could be combined, removing the need for the laws to be repeated twice.

In this shiur we shall focus on what uniquely characterizes parashat Vayikra - specifically in distinction to parashat Tzav - and thereafter to look back at the relationship between this opening parasha of the Sefer and the name of the Sefer - Torat Kohanim.

The repetitions in these two parashot are obvious and well-known. Following the conclusion of the list of sacrifices in parashat Vayikra, this list is reopened in parashat Tzav, and the Torah again reviews the sacrifices and clarifies their various laws. It is true that there are some laws which appear for the first time in parashat Tzav (mainly the focus on who eats the sacrifice - as will be discussed below), but it still remains unclear why the Torah divides the laws of the sacrifices into two separate and largely repetitive listings, rather than grouping all the laws pertaining to the "ola" (burnt offering), for instance, together.

In order to understand the need for both listings, we need to examine the main differences between them and thereby to try and define what is unique to each.

Let us begin with a structural difference - the order in which the different sacrifices are listed, ignoring for the moment the details of the laws themselves:

The order as it appears in parashat Vayikra is as follows: "A person who sacrifices from among you a sacrifice to God... that it may be accepted before God..."

1. ola (cattle/flocks/birds)
2. mincha (regular/baked/baked in a pan/baked in a frying pan/first fruits)
3. shelamim (peace offering) - (cattle/flocks/goat) "And God spoke to Moshe saying... a person who sins ..."
4. communal sin (chatat tzibbur kohen/the whole nation/prince of a tribe)
5. personal sin - chatat yachid
6. guilt offering - asham (trespass/doubt/theft)

The order of this listing is quite logical. It starts with the three sacrifices which a person brings voluntarily, of his own free will, to sacrifice in the Beit HaMikdash - a free-will ola, a free-will mincha and a free-will shelamim. Thereafter there is a new introductory verse for the obligatory sacrifices, brought in the case of sins committed unwittingly or when in doubt of sin (chatat or asham). We may perhaps ask why certain sacrifices are not included in this list, but the order as it appears is understandable and eminently logical.

For this precise reason, when we proceed to parashat Tzav, we are surprised to find that the sacrifices are listed differently: "Command Aharon and his sons saying..."

1. ola
2. mincha "And God spoke to Moshe saying..."
3. mincha of the sanctification of the kohanim "And God spoke to Moshe saying..."
4. sin offering (chatat)
5. guilt offering (asham)
6. peace offerings (shelamim)

The most obvious difference between the two lists concerns the placement of the shelamim, which appear in juxtaposition to the ola and voluntary sacrifices in Vayikra, but move to the end of the list (after the obligatory sin and guilt offerings) in Tzav.

Aside from this clear difference, in the second list we find the innovation of the obligatory mincha for the kohen "on the day of his anointment." This innovation appears within the framework of a special command to Moshe ("And God spoke to Moshe saying ..."), which gives us the feeling that what we have here is an exception to the basic list.

We need to clarify why the peace offerings appear here at the end of the list, and why the mincha of the kohen appears only in this listing, and not as part of the detailed list of mincha offerings that appears in parashat Vayikra.

Let us turn our attention to the principal aspect of this second listing, as emphasized by the Torah in the laws of how the sacrifices are eaten.

The list opens with the ola, where there is no consumption of flesh and blood - the entire sacrifice is consumed by fire on the altar. The Torah then moves to the mincha, where it is emphasized that "he shall burn it on the altar for a sweet savor, its memorial, to God. And what remains of it Aharon and his sons shall eat; with matzot shall it be eaten in the holy place, in the courtyard of the ohel mo'ed shall it be eaten. It shall not be baked with chametz. I have given it to them for their portion of My offerings ... all the males of Aharon's children shall eat it; it is an eternal statute for your generations." (6:8-11)

In other words, the main part of the mincha is consumed upon the mizbei'ach, and the "remainder" is eaten by the kohanim (in fact, the portion which is eaten is quantitatively greater than that sacrificed to God, but it is nevertheless referred to as the "remainder" of what is burnt on the altar). God refers to the eating by the kohanim as "their portions which I have given of My offerings" - i.e., God gives part of His

sacrifices to the kohanim. They eat a portion of the sacrifice as guests at the Almighty's table.

This eating is mentioned briefly as an aside in parashat Vayikra (2:3), while here in parashat Tzav this law is expanded upon (how and where it should be eaten, etc.).

Following the mincha, the Torah proceeds to the laws of the chatat and here, too, right at the beginning of the command, the issue of its consumption appears. The same issue also concludes this unit, such that the whole framework of the sin offering revolves around its consumption: At the beginning - "The priest that offers it for sin shall eat it, in the holy place shall it be eaten, in the courtyard of the ohel mo'ed." (6:19) At the end - "Every male of the kohanim shall it eat, it is holy of holies. And no sin offering of which any of the blood is brought to the ohel mo'ed to be sprinkled in the kodesh shall be eaten; it shall be burnt with fire." (6:22-23)

A similar emphasis is to be found immediately thereafter, concerning the asham:

"Every male of the kohanim shall eat it, in the holy place shall it be eaten, it is holy of holies. LIKE THE SIN OFFERING, LIKEWISE THE GUILT OFFERING (ka-chatat ka-asham), the same law applies to both; The kohen who makes atonement thereby shall have it." (7:6-7)

Here the Torah hints at why the guilt offering appears in juxtaposition to the sin offering: the same law applies to both, and this common law is that the kohanim have to eat it next to where it is burnt on the altar.

After all of these the Torah moves on to the shelamim. Here a new law of eating appears: together with the stipulations that it be eaten next to the altar and by the kohen, the owner (who brings the sacrifice) joins in: "And he shall offer of it one out of each offering for a teruma to God; to the kohen who sprinkles the blood of the peace offering - to him shall it be. And the flesh of the sacrifice of the peace offering for thanksgiving shall be eaten on the day it is sacrificed (by its owner); he shall not leave any of it until the morning." (7:14-15)

If the new emphasis appearing in Tzav concerns the eating of the sacrifices then it is clear why the peace offerings appear at the end of the list. First we read of the ola, which is completely burnt upon the altar. Thereafter come those sacrifices of which the kohanim eat a part (mincha, sin offering and guilt offering), and finally the exceptional sacrifice, of which the owners also eat (peace offering), appears.

It seems, therefore, that all the differences between the two lists derive from the different emphasis on the laws of how a sacrifice is eaten. Why does the liin parashat Tzav emphasize this of the consumption of the sacrifice while the listing in parashat Vayikra all but ignores it?

It would appear that the reason is connected with the purpose of each of the two listings or, to be more precise, to the different people to whom they are addressed. The listing in parashat Vayikra opens as follows: "Speak to the children of Israel and say to them, if any man among you bring an offering to God" This list is addressed to Benei Yisrael, and is presented with their perspective in mind. In contrast, the

listing in parashat Tzav begins, "Command Aharon and his sons" This latter list is meant for the kohanim, and is presented in accordance with their perspective. Throughout the laws of the sacrifices, the Torah clearly indicates to whom Moshe is speaking: In Vayikra, the command is formulated in a general way, without any special identification; it is the "man among you" - anyone - who brings the sacrifice. In contrast, in parashat Tzav it is the kohanim who hear the command, and when the Torah turns its attention to what should be done by the person (Israelite, not kohen) who brings the sacrifice, it indicates this explicitly, since the subject of the sentence has changed.

In this light the reason for the differing structure of the two parshiot is clear. In our parasha, where the Israelite is the focus, the categories are clearly voluntary and obligatory sacrifices. From the point of view of the person bringing the sacrifice, these are two completely different experiences, and his whole visit to God's house changes in light of the reason for his bringing the sacrifice. This difference, though, is almost completely irrelevant to the kohen who serves in the Beit HaMikdash. The sacrificial ritual is not directly influenced by the reason for the sacrifice being brought. Whether the sacrifice is a voluntary *ola* or an obligatory one, the kohen's work still involves stripping the animal's skin, cutting it into parts, burning parts of it, etc. From the point of view of the kohen on duty a more important question is who eats the sacrifice. In other words, it is important to him (both practically and experientially) whether the sacrifice in question is an *ola*, of which he cannot partake at all, or one in which he has a portion, or a peace offering which - as its name indicates - brings and symbolizes peace, and all those involved eat of its meat.

Since the listing in parashat Tzav focuses on the kohanim, we can also understand why the Torah suddenly "remembers" and adds to the list of *mincha* offerings that special *mincha* offered by the newly sanctified kohen. It is logical that this sacrifice not appear at the beginning of the Sefer, in parashat Vayikra, where the focus is the Israelite, but rather in the listing in parashat Tzav which is addressed to the kohanim and focuses on them.

Let us now return to our opening observations. Sefer Vayikra is indeed the "torat kohanim." It deals with the laws pertaining to the sacrifices and to the Beit HaMikdash, and this subject is connected both practically and in its very essence specifically with the kohanim.

And yet, it is for this very reason that the Sefer opens with a focus on the Israelite who comes to the Beit HaMikdash! In many cultures of the ancient world the priests were an elite amongst the nation, and their actions in the temples were hidden from the masses, such that their service of the gods became quite esoteric in the minds of the people. The philosophy underlying this was that not every mortal is capable of serving God. The servants of God were the special class of priests, and the simple individual from amongst the nation could only regard their spiritual world with admiration.

Sefer Vayikra deals with issues pertaining to the kohanim, and the danger exists that in the minds of both the Israelite masses and the kohanim performing the Divine service the institution of the *kehuna* will become esoteric, removed from the masses

seeking communication with God and a spiritual experience which will bring them closer to Him.

Therefore, this Sefer, with its focus on the kohanim, opens - as a sort of declaration of intent - specifically with the viewpoint of the person seeking to bring a sacrifice. The kohanim may be God's representatives in the eyes of the people in this regard, but they are also representatives of the people in the eyes of God.

The Sefer concludes in the same vein. The second half of Sefer Vayikra emphasizes the fact that holiness resides in Israel beyond the confines of the Mikdash. Holiness of time (the festivals) and holiness of place (especially Behar-Bechukotai, dealing with the laws of Shemitta and Yovel) go beyond the confines of the Mikdash and address each and every Jew.

The framework of Sefer Vayikra, the book of the kohanim, is the connection of the simple Israelite with the world of holiness. Even if it is the kohanim who stand at the center of the Sefer, it is only because their entire purpose is to create and facilitate closeness between God and His people, Israel.

Further study:

The opening command of parashat Vayikra is introduced by "Speak to the children of Israel and say to them: If any MAN (ADAM) OF YOU shall bring a sacrifice to HaShem...." Since the command is undoubtedly addressed only to Jews, what is the meaning of the address to the universal connotation "adam?" The shiur explains that the motivation of the owner is not a concern of the kohen. Why are the laws of eating, which may include him, not a concern of the owner? It is clear (see 1,5-8) that the Torah refers the slaughter of the animal to the owner rather than to the kohanim. Halakhically, "shechita" does not require a kohen, though the rest of the ritual does. This however is nearly irrelevant, practically speaking, since the animal is slaughtered next to the altar, where a Yisrael may not enter. (The Talmud says that he could use a very long knife while standing in ezrat Yisrael). What then is the significance of this permission? Notice that the word "hikriv" does not refer to the slaughter, but to a later stage, where a kohen is a requisite. In Parashat Tzav, the commands addressed to the kohanim are prefaced with the distinctive phrase "zot torat ha-...." This was not used in parashat Vayikra. What does it signify?