

Vayikra Leviticus 1:1-2 ויקרא

Context: Vayikra, the first torah portion in Leviticus, introduces a book which on the whole wants to make the Israelite people holy and keep them pure so they can be in contact with the holy. According to Leviticus, God's created world is orderly. Therefore, Leviticus sets out to both establish

important boundaries and specifies what must be done when those boundaries are crossed. Rituals, including sacrifice, serve to restore God's created order and equilibrium. Although sacrifice was a common worship practice in the ancient Near Eastern and Mediterranean regions, they contain their own special meaning within the system of holiness that Leviticus ordains (Tamara Cohn Eskenazi, *TAWC*, 567-570).

Adonai called to Moses. always out of the cloud; similar to what was described already at Mount Sinai (Exodus 24,16) "He called to Moses on the seventh day out of the cloud." Moses could never enter the Tabernacle without first having obtained permission to do so. (Sforno on Leviticus 1:1)

ויקרא אל־מֹשֶׁה וַיְדַבֵּר יְהוָה אֵלָיו מֵאֹהֶל מוֹעֵד
לֵאמֹר:
דַּבֵּר אֶל־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמַרְתָּ אֲלֵהֶם אָדָם כִּי־יִקְרִיב
מִכֶּם קָרְבָן לַיהוָה מִרֹהֲבֵהֶמָּה מִן־הַבְּקָר וּמִן־הַצֹּאן
תִּקְרִיבוּ אֶת־קָרְבַּנְכֶם

Adonai called to Moses and spoke to him from the tent of meeting saying: Speak to the children of Israel and say to them, "When any of you presents and offering of cattle to Adonai, you should offer your offering from the herd or from the flock.

from the Tent of Meeting. The portable Tent, which will accompany the Israelites through the wilderness, symbolically replaces Mount Sinai as the source from which divine messages come.

Speak to the children of Israel. Leviticus begins with an address that is

intended for the people as a whole, not only for an elite group of priests. In so doing, the book establishes the principle that priestly activities are open to scrutiny by the people as a whole. Just as this "manual" for priestly activities is to be taught to all Israel, so the legal precepts of the Torah are to be taught to all the Israelites. (TAWC, 572)

When any of you presents and offering of cattle to Adonai, you should offer your offering from the herd of rom the flock. Leviticus's literary style is correlative, it works through analogies. Instead of explaining why an instruction has been given, or even what it means, it adds another similar instruction, and another and another, thus producing its highly schematized effect (Mary Douglas, *Leviticus As Literature*, 18)...If we read the instructions of sacrifice and try to imagine them being carried out, we can see it as a form of philosophy by enactment. Leviticus exemplifies a way of being and doing based on analogies which prescribe the same actions in multiple contexts (Douglas, pp.67-69).

Questions For Discussion:

1. How might the ritual of sacrifice help Leviticus to achieve its overarching goal of making the Israelite people holy?
2. If we understand sacrifices to serve as analogy to something greater, what do you think they might be an analogy for? Can you think of any other analogies that we might encounter in Leviticus?
3. Today we do not enact the ritual of sacrifice, however, we have many other rituals in Judaism. What Jewish ritual(s) help you to create order and/or holiness in your world?