

**Partners In Torah**

**San Diego-Los Angeles**

**Study Guide**

***Parshat Vayikra***

 ***תשפ"ג***

***Authored by Rabbi Avi Cohen***

***Partners Detroit***

*3/21/2023*

***Partners In Torah***

***Mission Statement:***

**Partners In Torah is a community-wide,**

**independent and inclusive adult education program focusing on understanding Jewish relevancy to our lives by studying text most interesting to each participant.**

**Through one-on-one discussion for 1 hour each week, friendships are forged between mentors and mentees.**

***Partners in Torah has proven to be effective at reclaiming the rich legacy of wisdom, inspiration, and guidance for many who have, until now, lacked access.***

**Welcome.**

**Thank you for coming.**

**Please encourage friends to join you in participating so that we can grow together as a community.**

This week we begin the third book of the Torah, ויקרא (Leviticus). Another name for this book is תורת כהנים, (*the Laws for the Kohanim)*, because most of it deals with the laws of the service in the Tabernacle, the domain of the Kohanim. Although this includes the Menorah’s lighting, the incense offering, and the show bread, the majority of the book deals with the different sacrifices brought on the altar.

In the world climate in which we live, with groups like PETA advocating for animal rights, how can we feel comfortable with animal sacrifices, which are so integral to Temple service?

How do we pray for the building of the third Holy Temple when we say in our prayers:

יְהִי רָצוֹן מִלְּפָנֶיךָ יְדֹוָד אֱלֹהֵינוּ וֵאלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵינוּ, שֶׁתַּעֲלֵנוּ בְשִֹמְחָה לְאַרְצֵנוּ וְתִטָּעֵנוּ בִּגְבוּלֵנוּ וְשָׁם נַעֲשֶֹה לְפָנֶיךָ אֶת קָרְבְּנוֹת חוֹבוֹתֵינוּ תְּמִידִים כְּסִדְרָם וּמוּסָפִים כְּהִלְכָתָם

*May it be Your will Hashem our G-d and the G-d of our fathers, that You should take us up in joy to our homeland and establish us within our borders and there we will bring before you the daily mandatory sacrifices and the extra Shabbat sacrifice according to their specifications.*

The third Holy Temple will restore animal sacrifices. How are we to understand the Torah’s emphasis on animal sacrifices? The following story holds the key to understanding the difference between the world’s view of animals versus the Torah’s view on animals.

When the woman sitting next to a rabbi on the plane received her vegetarian meal, the rabbi mistakenly thought that perhaps she was eating a vegetarian meal because she kept kosher.

The rabbi said to her, “Oh, you also keep kosher?” To which she said, “No, I don’t eat *other* animals!”

When a human being sees himself as merely a sophisticated animal, it makes sense to advocate for the rights of his cohorts, other animals. After all, what gives one animal greater importance than another? The Talmud (Shabbat 77b) says:

אמר רב יהודה אמר רב כל מה שברא הקדוש ברוך הוא בעולמו לא ברא דבר אחד לבטלה

*Rabbi Yehuda quoted Rav to say, “With everything that Hashem created in the world, there is not one thing that was created for nothing.”*

In other words, every creation no matter how small, serves a purpose in the world, and all are necessary for the world to function properly.

This argument’s obvious flaw is that other animals eat other animals! In the wild, there are just enough predators and just enough prey to keep nature in balance. So, if human beings are merely animals, why should they abstain from eating other animals? (Just the fact that a human being can perceive of an injustice in “eating other animals” already shows that he is not an animal. What lion ever felt remorse for eating a deer?)

For various reasons, evolution being one, many people think they are merely sophisticated animals, and therefore feel it is wrong to take advantage of other animals and use them for personal pleasure.

The Torah teaches us the exact opposite. Not only is the human being not an animal, he is greater than an angel. An angel is created with one mission and is endowed with all the spiritual qualities that he will need to fulfill his mission; but he cannot grow or change one iota. A human being, on the other hand, is created with great latent potential, and his job in life is to use the material world as a tool to unlock his potential and make it a reality. In this way, a human being is always growing, always changing.

This argument of whether a human being is merely a sophisticated animal or a creature of a different class is not a new argument. Maimonides had the same argument with the philosophers of his time who claimed that a human being was merely a highly trained animal, and that, with time and training, any animal could behave like a human. To prove their point, they trained a cat to walk on its two hind legs, carry a tray in its paws, and serve the tray at a banquet. If a cat could be trained, so could any animal, proving that humans are merely better trained animals.

When they had completed training the cat, they held a great banquet to showcase their accomplishment, and show that they had defeated the great Maimonides.

Maimonides sat calmly at the head of the table as he observed the cat walk into the room on its hind legs carrying the tray in his front paws, making his way to the front of the room where he would put the tray down in front of Maimonides. As the cat approached, Maimonides opened up his pocket, and out popped a little mouse. As soon as the cat caught sight of the mouse, he dropped everything and ran after the mouse to eat him for dinner.

With that, Maimonides shattered the opposing view. A cat cannot decide if it should chase a mouse or not. A human being *can* decide whether it wants to eat other animals or not. And there lies the difference between human beings and animals: human beings have the power to make a moral choice between good and bad. Animals do not. This is why we were put on this world, to make the proper moral choices; hence, the human being is in a class of his own.

The Midrash tells us (Kohelet Rabba 7:19):

בשעה שברא הקב"ה את אדם הראשון נטלו והחזירו על כל אילני גן עדן ואמר לו ראה מעשי כמה נאים ומשובחין הן וכל מה שבראתי בשבילך בראתי תן דעתך שלא תקלקל ותחריב את עולמי

*After Hashem created Adam, He took him and showed him all the trees in the Garden of Eden and told him, “You see how beautiful my creations are?* ***I created all of them for you!*** *Make sure you don’t ruin and destroy My world!”*

Hashem created the world for man to use and enjoy. Yet man ruins and destroys Hashem’s world by choosing to use it in ways forbidden by Hashem.

Adam was the last thing that Hashem created, and he was placed into a world perfect and complete with everything he would need for his mission. He is the purpose for creation, and everything else was created to serve his needs.

After creating Adam, Hashem told him (Genesis 1:28):

(כח) וַיְבָרֶךְ אֹתָם אֱלֹהִים וַיֹּאמֶר לָהֶם אֱלֹהִים פְּרוּ וּרְבוּ וּמִלְאוּ אֶת הָאָרֶץ וְכִבְשֻׁהָ וּרְדוּ בִּדְגַת הַיָּם וּבְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבְכָל חַיָּה הָרֹמֶשֶׂת עַל הָאָרֶץ

*28) And Hashem blessed them and said to them. “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth* ***and subdue it*** *and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the bird of the air, and over every living thing that moves upon the earth.”*

Hashem clearly told Adam that he may *“subdue”* the earth and everything in it. He is the master of all the creatures, and may use them as he sees fit. Although he wasn’t permitted to eat animals until after the flood, nevertheless, he was told that he had dominion over all other creatures on the earth. They were the tools that he would use to serve Hashem and grow.

After Noach took care of all the animals in the ark for a full year, upon leaving the ark Hashem told him (Genesis 9:3):

(ג) כָּל רֶמֶשׂ אֲשֶׁר הוּא חַי לָכֶם יִהְיֶה לְאָכְלָה כְּיֶרֶק עֵשֶׂב נָתַתִּי לָכֶם אֶת כֹּל

*3) Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you; like the green herbage, I have given you everything.*

There is yet a deeper level to this concept. Since everything in creation was created for man to use as a tool to serve Hashem, upon his doing so, the particular object used reaches its purpose for creation.

For example, when a person recites a blessing over an apple, acknowledging Hashem as his benefactor and thanking Him from the depths of his heart for the scrumptious treat, the apple, having triggered that gratitude to Hashem, has reached its ultimate purpose in the world. It has brought honor to Hashem by connecting the person to Hashem. There is nothing greater in the world! This concept applies to everything that Hashem created. He created it to be used by man in his service to Hashem.

The Midrash clearly expresses this concept. At one time in Jewish history, the Jewish people were led by Jewish kings who were idol worshippers. In those days, false gods had false prophets. Eliyahu (Elijah) the prophet was then the last authentic prophet left, and he decided that it was time to do something about the false prophets, the prophets of the Baal. He challenged them to a contest: They would both bring a sacrifice on an altar, and the sacrifice that Hashem accepted by sending down a bolt of fire and consuming it would prove who was the real prophet.

 The false prophets of the Baal accepted the challenge, thinking that they could “guaranty a win.” How? In their altar they hid a person, who, on cue, would light the fire under their sacrifice. Hashem, however, brought a snake that bit and killed the fellow, so their ruse failed. Eliyahu upped the ante, and, with a bit of showmanship, first poured gallons of water on his sacrifice, thoroughly soaking it and the wood beneath it.

 As to the animals used in this contest, a very interesting Midrash informs us (Bamidbar Rabba 23:9):

מה עשה אליהו? אמר להם, בחרו שני פרים תאומים מאם אחת הגדלים על מרעה אחד והטילו עליהם גורלות אחד לשם ואחד לשם הבעל ובחרו להם הפר האחד. ופרו של אליהו מיד נמשך אחריו והפר שעלה לשם הבעל נתקבצו כל נביאי הבעל ונביאי האשרה ולא יכלו לזוז את רגלו עד שפתח אליהו ואמר לו לך עמהם השיב הפר ואמר לו לעיני כל העם אני וחבירי יצאנו מבטן אחת מפרה אחת וגדלנו במרעה אחד והוא עלה בחלקו של מקום ושמו של הקב"ה מתקדש עליו. ואני עליתי בחלק הבעל להכעיס את בוראי? אמר לו אליהו, פר פר אל תירא לך עמהם ואל ימצאו עלילה שכשם ששמו של הקב"ה מתקדש על אותו שעמי, כך מתקדש עליך! אמר לו וכך אתה מיעצני שבועה איני זז מכאן עד שתמסרני בידם שנא' (שם) ויקחו את הפר אשר נתן להם ומי נתן להם אליהו

 *What did Eliyahu do? He told them to choose two cows, twins from the same mother who grazed in the same pasture. They did a lottery, one for Hashem and one for the Baal. Eliyahu’s cow immediately went over to him, but the other cow wouldn’t move. All 850 prophets tried to move it but they couldn’t budge even one foot. Eliyahu went over to the animal and told it to go with them. The animal replied to Eliyahu in front of everyone. “My friend and I came out of the same womb from the same mother cow, and we grew up eating the very same grass. His lot is to sanctify Hashem’s name, and my lot in to be with the false prophets of the Baal to anger Hashem!” Eliyahu told her, “Cow, cow, do not fear, go with them, and just as Hashem’s name will be sanctified through the cow with me, so, too, it will be sanctified through you.”*

 Eliyahu meant that when the cow for the Baal would notbe burned, it will be testimony to the people of the falseness of the Baal’s prophets.

 The false prophets couldn’t get anything to happen to their cow, and after having tried every trick they had, no heavenly response to the Baal’s prophets was forthcoming. Eliyahu, though, after dousing the alter until it was soaked with water, fervently prayed to Hashem; immediately, a fire descended and consumed the animal, the wood, and the water. When the people saw this, they proclaimed in unison, “Hashem is the real G-d, Hashem is the real G-d!!”

 This Midrash reveals to us that the purpose of every creature on the planet is to bring honor to Hashem’s name. When the animal was given the opportunity to express it, it did so unwaveringly. The other cow wanted to be slaughtered and put on Eliyahu’s altar instead of the altar of the false Baal prophets. Eliyahu’s consolation to the cow was that, by not being consumed, it would also fulfill its mission of sanctifying Hashem’s name.

The Mishna in Pirkei Avot (6:12) tells us:

(יב) כָּל מַה שֶּׁבָּרָא הַקָּדוֹשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא בָּעוֹלָמוֹ, לֹא בְרָאוֹ אֶלָּא לִכְבוֹדוֹ

*12) Everything that Hashem created in his world, He created exclusively for His honor.*

What does this statement mean? Why does Hashem need us to give Him honor? Our Sages explain that Hashem created everything in the world so that we can recognize Him through His miraculous and amazing creations. When one takes time to learn about any one of Hashem’s billions of creatures, be it an ant, a cow, or a 200-ton blue whale, he will discover an infinite amount of wisdom in each one. They instinctually use this wisdom to seek to escape from predators and to find food. An octopus caught by a shark and was about to be devoured, stuck two of its tentacles into the shark’s gills, essentially choking it until it let him go. Man is forever discovering more and more how the animal kingdom works and how interdependent the different components are. As each new discovery is revealed, the scientists who discovered it stand in awe of the sophistication of the creatures they are studying. These miracles are documented in videos such as “Planet Earth” and “The Blue Planet.” Yet these videos showcase only a miniscule fraction of Hashem’s brilliant creation.

 The Malbim (d. 1879) explains that this is the meaning of the verse that we say in *Ashrei* (Psalms 145:4) thrice daily:

 (ד) דּוֹר לְדוֹר יְשַׁבַּח מַעֲשֶׂיךָ וּגְבוּרֹתֶיךָ יַגִּידוּ

*4)Each generation will praise Your deeds to the next (generation), and Your mighty deeds they will tell.*

As each new generation discovers more of Hashem’s miraculous world, it relates it to the next generation. With this, we appreciate more and more the mighty deeds of our miraculous world’s Creator.

 There is even more depth to this matter.

 The world comprises four levels of creations: דומם - inanimate materials such as earth, water, and sunlight; צמח – vegetation - grass and trees, etc.; חי – living creatures - animals, birds, and fish; and מדבר – speaking creatures – the human being. Each level depends on the level before it for sustenance. The plants grow in the earth and use water, sunlight and other inanimate substances to grow. All kosher animals are herbivorous and live on the grass and plants that they eat. The human being eats both vegetables and animals to sustain himself.

 When a human being eats, his body processes the food extracting the beneficial vitamins and nutrients, distributing them throughout the body to nourish it and to supply it with energy for activity. When a person engages in a mitzvah and uses that energy to fulfill Hashem’s will, he has given purpose to all the contributing factors of that food, all the way back to the sunlight that shone on the plants to make them grow. This is because when a person eats fruits, vegetables, or an animal’s meat, that food becomes *elevated* from the lower level of a plant or animal to becoming part of a human being who has chosen to use the energy he gained from them to serve Hashem.

 It is for this reason a holy person’s table is like an altar. It is there that he eats the food that is *burned up* as energy to power him in his service to Hashem. This is also why the Sages say that if a person feeds a Torah scholar, it is as if he has brought a sacrifice in the Holy Temple. Since the food will be *consumed* in the Torah scholar providing him the energy to learn Torah, it is as if an animal was burned on the altar for the sake of Hashem.

 This brings us back to the concept of animal sacrifices in Judaism. Bringing an animal as a sacrifice causes the animal to reach its purpose in the world by being used as a tool for service to Hashem.

As to a sin offering, where an animal is brought to atone for a sin, Nachmanides explains that the process of bringing a sacrifice on the altar is instructive to the sinner, helping him refrain from repeating his offense. As he watches the animal being slaughtered, quartered, and placed on the alar, sees the animal’s blood sprinkled on the altar, and then watches parts of the animal consumed by the altar’s fire, what should be going through his mind is, “This should all be happening to *me*, because I sinned to Hashem. I should be slaughtered, I should be quartered, my blood should be splashed about, and I should be consumed by fire! Hashem, however, in His infinite mercy, has allowed me to observe this happen to an animal instead, and to learn the lesson, without having to go through it myself. I have learned my lesson.” In this way, the animal serves a very important purpose, helping a person to better serve Hashem.

 Rabbi Moshe Chaim Luzzato expresses this concept very clearly in the first chapter of his book *Path of the Just*:

וְאִם תַּעֲמִיק עוֹד בָּעִנְיָן תִּרְאֶה כִּי הָעוֹלָם נִבְרָא לְשִׁמּוּשׁ הָאָדָם, אָמְנָם הִנֵּה הוּא עוֹמֵד בְּשִׁקּוּל גָּדוֹל, כִּי אִם הָאָדָם נִמְשָׁךְ אַחַר הָעוֹלָם וּמִתְרַחֵק מִבּוֹרְאוֹ, הִנֵּה הוּא מִתְקַלְקֵל וּמְקַלְקֵל הָעוֹלָם עִמּוֹ, וְאִם הוּא שׁוֹלֵט בְּעַצְמוֹ וְנִדְבָּק בְּבוֹרְאוֹ וּמִשְׁתַּמֵּשׁ מִן הָעוֹלָם רַק לִהְיוֹת לוֹ לְסִיּוּעַ לַעֲבֹד בּוֹרְאוֹ, הוּא מִתְעַלֶּה וְהָעוֹלָם עַצְמוֹ מִתְעַלֶּה עִמּוֹ. כִּי הִנֵּה עִלּוּי גָּדוֹל הוּא לַבְּרִיּוֹת כֻּלָּם בִּהְיוֹתָם מְשַׁמְּשֵׁי הָאָדָם הַשָּׁלֵם הַמְקֻדָּשׁ בִּקְדֻשָּׁתוֹ יִתְבָּרֵךְ

*If you look deeply into the matter, you will see that the whole world was created for man’s use. However, it stands in the balance. If a person is drawn after the pleasures of the world and distances himself from Hashem through them, he ruins himself and he ruins the world with him. If, however, he takes control of himself and uses the world only to serve as an instrument to help him serve Hashem, he elevates himself, and the entire universe (his helper) is elevated with him.* ***For it is a great merit for the creatures to be used as a tool in the hands of a human being perfected with Hashem’s holiness.***

 But what about “cruelty to animals?” Are we permitted to torture an animal to further our own agenda?

 The answer is an unequivocal “No!” There is an explicit law in the Torah forbidding paining an animal unnecessarily.

 What about slaughtering the animal? Doesn’t the animal suffer in the process? The answer is, “No, it does not.” -שחיטה - *ritual slaughter*- with its intricate rules, ensures that a slaughtered animal endures no pain.

 The act of ritual slaughter requires theשוחט - *shochet* (slaughterer), in a single cut, to sever most of the trachea and esophagus and to completely sever the animal’s two carotid arteries. This must be done by continuously sliding the knife back and forth over the animal’s neck without pause or hesitation whatsoever.

A most crucial component of a slaughter is the knife. It must be razor sharp so that it cuts cleanly and swiftly through the animal’s hide and flesh. The blade must as well be perfectly smooth without even the slightest nick. Before a shochet can use his knife, he must check every millimeter of it to assure that it has no nick. He does this by lightly and carefully passing his fingernail along the entire blade - on the top, and its two sides. The slightest nick renders the knife unfit for use, and if an animal would be slaughtered with it, the animal is נבלה - *nevaila* – unfit for consumption. The animal feels no pain from the knife’s incision, but what about other pain?

 Within a second of the shochet cutting the two carotid arteries (the blood’s central route to the animal’s head) blood ceases flowing to the brain. The animal’s blood pressure falls drastically, causing the animal to immediately lose consciousness, and, therefore, it can no longer feel pain. The animal’s subsequent twitching or movment after slaughter results from a muscle reflex similar to a chicken that can run around without its head and is no indication of brain function.

 There is a remarkable anatomical difference between a kosher animal verses a non- kosher animal. In non - kosher animals, the vertebral artery, which feeds blood to the brain, is not connected to the carotid artery. This means that even after cutting the carotid artery, since blood continues to flow to the brain through the vertebral artery, the animal’s brain continues to function and the animal feels pain. In kosher animals, the vertebral artery to the brain is connected to the carotid artery. When the carotid artery is severed, the vertebral artery to the brain also loses its blood. Hence, with no blood flowing to the brain, the brain immediately shuts down and the animal feels no pain.

 This is an example of how Hashem’s mercy applies to all of His creatures. Even though we are allowed to slaughter animals for sacrifices and for consumption of their meat, it must be done painlessly.

Rabbi Moshe Cordovero (1522-1570) in his work תומר דבורה– (*The Palm Tree of Devorah*) brings this concept to a higher level. He writes:

החמלה על כל הנמצאים שלא לחבלם, תלויה בחכמה. זולתי להעלותם ממעלה אל מעלה מצומח לחי, מחי למדבר - שאז מותר לעקור הצומח ולהמית החי, לחוב על מנת לזכות

*A person’s compassion should extend to all Hashem’s creatures not to harm them, other than when he elevates them from level to level: from plant life to animal, and from animal to a person. Then he is permitted to uproot a plant or kill an animal because he brings merit to them.*

This is why during the times of the Holy Temples animal sacrifices were so significant, serving as important tools through which one could come closer to Hashem. Similarly, if a person uses his food to come closer to Hashem by thanking Him for it before and after he eats via reciting the appropriate blessings, or through the food’s providing him energy to serve Hashem, he is actually bringing that food to its ultimate purpose in this world: to serve Hashem.