Kol Rina
An Independent Minyan
Parashat Vayikra
March 20, 2021 *** 7 Nisan, 5781

Kol Rina – An Independent Minyan, is a traditional egalitarian community. We are haimish (homey/folksy), friendly, participatory, warm and welcoming. We hold weekly services in South Orange as well as holiday services and celebrations which are completely lay led. We *welcome* all to our services and programs from non-Hebrew readers to Jewish communal and education professionals.

Friday Torah study and service

Now that Shabbat is starting an hour later, we will be going back to our original Zoom schedule. We will begin at 5:15 pm with Torah study with Lenny Levin. Kabbalat Shabbat will follow at 5:45, led by Treasure and Rich Cohen, followed by Maariv led by Nikki Pusin. Rebecca Lubetkin will present a d'var on "A Synagogue's Transformation in the 1970s: The inside story of how a local synagogue transformed into a growing, dynamic, inclusive, still traditional, community." We hope you will join us!

Use the following Zoom link to attend:

https://zoom.us/j/533517572?pwd=dVFHR2NGZFBCYWp1Yzd6ald0bzFRdz09

Meeting ID: 533 517 572
Password: 003293

Vayikra in a Nutshell
https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/1480/jewish/Vayikra-in-a-Nutshell.htm

G-d calls to Moses from the Tent of Meeting, and communicates to him the laws of the *korbanot*, the animal and meal offerings brought in the Sanctuary. These include:

• The "ascending offering" *(olah)* that is wholly raised to G-d by the fire atop the altar;
• Five varieties of "meal offering" *(minchah)* prepared with fine flour, olive oil and frankincense;
• The "peace offering" *(shelamim)*, whose meat was eaten by the one bringing the offering, after parts are burned on the altar and parts are given to the *kohanim* (priests);
• The different types of "sin offering" *(chatat)* brought to atone for transgressions committed erroneously by the high priest, the entire community, the king or the ordinary Jew;

• The "guilt offering" *(asham)* brought by one who has misappropriated property of the Sanctuary, who is in doubt as to whether he transgressed a divine prohibition, or who has committed a "betrayal against G-d" by swearing falsely to defraud a fellow man.

Haftarah in a Nutshell :Isaiah 43:21-44:23.

https://www.chabad.org/parshah/article_cdo/aid/649861/jewish/Haftorah-in-a-Nutshell.htm

This week's *haftorah* starts with a rebuke to the Israelites for abandoning the Temple's sacrificial service. Sacrifices are the dominant topic of the week's Torah reading, too.

The prophet Isaiah rebukes the Israelites for turning away from G-d and refraining from offering sacrifices, turning to idolatry instead. G-d exhorts the people to return to Him, promising to forgive their transgressions, as is His wont.

The prophet then mentions the futility of serving empty idols which may be crafted by artisans but "neither see nor hear nor do they know…" The *haftorah* concludes with G-d's enjoinder to always remember Him and to return to Him.

FOOD FOR THOUGHT

The Sins of a Leader (Vayikra 5781) by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks z"l

https://rabbisacks.org/vayikra-5781/

As we have discussed so many times already this year, leaders make mistakes. That is inevitable. So, strikingly, our parsha of Vayikra implies. The real issue is how leaders respond to their mistakes.

The point is made by the Torah in a very subtle way. Our parsha deals with sin offerings to be brought when people have made mistakes. The technical term for this is sheggagah, meaning inadvertent wrongdoing (Lev. 4:1-35). You did something, not knowing it was forbidden, either because you forgot or did not know the law, or because you were unaware of certain facts. You may, for instance, have carried something in a public place on Shabbat, perhaps because you did not know it was forbidden to carry, or you forgot what was in your pocket, or because you forgot it was Shabbat.

The Torah prescribes different sin offerings depending on who made the mistake. It enumerates four categories. First is the High Priest, second is "the whole community" (understood to mean the Great Sanhedrin, the Supreme Court), a third is "the leader" (Nasi), and the fourth is an ordinary individual.

In three of the four cases, the law is introduced by the word im, "if" – if such a person commits a sin. In the case of the leader, however, the law is prefaced by the word asher, "when" (Lev. 4:22). It is possible that a High Priest, the Supreme Court or an individual may err. But in the case of a leader, it is probable or even certain.

Leaders make mistakes. It is unavoidable, the occupational hazard of their role. Talking about the sin of a Nasi, the Torah uses the word “when,” not “if.”

Nasi is the generic word for a leader: a ruler, king, judge, elder or prince. Usually it refers to the holder of political power. In Mishnaic times, the Nasi, the most famous of whom were leaders from the family of Hillel, had a quasi-governmental role as representative of the Jewish people to the Roman government. Rabbi Moses Sofer (Bratislava, 1762-1839) in one of his responsa[1] examines the question of why, when positions of Torah leadership are never dynastic (never passed from father to son), the role of Nasi was an exception. Often this role did pass from father to son. The answer he gives, and it is historically insightful, is that with the decline of monarchy in the Second Temple period and thereafter, the Nasi took on many of the responsibilities of a king. His role, internally and externally, was as much political and diplomatic as religious. That in general is what is meant by the word Nasi.

Why does the Torah consider this type of leadership particularly prone to error? The commentators offer three possible explanations. R. Ovadiah Sforno (to Lev. 4:21–22) cites the phrase “But Yeshurun waxed fat, and kicked” (Deut. 32:15). Those who have advantages over others, whether of wealth or power, can lose their moral sense. Rabbeinu Bachya agrees, suggesting that rulers tend to become arrogant and haughty. Implicit in these comments – it is in fact a major theme of Tanach as a whole – is the idea later stated by Lord Acton in the aphorism, “Power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.”[2]

Elie Munk, citing the Zohar, offers a second explanation. The High Priest and the Sanhedrin were in constant contact with that which was holy. They lived in a world of ideals. The king or political ruler, by contrast, was involved in secular affairs: war and peace, the administration of government, and international relations. They were more likely to sin because their day-to-day concerns were not religious but pragmatic.[3]

Meir Simcha ha-Cohen of Dvinsk[4] points out that a King was especially vulnerable to being led astray by popular sentiment. Neither a Priest nor a Judge in the Sanhedrin were answerable to the people. The King, however, relied on popular support. Without that he could be deposed. But this is laden with risk. Doing what the people want is not always doing what God wants. That, R. Meir Simcha argues, is what led David to order a census (2 Sam. 24), and Zedekiah to ignore the advice of Jeremiah and rebel against the King of Babylon (2 Chr. 36). Thus, for a whole series of reasons, a political leader is more exposed to temptation and error than a Priest or Judge.

There are further reasons.[5] One is that politics is an arena of conflict. It deals in matters – specifically wealth and power – that are in the short-term, zero-sum games. ‘The more I have, the less you have. Seeking to maximise the benefits to myself or my group, I come into conflict with others who seek to maximise benefits to themselves or their group.’ The politics of free societies is always conflict-ridden.

The only societies where there is no conflict are tyrannical or totalitarian ones in which dissenting voices are suppressed – and Judaism is a standing protest against tyranny. So in a free society, whatever course a politician takes will please some and anger others. From this, there is no escape.

Politics involves difficult judgements. A leader must balance competing claims and will sometimes get it wrong. One example – one of the most fateful in Jewish history – occurred after the death of King Solomon. People came to his son and successor, Rehoboam, complaining that Solomon had imposed unsustainable burdens on the population, particularly during the building of the Temple. Led by Jeroboam, they asked the new King to reduce the burden. Rehoboam asked his father's counsellors for advice. They told him to concede to the people's demand. Serve them, they said, and they will serve you. Rehoboam then turned to his own friends, who told him the opposite: Reject the request. Show the people you are a strong leader who cannot be intimidated (1 Kings 12:1-15).

It was disastrous advice, and the result was tragic. The kingdom split in two, the ten northern tribes following Jeroboam, leaving only the southern tribes, generically known as "Judah," loyal to the king. For Israel as a people in its own land, it was the beginning of the end. Always a small people surrounded by large and powerful empires, it needed unity, high morale and a strong sense of destiny to survive. Divided, it was only a matter of time before both nations, Israel in the north, Judah in the south, fell to other powers.

The reason leaders – as opposed to Judges and Priests – cannot avoid making mistakes is that there is no textbook that infallibly teaches you how to lead. Priests and Judges follow laws. For leadership there are no laws because every situation is unique. As Isaiah Berlin put it in his essay, 'Political Judgement,'[6] in the realm of political action, there are few laws and what is needed instead is skill in reading a situation. Successful statesmen "grasp the unique combination of characteristics that constitute this particular situation – this and no other." Berlin compares this to the gift possessed by great novelists like Tolstoy and Proust.[7] Applying inflexible rules to a constantly shifting political landscape destroys societies. Communism was like that. In free societies, people change, culture changes, the world beyond a nation's borders does not stand still. So a politician will find that what worked a decade or a century ago does not work now. In politics it is easy to get it wrong, hard to get it right.

There is one more reason why leadership is so challenging. It is alluded to by the Mishnaic Sage, R. Nechemiah, commenting on the verse, "My son, if you have put up security for your neighbour, if you have struck your hand in pledge for another" (Prov. 6:1):

> **So long as a man is an associate [i.e. concerned only with personal piety], he need not be concerned with the community and is not punished on account of it. But once a man has been placed at the**

> **head and has donned the cloak of office, he may not say: 'I have to look after my welfare, I am not concerned with the community.' Instead, the whole burden of communal affairs rests on him. If he sees a man doing violence to his fellow, or committing a transgression, and does not seek to prevent him, he is punished on account of him… you are responsible for him. You have entered the gladiatorial arena, and he who enters the arena is either conquered or conquers.[8]**

A private individual is responsible only for their own sins. A leader is held responsible for the sins of the people they lead: at least those they might have prevented.[9] With power comes responsibility: the greater the power, the greater the responsibility.

There are no universal rules, there is no failsafe textbook, for leadership. Every situation is different and each age brings its own challenges. A ruler, in the best interests of their people, may sometimes have to take decisions that a conscientious individual would shrink from doing in private life. They may have to decide to wage a war, knowing that some will die. They may have to levy taxes, knowing that this will leave some impoverished. Only after the event will the leader know whether the decision was justified, and it may depend on factors beyond their control.

The Jewish approach to leadership is thus an unusual combination of realism and idealism – realism in its acknowledgement that leaders inevitably make mistakes, idealism in its constant subordination of politics to ethics, power to responsibility, pragmatism to the demands of conscience. What matters is not that leaders never get it wrong – that is inevitable, given the nature of leadership – but that they are always exposed to prophetic critique and that they constantly study Torah to remind themselves of transcendent standards and ultimate aims. The most important thing from a Torah perspective is that a leader is sufficiently honest to admit their mistakes. Hence the significance of the sin offering.

Rabban Yochanan ben Zakkai summed it up with a brilliant double-entendre on the word asher, meaning "when" in the phrase "when a leader sins." He relates it to the word ashrei, "happy," and says: Happy is the generation whose leader is willing to bring a sin offering for their mistakes.[10]

Leadership demands two kinds of courage: the strength to take a risk, and the humility to admit when a risk fails.

[1] Responsa Chatam Sofer, Orach Chayyim, 12. [2] This famous phrase comes from a letter written by Lord Acton in 1887. See Martin H. Manser, and Rosalind Fergusson, The Facts on File Dictionary of Proverbs, New York: Facts on File, 2002, 225. [3] Elie Munk, The Call of the Torah, Vayikra, New York, Mesorah Publications, 1992, 33. [4] Meshech Chochmah to Lev. 4:21-22. [5] This, needless to say, is not the plain sense of the text. The sins for which leaders brought an offering were spiritual offences, not errors of political judgment. [6] Isaiah Berlin, The Sense of Reality, Chatto and Windus, 1996, 40-

53. [7] Incidentally, this answers the point made by political philosopher Michael Walzer in his book on the politics of the Bible, In God's Shadow. He is undeniably right to point out that political theory, so significant in ancient Greece, is almost completely absent from the Hebrew Bible. I would argue, and so surely would Isaiah Berlin, that there is a reason for this. In politics there are few general laws, and the Hebrew Bible is interested in laws. But when it comes to politics – to Israel's Kings for example – it does not give laws but instead tells stories. [8] Exodus Rabbah, 27:9. [9] "Whoever can prevent the members of his household from sinning and does not, is seized for the sins of his household. If he can prevent his fellow citizens and does not, he is seized for the sins of his fellow citizens. If he can prevent the whole world from sinning, and does not, he is seized for the sins of the whole world." (Shabbat 54b) [10] Tosefta Baba Kamma, 7:5.

The Pollution of Non-Acts – Parashat Va'Yikra by Rabbi Yitz Greenberg

https://mechonhadar.s3.amazonaws.com/mh_torah_source_sheets/GreenbergParashatVayikra5781.pdf?utm_campaign=Dvar%20Torah%205781&utm_medium=email&_hsmi=116346153&_hsenc=p2ANqtz--PXnyVQrzh0XSbH7Gk2lkLqBkMJ714gWyF90dnLF_p7ZVc4YXmLwlGDe35mOyOj67LcSv0ZAvPZRAuN2LBW9aQ469LHw&utm_content=116346153&utm_source=hs_email

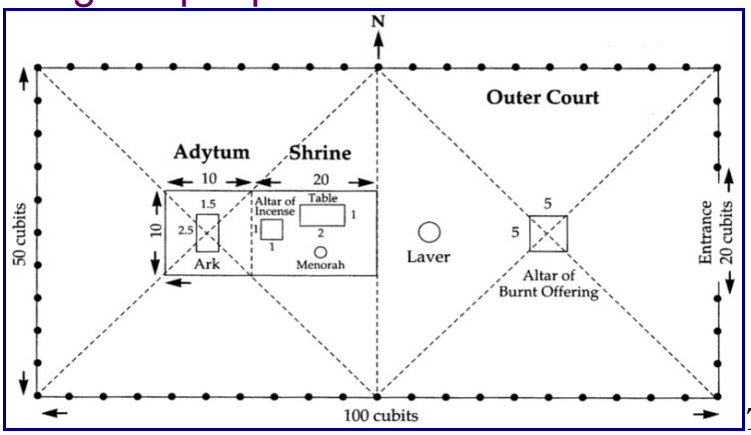
This week we begin the book of VaYikra/Leviticus, which has a strong focus on the priests and the Torah (teachings) of sacrifices.[1] Our *parashah* teaches the rules and purposes of five sacrifices, including the purification offering (Hebrew: *hattat*). When I grew up, the English translation of the *hattat* sacrifice was generally "a sin offering" based on the association of the name *hattat* (חטאת) with the Hebrew word *heit* (חֵטְא), meaning sin. Even today, the Jewish Publication Society translation calls it a guilt offering. Bible scholar Jacob Milgrom convinced me that the word *hattat* is related to *lehatei* (לְחַטֵּא), meaning, to purify. This offering is therefore more properly called a purification offering.[2] The question is: purification of what?

You might have thought that the *hattat* brings purification from sin, so that the difference in name is merely semantic. But in fact this sacrifice is also brought for other reasons. Many of the cases requiring a *hattat* have to do with a person having become impure through contact with a dead animal but not going through purification as soon as possible.[3] Thus, the person has increased or extended the sway of impurity in biblical Israel. What has impurity to do with sin? Why bring an offering for being in a state of impurity? It makes some sense that a problem of impurity would be followed by a purification offering, but what is the connection to sin?

I want to call special attention to one of the cases that requires a *hattat*. A person witnesses a crime and hears a public exhortation asking witnesses to step forward and report what happened. The person saw the crime, but, despite the exhortation, still decides not to step forward as a witness. That person is guilty, and required to bring a *hattat* offering to clear himself of his guilt. We are not dealing here with any sinful **act**. We are dealing with a non-act, a decision to be a bystander and not get

involved, even though the person knows the culprit. The guilt stems from not having acted to balance this crime with justice (or prevent future crimes) by witnessing, but choosing not to act. Still, this person is not impure and committed no act of sin. What, then, is this person being purified from?

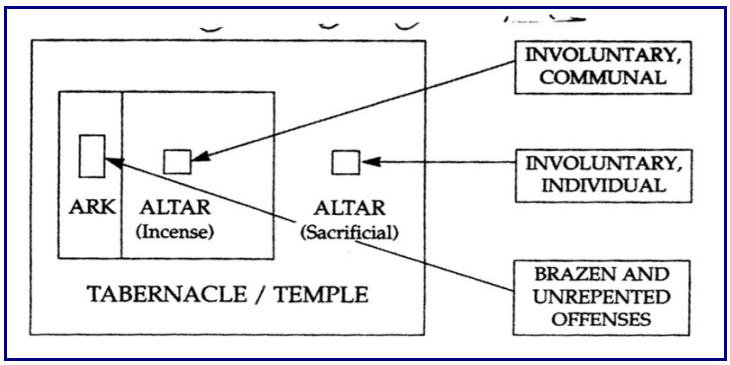
Milgrom explains that the purification offering is not so much for the person who brings the *hattat* sacrifice. Rather, it is for **the sanctuary**, the tabernacle. The tabernacle dwells in the midst of the Jewish people and it represents the presence of God among the people. The shrine is built as follows:[4]



The ground plan of the tabernacle

The sinful behaviors of people are not only wrong acts that need correction and repentance from the sinners. They create an atmosphere in the community and culture within which the acts were done.

Milgrom shows that if one looks at the sins that require a *hattat*,[5] as well as on which altar the sacrifice was brought and where the blood of the sacrifice is spilled, the following pattern emerges. When an individual involuntarily, e.g. unintentionally, commits a sin, s/he generates a moral pollution in the culture of the community. The symbolic language of the sacrifices says that the toxic effect 'attacks' the outer court of the *mishkan* and its altar. If the whole community or its leadership commit an unintentional sin, then the act is a more weighty creator of pollution. As it were, the toxicity penetrates further and 'attacks' the altar of incense in the inner sanctuary. Finally, if intentional and unrepented sins are committed, the toxic fallout spreads farther and deeper. The spiritual pollution 'attacks' the ark in the Holy of Holies, in the very innermost sanctum of the tabernacle.[6] Here is Milgrom's illustration:



Unless the individual and the community repent and bring a purification sacrifice to

purge the Tabernacle, the pollution caused by sinful acts builds up. At some point, the Divine Presence cannot tolerate such an atmosphere, in which sins are neither checked nor repented and reversed. Ultimately, when the presence of sin reaches toxic levels, the Divine Presence will leave the tabernacle/Temple.[7]

The symbolic language of sacrifices is telling us that a society builds up a culture in which people live and work. If sin is not checked or undone, it becomes dominant. People are living in an environment full of evil and will be affected by it. Then the Divine Presence will leave, leaving behind a useless, empty shell of a building. This is the scene that Ezekiel portrayed in his mystic vision of the chariot of God leaving the Temple. The evil pollution in the society stifled good people and normalized bad behaviors. Israel became a culture of sin and death, which the God of life would not abide. Similarly, Jeremiah describes a Temple hollowed out of holiness and sunk in an atmosphere of oppression and abuse from human to human. God then left the Temple, leaving a void, a lifeless sanctuary without God, for the Babylonians to enter and destroy at will.[8]

What has the case of extended impurity to do with this? Often, impurity symbolically stands for death.[9] Holiness symbolically represents life.[10] This is why people's corpses are not allowed into the tabernacle/Temple. Those extending impurity (instead of removing it through prompt purification and rebirth-to-life rituals) allow expanded presence of death to permeate the community. In rituals (as shown above in ethics and sin), unless impurity is checked, God will leave. In this case, too, a purification sacrifice is required to purge the tabernacle before impurity/death becomes entrenched and dominant.

Our portion teaches us that not only acts of sin, but choosing to bystand, neither to fight nor report criminals, is a grave offense, whose influence spreads and poisons the atmosphere of a community. Similarly, complacency in living with death or death impurity, rather than removing it, crowds out a culture of life and holiness. In the end, God 'departs' from a culture of death.

With the aid of Milgrom, we are able to cut through the somewhat remote or baffling symbolic language of the sacrifices and of the animals brought to the altar and of the types of altar. We can see the deeper lesson of the Torah portion: life needs to be constantly affirmed and renewed. Failure in either the ethical (such as bystanding in the face of sin) or ritual realms (such as acceptance of death impurity's presence without reasserting life) generates an atmosphere where the ability to resist sin or death is debilitated. Without repentance and serious action to stop this process of sin/death entrenching itself, the moral and spiritual oxygen will be sucked out of the community. The final result is that the Divine Presence will depart from such a society.

In bringing the purification sacrifice, the individual, the leader, and the community signal that they want to fight against sin and not allow evil to become normative or dominant. They signal that bystanding is as grave an act as outright sinning,

because it allows bad actions to go unchecked and evil to dig itself deeply into the community. In every society, one must end bystanding and get people to step up and fight for the good. In parallel, one must constantly reassert or renew life—or the society may pass the tipping point and slip into a culture of moral or spiritual death. Shabbat Shalom.

[1] I want to acknowledge the profound influence on my understanding of Leviticus by the scholarly work of Jacob Milgrom, especially in his masterpiece, his commentary on the book of Leviticus in the Anchor Bible series, volume 1 on chapters 1-16. With an amazing combination of rabbinic and medieval commentaries and modern critical studies, including cognate studies of other Mesopotamian religions, he shed new light on hundreds of passages. He has a feel for literary structures and specific details. Most of all, he opened my eyes to the central themes of the book of Leviticus—that there is a struggle between life and death in the world and humans are asked to throw the weight of their actions on to the side of life. This in turn influenced me deeply as I developed my forthcoming book on Judaism as the religion of life in which God invites humans to partner in the work of filling the world with life and repairing it to sustain life at the highest level. There will be more references to Milgrom in these essays throughout Leviticus. [2] See Milgrom, *Leviticus* vol. 1, pp. 226-292. [3] See Leviticus 5:2-3. [4] Milgrom, *Leviticus*, p. 135. [5] See Leviticus 4-5. [6] See Milgrom's illustration, *Leviticus*, p. 257.

[7] The tabernacle/*mishkan* is the house of God's presence in Leviticus. In later centuries, the Holy Temple is the house of God's presence. [8] See the books of Ezekiel, especially chapter 1, and Jeremiah, especially chapter 7. [9] This will be the focus of the forthcoming essay on Parashat Tazria-Metzora. [10] See my previous essay on Parashat Tetzaveh, "On the Priesthood, Or: Holiness is Living in the Fullness of Life," available here: https://www.hadar.org/torah-resource/priesthood.

Standing At The Gates by Eliezer B. Diamond
https://www.jtsa.edu/standing-at-the-gates

In Kafka's cryptic parable "Before the Law," a man stands before a gate seeking entry into the Law. The gate is open, but at its side is a gatekeeper who refuses his request to enter. The man uses every stratagem that he can think of to gain the gatekeeper's permission, but every attempt fails. This stalemate continues until the moment of death arrives. The tale ends with the following exchange:

"*Look, if every man strives after the Law," says the man. "How does it happen that in all these years nobody but myself has demanded entry?" The gatekeeper recognizes that the man has already reached his end and, so as to reach him through his failing hearing, he shouts to him: "Nobody else could obtain permission here. This entrance was destined only for you. And now I am going to shut it."*

What this tale signifies is anyone's guess—not surprising, given that the author is Kafka. Is Kafka describing a world of absurdity, in which one is simultaneously granted a portal and barred from entry? Alternatively, had the man simply strolled up to the gate without asking permission to enter would the gatekeeper have stepped aside?

What we can say is this: entrances are complex; they can be simultaneously open and inaccessible. And there are portals that we are meant to enter, and yet we fail to do so, through a combination of factors within and beyond our control.

An oft-mentioned locale in Leviticus is the petah ohel mo'ed (Lev. 3:2 and elsewhere), the entrance to the Tent of Meeting (as it is generally translated) or Mishkan, the dwelling place of divine glory. It is both an entryway and a checkpoint. As a point of contact between human and the divine, it is the site of much of the sacrificial service that is to be done "before the Lord" (Exod. 29:11 and elsewhere). Yet the entrance also demarcates the restricted realm of the holy. Few are allowed beyond this point, and only to perform specific sacred tasks.

At the outset of Leviticus, as Moses stands before the entrance, God calls to him "from within the ohel mo'ed" (Lev. 1:1) in order to give him instruction. Rabbinic commentators understand the significance of this phrase as follows: When the Divine Presence descends upon the sanctuary and God's glory fills it, Moses cannot enter the tent (Exod. 40:34–35). He yearns to go within but he must await God's permission to enter. God's call to Moses at the beginning of Leviticus is an invitation to pass through the portal so that God can instruct him.

A very different narrative is that of Jacob at Bet El. Jacob encamps there for the night on his way to Haran. In his dream he both sees a ladder connecting heaven and earth and hears God speak to him. When he awakes, he proclaims, "Indeed, God is in this place and I did not know . . . this [place] is nothing other than God's house and here is the gateway to heaven" (Gen. 28:16–17). Upon arrival at Bet El Jacob had not seen the heavenly portal that was before him; he drifted off into slumber totally unaware of its presence. It is God who must show him the true nature of the ground upon which he lies.

These three stories lead me back to one of the most poignant passages in the Yom Kippur liturgy, found in the Ne'ilah service:

"*Open (petah) the gates for us, in this moment of the closing of the gates, for the day has waned."*

This petition is a bit curious: Why ask for the gates to be opened precisely at the moment that they are to be closed? Perhaps we should understand the Hebrew petah not as "open" but "keep open." We know that the gates must now close but we ask for a few more moments to be heard.

Another solution suggests itself. Perhaps we have been spiritual sleepwalkers, inattentive throughout the day to the open gates. It is only at day's end when the gates begin to close that we open our eyes; it is only now that the gates are truly open for us. Are we too late? We pray that it not be so.

We stand at so many gates struggling to gain entry. Yet in those same moments we can be oblivious to other gates that open themselves to us, waiting for us to step through them. Maybe we are standing at the wrong gate. Maybe we need to open

ourselves up and search for the gate that is meant for us. *(Eliezer Diamond is the Rabbi Judah Nadich Associate Professor of Talmud and Rabbinic at JTS)*

Just in Case by Ilana Kurshan

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1bWbqMenFnh0NDQwcZZuBFBs54DG9-uws/view

The typology of sacrifices in parshat Vayikra offers a window into the various reasons a person might wish to draw close to God. These sacrifices fall into two main categories: There are voluntary sacrifices offered out of gratitude and thanksgiving; and then there are obligatory sacrifices, most notably the sin offerings to atone for wrongdoing. Somewhere between them is a sacrifice known as the *Asham Talui*, the conditional guilt offering, which speaks to the complexity of assuming personal responsibility in a world of uncertainty.

The *Asham Talui* is offered when an individual suspects that she might have committed a grave offense but can't be sure. If the individual knew with certainty, she would bring a sin offering, which would involve confessing her sin before the priest. In the case of the *Asham Talui*, however, she cannot confess because she can't be sure she did anything wrong. Instead, she merely brings the sacrificial animal to the Temple, and the priest makes expiation on her behalf. Like the obligatory sin offering, this sacrifice serves to atone. But like the voluntary offerings, this impetus for this sacrifice comes from within – the individual wishes to clear the record just in case she is at fault.

The Torah does not offer examples of the types of situations that might require an *Asham Talui*, stating only that it applies "when a person, without knowing it, sins in regard to any of the Lord's commandments about things not to be done" (5:17). But the Talmud (Kidushin 81b) explains that whenever Rabbi Akiva came to this verse, he would cry, lamenting that if a person is unsure of his sin and still has to bear his iniquity, all the more so must this be true for a person who sinned knowingly. Rabbi Akiva uses the example of an individual who meant to eat permitted fat, but instead may have mistakenly eaten forbidden fat. The person can't be sure which fat he ate, and so he brings a sacrifice just in case. Rabbi Akiva is distressed by the weight of human responsibility – we are accountable not just for sins we know we committed, but even for those of which we are not fully aware.

But the Talmud tells of another sage who had a very different approach to the *Asham Talui*. Bava ben Buta, a disciple of Shammai, used to offer an *Asham Talui* every day out of concern that he might have sinned unawares. The only day of the year he did not bring this sacrifice was on Yom Kippur, because it would be redundant to atone for guilt on the day that all sins are forgiven. The Mishnah (Keritut 6:3) relates that in fact Bava ben Buta was so obsessively preoccupied with his fear of sin that he wished to bring a sacrifice on Yom Kippur as well; the only reason he didn't was because the other sages forbade him.

For Bava ben Buta, there was a tremendous sense of security in knowing that he could rid himself of potential guilt. And he is not alone. The Talmud recognizes that the *Asham Talui* played an important psychological role, explaining that it serves "to protect a person from suffering" (Keritut 26b) because "the Torah is concerned for the bodies of Israel" (Keritut 25a). Sometimes what you don't know can hurt you quite a lot. For individuals like Bava ben Buta, one gets the sense that it would be impossible to keep putting one foot in front of another without a way to atone for all the microscopic critters he was potentially trampling with every step.

We live in a world in which we cannot always know if we are doing the right thing, or if we have done something wrong. While it would probably be crippling to live plagued by doubtful sin like Bava ben Buta, it would be presumptuous and even dangerous to assume that any of us, with our limited perspective, can see the full repercussions of our actions. The wrongs we commit matter even when we are not aware of them, and they require redress. And so we give charity, and we offset our carbon footprint, and we reach out to friends we have not heard from in a while – because who can be certain that everything we own is ours, and that we have not done our share of damage to our planet, and that something we said or did is not the cause of prolonged estrangement. If we each bear responsibility for the sins we may have committed unintentionally—if we each bring our offerings out of doubt—perhaps we will begin to find ourselves, and our world, in a better place.

From Weariness to Rest by Bex Stern Rosenblatt
https://drive.google.com/file/d/1bWbqMenFnh0NDQwcZZuBFBs54DG9-uws/view

We know what it is to be weary. We have lived a year in which each day bled into the next and the things that one gave us solace became mortally dangerous. We know what it is for routines to be dissolved and life to descend into chaos. And we are ready for Isaiah's words of comfort, we are ready for a return to an old-new way of life.

Our haftarah ends with the words we long to hear: "Sing out, oh heavens, for God has made, shout out, oh depths of the earth, break forth, oh mountains, singing, oh forest, and every tree in it. For God has redeemed Jacob and is glorified in Israel." We are more than ready to sing, to break forth from our confinements and find glory in our communities. And as we get our vaccines, as Passover approaches with the spring, "the blossoms appear in the land, the time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land," as we read in Song of Songs 2:12.

How are we to transition from weariness to song? How are we to shed the past year's sense of loss and embrace freedom once again? Our Torah portion and haftarah portion are rather clear on the process. Transitioning from slavery to freedom, from exile to homeland, or from lockdown to life requires us to create an ordered existence by coming back to the creator of order himself, God.

The haftarah portion starts with talk of weariness - we are weary of God and God's demands, while God is made weary by our guilt. Weariness or tiredness is a particular concept in the Tanakh. Weariness is a lack of rest, a lack of comfort. The second line of our haftarah reads, "And you did not invoke me, oh Jacob, for you have wearied of me, oh Israel." Our weariness has brought us to inaction. We have wearied of God and we have not called God. We have not brought God sacrifices. God points out that the substance of the sacrifices was not a burden, it ought not to have made us weary. And in fact, it did not. We did not even offer the sacrifices. Our inaction made us all the more weary.

How are we to find rest then? We must not mistake our lethargy for rest. Weariness comes from chaos, comes from a loss of sense of responsibility and ability to act. Rest comes from creation. Rest is the reward of a job well done. Rest is the activity of Shabbat, the seventh day made separate from the rest of the week by our choice to desist from regular activity. Rest is the resumption of order. As order resumes and we throw ourselves back into it, soon enough we will find ourselves able to join in song, celebrating ourselves, not for the work of our hands, but for the lives we can lead.

Yahrtzeits

Shari Mevorah remembers her brother Joel Leigh Kirstein (Yaakov ben Simcha v Chaya Sura) on Saturday March 20th (Nisan 7).

Our regular weekday evening minyan will take place on Monday, March 22, beginning at 8:00. Your presence allows mourners and those observing yahrzeits to say Kaddish. Please support your Kol Rina friends by attending.

Use the following Zoom link to attend:
https://zoom.us/j/97663987468?pwd=NjFhaVZUZkpSZ3pxQWJjOU5UWFR4QT09

Meeting ID: 976 6398 7468 Password: 080691